



The Salem Witch Trials: Voice(s)

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Boring: College-level writing must have a strong thesis statement. College-level writing is tightly woven and unified—buttressed by topic, transitional, and parallel sentences that flow seamlessly and thematically from paragraph to paragraph. College-level writing must have an introduction, body, and conclusion. It is demonstrated in essays, papers, stories, journals, research projects, lab reports, reader responses, articles, etc. It conforms to state and national standards and adheres to the conventions of correctness. *Boring*.

“Rewind, *ese*” (from the movie, *Selena*, 1997). In 1965, I was a sophomore in high school, and I was bound to go somewhere. Most likely, I was headed for the army and Vietnam, like my classmate Robert Steven Trujillo—Bobby, who is gone but not forgotten (high school graduate, May, 1967; missing in action, January 7, 1968).

In Pojoaque, our remote northern New Mexico town, the term *college bound* was somewhat foreign. Girls were on the clerical track (Typing I, II, III, and Bookkeeping), and they all took Home Economics. Boys took Drafting, Vocational Agriculture, and Shop (woodworking, leather crafting, or auto mechanics). We also took required courses, of course. And there were exceptions—the brains who took Advanced Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus, and were also straight-A students in English I through IV. They were the few who would definitely go to college. Many of us, however, had been counseled to join the military, to serve our country, to become men. John F. Kennedy’s motto had been coined and ingrained in our collective conscious-

ness: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” The poster on the wall of the counselor’s office pointed at *me* and said, “Uncle Sam wants *you*.” *Chale, bro*—no way, *Jose*.

Generally, our main objective was to attend school every day, 180 days a year; get a certificate for perfect attendance; stay on task; get the diploma; go into the service and/or work for the rest of our lives. So what did the Salem Witch Trials mean to me? Nothing. *Nada. El zilcho*.

Our English teacher said we should learn to do research in case we went to college. English classes back then were largely grammar-based with plenty of sentence diagramming. We started on page one of Warriner’s, or *English 2600* (Blumenthal). Our goal was to finish the book by the end of the year while learning, reviewing, relearning (not Re: Learning), and reiterating the parts of speech, the subject, the predicate, the four types of sentences; auxiliary verbs; the six comma rules, capitalization rules, and prepositional phrases among other things: cursive penmanship, independent clauses, dependent clauses, subordinate and coordinate clauses, the use and over-use of semicolons and colons, the conjugation of verbs . . . *perfecto tense*.

Sophomore year, when I did my first research paper in case I went to college, I was stumped. Our teacher gave us a handout that illustrated the essential parts of the paper, including a bibliography. When she wrote our research options on the blackboard, the only one that jumped out was the Salem Witch Trials.

I swear the first image that came to my mind was the Salem cigarette pack and TV commercial with green meadows, a babbling creek, a misty waterfall, *menthol*. The second word that grabbed my attention was *Witch*. *Brujas* were real in our part of the country, so I was curious to know more. I don’t even remember the other topics we might have chosen. I had two weeks to do my research paper. It was hard homework, homework that I had never done before. Good thing my parents had bought a set of encyclopedias from a traveling salesman when I was in junior high.

A week later I realized my research paper was due Friday, and it had to be typed! I asked my mom if she would type it at work because we didn’t have a typewriter at home. She told me she’d type it during her lunch hour Thursday, but I’d have to

write it by Wednesday. I initially had trouble finding the Salem Witch Trials under T for *the*, but eventually I found my topic under S in the encyclopedia. The print was small, and the story was long, so I skipped a lot of it because it was time to write the paper.

I took out my pencil and paper, and I started copying from the sections of the encyclopedia that I had skimmed. I put what I read into my own words; I changed “and’s” to “but’s” and “or’s” to “nor’s,” so to speak. My paper became ten pages of encyclopedia text that I had rearranged and copied almost directly from the book. How else does a high school sophomore write ten pages? It was okay because I honestly (if naively) thought it was the kind of research and writing I’d have to do if I decided to go to college. My mom typed it for me, as promised. I turned it in when it was due. When I got it back, a B- was at the top of the page with no other marks on the paper. In retrospect, I should have gotten an A+ for plagiarism, and the teacher should have received a C- for effort.

Preparing for college writing today is no longer just encyclopedia “research.” There are heaps and layers of printed and electronic texts accessible to students now. How do we help them plow through the material and cultivate college-level writing without copying or clipping and pasting? What is acceptable and genuine student writing today?

I’d say good writing rings true with *voice* authenticity (Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Nancy Martin [may she rest in peace], Donald Graves, Peter Stillman). As far as I know, the nebulous term *voice* has been kicked around for the last quarter of a century, *mas o menos*.

