

1982

# Teaching Advanced Writing: the Critical Essay. A Community Language Learning Based Approach

Kathleen Patricia Graves  
*School for International Training*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection)

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Graves, Kathleen Patricia, "Teaching Advanced Writing: the Critical Essay. A Community Language Learning Based Approach" (1982). *MA TESOL Collection*. 355.  
[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp\\_collection/355](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/355)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

Teaching advanced writing: the critical essay  
A Community Language Learning based approach

Kathleen Patricia Graves

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

March 1982

## INTRODUCTION

Often the materials and techniques developed to implement an approach are confused with the approach itself. A double misunderstanding arises from this confusion. The first misunderstanding is that the materials or techniques are the approach.<sup>1</sup> Let us take the case of Community Language Learning (CLL) and the taping/transcription technique. An observer might see a taping/transcription and think "Ah. CLL." This technique can indeed be used in CLL classes, but only because it implements certain fundamental concepts of the approach such as security, understanding, and student investment. If these concepts are not being implemented then the technique can hardly be called CLL. The second misunderstanding arises from the first; the approach becomes associated with certain techniques or materials and the equation is reversed: CLL is taping/transcription. For example, a teacher who uses the technique might say: "I use CLL in my class," where she might more accurately say: "I use the taping/transcription technique in my class."

As a result of this misunderstanding, teachers tend to limit themselves to only a few applications of the CLL approach rather than finding other ways to apply it. There is a tendency to adopt the technique and ignore the approach or, if the person does not like that particular technique, to throw out the approach. In fact, the materials and techniques grow out of the conceptual framework of the approach. This does not mean that they are the only materials and techniques which can be used to implement the approach.

## ABSTRACT

In this paper I will discuss how I applied my understanding of certain concepts of Community Language Learning to a writing class and specifically to the teaching of the critical essay. In Part One I will describe what we did in the class; in Part Two I will discuss the concepts of Community Language Learning that I was trying to apply in the class and how I was doing so; in the conclusion I will discuss how I see those concepts as being applicable to any class, regardless of the subject matter being taught.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	p. 1
Part One	p. 5
Part Two	p. 19
Conclusion	p. 34
Notes	p. 40
Bibliography	p. 41
Appendix I	p. 42
Appendix II	p. 45
Appendix III	p. 48

This project by Kathleen Graves is accepted in its present form.

Date June 27, 1982 Principal Advisor Ruthanne Brown  
Project Advisor/Reader: Kathy Ittner

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Ruthanne Brown, Lise Sparrow, Kathy Ittner, Donald Freeman and Claire Stanley for the time they spent helping me with this paper and for their encouragement.

For the first year and a half after I had been introduced to CLL, I worked with it only in certain types of classes such as grammar and aural/oral skills classes, and I limited myself to certain basic techniques and ideas such as the taping/transcription technique. Over time, as I became more familiar with the theory and principles of CLL, and gained a greater understanding of how to work within the approach, I was able to see how it could be applied in classes where the familiar techniques were not appropriate. The first class in which I moved away from techniques to a broader application of the approach was a writing class. In this paper I would like to describe that class and show how I tried to apply my understanding of CLL and work within the approach rather than just with certain techniques.

The class was an advanced composition class for ESL students. The students were adolescents from countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. The syllabus required learning to write six types of compositions: an autobiographical essay, a descriptive essay, an argumentative essay, an objective report, a narrative and a critical essay. Altogether I taught the course for four terms, with a different group of students each term. The first two terms I did not consciously try to work within the CLL approach. I did work with certain elements of the approach such as understanding responses, but the classes were still teacher-centered: I decided what the students needed to know about each type of composition; I explained it to them; I wrote the handouts. The essays which the first two groups wrote were adequate, except in the case of the critical essay. There, the conventional way of teaching did not produce the desired results. I explained thesis statements, handed out

definitions, gave the students model essays to read, and got back papers that were mainly rehashings of the plots of the novels they had read or the movies they had seen. To borrow from the terminology of the Silent Way, the students had not acquired the "inner criteria" that would guide them in writing this kind of essay.

After the second group I decided to look at what had and hadn't worked in the writing classes and to find a better way to approach teaching writing, one that would allow and encourage the students to develop the inner criteria that would guide them in writing compositions in general, and the critical essay in particular. So the third term, building on the experience gained in the preceding two terms, I tried to work more broadly with the concepts of CLL and to apply them to my whole conceptual approach to the class, rather than just to certain techniques at certain times.

I have chosen the critical essay as the focus of this paper for two basic reasons. First, because this type of essay was the one which caused my students the most difficulty and because this approach was successful in helping the students develop the criteria they needed to write this type of essay. Second, because it required an articulation of their understanding of the human condition, it allowed me to see depths of thought and imagination in my students which were usually hidden.

In Part One I will describe step by step what we did in class, including the outside assignments. I will describe the work done by the two groups with whom I worked in this way: the fall term group, "Group A", and the winter term group, "Group B". In Part Two I will



describe how this way of working was an implementation of CLL, and how it allowed the students to develop the criteria they needed to write the critical essay. Finally, I will discuss the lessons I learned from this experience as they relate to student-centered teaching.

## PART ONE

We started the section on the critical essay with poems. The "classical critical essay"<sup>2</sup> includes a thesis statement, a brief plot summary, development of the thesis, and one's own opinion regarding the work.<sup>3</sup> In the American approach to this kind of writing, the thesis development is the most important part of the critical essay. In formulating a thesis, the writer articulates her/his understanding of the underlying meaning of a work of art, what the author or artist is trying to say about the human condition. Poems are a good starting point for gradually building toward an understanding of the concept of the thesis. I found that poetry, in contrast to the short story, the novel or a movie, lends itself more readily to interpretation. Poets use words economically. They rely heavily on the symbolic meaning and multiple associations of the words they choose. Poetry usually requires interpretation in order to be appreciated. Films, novels, and short stories on the other hand, unless they are very esoteric, can be enjoyed for their narrative and do not necessarily compel us to look deeper. For these reasons we started the section on the critical essay with poems.

The poems we used were translations of eight poems by the Japanese poet Takuboku,<sup>4</sup> and "A Man Saw a Ball of Gold in the Sky", by Stephen Crane.<sup>5</sup> (See Appendix I) The vocabulary in these poems is very concrete. The surface meaning of the poems is easy to grasp and the underlying meaning is also easy to appreciate.

Our class periods were 45 minutes long. On the day we conducted a

final review of the compositions from the previous section, I gave the students a copy of the eight poems by Takuboku 15 minutes before the end of the period. I asked them to read the poems silently and individually and to underline or mark any vocabulary words they weren't sure of. After they had read them, I asked them which words they had marked. I gave them a brief and simple explanation of the words. The poems were short--five lines each--and the vocabulary was not difficult to explain. After the explanation, I asked them, for homework, to read the poems again, to choose three they particularly liked, and to describe what the poet was saying, in their own words, as well as any special message about human beings that he might be trying to give us in the poem.

The next day I asked the students to get out the poems and the descriptions they had written the evening before of the three they liked. Starting with the first poem, I asked if any of them had chosen it, and if they would like to share their ideas about it with the class. Usually the first comments about any of the poems were about the concrete, surface meaning of the poem. I tried to lead them to look under the surface by asking them why the poet had picked a certain word, or why he had described a particular situation. For example, the third poem was about a man who catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror and is surprised to see that he looks like a bum. I asked the students if the poet had just wanted to describe the man's actions and surprise or if there could be another reason for what he had written. The discussion led to their observation that the mirror might represent society and that society judges him as a bum even though he doesn't see himself that way.

