

# Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Writing and Reading  
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## Inside Inkshed

Doug Brent	Trying Out Collaboration	1
Doug Vipond	Review: Clark & Holquist's <i>Mikhail Bakhtin</i>	3
Alan Hall	The End of English	5
Editor	1987 CCCC, Atlanta	6
Russ Hunt	Review: Scholes' <i>Textual Power</i>	7
Heather Reed	Cohort Report: Help Desperately Needed	9

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It was always assumed in the classical tradition that one had some *thing* to write about, thus the focus in invention not on discovery of *subject*, but on appropriate mode of development, ethical stance, etc. Today's attitudes about "pre-writing" assume a writer who does not deal with sophisticated and interesting ideas in daily life. Thus the point of pre-writing exercises is often to get the student to transform mundane, boring (and usually sentimentally viewed) experience into the stuff of interesting writing.

Harry Brent, "Epistemological Presumptions in the Writing Process: The Importance of Content to Writing," in *Writers on Writing*, ed. Tom Waldrep (New York: Random House, 1985): 58-59.

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# Inkshed

5.5. November 1986.

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A primary objective of this newsletter is to intensify relationships among research, theory, and practice relating to language, language acquisition, and language use—mainly (but by no means exclusively) at post-secondary levels. Striving to serve both informative and polemical functions, *Inkshed* publishes news, announcements, notices, reports and reviews (of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, workshops); commentaries, discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to academics in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

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The great art of writing is the art of making people real to themselves with words.  
Logan Pearsall Smith, *Afterthoughts*.

## Trying Out Collaboration

At the Inkshed conference in May, 1986, we were given the traditional opportunity to put ourselves through the same activities we were recommending we put our students through. Since the theme of that conference, "The Social Contexts of Reading and Writing," implies collaborative learning, we did some collaborative learning ourselves. These hands-on experiences proved once again that trying teaching techniques on oneself can lend a new perspective to the glib pronouncements of educational theory.

First, we performed some of the traditional inksheddings collaboratively. During our first session, my group tried to achieve full consensus sentence by sentence as we wrote. Despite our general agreement on what we wanted to say, it was an exhausting task. We finished one sentence and moved on to the next not so much when we were satisfied with it as when we were fed up with wrestling with it. Whenever one of us suggested a full sentence that no one disagreed with, we seized on it and put it down quickly before we started to argue. After forty-five minutes' work, we had produced five weak, impersonal, cliché-ridden sentences, a styleless mishmash with no coherence, no purpose and, worst of all, no voice.

In the second session, instead of working for consensus sentence by sentence, we rambled on in group discussion while one member picked ideas out of the stream of dialogue as they flew by, phrasing them in his own words and writing them down as coherent text. The results were much better developed, but they were not so much a consensus as one person's document, inspired by the ideas of various people in the group.

The moral here is that despite the theoretical advantages of collaborative writing, teachers who use it in the classroom must be prepared to take into account the enormous expenditure of time and mental energy required. They must also consider their goals carefully. Can they be content with a document that is really the work of only one member of the group, either the one with the strongest (or pushiest) personality, or the one who already has the most facility with writing? If not, how can students be shown how to produce true consensus? Is it even desirable that they do so? After all, experts in the real world frequently have to agree to disagree. When consensus is an absolute requirement rather than a hoped-for goal, the result may be a lowest-common-denominator document, with all the controversial ideas squeezed out in favour of the ones that provoke no disagreement.

The sort of consensus reported by collaborationists like Lunsford and Ede requires a special set of circumstances and personalities not always found in classroom groups drawn together not by bonds of common interests and personal friendships but by a list of names handed out by a teacher, or by accidental proximity of chairs. Teachers may have to consider abandoning the idea of full collaboration in favour of weaker but more functional models. It may sometimes be more effective to use the group to generate ideas and offer criticism, but to make each member finally responsible for his or her own text.