What is voice in writing? To simplify, it is, perhaps, when the writer recognizes in her or his prose or poetry a style, tone, personality, and rhythm that work. And the writer must have an ear for detail (Macrorie); this helps establish the writer’s voice. In “A Letter to Gabriela, A Young Writer,” author Pat Mora encourages young writers to listen with all of their senses. “Listen to the wrinkles on your *tia’s* face,” she advises.

“Voice is the imprint of ourselves on our writing,” says Donald Graves in *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*. “Divorcing voice from process is like omitting salt from stew, love

from sex, or sun from gardening. Teachers who attend to voice listen to the person in the piece and observe how that person uses process components” (227). Students should feel free to express themselves, to choose their diction, to take risks in their writing. Writing without voice is breathing without rhythm—is speaking without body language, accent, dialect, or inflection. When a student writes, she or he is talking on paper.

Inevitably, the writer engenders a rhetorical stamp—a linguistic habit that consists of “spelling, diction, grammatical accident, syntax, internal biographical evidence, psycholinguistic material” (Foster). One’s personal writing technique produces unique, thoughtful prose or poetry that includes literal and figurative language—seriousness, analysis, and humor on paper. It’s akin to Buzz Lightyear’s “falling with style” (*Toy Story*), but this is *writing with style*.

One of my first classes at the Bread Loaf School of English was Nonfiction Prose, taught by Ken Macrorie (*The I-Search Paper; Writing to Be Read*). We thought on paper—what a concept! We wrote, and we rewrote. Many of our first drafts were timed, stream-of-conscious freewrites. The topics varied; the philosophy was simple. Writers learn to write by writing; writers write to be read, and writers revise. Papers that were returned by Ken had no grade at the top, but they had plenty of feedback: “This is good . . . flesh this out . . . include dialogue . . . great image . . . good ear . . . your conclusion needs work . . . don’t explain . . . your paper starts here,” etc. Those comments reminded me of the first time I felt like a teacher had truly read my paper. I was a freshman at New Mexico State University in the fall of 1967. The professor’s name was John Hadsell. (We always remember the names of teachers who respond to our writing.)

We were reading *Writing Prose: Techniques and Purposes*, a literature anthology with segments on mechanics and usage, grammar, and writing. We used the writers in the anthology as models. We wrote essays. The grading system was plus (+) for exemplary, check (✓) for good, and minus (-) for needs work. That was it: a plus, check, or minus at the top of the paper, but the paper always had Mr. Hadsell’s comments on the margin. One assignment was to write an argumentative paper. We had

read “Boxing with the Naked Eye,” an essay from *The Sweet Science* in which A. J. Liebling asserts that watching boxing live is far better than watching it on television. We were asked if we agreed or disagreed with Liebling. Our objective was to convince the reader that watching sports on television was better than watching them live or vice versa. I argued in favor of watching baseball on television because the replay option was not available at the stadium. I wrote something like, “[I]n the stadium, a loudmouth with a hotdog or a bag of popcorn in his hands could jump up right in front of you and block the view of a pin-striped Yankee sliding chest first into third base.” Mr. Hadsell checked the passage and on the margin wrote something like, “good concrete image, tone, and choice of words.” This meant more to me than any A, B-, plus, check, minus, whatever. It wasn’t even good writing perhaps, but finally someone had recognized *my words*, even if they mimicked the author’s. I had stumbled upon my voice.

As a teacher of English I try to replicate Hadsell’s and Macrorie’s pedagogy. I comment on passages that seem unique to my students’ voices, and I hope the comments guide them through revisions and future papers. I also mark spelling, mechanics, and usage, of course, but the emphasis is placed on passages that stimulate the reader’s senses. Below are some final draft excerpts of student writing that I consider college level.

Bianca and Colin wrote the following identity poems after reading Pat Mora’s *My Own True Name*.

I Am . . .

I am from Cuautemac, Chihuahua.
I am from the desert mountains.
I am from the smell of “*bizcochitos*,”
still fresh, just out of the oven.
I am from the taste of “*pan dulce*,” sweet as candy.
I am a small star in the dark cloudy sky,
just starting to shine.
I am like the sound of “*cumbias*,”
tun, tun, tun, tun, tun, tun.
I am from Mexico.
I am me.

Glossary

<i>bizcochitos</i> :	Mexican sugar cookies
<i>pan dulce</i> :	bread with candy (like donuts)
<i>cumbias</i> :	a Mexican kind of dance

Bianca Madrid, 7th grade

Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

The Solver of the Real Homework

I am the forgetful one, the one who probably forgot his homework today. In fact, I am the one who forgot his homework today, and I am the one who forgot it yesterday, and I am the one who will probably forget his homework tomorrow too.

