

WRITING PLAY: VALUING PROCESS TO THRIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABDAAL (2023)

What would _____ look like *if it were fun?*

- Teaching
- Learning

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HOW I APPROACH PLAY/PLAYFULNESS IN MY WORK

Play as an **attitude** (or stance, or disposition); a “**how**”

- A tool for being (Sicart, 2014)
- Prioritizes imaginative, divergent learning; unscripted moments (Medina & Wohlwend, 2014)

Play as a form of **critique to norms**

- Refusal of inhumane realities (Bey, 2019; Odell, 2019)
- Resistance for teachers and students in a dehumanizing education system (Ferguson, 2018)

Social contexts shape what’s possible for entering literacy play

- “...**play is political**, and approaches to this topic further the dynamics of White supremacy when they are naive to the implications that play is a form of power” (Trammell, 2023, p. 28)

OUR CLASSROOMS

Today's college students increasingly **value an emphasis on learning processes and experiences** (Camfield & Bayers, 2023).

Yet, learning in higher education is often valued via assessments of final products (i.e., “the what” of a course) rather than “**the how**” or “**the why**” of learning.

TRANSPARENT TEACHING (WINKELMES, 2019)

Research by Winkelmes et. al. (2016) suggests that courses built on transparent teaching strategies **increase students' sense of belonging**, among other positive outcomes such as:

- Academic confidence
- Metacognition
- Greater learning gains for marginalized students

TRANSPARENT TEACHING (WINKELMES, 2019)

In Fall 2023, my writing teaching methods courses drew on **play** and **transparent teaching** to shape purpose, task, and criteria

- **Purpose** (e.g., “real world” experiences, like writing curriculum design scenarios)
- **Task** (e.g., possible mistakes, anticipated struggles, like writing assignments completed as writers and teachers of writing)
- **Criteria** (e.g., self-evaluation, co-constructed rubrics as writers and teachers of writing)

PLAY AS AN
ATTITUDE; A
“HOW”

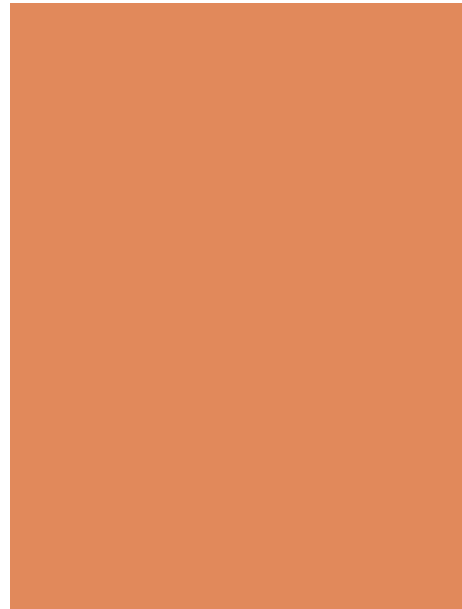
A tool for *being* (Sicart, 2014)

Prioritizes imaginative, **divergent learning** and
unscripted moments (Medina & Wohlwend, 2014)

