

FUZZY
TRACE!

THEORY: A PERSONAL LEXICON OF LITERACY

BY

TAYLOR
TOLCHIN



"READ: I REDI

1994
"MOMMY, WHAT IS
F-O-R-D?"

GROCERY
STORE:
• APPLES
• OATMEAL
• MILK
\$4.75

???
PHONETIC spelling!

VERB

LOOK AT & COMPREHEND THE
MEANING OF WRITTEN OR
PRINTED MATTER BY MENTALLY
INTERPRETING THE _____ OF
WHICH IT IS COMPOSED"

STRESSES ME OUT.

HOP ON POD

BOOKS ON MY NIGHTSTAND:

- JUNIE B. JONES
- HORATIO'S BED
- MR. POPPER'S
PENGUINS
- RAMONA QUIMBY
- ALL JUDY BLUME
- HARRY POHER
- THE RAINBOW
FISH
- THE KISSING
HAND
- THE SECRET
GARDEN

• PATRICIA POLACCO

the

VELVETEEN

RABBIT:

On the day that I'm
born, my uncle gives me a copy of this
book. The neighbors give me a pink
teddy bear - "teddy" becomes my very own velveteen rabbit. When I'm
five, I get sick with scarlet fever. My mom thinks I'm crying
because I'm sick, but when she asks what's wrong, I tell her
that I'm scared teddy will need to be burned because of the
germs. She reassures me that this is not true - she also tells
me teddy is REAL.

WHAT
IS
REAL?

SHE LEARNED
TO READ HIS
PURSED LIPS, GLARING
EYES, TENSION HELD
IN A FIST

ANGER WAS WRITTEN ALL
OVER HIS FACE

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

BEAUTIFUL GILLS LOUD DANCE
 RAIN HISTORY OPALINE TONGUE
 HEKATONKHEI RES ORIGIN SPLA-
 SHOU T PLUM ACAPPELLA EYE
 VIB RATO AGENCY BRIGHT
 RAINBOW! RAINBOW RAIN-
 BOW! LITTLE BOATS
 HONE YH IVE TEETH
 ODE DAZZLE
 YAWE SUNSHINE
 JO YOU HOVER IGNITE
 TIARA SHORE COVE ROO-
 VELVET STARRY STARRY
 BELONG NIGHT FILLING
 OT MEMORY WANDERING HOME



HANDS:

2

NOUN

THE END PART OF A
 PERSON'S ARM...
 INCLUDING THE
 PALM, FINGERS &
 THUMB

My grandfather was born deaf & participated in the Deaf community. At one point, he worked as a translator for the Chicago Police Department & taught nurses ASL. He could read lips well but I loved watching him sign, especially when he signed with my father (a CODA) & me. I would point to objects & sign them. My grandfather would nod, smile, sometimes correct me. I'd buy books & computer programs with allowance \$. I've lost a lot of the language over time.

וואס איז

↑ MY LAST NAME IN YIDDISH

4th grade
 assignment: write &
 illustrate your own picture book.

Result:

Goodbye
 Russia

an imagined
 story of
 my great-grandparents' emigration
 as an escape from the Bolshevik Rev.

BOOKS:

My great-grandparents emigrated from Kiev in 1920. I have their small menorah, mezuzah, & my great-grandfather's (MOISHE) books. He was a writer & published short stories in the local Jewish newspapers. Eventually, he published short story collections & novels. They're in the Spielberg Yiddish Library. I also have a couple of typewriter drafts that are scribbled on, scratched out, loved. They are the only writings I can read - all of his work was published in Yiddish.

BOOK
NOUN

A WRITTEN OR PRINTED WORK
CONSISTING OF PAGES GLUED
OR SEWN TOGETHER....

3

I can't remember ever feeling ashamed of reading or feeling the need to hide a book I was reading from my mother. In first grade, I told her I wanted to read THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK. Every night before bed, we would open up to a new diary entry.

AGE 11: MARY
HIGGINS CLARK
SERIES

The quiet of the listener makes room for the speech of others, like the quiet of the reader taking in words on the page, like the white of the paper taking ink. "We are volcanoes," Ursula Le Guin once remarked. "When we women offer our experience as our truth, as human truth, all the maps change. There are new mountains." The new voices that are undersea volcanoes erupt in what was mistaken for open water, and new islands are born; it's a furious business and a startling one. The world changes. Silence is what allows people to suffer without recourse, what allows hypocrisies and lies to grow and flourish, crimes to go unpunished. If our voices are essential aspects of our humanity, to be rendered voiceless is to be dehumanised or excluded from one's humanity. And the history of silence is central to women's history.

