

Writing to Learn Philosophy

Jessie Yoshida
Inglemoor High School, Bothell, Washington

Both philosophy and writing to learn are process oriented and intended to help students connect images of self and the universe. As Randall Freisinger notes of writing to learn, "The goal of this method . . . is to allow the students to enlarge their image of the world . . . by connecting the existing picture to the new experiences. As they encounter new materials, they must either assimilate the materials into their new image or they must accommodate . . . And the key point is this: These connections must be personal" (*Language Connection* Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982).

Four goals were developed to help students "enlarge their image of the world" and connect meaningfully with philosophic issues. They are:

to understand with Socrates that the "unexamined life is not worth living,"

to "know thyself,"

to confront the problems of existence as revealed in literature and in life, and

to clarify personal values and develop a philosophy of life.

In this chapter, I will describe how writing-to-learn strategies helped students achieve these four goals. While there is a sequence to the strategies (writing interview questions follows **dialectics**, and **admit slips** with **metaphorical questions** follow **community building** metaphors and questions on poetry), these strategies are layered more than sequenced to help students think substantially and imaginatively about philosophical issues.

To begin this quest into the nature of wisdom (philo: love; sophia: wisdom), individual students list in five minutes their reasons for electing philosophy and the questions they hope to clarify during our twelve

weeks together. Then they form groups of five to six, combine their lists on newsprint, and add any reasons or questions that the group interaction generates. Then one member of each group reads its list to the entire class, others note similarities and differences, and clarify meaning. Following are some of the goals and questions students listed.

Why are we in this class?

- to become wise
- to explore inner self
- to learn how to make our own decisions
- to compare philosophies
- to communicate with and understand other class members
- to learn to support our own beliefs
- to keep an open mind

What questions do we have?

- What use do religions serve?
- What will happen after death?
- What is happiness? Why do people continuously look for true happiness?
- Is there truth? What is it? How can we find it? Can there be more than one truth for different people?
- What is and how important is success?
- How can we make our lives fulfilling?
- What and who is God?
- How do people develop certain "trains" of thought?
- How can people believe in evolution?

As students performed this task, they called upon **brainstorming** and comparing and contrasting skills. In addition, they clarified goals which would later be written up in individual contracts. In these contracts students list questions they hope to answer, goals to accomplish, and course requirements to fulfill. A third function of this listing is that it is a community-building exercise.

A sense of community is essential for the success of a philosophy class. Revealing deeply held beliefs and values requires courage on the student's part, and sensitivity on the teacher's to plan activities that lead to trust and a sense of belonging. Students can take risks when they trust that others respect their positions and share their concerns and feelings. This initial listing exercise is a safe first step in getting ac-

quainted and discovering mutual interests, first individually, then in small groups, and finally with the entire class.

Another activity that aids community building as well as “knowing thyself” is forced-choice response to **metaphorical questions**. Students gather at room center and step to one side or the other in response to questions such as “Are you more like a daisy or a rose?” “More like winter or summer?” “More like no trespassing or public fishing?” Again, students first share in pairs, then volunteer to share with the entire class. They enjoy the novelty of metaphorical questions, and this imaginative, indirect route to self-knowledge and revelation seems less threatening. They weigh and sort who they are, “re-cognize” themselves in new images, and distinguish the variety of characteristics others assign to a “rose” or “summer,” none of them right or wrong. This paves the way to being open-minded and willing to explore and experiment, important for achieving the four class goals. Through these initial activities, students begin to dance to Neruda’s truth:

There is no insurmountable solitude. All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are. And we must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence in order to reach forth to that enchanted place where we can dance our clumsy dance and sing our sorrowful song. But in this dance and in this song there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our conscience in the awareness of being human and believing in a common destiny. (Pablo Neruda, “Toward a Splendid City,” Nobel Address).

This community building segment ends with the Neruda **dictation** which students write in their journals. However, building community is only the first step toward the difficult work that lies ahead.

Not snap reading for adults, Plato, Sartre, and Niebuhr present a genuine challenge for juniors and seniors. Students need to understand syntax, vocabulary, and concepts, and to connect meaningfully to works such as Hesse’s *Siddhartha* and Dostoevski’s “The Grand Inquisitor” (from *The Brothers Karamozov*). **Dialectics** offer one useful approach. Unlike traditional notetaking or answering study questions at the end of a chapter, dialectics ask the student to identify main points in a reading, and then to respond personally: what does the passage stir in his or her thinking, memory, imagination, associations, or feelings? Does the student agree or disagree? Is the student unclear about or confused by a passage? In addition, students are encouraged to keep an eye out for “jellybeans,” lines from a reading that strike them as well turned, not only true but also beautifully phrased. They often incorporate these “jellybeans” in writing more formal papers. For example, on a series of poems on truth, students make two columns: on the left they summarize the author’s ideas, and on the right, they comment.