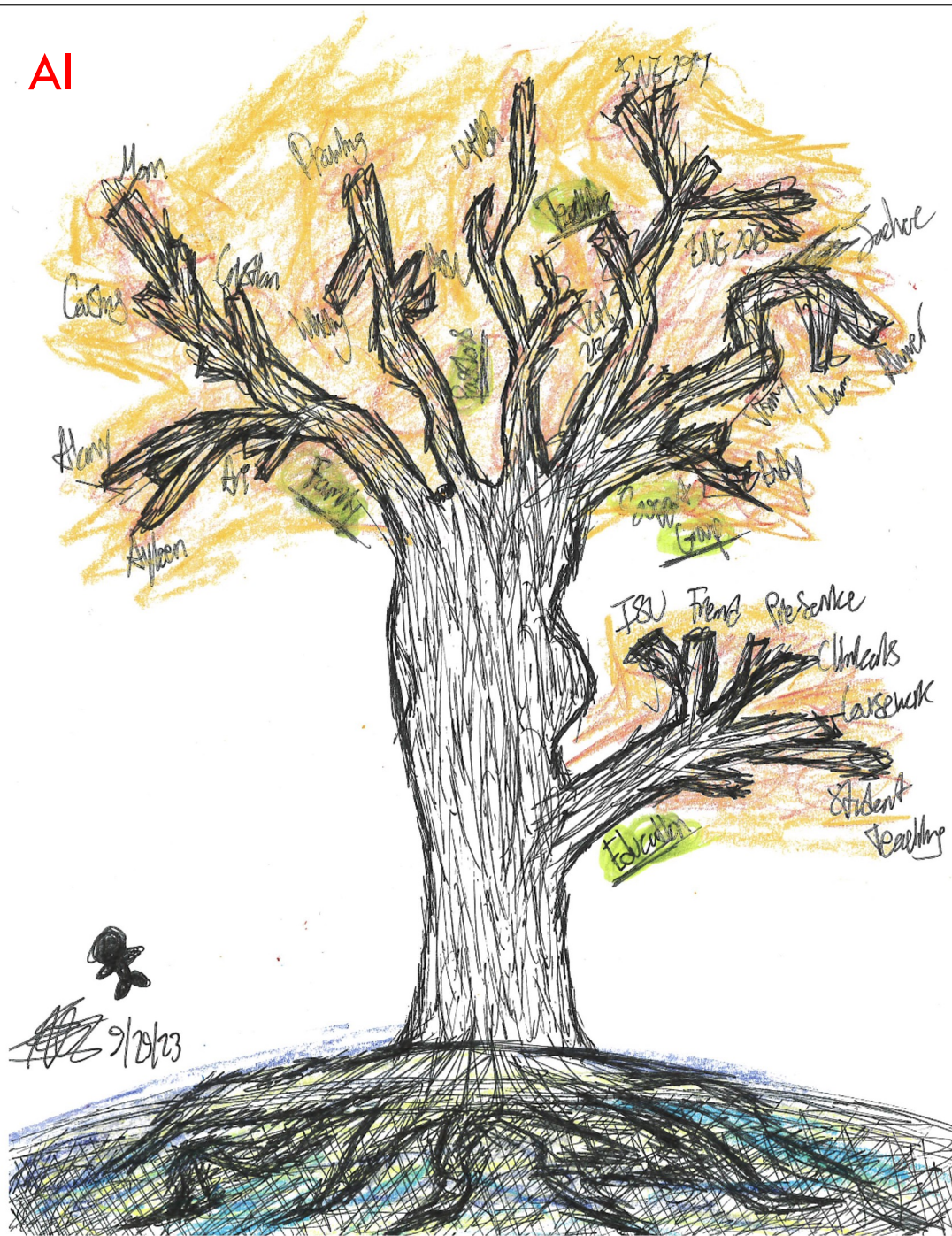
WRITING PLAY: OUTSIDE

Invitations to:

- Be **curious** about our surroundings
- Be **creative** in how we approach writing skills
- Be **imaginative** in building other possibilities based on our observations of/engagement in place

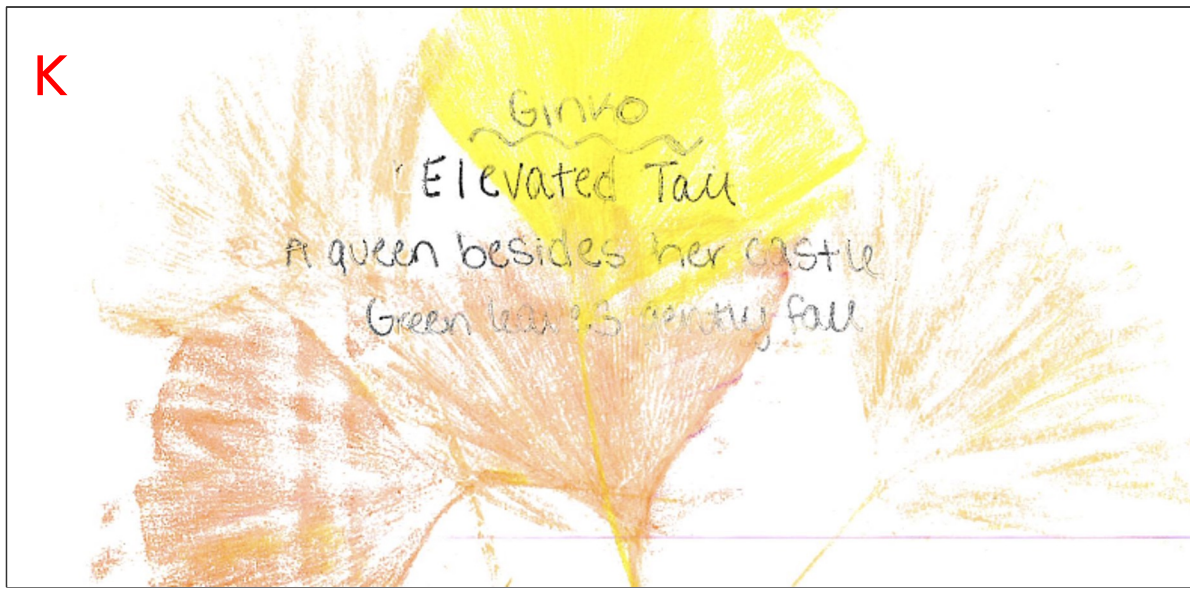


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- Trees as models of life, growth
- Writing around meaningful “branches” of places, experiences, identities, etc.
 - Personal essay
 - Personal statement
 - Other forms of narrative writing

