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Callings: The Purpose and Passion of Work

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The University of Mississippi Common Reading Experience Resource Guide

Integrating *Callings* into the Classroom

EDHE
Library
Writing and Rhetoric
Faculty and Staff
2023-2024

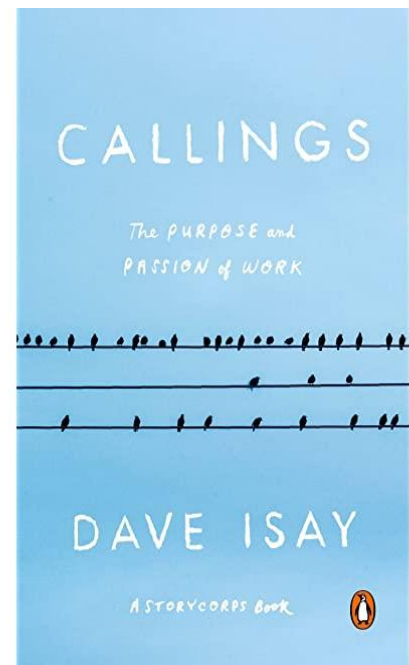


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Chapter 1: Using *Callings* in the Classroom

Why does UM have a Common Reading Experience Program?

The Common Reading Experience is a shared intellectual event for members of the UM community. Through reading and considering a common book, students engage with each other and UM faculty in exploring issues relevant to today's global community. The Common Reading Experience helps students understand the expectations of college-level academic work, the nature of scholarly inquiry, and the values of an academic community. The program also enriches students' campus experiences through co-curricular programs and events related to the book. The Common Reading Text is used in EDHE classes, Writing 100/101 classes, and other classes on campus. For more information about the Common Reading Experience visit <http://umreads.olemiss.edu/>.

What are the Common Reading Experience student learning outcomes?

By reading, writing, and learning together through the shared venture of the UM Common Reading Experience, students:

- Develop critical thinking, reading, writing, and research skills and abilities.
- Gain an emerging sense of confidence as learners, thinkers, readers, and writers.
- Develop a sense of community among peers, neighbors, and instructors.
- Develop connections among ideas, experiences, disciplines, and academic and personal goals.
- Relate the issues raised by the common book to their lives as new or returning students.

Why was *Callings* selected?

Callings is a collection of stories about the jobs and careers held by a wide-ranging group of Americans. Isay and his team selected the contents in *Callings* from over 65,000 stories collected by StoryCorps, and the accounts run from street-corner astronomer to beer vendor to physician to U.S. Congress member, with so much in between. These stories illustrate the devotion the subjects have for their work and the journeys they took to their chosen fields. The book is a product of Isay's [StoryCorps](#) project, the goal of which is to record and archive the stories of America's diverse and fascinating population.

Who is Dave Isay?

Dave Isay is an author, radio producer, and the founder of [StoryCorps](#) and Sound Portraits Productions. He has won numerous awards for his work, including six Peabody Awards, two Hillman Prizes, a TED Prize, and a MacArthur fellowship. Some of Isay's most notable edited collections include *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project* and *Mom: A Celebration of Mothers from StoryCorps*.

How do I teach non-fiction?

The Common Reading Experience provides students and teachers in all disciplines a chance to interact with a shared text. Critical analysis of texts may feel like foreign territory to some teachers; however, analysis is a skill that is useful in all areas of education and beyond and can be approached in ways with which teachers are comfortable. Writing classes use the Common Reading Text as the basis of a major project, but work with the book in other classes does not need to be so in-depth or take up entire class periods. Try to implement short in-class discussions, homework assignments, response papers, or journal writings using the themes and prompts listed in this guide. Or ask students to examine the choices Isay makes as an editor and how they impact us as readers. Remember that you can concentrate on a few stories that relate specifically to the themes of your course. This resource guide should provide starting points for discussions, homework, and/or writing assignments that will challenge students.

How do I encourage students to read?

Before assigning reading:

- Preview *Callings* with students. Introduce the book during class. Explain how the book will be used in the course and how it will help students meet learning outcomes. Share your own excitement about the book, perhaps describing some favorite passages, events, or people.
- Help students understand the depth of reading required. Display a passage, and model critical reading strategies such as text annotation and marginalia.

As students read:

- Provide focused questions for students to consider while they are reading. Ask them to respond to those questions in writing before the next class.
- Have students identify and submit a discussion topic or question via email or Blackboard after they have read an assignment but before the next class meeting. Use their topics and questions as the basis for class activities.
- Require students to keep a reading response journal in which they comment on or question the reading assignment.

- Ask students to underline/highlight several passages from a reading assignment. In class, ask students to discuss one of their underlined/highlighted passages.

After students have read:

- Use class time and activities to build on, rather than summarize, the reading assignment.
- At the start of class, assign a one-minute paper in which students identify both the most crucial part of the reading assignment and an unanswered question they have about the reading assignment.
- During the first few minutes of class, ask students to write about links between the reading assignment and the topic being discussed in class.
- Distribute one or two questions that build on the reading assignment. Use the think-pair-share protocol. Students first consider the question(s) on their own. Then they discuss the question(s) with a partner. Finally, they share their results with the class.

How do I lead a class discussion?