Poetic Truth

Comment

"Truth Is As Old As God" by Emily Dickinson

Truth is God's twin. It will disappear the day God perishes.

Truth and God are dependent on each other—one can't exist without the other.

"The Wayfarer" by Stephen Crane

The paths of truth can be deceiving—but more importantly, painful and difficult.

"Preludes" by T.S. Eliot

First part of the poem shows a regimented life where everything goes as planned. Second part shows hope for individuality. Third part shows that it's futile and people are slaves to society.

I don't understand what is meant by the last three lines.

Is she saying that truth is like her God? Why assume that truth would be gone if God didn't exist?

Without a willingness to sacrifice, the path of truth will not be chosen.

This reminds me of a thing by Steve Martin where he conceded that things are terrible. Then he says maybe we can change them. Maybe . . . maybe. Na a a ah.

As students comment, they begin to question, compare, interpret, and modify. They move from simple requests for clarification and information to higher-level analysis and evaluation. They begin to distinguish between the poet's ideas and their own ideas stimulated by the poem. In the writing-to-learn approach, as Freisinger noted, "the expressive function of language assumes a crucial role" (1982). Through expressive writing, students initiate a dialectic with the self as first audience, attempting to get ideas straight in their own minds before transacting with others. Dialectics develop the expressive mode of writing, legitimizing the uncertainty and tentativeness natural to the discovery process. This focus on formative writing in the expressive mode contrasts with more typical transactional assignments which focus on summative writing to the teacher as expert or examiner. Utilizing strategies that help students give words to vague images and shadowy ideas

enables them to experience writing as a learning tool. All too often teachers have overlooked this important function of language by assigning writing as a test or show of fully formed ideas. Through exploratory dialectics with the self, the unknown becomes familiar. This kind of initial writing leads not only to more fruitful class discussions as students have ready responses, but also to more effective summative papers and essays.

A series of metaphorical questions further facilitates the journey into difficult territory. To the toughest poem, T.S. Eliot's "Preludes," one student answers:

1. What color is this poem?
A glossy pumpkin orange with a grimy black film covering.
2. What kind of weather?
The kind of day that as soon as you put your umbrella up, the sun breaks through the clouds and as soon as you take it down, it pours again.
3. What means of transportation?
This poem would be a subway, crowded and dirty.
4. If T.S. Eliot were a guest on the Phil Donahue Show, how would Phil introduce him?
Our next guest on the show today is an intelligent writer whose poetry has raised many questions about the future, and hopelessness of mankind.

Responding to metaphorical questions helps students grasp the tone and texture of a poem, and generate images that reflect their judgments and inferences.

After students read their metaphors aloud, they choose one they've written, and engage in a **dialogue** with Eliot to discover his truth more fully. In the following dialogue, a student elaborates on her transportation metaphor.

Me: Mr. Eliot, your poem reminds me of a subway that is crowded, grimy, and always moving, with lots of graffiti on the walls. But on this subway there would be a small child that smiles and giggles in the chaos—only to be silenced by the authoritative smack of her mother.

TS: That is ridiculous, why?

Me: Your poem revealed the essence of everyday grit and grime, but in the fourth stanza, the words chosen reminded me of a child and a child's dreams (fancies, curled, images, cling, gentle). But it is ended on a very bitter, sarcastic note. Does this conclusion reflect a viewpoint that there is no concrete hope for mankind?

TS: I only suggest that the world becomes a vicious cycle—it is for you to decide whether this is positive or not. Judging from past history, I would say that man can't get out of his rut—his nature is basically evil. Especially since the industrial revolution, we have seen how quickly technology and success brings out the greedy selfishness in man. It's almost laughable.

Me: Why do you choose to laugh at these problems rather than doing something about them? Isn't laughing an acknowledgment that you can't deal with the problems?

TS: Laughing is also a way of preserving one's sanity. I wrote the poems to express my own ideas; perhaps they have opened some eyes and minds, but I doubt it. You can't fight society and human nature.

Me: I disagree. I think we can do something about our problems or at least help others find satisfaction with their own lives. I prefer to "cling to your notions of an infinitely gentle, suffering thing."

TS: Perhaps you will be "moved by fancies," but you will soon look back on these immature idealistic ideas with scorn. The more things change, the more they remain the same. History will repeat itself for eternity—if we make it that long (which I doubt).

