

7

# Exploring the Possibilities: An Introduction

*I*n *Learning the Landscape*, you'll observe, record, read, and write about the landscapes that we live in and those we create for ourselves through our actions and our visions. We use the word *landscape* in a metaphoric way to include not only the physical features of the land but also the neighborhoods, communities, and societies that we've created. We'll ask you to examine how the landscapes in which we live shape us as well as how we shape the landscapes. Our powers of observation enable us to perceive patterns and meaning in the world around us, to recognize and interpret the outer, physical aspects as well as the inner world—that mental landscape that helps inform who we are and what we feel and believe. In this book you'll focus on both the exterior and the interior landscapes, particularly as these have been experienced or imagined by writers and as you will express them through your own writing and projects.

We've designed projects that involve you in fieldwork of one kind or another and have selected literature that focuses on the theme of landscapes. We'll ask you to write poems, stories, essays, and scripts as ways of adding various angles of vision to what you already know and believe about both the geographic and societal landscapes of which we are a part. We hope it will be impossible for you to work through this book without reassessing your relationship with the world around you. In what follows, we detail some of our beliefs so that you can get an idea of why we'll ask you to do some of the activities and projects that we do.

Reading means more than opening a book, moving your eyes across a page, and trying to figure out what the author means. *Reading*, as we use the word, involves using all of your knowledge and experience as you work out interpretations of a story, poem, play, or essay. There are many ways to read a book, just as there are many ways to read the world. Reading involves more than understanding words: We talk about reading the weather, reading other people's moods, reading a friend's actions or a parent's tone of voice. If you find various angles from which to read a text, you'll find multiple ways of understanding it.

We use the word *text* often throughout this book, and for us, text means a poem, play, novel, short story, diary entry, essay, letter, film, drawing, painting—nearly anything that requires reading. Text is an artifact of imagining and crafting, something you or someone else creates. The text is like a fabric of many colors or tex-

tures with each reader taking a different thread or color of meaning from what's said and not said. In this book, we'll introduce ways that you can step back from the words of a text and look through a variety of lenses and from different angles. Each lens and angle will give you different ways of thinking about the reading.

Other people will read a text differently from the ways you read it. That's one reason we ask you to respond to what you read and then to share your ideas and collaborate with other readers to make comparisons. You will need to listen carefully to one another and be sensitive to why and how your meanings differ. Your experiences with family and friends or in your school or community will influence how you sort through and make sense of the experiences you find in literature. For example, if you've just experienced the death of a close friend, you might respond deeply to a story about death. In short, pay attention. Listen. Question. Keep an open mind. Share your thinking with others. Your class is a community of readers, and it is important to hear different opinions. Remember that while there is no "right" interpretation, you do need to validate your interpretation. It must make sense in light of the text itself, and it must make sense to you, given your own experiences and knowledge. The meaning of what you read is what happens between you, the community of readers, and the text.

We'll also ask you to do many different writing assignments and projects. You'll have experiences as a naturalist and ethnographer as you record close observations and extend those observations into understanding the world around you. We'll ask you to write about your own experiences with the environment and cultures as well as about how authors, including other student writers, report their experiences—from the very smallest of observations to critiques of how we are preparing for our future on this planet. We believe that these assignments are ways for you to think about the topics that other writers raise, to discover your own visions, and to share what you discover with others. We'll ask you to work in multiple ways: record initial reactions; sketch or map ideas; compile field notes; photograph, film, or perform scenes; and write original literature. In activities such as "logs" and "collaborating," we offer choices, which are bulleted, and steps, which are numbered. Some activities will be more useful if you complete all of the steps; in other cases, you are free to choose one or more options. We believe that writing finished pieces takes time and careful attention, so you'll be asked

to select some of the assignments that you think hold the most promise and work with your classmates and teacher to revise these into the best possible pieces that you can.