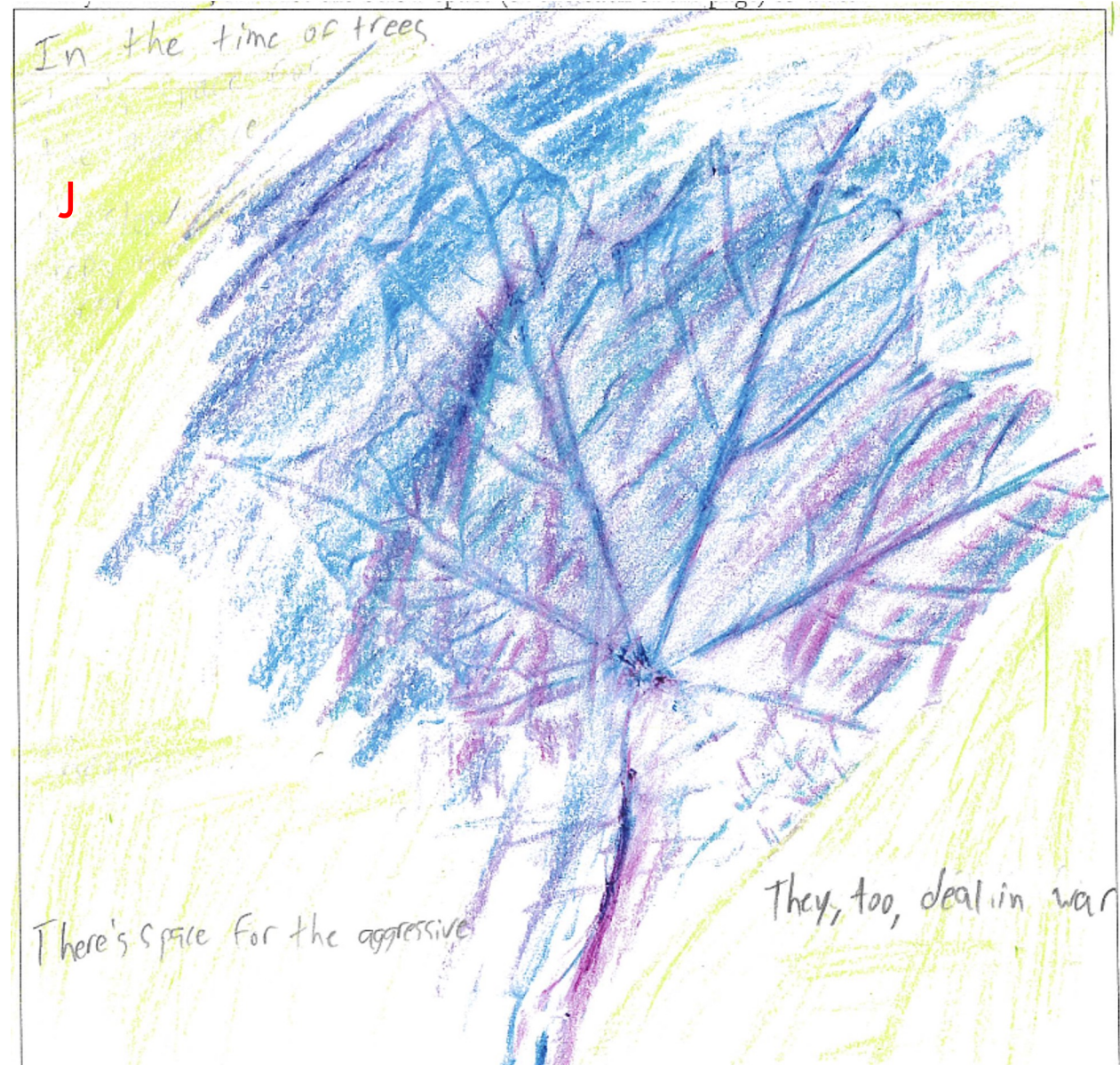
K



- Trees as models of writing detail that give insight into larger contextual features/dilemmas (micro/macro)
- Writing on nature-inspired concepts that support writing informational text
 - Gender stereotypes
 - Climate justice

In the time of trees

J



There's space for the aggressive

They, too, deal in war

WRITING PLAY: VISUAL THINKING

Invitations to:

Be **curious** about images

Be **creative** in how we approach writing skills

Be **imaginative** in building worlds based on our observations of art



N

Story 1

guided by the stream,
flowers grow.

