LAYING OUR BURDEN DOWN: SAYING FINAL GOODBYES TO THEME WRITING

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In 2009 I began a study of articles and books on composition instruction dating back to 1897, to try to understand both the persistence of theme writing over the last century and the emergence of the five-paragraph theme about fifty-six years ago. Significant in this exploration have been the hundreds of voices who have spoken before now about current-traditional theme-writing practices. Thus, anyone who writes today about theme writing is "not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" on this issue (Bahktin 69), which suggests that it is important for writing teachers to listen to our colleagues of the past.

From the study, a dominant impression emerges: theme-writing pedagogies and the five-paragraph theme have persisted, despite the many negative descriptions of and opinions about them (eerily similar across the expanse of time since the turn of the twentieth century), and consistent objections have done little to unseat theme-writing instruction. However, while it is true that writing teachers in the twenty-first century are still enamored of the formula (cf. Boldt; Jenkins; Kunkler-Laake), I do not see the history of theme writing as a history of futility (even though coming upon the five-paragraph theme in a writing classroom today can feel like coming upon a dunce-cap-wearing student sitting in a corner with a slide rule).

Instead, I see an opportunity 1) to argue that now is the time for all writing teachers to end the practices of theme-writing and the five-paragraph theme that have shaped so much writing instruction for over a hundred years and 2) to offer a bibliography

of sources to broaden the knowledge of those who want to say goodbye to the outdated relic of the school theme, who want to, finally, lay this pedagogical burden down by the riverside—or wherever mathematics teachers have discarded those slide rules. Embedded in the argument are short, virtual conversations on theme writing that function as supportive intermezzos and provide a snapshot of a theme-writing discussion across a century. Taken together, the argument, the intermezzos, and the bibliography intend to help those who want to construct a case for abandoning formulaic approaches to teaching writing argue that case before resistant others (e.g., colleagues, program directors, students, administrators, business, government, parents, or the wider public).

Enough is enough. In 2015 the five-paragraph theme or practices that contain the residues of theme writing have no place in the writing curriculum if our country is truly serious about twenty-first century literacies and communication skills, as I hope it is. The question is how to dislodge the practice. One way, I think, is to create broader awareness of the century-long, recycling conversation on theme writing—escaping George Santayana's indictment that people who don't know history are condemned to repeat it—and to foster more pedagogically and rhetorically defensible approaches to teaching writing than current-traditionalism.

Despite the writing rut in which our educational systems are stuck (Applebee and Langer 27), we can, with many intelligent, creative, dedicated, and tenacious writing teachers armed with knowledge, take on the project of breaking the stranglehold that formula has had on writing instruction and not waste the next hundred years playing at writing via fake discourses like the five-paragraph theme. To do this, we need transformative change that rejects the wrong-headed, "culturally narcissistic" reform that expects children to be perfect (especially intellectually) and that gives adults "a grandiose sense of superiority and entitlement [that results in their] relentless fault-finding [,] preoccupation with control [, offering of] conditional approval [, viewing] their own

self-centered motives and insensitive actions as being beneficial for children" (Pajak 2018). Such reform hurts teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn because it privileges

> scientific research and quantitative data[,] and obscures the importance of empathy and consideration of the emotional foundation of teacher and student interaction. Such arguments reflect an intellectual failure to distinguish between *teaching*, which contributes to the growth of students as whole human beings, and *instruction*, which involves nothing more than conveying information from one person to another. (2031, emphasis added)

The five-paragraph theme and other template approaches to writing participate in "instruction" and have little to do anymore (if they ever did) with "teaching" or learning to write. For these reasons, educational institutions would do well to abandon them.

Rejecting theme writing and the five-paragraph-theme formula does not mean that we reject form in writing. It does mean, however, that we work harder to engage student writers in the act of writing, something with which we've long struggled. In this, I hope the virtual conversations and arguments here, along with the accompanying bibliography, may serve as a springboard for substantive conversations with all educational stakeholders that lead us to rich, fully authentic writing tasks and sophisticated assessment tools, in order not only to challenge our students to achieve tough standards as writers but, more importantly, to envision themselves as life-long writers who, when they leave school and college, will want to engage in the practice of writing in individually meaningful ways productive to society.