The focus of that period was to bring their attention to the underlying meaning of the poems. Some of the students in Group B were

already familiar with this kind of exploration. They used such words as "symbol" quite comfortably. In both groups I introduced terms such as "literal", "figurative" and, for Group A, "symbol", during this discussion because I wanted them to have the vocabulary to describe underlying meaning. The discussion itself was quite general. We did not take any poem apart completely, and we only discussed the first four or five poems in that 45 minute period.

At the end of the period I asked them, for homework, to choose one poem and to write about what they thought the underlying meaning of the poem was. I asked them also to describe how they had decided that that was the underlying meaning, that is, what in the poem had given them that idea.

The next day in class we followed a procedure similar to the one the day before. We discussed those poems they had chosen to write paragraphs about. I asked the students to volunteer to tell us what they had written. We only discussed four or five of the poems, but we talked about them in greater detail because they had had more preparation. I guided the discussion: when a student expressed an idea, I asked him or her to show us where in the poem s/he had gotten that idea. If s/he had difficulty explaining this, I asked the other students if they could help find the source of the idea. I collected their paragraphs at the end of the period.

The paragraphs, for the most part, were not masterpieces of organization or clarity. But I had not expected them to be. I read them to see how well the students had understood the idea of underlying meaning and how well they had been able to support their ideas. The paragraphs gave me a sense of the class.

The next day I returned their paragraphs, on which I had made suggestions about how to present and support their ideas more clearly. We discussed their paragraphs and my comments.<sup>6</sup> About fifteen minutes before the end of the class I gave them a copy of the next poem we were going to work with: Stephen Crane's "A Man Saw a Ball of Gold in the Sky". This poem, like the Takuboku poems, had simple vocabulary and a straightforward literal meaning. I chose it because it was even more highly symbolic than the Takuboku poems and so would help further the students' understanding of the symbolic meaning to be found in literature. In addition, the message--that we will always strive for what glitters, even though when we have it we see it is really worthless--was one that the students could easily appreciate in terms of their own lives.

The treatment of this poem was quite different from the treatment of the Takuboku poems. Earlier in the term, the students had made a list of objectives they wanted to accomplish in the course. One of them was to have the opportunity to write in-class essays because they knew they would have to write those kinds of essays in American high schools and colleges. The Stephen Crane poem was one of the topics I chose for an in-class essay.

During those fifteen minutes I asked the students to read the poem and to mark any words they didn't understand. I explained the words they had marked, words such as "clay" or "lo". After the explanation I told them that the next day I would give them an essay question. Their homework was to read the poem carefully, looking for the underlying meaning, just as we had done with the Takuboku poems.

The next day in class they wrote the essay. (See Appendix I) I

collected their work at the end of the period. Then I gave them a copy of the short story which was to be the subject of the critical essay itself, "A Clean, Well-lighted Place" by Ernest Hemingway.<sup>7</sup> (See Appendix I) I asked them to read the story that evening for homework, to look up the words they didn't know, and to underline the expressions or words they couldn't understand, even with the help of a dictionary. I explained that the purpose of their homework was just to see if they could understand what happened in the story, not necessarily why it happened. The story is quite short (5 pages), and the vocabulary is not difficult, except for a few Spanish words.

The following day I read the story aloud, paragraph by paragraph. I had found that hearing a story read aloud with proper phrasing and intonation often made the meaning clearer. I stopped after each paragraph and asked them if they had any questions regarding the meaning. After we had discussed and clarified those points, I asked them to retell the paragraph in their own words. That way, I could see whether or not they had understood the main points.

The reading and discussion of the story took the whole period. At the end, I asked them to reread the story that evening and then to retell it in their own words in writing. On reading what they wrote, I had a chance to verify their understanding. There were a few misunderstandings about the action and the relationships of the characters. For example, some students thought it was the old man who was in danger of being picked up by the guard. In that case, we reread the part in question and I said that although it could be interpreted that way, in fact it was the soldier to whom the waiters were referring.

In the following class we began the procedure which I used when

introducing each new type of composition. The aim of this procedure was to establish a group definition for that type of composition. I wrote the name of the type of composition--in this case the words "CRITICAL ESSAY"--at the top of a large sheet of paper. I then asked the students to reflect for about three minutes on what those words meant for them. Then I asked them to discuss for three to five minutes in small groups or in pairs, depending on the size of the class, what they thought the words meant. I then asked them to share their ideas with the whole class. I wrote those ideas on the paper under the CRITICAL ESSAY heading. My role at this point was "scribe". I made sure I had understood what they were trying to say, and then wrote it up, in their own words as much as possible.

Group A, which had five people, responded with the following:

#### CRITICAL ESSAY

- Describe the story
- Explain the main idea of the author
- Describe the characters
- Pick out the important incidents of the story
- Pick our opinion

Group B, which had nine people, was more elaborate:

#### CRITICAL ESSAY

- Criticism of the author's style (way of writing)
- Criticism of the author's idea (whether or not we agree)
- What the author is trying to say in the story
- The meaning
- The relationship between the author's meaning and our own life
- What we learn from it
- Our feelings about the story
- Retell some parts of the story, examples
- Summary of the story
- What we think of the characters in the story

Next, I asked them to reflect for three minutes on the ideas which had been written up to see if there were any ideas which could be grouped together. After that, I again asked them to discuss their conclusions in small groups. This kind of reflection and grouping into categories gave them practice in using a skill which is essential for effective writing: the ability to perceive relationships among similar ideas and to categorize them. As they expressed their ideas in the group as a whole, I wrote up their categories, identifying them with Roman numerals.

Group A categorized their ideas as follows:

- I Describe the story
  - Describe the characters
  - Pick out the important incidents of the story
- II Explain the main idea of the author
  - Pick out the important incidents of the story
- III Pick our opinion

The group decided that the "important incidents" could come in categories of both description and explanation.

Group B grouped their ideas as follows:

- I Criticism of the author's style
  - Criticism of the author's idea
  - Our feelings about the story
  - What we think about the characters
- II What the author is trying to say in the story
  - The meaning
- III The relationship between the author's meaning and our own life
  - What we learn from it
- IV Retell some parts of the story
  - Summary of the story



After they had grouped their ideas in categories, I asked them to study those categories and decide which one or ones were the most important in the essay and to be prepared to say why they had made that choice. I gave them time for individual reflection, followed by discussion in a small group, before we discussed this as a whole. Group A agreed right away that the author's meaning was the most important part of the essay. The responses in Group B varied. Some felt it was the criticism, others felt it was what they had learned from the work, and others felt it was the author's meaning. At points such as this one, I acted as a guide. In this case I set a new focus. I wanted to lead them to a discussion of what the goal of this kind of critical essay was, so I asked them where they might have read something similar. We discussed reviews they had read in magazines and newspapers and their purpose, which was to help us decide whether or not it was worthwhile seeing that particular movie or reading that book. We contrasted it with a class paper, which is usually about something the reader (the teacher) has already read or is familiar with. After some lively discussion this group agreed that the author's meaning was important because that showed that they could think and had understood the work.

After each group had reached agreement on what they considered the most important part of a critical essay, I asked them to put the categories in an order which made sense to them, the order they might use in writing the essay. They worked in small groups to determine an appropriate order, and then, as a whole, they agreed on an appropriate order. Group A kept their original order: I - Description of story and characters, II - Explanation of the story, III - Their opinion. Group B rearranged theirs: first, II - What the author is trying to say, second, IV - Summary,

third: I - Criticism of the story, fourth: III - What we learn from it.

Their assignment that evening was to reread the story and to write down what they thought the author's message was.