By engaging in dialogue, this student enlarges her world by "becoming" the author, and seeing two viewpoints. She wrestles with her own picture of the universe as well as the author's. Unsure if she wanted to "grow up" and see what adults called reality, this student liked to "think positive," clinging to childhood assurances which risked wounding in jousts with Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor, Stace's agnosticism, and Niebuhr's Christian existentialism. As she wrote eleven weeks later in her final paper, she considered dropping class at the time of this dialogue; class raised so many uncomfortable questions, and feelings. Instead, she chose to remain and expand her "image of the world." Writing to learn helps students connect the heart as well as the head to course material.

The dialogue technique is wonderfully fitting for a philosophy course, not only because of its Socratic history, but because it helps students understand an author's view in depth. I use it often, and with each assignment, give a clear purpose, a question to be explored and a possible opening line. I also hand out sample dialogues and share with the students parts of dialogues I write. In the following dialogue with Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor, the aim was to understand the inquisitor's (GI's) beliefs about human nature, and his motivations for burning the heretics and ultimately setting Christ free. Christ had returned to the world, and while holding him prisoner, the GI carries on a mono-

logue defending the church as the highest authority, and chastising Christ for granting people the freedom to choose.

PS: You obviously are sincere in your wish to make everyone happy, but will losing freedom make them happy?

GI: Of course it will! People will no longer have to face agonizing questions or choose between right and wrong.

PS: But what about the freedom they have lost?

GI: First of all, they didn't lose it; they gave it away, and second, the only thing they lost was the agony of their choices.

PS: Let me ask you this then, would you make the trade: your freedom for your "agony of choice?"

GI: No, not now, the people need someone to lead them. It is because I am strong enough that I keep my freedom. Mankind is weak and cannot handle freedom. I know this but I love people and will help them to be happy.

PS: What about those who are strong enough?

GI: They must be sacrificed for the good of the whole just as I have sacrificed my life for the good of the whole.

PS: This is what you perceive to be true?

GI: Yes, I searched and found the truth. It wasn't nice but it was and still is the truth.

Following this dialogue, the student concluded:

The Grand Inquisitor was a man who had searched for and found what he thought was truth. He accepted it and lived by it even though it wasn't very pleasant for him. He was unselfish and gave his devotion to the job he felt had to be done. His love of mankind and the truth exceeded the value he placed on his own life. I think the GI was a very moral person in that he was true to what he believed.

While I could wish for a great deal more discussion and clarification, the student grasped the GI's view of humankind. Also, as the GI, he came up with firm statements about what the issues were, and why he behaved as he did. Without agreeing, the student came to appreciate another perspective and to see the humanity in an apparently "evil" person, much like the silent Christ who kissed the Grand Inquisitor and left the memory of that kiss glowing in the old man's heart. A dramatic technique, the dialogue engages students in what James Britton calls the "language of being and becoming," through which students clarify who and how they are in the world. It differs from language for informing and explaining in its concern with personal connections and

values. In the preceding example, both analytical thinking and personal meaning-making are evident.

Later, students wrote **biopoems**. Then in small groups, they read their poems aloud, and selected one to read to the class. The following biopoem differed from most in the student's use of metaphorical language and imagery. Typically, students analyze character in literal terms; the poet in them remains silent. Paul's Grand Inquisitor, however, "radiates cold shafts of broken glass," and "fits all mankind with a collar and chain." Paul paints an unflinchingly cold portrait of the GI. So clearly does he see the GI, that he takes the thinking process a step higher and fuses it with imagination.

Inquisitor,
 Cynical, bold, all knowing, and fearless.
 Friend of no one, peer of few.
 Lover of self, wisdom, and unconquerable knowledge.
 Who feels neither pity nor compassion nor the love of God.
 Who needs no man, save for himself.
 Who fears the kiss that warms his heart.
 And the coming tide which will not retreat.
 Who radiates cold shafts of broken glass
 And who fits all mankind with collar and chain.
 Who would like to see the deceivers burned
 And Christ to be humbled before him.
 Resident of ages past,
 The Grand Inquirer.

Paul has moved from the expressive mode where one gets ideas straight first with the self, into the poetic mode where connections are reflected in imaginative word play. Where the transactional mode is functional, aimed to inform or persuade, the poetic mode is imaginative, creating a poem, play, short story, or other art form. In the biopoem, language for its own sake, language toward artistic expression dominates. Also, unlike previous journal entries which were only read aloud in class, this biopoem was revised, edited, and submitted for a grade.