The time is *more* than ripe to say goodbye to teaching the five-paragraph theme as though it were the essay; to stop pretending that school themes have anything at all to do with authentic essay-writing (besides the fact that each has a beginning, middle, and end—a basic structural concept teachable in much richer ways than the five-paragraph theme); to acknowledge that we are

wasting precious time; and to move on to a wealth of writing practices that get students excited about writing. If we can lay this burden down, we can entice students to communicate their ideas to audiences that matter to them as the context for mastering the skills and mechanics of writing needed to meet twenty-first-century-literacy demands. Armed with the arguments in this article and historical source material, I hope others are willing to take up the cause.

Persistence of Theme Writing

For this effort, we have precedents for a dramatic rethinking of writing pedagogy in such movements in the United States as "expressivism" and the process approach of the late 1960s and socio-cultural approaches in the 1980s, as well as others elsewhere, like the "New Basics" movement in New Zealand (Queensland). We can draw on such movements to escape the stranglehold of theme writing and other current-traditional approaches. In fact, some might believe we *have* moved beyond these already and think it strange even to be talking about theme writing in 2015; however, as George Hillocks' research has shown, the five-paragraph theme is alive and well (69), as a result, primarily, of "poorly considered choices for assessment at every turn" (65).

Despite speculation as long ago as, at least, 1976 about "whether, ten years from now, the form [would] retain the importance . . . attached to it [or] go the way of the Model T Ford" (Nystrand 76), the five-paragraph theme has not faded away because of those reductionist writing assessments and inappropriate, large-scale standardized testing practices (Hillocks 69-70). In addition, the seduction of the five-paragraph theme's seeming simplicity and neatness have been irresistible to many already overburdened teachers because of other perpetuating forces outside their classrooms like budget and personnel cuts that raise class size and course loads.

A less well known, but important, reason is that since the beginning (as early as the 1910s), school reform efforts, including

those related to writing instruction, have operated under "the assumption that the primary purpose of schooling is maintaining a more or less 'good' status quo," which suggests that reform strives to make a long-standing, accepted practice, like theme writing, "'better' rather than different—that is to make it more like it already is rather than change it in any fundamental way" (Yagelski 48). This means that the "fundamental components of [a Cartesian] view of writing [from which theme writing originates] remain intact in mainstream writing pedagogies, in conventional schooling, and in the culture more generally" (45).

Although we know so much more in 2014 about the reciprocal nature of thought and language, the non-duality of mind and body, and the social nature of thinking; the intricacies of writing processes; and the developmental nature of a mastery of writing conventions than Descartes knew in the seventeenth century, this status-quo tendency of educational reform means that the Cartesian view of writing (essentially that what constitutes writing is the dictation of already conceived thoughts onto a blank page, much like Athena springing fully formed from the head of Zeus) persists. Cartesian components like "an understanding of language as a relatively unproblematic conduit for thought; an essentially positivist conception of knowledge as separate from knowing; and a sense of self as an autonomous, thinking being" (Yagelski 45), consequently, contribute to an inability to shake the appeal of theme writing, in general, and the five-paragraph theme, in particular.

From a practitioner's perspective, then, one important reason for persistence of formula in writing is that individual writing teachers and departments have not yet come to terms with this Cartesian influence in the history of the school theme, in the profession, and in their own writing histories. Because they have yet to "fully answer that all-important research question [:] What happens to a writer when s/he writes?" (Nystrand 76), theme writing continues to resonate with them—and probably will until large numbers of teachers carefully consider it in the context of their own views and experiences of what it means to write and to

teach writing, and of themselves as writers. With more knowledge about the history of theme-writing and the five-paragraph theme, though, writing teachers can ask themselves important questions such as "What does a writing practice mean to me? What do my writing practices look and sound like? How does my relationship to writing translate into my teaching?" in order to look harder at how a formulaic approach to writing instruction hampers efforts to involve twenty-first-century students in their own writing development.

Will this kind of soul searching happen in great enough numbers to end current-traditional practices like the five-paragraph theme? As an optimist, I think we *can* transform ourselves in order to transform writing pedagogy in ways that we have not yet. However, in order for that to happen, I agree with what historian Donald Stewart observed thirty years ago: "a writing teacher's development can be measured by the degree to which that person has become liberated from current-traditional rhetoric. And the progress of that liberation . . . is closely linked to that person's accumulating knowledge of the history of composition as a discipline" (134).