A good class discussion, like any part of teaching, should be structured yet open to improvisation. Following are some pointers for leading a discussion based on what students have read (or even their attendance at an event).

Preparation before the class meeting:

Though you may have already read the stories, be sure to review what the students are reading for your class meeting. Make a list of what you would like your students to learn from this exercise in order of importance.

- For instance, you might prioritize that students understand what they read.
- Then, you might select a couple of scenes or events in the book that seem important or interesting (or even puzzling – just because you are leading class discussion does not mean you need to have all the possible answers).
- Perhaps you have selected several themes in the stories as your focus. You might choose scenes that relate to collegiality, perseverance, or the influence of mentors.
- You might also ask students to respond to a specific quotation or passage.
- Jot down a few notes so you can access them easily during your class discussion.
- Annotate your own text.

Class time:

- Establish respect. Class discussion is a time for exploration, and the classroom is a safe environment for students to say what they are thinking. Remind students of the first rule of the University creed: “I believe in respect for the dignity of each person.” Be sure students are listening carefully to each speaker and taking his or her ideas seriously.
- Before discussion, ask students to reflect on a directed, yet open, question in a five- to ten-minute writing. Encourage students to keep writing throughout the allotted time even if they run out of things to say. They will surprise themselves with this unstructured writing. This writing is not a quiz with one correct answer. Ask them questions such as, “What do you think is the significance of X?”; “How has X changed over time?”; “Why did X do what he or she did?” You could also ask them to do a close reading of a particular passage, perhaps even comparing it to another passage.
- Avoid general questions such as “What did you think of the reading for today?” or “What did you find interesting?” These can be dead-end questions that will lead to short discussions.
- To mix things up, you may also have them work together in small groups to find discussion starters or answers to your questions.

Other ideas and approaches:

- Different classes have different personalities. Just make sure the environment in which students speak is a safe one, and continue to encourage discussion in different ways if something is not working.
- Some students will direct their comments just to you. Encourage them to talk with each other.
- If you had them write a response, invite students to share what they wrote.
- If you had them work in groups, invite representatives from each group to share what they found.
- Encourage students to point to specifics in the text. Ask them where they see what they see.
- Invite students to read sections out loud.
- Be open to where the conversation takes you. Sometimes students will pick up on details that you didn’t see.
- Try not to let the class discussion go over fifteen to twenty minutes. Students are most productive in that time frame.
- At the end of the discussion, recap the major points made or ask students to do so.
- Course-specific discussion prompts are included in the course-specific sections of this guide.

How do I deal with controversial topics?

Some issues in *Callings* may spark controversy in the classroom. Issues that may generate controversy include but are not limited to gender discrimination, mental health, and same-sex marriage. The Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning's [Teaching Controversial Topics](#) can help you consider different approaches to discussing these issues.

Remember that the common read discussion should always serve your course outcomes. If a student raises an issue with which you have no expertise or are uncomfortable tackling, you might respond by explaining the topic is more suited for discussion in a different course (such as English, Sociology, or Political Science). For example, you might say, “[Controversy X] is an important issue, and it’s one that you can study in depth in [Course Y]. [Course Y] is taught by an expert in that field. For the purposes of this course, let’s keep the focus on [your course outcome Z].” Additional guidelines are below.

If a student raises a controversial issue unexpectedly, you may want to:

1. Acknowledge the student’s remark.
2. Acknowledge that other students may hold different views or positions.
3. Assess your willingness to continue the discussion further.
4. Assess other students’ willingness to continue the discussion further.

The following guidelines may be helpful for facilitating planned discussions of controversial issues:

1. Articulate a clear purpose for the discussion (for example, how the discussion is related to course objectives).
2. Establish ground rules, such as listening without interrupting the speaker, questioning ideas rather than criticizing individuals, offering at least one piece of evidence to support each point made, using “I” statements rather than “you” statements.
3. Be an active facilitator by redirecting students who are off topic or participating too actively, ensuring students are not put on the spot as spokespersons for certain groups, providing opportunities for all students to participate (orally or through writing), and being attuned to students’ emotions.
4. Summarize the discussion at the end of class and obtain student feedback.

How do I build instruction around the stories' themes?

The stories capture many themes: formal vs. informal education, happiness, work-life balance, friendship, family, mental health, money, wellbeing, and others.

1. A class focusing on the theme of formal vs. informal education might look like this:
 - a. Individually, students identify and write about a passage that examines formal and/or informal education. (five to seven minutes)
 - b. As a class, students discuss the passages they have chosen. (ten to fifteen minutes)
 - c. With partners, students list why formal and/or informal education is essential for a certain job/career and why this matters in a larger context. (five to ten minutes)
 - d. Student pairs report their findings to the entire class. (ten to fifteen minutes)
 - e. Homework: Students write a personal reflection on how formal and/or informal education will play important roles in the pursuit of their desired jobs/careers, perhaps examining why a college degree (or degrees) is or is not required for the positions or related positions they are interested in pursuing.

What library resources are available?

Visit the [UM Libraries Common Reading Research Guide](#). Explore this library research guide about *Callings* to learn more about the author, upcoming events and the stories inside the book. Previous UM Common Read texts and guide links are also available.

Where can students find extra copies of the book?