Consensus statements and **exit slips** are two additional strategies which help clarify key ideas in a literary piece. Consensus statements force a more thorough discussion of word meanings, reasons for agreement or disagreement, and consideration of alternative views. In the exercise, students first mark under the *self* column, A if they agree and D if they disagree with the statement. Then in groups of 4 or 5, they must "as a group" agree or disagree under the *group* column. They may not vote, but must use persuasion. Later, each group is polled for further discussion. The following example shows how one junior changed two opinions after group discussion.

<i>Self</i>	<i>Group</i>	
<u>D</u>	<u>A</u>	1. Humans experience freedom as a burden rather than as a gift.
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	2. The Grand Inquisitor loves humankind.
<u>D</u>	<u>D</u>	3. The Grand Inquisitor loves God.
<u>D</u>	<u>D</u>	4. The Grand Inquisitor allies with the Devil.
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	5. Christ loves the Grand Inquisitor.
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	6. Human beings need, consciously or unconsciously, someone to worship, preferably someone who reflects "miracle, mystery, and authority."
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	7. Human beings are caught between the desire for deep spiritual fulfillment and the fear of deciding for themselves.
<u>D</u>	<u>D</u>	8. Some human beings are strong; most are weak; therefore, the strong must take care of the weak for their own good. Otherwise, their suffering would be overwhelming to them.
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	9. Money is America's God: it is the source of "miracle, mystery, and authority."
<u>D</u>	<u>A</u>	10. Today, we have more freedom of choice and power than we have ever had, and that is the source of our confusion and anxiety.
<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	11. Human beings try to allay anxiety and confusion through agreement, and a community of worship.

Students then write exit slips in the remaining five to ten minutes of class. The topic is anything relevant to the discussion: a personal connection, a dangling question, a summation. One junior identifies a conflict of values:

I have thought a lot about money as America's God and the desire for spiritual fulfillment. I don't see how people can ever find fulfillment through money. Yet at my church, they always want to know how much money we are giving, for the new church.

Whereas the exit slip synthesizes the student's thoughts after a period's activity, the **admit slip** starts the day's activities. Usually anonymous, admit and exit slips are collected by the teacher and read aloud. What students write on the back of scratch half sheets clues the class to everyone's thoughts on the subject. The admit slip is a good warm up, helping the class focus on task. Two thirds through Hesse's *Siddhartha*, students were asked in an admit slip to describe a passage, idea, or event that was personally meaningful:

The only way I can relate to Siddhartha is that I am confused too, as to what I want to do in the future. I am a little lost.

In the book Siddhartha felt he was merely playing a game in life abiding by the rules, while the real life was slipping past him. Recently I came to that realization myself. Though I do still "play the game," I believe that I am getting more out of life than I used to. Hopefully someday soon, I will completely stop playing the game.

I believe the event which hit close to home was when he went to the other village to pick up merchandise and they had none. Instead of looking at it like a loss, he gained something. He wasn't angry. I'm never patient and when I lose something it's lost and I lose my control. I fall to pieces. Instead, I realized something can be gained. It's already helping me.

It seems significant to me that Siddhartha could get "lost" in the "garden of pleasures" but he eventually finds his way out.

I thought about a relationship that I had, what I had thought was real but wasn't, about playing games, and losing parts of me, changing my values for another person. I don't want that to happen again, but I also think that you have to take a risk, and be in control. It's hard to find the point between risk and control.

Another time, a metaphorical question was combined with an admit slip, to help students focus on a difficult Niebuhr essay on Christian commitment: (1) What is a key idea that Niebuhr expresses? (2) What season of the year would represent his impact on your thinking?

That the Bible is not true historically but is true spiritually. Niebuhr impacted me like the end of winter, and the beginning of spring. His ideas sounded dark and cold, but I also see warmth and brightness in his ideas.

Reinhold Niebuhr's main point is that a Christian must have the faith to change his or her perceptions with time and discovery, because Christian doctrine can be interpreted in so many ways, like art. This had impact on me because it was a refreshing look at the Christian faith, almost a springlike approach to the old dead winter ideas.

That you need to teach the truth by deception—in order to make the truth clear. What season? I would say fall because everything

seems to fall down around you when you see the truth. The leaves come off the trees, and everything seems to open up. There's a mess for a while, while the leaves are still falling, but once they stop falling and are cleaned up, you can live again.

The Bible's truth lies within deception. Winter—what appears useless is actually quite essential. What is barren on the outside today may contain the seeds of truth for tomorrow.

