

Writing to Learn Project Summary
Kimberly K. Williams
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My specific project was to use low stakes writing prompts to lead to “higher stakes” prompts during the mythology unit in my English 111, Freshman Composition class. This ENGL 111 course was linked to an Introduction to Psychology course through a learning community. I wanted to use the low stakes writing to have students solidifying ideas and making connections between certain key concepts—such as Jung’s idea of the Collective Unconscious, and the stories that are told in certain cultures. Then, I was hoping that the lower stakes writing would lead to quality unit papers.

Here were the questions that comprised some of the low stakes writing prompts:

- What do myths, fairytales, and stories mean to you/your family/your culture?
- Which creation story (from a reading assignment of six) do you relate to the best, and why?
- How do the stories that you read for today relate to the [Joseph Campbell] video [called *The First Storytellers*]?
- How do you see each of the myths that we’ve read or heard about relating to each other?
- What do you (specifically) and human beings (in general) learn from myths?

Each of these low-stakes questions were answered in writing during class. Some of the answers were shared aloud, some not. The readings and writing prompts then led to a viewing of the original *Star Wars* movie. The students then had an in-class essay which they were to write for a grade. The topic was to write about how *Star Wars* represented a hero’s journey. Also, they had an out-of-class unit assignment where they had to either record a tale (from their own culture or childhood growing up) or create a tale.

What disappointed me most was that the low-stakes writing (which I ended up collecting but not grading) revealed that the students were making connections and thinking deeply about the subjects at hand. What didn’t happen, however, is that many of the students failed to make those same connections when the stakes were higher and the papers were graded.

Brian Parry observed the classes where the students did the low stakes writing and his feedback indicated that he observed the students going in depth making connections between the readings, the video, and the topic at hand. Therefore, some how, the disconnection occurred between the low-stakes writing and the higher stakes writing, which might underscore the value of low-stakes writing.

I did find the entire Writing to Learn project to be invaluable. My only regret is that it occurred in an unusually busy semester for me. However, in a semester which included a lot of taskforce work, the WTL meetings kept me focused on what truly matters to my heart. I am looking forward to continuing the WTL journey next semester.