AGE 9: WHERE
THE RED
FERN GROWS

I must have known about my family's ties to Judaism before I wanted to read the diary of Anne Frank. I must have known about my great-grandparents' emigration. I can't say for sure why I chose this book, but if I had to take a guess, it was because in some way, I related to Anne.

SHHHH. IF
YOU'RE GONNA
BE LOUD, GO
TO YOUR
ROOM!

THIS IS
ADULT TIME!!

YOU CAN'T
TALK NOW, THE
ADULTS ARE TALKING

EVERY NIGHT
MY DAD AT
THE DINNER
TABLE.

"WHERE DO BAD
MEMORIES GO?

WHY DO WE
KEEP THEM?"

My mom always encouraged & prioritized reading, even punishing me as a child with a series of picture books about good & bad behavior called HELP ME BE GOOD.

RECURRING BOOKS: HELP ME BE GOOD: DISOBEYING
HELP ME BE GOOD: BEING FORGETFUL
HELP ME BE GOOD: TALKING BACK

"YOU ARE QUIET.
LIGHT FROM THE OUTSIDE
TRAVELS IN. ON THE
INSIDE YOU ARE ANYTHING BUT
QUIET."

I have never considered myself a "good" student. I'm forgetful - I lose homework, I lose folders, I forget my belongings in lockers, in desks, I forget where my classrooms are. But where I come from, HONORS CLASSES are what matter, so my mom tells the teacher who tries to talk to her about this that I'm just "acting up."

4

Writing is at once both two steps away from conversation and a result of conversation. By writing, we re-invent conversation in its social medium. Writing is two steps removed from conversation because, for example, my ability to write this essay depends on my ability to talk through with myself the issues I address here. And my ability to talk through an issue with myself derives largely from my ability to converse directly with other people in an immediate social situation.

WORD: INWARD A SINGLE DISTINCT MEANINGFUL ELEMENT OF SPEECH
NOUN OR WRITING

MY WORDS have sighs & screams.

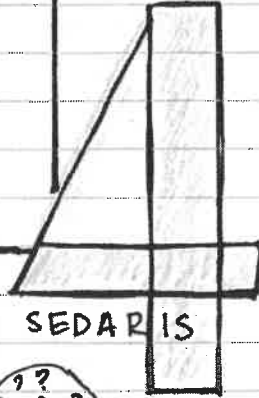
numbers have colors.

they can dance on the page.

they can tremble.

Sometimes a letter can look so

WRONG on the page that it feels like nails on a chalkboard.



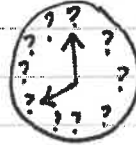
BOOKS:

CATCHER IN THE RYE

LANGSTON
HUGHES

DAVID SEDARIS

EEEEK!



DYSCALCULIA: [DISKAL'KYOOLE]
NOUN SEVERE DIFFICULTY IN MAKING ARITHMETICAL CALCULATIONS, AS A RESULT OF A BRAIN DISORDER

I don't fit inside this box

classes related to math. My mom doesn't understand why I can't understand these concepts. My brother is so good at math that he has skipped two grades. He is so smart that he is on the kid scientist episode of the David Letterman show. I'm 17 & can barely read an analog clock. North is always in front of me. East is toward Lake Michigan - if I can see it. I have failed so many math tests that when I get a question right during class the teacher - in front of everyone, asks if I've copied my peek! This is not the first time we made me feel dumb in front of everyone. When I go to the counselor, he just looks at me. He tells me, he knows I've failed other classes. He tells me the geometry teacher is a good friend of his. He tells me he knows him. He tells me, what can you expect? He tells me, look at you. What can you expect?

"IF YOU DON'T DARE SAY HELP, IF YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO NOT BOTHER PEOPLE BY SAYING HELP..."

"in this way is the one baffled now truly learning to guide his own thinking"

Eternally grateful

Here's the light!

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I WAS

6

THE FIRST TIME MY MOTHER TOLD ME I COULD BE THE 1st

DR. TOLCHIN. I WAS TOLD TO

5

DOES YOUR DREAM FIT THE PARAMETERS?