Russ Hunt and Jim Reither made an even more ambitious attempt to involve inksheddors in collaboration. Russ and Jim both teach their courses collaboratively from the beginning, involving their students in creating provisional reading lists, finding material in the library, creating, sharing and synthesizing abstracts of source material, and producing collaborative reports of the results. As Russ described it, the purpose is to reproduce in the classroom the sort of conversation that goes on in real academic communities.

To get us involved in the students' side of this process, we were each mailed four articles on discourse and instructed to write a short statement making one point about their relevance to writing as a social process. At the conference we were grouped with others who had read the same documents and asked to prepare a joint statement about their relevance to the

learning, teaching, and practice of writing. These statements were to be distributed and made the basis of a second cycle of reading and writing.

The workshop was something of a bust in terms of its intended purpose. Most groups either produced nothing or produced nothing that would have been useful or even comprehensible to anyone else. Yet like a lot of failures, the failure of this workshop in a way told more than if it had succeeded.

The main problem was that the exercise was one that would have made Plato shudder, a copy of a copy. Russ and Jim's classroom strategy, designed to model an entire discourse community as a size that fits a classroom and a term, had been further reduced to one that would fit a two-day conference. The readings were ones that had been arbitrarily handed out, not ones that we had found together. As a result, we kept reading the instructions over and over, trying to intuit what Russ and Jim were after. We were anxious to comply with their design, to help them out in their workshop—not to learn anything for ourselves or to address the as-yet-unknown group who would read our summaries. In the groups, we discussed the readings animatedly, but without overall purpose, and had no real commitment to the demanding task of producing by consensus a summary of our summaries. Ironically, the workshop was a perfect model of a teacher-centred activity.

Our bewilderment, our anxious searching for ways to comply with what *they* wanted, reinforce the fact that collaboration must have a purpose that grows out of a shared commitment to a task. That commitment grows gradually when collaboration is part of the intrinsic structure of a course, as in Russ and Jim's classes, not when the requirement to collaborate descends suddenly from the heavens as a set of teacher-sponsored requirements.

These experiences should make us think carefully about how we apply a technique that has suddenly become so popular that it has attained the status of a buzzword. However much the "real world" may function collaboratively (also a debatable point), it is no simple matter to make a discourse community bloom in the sandy soil of the classroom. It requires steady commitment from the teacher, a lot of patient trial and error, a clear understanding of the purpose of the entire endeavour, and, most important, time for students to learn how to work together and build up a sense of what they can do for each other. There is no such thing as a collaborative assignment; there can only be a collaborative class, a class that functions collaboratively from day one.

Moreover, collaboration does not necessarily require consensus. Knowledge is not only consensus but also dialectical, and one synthesis is inevitably succeeded by a new antithesis. There are many ways of using the strength of a group besides asking students to produce a single unified document, ways that respect the disagreements that inevitably block perfect consensus. In short, collaboration, like any teaching technique, is fraught with complexities and difficulties that must not be overlooked in the rush to implement a potentially powerful new tool.

Doug Brent

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The subject matter I use in my own writing does not come as the result of any "pre-writing" activity. It comes from my daily life, which, I am fortunate to report, is rich with interesting things, such as the books around my bed. Pre-writing and brainstorming have no place in my writing process. My focus is on revision.

Harry Brent, "Epistemological Presumptions in the Writing Process:  
The Importance of Content to Writing," p. 59.

**Review:** *Mikhail Bakhtin*, by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P / Belknap Press, 1984. 398 pp.

From a distance, Bakhtin has struck me as one of those brilliant thinkers—right up there with Kenneth Burke, say—whom everybody seemed to agree was important, and yet whom nobody, including me, seemed too eager to go out and *read*. And Charles Schuster's description of Bakhtin (in *College English*, 1985) as "a kind of Zorro figure, the Masked Marvel of theoretical criticism," didn't exactly make him seem more approachable. Then I discovered Clark and Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin*. It makes Zorro a lot easier to get to know.

