

Every morning, no matter how late father had been up, Anne's father rose at 5:30, went to father's study, wrote for a couple of hours, made Anne and the family breakfast, read the paper with Anne's mother, and then went back to work for the rest of the morning. Many years passed before Anne realized that father did this by choice, for a living, and that father was not unemployed or mentally ill. Anne wanted father to have a regular job where father put on a necktie and went off somewhere with the other fathers and sat in a little office. But the idea of spending entire days in someone else's office doing someone else's work did not suit Anne's father's soul. Anne thinks doing someone else's work would have killed father. Father did end up dying rather early, in father's mid-fifties, but at least father had lived on father's own terms.

So Anne grew up around father who sat at father's desk in the study all day and wrote books and articles about the places and people father had seen and known. Father read a lot of poetry. Sometimes father traveled. Father could go anywhere Father wanted with a sense of purpose. One of the gifts of being a writer is that being a writer gives writers an excuse to do things, to go places and explore. Another benefit of being a writer is that writing motivates writers to look closely at life, at life as life lurches by and tramps around.

Writing taught Anne's father to pay attention; Anne's father in turn taught other people to pay attention and then to write down other people's thoughts and observations. Father's students were the prisoners at San Quentin who took part in the creative-writing program. But father taught Anne, too, mostly by example. Father taught the prisoners and Anne to put a little bit down on paper every day, and to read all the great books the prisoners and Anne could get the prisoners' and Anne's hands on. Father taught the prisoners and Anne to read poetry. Father taught the prisoners and Anne to be bold and original and to let the prisoners and Anne make mistakes. But while father helped the prisoners and Anne to discover that the prisoners and Anne had a lot of feelings and observations and memories and dreams and opinions the prisoners and Anne wanted to share, the prisoners and Anne all ended up just the tiniest bit resentful when the prisoners and Anne found the one fly in the ointment: that at some point the prisoners and Anne had to actually sit down and write.

The Writer: Anne

Every morning, no matter how late he had been up, my father rose at 5:30, went to his study, wrote for a couple of hours, made us all breakfast, read the paper with my mother, and then went back to work for the rest of the morning. Many years passed before I realized that he did this by choice, for a living, and that he was not unemployed or mentally ill. I wanted him to have a regular job where he put on a necktie and went off somewhere with the other fathers and sat in a little office. But the idea of spending entire days in someone else's office doing someone else's work did not suit my father's soul. I think it would have killed him. He did end up dying rather early, in his mid-fifties, but at least he had lived on his own terms.

So I grew up around this man who sat at his desk in the study all day and wrote books and articles about the places and people he had seen and known. He read a lot of poetry. Sometimes he traveled. He could go anyplace he wanted with a sense of purpose. One of the gifts of being a writer is that it gives you an excuse to do things, to go places and explore. Another is that writing motivates you to look closely at life, at life as it lurches by and tramps around.

Writing taught my father to pay attention; my father in turn taught other people to pay attention and then to write down their thoughts and observations. His students were the prisoners at San Quentin who took part in the creative-writing program. But he taught me, too, mostly by example. He taught the prisoners and me to put a little bit down on paper every day, and to read all the great books we could get our hands on. He taught us to read poetry. He taught us to be bold and original and to let ourselves make mistakes. But while he helped the prisoners and me to discover that we had a lot of feelings and observations and memories and dreams and opinions we wanted to share, we all ended up just the tiniest bit resentful when we found the one fly in the ointment: that at some point we had to actually sit down and write.

Student editors

Outline: Learners work to edit a text by making use of reference words

Time: 20 minutes

Focus: Identifying text fluency and the purpose of reference words

Preparation

Choose a short text that can be copied into a word document for editing. It should have a good number of reference words. Before the activity, edit the document by changing the reference words into their referents. Share the text with learners and ask them to read. They should notice that without the reference words, the text is repetitive and lacks fluency. Ask learners to improve the text by changing repetitive parts of the text with appropriate reference words. When done, show the learners the original text and compare them.