1. All first-year students received a paperback copy of *Callings* during summer orientation.
2. UM Libraries has one electronic copy of *Callings* that can be read online or downloaded for up to three days on a single device. Go to libraries.olemiss.edu and search for "Callings Dave Isay" in the OneSearch box. You will have to log in with your Ole Miss WebID and password to access the e-book.
3. Inside the J.D. Williams Library, students may check out a [Reserve](#) copy of *Callings* at the main desk on the 1st floor for one day. On Reserve for EDHE 105/305 are two copies of *Callings*, one copy of *The A Game*, and one copy of *The Ole Miss Experience*, under the instructor name: Melissa Dennis.
4. There is one print copy of the book in the main stacks of the library that students can check out using this call number: [HD8072.I83 2017](#).
5. Finally, a copy of all Common Read titles ([2011 - present](#)) are available in Archives & Special Collections (but these can only be viewed inside the library).

If anyone needs help with finding books or finding other library materials for the Common Read, please email Melissa Dennis at mdennis@olemiss.edu

What events or speakers are being planned for the fall semester?

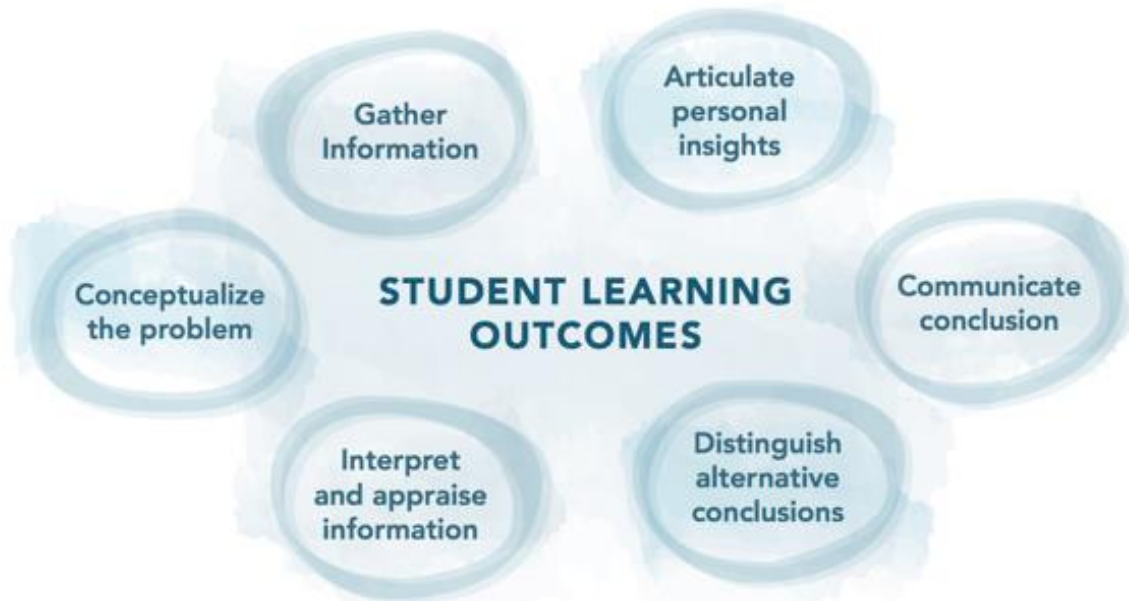
Thought-provoking events are an excellent way to get students involved with the book outside of the classroom. Please consider encouraging your students to attend an event and reflect on the overall message being delivered. For the most up-to-date list, visit the [UM Common Reading Experience 2023 Callings Library Guide](#).

What if one of my students has a disability and needs a copy of the book in a different format?

Students with disabilities should visit Student Disability Services in 234 Martindale as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. SDS provides classroom accommodations to all students on campus who disclose a disability, request accommodations, and meet eligibility requirements. SDS will be able to help your student acquire a copy of the CRE book in an appropriate format. The SDS website, <https://sds.olemiss.edu/faculty/>, has some helpful resources for instructors.

Chapter 2: *Callings* Critical Thinking Exercises

The UM QEP, *Think Forward*, defines critical thinking as the ability to conceptualize problems, gather pertinent information, interpret data, appraise evidence, distinguish diverse points of view, and articulate personal insights in order to present reasonable and effective arguments, responses, or conclusions.



(Diagram from *Think Forward Quality Enhancement Plan*)

These small group exercises may help students develop critical thinking skills.

(1) Barbara Abelhauser says she took a pay cut to go to a job she loves, being a bridgetender, and leave behind a job where she was “miserable” (17-21). Many people have to weigh pay vs. happiness when considering work. Why do you think this is an either-or scenario for so many people? In small groups, discuss careers you are considering, and then research salaries for those careers and possibly related ones (consider sites such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics at https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm). How much can people expect to make as beginners in the positions you looked at? What is the typical pay range? Does it meet your expectations? Research information on how happy people are in that line of work. Do the results meet your expectations? How so or not? Consider the particular career paths you researched, potentially including related careers/jobs, and then discuss the results as a group. You might also discuss areas such as benefits, travel expectations, balancing work with a family, etc. Finally,

make an argument as a group about how people might best balance the type of pay they seek with the happiness level they expect and why such balance is meaningful.