"My life is an utterance, therefore nothing in discourse is foreign to me." Clark and Holquist suggest that this could have been Bakhtin's motto, for how else can we explain the incredible diversity of his thought? Although best known as a literary theorist and critic, Bakhtin also wrote major works on moral philosophy, linguistics, theology, and psychoanalysis. In a sense, though, the diversity is misleading, for throughout his life Bakhtin was preoccupied by the same central problems. These problems included relations between self and other, and "how the appearance of sameness emerges from the reality of difference" (313). Whether writing about Dostoevsky, Freud, or intonation, then, Bakhtin kept returning to these central problems, constantly re-thinking and re-writing—for he regarded all texts as unfinished. (It was a theoretical point for Bakhtin that all discourse is incomplete; as a practical matter, this also meant that he was reluctant to send his work to publishers!)

Bakhtin championed dialogism, uncertainty, and loopholes, which he set against monologism, certainty, and absolute truth. He favored Dostoevsky over Tolstoy, Romanticism over Classicism, prose over poetry, because the first element in each pair tends to be unruly, many-voiced. The major topic of his career, Clark and Holquist write, was "the dialogic nature of language and its relation to the dialogic nature of the world" (319). Dialogue is even in the individual word; that is, the word is a two-sided act. As Clark and Holquist explain, the word "is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. . . . A word is territory *shared* by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker *and* his interlocutor."

This territorial concept of the word requires a politics of representation. How is the territory governed? What legislates the way . . . meaning is parceled out in any given utterance? Bakhtin's life and thought were dedicated to answering these questions. (15)

Bakhtin developed his answers through dialogue with the most important movements and thinkers of his age. His method was to co-opt "hot" ideas and rhetoric and use them to his own ends, to appropriate other discourses for his own. As an example, Clark and Holquist point out that in his dissertation on Rabelais, Bakhtin uses a number of Stalinist catch phrases—"the people are immortal," "the new and better future," etc.—although in ways as to suggest meanings they did not usually carry.

The Stalin example also suggests that Bakhtin was aware of the need to make his work politically acceptable. Although he was exiled for a number of years, and lived most of his life in obscurity and poverty, Bakhtin somehow managed to buy time to think and write. Unlike many others, he survived his dangerous times.

"Utterance," "discourse," "dialogue"—as these terms suggest, Bakhtin's preoccupation was language. He views language as a contest between "centripetal" forces, which tend to unify, systematize, and normalize meaning, and "centrifugal" forces, "those tendencies that foster the diversity and randomness needed to keep paths open to the constantly fluctuating contextual world surrounding any utterance" (13). In these terms, traditional linguistics has been a study of centripetal forces, whereas Bakhtin studied the centrifugal forces that promote

"heteroglossia": the diversity, stratification, and randomness within a national language.

Of all art forms, the novel is the one that most consciously exploits and strengthens heteroglossia. This in part explains Bakhtin's attraction to that genre. Another reason is that the ways a given culture perceives the world are revealed by the typical arrangements of time and space ("chronotopes") in the texts that each society nominates as art (294). Because the novel is an 'open' genre, which seeks variety, it

indicates shifts in the coordinates governing perception more precisely and comprehensively than all other art forms. . . . The novel [is] Bakhtin's preferred means for dramatizing his ideas about language, social theory, and the history of perception. For Bakhtin, the novel is the great book of life (294).

*Mikhail Bakhtin* is a pleasure to read. It is heavy going at times, but usually Clark and Holquist are able to explain difficult ideas simply, in clear, heads-up prose. Again and again I found myself muttering, "Jeez, I wish I had written that!" As well, the book is attractive to look at, is virtually typo-free, and has a pretty good index.

But the main reason I like this book is that Clark and Holquist make sense of Bakhtin. Instead of giving several short examples of this, let me give one rather long one, which has to do with the question of why Bakhtin studied Rabelais, but which leads quickly to broader issues. Clark and Holquist start by noting that Rabelais and Bakhtin seem an unlikely combination—on the one side, the epic poet celebrating endless food, drink, and sex, and on the other, the ascetic scholar sipping tea at his desk—and yet they resembled each other in their breadth of knowledge, their love of jokes, and their tolerance.

