

# The Power of Words

## *Teacher's Student Activities*

### **Objectives**

Completion of the suggested explorations will enable students to address the following questions:

- What is the role of life experiences in the motivation to write and the development of the writer?
- What role does inspiration play in the writing process? What is the Muse?
- What roles do regular writing schedules, discipline, commitment, and hard work play in the writing process and achievement in writing? What advantage is there in writing daily in a diary or journal?
- What types of writing and writing achievements are exemplified by the Academy of Achievement panelists and by the writers they allude to in their discussion?
- What does the term "structure" mean in relation to writing and what are some methods for developing and structuring manuscripts?
- What kinds of relationships does the writer form with his material? To what degree does the material direct the writing process?
- What kinds of attitudes do writers have about the power of words and the importance of precise choices about words in a particular work?
- How do writers define success and what effect does public recognition have on their ability to work productively?
- What special insights do writers have about human values, what it means to be a person, and the essential truths worth living by?
- What effect will technology have on the importance of books in our society?
- What special challenges do women face as writers, leaders, and achievers?

### **Using the Pre-Program Explorations**

- Prior to viewing the program, students should define any of the content-related terms that are unfamiliar to improve their understanding of discussion.
- Research of the suggested topics will provide students with the background information needed to understand the allusions the

panelists make to their own works and to other writers. Depending upon time constraints and access to research materials, you may want to divide the questions among different student groups; findings can then be shared with the entire class. The Web sites listed in the "Reference Materials" section may be good starting points for student research efforts.

- The "Issues to Consider" provide thought-provoking questions that can be used as the basis for classroom discussions or can be answered through individual written responses. You may want to revisit these issues after the students have viewed the program, to see if their thoughts and opinions have been modified in any way.

### **Using the Post-Program Explorations**

- The explorations are divided into curriculum areas; however, you will find that some of the lessons are actually interdisciplinary in scope and could easily be used in more than one area. We have categorized these multidisciplinary studies based on dominant themes.
- Included in this section is a "Current Event Exploration," a Web lesson designed around a timely issue, related to the program content. The suggested Web sites will aid students in the information gathering process. The synthesis of their research efforts can be documented via written response, oral presentation, or multimedia presentation (e.g. PowerPoint, HyperStudio, Web page).

### **Structuring the Pre and Post Explorations**

- The suggested lesson ideas can be approached in numerous ways. Some are well suited to collaborative learning, where members of individual student groups address different aspects of an issue, and the group then synthesizes that information to formulate an answer. Other activities require individual work and independent reflection and writing.
- Individual or group completion of all of the explorations provides an interdisciplinary approach to the program theme. As a result, students are able to analyze the issues from multiple perspectives. If, however, time is limited, you may choose to confine student explorations to those that directly relate to your discipline. For additional independent study opportunities, students could investigate topics in other disciplines according to their interest.

### **Assessing the Pre and Post Explorations**

- Possible assessment methods for these explorations are varied. You may want to have students demonstrate their understanding through individual written essays, through group projects, or through classroom discussions and debates. The method(s) you choose can be tailored to learner strengths or curriculum considerations.

### **Using the Reference Materials**

- The "Reference Materials" can aid in the completion of these explorations and will probably foster your own ideas for lessons. Giving students reading assignments from the print materials will enhance their knowledge base and provide them the opportunity to examine original sources. These resources vary in terms of their reading level; these differences may be a consideration as you assign student readings.
- Also included under Reference Materials are **Integration Guidelines** for using the materials in your classroom and a list of **National Standards** that relate to the subject matter covered in the program.

### **Pre-Program Explorations**

#### **Terms to Define**

- character
- dialogue
- diary
- film animation
- historical research
- inspiration
- journal
- limerick
- Muse
- novel
- pc (politically correct)
- plot
- poem
- screen play
- structure

#### **Topics to Research**

- What are the major literary genres and the basic elements of their structure?