DREAM

but I was also told that my dreams had limitations that mostly

DISAPPEARANCE

DISPENSATION

AN INSTANCE

OR FACT OF SOMEONE OR SOMETHING CEASING TO BE

expectations

for women. My first poetry professor was the first person to

can't you put on something more pretty?

truly give me a safe space to dream, but I was too timid &

WOMEN SHOULD BE SEEN & NOT HEARD

UNAWARE TO UNDERSTAND & TAKE

ADVANTAGE OF THIS. BUT EVEN IF I DIDN'T KNOW IT, FOR 90 MINUTES 2X A WEEK, I WAS WORKING ON

DREAMING. LOOKING BACK, I THINK APPLYING TO MFA VISIBLE

PROGRAMS HAD LESS TO DO WITH WRITING & MORE WITH REALIZING WHAT THIS PROF. HAD GIVEN ME & BEING AFRAID THAT IT WAS GOING TO BE TAKEN AWAY FROM ME. POETRY TAUGHT ME TO QUESTION, TO TRY, TO FAIL, TO STAND UP FOR MYSELF, TO STAND UP FOR OTHERS, TO I LEARNED HOW TO BREAK OUT OF THE PRISONS I HAD LET OTHERS PLACE AROUND ME & THE PRISONS I HAD PLACED AROUND MYSELF.

PARTS OF MY 1ST POEM: "DISAPPEARANCE"

Sometimes it happens this way: you are

watching your face in the foam my loop-de-loops of spilled soap,

how your cheekbones rise & fall, distorted depending on the angle, how the reflection from the sun through the skylights can turn your eyes into a thin line of rainbow.

you are in your parents' bathroom in your hands & knees mapping 3 valve-size bottles of soap your father emptied across the pale tiled floor & counter tops... you are imagining your father as little bubbles between your toes. His vomit has clogged one of the sinks... you are ignoring the thick suds he used to scrawl C--S

across the mirror with his finger... when you stand up & look at yourself in the mirror, the letters spell perfectly across your forehead. You lie down in the soap & let the bubbles pop against your spine & it feels surprisingly warm, like someone who

loves you is wrapping you over & over in an old blanket & carrying you away.



d R



0:00

EXCLAM

000 0000 0000 000 0000 0000

6

MY MOUTH SPENT SO LONG

LOCKED IN THE SOG &
GRISTLE OF SCREAM

EVERY NIGHT &
EVERY MORN
SOME TO MISERY
ARE BORN
EVERY MORN &
EVERY NIGHT
SOME ARE BORN
TO SWEET DELIGHT

I AM A 1st GEN COLLEGE
STUDENT. I ALMOST DIDNT GO
TO COLLEGE AT ALL... I DONT
WANT TO IMAGINE WHAT MY
LIFE WOULD BE LIKE IF I
DIDNT. ACADEMIA WAS AN
ESCAPE, BUT THEN IT
BECAME MORE...

W. BLAKE

Philosopher John Dewey believed that the purpose of education is to foster a love of learning and a desire for more education. For Dewey (1920), education is an end in itself because openness to learning leads to greater social cohesion, democracy, and equality. These ideals were not idle abstractions in the first half of twentieth-century America when Dewey's writings were taking shape against a backdrop of grinding automation, income inequality, and child labor. Dewey's ideas were born in an American context of swelling immigration, crowded schools, and racial and ethnic tensions that were no less severe than the ones we face today. Dewey believed education was the lever that would move the United States and the world to a better place. It still holds that promise.

"WHY DID I WANT
TO READ
ANNE FRANK?"

"YOU ALWAYS
WANTED A
REALISTIC,
USUALLY TRAGIC
BUT RELATABLE
STORY RATHER
THAN AN
UNREALISTIC
FAIRYTALE. YOU
LIKED READING
ABOUT WOMEN
FROM HISTORY.
FAIRY TALES
OFTEN SCARED
YOU, ACTUALLY."

academia saved my
life

BECAUSE SOMETIMES HOME ONLY HAS DEFINITION AFTER
LEAVING. BECAUSE WITHOUT "I" RUIN IS SIMPLY RUN.

HOME: HŌM N UN

THE PLACE WHERE ONE LIVES
PERMANENTLY ESP. AS A
MEMBER OF A FAMILY...

once, i tried
to go back to
that home & all of the
pictures of me had devil
horns drawn on with black
marker. because
no one else
there had
noticed we'd
done this.