(2) Several women featured in *Callings* overcame gender barriers to reach their career/job goals. Anne Lucietto's father Ledo says people asked him, "What do you want to send her to college for? She's only a girl. They're only good for making babies" (66). Anne went on to become a mechanical engineer. Dr. Dorothy Warburton explains that her own father couldn't see her in science (43-4), yet she became a leading genetic researcher. Why are women still so underrepresented in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields? In small groups, discuss Lucietto, Warburton, and/or any other women from *Callings* who had to fight through gender barriers. Also, do some research in places such as the American Association of University Women website: <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/the-stem-gap/>. What can we do in America to make sure more women are in STEM jobs? Each group should make an argument about why the numbers of women in STEM fields are what they are today and what might occur if the numbers become more balanced.

(3) In the introduction to *Callings*, Isay says, "Listening has always been at the heart of StoryCorps' mission" (3). Watch the TED Talk, "[5 Ways to Listen Better](#)," by author and sound consultant Julian Treasure. Discuss Treasure's contention that we are losing our ability to listen well. Then divide students into pairs or small groups to practice Treasure's mixer exercise. Ask them to leave the classroom and find a place, inside or out, to sit together. Groups should remain at their chosen locations for 5-10 minutes, with each group member listing the channels of sound they hear. Then group members should compare notes, making a master list of all the sound channels they heard. Groups should then return to class to share their results and consider how those channels affected their environments. Following the sharing, discuss the channels operating in other environments, like the classroom. How do these channels (students whispering to one another, students watching online videos, students listening through headphones to something else, etc.) affect the classroom experience? What about the channels operating in the dorms? On the Square?

(4) Use this exercise, adapted from [StoryCorps Lessons](#), to encourage students to consider and practice the role of wait time in active listening.

- Display and discuss author Diana Senechal’s quote: “Listening . . . involves a certain surrender, a willingness to sit with what one does not already know . . . [it] requires us to stretch a little beyond what we know, expect, or want.”
- Ask students to interview each other, using the following prompt: *Who has been the most important person in your life?* As they interview each other, they will practice using short silences. Whenever the interviewee stops speaking, the interviewer should pause for six to eight seconds (counting quietly to themselves) before asking a follow-up question. During this silence, the interviewee is free to add any details to their story. The interviewer will then need to wait for another opportunity to ask a follow-up question. Each interview should last five minutes.
- Following the interviews, bring the class back together to discuss the following questions: How did it feel to pause before the follow-up question? Do you think people generally use these short silences in real life conversations? What does it feel like when someone interrupts you? Why do people interrupt?

Chapter 3: CRE Community of Voices Essay

An Essay Challenge Connecting Diverse Ideas, Experiences, Disciplines, and People

The Creed characterizes the University of Mississippi as “a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment.” As part of that mission, the UM Common Reading Experience helps students develop a sense of community among diverse peers, neighbors, and instructors, while making connections across varied ideas, experiences, and disciplines. The CRE Diverse Voices Essay Challenge provides an opportunity for students to further engage with that mission by examining issues related to the common book. Below are challenge and submission details:

- The annual challenge is open to all UM undergraduate students.
- One winner and two finalists will be chosen by a panel of judges.
- The winner will receive \$400.
- There is no length requirement. Writers will determine the appropriate length required to effectively answer the prompt

Submission details:

- All essays should include the student’s name, ID number, and classification (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior).
- Entries must be submitted through the online submission portal.
- The deadline to submit is Dec. 31, 2023, with the winners and finalists announced in early 2024.
- Submit essays through the online portal by following these steps:
 - Access the Department of Writing and Rhetoric Awards site at <https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/awards/>.
 - Click the Common Reading Experience: Community of Voices Outstanding Essay button.
 - Click the Submit an Essay button.
 - Fill out the form and attach the essay.

Fall 2023 Prompt

In Dave Isay’s 2016 book *Callings*, he presents stories of people describing the career paths they chose to pursue, their inspirations for choosing those paths, and the connections to their communities created through their work. The book is part of the StoryCorps project, whose mission is to “preserve and share humanity’s stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world.” Our UM community is also built from these connections shared among students who are pursuing their callings, and like the people in

Isay's book, the diversity of those stories creates a vibrant portrait of our students' lived experiences. For this year's Community of Voices essay contest, we want to hear your stories. What calling are you pursuing? What inspired you to follow that path? What challenges have you faced along the way, and how have you worked to overcome those challenges? Why is your calling important, and how do you plan to use it to connect to your community both now and in your future? Consider these questions and write a personal narrative that tells the story of your own calling.

While the Common Read is a text provided to incoming first-year students, we encourage participation from all UM undergraduate students. The following links lead to some of the recorded interviews that are included in *Callings*. Each recording is around two minutes. Students who don't have access to the book might consider listening to some of these stories on the StoryCorps site for inspiration. Note, though, that the recordings are interviews and not essays. Use them for inspiration to think about your own story, but present your work as a narrative essay for the contest. For more links to the interviews behind the essays, use the [UM Common Reading Experience Library Guide](#).