But more important than their personal affinities is the distinctive way in which each through his writing inscribed himself into his times. The early Renaissance and the Russian Revolution were threshold ages, border situations on the map of history. Each created in the inhabitants of its moment an urgent awareness of radical change. Each was a rip in the fabric of time. As such, those who lived in these periods were willy-nilly thrown into the work of history. . . . [Bakhtin] responded so deeply to the Renaissance because it was an age similar to his own in revolutionary consequences and in the acute sense it engendered of one world's death and another world's birth. Such ages . . . create particularly favorable conditions for study of the relativity of cultural systems, of the holes in the discursive wall erected by cultures to order their religions, laws, and genres.

In these ages the concept of text is both problematicized and expanded—problematicized because the usual idea of the text as a closed, hermetic structure that is always adequate to itself is brought into question. In Rabelais' age medical or military manuals "leaked" the styles and topics that were regarded as proper to these texts into other texts, such as literary ones, where the specialized languages clashed with each other. In Bakhtin's age, newspapers blended into novels and novels into political pamphlets. Problematicized in this way, the texts in these ages overflowed the bounds of what had been conceived in more settled times to be the proper textual limits (296–297).

It is no criticism to say that Clark and Holquist's text does not overflow its bounds, but stays within the proper textual limits of intellectual biography. In their preface Clark and Holquist say that Bakhtin is emerging as one of the major thinkers of this century, and the book amply justifies the claim. For Inkshedders who would like to get to know this important thinker, *Mikhail Bakhtin* is a good starting-place.

(Now, will someone please do the same for Kenneth Burke?)

Douglas Vipond  
St. Thomas University

## The End of English

Inksheddors might be interested to learn of the visit of Terry Eagleton to Memorial University last September 29th to give the Pratt Lecture (the principal event in the English department's calendar). It brought a large audience, as one might expect for an address entitled "The End of English" by a high-profile writer on literary theory, with the piquant addition of his being a Marxist—though the label may in fact have repelled as many as it attracted. And of course a very particular interest attached to the presence of a writer who has provided a synoptic and persuasive view of developments in a field which the wider audience may have lacked the opportunity to follow and absorb. He has been a stimulating mediator of the more recondite modern mysteries, a skilful popularizer in an influential and highly contentious field of thought.

"The End of English" developed a theme which Eagleton-watchers have met before, notably in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. There he argued that "the present crisis in the field of literary studies is at root a crisis in the definition of the subject itself," and that literature, in its canonical privileged sense, is an *a priori* concept at odds with the realities of our time. The far-reaching implications of this argument are that 'departments of literature as we presently know them in higher education would cease to exist': literary studies would take a place in the wider field of cultural studies, with an integral but no longer autonomous role. *Literary Theory*, through its retelling of conventional literary history, argued that the received definition of literature conceals the political role literature plays and therefore obstructs an understanding of its function.

The lecture, "The End of English," is built on similar assumptions and arrives at similar conclusions. It too offered a perspective on literary history, confined this time to the twentieth century. The announced purpose was to illustrate the text that "it is the colonised and dispossessed who inherit the literary earth." It was those former subjects of empire, the Irish and the Americans, for example, who seized the commanding heights of "English" literature early on in the century, were "able to carry through this audacious feat of inverted imperialism precisely because they lacked those vested emotional interests in an English literary tradition which hamstrung the natives." James, Conrad, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Beckett could approach that heritage from the outside, seeing it less as "a heritage to be protected than as an object to be problematized." Those native English who appeared at one time or another to be confronting the changing times—for example, the Cambridge school of English and, more particularly, F. R. Leavis in *Scrutiny*—were an illusory avant garde, structurally regressive and ineffective because they invoked an idealised past as an answer to the problems of the present. 'English' has lived on "like a headless chicken," proving to be an increasingly unworkable discourse, "if not in the cloistered universities, then most certainly in the inner city schools." For Eagleton it is 'theory' which "nowadays recruits the kind of committed, zealous young disciples which Leavis did in his day," perhaps because it is through 'theory' and 'criticism' that current challenges to untenable cultural and political positions seem most readily to be launched.