In the next class I asked them to volunteer their ideas about what the story meant, based on what they had written the previous evening. I wrote their ideas on another large sheet of paper. The ideas offered by Group A are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

#### WHAT WAS THE AUTHOR TRYING TO SAY?

- The world is nothing.
- If people go into a matter deeply, they will find out it's nothing.
- Friends are the most important thing in the world.
- Ultimately, people are always alone.
- People's opinions about old people change, possibly for the better, as they get older.
- The world is not clean, because there's evil.
- Money isn't everything.
- Old people are sometimes alone because they don't have friends.

After all their ideas had been written down, I asked them to reflect on these statements to determine whether any of them belonged together. After a few minutes of reflection, they discussed their ideas in small groups. Then I asked them to share their ideas and group the statements accordingly. Here is the way they grouped their statements:

- A) The world is nothing.  
If people go into a matter deeply, they will find out it's nothing.
- B) Friends are the most important thing in the world.  
Old people are sometimes alone because they don't have friends.
- C) Ultimately, people are always alone.
- D) People's opinions about old people change, possibly for the better, as they get older.

- E) The world is not clean, because there's evil.
- F) Money isn't everything.

After this I asked them to think about the story and to decide which category or categories they thought were the most important meaning in the story. I starred the ideas they had decided were the most important:

- \*A) The world is nothing.  
If people go into a matter deeply, they will find out it's nothing.
- \*C) Ultimately, people are always alone.
- \*E) The world is not clean, because there's evil.

Finally, I asked them to reflect on these major ideas, the ones they had starred, to see if they could see any possible relationships among them. They discussed the possible relationships in small groups and then as a whole. I asked each small group to write down a statement that would express the relationship they had perceived among or between the ideas. I suggested that they might see if one of the ideas existed because of another one. After they had written their sentences, I asked them to volunteer one as an example, which I then wrote on the board. The one they chose was: "The world is nothing and Hemingway thought that's the reason people are ultimately alone."

That sentence was, in effect, a thesis statement. As I wanted to guide them to their own understanding and definition of a thesis statement, I asked them to write a definition of the kind of sentence I had just written down. The definition they gave was: "This sentence is an expression of the main ideas and how they go together." I told them that the name usually given to this kind of sentence was "thesis statement".

For homework I asked them to read the story again, to think about what we had done in class, and to write down their own thesis statement.

In the next class I asked the students to volunteer their thesis statements. I wrote the ones they volunteered on another large sheet of paper. Here are the statements they offered:

"I think the author's main idea of the story is the loneliness which comes from the nothingness and dirtyness of human society."

"In this story, Ernest Hemingway wants to explain that the world is nothing and we have to think about something else which is called God."

"Ernest Hemingway believes that the world is followed by an unchanged human life pattern and life is nothing graceful."

I asked the students to look at these statements to see if they needed clarification of any of the words or phrases. I underlined the words they told me. Then we looked at each word or phrase in order to find a definition that could be understood by everybody. As we tried to find these definitions, it became apparent that two kinds of explanation were needed. In some cases, because the student had chosen a word which had a special meaning for him or her, a simple rewording clarified the matter. Examples of this were "dirtyness" and "unchanged human life pattern". In other cases, the student whose statement we were discussing would say: "I got that idea from the story." Examples of this were the concepts of "nothingness" and "loneliness". We held those explanations until the end.

The definition they agreed on for "dirtyness" was "moral wrong" and for "unchanged human life pattern", "the cycle of birth, youth, middle and old age". For the concepts of "nothingness" and "loneliness", I

asked them to reflect on how they would make these ideas clear to someone who hadn't read the story and didn't understand what they meant. Their basic conclusion, which they shared, was that they would have to show how they got those ideas from the story itself.

I asked them to write down every piece of evidence they could find in the story to support their statement. This simple listing turned out to be much too superficial a treatment of the ways of supporting a thesis statement with documentation from the story. As a result, their papers were poorly documented. Consequently, I asked the students in Group B to reflect and discuss, in class, a variety of ways in which they could support their thesis statements. They concluded that they could support them with quotes, examples, and their own explanations based on the story. I wrote those ways up on a large sheet of paper and asked that group, for their assignment, to use all those ways to support their statements.

The following day, we started to examine the other parts of the essay. We started with the summary. We followed a procedure similar to the one described earlier: reflection on what should be included in that part of the essay, discussion in small groups, discussion in the whole group and recording of ideas. In the reflection and discussion on the summary, I focused them on the idea that it should not be a simple retelling of the story. Their answer to the question: "What is the purpose of the summary?" was : "To give an idea of what the story is about so that people can understand your thesis explanation." When I asked the question: "What do we include in the summary?", they arrived at this answer: "The incidents that are important because they express

the author's idea, according to our thesis."

At this point we had a long discussion about how one determined what the important incidents were. I asked them to look at their thesis statements to see what kind of information they would give. The pivotal point of this discussion was the soldier in the first part of the story. Some of the students thought the soldier was important. Others found him of minor significance. We concluded that if the reader needed to know about the soldier in order to understand a person's thesis, then that person should mention him in the summary. Otherwise, he shouldn't be mentioned.

We also discussed the length of the summary. I pointed out that it should be as brief as possible since it was not an explanation, just a skeleton that they would flesh out in the development of their thesis. Knowing how easy it would be to fall into a retelling of the story, I asked them what their reaction was to someone who spent an hour telling them about a movie s/he had seen. Most of them responded that they either got bored or decided they wanted to see the real thing. I suggested they keep that in mind while writing their summaries. I did not assign a summary for homework to this group, Group A. This turned out to be a mistake because in their final papers some of their summaries were interminable, in one case a two page retelling of the story. Consequently, I assigned the summary for homework to Group B. In general, Group B's summaries were concise and gave the necessary information. In some cases they strayed, but I was able to hand the summaries back with an indication of where they had strayed. They corrected their errors and I checked the summaries again to verify understanding of my comments. There were also some

instances where they had quoted from the story and I suggested they save the quotes for the development of their thesis and use only their own words in the summary.

After completing work on the summary, we examined the criticism component of the essay. After the usual procedure of reflection, discussion and grouping of ideas, the students determined that criticism was of two kinds. The first kind determined whether or not the author had communicated his or her idea through the story. They couldn't criticize the idea itself, only the effectiveness of the presentation. The second kind of criticism determined whether or not they thought the story was good, whether or not it had been well-written, whether or not it had been interesting, whether or not it had used an appropriate style.

In discussing the second kind of criticism, I asked them to imagine that each time I had returned one of their papers all I had written on it was "terrible", or "needs improvement", or "good." I asked them what their reaction would be. They said they would like to know why it was terrible or where it needed improvement. I suggested that in saying whether they thought the story was good or bad, they should say why, and particularly if they thought something wasn't good, how it could be improved.

After we had completed work in class on understanding each different part of the essay, I assigned the complete essay. Group A followed this pattern: summary, thesis development, criticism. Group B presented their thesis statement first, followed by the summary, followed by the development and criticism.

PART TWO

At this point I am going to briefly outline the elements of CLL that are especially pertinent to what I did. They are: security, student investment, understanding responses, limits, the teacher as "seed planter" rather than as "answer person", and community. I will then discuss how those elements determined the way I approached, planned and directed the class.

Student security is crucial to learning in the CLL approach. Security creates an environment in which the students transform their anxieties and fears concerning the language, the teacher, the reactions of other students, and their own abilities into the willingness to take risks, to become active in class, and to work together. Security does not simply facilitate learning, it is the sine qua non of invested learning. For the teacher, this means that she must learn what the students are capable of and utilize those capabilities while building on what they already know. She must set tasks which will challenge them, but which are not beyond their ability. The latter could make the students feel incapable or inadequate and, therefore, insecure. Trust can be built in a class where students know they will be challenged but not threatened. Security depends on that trust. More importantly, successfully accomplishing a task builds the students' self confidence. Continued progress in learning depends on that self confidence.