As you work on the projects in this book, you will also explore different ways of seeing, what we call *angles of vision*. Looking at a text from a number of different angles, you'll find multiple ways of understanding it. What are these angles of vision? You might write or draw how you feel after you finish a story or poem; you might tell the story to someone who hasn't read it; you might tell your group about an experience of your own that was similar to what you read and listen to their experiences; or you might write a poem or story of your own. You might read more stories or poems by the same author, or you might reread the story or poem. All of these responses will help you come to your understanding of a text. The angles we suggest are not the only ways of looking at a text; there are many others that you'll find by yourself or with your discussion group. We won't be asking you to explore all of these angles for every text that you read, but we will always ask you to look at the text from more than one angle.

## Terms and Concepts You Need to Know

Following are some of the terms and concepts that we use frequently throughout this book:

**Log:** The log is where you'll record ongoing work for a particular project. The log may include responses to or discussions about the texts you read. It may include specific observation assignments or lists generated from brainstorming. The form should fit the purposes for using the log. Your teacher may prefer one kind of log, such as a loose-leaf notebook; other teachers may prefer spiral notebooks.

In this book, we have numbered the log entries by chapter. When you begin a new chapter, label the new set of log entries with the name of that chapter and begin numbering again with Log Entry 1.

**Double-entry Log:** There will be some times that we will ask you to set up your log as a double-entry notebook (sometimes called a dual-entry notebook), recording on the left-hand side of the page the words, phrases, or lines that trigger a response for you. On the

right-hand side, write your own thoughts and ideas. Set up your log this way:

**Double-entry Log Format**

|   |  |                                |  |
|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Class _____                                   |  | Name _____                     |  |
| Date _____                                    |  | Log Entry # _____              |  |
| <i>Words, phrases, or lines from the text</i> |  | <i>My response to the text</i> |  |
|   |  |                                |  |
|   |  |                                |  |
|   |  |                                |  |

**Clustering:** Clustering is a process that helps you generate ideas and explore possibilities for writing. Begin by writing the key or stimulus word in the center of a page. Then, in two or three minutes, write as many words and phrases as you can, radiating outward from the key word. Each word or phrase triggers another until you have a web of words and phrases. Usually you find, as you are clustering, that ideas you were not even aware of emerge from the web.

**Mapping:** Mapping is a more consciously organized way of arranging your ideas on a page than clustering. In mapping, you begin with some ideas or categories and place your items of information meaningfully on the page. The way you organize your material makes it available to you visually. Notes that would take pages, for example, can all be placed on a one-page map. Maps may be completely made up of words; they may use words and symbols or drawings; or they may be completely nonverbal—all symbols and drawings.

**Graphic:** A graphic is a drawing, cluster, or map. We'll often ask you to respond to or interpret a piece of literature by drawing or mapping your ideas.

**Partner or Group:** Throughout the book, we will frequently ask you to collaborate with a partner or a small group of your classmates as you explore your understanding of a text and work through revisions in your own writing or performing. Your teacher

will establish these groups; they may change from time to time, depending on how your teacher organizes the class.

**Writing Folder:** The writing folder is a place to keep your work in progress—drafts of essays, stories, and poems. When you work through a particular assignment—writing a draft, having your writing group respond to it and, possibly, revising it—you will keep all of that work in your writing folder.

**Course Portfolio:** The portfolio represents your best completed work. When you have a finished piece of work, one that your teacher has read and responded to and that you have revised and edited, put that piece into your portfolio. Throughout this book, we suggest many activities that could lead to finished portfolio pieces. Each is identified in the text as a *portfolio entry*.

## Angles of Vision on a Poem

To demonstrate how various readings and perspectives can contribute to the meanings we make from text, we ask you now to read from seven different angles of vision the poem “Traveling Through the Dark.” Because we want you to respond first to the poem itself, we omit the poet’s name until the fourth angle.

Remember that this is practice, to acquaint you with the strategies you will develop as you read and write your way through *Learning the Landscape*. To work through these angles, you will need to set up a log. Your teacher will explain how you are to establish partners for sharing and collaborating. Begin by reading the poem; then follow directions for each of the seven angles of vision. You will not have to read other works this many times, but we hope experimenting with these seven angles of vision will help you explore possibilities for how to read other selections in this book.