<https://storycorps.org/stories/barbara-moore-and-olivia-fite/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/don-and-mackenzie-byles/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/carl-mcnair/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/barb-abelhauser-and-john-maycumber-160415/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/james-taylor-and-darlene-lewis/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/al-siedlecki-and-lee-buono/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/ayodeji-ogunniyi/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/dawn-maestas/>

<https://storycorps.org/stories/burnell-cotlon-and-lillie-cotlon-150821/>

Chapter 4: Integrating *Callings* into EDHE 105/305

The Common Reading Text is used each year in EDHE 105/305 courses primarily as a framework for class discussions, projects, and writing assignments that explore social themes and/or issues from the book. EDHE 105/305 instructors use the book (with a focus on those themes and issues) to teach students how to explore their personal reactions, to understand and appreciate both the things that make them different from their peers and the things that they have in common, and to effectively and respectfully voice their own opinions and viewpoints.

Affordances of *Callings*

The short story structure of *Callings* affords instructors and students some options previous Common Reading Texts have not. Most of the stories are short enough to be read in the first ten-fifteen minutes of class. Also, each story can stand independently from the others, so each can be treated as a primary text.

Class Discussion/Writing Prompts

1. Dave Isay’s *Callings* is about finding and living your passion. Think about your major and your aspirations for after college. Do they inspire the passion that we find in the stories we have read?
2. Library Assistant Storm Reyes talks about a chance encounter with a bookmobile staff member that set her on her path to loving books, which ultimately broadened her view of the world. Reflect on an interaction you’ve had with someone who turned out to be pivotal in changing your perspective or view of the world.
3. Bridgetender Barbara Abelhauser discusses leaving the corporate job that she was *miserable* in to go to the lower paying but more Zen-like job of bridgetending. What are some of the pros and cons of choosing happiness over monetary compensation?
4. Tool and Die Maker Phil Kerner reflects on the difficulty of losing his business and talks about how it inspired him to start an organization to help small businesses. Think about a time in your life where you had to face a “crushing” disappointment. How did you respond to it? Were you able to find a way to use the experience for growth?
5. Farmer Johnny Bradley remembers his father saying, “Son, you can’t whip a man that don’t quit.” Think about a time when you persevered through adversity; share the situation and the outcome.

6. Street-corner astronomer Herman Heyn was inspired by “Miss Wicker’s class” to share his love of astronomy. Think back on the interactions you have had in your life; write/discuss how a teacher may have influenced your life’s direction.
7. Angelo Bruno and Eddie Nieves were the sanitation workers who found a great partnership in helping their community. Think about the ways the people around you can help fuel your ability to find your calling.
8. Beekeeper Ted Dennard talks about being totally in the moment when he’s working with his bees. What is an activity or pursuit that keeps you completely engaged? Reflect on what you experience through your various senses “in the moment.”
9. Marc Anderson Lawson discusses his video game inventor father with his sister. When he decided to go to college, he said to himself, “What could I do for a living that I would want to do for free?” He decided to do programming, like his father. If asked that question, how would you answer?
10. Building contractor Lyle Link talks about how successes don’t teach you much, but mistakes are learning situations. In college you’ll encounter both successes and failures. Think back on your life; what is a mistake you learned more from than you did from any of your successes?

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Research Project/Presentation:** Think about your own calling. Interview a person who is in that field. Ask them about their pathway to finding their calling. Present your findings to the class.
2. **Research Project/Presentation:** Create a PowerPoint presentation on the career of your choice. Include pertinent information, such as salary, education requirements, nature of the work, working conditions, occupational outlook, and pros/cons of the career.
3. **Talk Response:** *Callings (StoryCorps)* is also a podcast that can be found on all major podcast platforms. Go to the [StoryCorps website](#) and search for your favorite story by the person’s name. While the written word can be very powerful, think about how you feel after you listen to the podcast in their own words. Links to the stories in each chapter of the book are available for your convenience on the [UM Common Reading Experience Library Guide](#).

4. **Vignette Writing Assignment:** All of the stories in *Callings* connect humans to their passion. Think about your life at the University of Mississippi and how you will be able to connect with your future self as you find your passion. How do you see yourself in five, ten, and/or fifteen years? Write a vignette (experience) about your future self in the midst of your own calling.
5. **Outside-of-Class Activity:** Choose a [Career Fair](#) that piques your interest and attend. Write a reflection on your attendance and interactions.
6. **Research Project/Presentation:** Write an aspirational resume that will help you realize what you should be striving for with regard to skills for the job you aspire to attain.

Chapter 5: Integrating *Callings* into WRIT 100/101

The first-semester, first-year writing courses—WRIT 100 and WRIT 101—use the Common Reading Text as the basis for a major writing project. This project emphasizes the critical reading, critical thinking, analysis, research, and synthesis skills that are vital to college writing. In this assignment, students are given a prompt pertaining to the Common Reading Text and asked to compose an essay that integrates the Common Reading Text with the student’s own ideas and perhaps outside sources. The prompts are intentionally complex to introduce students to the expectations of college thinking and writing. First-year writing courses use the Common Reading Text as a basis for student reading and writing rather than as a literary study.

Affordances of *Callings*

The short story structure of *Callings* affords instructors and students some options previous Common Reading Texts have not. Most of the stories are short enough to be read in the first five minutes of class. Also, each story can stand independently from the others, so each can be treated as a primary text.