- What is meant by the term "the writing process" and what roles do creativity, personal choice and experience, the nature of words, and the structures of composition play in the writing process?
- What is the occupation and position in public life of the Academy of Achievement panelists and what are the types of writing for which they are well known?
  - Ambrose, Stephen E.
  - Dove, Rita
  - Lucas, George
  - Shields, Carol
  - Simpson, Alan K.
  - Tan, Amy
- Who are the following literary figures, which genre is their specialty, and what is their significance in the world of writers?
  - Gilbert, Sir William Schwenck and Sir Arthur Sullivan
  - O'Connor, Flannery
  - Plath, Sylvia
  - Sayers, Dorothy
  - Shakespeare, William
  - Woolf, Virginia
- Who are the authors of the following works and what are their subjects?
  - *A Confederacy of Dunces*
  - "Daddy"
  - *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*
  - *Right in the Old Gazoo: A Lifetime of Scraping with the Press*
  - *Small Ceremonies*
  - *Star Wars Trilogy*
  - *The Kitchen God's Wife*
  - *The Joy Luck Club*
  - *The Republic of Love*
  - *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*
- Who are the following historical figures and why are they important?
  - Dwight Eisenhower

- Karl Marx
  - Meriwether Lewis
  - Thomas Jefferson
- What are some of the major benchmarks in the progress of research and writing on the creative process in the last few decades?
  - What are some of the major benchmarks in the progress of research on and teaching of the writing process in the last few decades?

### **Issues to Consider**

- Do you believe that achievement as a writer is a function of talent, inspiration, hard work, luck, or some combination of these?
- Do you think words are powerful and, if so, in what ways are they powerful? Are the sounds, textures, and specific meanings of words important?
- What defines success? Which of the following do you think are the most important criteria for judging the successful life: wealth, power, fame, financial gain, the praise of others, personal fulfillment, happiness and satisfaction, the opportunity to do the work you love, self-knowledge, virtuous behavior, trust and kindness, love and a positive family life.
- Do you think the writer makes an important contribution to the lives of individuals and to society as a whole? How crucial is the role of the writer in modern society?
- What changes has technology brought to the writing process and to the distribution and reading of books in the last two decades? What changes do you anticipate will occur in the next two decades as a result of new advances in technology?

### **Post-Program Explorations**

#### **Achievement Explorations**

- Achievement Television has defined six components of achievement: vision, preparation, integrity, courage, passion, and perseverance. Choose one of the featured guests and give examples of ways in which he/she embodies these traits.

- Choose one of the featured guests and analyze the role personal ideals and values have played in defining this person's character and choices as a writer. Do these ideas and values contribute to your view of the person as an achiever?

### **English/Language Arts Explorations**

- Identify the genres of writing practiced by the featured guests in this panel discussion. Explain the differences in the way the writer develops material for the different genres, according to each guest's description of his/her writing process. Do certain genres share similar approaches? Why is the writing process different for different genres?
- Select one of the panelist's works as the subject for a reading and research project. Read at least one full-length novel, screen play, collection of poems, or historical work. Find reviews of the work and write an assessment of the quality of the writing. Conclude this assessment with insights about the writer from your viewing of "The Power of Words" video.
- In the course of the panel discussion, the following writers are mentioned as influences or models whose words or approaches to writing are important to one of the panelists. Research one or more of these writers, identifying major works, the writer's influence during his own time period, and the reasons for the author's sustained influence on current writers:
  - Gilbert, Sir William Schwenck and Sir Arthur Sullivan
  - O'Connor, Flannery
  - Plath, Sylvia
  - Sayers, Dorothy
  - Shakespeare, William
  - Toole, John Kennedy
  - Woolf, Virginia
- The panelists strongly recommend the habit of keeping a daily diary or journal in which you write about yourself for at least 15–20 minutes every day. Sometimes it is difficult to write without pausing, erasing, editing, and censoring what you write. In a diary or journal, however, there should be no erasing or censoring. Instead, this writing should be a free flow of thoughts, simply a recording of exactly what the thoughts are in your mind during the moments when you are writing. The most productive way of writing in this mode is to maintain a continuous, constant flow without lifting your pen from the page, a method called free writing. Try this experiment: Free write in a diary or journal for 15 minutes every night for two full weeks. When you complete

15 minutes every night for two full weeks. When you complete each night's writing, pause and identify the subjects you wrote about and observe your writing style. Write a short note about what you observe. At the end of the two weeks, write an account of the changes you observe in the topics of interest and concern to you, in the way you write, and in your attitude toward writing.