As Stewart says, some "current-traditional composition teachers who have progressed well beyond [a] single-minded preoccupation with copy-reading skills to matters of form" are incomplete in their development because "their knowledge of the history of this discipline is very sketchy" and they are "wedded intellectually to the five-paragraph essay" (136). This intellectual—and I would argue emotional—"wedding" is something to resolve, in order to ignite fervor among writing teachers to rebel against the powers at work to keep current-traditional practices in place. Until that happens, theme writing will not die, despite its fundamental flaws of a-rhetoricality and artificiality, something with which our colleagues from the past have wrestled since the inception of theme writing and which we would do well to consider.

Conversation 1[1]

Walter Eaton (1907): "When I was an undergraduate at Harvard our instructors in English composition endeavored to cultivate in us something they termed 'The daily theme eye….By training the daily theme eye, we watched for and found in the surroundings of our life, as it passed, a heightened picturesqueness, a constant wonder, an added significance" (83, 85).

Edna Williams (1912): That might have worked for you, Walter, but "I think that theme work in connection with literature teaching results in traveling in a circle; ultimately the teacher retires from the profession a nervous wreck, and the pupil has a horror of literature and shuns the very thought of books, then and ever after" (154).

William Hawley Davis (1917): I agree. As one of my students characterized it, "'[t]he theme is a form of thought-expression invented by the devil.' . . .'The most pernicious form of theme,' [he] says further, 'is the daily theme.' There is not a high-school assembly nor a college rally in the country, I suppose, which would not enjoy and applaud this expression" (286).

H.W. Davis (1922): So true. Although it might be "unwise . . . to allow one's self to condemn any form of English utterly, [still] if there be a form that deserves complete condemnation it is the high-school theme and college composition. Why we have put so much faith in a form that has no existence outside of schools and colleges no one has ever successfully explained. . . . The student . . . is careful merely to conform to the wishes of his [sic] teacher [, and i]t is in this typical theme or composition that many a student has all of his best and most natural tendencies as a writer beaten out of him. . . . [T]he composition or theme has . . . given [the teacher] a beautiful opportunity to apply measures, rules, regulation, and standards. Having no other means of measuring its worth, he has measured it by standards and rules provided in textbooks. The college composition has been an interesting

plaything for college teachers, but it has the same relation to learning to write that a cataract over the eye has to learning to see" (328-29).

Over the more than seventy years since this early resistance to the school theme, it has become more entrenched and rigidified in the genre's most common container form: the five-paragraph theme.

Rationale for Theme Writing

To be clear, not every writer who has written on the issue of theme writing and the five-paragraph theme agrees that the practice is destructive to writing development. From at least the 1920s on, many writing teachers have praised theme writing: for example, James Fulwider's 1922 list of seven theme elements (101-01); Victor Pudlowski's early articulation of the five-paragraph theme in 1959 as a "composition outline" (535); Clarence Hach's 1960 compositional sequence (541-45); Dorothy Brown's 1977 "five-paragraph-theme stepstool" (58); Diane Lockward's 1985 "scared cow" (34); Thomas Nunnally's 1991 "FPT" (70); the Jane Schaffer model, popular since the late 1990s (Plante 12-13); or Rob Jenkins' 2010 five-paragraph "accordion."

Consistently across these decades, writers on the topic of school themes have offered different reasons to explain their continued use and/or usefulness, perceived or actual. If we understand more about this line of thinking, which proponents still use today, we can show that while it might be well meaning, it is ultimately misguided in perpetuating an approach to writing that is irrelevant to twenty-first century communication.

Conversation 2

Duane Nichols (1966): The five-paragraph "system does contain within it the essence of generally acceptable essays" (908).

Martin Nystrand (1976): And "[t]he current market [also] demands some work on the five-paragraph theme…as an apparently useful strategy for teaching students 'to organize their thoughts,' at least

in forms of organization which teachers and departments of English currently value" (75-76).

Rosalyn Knutson (1980): Yes, I believe that "[t]he essays produced by this method are not necessarily brilliant, but they have virtues that profit the student-never-to-be-professional-writer" (53).

Anne Wescott Dodd (1997): From my perspective of 20+ years in the field, the five-paragraph theme "can be taught as a useful strategy for dealing with some 'real' writing tasks students encounter, such as responding to essay questions on history or biology tests" (14).