Eagleton's lecture was densely allusive and conceptual. Since he wished to adduce the evidence of a whole century of literary history he took the usual shortcut through generalization and abstraction. It became clear afterwards that many of the audience found this idiom outside their range. A number of students confessed to me that they were defeated by being supposed to possess a great deal more knowledge than in fact they did. Others found unfavourable comparison between this year's Pratt Lecture and last year's, which was given by David Lodge, who, speaking both as novelist and narratologist, worked up to his

conclusions from vivid and specific (and engagingly delivered) examples, and by thus proceeding from concrete particulars to general conclusions, found great favour with his audience. Eagleton's more cerebral, ratiocinative approach was not compensated for in the eyes of the Lodge fans by his informality of dress, which proclaimed an uncompromising, Thoreauvian distrust of new clothes. It was notable that the most interested questions to the lecturer came from anthropologists, sociologists, and economic historians, to whom of course the abstract idiom is the native air. To Inksheddors one may confess that the 'literary' audience, resistant perhaps to suggestions that KingLit could conceivably be dethroned, did not rush to question or confute.

Alan Hall  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

## 1987 CCCC, Atlanta (19-21 March)

Once again the CCCC executive have given the Canadian Caucus a slot in the conference program. We're scheduled for Thursday, the 19th, 5:30-6:30 p.m. I hope those of you who attend the conference will all be able to join us. Traditionally, the major items on our agenda are getting acquainted and deciding what to propose as a Canadian caucus-sponsored session for the next year's CCCC. These sessions have always been valuable.

If any of you will be presenting at the CCCC it would be nice to know about it. Why not drop me a line giving me the details (date and time, title of presentation), ASAP, so I can publish a micro-schedule here in *Inkshed*?

By the way: The convention hotel is the Westin Peachtree Plaza; and the convention room rate is U.S. \$70.00, single. Does anyone know Atlanta well enough to be able to suggest a hotel not too far from the Westin Peachtree Plaza that might be a bit more affordable? Please, if you do—or if you have a way of finding out—let me know—soon—and I'll publish a note about that, too.

Jim Reither

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To help students build a sense of maturity in their writing requires some basic rethinking of current approaches to the pedagogy of writing courses, perhaps a shift of the pendulum once again toward the importance of content in student essays and the usefulness of reading as a prelude to writing.

Harry Brent, "Epistemological Presumptions in the Writing Process:  
The Importance of Content to Writing," p. 53.

Review: *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*,

by Robert Scholes. New Haven: Yale U P, 1985.

In the introduction to his latest book, *Textual Power*, Robert Scholes remarks that "a dialogue between teaching and theory flows through this book" (ix). What makes this statement remarkable is not so much that the dialogue is *there* (it's always there in our profession) but that Scholes openly acknowledges it. As literary theorists, we rarely acknowledge it—at least, we don't acknowledge that it's a dialogue. But Scholes even foregrounds it: unlike his previous two books about literary theory, this one is, he says, specifically concerned to consider the impact of theory on teaching (he doesn't say much about the other half of the dialogue, the impact of teaching on theory, but we can't have everything).

It is this foregrounding that makes this book so much more engaging, so much more *tangible*, than any recent book I know about critical theory, including Scholes' own. The chalkdust on his back keeps him honest. The realer the students in front of you are to you, the less likely you are to spend time pursuing ingenious interpretive will-o'-the-wisps, and the more conscious you are likely to be that your discourse has to be *for something*. You can't, in deconstructionist fashion, spin critical discourse for its own sake. There's a payroll to meet. There's a row of sceptical faces in the back of the room.