### Angle 1: Initial Responses

#### Traveling Through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

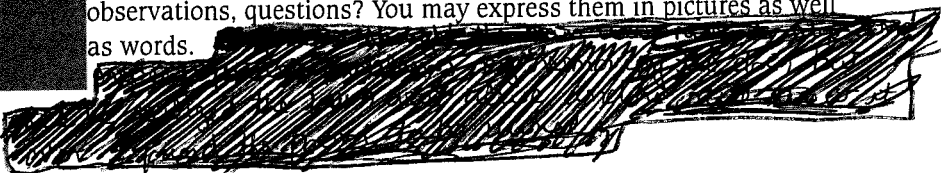
My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## g Entry 1

After reading this poem, what are your initial thoughts, feelings, observations, questions? You may express them in pictures as well as words.



## Angle 2: Story Threads

### Traveling Through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,

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Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## Collaborating

With your partner, share stories about “traveling through the dark.” Have you had or do you know of experiences similar to the ones the poet describes? Your stories needn’t be about actual darkness; they could also be about times you had to make a decision or came upon something unexpectedly. Whatever the experience, think about what you noticed. What did you feel? Your stories can be your personal experiences, or they can be experiences you’ve heard or read about.

## Log Entry 2

Record in pictures and/or words the similarities, or common threads, in all the stories you’ve told and heard.

## Angle 3: Shifting Perspectives

### Traveling Through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
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The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## Collaborating

Speculate with your partner on how you might read this poem differently if

- you were totally unfamiliar with surroundings such as these.
- you have had an unpleasant experience that this poem makes you recall.
- you believe the speaker of the poem is an elderly man.
- you believe the speaker of the poem is a teenager.
- you believe the speaker of the poem is a pregnant woman.

## Log Entry 3

Record a summary of your discussion.

## Angle 4: Connecting with the Writer

Poet of "Traveling Through the Dark," William Stafford, was born in 1914 in Hutchinson, Kansas, and was raised in small towns on the Kansas plains. He was a conscientious objector who worked in civilian public service camps during World War II. Although he taught elsewhere for short periods of time, he spent most of his career at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He died in 1993.

He often spoke or wrote about his craft. In *An Oregon Message*, Stafford said: "Each poem is a miracle that has been invited to happen" (Harper & Row, 1987, p. 10). Stafford believed that a poem was more than its subject as well. He wrote, "A poem is anything said in such a way or put on the page in such a way as to invite from the hearer or reader a certain kind of attention" (*Writing the Australian Crawl*, University of Michigan Press, 1978, p. 61). For Stafford, a poem was a kind of performance.

In light of your knowledge about the poet, read the following poems, also by William Stafford:

### Ask Me

Some time when the river is ice ask me  
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether  
what I have done is my life. Others  
have come in their slow way into  
my thought, and some have tried to help  
or to hurt: ask me what difference  
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.  
You and I can turn and look  
at the silent river and wait. We know  
the current is there, hidden; and there  
are comings and goings from miles away  
that hold the stillness exactly before us.  
What the river says, that is what I say.

### To You Around Me

The ways I follow go down by the river  
and look out. They pause on the pavement by a church  
where a stone says, "Old." They take me slowly

to a house behind a white gate, still,  
 and clean, and vacant. The ways I follow  
 won't rest. They find the country and cross  
 a field where a killdeer is grieving for its mate.  
 Evening begins to move near. Something  
 calls through the stars, telling me  
 to be brave and also be afraid.  
 You around me, is it like this for you?—  
 far, full of surprises, lonely  
 and scary sometimes, on the ways you follow?

## Collaborating

- Talk with your partner about how knowing details from the poet's life affects your reading of "Traveling Through the Dark."
- Discuss with your partner how knowing what Stafford says about writing poems affects your reading. *Do* the poems "invite . . . a certain kind of attention"?
- Describe how your reading of these two poems by William Stafford affects your reading of "Traveling Through the Dark."