Tara Star Johnson et al. (2003): To extrapolate from a case study we conducted in an era of large-scale testing, we might say that new teachers, especially, have relied on the five-paragraph theme when their "deeper belief system included faith in the five-paragraph theme's utility; it was a form that had helped [them] to stay organized as a secondary student, so [they see] value in employing this tool with [their] students. [Their] own positive experiences with writing five-paragraph themes as a student, predispose[e] them] to accepting [state testing] mandate[s] as reasonable and fitting" (167).

Jeanetta Miller (2010): Also, "[t]o an overloaded and anxious student who is focused on surviving high school, the five-paragraph essay must seem predictable and safe. Students may not be joyful or even engaged in writing the five-paragraph essay, but they can feel the all too adult satisfaction of checking an item off that long To Do list. The five-paragraph essay relieves students of responsibility to make decisions about form and organization, relief that may be shared by equally overloaded and anxious teachers" (99).

Indeed, given the material conditions of schooling that continue to overburden teachers and create performance worries in both students and teachers, templates, which at best produce

minimally competent writing, provide some level of comfort and predictability. In this educational climate, sometimes faith in formulas as appropriate training wheels for beginning writers is purely a matter of survival.

Problems with Theme Writing

Although what is behind using container practices to teach novice writers might seem sensible and necessary—and containers are certainly appealing because they are neat and orderly—using a template stunts writing development, and instead of being a foundational experience on which writers can build, it actually has an opposite, detrimental effect as compared to process and post-process pedagogies. Again, the literature on theme writing can enlighten us about why template approaches harm far more than they help novice writers.

Conversation 3

Mike Rose (1980): When I studied blocked and un-blocked college writers, I found that blockages had at least something to do with the "rigid rules" they'd internalized. Take Laurel for example. One of her papers "included a paragraph on an issue that was never mentioned in the topic paragraph. This was the kind of mistake that someone with Laurel's apparent ability doesn't make. I asked her about this irrelevant passage. She knew very well that it didn't fit, but believed she had to include it to round out the paper. 'You must always make three or more points in an essay. If the essay has less, then it's not strong.' Laurel had been taught this rule both in high school and in her first college English class; no wonder, then, that she accepted its validity" (394).

Lillian Robinson and Linda Brodkey (1992): "I see our students as having learned that what you do in school is not to write but to rehearse writing, with the point being to avoid the minefield of potential syntactical problems. The students we teach . . . , many of whom are practiced writers, but practiced writers of the five-paragraph essay, haven't experienced writing as we do it, as a

chance to explore ideas, articulate claims, lay out cases and modify them in light of the evidence. None of that happens if you think an essay is nothing but an elaborate test of grammar and usage" (23).

Bruce Pirie (2002): And students have trouble moving on from templates. "When we provide those simplistic gimmicks, we mean well. We don't want to see our students stumped, so we try to smooth the path for them. Structuring an essay is hard work, so we suggest a five-paragraph formula, with three body paragraphs. We never meant to suggest that all essays should have three and only three main points, but we forget that early teaching has lasting impact. When students are first learning and struggling with a new practice, they take firm hold of anything that looks like help. Misconceptions introduced at the time of first teaching are appallingly persistent and hard to pry loose in later years" (55).

Richard Argys (2008): Loretta Sue Kane found in her research that "[b]ecause the five paragraph essay format provided an almost 'fill-in-the-blank' structure, it did not allow students to do what real writers do: develop compositional goals, make plans to reach those goals, and address rhetorical and pragmatic concerns that develop during composing, or to practice making strategic decisions as writers must do" (qtd. in Argys 98). "In fact, given the symbiotic relationship between writing and thinking, it is possible that too tightly restricting students' written expression might restrict their intellectual exploration and growth. Maybe part of students' failure to move beyond stilted prose is due to our failure to allow them freedom to move beyond formulaic writing and tidy subgenres when their thinking and writing skills are ready" (99).