In this secure environment the students are given the freedom to take an active part in the learning process by being asked and encouraged to contribute their ideas, perspectives, knowledge and suggestions. When



students venture to take an active part in the learning process they are investing themselves in that process. Investment is an ongoing, active commitment to the class. It is most evident in verbal expression and response, however, it can also be silent commitment. A public investment such as a verbal response or having one's paper read to the group involves a certain amount of risk. Even if the teacher has said that there are no right or wrong answers, the students may still feel that what they want to say may be wrong, or way off target, or unacceptable to the others. Those students can thus risk feeling ridiculed because they have ventured to express or share what they believe to be true, although it may differ from what the teacher or their classmates think. In the CLL approach, student investment is the very stuff of the class; without it the class could not function.

The understanding response is essential to encouraging and promoting investment. When a student volunteers a statement, the teacher responds in such a way that she shows the student that she has understood what s/he is attempting to express. This response is usually a rephrasing in the teacher's own words of what the student has said. This kind of response shows implicit recognition of the value of the person, as well as of what s/he is saying. Explicitly, it helps to clarify what is being said and, in the language classroom, to rephrase it correctly in the target language. It also allows the discussion to flow. A student who knows that her or his contribution will be recognized and understood can be secure, and is therefore more likely to contribute than one who is not sure of such understanding.

Limits are a definition of the task in all its aspects: time,

content, role of the individual student, procedure and purpose. Limits are the responsibility of the teacher and force her to be clear about what she is trying to accomplish and why. Limits are essential to security because they let the students know exactly what is expected of them. Appropriate limits serve to focus the energy and concentration of the students on the task at hand, thus permitting them to use their energy efficiently and effectively.

CLL distinguishes between two roles for the teacher: the seed planter and the answer person. As a seed planter, the teacher furnishes the beginnings, or seeds, of ideas, which can be embedded in the activity or in the form of questions, which allow the students to find an answer according to their individual needs, abilities, interest and readiness. As an answer person, the teacher must always have the answer--usually there is only one right one--and the students must learn that answer from the teacher. The seed planter is more concerned with the person and the process of learning, the answer person with the correctness of the result. When the teacher takes the role of seed planter, she does not give the students the answers; the students have to take an active and willing part in their learning in order to find them.

Community, a group of people working together and learning from one another in pursuit of common goals, is the natural outcome of the CLL approach. However, it is not a static result, which once achieved will continue to exist. It depends on the constant interplay of all the elements mentioned above, recognition of people and valuing their contribution, and allowing them to work together and to draw on each other as resources.

By the time we started to work on the critical essay, a community had already developed in the class and the students worked well together. However, because of the difficulty my previous groups had had with the critical essay, and because I wanted these two groups (A and B) to develop an inner understanding of how to write this essay, I was especially concerned with the need for security and conscious of my role as seed planter. The thesis and its development were the key to writing the essay. The students' ability to interpret an author's ideas was the key to understanding how to write a thesis. As discussed earlier, poems lent themselves easily to interpretation of this kind. So, in the interest of security, I chose to work on poems as the first step in gradually building toward an understanding of what a thesis was. With the poems as well as the short story, we worked first on the vocabulary and surface meaning so that the students would feel sure of what they knew before going on to the less tangible realm of underlying meaning. I wanted each step to follow and build on the one before it.

Security should not imply complacency. On the contrary, the whole reason for building security was to encourage students to take an active part in the learning process. This meant that the students had to be willing to take risks. In these two classes the students were continually asked to share their thoughts with the group: about the meaning of the poems, about the meaning of the words 'critical essay', about which ideas they thought were more important. But they were not put on the spot. Their work in small groups or pairs before sharing ideas as a whole group gave them a chance to try out their ideas in a less threatening situation, with their peers. This also helped to

maintain the community.

Let's take the example of when I wrote the words "critical essay" on the butcher paper and asked the students "What do these words mean for you?" That moment was a critical one. I needed their responses so that I could assess what they knew and so we could have the raw material with which we were to work. I also wanted the group to become aware of what they knew as a group. I tried to make it as non-threatening a moment as possible by first giving them some time to reflect and then to share their thoughts and ideas in a small peer group. Then, even in the whole group, I did not call on anyone in particular, nor did I look at anyone because I didn't want the students to feel pressured to speak. Nevertheless the people who did volunteer an answer were taking a big risk: the others might not understand or agree, they might challenge or laugh at them. Because I had been consciously building security, because the task was challenging but not too difficult, the students did choose to respond. Thus, throughout the course, since the originators of the ideas were the students, not a text or handout from me, the students were continually investing in the learning process.

When a student did choose to respond, for example by saying: "I think the author was saying...", I could have responded to her or him in several ways. I could have approved of or disagreed with what s/he had said. I could have asked the other students if they agreed or not. Such ways of responding would have implied that learning was a process aimed at getting the right answers, not a process of finding one's own personal meanings and answers. In that case, the students would

probably only have answered if they thought they had a good chance of being right, according to standards set by me as the teacher. Another way of responding would have been to simply remain silent. In that case I would not have been applying right/wrong standards. I would have been allowing each student to build his or her own criteria for that. But I would have left the student who spoke with the uncertain and insecure feeling of not knowing whether s/he had made sense to anybody. S/he might possibly have experienced a feeling of isolation. Because I wanted my students to feel secure, understood, and part of a community, I chose to respond to them with understanding responses.

Each verbal investment was received with understanding starting from the question "Which poem do you like and why?" I listened very carefully to what the student said. I then tried to put into my own words what I had understood. There was no expression of judgement in that understanding, no approval or disapproval. (In fact, approval would not have shown acceptance of what s/he had said; rather, it would have meant that I had evaluated the ideas according to my own criteria.) After I had verbally understood the student, I checked with him or her to verify whether my understanding had been on target or not. If s/he indicated that it had, I wrote that statement on the butcher paper. I wrote everything the student had said, trying as much as possible to keep the original phrasing because that, too, was an investment. Because those words had an immediately recognizable meaning for the student, they provided security. If the student indicated that I hadn't understood, I asked for clarification and then tried again.

As a teacher and a knower of the subject matter, it was very easy

to hear only what I knew or expected to hear and not to hear what I didn't expect. For example, in the discussion about their comments on the poems, I understood every comment they made if it was focused on a poem because that was the limit I had set. Some students in fact saw some things that I hadn't. I almost "misunderstood" them, that is, I tried to fit in what they said with what I knew, rather than suspending all my expectations and listening to them. By listening to them in this way I discovered new points of view and a wider interpretation of the poems.

This kind of understanding enabled the students to hear themselves objectively. In an ESL class such as this one, students had a hard time expressing themselves in English on difficult points. My understanding helped them to hear their ideas expressed in a way they could feel confident about. They knew they had made sense and so they felt that what they had to say was valid. Finally, they felt encouraged to continue investing. For this course to keep going and for the students to keep learning, they had to keep investing. A cycle emerged: investment, which was met with understanding, which in turn encouraged further investment. Because each step built on the previous one this cycle was actually a spiral.

The investment was not always publicly expressed. I'd like to give an example of one of my students who was very involved in the process and yet never said anything in class. In Group A, three of the five students volunteered their thesis statements and the other two did not. One of those who hadn't, stayed after class the day we worked on their thesis statements. He wanted to talk to me about the class. Actually, because

he hadn't said a word during this whole section on the critical essay, I had begun to worry that he might be having difficulties, so I was very glad that he had come to talk to me. He opened the conversation by saying that he really didn't see the things in the story that the other students saw. (v. pp. 13-15) As he put it, it was "too deep" for him. I responded with understanding responses until he had gotten all this off his chest. Then I told him that the important thing was not how deep his thesis was but that his thesis was his and expressed what he saw in the story. At that point he was feeling insecure and hesitant because he was not sure of the limits. I defined the limits for him and also added that whatever he understood was right as long as he could support it with examples from the story. Then I asked him if he had any questions about what we had been doing in class, since it had been hard for me to know because of his silence. He said that he didn't have any questions and that he had understood everything. He was just shy and didn't like to talk in front of others. The final critical essay he wrote did, in fact, show that he had understood everything. I have attached it at the end in its entirety in Appendix III.