What is particularly remarkable in this book, I think, is Scholes' direct and readable tone. For example, he introduces a section on the pedagogy of interpretation with this humane and charming disclaimer:

The great danger here is the instructor's temptation to show off, which is mirrored by the critic's temptation to do the same thing (I am fighting it myself on every page here.) This is not simply a matter of vanity. There is a bright little student inside most teachers, who wants to set the rest of the class straight, because he or she *knows* the "right answer." (30)

It may seem that things like this—that the book's tone is engaging and its prose readable—are the sort of thing that should be mentioned last, and perfunctorily, after a consideration of the "substance" of what Scholes actually has to say, but in my experience it is so rare and valuable to find a book which actually involves me in a dialogue about my teaching that, in comparison, it really doesn't seem very important whether I agree with its central position. In this case, however, the book's central ideas are ones I find both congenial and challenging. Scholes' practical, Johnsonian-style demolition of the hothouse fantasies of the deconstructionists and the Fishy rococo Rube Goldbergs of the reader-response critics are a bracing tonic. The wonderful chapter title, "Is There a Fish in This Text?" heads an even more wonderful chapter, in which he applies common sense like a birch rod to the backsides of Louis Agassiz, Ezra Pound, and others.

But even so, there's one sense in which this book falls far short of what I expected and hoped. It is a common failing of our profession—perhaps of humanity in general, as well—that we don't find it easy to pay attention to the actual flux of real, diachronic process. We slip through it to static, synchronic *products*. When we try to talk about reading, for instance, we almost invariably skid past what *happens* while we read and find ourselves talking about results, about "meanings," about products (our very use of a word like "reading" to designate a written interpretation, for instance, is a symptom of this). This is true of reading and writing—and of language generally, as is clear if we look at the long-lived vogue for linguistic studies of pure, idealized linguistic structures (what Saussure called *langue*) as opposed to the social processes of real occasional language (what Saussure dismissed as

*parole*). And the same happens with another process to which it would pay us to attend more than we usually do—teaching.

What Scholes has to say about teaching, unfortunately, bears out this rule. He announces repeatedly that he's going to 'get down to cases,' but when it comes to the crunch he uses the same weasel-words we all do to smooth over the differences between what we're describing and what our readers might imagine. 'I would begin by asking students to make explicit. . . .' He would 'initiate a discussion.' His students 'come to understand.' 'I would encourage the students to think of Hemingway's text as. . . .' Always, such generalizations can be read by teachers doing radically different things—from each other, as well as from Scholes—as recommending exactly what they're already doing.

Consider an example. Looking at a text from Hemingway's *In Our Time* in class, Scholes says 'I would begin by reconsidering the reading of the story, inviting summaries and responses to questions about what makes it a story. I would do my best to keep such a discussion going until some of the following features emerged. . . . In such a discussion I would expect that certain cultural information important to the story would emerge' (32). Scholes may be different from me and from most English teachers I know, but my experience of such strategies is that they are often actually thinly disguised lectures, in which a few particularly eager students occasionally fill oral 'cloze gaps' with appropriate phrases which are then deemed to have 'emerged.' And indeed within a couple of pages Scholes has slipped back into an undifferentiated 'we' who is constructing discourse and conceptual structures with no reference to the social dynamic of the classroom ('the textual oppositions we have emphasized must be connected to the larger cultural entities of which they may be seen as instances' [34]). He discusses what we should 'encourage' our students to do, what ideas they should 'confront'; he opines that 'our students must be invited into these critical debates.'

As usual, there's but one ha'penny worth of *how* to this vast deal of *what*. It's a cliché, of course, to point out that the medium is the message, and the form is the content; but there's no arena in which it's truer than in teaching. If English teachers are to find a way to empower our students, to help them get hold of the power of text and the power over text which is Scholes's basic metaphor, we have to find ways to decenter the teacher. We can't do that by ignoring the nitty-gritty of *how* in favor of the cleaner, more upper-class and theoretically respectable realms of *what*.

In spite of this carping, I think any literature teacher will find Scholes' book an exciting and energizing read.