“Why?” you might ask.

“Because,” I would answer, “I am busy trying to find the answers to my homework.”

I would not, however, tell you that I do not mean my math homework or my French homework but the unassigned homework—the real homework—the homework that we will all have to “cash in” on someday; the homework that is unwanted because it is hard and because people are scared of it. It’s unwanted because humans created something that none can control. Too many things are masked to such a point by the textbooks that were rewritten by the media. Few can see the truth or their real identity, and some have lost sight completely, only thinking of war and their own good being. But there is a way we can see the truth—“the light”—and our real identities again, and that is what I am working on instead of doing my homework. This way is hard and long but worth it. This way is to do the real homework. It is your homework, my homework, everybody’s homework. This homework includes solving the hard problems like world hunger and homelessness.

This is the world that I have come from, and this is the world that has masked my identity from me to such a point that I could say hi to my identity on the street and not recognize him. But for some reason I feel that part of my identity is the forgetful one and also a big part of my identity is the solver of these big problems like world hunger that I like to call The Real Homework.

Colin Strauch, 7th grade

Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

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The following pieces were written by Ben and Briana after they were asked to write about an interest/passion that they have.

My Batting Routine

When I'm in the on deck circle, waiting for my turn at the plate, I like to put pine tar on the handle of my bat. The pine tar is sticky so it helps me get my grip. As the batter in front of me gets on base or is out, it is my turn at the plate. I walk up to the box. While I am getting my signs from the coach at third base, I flex my fingers on and off of the stickiness of the tar. I step into the box, and dig in with my cleats (so I have good footing) . . .

*Ben Balkcom, 7th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe*

My Own Stage

In the wings,
dark and quiet,
pulse quickening

Concentrate. Settle down. Breathe.

Your turn.

You are out on stage,
lights bright,
shining on your dazzling costume.

You say your line,
and as the play goes on,
the character thrives in you,
and you become the character.

You take a bow.
The lights dim.
The play is over.

*Briana Thomas, 7th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico*

The following poem was written by Sinay in response to "My Father's Hands," a poem from Nora Naranjo-Morse's *Mud Woman*.

AMÁ

*Las manos de mi amá
son muy importantes
Desde que nació
sus manos han hecho todo
para tenerme vivo
trabajaban para el dinero
cocinaban para comer
me bañaban para tenerme limpio
me tocaban y me cariciaban para sentirme amado
Y ahora que ya están en la mitad
de su vida, todavía me dan de
comer, trabajan, y con sus manos me
sigue amando*

*Sinay Alvarez, 10th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico*

Below is Nolan Ellsworth's entry, which was written on a train ride across the United States. His teacher is Amy Bebell at the Brooklin School in Maine. I recently read his reading journal. I loved this entry and its communicative format (a letter to his teacher), so I'm including it even though he is not a student of mine.

Reading Journal, 9-30-04

Dear Mrs. Bebell,

I found another book to read called *The Ghostmobile*. It's about a boy named Ryan who moves to Wisconsin from Evanston with his family, his brother Josh, his sister Carrie, and his other sister Brook. They're all miserable camping in the middle of a cornfield until a giant glowing bus lands in the middle of their driveway!

But wait, on my way to Wyoming I stayed in a hotel in Boston and went to a giant bookstore. I got the 5th *Spiderwick* book, which is about these three kids named Jared, Simon, and Mallory who discover their great, great uncle's field guide to fairies, and start seeing strange creatures everywhere . . . it's a great book!

From,
Nolie

P.S. I'm not writing in cursive because the train ride was too bumpy.

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*Nolan Ellsworth, 3rd grade
Brooklin School, Brooklin, Maine*

The two following excerpts are reader responses by Jamaica and Guy after they read sections of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself."

Song of Self

I am a 14 year old girl, who likes many things.
I was born on September 12, 1990. I am a Virgo.
I was born of Aileen Lopez and Ruben Gonzales,
my supporting parents.
I am the oldest of 4 children.
I am a Catholic/Christian, who believes in God and all His
mysterious ways.
I am of Hispanic, White, Mexican, French, German,
and other heritages.

I am from Carlos Gilbert Elementary School
and Monte del Sol Charter School.
I like math, English, history, and choir.
I have been in a lot of sports in my life:
basketball, soccer, tennis, cheerleading, and track.
And I have been in a lot of dance programs:
ballet, Spanish, drill team, NDI, and hip-hop.

