

All right. This being the end of the year, I've decided to write a final reflection. Well, actually, I've decided that I'd better write it. It's due tomorrow. Anyway, I've learned a lot this year, especially about myself as a writer. I've learned to be a lot more confident about my work. I used to think of writing as an activity that I enjoyed, but I always hated the pieces I wrote. I've learned this year that a piece can almost never be characterized as either fabulous or horrible. In every horrible piece of writing, there's got to be at least one good part. The reflection (pink) sheets that we've filled out have really helped me to pick out good qualities in my own and other people's writing. They've also helped me to be more aware of what can be improved and what to look for during revision. That's really helpful. And I interpret this assignment as being a large reflection, but rather than reflecting on a specific piece, I'd like to reflect on the writing I've done this year in general.

Let's start at the beginning (that usually is the best place to start). I'd like to do kind of a quick little analysis of each piece. The first piece we wrote this year was an ending to Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger". I liked this piece at the beginning of the year, possibly because I really had no basis for comparison. Even now, when I think of how much I've grown this year as a writer, for me at that time, it was a pretty good piece. It helped me conquer my fear of reading my writing to the class. I've always been afraid of having my writing rejected, but this year I've learned how to share my pieces and how to react when others share theirs. After all, we are all in the same boat - and often times we're stranded.

Then it was on to October and on to longer, if not better, things. Or at least for me. That was fractured fairy-tale time. I liked my piece when I wrote it, but if I were to go back and revise it now, it would be a whole lot different. This was when I learned quite a bit about tact during revision. Even if you can't understand a piece, you can probably find something good to say about it. I couldn't understand a word of the piece I was revising, but not wanting to hurt my revision partner's feelings, I didn't tell him this. Plus, I didn't want to sound stupid. What if everyone else already knew what a necromancer was? Anyway, I'll talk more about that later.

In early November, we explored monologues. I had never written one before, and my first was a complete flop. I tried to write it in a German dialect. So what was the problem? Part of it was that I don't think I've heard anyone speak with a German dialect. Anyway, monologues were sort of interesting, but I find that it's a lot easier to hold an audience's attention when two or more characters participate in a conversation. My second monologue, also based on "The Last Leaf", was almost as bad as the first one. I still dislike it. I don't think that I captured the character's true essence, which is what I think a monologue should do. After that, I challenge you to find one example of a monologue in any of my pieces. I'll bet you have a hard time.

About the time of the never-ending monologue struggle, we

were reading Saint-Exupery's adorable story, The Little Prince. My "Matters of Consequence" piece, which was the first to actually make an appearance in my portfolio, stemmed from this. When I first wrote it, I really liked the piece. I thought it was my best one thus far, and I chose it as my first portfolio piece because I thought it told a lot about me as a writer. Now that I look back, it tells a lot about me as a person, but doesn't reveal much of my true writing style. Plus, the grammar is not good at all. It's the kind of piece that, if you saw it in an English book, would tell you to circle and correct all of the mistakes. And it would take forever. Oh well. As the old saying goes, you can't grammatize 'em all . . .

And you must remember the next piece. It went on and on and on and on and on and . . . Now I bet it's coming back to you. Since you've probably read my "Biography of Almond Cave" I'll just give you a short little synopsis of my conflicting feelings about the "Almond Cave" piece itself. It was the first thing during this school year that I had actually hated. And I hated it with a passion. It was nine typed pages of absolutely nothing. Or so I thought at the time. Now I like it. A lot. The piece that I hated so vehemently won me a writing award from the National Council of Teachers of English. Go figure! Anyway, this piece taught me a lot about the proper use of dialogue to really enhance a piece and about the value of multiple revision partners.

And now it's January. Time for another free writing piece. This was one that I liked when I first wrote it, and one that I still like. It's about sheep. Now, you may ask "How could anyone write a story that makes any sense about *sheep* !?!" It was funny, okay? Here was where I learned that real life experiences can make a good fiction piece. If, that is, you twist them around a little bit . . .

And then in blew March. And Golding's Lord of the Flies. And the ides of theses (or however you say that you have more than one thesis.) This continued through April. I hope I never have to write another expository paper. I hated the book and I hated the theses that I wrote. They were a heart-wrenching struggle (well, maybe that's a little bit of an exaggeration, but not much) and, by my own standards, a dismal failure.

Come May, we thankfully moved on to Edgar Allen Poe. I loved his work. I found him to be a captivating and absolutely fabulous author. I really enjoyed writing the Raven piece, especially since I love to write descriptively. I sometimes get very vivid pictures in my mind, and I love to try and describe them to an audience. What a relief. No more theses! (I'm still happy about that!)

And finally, June rolled around. And with it, Animal Farm. What a great book! This time, however, we had to teach a lesson about power through one of a variety of creative genres. You might not think that was so hard, after reading Animal Farm, but this time, we had to write before we read, a hard transition for those of us who were used to having at least an example to go by. But from my own personal point of view, it wasn't that difficult. At least not after I got an idea. That took awhile. This is a

piece that I like now, but after a month or two, who knows? But even if I decide that I hate it next month, it was just one of the many ways of writing we've explored over the course of the past year.

All right. So I've taken you through the whole year (the abridged version). But I still haven't told you about revision, which I did say I'd talk more about later. At the beginning of the year, we really didn't have much experience with peer revision. Usually, our parents read our pieces, or maybe the occasional close friend, but revision usually consisted of running the spellchecker and proof-reading for grammatical errors. So none of us knew quite what to say when we first got into revision groups. It was easy to say that a piece was good, but now we had to give the specific "latitude and longitude" of the good parts? And how could we tactfully say that the ending needed to be changed? It was hard. The first time we got into groups to revise, no one wanted to make comments. We were afraid to write on one another's papers. But little by little, everyone began to feel more comfortable with each other. After switching revision partners for a few assignments, everyone sort of found their "niche" and at the same time found a partner on their level who could work constructively with them. We began to be less inhibited, we found ourselves not only able to write in the margins of people's papers, but we felt free to cross things out and write new ones in their place. We began trading papers, enlarging revision groups to make the maximum use of everybody's talent. And that's the best way to write. Or at least, we all think so.

And so I've taken you through it all. But not really. A little white piece of paper, as expressive as the words written upon it may be, is not enough to express the true meaning of what Language Arts has become, not only to me, but I think to almost everyone in the class. It is a friendly environment of discussion and compatible argument, a place of freedom of the mind. A place where everyone, no matter where their talent lies, be it in writing, or music, or art, or even belly dancing, is welcome. A place to explore what the written word is and what it can be. A place to express the feelings deep within ourselves.