Russell A. Hunt

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I tend to see my approach to writing as like a potter's approach to making something out of clay. . . . Never do I start out to 'develop an idea.' I always build *material* into an idea, thus the primacy of content. I like to wander and let the point of the journey emerge.

Harry Brent, 'Epistemological Presumptions in the Writing Process: The Importance of Content to Writing,' p. 61.

## Cohort Report: Help Desperately Needed

There are literally hundreds of published pieces of advice about how to read and how to learn to read short stories. Most of it, however, has not been tested by anyone other than the people who created and published it. Thus, an important question remains—Do such techniques really help?

We are the members of Professor James Reither's introductory English course at St. Thomas University. Our class is organized as an experimental workshop whose task is to try to answer the questions of whether or not (and how) such techniques might actually benefit those who use them.

First, alone and in small groups we locate, study, and learn how to do techniques, strategies, and exercises published in articles and books about how to read and how to learn to read short stories.

Second, using the stories we collect as a part of our reading, we teach the others in the class the strategies, techniques, and exercises we have learned, and we all try them out. We try to master what the author tells us to do: alone, in small groups, as a whole class, in and out of class, we apply the advice about reading or how to read that the author has told us will work.

Third, in small groups and then as a whole class we evaluate that advice. We practice each strategy or technique, doing our best to master it. Our general question is: Does following the author's advice help us become better readers of short stories? If the advice does not seem to work, we discard it; otherwise,

Fourth, in small groups and as a whole class we rewrite it for our own purposes, putting it in our own words and forms. We might, for example, try to make it simpler, clearer, or more effective and useful—unless, of course, it's so clear and effective as it stands that we can't improve it.

And finally, as our conclusion, we will put together and "publish" a small booklet of advice to senior high school students on how to read and how to learn to read short stories.

We are asking you, the readers of *Inkshed*, for help. We ask first that you send us exercises and techniques for reading that have worked for you in teaching students to get the most out of what they read. (We are collecting and studying exercises and techniques for reading poetry and plays as well as short stories.) Any and all suggestions will be greatly appreciated.

In addition, we would like for you to test, in your own classrooms, the following exercise for reading short stories, which we have developed and believe to work in helping people better understand and get more out of short stories.

We ask that you and the students send us as soon as you can any feedback you have, as it will be a great help toward achieving our goals. We would like to know what the students who tried the assignment might have learned from it, what worked and what didn't, whether the students enjoyed doing the assignment, and so on. Please also send us copies of short stories used for this exercise.

As a way to thank you for your help, we shall send you a copy of our booklet of assignments and strategies.

Please send materials and responses to:

Heather Reed  
101 Preston Drive  
Fredericton, NB E3A 2L5

## Reading a Short Story

When reading a short story it is important to notice details or clues and to use these to make connections. Even though we may read stories line by line, we project ahead and glance back in our minds. "We remember, we predict"; and by doing so we are able to follow and understand a story.

The following exercise has been arranged in such a manner as to emphasize these instincts to guess where the story is going and to review what is already known. To do this exercise everyone in the class will need a copy of the story (preferably a short, short story that can be read in fifteen minutes or so) and a sheet of paper which will be used to cover the story. Here, then, are the directions for our exercise:

1. Appoint someone to read the story aloud to the class.
2. Ask everyone in the class to cover all of the text of the story except the title. The reader should then ask, "From the title, what do you think the story will be about?" And the class should discuss possible answers to the question.
3. The reader should then read the story to the class while the others in the class read along, uncovering the text line by line. The reader should pause after every five or ten lines of the text, to discuss these four questions:
  - What is happening in the story at this point?
  - How do you know or what makes you think that?
  - What do you feel about the characters in the story at this point?
  - What do you predict is going to happen in the story?
4. When the reader has finished reading the story, discuss these questions:
  - Did the story end the way you predicted it would?
  - Has your opinion of the story and its characters changed in any way?
5. Finally, ask the students to write a page or so in which they explain what they think they learned from doing the assignment, what worked for them and what didn't, whether or not they enjoyed reading the story this way.