Rigid rules and form not following function: these damage novice writers, causing fear, writer's block, and abhorrence and avoidance of the act of writing. What Rose's, Robinson and Brodkey's, Pirie's, and Argys's comments demonstrate is that even before schools became highly interested in teaching "twenty-

first literacies," or before documents like the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (1) and the Common Core State Standards (18, 41) called for engaging students in writing for audiences beyond a teacher/corrector and for purposes other than correction/grading/testing, it was clear that formulaic approaches like the five-paragraph theme produce only mock-essays; and because they do not pass muster as *real* ones (i.e., those published outside of schools in print or online publications), they hurt the very writers they mean to help. In 2015 the cost of themes-masquerading-as-essays is increasingly more burdensome in terms of student motivation to (continue to) write than any small benefit they offer in terms of skills or organizational strategy.

Instead, we would better serve novice writers if we did some careful soul searching and honest confronting of the hardwired attraction to such pseudo-logical, rigid, quantifiable pedagogies in writing programs "based on a deficit understanding of those students" (Brannon et al. 17), programs that see novices as ignorant and needing to be fixed. Knowing why template approaches do not work can help us persuade resistant others to abandon such deficit practices and embrace writing curricula that start from a presumption that student writers have sound writing instincts and emerging skills, as well as tender shoots of interest and creativity that teachers can cultivate.

Alternate Approaches to Theme Writing

Colleagues from the past can steer us away from deficits-to-be-corrected thinking toward talents-to-be-nurtured approaches and can help us conceive of ways to lay five-paragraph-theme instruction to rest. Over the last almost-fifty years, at least, writing teachers have presented alternatives to theme-based pedagogies and drilling in the five-paragraph theme (including rhetorical approaches gaining new interest because of the Common Core State Standards) to help students learn to shape ideas into coherent discourse.

Conversation 4

Richard Larson (1966): "Viewed from the perspective of rhetoric, writing ceases to be the carrying out of mechanical procedures and becomes, instead, an activity that requires great sensitivity and discretion. Writing is a continuous exercise in the meeting of responsibilities to one's readers" (1061), in contrast to "pointless activities in which students simply get purposeless drill" (1062).

Jean Pumphrey (1973): A rhetorical approach also fits with inquiry-based learning and teaching, in which "[o]ne does not know beforehand what form [a] whole will take…" (667), and "[i]t then becomes the function of the teacher, not to leap in with a magic formula five paragraph theme to assure the student of what will please…the teacher, but rather to help the student[s] through the wilderness of [their] own thought, to encourage [them] to use language expansively until [they] discove[r] what it is [they] wis[h] to give order to. Free of any pressure to pre-order…thoughts, the student can then experience the excitement of seeing form evolve out of content as…scattered thoughts come together into a new whole" (670).

Clinton Burhans (1983): And key to a sound writing program is that teachers have "knowledge of what writing is and how writers go about writing—that is, teachers of writing must have experience in and knowledge of the basic process they are trying to teach" (653).

Diane Freedman (1991): Something I think is important that we don't do enough of is to have a transparent talk with our college students during "workshops in what-is-this-English-business-anyway" (80). In such talk we can emphasize "that they've got to learn to write for themselves even though that's a kind of impossibility. We might detail the demise of the five-paragraph essays of their high school days, explaining that high school teachers assigned them, among other reasons, to save time grading—a motive we can't easily fault" (81).

Linda Tabers-Kwak and Timothy Kaufman (2002): We often find ideas for authentic writing experiences in unexpected places. For instance, one year we looked to Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theories of reading to help us out of the bind we were in with essay writing. "We asked [our] ninth graders to compose . . . a [musical] composition that would, appropriately, accompany a select scene or character from the play [*Julius Caesar*]. We wanted to define the assignment in loose terms, hoping we would not convey a sense that this 'project' should resemble a PowerPoint presentation where one reads the material slide by slide, or a multitude of five-paragraph essays that begin, 'In this essay, I am going to tell you about Caesar.'" And our students didn't disappoint. For example, one pair, including a "student [who] had voiced a desire to drop out of 'boring' school," produced "a battle of the bands to symbolize the tension between Plebians and the Tribunes in Act 1 . . ." (71).

Suggestions like these for alternatives to the five-paragraph theme and other template approaches aim to avoid the fundamental problems with current-traditional, structure-driven writing instruction; and, because they work, individual practitioners who feel caught in the web of formulaic teaching should certainly try them. However, since focusing on alternatives in isolation has done little and, I imagine, will continue to do little to disrupt the systemic misunderstanding of what writing is and how instruction can and should encourage life-long communication through writing, we need a larger movement against theme writing and other current-traditional practices now.