Thoroughly enjoying what students had written, I remarked, "Isn't it amazing what we can come up with when we're not even sure what we think?" A number grinned and nodded agreement. Each student had summarized a key Niebuhr idea slightly differently so that by the end of the reading, we had a rich collection of understandings. Beyond that, we had an appreciation for the personal responses Niebuhr's Christian existentialism had evoked. Students completed this activity with warm regard for their imaginative and intellectual skills, and heightened respect for the feelings each experienced while wrestling with new "images of the world."

Writing interview questions is another way for students to comprehend a philosopher's ideas. Each philosopher or literary character is interviewed about his beliefs and experiences. Over each section of reading, students write comments or questions to classmates who **role-play** Plato, Sartre, Siddhartha, or Ivan. The two or three role-players confer for ten minutes and begin the interview with a brief autobiography and position statement. Following are questions on three works: On Dostoevski's "The Grand Inquisitor"

It said, "They have vanquished freedom and have done that to make man happy." How is that going to make man happy?

You say freedom does not support man in a society. What does support society?

What do you mean when you say, "We shall deceive them again, for we will not let thee come to us again. That deception will be our suffering for we shall be forced to lie"?

Christ, why did you stay so silent when the Grand Inquisitor was talking?

Why is Ivan writing this story if he is an atheist?

On Hesse's *Siddhartha*

How does Siddhartha's searching relate to the "Allegory of the Den"? Could the wisdom of the "true light" be incommunicable to the prisoners according to Siddhartha's philosophy? Must the prisoners discover the truth for themselves?

Why does wisdom sound foolish to ordinary people? You did not think Gotama's words were foolish.

On Stace's essay "Man Against Darkness"

You say nature means nothing, has no use, no purpose. What do we do then if we are to disregard dreams, ideals? What do we do if we're not supposed to believe in these things? Are we then to give up our hopes? Do we then have nothing in our lives that means anything, and are to look for nothing to help us either?

If you don't know if God exists, then why do you condemn religion?

Through their questions, students request information and clarification. They compare with concepts studied earlier, criticize logical fallacies and infer meaning. Preparing for role-playing supports the students' journey into unknown territory by legitimizing uncertainty and tentativeness. Zen teaches that while the questions are profound, the answers are often shallow. Questions students write generate more questions and connections so that while role-players' answers clarify, it is the process of questioning and seeking that empowers. The process of discovery in writing to learn parallels philosophy as discovery, life as discovery. The educational, intellectual, and personal realms richly reinforce each other.

Following the interview and before a major paper is due, I assign a **focused write**. Students ignore spelling and mechanics and simply write all the thoughts that come to mind for at least one page. The focused write proved to be a solid technique for developing student fluency and appreciation for inner resources. From feeling they have little to say, students move to the truth that they'll write something worthwhile. Also, instead of the minimum one page, many, caught up in the momentum of their thinking, write past ten minutes. Perhaps because they know this formative paper will help them make a summative statement and because they are freed from worrying about correctness, they give themselves more fully to the task. In her focused write describing the process of enlightenment which Siddhartha experienced, one student wrote:

Siddhartha had to go through a lot of experiences before he was enlightened. By enlightenment I mean he had a sense of unity in the world. He had inner harmony and harmony with the world. He lived for the present and had no need for material possessions. To reach this enlightenment, Siddhartha's first step was to break away from his father and the beliefs he had held as a child. He went out alone and tried out many different teachers. He deprived himself, learned the art of love, surrounded himself with material possessions. He had to go through all this before he realized he did not want that. He didn't want to follow others' beliefs or play a game instead of really living. He then went into a great depression, came

close to suicide then thought, "Wait a minute! All this time I've been playing a dumb game, when what I really wanted was right under my nose!" He was able to see the unity of all things, good and bad. Yet it was like he had to go through all these other things before he could see past them to something more. He realized that people share desires and needs and this all makes up the world. After experiencing these desires, he could then understand why people do what they do and that life is a continuous cycle. I think that this is true wisdom.

At the end of ten minutes, this student was able to define wisdom. Engaged in "explaining the matter to herself," she discerned the pattern underlying Siddhartha's life experiences, generalizing this as a process common to all. She identified turning points in his life and drew her own conclusions.

Sometimes students exchange focused writing with two others. Besides continuing to build community, the exchange helps students discover alternative interpretations and strengthen appreciation for their own and classmates' skills and insights. Other times they underline their best, most effective, or "right on" sentence and read to us. Or they read aloud in groups of four to five and select their best to share with the class. This last option asks them to be critics as well, and to define the criteria by which the paper is chosen.