Discussion Starters

(1) Some people learn early in life what their passions, or callings, are. Lee Buono, for example, was encouraged by his eighth grade science teacher, Al Siedlecki, and knew he wanted to be a neurosurgeon (177-81). What are the advantages and disadvantages to being sure of your passion/calling at a young age? How does school, in particular, college, help or muddle people’s pursuit of their passions/callings? Why does this matter?

(2) Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, an actor, says about talent, “you only get a portion of the gift, and if you’re patient, the rest of it will come” (95). What does Pitts-Wiley mean by this statement? Do you agree with him? Is being “patient” the way to maximize a talent? Why or why not?

(3) In her 2018 commencement address to the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, Oprah Winfrey shared this career advice: “Your job is not always going to fulfill you. There will be some days that you just might be bored. Other days, you may not feel like going to work at all—go anyway.” Choose a few of the stories you have read in *Callings*, and consider when or how those jobs might be boring or unfulfilling. How do you imagine people cope with the less engaging parts of their work? What keeps them moving forward despite boredom or fatigue?

(4) The subtitle to *Callings* is *The Purpose and Passion of Work*. As a class, read or listen to Samantha Todd Ryan’s *Forbes* article, “[The ‘Why’ Behind Our Work: What Is ‘Purpose’ and Do We Need It?](#)” Then, discuss what purpose means. Can you agree on a definition? If not, why? Borrowing from the question in the article title, do we need purpose in our work? Why or why not?

(5) Introductions and conclusions are hard to write. Look at the opening and closing of your favorite story. What techniques does the storyteller use to draw the reader in? What techniques help bring the story to a graceful close?

(6) *Callings* is broken into five sections: Dreamers, Generations, Healers, Philosophers, and Groundbreakers. Some of the stories, though, seem like they could be classified under different sections. Discuss the stories in *Callings* and select one you feel is in the wrong section or at least could be in a different section. Why does or could the story fit somewhere else? Where should it or could it go? Should the book even feature sections? Why or why not? Why do we feel the need to label or categorize so much? How is it helpful? How is it limiting?

(7) Isay ends his introduction with the line, “May their words help give you the strength to listen to that still, small voice inside—that voice which can help you discover the work that you were born to do.” Discuss the idea that we are each born to do a certain type of work. Is that thought limiting or inspiring? Would the individuals featured in the stories all agree they were born to do the work they are doing?

Reflection Prompts

(1) Herman Heyn, a street-corner astronomer whose story is featured on pages 11-16, says he was inspired by his grade school teacher Miss Wicker. Reflect on who inspired a particular interest for learning in you. Have you told that person? If so, how did that make you feel? If not, what would you say to them now if you could? Why?

(2) *Callings* features short excerpts from interviews and includes a picture of the people at the end of each story. Reflect on how the photos impacted your reading process. Why do you think they are included? Do they make you think differently about the people you just read about when you see them at the end? Why or why not? Did you always wait until the end of each story to look at the picture? Why or why not?

(3) Some of the stories in *Callings* feature people who are in their 70s—some even beyond that—well past the average retirement age in America. Why do you think these people still work? Reflect on whether these stories make you think more about your choice for a future career or future careers. Why do they or don’t they?

(4) In the “Introduction” to *Callings*, Dave Isay quotes author and activist Parker Palmer when he writes, “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.” Reflect on how you might take this advice as a student new to college. What opportunities might college provide to help you “listen to your life”? Why does listening to your life matter in the bigger picture?

(5) Sharon Long, a forensic artist, says that she can get lost in her work, forgetting about everything else for hours. Reflect on what type of work or activity makes you lose track of time. Why? What does this tell you about yourself and what you might like to do for a career/job?

(6) When library assistant Storm Reyes was a little girl she visited a bookmobile at the farm fields where her migrant family worked. During one visit to the bookmobile, the person working told her “the more you know about something, the less you will fear it” (41). Reflect on what this means when applied to work. Does this mean we should follow a career/job path in something familiar? Does this mean we should not be afraid to chase dream careers/jobs? What does it mean to you, and why?

(7) *Callings* features dozens of short stories about work, some of which feature people who went into their line of work because of something important that happened to them in their childhood or teenage years. Reflect on something from your childhood or teenage years that has helped shape your career/job goals. What and/or who helped shape you? Why was this meaningful? Did your approach to academics change in any ways afterward? If so, how? If not, why?

(8) When Noramay Cadena was at M.I.T. she managed school and having a young daughter by focusing on one week at a time and telling herself “next week will be better” (79). Cadena knew that graduating was the one thing that could help her and her family the most. Reflect on your own approaches to getting through difficult times in school. Do you have something that you do or tell yourself to help stay focused? If so, what, and why does it help? If not, why, and is that something that might be valuable to you in college?

(9) Some of the people featured in *Callings* followed in the footsteps of a parent or parents for their careers/jobs. Reflect on the influence your parents, or other close relatives, have had on your thoughts about future careers/jobs. Have you been heavily influenced by family or not? Whatever your answer, what impact has this had on your choices and why?

(10) In a review of *Callings* for NACADA, the Global Community for Academic Advising, Ashley Wegener writes that a “theme present throughout the book was the importance of mentors in providing accountability, support, and inspiration for callings.” Reflect on the role of mentors in your life. What does the word “mentor” mean to you? Do you have a mentor? If so, who, and how does this person help you? If not, why, and do you have someone who might serve as a mentor? Why is college an important time to have or consider having a mentor? Are mentors people who just help with areas such as school or careers/jobs? Why or why not?