The smooth functioning of the process of investment and learning depended on my setting tasks with clear and appropriate limits. For example: "Please take a few minutes to read the poems and, as you read them, underline or mark any words that aren't clear to you." When the limits were clear the students didn't feel confused or afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing. They felt challenged but not threatened. For example, with the question "What is the author trying

to say?" they knew they were being asked what, not why. They wouldn't be asked questions about their statements, they needed only to state, not to defend what they said. These instructions gave the students a specific focus for their energy. The kind of task I set depended on my assessment of the students' readiness and security. A proper assessment depended on my own clarity.

If the students strayed from the limits, I gently reminded them of the limits. This required a certain amount of sensitivity. If a student was really investing in something that was outside of the limits set, I responded with understanding, hence recognizing that person, and then guided him or her back with "But I was asking you to..." If what s/he said was off because my instructions had been unclear, then I restated them, I did not defend them. The purpose of the limits was to free students to invest as fully as possible in the task at hand.

Limits form a kind of contract between teacher and student. Both teacher and student should abide by them. It's also easy for the teacher to stray from the limits. For example, the final assignment for the Takuboku poems was to choose one of the poems and to write about what they thought the meaning of the poem was. When I checked the paragraphs I checked to see how well they had expressed their understanding of the meaning they had perceived. Even though I was tempted to, I didn't check for style or organization because that hadn't been part of the contract.

There is another way in which I could have strayed from the limits. When the students were trying to find the meaning of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", if they had not mentioned a meaning I personally thought was there,



and if I had asked them, "Well, what about this meaning?" I would have been breaking the contract. The contract asked them to express their ideas. Had I felt the need to introduce another idea, I would have waited until after that activity and found another way to introduce it.

Meanwhile I would also have had to ask myself why I wanted to introduce this idea. Was it to meet my need to show them a better way? Was it to show them they still had something to learn from me? And I would have had to ask myself where this need sprang from. Was it really a need? Or was it a lack of trust in the students' ability? If it was a lack of trust, I would have been reverting to the role of answer person.

The first two terms of teaching this writing course I had basically taken the role of answer person. I had told the students what a critical essay was. I had told them what to do each step of the way. I had not assumed any previous knowledge on their part, nor had I allowed room for them to become personally involved with this information. I had viewed the matter as information they needed to learn. As mentioned earlier, I was concerned with the result, not the students or the process.

Taking the role of answer person can have two detrimental consequences. In that it asks the students to set aside their own self-identity, which is based on what they know, it asks them to acknowledge that in this subject area the teacher is complete and they are incomplete. As a result, students feel a natural desire to assert their own identity and the only way to do that is by rejecting in some way the situation which denies them their identity. As that situation is embodied in the teacher, this often emerges in attempts to thwart the teacher's carrying out of her role: disruptive behavior, tangential questioning, deliberately

giving wrong answers, refusing to learn, getting high marks but not caring, challenging the teacher, etc. This has been called "defensive learning"<sup>9</sup> because the students on the attack to defend their identity put the teacher on the defensive. She has to defend her authority and identity as answer person.

The second detrimental result is the lack of result: since no attempt is made to involve the students so that they can relate the answer to themselves in a meaningful way, the learning can't take root. The students often don't learn. This, I think, was the case in the first two terms I taught the course. No matter how much I lectured or explained, the critical essays showed that the students hadn't learned.

An alternative to the teacher as answer person is the teacher as seed planter, that is, as one who is planting a seed or seeds in the "soil" of the students' experience. In this class, the seeds I planted were questions which would lead to the understanding of how to write a critical essay. These questions could mature into answers through each student's processing of them through her or his knowledge and experience, through my guidance, and through learning from other students. The sentence Group A used to describe their thesis statement was: "A sentence which is an expression of the main ideas and how they go together." This is very similar to a book definition but there is a huge difference between students arriving at that definition through their own efforts, and being given that definition by the teacher. For my classes the first two terms, I had written the definition on the board, told them it was a definition of a thesis statement, and asked them if they had any questions. As a result, I had very little way of knowing

whether the idea had taken root or not and whether they had truly understood it. I knew Groups A and B had understood what a thesis statement was because I had watched them go through the process of formulating it.

As a seed planter I prefer to plant seeds in a garden, not in a row of separate flower pots. This garden is, of course, the community. Throughout the course the students sat around a table facing each other. I circulated around the class. They worked often in small groups, in pairs, or as a whole group. They learned to listen to each other and to depend on each other, rather than on me, the teacher, for response to their ideas. For example, in the winter term, when Group B was working on thesis development, we had discussed the roles of the various characters in the story. One morning one of the students came to class with a burning question: "Why was the old man deaf?" That was actually something I had never thought about and I was very happy to be able to turn it over to the class for their comments and suggestions. They cleared the matter up in minutes: the old man was deaf because Hemingway didn't want him to take an active part in the story since he was a symbol of old age.

As a community their resources were immeasurably increased and there was no pressure on any one individual to think of all the answers alone. The students benefited from peer support and criticism, other points of view, chances to rest and reflect while others spoke. The ideas became communal, so it wasn't difficult to speak out.

In the interest of community I had all the students work on the same short story. In the first two terms, when the students had all

worked on different stories of their choice, it had been very difficult to bring their experiences together. Since this story was simply a vehicle for learning to write a critical essay, it was much easier to have that common focus.

It is important to note that creating a class in which the teacher is not the focus of the students' attention does not mean the teacher relinquishes control of the class to the students. To continue the metaphor of a garden, a gardener who lets her garden take its own course untended will end up with a wild tangle of plants and weeds. The flowers and fruit may well be choked off before they can grow. By contrast, a successful gardener takes watchful care of her plants, pulling up weeds when necessary, but not uprooting the plant; ensuring that they have proper nourishment and sunlight, but not watering them to death or overexposing them. So, too, the teacher's role is crucial in structuring the class. She sets limits on both the content, e.g., thesis documentation, and the procedure, e.g., reflection, and the time limits for each activity. I planted the "critical essay seed". The ground, the students, accepted it because there was trust. Security was built on the trust that I would set tasks they could accomplish. It was also based on understanding responses which encouraged continued investment. Through this interplay of investment and understanding I could be in constant touch with my students' progress each step along the way. Because the ideas were shared, a community of mutually supportive individuals developed. The fruit of our work was their understanding of the critical essay and how to write one.

The students' final task was to combine the parts we had done in

class into a meaningful and coherent whole. As the seed planter, I could never know exactly what fruit or flower the seed would actually bear. I knew that each would be unique. I also knew that full maturity would take time. No one in either class submitted a perfect essay. Different essays erred in different directions. The summaries in the essays written by Group A were generally too long and their thesis statements were not adequately supported. I had not asked them to write trial summaries; I had not built a secure base from which I could determine whether or not they had understood how to write a good summary. Neither had I asked them to define their own criteria for how to support their thesis. Consequently, I had Group B work more thoroughly with both the summary and the thesis development and documentation. Their papers, in some cases, contained too many supportive quotes and not enough explanation of how the ideas fit together. In other papers their evidence did not always support their thesis statement. On the whole, however, they were using the ideas and organization we had developed in class. If they made mistakes, at least they were the right mistakes. One student, in an evaluation session, summed this up by saying: "Well, I may not know how to write a good essay, but I know how to write one." He had the criteria he needed. The "good" would come with practice.