Story 2

blue, pink, yellow an
awaited meeting.

Story 3

in the grassy park,
princesses meet.

Reflect here!

For this assignment, I focused on the prompt "what visual elements do I notice?"
I chose my image because I thought the stream under the bridge was beautiful
and reminded me of back when I visited the Chicago Botanic Garden. When I sat down
and looked at it more, I saw that there were princesses in the distance, which is how
I came up with 2 of my stories. The second story I come up with is the one I like
the most. For this story, I took the colors of the princesses dresses to represent the
princesses themselves, & because they looked to be moving toward each other, I inferred
they were planning to meet up.

<p>Story 1</p> <p>I can't leave. Not like them.</p>	<p>Story 2</p> <p>she's married. she won't fly again.</p>	<p>Story 3</p> <p>Let the leaves devour my body.</p>
<p>There is no leaving this place.</p>	<p>I'm not free like the birds.</p>	

Reflect here!

Honestly, this was hard for me because there is so much I want to say about this image. Narrowing it down was hard but it also made me consider what is most important to share about the photo.

WRITING PLAY: VISUAL THINKING

Invitations to...

- Practice visual analysis
 - **Literary analysis**; color imagery
- Imagine and create possibilities for artwork/postcards
 - Descriptive language and **word choice**
 - **Narrative structure**



Informative/Expository Curriculum Scenario

You are high school English teachers working at the same school in a familiar to you school district. You were planning to have time to give feedback on all these narrative essays during your shared planning periods today, but, surprise!! Your department chair sent an email at 7:03 AM this morning volunteering you all to make some shared curriculum for the 10th grade ELA team. Cool cool. So, you've been tasked with coming up with a tiny writing unit (O'Dell, 2016) around informative/expository writing for your 10th grade students. As a reminder, your state's writing standards require the following for informative/explanatory text types in 9/10th grade ELA...

**Collaborative
curriculum
design**

**State learning
standards**

Because you care about engagement and approaching writing instruction in culturally relevant ways, you've decided to use a topic your students are really interested in, _____, within this tiny writing unit. As a teacher team, you now need to finish building the tiny writing unit on gathering information on the above topic using one-pagers. Oh, and the department chair like really needs this unit by the end of the day today!! Thanks!!!!

**Real 10th grade
students'
research topics**

*Rubric from the PSA/Zine.