- Carol Shields proposes that a writer identify a physical image to serve as a useful hook for structuring writing—the idea that the nine months of the academic year, the controlling structure of her first novel, *Small Ceremonies*, were like nine cars of a freight train. Select a physical object that is important to you. Draw a picture of the object. Compose a short piece of writing -- a poem, a dialogue, a short narrative, or an essay -- that is structured like the object you chose. Shields's image of freight train cars enforced relatively equal chapter lengths. What are the sizes and shapes of the parts of the object you chose and what implication do these structures have for the shape of your composition?
- George Lucas recommends that a writer work from 9:00 to 5:00 every day, whether he feels like writing or not. Carol Shields reminds us that two pages of writing a day, yields ten in a week, and a book at the end of the year. Stephen Ambrose argues that the writing process itself evokes topics for research and writing. A full day of writing even once a week for an entire year would be difficult for most students. However, try setting aside three hours a week for a month. Start writing that piece you've always imagined creating: a children's book, a story, a poem, a film script, a television play, a complaint, an editorial letter. Rather than staring at the page, write whatever comes to mind, without censoring yourself. At the end of the month, decide if you want to continue this writing process.

## **Psychology**

- Most of us were engaged in the creative process through our play experiences during early childhood. You can learn about your own creative process by reflecting on those childhood experiences. Find a quiet, isolated place where you can think without interruption for at least an hour. Think deeply and recall the most pleasurable experiences of play during your pre-school and early elementary school years. Make a few notes describing these experiences. Then consider the structure of the play experiences you most enjoyed. Did you like best repetitive movement such as swinging or jumping rope? ball games and other sports? pretend and fantasy games you made up yourself?

other sports, pretend and fantasy games you made up yourself. Next, examine the work processes and study areas you enjoy the most. Is there any correspondence between the structure of the work activities you most enjoy and your favorite kind of childhood play? How might this kind of reflection and self-knowledge help you choose a career?

- The creative process has been the subject of a great deal of study and research. Consult some of the reference resources on this topic and identify some of the ideas psychologists and psychotherapists have about the creative process and the personality traits of creative people.

### **History and Politics**

- Almost any historical event can be researched and written about from a new and original perspective. Stephen Ambrose has written a whole collection of books on World War II as well as two books on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Use the Internet or a library to identify and read reviews on his works. What are the characteristics of his topics, titles, and approaches to history that make him such a popular writer in this genre?
- Select an event that is notable in importance to your family, your school, or your home town. You might choose your own birth, the opening of your school, or the erection of an important building in your town. Plan a short historical sketch on this event. Research the event by using the processes and resources historians rely on: newspaper accounts, photographs and videos, interviews with first-hand participants, interviews with second-hand observers, imaginary re-dramatizations of the event in your own mind, analyses of the persons who participated in the event, written sources about the event. Compose your historical sketch, and ask others who were involved in this event to assess your historical accuracy and perception.
- Read selections from Alan K. Simpson's *Right in the Old Gazoo: A Lifetime of Scrapping with the Press* and summarize the problems a politician faces as a result of his public role.

### **Media and Technology**

- George Lucas argues that his script writing for a film is a process of imagining characters, who are representatives of parts of himself, and then allowing those characters to realize themselves—even if they take a direction different from his intentions. Watch a film that you like very much and select a scene that you think is particularly well done. Notice the positions of the characters on the screen, the background setting, the

camera angles, and the lighting. Next, choose three characters for your scene, select a subject for a dialogue, and write a description of their positions on the screen, the background setting, the camera angles, and the lighting. Use free writing and let each character speak in a dialogue. Try not to censor your writing, but let the characters act as they wish and say what they wish to say.

- Beginning in the late fall of 1998, a number of different versions of electronic books came on the market. These small, hand-held computers are used only for reading the text of a book and each one will hold up to ten book-length works. The texts can be purchased over the Internet, downloaded, and read a page at a time from the screen. The light on the screen can be adjusted so that the electronic book can be used comfortably in a dark airplane or lying on a sunny beach. Use the Internet to look at samples of these electronic books. Think about the comments at the end of the panelists' discussion on the ongoing life of books in the age of technology. Do you agree or disagree with their views?