After all of these activities we arrive at the marriage of formative and summative writing. We shift from writing to learn to writing to inform in three summative assignments. One is the *Siddhartha* paper which discusses wisdom and the process of enlightenment. Students include where on this path they see themselves since personal and intellectual connections are important. A second summative activity discusses key ideas garnered from their supplementary reading. In selecting the supplementary book, students considered how it would meet their personal contract goals, since they are asked not to summarize, but to discuss ideas that shaped their understanding of self and the universe. For their final summative activity, students write their philosophy of life.

Summative writings are evaluated for content and form. This is unlike formative journal entries that are exploratory responses to content which students read aloud, or refer to in class discussions. Each student is expected to read aloud ten times during the twelve weeks, and is simply checked off in the grade book after each reading. In this way the sense of community is continually nurtured, I have constant feedback on the degree of student understanding and confusion, and the paperload is manageable. Any writing-to-learn strategy may remain

purely at the formative level; however, many can be taken to the summative stage, by students revising and editing their initial drafts to meet particular requirements.

There are four parts to this philosophy final. First is a map drawn in oil pastels indicating personal turning points during the course, with a brief description of what was learned at each turn. Second is a set of metaphorical comparisons, third is a biopoem, and fourth is an essay on their philosophy. This sequence assists students to synthesize their ideas, and focus their essays. They appear not only to enjoy the process more, they also write more authentically and effectively. To that end, they are asked and assisted to be artists, poets, and imaginative essayists.

While the class had a map—four course goals—to follow, the journey was unique for each individual. As Mike describes the turning points on his map, he reveals how each new idea shaped his image of himself and the world, and how he accommodated. His needs, interests, and concerns gave a unique inflection to his learning.

1. "The unexamined life is not worth living"—the clarity of this statement more fully impacted me when I was offered the opportunity to view man as insecure, and for the most part in need of an illusion. Then I began to see that we choose.
2. "To know all is to forgive all"—at first glance I was not able to accept this idea. After some thought, however, I came to the conclusion that everyone has reasons for everything they do. I was in a way shocked by the power of this statement. Somehow I felt as though I, at this point, opened my eyes.
3. Siddhartha's first enlightenment—at this point I started to participate more in the ideas of enlightenment. This was largely true because I could equate myself with Siddhartha since I was experiencing similar feelings.
4. Siddhartha listened to the river, hearing himself—the idea of finding oneself helped me understand enlightenment. I also feel that American society has become too hung up on external stimuli to listen to what the body or mind needs. This may have to change for society to continue.
5. Indulgences are modern illusions—society is not looking out of itself. We all (almost) are engaging in indulgences that actually keep us from facing uncomfortable situations. Because of avoidance, we will not have the chance to grow.
6. Examination of Sartre and Stace—through these two I have become more aware of the need for questioning the old ways. Everything else changes; why not beliefs? Rebellion against society has been repressed, but now I have a better understanding of the need for rebellion and I have relocated my challenging mind before my accepting mind.

7. Attitude—recently I have been exposed to readings which express the importance of attitude. The idea of using positive attitude has been a key to my getting back together.
8. “The fall upward”—this idea unlike others explored in class is totally new to me, and I feel more reassured that man as a force may be able to grow up and mature into a rational civilization. There is still hope!

In part two of the final paper students answered a set of metaphorical questions about themselves which tied in to our second goal, “know thyself.” Students were free to use any of the metaphorical questions asked in earlier exercises or to create their own. They asked class members how they were seen as a dance, color, means of transportation, body part, dessert; then they wrote how they saw themselves. Students “re-cognized” themselves in the following metaphors:

Ellen

If I were a means of transportation, I would be a bicycle, because I think that getting there is not only reaching a destination, but also how you get there, and because a bicycle is powered solely by man . . . self-reliant.

If I were a type of dance, I would be ballet, because it is traditional and somewhat reserved, but is very expressive to those who realize the depth and discipline ballet portrays.

Rhonda

A foggy day with the sun trying to show through. I have a hard time showing others my feelings and thoughts. Some think I try to hide my feelings and put on fronts. I really don't. I just don't know how to show my thoughts.

I'd say an elbow or knee because I am bendable in the way I can see others' sides or views, but you can only bend me so far.

Mike

Perrier. Not really a dessert, but I think it fits—you don't get it often, and when you do, you savor it. I don't see the self in me that is truly me very often. But when I do, I savor it. Perrier is also simple, basic, and natural—but with a touch of “class.”

Alley cat. A loner—I know what I want—I don't need anything new—I can live off leftovers.

In their metaphorical comparisons, students described themselves in authentic and touching ways. By this point in the trimester, sharing one's “true self” was received as a welcome, rewarding activity. Their honest and imaginative self-reflection demonstrated how trust had grown so that students could sing their songs and dance their dances in a world made larger and more comprehensible.