BOOKS:

maric howe, natalie diaz
terahle hays, lidia yvannette

"HER VOICE COUNTS FOR SOMETHING"

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SOME KIDS & YOUNG ADULTS SPEND THEIR TIME AT HOME BEING A PARENT - MAKING THEIR YOUNGER BROTHER SANDWICHES TO TAKE TO SCHOOL, RUNNING THE BATH FOR THEIR MOTHER, LOUNGING THE PILLS LEFT IN THEIR FATHER'S PRESCRIPTION BOTTLES, HIDING SOME OF HIS PILLS, HIDING THE ALCOHOL. IT IS ANOTHER KIND OF PRIVILEGE TO COME FROM A GOOD FAMILY, A GOOD HOME.

If we can't fix papers, is there anything left for us to do? I would like to suggest that when we refuse to edit, we become more active than ever as educators. In the writing center, we have the luxury of time that the classroom teacher does not have. We can spend that time talking and listening, always focusing on the paper at hand. The primary value of the writing center tutor to the student is as a living human body who is willing to sit patiently and help the student spend time with her paper. This alone is more than most teachers can do, and will likely do as much to improve the paper as a hurried proofreader can. Second, we can talk to the student as an individual about the one paper before us. We can discuss strategies for effective writing and principles of structure, we can draw students' attention to features in their writing, and we can give them support and encouragement (writing papers, we shouldn't forget, is a daunting activity).

THIS INCLUDES THE RIGHT NOT TO SPEAK.

FRAGMENTATION & WHITE SPACE ARE

SILENCE? QUIET? INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO MY WRITING. WHEN I FIRST STARTED USING IT, IT WAS PROBABLY AN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY EXCLUDING DETAILS. NOW, IT IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX & PURPOSEFUL. IN SOME WAYS, I USE IT TO RESIST THE CANON. I THINK IT'S NECESSARY FOR WRITERS TO BE AWARE OF THE HISTORY IN WHICH THEY'RE PARTICIPATING, WHO TAUGHT THEM TO WRITE IN THE FORMS THEY USE, & THE POSSIBLE POLITICAL AGENDA SURROUNDING IT - THEN & NOW. MORESO, DISORDER IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH SOMETHING INCORRECT OR MALFUNCTIONING, & I THINK THAT'S AN INCORRECT ASSUMPTION DRIVEN BY NORMATIVE SOCIETY THAT PROMULGATES TROPES & SINGLE STORY NARRATIVES...

For tutors reading this book—from those who have little experience to those with a lot, and from undergraduate to graduate tutors—it is worth taking a moment to understand why Dewey's vision of progressive education provides a foundation for the work of writing centers. I believe it does so for three reasons: Dewey's vision is grounded in real-world experience, it looks toward the future, and it is embedded in a robust philosophical tradition.

"JOY is SUCH A HUMAN MADNESS"

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... MY WRITINGS HAVE BECOME

LESS ABOUT EXISTING AS A FRAGMENTED SELF
& MORE ABOUT REFLECTING A RECLAIMING OF
MYSELF & MY STORIES.

AS A CHILD & YOUNG ADULT,

SILENCE permeated my definition of existence. White space in my writing is not silence imposed

on me, rather the quiet I am allowed to choose. It is the reclaiming of my voice, my story, & the right to choose quiet. White space allows me to find what was lost, and what was lost more often than not, in all those stories was ME.

Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power.

Stories save your life. And stories are your life. We are our stories; stories that can be both prison and the crowbar to break open the door of that prison. We make stories to save ourselves or to trap ourselves or others — stories that lift us up or smash us against

"**REAL** isn't how you are made," said the SKIN HORSE. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long time, not just to play with but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL."

Works included:

(not cited
on page
in narrative)

NEW OXFORD AMERICAN DICTIONARY

Rebecca Solnit's "Silence and powerlessness go hand in hand - women's voices must be heard"
included on page 3, 4, 8

Lynda Barry's WHAT it IS
included on page 3

PAULO FREIRE'S "PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED"
included on pg 4, 8

BEN RAFOTH'S "Second language writers, writing centers, & reflection"
included on page 6, 7

Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist tutoring: Making the student do all the work"
included on pg 7