(11) In one of the stories in *Callings*, firefighter Dekalb Walcott Jr. says of his career aspirations, “you shoot for the stars, and if you land somewhere in between, you’re still in good shape” (55). Reflect on your preparedness to handle changes or even setbacks if college or your plans beyond college don’t go exactly as you thought they would. Do you need to accomplish all of your goals to be truly happy? Why or why not? What do you think Walcott Jr. means when he uses the words “land somewhere in between” and “good shape”? What would that mean for you?

(12) StoryCorps’ website includes this statement: “At StoryCorps, we know the power of one great question. When we sit down face to face, ask to hear someone’s truth, and listen to it, we begin to recognize where our lives intersect.” Reflect on a moment of “intersection” that you felt when you read one of the stories in *Callings*. What was that connection like for you? Why do you think it resonated?

Essay Prompts

(1) In the “Author’s Note” section, Dave Isay points out that “[w]ords and phrases that read well are not always the strongest spoken moments, and the reverse is also the case.” Many of the stories in *Callings* are available as audio recordings on storycorps.org (enter an interviewee’s name on the top of the page using the “Search” feature). You can also find some of them in the [UM Common Reading Experience Library Guide](#). Select one story to work with that is available on audio, and listen to the recording a couple of times. Then, compose a thesis-driven essay in which you analyze the differences between the written and spoken story, arguing which is more rhetorically effective to you and why. Think about the differences rhetorically, that is, how the different formats work to reach you and other readers or listeners. Is one more emotionally impactful? If so, why? Do the editing differences between the audio recording and the written story impact the experiences in any ways? If so, how? To Isay’s point, are there words or phrases in either the recording or the story that are stronger or more clear in one form over the other? If so, why? How does hearing the voices in the interview differ from reading their words, and why does that matter in considering the subject matter? Be sure to cite from the text and the interview.

(2) In his story, Lyle Link reflects back on being a contractor and says that he was essentially a “salesman” (256). Really, a lot of jobs that aren’t classified as sales involve being a salesperson in some way(s). Why is this? Select two other stories from *Callings* to work with, and examine how the people are selling something in one form or another. Keep in mind that you might be liberal with your definition of sales. Then, compose a thesis-driven essay in which you define how you are using the term “sales” or “salesperson,” and examine how you see your chosen subjects as being salespeople. You might construct a thesis that lets you contrast your subjects or focus on similarities, or perhaps some combination. Be sure to cite from the text.

(3) Sharon Long says of her field, forensic artistry, that now “they have state-of-the-art equipment” (25) and that “technology is moving so fast” that she would be left behind if she

were to keep working. What roles might technology and artificial intelligence play in the careers/jobs people currently hold? Select two other stories from *Callings* for a focus, and examine how AI or technology in general might impact the fields in the future. Will humans still be necessary for these positions? If so, will it be in the same ways as in the past? Do you see the technology having a positive or negative impact on the positions? Do the stories you selected contain any information that helps you shape your argument? Consider doing a little research to help you, and then compose a thesis-driven essay in which you argue how technology will impact your chosen positions in the coming years. You are welcome to bring in outside sources, but be sure to cite *Callings*, as well.

(4) Read the StoryCorps mission statement below:

StoryCorps' mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. We do this to remind one another of our shared humanity, to strengthen and build the connections between people, to teach the value of listening, and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters. At the same time, we are creating an invaluable archive for future generations. -- About StoryCorps, storycorps.org

How can reading about the work some people do help “strengthen and build the connections between people”? Why does “everyone’s story” matter? Think about StoryCorps’ mission statement, and consider the different stories in *Callings*. Then, select two stories to focus on. Why should we care about what your chosen subjects have to say? What do they help us understand about humanity? How do they make us or help us think about being “more just and compassionate”? What does reading these stories teach us about listening? And why does this matter in relation to StoryCorps’ mission statement? Why is compiling an “archive for future generations” important? Construct a thesis-driven essay in which you argue how the stories and people you chose exemplify and help perpetuate StoryCorps’ mission statement. Be sure to cite from the text.

(5) Read Jeremy Hsu’s *Scientific American* article, “[The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn](#),” paying particular attention to his discussion of narrative transport factors (familiarity, empathy, learning, and social cohesion). Choose two or three stories in *Callings* that appeal to you and apply those narrative transport factors to your experience in reading the stories. Construct a thesis-driven essay analyzing how these factors affected your experience as a reader of these stories. Be sure to include evidence from Hsu’s article and from the *Callings* stories to support your argument.

(6) Read “[Speaking my truth: Why personal experiences can bridge divides but mislead](#),” Van Bavel et al.’s commentary in *PNAS* (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences). Consider their argument that stories of personal experience can help readers engage with outgroups, build respect, and humanize marginalized individuals. Choose one or two *Callings*

stories featuring individuals whom you perceive as very different from you. How did these stories help you understand these individuals in new and positive ways? Which of the factors that Van Bavel et al. covered were in play? Then consider Van Bavel et al.'s point that stories of personal experience can be exploited. How might the stories you have chosen be subject to exploitation in larger cultural conversations about income inequality, fair labor practices, gender or racial stereotyping, etc.? Construct a thesis-driven essay in which you analyze how the stories you have chosen may bridge divides but also mislead. Be sure to include evidence from the *PNAS* article as well as the *Callings* stories to support your analysis.