Metaphorical comparisons led students to the biopoem, a much more direct statement of self. In these later biopoems, students exhibit more imaginative, metaphorical language than in their first characterization on the Grand Inquisitor.

Paul.

meticulous, headstrong, grey matter, naive.

Relative of the burdensome.

Lover of untouchables, intellect, biting satire.

Who feels the weight of the stone, spiteful, the wrench of cold reality,

Who needs love, something beyond the formula, the ever-elusive lady luck,

Who gives disillusionment, lies to veil the clockworks, and who plays the tragedy to par,

Who would like to see his day arrive, the future which awaits him, the silver lining before the cloud appears

Resident of the big blue marble,

Rowe

Jan

Energetic, serious, opinionated.

Friend of Jodi

lover of Tim, life, good friends

Who feels free, content, hopeful

Who needs to learn, to love, to experience

Who fears failure, loss of choice, not being loved

Who gives criticism like acid and support like a rock

Who would like to see less pettiness, more communication, more caring

Resident of the world I choose to see.

Smith

Mike

Curious, cloudy, sensitive, longing

Brother of two who need to care

Lover of hair, art, the Grateful Dead

Who feels frustrated, misunderstood, free

Who needs forests, music, love

Who fears leaders, obligations, dark houses

Who gives love in hopes of receiving love

Who would like to see the world and its people at peace

Resident of The Earth.

Dove.

Finally, students write the essay, presenting those beliefs and values they have clarified, changed, and confirmed in encounters with various philosophers. In discussing their philosophies, students illustrate how writing to learn expanded their world pictures. Excerpts are grouped according to the four course goals, though they overlap in many ways.

On Examining Life

One of the key tasks of education is nurturing curiosity and a questioning attitude. These first two excerpts demonstrate growth toward analysis and reflection.

One of the most important things that came clear to me this trimester was the fact that "the unexamined life" is the height of immorality. If a person doesn't analyze what he's doing and just goes along with everyone, then he is voluntarily giving up his freedom.

By reading and discussing different philosophers and their significance, I have learned the importance of thinking and questioning. There is a lot of truth in the quote. "The unexamined life is not worth living." At the beginning of the course I did not fully realize the importance of that statement, but now I do.

On Knowing Oneself

In the following, three students have taken to heart Socrates' enjoinder to "know thyself." The first writer describes the fear that accompanies encountering oneself and others and the fear, especially for adolescents, of "what will others think of me?" It is through entering a dialogue with self and others that students forge a clearer identity. By encouraging dialogue, writing-to-learn strategies nurture mastery and self-confidence.

This is the part I liked most about this class. I learned a lot about myself. When I got into this class, I thought I was just going to learn about other philosophies, but I learned more about myself than anything else. I learned I don't have to agree with people just to make them happy. If I do all this agreeing, I'll never know what I feel, and other people will never know what I feel, but if I let people know how I really feel; they will like me for what I am, and hate me for what I am.

My idea of happiness lies beneath the music of wisdom within myself. When I lose my love for wisdom, happiness seems like a million miles away. Wisdom, for me, creates a passion for knowing myself and how to live.

When I started philosophy, I thought that all my religious questions would be answered, but it's not a matter of learning all the answers, it's a knowing where the answers are going to come from. Not from someone else, and not from knowledge of facts and figures, it comes from inside, from what you find through knowing yourself and experiencing life.

On Confronting the Problems of Existence

Again, the first writer echoes the fear of revealing himself to others and struggling, not with not caring or not having enough to say but with

how to appropriately express intense feelings and beliefs. How could he develop tolerance, if not appreciation, for different views, to respect others? Through participating in dialogues, role-plays, and metaphorical questions that actively engaged him, he learned to put himself in others' shoes. The other three students describe wrestling with issues of purpose, commitment, and independence. They show how involvement with literary ideas and characters helped them resolve personal issues.

After the first two weeks of the class, I knew I was in for it, because I could see that I was going to have to deal with one of the things I fear most, which is revealing my true, most inner feelings to people I hardly know. So this class rapidly became my most feared class. Getting into groups with people I don't know gives me the feeling that I wish I could be beamed up or just fly away, until the group had broken up

One thing I learned from this class was to respect other people's opinions. I used to want to come right out and attack people that didn't agree with me. And if I didn't attack them, I would always think about attacking them. Through this class I've learned to put myself in other people's shoes and try to see some positive aspects points to their opinion. Even if I still can't see some positive aspects or where they're coming from, by doing this I can at least carry on a somewhat calm conversation.