### **Current Event Exploration**

(Web Lesson)

### **Women as Public Leaders**

In February, 1999 Elizabeth Dole spoke to the Chamber of Commerce in Manchester, New Hampshire, a traditional first step in declaring entry into the presidential race. This potential that a woman might run for the American presidency in 2000 was the impetus for *Parade* magazine's February cover story on the importance of individual women as national and world leaders. Not only in politics but also in literature, women are achieving wide-spread recognition. The unusual achievements of Rita Dove as a poet laureate and Amy Tan as the author of *The Joy Luck Club*, popular both as a novel and a film, exemplify the new status of women as writers in American society.

In this lesson, you will explore the Web to discover women who play important roles in contemporary American society because of their positions in political life or their contributions as writers.

### **Questions for Exploration**

What are the character traits, personal values, and achievements

that characterize outstanding women leaders in politics and literature? Must a woman adhere to gender stereotypes in order to be a successful public figure? Do different social rules apply to women in politics and women writers?

### Procedure

1. In order to answer the "Questions for Exploration," you will need to collect information about some important women politicians and writers and explore their character traits, values, and achievements. You will also need to assess their position in American society and decide if their life choices and self-presentations indicate an adherence to stereotypical gender roles. You may recognize many of the women in politics, and you may have already formed opinions about their public images. You can also search newspaper and periodical articles, take notes on news reports and talk shows that feature information about them, or explore the web sites provided. You might also recognize many of the women writers listed, and you may have read some of their works. In addition to the web sites provided, look for book reviews of their works and magazine articles about them, and read from their works. Make notes on each resource you use and keep a record of your sources, using correct documentation conventions. For web resources include both the official name of the web site and the URL address.

Research outstanding women in contemporary American politics:

- Elizabeth Dole, prospective presidential candidate, 2000 election
- Hillary Rodham-Clinton, current First Lady, prospective Senate candidate, 2000 election
- Kay Bailey Hutchison, Senator from Texas
- Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, Senators from California
- Olympia Snowe, Senator from Maine

Research outstanding, contemporary American women writers:

African American Writers

- Maya Angelou
- Rita Dove
- Toni Morrison

- Alice Walker

#### Asian American Writers

- Maxine Hong Kingston
  - Amy Tan
2. Synthesize the information you collect and develop a response to the "Questions for Exploration." The format for your response (written, oral, web page, etc.) will be decided by your teacher.

#### Suggested Web sites:

##### Politics

Clinton, Hillary Rodham. [First Ladies Biographies: Hillary Rodham Clinton](#); [The First Lady of the United States](#); [Hillary Clinton Forum](#): Supporting Hillary Clinton for President Since 1995; and ["Save America's Treasures Tour"](#)

Dole, Elizabeth. [Say Yes, Elizabeth](#); [Draft Elizabeth Dole 2000](#); and [Dole for President](#)

Boxer, Barbara. [United States Senator Barbara Boxer](#)

Feinstein, Dianne. [United States Senator Dianne Feinstein](#)

Hutchison, Kay Bailey. [United States Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison](#)

Snowe, Olympia. [United States Senator Olympia Snowe](#)

##### Writing

Angelou, Maya. [Maya Angelou Pages](#) and [Maya Angelou](#)

Dove, Rita. [Rita Dove: Vita](#); [The Circle Association's Rita Dove Page](#); [Lady Freedom Among Us](#)

Kingston, Maxine Hong. [Celebrating Women's History: Maxine Hong Kingston](#)

Morrison, Toni. [Anniina's Toni Morrison Page](#) and [The Nobel Prize Internet Archive: Toni Morrison](#)

Tan, Amy. [Anniina's Amy Tan Page: The Salon Interview](#)

Tan, Amy. [Anniina's Amy Tan Page](#), [The Salon Interview](#).  
[Amy Tan](#)

Walker, Alice. [Anniina's Alice Walker Page](#); [Alice Walker: Womanist Writer](#); [Voices From the Gaps: Alice Walker](#)

Women Writers Resource: [A Celebration of Women Writers](#)

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