(7) The stories in *Callings* paint a portrait of work as fulfilling and life-enriching. Is that how everyone views work? Watch Gallup's "[The State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report](#)" and download the [report](#). Pay particular attention to the key findings on global engagement/well-being and employee stress. Think about how the stories in *Callings* address those issues. Construct a thesis-driven argument about how and why workplace leaders should or should not address these issues, using evidence from the Gallup report and the first-hand accounts in *Callings*.

(8) In an *Oral History Review* article, "[Under Storytelling's Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age](#)," Alexander Freund cautions against conflating storytelling and history, arguing our current fascination with storytelling is rooted in neoliberalism, hyperindividualism, and therapy culture. Read Freund's article and think about the stories in *Callings*. Construct a thesis-driven argument agreeing with or refuting Freund's case, using the stories in *Callings* as evidence.

(9) Read Simone Stolzoff's essay, "[Please Don't Call My Job a Calling](#)," in *The New York Times* and his *Forbes* interview, "[Understanding What is the Good Enough Job](#)." Think about his arguments that the term "calling" can lead to worker exploitation and that work-centric lives may not be healthy. Then think about *Callings* as a complete text. In what ways does the book intrinsically or extrinsically foster worker exploitation and work-centric lives? In what ways does it not? Compose a thesis-driven argument supporting or refuting Stolzoff's argument, using evidence from *Callings* to shore up your points.

(10) *Multimodal option*: For this assignment, you will create your own story like the ones featured in *Callings*. The process should help with skills such as interviewing and writing interview questions, editing through making rhetorical choices about content, and thinking critically about different forms of media.

- First, you will decide on a subject to interview. The person you select should be someone whose career/job is interesting to you and something you would like to learn more about. Whom you interview is entirely up to you.
- Write a series of interview questions that will get your interviewee talking about their career/job. These questions may range from origin stories (how the person became

interested in or got into the career/job) to questions about the day-to-day work to questions about how the work is rewarding and fulfilling.

- Obtain permission from the interviewee to record and edit the interview for your assignment purposes.
- Interview the subject, ideally recording at least ten minutes of material either through video/audio or just audio.
- Edit the interview so your final product is between three-five minutes in length (editing should cut down the length of the project, not change meaning).
- Make sure the interviewee is the focus of the final product (i.e., even if you are part of the final product asking questions or participating in small ways, the interviewee should be the one mainly featured).
- Submit the final product as an audio file or a video using approved file forms or platforms.

Remember, the subtitle of *Callings* is *The Purpose and Passion of Work*, so your goal should be to interview someone who enjoys their work and/or feels fulfilled. An interview featuring a subject complaining a lot about a job wouldn't fit well in *Callings*, so it won't work well for this assignment either.

Appendix

Sample Rubrics

Sample Group Presentation Rubric

1. Was the content of the presentation well organized and presented with compelling evidence?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

2. Did the visual component enhance the presentation?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

3. Was the verbal presentation clear and engaging?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

4. Did the group engage the class in a discussion?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

5. Did the group follow the time limits?

1 2 3 4 5
Comments: _____

Sample Group Presentation Peer Evaluation

Your name: _____

1) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

2) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

3) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

4) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

Other comments or concerns about your group and how you worked together? (use back)

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR RESPONSE PAPERS

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

ASSIGNMENT TITLE: _____

SCORE: _____

CONVENTIONS/MECHANICS		
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective
Multiple errors in writing hamper communication, and text does not demonstrate standard English grammar, punctuation, and/or usage, and/or does not meet the requirements for length and format.	Minimal errors in standard English, grammar, punctuation, and/or usage are present in some of the writing, and/or the text does not meet requirements for assignment length and/or format.	The writing meets guidelines for standard English grammar, punctuation, and usage, with very few minor errors present. Meets requirements for assignment length and format.
D / F	C	B

INFORMATION PRESENTED			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Does not introduce or integrate information relevant to the topic/event, or includes inappropriate use of sources. In the case of an event paper, it is unclear that the event was attended.	Demonstrates only minimal or ineffective use of integrating information relevant to the topic/event. Writing only barely addresses details of event or class materials.	Introduces and integrates information relevant to the topic/event. Writing addresses details of event or class materials and places information within a larger context.	Demonstrates exceptionally strong, integrated information that enhances credibility of writing. Writing includes skillfully represented details about event or class materials.
D / F	C	B	A

REFLECTION/RESPONSE			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Fails to explore new ideas and/or works without making any connection between event or class materials and a personal context.	Begins exploration of new ideas but could push further. Experience of event or class materials is put in a personal context but lacks development of ideas.	Explores ideas unfamiliar to the reader, and questions different thinking. Puts experience of event or class materials in a personal context, is well-developed, and includes self-evaluation.	Exhibits a significant investigation of new ideas by way of exploring an event or class materials. Shows signs of personal growth and/or considerable self-evaluation.
D / F	C	B	A

Write additional comments on the back of the rubric.