One great understanding I now have concerns the meaning of my life. Confusion had overpowered my thoughts to the point where I asked myself, "What am I doing here? Would I be better off dead?" But after reading *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl, I realize life's meaning changes from man to man, from day to day, from hour to hour. As the existentialist philosophers say, "You, yourself, make your own life."

Though I approached this class with the attitude that I was simply taking it to fill a junior English elective, I quickly decided after the first day that I had two choices. I could drop the class, or commit myself to an open, honest reevaluation of my beliefs. Unconsciously, I had my first experience with philosophical commitment at this point. Though I had made a Christian commitment before, this was a new kind of commitment. It was a commitment to growth, and a willingness to change. It was a commitment to accept ideas and really look at other beliefs. Whether I retain all of my Christian beliefs at this point is questionable, but my commitment to growth is one that I can make and uphold no matter what beliefs I might support. Spiritual death results from a closed mind and a closed heart.

After making this commitment, the class became an experience with inner turmoil. As a result of examining poetry and "The Grand Inquisitor," I concluded that truth, beauty, and goodness

would serve as an adequate definition for God as I perceived Him. This certainly did not threaten my Christian beliefs, and it also integrated what we learned. But something was gnawing at me. I soon found out why after analyzing "The Allegory of the Den." I began to recognize my own resistance to new ideas. As a Christian that is what I had been taught to do, but I knew it wouldn't work for philosophy. I began to experience the pain of trying to let go of some old ideas.

When I first came into philosophy, I was in a state of confusion. I had just begun to question my values and to wonder about life. I was unhappy, yet hiding behind a mask of indifference. At the time I had discarded my friends that I associated with in junior high, not being able to accept their values any longer. I could no longer live thinking that clothes, who I was friends with, and my current date were the most important things in life. I didn't know what my values were, and I was unhappy. Joyfully, I now see a clearer picture of myself, others, and the world.

First of all, the readings of philosophers helped open my eyes. The main eye-opener was *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse Young Siddhartha was frustrated with the teachings of parents and other authority figures He did not want to live by someone else's version of truth; he wanted to discover it for himself. This is exactly how I feel Siddhartha taught me that naturally I want to break away from my parents, and go on with my own quest, and it is totally natural, and I do not need to feel guilty about doing it.

On Clarifying One's Beliefs

On this last course goal, one student came to define himself as an existentialist while a second was able to define wisdom and to recognize the unceasing nature of the journey.

I am fundamentally an existentialist. Like Sartre, Stace, and Niebuhr, I believe that "existence precedes essence" and not vice versa. In other words, what I become I am solely responsible for. I must take the credit or the blame for what I make out of my life. Man must learn to accept the world as it is, looking at it neither through "rose colored glasses" nor the darkened glasses of negativism.

Epictetus is reputed to have said, "A life entangled with Fortune is like a torrent. It is turbulent and muddy; hard to pass and masterful of mood: noisy and of brief continuance." This class has helped me to understand how to deal with this torrent of life. Through reading and thinking about the existentialists, and after assuming the character of Stace in class discussion; I understand that I must be responsible to myself and to others. If I am to make sense out of the torrent, I cannot lapse into "quietism," but instead must try to change the world to what I want it to be.

My definition of wisdom, taken from *Siddhartha* and my own limited experience is: a state in which one has knowledge and conception of oneself and one's relationship to the universe. In *Siddhartha*, "this stone is a stone, it is also animal, God and Buddha . . . it has already long been everything and is everything." (*Siddhartha*, p. 117) Everything is itself and all other-things, and it is this realization that becomes and is wisdom.

I ask myself: who am I, what exactly do I believe (which has been clarified by this paper), and do I believe it because of myself, or my parents, or the society I live in? Do I really want enlightenment, and how much will I work or give up to get there? I have, indeed, not gone very far toward experience and wisdom, but I am learning and experiencing more every day.

In every case, students commented on the process of discovery they embarked on. They view life now as a process, with themselves as involved actors. They express greater confidence in their ability to grapple with the challenges life offers. They are less concerned with the product or destination and more absorbed in the myriad patterns of the journey itself. As one student concluded, "Life is a trip. Saddle up!"

Writing as a means for learning played a key role in facilitating this journey, helping students formulate a philosophy and shape an image of the universe and their relationship to it that had lain unformed and inarticulate until they began to write.

Teaching philosophy in this way is enormously pleasurable and satisfying. To see students grow in trust, self-understanding, critical thinking skills, and imaginative sensitivity is a joy. Since I believe strongly in the inquiry approach and the student as an active learner, the techniques I've described have greatly enriched my teaching repertoire and increased my effectiveness in the classroom.