Giving Up Theme Writing Once and for All

It's time—more than time—ninety years overdue. As H.W. Davis pointed out in 1922, the school composition or theme has "no definite audience," and "[w]here the audience is missing we are bound to have artificiality and emphasis on form, there being nothing else to emphasize. The composition has become a great narrowing force, blinding both teacher and student[s] to the truer

and bigger value and use of language." This is "as far as [they] can get from the natural condition under which any business or literary worker works," and "many [students have] all of [their] best and most natural tendencies as a writer beaten out of" them (328). Davis would probably agree with Ray Salazar's 2012 plea to adults who have an opportunity to change the writing instruction their children are getting: "If you're teaching [the five-paragraph theme]—stop it. If your son, daughter, niece, or nephew (or a young person you care about) is learning it—prepare to engage with the teacher to end it."

Students' guardians and writing teachers—if there are enough of them—can make a difference; but we also need school administrators, departments of education, and politicians to get educated about the teaching of writing and to look very closely at why exactly they are investing billions of dollars in tests and test preparation materials that perpetuate the five-paragraph theme and formulaic writing. The writing test industry is spreading like a cancer, hiring unemployed college graduates of any stripe to spend two minutes reading and passing judgment on a student essay (Farley 57-58), and research into machine scoring is gaining interest, ostensible validity, and sophistication (59), despite "what in the name of efficiency and productivity, we might be doing to the ecology of writing, especially the areas of rhetorical complexity, the role of writing for establishing and shaping relationships, and the diversity of readings and interpretations" (Hesse 6).

The testing industry, profiting from a confidence in large-scale evaluation as a guide to educational reform, will likely not go away any time soon. However, since one argument that schools make in favor of the five-paragraph theme is high-stakes testing, a recent move within the industry, by ETS in 2014 to make optional the essay portion added to the SAT in 2005—as it already was on the ACT (Anderson)—provides an opening for writing teachers to make arguments for eliminating template writing instruction.

In order to use this opening to take on the big machines of education, we need to have a seat at the policy table, where

teachers have been and are still being excluded (Bernstein 35). Knowing the history of theme writing in America can be a start to working with firm resolve toward that broader influence on policy. As individual writing teachers try to gain such influence, this article is a call to action for them to say, "No, I'm not going to teach writing this way any more! I'm not going to "waste time [any longer] on stupid stuff" (to paraphrase Neal Conan's sign-off from the last episode of *Talk of the Nation*). When we are teaching writing, we are really teaching thinking; and teaching by formula is inconsistent with and counterproductive to teaching thinking. As Heather Lattimer, assistant professor at the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego observes, "We don't know all the ways now that kids will be expected to communicate in five, ten, twenty years, [so w]e need to teach kids not just the medium and genre or the particular form, but how to navigate and manipulate structure and form in order to fit with . . . purpose and . . . audience" (qtd. in Collier 8). And we certainly should not be teaching a five-paragraph formula that exists nowhere outside a test or artificial classroom exercise and that college writing instructors "have to teach . . . incoming freshmen how to *unlearn*…" (qtd. in Collier 9), in order for them to get at real writing.

As a teacher, in general, and a writing teacher, in particular, I am hopeful that educators will listen to and thoughtfully consider the many voices that have advocated for a better anchor practice than theme writing, the five-paragraph theme, and other template approaches to working with novices on their writing. I am hopeful that working together, we might finally lay this more-than-100-year burden down. We have been trying to say goodbye for far too long.

Note

[1]Comments included in virtual conversations come from publications on the issue of theme writing over 107 years. I have tried my utmost to accurately and fairly quote and paraphrase ideas, and to give equal voice to all speakers. At times, I have summarized ideas as transitional material or added a conversational tag for context or coherence.

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In addition to sources cited in the article, this accompanying bibliography is organized according to four categories: descriptive/relatively neutral discussion of (five-paragraph) theme writing, arguments for (five-paragraph) theme writing, arguments against (five-paragraph) theme writing, and alternatives to (five-paragraph) theme writing. It is intended as a resource for *JTW* readers who want to broaden their own knowledge about what has been at stake in the practice of school theme writing and the five-paragraph theme. With that understanding, those who want to construct a case for abandoning formulaic approaches to teaching writing can argue that cause before resistant others (e.g. colleagues, program directors, students, administrators, business people, parents, or the wider public).

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