I like to imagine, and I love to read.
I am smart, and I am dumb.
I am good, and I am bad (I make good and bad choices).
I am a friend and an enemy.
I am placed in this world to make a difference
(everyone can make a difference).
I am who I think I am; I am Jamaica Ashley Gonzales.

*Jamaica Gonzales, 8th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico*

I Stand

I am from my mother and my father,
I am from the weak, and I am from the strong,
I am from the power of those who came before me . . .

I am from late night phone conversations, sleeping in late, and procrastinating until everything seems hopeless.

I am from effort, and I am from laze.

I am from a vocabulary that rivals that of many adults.

I am from my mother's unrelenting love and my father's sometimes hard to identify but equally powerful affection.

I am from my name, Guy, its meaning is unimportant; my name is who I am no matter what. People have made fun of my name; they've even made fun of my parents for naming me so. I don't care what other people think about my name, it's MY identity and only mine . . .

I am from feeling the rhythms as I tap dance, no choreography, all improvised.

I am from the searing pains in my legs that I know are good for me during ballet class—all form, all choreography.

I am from the style of my Jazz classes . . .

I stand for the democratic process;

I stand for people working together to achieve what they want;

I stand for "Anyone but BUSH 2004," one of my favorite bumper stickers.

I am from the Presidential debates that seem to be the only important thing.

I stand for believing in John Kerry's and John Edwards' beliefs; I also stand for respecting the beliefs of George Bush and Dick Cheney as much as I may believe they are wrong.

I stand for uniting our country rather than separating it with political tools like religion and sexual orientation and political stances . . .

I stand for this country.

I do not stand for a country divided.

I am an American, not a Democrat nor a Republican

I am not independent.

I am an American.

I also stand for the world, the economy, the United Nations. I stand for peace treaties and global trade.

I stand for the affairs of the whole world as well as my country.

I stand for the Islamists, Hindus, Christians, Catholics, Buddhists, Pagans, Muslims, Unitarians, and all the religions of the world. I believe in a nondiscriminatory world, one without sexism, racism, or the struggle for oil underneath the soil of other countries.

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I stand for a world not terrified by the chances of global destruction from nuclear warfare, or even interplanetary warfare.
I stand for the farmer who can barely afford to feed his cows and harvest his crops.
I stand for the scuba diver, the coal miner, the vegan, and even the millionaire.
In order to be a world free of terrorists and dictators, we must be a united world, one without conflicts and warring countries.

I not only stand for nations and the world, I stand for myself and my immediate community.
I stand for my school, my family, myself.
I stand for nurturing myself and others.
I stand for the power of the individual, for the people who can stand alone for what they believe in.

People who have the power to stand alone will gain followers; people respect people who have the courage to stand up and say, "This is what I stand for," people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony and even the people who didn't make a national or global difference, the people who changed one village, one city, one state. These are the individuals that I believe in.

I also stand for youth. I stand for the children and teens of this country that will rise in the next generation to lead the world. If the world is to change into a better place, we need to nurture and develop our youth. The people who understand this best are teachers. They understand that by teaching they are building the power of the youth. A world of uneducated leaders in the next generation cannot possibly fare well. So I stand for the youth of this world and of my country. Though we may seem disrespectful and noisy, even ignorant, we usually catch the important things, and we almost always internalize these things to use later in our lives . . .

I am me. I am me. I am me . . .
I stand.
I stand for me.
I stand for my community.
I stand for my country.
I stand for my world . . .
. . . I don't plan to leave this world without making a mark . . .
I do stand.

*Guy Mannick, 8th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico*

The following double entry journals were written after close readings of several texts.

Double Entry Journal, 11-8-2004

“What are your blooms, your thorns, your roots?”

Pat Mora
“Dear Fellow Writer”
My Own True Name
p. 1–3

I really, really liked this quote because Pat Mora brings us into the book. She’s like inviting us into the book so that we can tell her what we think or what’s the answer to her question. She is asking the readers what were their good times, their bad times, and also when they learned a lesson. In my opinion, I’m going to enjoy this book.

Double Entry Journal, 11-7-04

“My pen is like music.”

Pat Mora
“A Letter to Gabriela, a Young Writer”
English Journal, September, 1990
pp. 40–42

In my opinion this was the best sentence. I really liked this sentence because when she said that her pen is like music. It, well, told me that the pen or pencil that we are writing with just says on the paper what we think. Because sometimes when I’m thinking . . . I just write it on paper, and I feel more relaxed because . . . I shared my thoughts with someone . . .

Bianca Madrid, 7th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Double Entry Journal, 11-7-04

“Listen to the wrinkles on your *tia*’s face.”