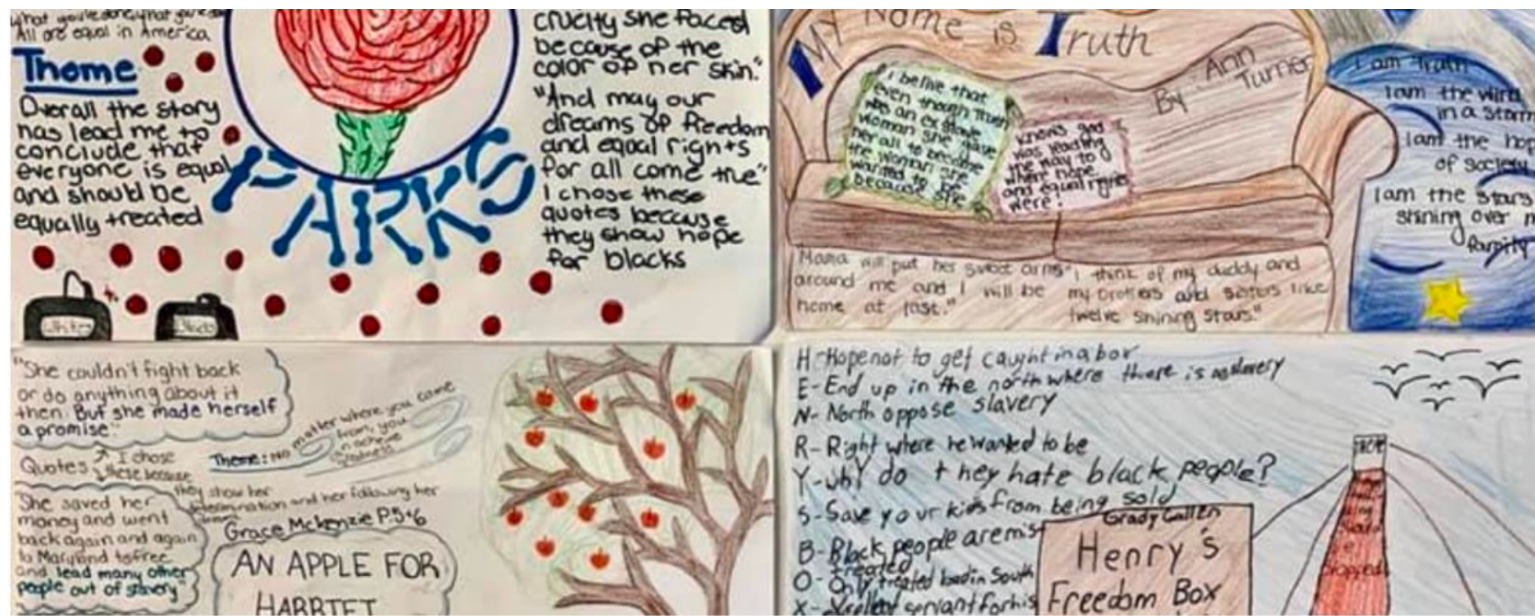
Outstanding (20/20)	Good (17-19/20)	Lacking (16-below/20)
Topic and call to action is clear and compelling; uses different modes to convey information in purposeful ways; demonstrates creativity in both thinking and layout to communicate ideas.	Content offers some ideas, but a takeaway is either meek or covert; modes communicate a message; organizes and structures thinking in a clear, logical layout.	Central topic is available, but feels more informative than persuasive; modes are not fully realized to communicate meaning in strategic ways; lacks structure and organization, making it difficult to takeaway meaning.

Sample rubric from writing assignment

Yours should include focuses appropriate to one-pagers. Here's a template to make clear what you get to play with in your assessment tool:

[Your ideas here] (X/20)	[Your ideas here] (X/20)	[Your ideas here] (X/20)
[Your ideas here]	[Your ideas here]	[Your ideas here]

Co-constructed rubric using template; inviting “play in the margins”



from Potash (2019)

For this assignment, you'll create a one-pager on your assigned topic from the above week nine curriculum scenario (or a topic of your choice). You'll turn in the following components by **November 3** via the assignment "Week 9 Informative/Expository Curriculum Scenario" on Google Classroom:

1. **One-pager mentor text** (i.e., an example of a one-pager for the informational text(s) you found on your assigned topic)
2. **One-pager teaching mentor text** (i.e., the above one-pager annotated with the writing moves/skills you made during writing. This will be a tool for you to think about the writing moves/strategies/skills you would teach as mini-lessons in the creation of one-pagers)
3. The **one-pager rubric** you created within your tiny writing unit
4. [optional. If submitted, will receive written feedback, not a formal grade] The full tiny writing unit curriculum you developed during the week nine curriculum scenario; if choosing this option, remember to distinguish individual work or co-collaborators for feedback purposes

Students practice creating one-pager assignment themselves as writers

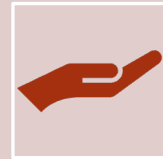
As teachers of writing

With criteria

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS



Invites building **community and sense of belonging** into coursework



Supports focus on the **“how” of learning** (i.e., the dispositions, or stances, key to the work) through attention to process over product



Playing in the margins as **low risk opportunities** for trying things out



Disrupts normative views of **professionalism and the discipline**

“Schools are just so serious, and as people, we are playful, maybe that's just me, but **people like to have fun and be silly, and I don't get why school can't be a place for that**, or why that has to only be, like, in the hallways or in the couple of minutes before class. Why can't we have that fun coexist with learning also? Because learning not at school is fun. Like, you watch a documentary because it is fun. You pick up a book at the library because that's fun to you. **That's how we learn outside of school. So why not learn like that in school?**”

–ISU student, Class of 2024

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What would learning in my class look like if it were fun? (Abdaal, 2023)

How can I encourage curiosity in my context?

How can I mitigate risk through play in the margins in my courses?



An emphasis on “**the relational and humanistic** aspects of teaching” (Philip, 2019, p. 3)



“A critical stance toward educators’ play can – and should – elicit concern for how social activity, like teaching and learning, **can be perceived as transgressive or, adjacently, as innovative**” (McBride et al., 2023)

PLAYFULNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

THANK YOU!

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