When I corrected their papers I tried to show as clearly as possible where they had strayed from the criteria we had established in class. I tried to use the terms with which they were familiar so that they would understand my comments in the context of what they had done. I encouraged them to ask their American friends to help them with grammar

and vocabulary. They also had the option of rewriting the paper until they were satisfied with it.

## CONCLUSION

I set out to apply my understanding of Community Language Learning to one class in which I felt that the subject matter was not being successfully learned. As the class unfolded, it became clear to me that the principles being implemented could be applied to any teaching/learning situation in which a learner-centered approach was desired. Moreover, I discovered that both my students and I gained far more than the successful transmission of knowledge. By building on the foundation of their own experience, the students gained self reliance and independence. I gained from the challenge and excitement of helping them to learn in this way. I would like to conclude with a discussion of those elements which I feel have general applicability to teaching and how they can benefit the students and the teacher.

If a teacher genuinely wants a student-centered class she has to begin with the students, not with the subject matter. In my experience it has been second nature to teach what I know as the teacher, to try to bring my knowledge to the students' experience, which usually has the effect of overpowering their experience. Students are people with already established identities who bring to the classroom a great deal which can have a bearing on what they are learning. The desire to start with the students must be rooted in the belief that the students learn because they do something with themselves, not because the teacher teaches them. Her role is facilitator of that process. For example, the students in the writing class all had the innate ability to interpret literature and to express their interpretation. I did not give them that ability

nor did I teach them what to write. I chose certain materials, I asked them questions which gave them the opportunity to apply their ability and to formulate their own answers. I acted as a facilitator.

In other classes I had been an answer person rather than a facilitator or seed planter. One basic reason for that was that in most of my education my teachers had assumed that role. Among other possible reasons there are two which I consider especially important. The first is insecurity about the subject matter. The ostensible reason for my being a teacher was that I knew the subject. When I was insecure about that knowledge, rather than be concerned with the students and their learning, I was concerned with the subject matter and how well I could teach it without the students discovering what I didn't know. That concern usually led to a rigidity and defensiveness on my part which made it very difficult to be a facilitator. However, I could have been a facilitator had I worked from what I did know. Rather than portray myself as an authority on every aspect of the subject, I could have structured the class within the limits of my knowledge. The second reason is attachment to the subject matter. When I knew, or even loved, the subject matter too well, part of my identity came from my authority on it. In that case I became more concerned with the subject matter and demonstrating my authority than with the students' learning. Relinquishing the role of answer person would have meant giving up the need to be recognized for my knowledge. Believing that the students don't learn from me, but from themselves, enabled me to do so. In summary, the ability to be a facilitator is rooted in teacher security vis-a-vis herself as a knower and as a person.



A facilitator manifests her trust and respect for her students as individuals, for what they bring to the class, and for their ability to learn. She does this in her attitude toward students, in the structuring of the class so that they can learn from their own experience, and in the way she responds to student involvement. Students can be involved from the beginning by giving them the psychological space and time to show the other class members, themselves, and the teacher what they already know that could be helpful in learning the subject matter. For instance, I taught a summer workshop a few years ago called "Introduction to Batik Dyeing." My initial plan was to start by explaining the dyeing process and then to take the students through it step by step. Instead, I decided to start with what the students already knew, as I had been doing in language classes. Consequently, I began by asking if any of them had done any dyeing before. Those who had, described what they had done. Some had done silk-screening, while others had done simple potato block. That information served as a basis for describing batik dyeing, by contrast and comparison. In this way they had a basis from which to work, which they themselves had established.

Implicit in trust is a willingness to understand students. To work from their experience, the teacher has to be willing to truly understand it, not to try to manipulate it to fit with what she wants. She has to let that understanding guide her. She has to be willing, in fact, to learn from students, to see teaching as an interactive process of evolution for both herself and the students. I have found that when I am attached to my way of doing things, or to my schedule for doing them, I have difficulty understanding what my students are saying to me, either

through their actions or their words, and acting accordingly.

Just as teachers come with expectations of "teaching" the subject, so students come expecting to be "taught." They don't expect to be granted space to bring themselves to the learning, nor do they expect to be given the responsibility to do so. In this respect it is clear that success as a facilitator depends on the ability to structure the class. Choosing to start with the students and to depend on their input does not mean turning the class over to the students and saying "Go ahead. It's all up to you." Such a course would be an abdication of the responsibility to guide them and could also destroy their security and their respect for the teacher. In fact, the responsibility to plan is even greater than when following a text or prescribed outline. The teacher has to give the students responsibility which they can handle as well as the opportunity to learn from their own experience.

I would like to illustrate the above with a case in which there was too little experience and too much responsibility. This was a class of seven people. One day three of them were absent. The other four did an activity whose purpose was to help them build their own criteria for understanding the usage of certain verb tenses. After the activity I asked them to draw conclusions about when those tenses should be used. When it was clear from their answers that they were confused about the appropriate usage, I explained it to them. In the next class I asked the four to "teach" the other three how to use the tenses. I saw this as student-centered because I was giving the students the responsibility to teach their peers. The four had difficulty explaining the appropriate usage, so I explained it to the other three.

In retrospect, I can see that by the end of both classes I had stepped out of the role of facilitator and into the role of answer person. My focus had shifted from the students to the subject matter. I was more concerned with their getting the right answer than with whether they had understood it or felt secure about what they knew. However, the fact that I had explained it did not mean that they had learned it. In terms of learning from their own experience, neither group had really been able to do so: the four because they had been given too little opportunity, the three because they had been given no opportunity. By asking the four to teach something they couldn't, I had given them far more responsibility than they could handle. The net result was confusion, frustration and insecurity.

In summary, the key to a student-centered class seems to be the interplay of security and responsibility. For the teacher this means security as a knower and as a person. Her responsibility is to her students, to ensure their security and to structure their learning time productively. For the students this means the security that enables them to take risks and to take the responsibility for becoming involved in the class.

What do the students gain from such a learning experience? They learn the subject matter. However, students can also learn the subject matter in a teacher-centered class. The real gain is in how they learn. Because they learn from their own experience, what they learn becomes a part of them, not easily forgotten. Because they have to rely on themselves and their fellow students in order to learn this way, they grow in self reliance as well as interdependence. As the learning is

successful, they grow in self confidence. Self reliance, self confidence and the ability to work with others are qualities that have implications outside of the classroom as well as for future learning. Finally, they enjoy the excitement of learning through doing in a community with others.

What does the teacher gain? She knows with certainty that the students have learned. She gains the satisfaction of seeing the seeds take root and begin to grow. She receives immediate feedback because the students are constantly responding. She experiences a feeling of renewal because each group brings new resources and presents a new challenge. Finally, she experiences the excitement of seeing people learn, of watching people work together to discover and expand what they already have within themselves.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward M. Anthony, "Approach, Method and Technique," English Language Teaching, 17 (January 1963), 63-67.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "classical" because, although this may be the most common, it is not necessarily the only way to write a critical essay. In fact, at the high school where I taught, the English department concentrated largely on thesis development with very little emphasis on summary or one's personal opinion regarding the work.

<sup>3</sup> Edgar V. Roberts, Writing Themes About Literature (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1964), pp. 10-13.

<sup>4</sup> Takuboku, Takuboku: Poems to Eat, trans. Carl Sesar (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972)

<sup>5</sup> A Little Treasury of American Poetry, ed. Oscar Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948)

<sup>6</sup> Were I to do the class again, I would ask them to rewrite the paragraphs in order to give them a chance to act on my suggestions.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Hemingway, The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1938), pp. 477-481.