Pat Mora
“A Letter to Gabriela, a Young Writer”

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English Journal, September, 1990
p. 41

I liked the phrase because if you imagine it, it's funny . . . if she's talking to you, and you're looking at her wrinkles, you're not even paying attention to her.

Vanessa Quintana, 7th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Double Entry Journal, March 7, 05

“The Kiowa came one by one into the world through a hollow log.”

N. Scott Momaday
“I”
The Way to Rainy Mountain
p. 16

They say a woman “swollen with her baby” got stuck in the log and no one else could get through, and that is why the Kiowa is such a small tribe. This story of creation interests me. I have never heard anything like it. I really like it because I can imagine it in my mind, and it really gives a good explanation instead of just saying people appeared one day. A lot of religions have a story like this—that pueblo people came from a hole in a kiva or that God made Adam from sand. They all have an explanation, but this one I really like. It makes me wonder what's on the other side of this log.

Gabby Seredowych, 7th grade
Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Double Entry Journal, March 11, 2005

“They formed a great circle, enclosing a large area of the plain, and began to converge upon the center.”

N. Scott Momaday
“II”
The Way to Rainy Mountain
pp. 18–19

I think that this is interesting because the circle is very important to the Kiowa. It represents equality and unison, and in this text it tells how they came together in a circle to hunt. This is important to me because the meat from the hunt will help everybody, and doing this will make up for the greediness of the ancient chief.

Double Entry Journal, March 11, 2005

“At first there is no discrimination in the eye, nothing but the land itself, whole and impenetrable. But then the smallest things began to stand out of the depths.”

N. Scott Momaday

“I”

The Way to Rainy Mountain

pp. 18–19

I think that this is very important in life because when you first look at things you just see a whole of something. If looked at closer, you can see everything big is made up of something smaller.

Tova Lecuyer, 7th grade

Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

The following poem was written by Alicia when she was a seventh grader. She wrote it after a prompt that asked students to observe their families doing something specific to their cultures.

Chile

Four people are seated in front of a wooden square table,
my mom, my aunt, me, and my grandma,
In front of us are two big plastic bags of mild green *chile*,
3 tin platters, 2 yellow bowls, and that week’s newspapers.

The only sound is the steady whirring of the ceiling fan.
My eyes are burning, and my face is itching.
I glance out of the corner of my eye, and I see my grandma.
She can’t see what she is doing, but she has peeled *chile* so many
times, she can do it by memory.

Her wrinkled hands are not very agile anymore, so she goes slowly.
“What are you doing?” I ask.

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“Estoy pelando chile. Qué quieres?”

I get up to wash my hands to leave, but I see my grandma still peeling,
so I sit back down. After-all, I need her help.
My grandma, she can't see.

Alicia Armijo, 7th grade

Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

[The following poem was written by Daisy after an “I am” prompt when she was in the seventh grade. She made it clear that she is *not* the Little Girl in the poem. “Little Girls” are seventh graders struggling with their middle school identities.]

Little Girls

The little girl can't breathe.
Tight clothes squeeze the air from her
Every time she bends.
Her boyfriend sucks it,
Straight from her lungs,
Each time their lips meet.
She used to breathe in wild flowers
In airy sun dresses.
But now it's stretch hip-huggers.
Tight T-shirts.
And she's suffocating alone,
At a dinner table full of parents, brothers, sisters.
Suffocating alone in a room
Full of people.
Suffocating alone at a desk in a classroom.
A classroom full of little girls.
12, 13, 14.
Little girls suffocating,
Suffocating, too.

Daisy Bond, 7th grade

Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, New Mexico

So what is good college-level writing today? I'd say a *good choice of words* at any level. Good writing is a student thinking on paper, using words unique to her or him—voice, a rhetorical stamp, citing the text, attributing quotes, answering the question

thoughtfully, creating intelligent prose, poetry, or poetic prose. And when there is doubt about the assignment, I would say that college writing is being able to “manipulate the task,” as one of my teachers, Nancy Martin, used to say (and by this, she meant “Be resourceful and make the assignment your own!”).

When does good college writing begin? Yesterday. Students in elementary, middle, and high school have to write and write often in multigenres: stories, personal essays, critical essays, parodies, poems, freewrites, letters to teachers, journals, jingles, reader responses, lists—and teachers have to read most of it (some writing should be for just the fun of it—not for assessment). One genuine little check mark and a comment like “Yeah!” or “Great!” or a suggestion like “good, now flesh the details out,” on a passage ringing true with a student’s authentic voice, may be the moment at which the writer recognizes that he or she has something valuable to say, and when it complies with the “conventions of correctness,” it is college-level writing.

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