<sup>8</sup> Starting from this point, so as not to make the paper too cumbersome, I will include only the written work done by Group A. However, I will continue to make reference to Group B when the way I worked with them differed from the way I worked with Group A.

<sup>9</sup> Charles A. Curran, Counseling-Learning in Second Languages (Apple River, Illinois: Apple River Press, 1976), p. 15.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Curran, Charles A. Counseling-Learning: A Whole Person Model for Education.  
Apple River, Illinois: Apple River Press, 1972.
- . Counseling-Learning in Second Languages. Apple River, Illinois:  
Apple River Press, 1976.
- Hemingway, Ernest. The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway. New York: The  
Modern Library, Random House, 1938.
- O'dea, Paul. Developing Ideas. Chicago: Science Research Associates Inc.,  
1966.
- . Solving Writing Problems. Chicago: Science Research Associates  
Inc., 1969.
- Roberts, Edgar V. Writing Themes About Literature. Englewood Cliffs, New  
Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964.
- Sesar, Carl, trans. Takuboku: Poems to Eat. By Takuboku. Tokyo: Kodansha  
International Ltd., 1972.
- Williams, Oscar, ed. A Little Treasury of American Poetry. New York:  
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

APPENDIX I

damn moustache  
 droops  
 now I  
 look like  
 the bad guys

night  
 in Asakusa  
 my loneliness  
 mingles with  
 the crowds

father and son  
 minds apart  
 face to face  
 in awkward silence  
 why - ?

looking for  
 a new soul  
 I stumbled into  
 nameless streets  
 once more

came to  
 a mirror shop  
 what a jolt -  
 I could've been  
 some bum walking by

wrote GREAT  
 in the sand  
 a hundred times  
 forgot about dying  
 and went on home

just felt like  
 a train ride  
 when I got off  
 there was  
 no place to go

kidding around  
 carried my mother  
 piggy-back.  
 I stopped dead, and cried.  
 She's so light.

Takuboku

The following is a sample paragraph written about the second Takuboku poem. (It is actually three paragraphs.)

Although the father and son were face to face, they did not talk to each other. Their minds were apart and were in awkward silence. Father and son are two generations and have a very close relationship. They have difference in view like the writer described them as minds apart. They were facing each other but in awkward silence which is not supposed to be. The word awkward strongly meant that the circumstance was not easy.

There are many reasons to the question "why", but as a third person in here. The only possible reason to this why is their refusal to communicate. They only facing each other in awkward silence. They do not communicate through speaking or acting. The writer is implying the people on earth do not speak out their ideas but keep them themselves which lead to minds apart. They keep themselves away from unity. Even though their relationship is close as father and son, they still cannot be in a unique community.

Although it is only a five line poem, it involves an important idea to mankind. He has great success in words using which gives an easy picture to the readers but a deep meaning. His last word "why" has strongly reflects his emphasis, to accelerate the readers interest to think and to understand the theme of this piece of creation.

Tom To



A Man Saw a Ball of Gold in the Sky

A man saw a ball of gold in the sky:  
 He climbed for it,  
 And eventually he achieved it -  
 It was clay.

Now this is the strange part:  
 When the man went to earth  
 And looked again,  
 Lo, there was the ball of gold.  
 Now this is the strange part:  
 It was a ball of gold.  
 Ay, by the heavens, it was a ball of gold.

Stephen Crane

In-Class Essay

The "ball of gold" in "A Man Saw a Ball of Gold in the Sky" is a symbol. It can be a symbol of many different things depending on who you are and what you want. Please explain what kind of symbol it is and give an example from real life, either from your own experience or from your knowledge of human beings.

Please explain also why, when the man comes back to earth, he sees a ball of gold again, using your example from above to make it even clearer.

Extra points: (You don't have to answer this part.) Explain why, in the last three lines, he says that it really is a ball of gold. Again, use your example to make it clear.

## APPENDIX II

## A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE

It was late and every one had left the café except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. The two waiters inside the café knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"What about?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was nothing?"

"He has plenty of money."

They sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the café and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind. A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The street light shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.

"The guard will pick him up," one waiter said.

"What does it matter if he gets what he's after?"

"He had better get off the street now. The guard will get him. They went by five minutes ago."

The old man sitting in the shadow rapped on his saucer with his glass. The younger waiter went over to him.

"What do you want?"

## 380 . A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE

The old man looked at him. "Another brandy," he said.

"You'll be drunk," the waiter said. The old man looked at him. The waiter went away.

"He'll stay all night," he said to his colleague. "I'm sleepy now. I never get into bed before three o'clock. He should have killed himself last week."

The waiter took the brandy bottle and another saucer from the counter inside the café and marched out to the old man's table. He put down the saucer and poured the glass full of brandy.

"You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deaf man. The old man motioned with his finger. "A little more," he said. The waiter poured on into the glass so that the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile. "Thank you," the old man said. The waiter took the bottle back inside the café. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.

"He's drunk now," he said.

"He's drunk every night."

"What did he want to kill himself for?"

"How should I know."

"How did he do it?"

"He hung himself with a rope."

"Who cut him down?"

"His niece."

"Why did they do it?"

"Fear for his soul."

"How much money has he got?"

"He's got plenty."

"He must be eighty years old."

"Anyway I should say he was eighty."

"I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o'clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?"

"He stays up because he likes it."

"He's lonely. I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me."

"He had a wife once too."

"A wife would be no good to him now."

"You can't tell. He might be better with a wife."

"His niece looks after him."

"I know. You said she cut him down."

"I wouldn't want to be that old. An old man is a nasty thing."

"Not always. This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk. Look at him."

"I don't want to look at him. I wish he would go home. He has no regard for those who must work."

The old man looked from his glass across the square, then over at the waiters.

"Another brandy," he said, pointing to his glass. The waiter who was in hurry came over.

"Finished," he said, speaking with that omission of syntax stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners. "No more tonight. Close now."

"Another," said the old man.

"No. Finished." The waiter wiped the edge of the table with a towel and shook his head.

The old man stood up, slowly counted the saucers, took a leather coin purse from his pocket and paid for the drinks, leaving half a peseta tip.

The waiter watched him go down the street, a very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity.

"Why didn't you let him stay and drink?" the unhurried waiter asked. They were putting up the shutters. "It is not half-past two."

"I want to go home to bed."

"What is an hour?"

"More to me than to him."

"An hour is the same."

"You talk like an old man yourself. He can buy a bottle and drink at home."

"It's not the same."

"No, it is not," agreed the waiter with a wife. He did not wish to be unjust. He was only in a hurry.

"And you? You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?"

"Are you trying to insult me?"

"No, hombre, only to make a joke."

"No," the waiter who was in a hurry said, rising from pulling down the metal shutters. "I have confidence. I am all confidence."

"You have youth, confidence, and a job," the older waiter said. "You have everything."

"And what do you lack?"

"Everything but work."

"You have everything I have."

"No. I have never had confidence and I am not young."

"Come on. Stop talking nonsense and lock up."

"I am of those who like to stay late at the café," the older waiter said. "With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night."

"I want to go home and into bed."

"We are of two different kinds," the older waiter said. He was now dressed to go home. "It is not only a question of youth and confidence although those things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the café."

"Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

"You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."

"Good night," said the younger waiter.

"Good night," the other said. Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself. It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was

not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanliness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

"What's yours?" asked the barman.

"Nada."

"Otro loco mas," said the barman and turned away.

"A little cup," said the waiter.

The barman poured it for him.

"The light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished," the waiter said.

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

"You want another copita?" the barman asked.

"No, thank you," said the waiter and went out. He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.

APPENDIX III

The following are excerpts from students' papers. I am including them to give the reader an idea of the kind of work the students finally did. I have included the comments I made, where they appear, in parentheses.

- Hemingway in his story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is showing the conflict between old people's frustration and young people's lack of consideration for anything that doesn't matter to them. [According to Hemingway, even if they have money, old people are lonely, and everything inside them is nothing but darkness, despair and dirtiness. Nevertheless, young people don't love, they are too hurried to learn from older people, nothing matters to them because they think they are happy.]

Fernando Motta

(Is the conflict you mention in the first sentence a clear conflict? Perhaps you should say what kind of frustration you mean so that it links better with the second half of the paragraph.

You mention "dirtiness". It isn't explained later in your essay.

The part in brackets is a good synthesis of ideas.)

- Hemingway explains and describes the way that old people look at their life by exact describing of young people. (?) Old people think that the life is nothing. They know that and they don't want to trick themselves like young people. Old people are lonely because they do not have any aims left in their life or at least they don't want to have any aims in their life. They are tired because after chasing their goals in their life, now they understand that their life is nothing. Hemingway expresses this by following quote:

"In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late, because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference."

Hemingway represents youthfulness through the symbol of the day, and through the image of the settling dust he portrays man's ebbing lowering of aims and desires, and eventual settlement into the dust of old age.

Shervin Emadi

(Shervin, although this last part is written in very nice English (!), it doesn't really support your ideas as stated above. You have many more substantial examples you could use from the story.)

- The point about youth or old ages are not Hemingway's main point. The real purpose is the word "nothing". Hemingway was trying to explain that life has no meaning, there is no reason why everyone's life exist in this world. He told that in the conversation of the old waiter left the cafe.

"It was all nothing that he knew well. It was all a nothing, and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it was all nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada."

The old waiter also continued that the religion, God, heaven was nothing.

In this conversation the well-lighted cafe symbolized the old man's soul. Hemingway said that old man's soul is not affected by those nada God, heaven or any religion, but only the light that show you the cleanness. What I mean is in you life the only thing that exist is the clean soul of goodness. All the rest was nothing at all but life is still nothing. He also said that there is a period of life that people misunderstand the meaning of life. The bodegas is symbolized the young man soul. He was trying to say that young man was joyful like the bodegas with music, but it was really nothing. Young man just misunderstood that he has a purpose of life.

Hemingway's way of writing in this story is pretty confused. It seemed that it doesn't much meaning at the beginning but the real meaning is at the end. Maybe a lot of people doesn't get that meaning but he just wanted to say that why we are in this world? And a very good answer this question is to get away from nothing to something. You know for sure that life is nothing, you are living in nothing, but you can leave this world and look for other world which has something. You probably won't find something in other world, but it will be better than staying with nothing.

Thepthai Tabtieng

(Thepthai, I think you have hit upon one of the most important points of the story. It is also the most difficult to explain.

There were several places in the paper where your meaning wasn't clearly expressed. Part of that--a large part--is poor grammar. You really need to work on learning your parts of sentences. You often leave the verb out completely. The other reason for the confusion is that your organisation is not always apparent. Your main idea is: "The story is about the realization we come to about the meaning of life. This realization is affected by environment, our daily concerns and our age. Old people, because they lack friends and things to do in life, realize that life is nothing. Young people don't see that." You explain why old people realize that and young people don't. Then you try to explain what Hemingway means by "life is nothing" and what the clean, well-lighted cafe represents. The last few paragraphs aren't very clear, although I can see your struggle to express what you want to say: life is nothing = no purpose; the clean, well-lighted cafe = our soul, which is something.)

- There are two parts in the story that express the loneliness of old people. One expresses the loneliness of the old man, the other one expresses the loneliness of the old waiter. These parts are: "Everyone had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light." They express that the old man is sitting alone

at night. "The old man was a little drunk and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying." The two waiters that were working there know the old man well because he goes to the cafe regularly, so it expresses that he is always there drinking alone. "Last week he tried to commit suicide." "He was in despair." This expresses his despairation, he feels lonely and he doesn't have anything to look forward to or somebody to be with. (It continues in this fashion for a page.)

Caroline Romero

(Caroline, in this whole part about the old man you need to state clearly what the main ideas about him are that you wish to tell us. It's difficult to follow the way you have written it: a string of quotes with explanations after each one. It would be clearer if you stated your ideas, for example: "The author expresses the loneliness of old people in the old man who drinks alone at the cafe every night. We know he's alone because..." and "The author describes, in a conversation between the two waiters, the reason for the old man's loneliness..." When you quote, be sure to give the context of the quote, where and when it appears in the story. Also, vary the way you use quotes. First say what you understand, then use a quote to support it. You have always put the quote first. That's effective sometimes, but not all the time.)

The last example I will quote in its entirety because it is short and yet touches all the points we discussed in class. It was written by the student who remained silent during most of the class discussions.

This story is about a conversation between two kinds of people: a young waiter and a old waiter. And this conversation is caused by an old, deaf man. The young waiter thinks that this old man is lonely and a nasty thing. He also curses the old man should have killed himself before, because the old man isn't interesting to live in this world, he just bothers him (the young waiter) and wastes his sleep time every night in the cafe. But the old waiter thinks that the old man is lonely, so he should have a quiet place like a clean, well-lighted cafe to go to.

I think that the author is trying to say that the old people and the young people are two different kinds of human. Besides that, the author is also trying to say that the old people are always alone and the world is nothing for them to live.

The old people and the young people are two different kinds of human means that their ages isn't the same and they have different mentalities. Usually, the old people have more experience than the young people, and they could think something more deeply and thoroughly. The young people do things just for their enjoyment. When the time passes by, then their enjoyment also passes. They don't really think about them, and they just think on the surface of the thing. In the story, "He is lonely, I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me." proves that the young waiter just thinks on the surface of it, because he doesn't think about

the future. When he is eighty years old, his wife may be dead, he will be alone like this old man.

The people are always alone means that they don't have friends besides their family. They can't be close to the young people with talk or work together, because at their age, they are too old to be active, and the young people like to associate with other young people, they don't think that the old people will make them happy. In the first sentence, "It was late and everyone had left the cafe except an old man." A cafe is a drink shop that everybody can relax in, but this old man is too old and deaf. He couldn't be active in the shop, so no one wants to talk to him.

The world is nothing for the old people to live means that the old people are not helped in this world, because they are too old to do something well. They lose their youth and their friends. They become stupid and just waste time someplace. In the sentence "He is drunk every night" it says that the old man spend the time in the cafe every night and just drink wine. He has never found something interesting to do. The old people think that they will die at any time so they are in despair, and fear of the truth. "He tried to commit suicide." It says that the old man is in despair and tried to kill himself. "An old man sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light." It means that the old man is in despair and in fear of the truth. "Shadow" means "dark", because he thinks that he will die soon, and he feels that this world is like a dark world. "Electric light" means "bright" and "true". Because he is in despair and feels dark, so he is afraid of the bright and the truth. He always does something against them.

I think this story is very good and interesting. The author used this simple story to represent most of the problems between the old people and the young people. It is similar to my family: my grandmother lived with us before I came here. Almost every day, my brothers including me had some troubles with her. She always ordered and limited us don't to do something that she thought that was bad, but we never listened to her, when we had the enjoyment of something. She cried after that, and she couldn't talk with somebody, because she didn't have any friends besides our family. Everyday, she just cooked the meal for us and sat in the living room to watch the television. And she always spoke to herself that she would die soon, there was nothing to remain or to interest her again.

Rong-lin Wong

(Rong, this is an excellent paper. You expressed and documented your ideas very clearly. I'm impressed with your writing and you have made me a very happy teacher!)