## g Entry 4

Record a brief summary of your discussion.

## Angle 5: Language and Craft

### Traveling Through the Dark

*William Stafford*

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
 dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
 It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
 that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## Log Entry 5

Use the double-entry log format, and in the left column jot down words and phrases from the poem that catch your attention or that are particularly interesting to you. In the right column, write a brief explanation of why you chose the words and phrases you did.

## Collaborating

- Discuss with your partner the choices you made and why you selected each one. Are the phrases you selected ones that you like because of images or sounds or because of the ways in which they make you feel or see? What other reasons?
- How does the title, "Traveling Through the Dark," contribute to the meaning you make from the poem? Is the traveling literal or metaphorical or both? If you were to give the poem a new title, what would it be and why?

## Angle 6: Recasting the Poem

### Traveling Through the Dark

*William Stafford*

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
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her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
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under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

### Log Entry 6

Try your hand at recasting this poem in any of the following ways  
or in a way of your own.

- Draw what the poem means to you.
- Bring to class an object that represents what the poem means to you and explain the connections.
- Write the poem as a brief story, dialogue, or scene. You may want to read what you have written aloud or act it out for the class or a small group.

## Angle 7: You, the Text, the World

### Traveling Through the Dark

*William Stafford*

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
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I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

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under the hood purred the steady engine.  
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I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

### Log Entry 7

- Read through your log entries and review your various readings of this poem.
- Trace how your understanding or appreciation of the poem has changed by creating a visual map depicting the changes. Or write a description of how your reading changed as you talked, wrote, drew, and read this poem from various angles of vision.
- Create your own structure for connecting you, the text, and the world.

## Building Your Course Portfolio

Periodically, as you work through this book, we will suggest that you compose a piece for your portfolio. While your writing folder contains notes, first drafts, and short pieces written without extensive revision, your *course portfolio* is a collection of finished works that represents your best thinking about an idea or works of literature you have been studying. Your portfolio pieces may include a piece of writing, a graphic, a live performance, a video presentation, or some combination. For the graphic, video presentation, and oral performance options, which probably will not fit into a portfolio, include a photograph or a carefully written description of your work, along with notes, scripts, or tapes. In this book we frequently identify possible portfolio pieces as a *portfolio entry*.

Usually the portfolio work will come after you have read a number of related texts. In this introductory section, however, which acquaints you with techniques that you will use throughout the book, your first portfolio piece will be in response to the Stafford poem "Traveling Through the Dark."


### Portfolio Entry

The following is the process for building your portfolio entry:

1. Reread the logs you wrote about the Stafford poem for each of the angles of vision.
2. Think about the ideas you would like to work with for your portfolio entry.
3. Once you have tentatively decided on an idea, do some clustering or brainstorming to generate additional ideas.

As you worked through the various approaches to this one poem, you

- recorded your thoughts and feelings.
- looked at parallel stories from previous reading you have done or experiences you have had.

- 
- speculated on how your reading might be different if you had changed various aspects of the poem.
  - noted how additional information about Stafford affected your reading.
  - recorded words and phrases you liked and explored reasons for your choices.
  - recast the poem in different ways.
  - reflected on how your understanding or appreciation changed as you worked through the various angles of vision.

## Content and Form

You will need to consider two aspects of your product: the *nature* of the idea you want to develop, and the *form* or *forms* you want to use to develop that idea. Each will affect the other. Following are some options, but don't feel limited by these. You may want to think of some of your own options.

### Written options

- an original poem based on an experience you have had
- a written dialogue based on your logs for Angle 3: Shifting Perspectives
- a story based loosely on a real-life experience you have had or know about, one that has similarities to the experience of the speaker of the poem
- a paper about William Stafford, based on additional readings of his poetry and information about his life
- a story based on the information of the poem but with an alternative ending. What if, for example, the man had been able to save the fawn's life?

### Graphic options

You probably have the origin of an idea for a graphic in your logs. Look through them for ideas about how you might present your

thoughts on the work in this chapter. Graphic options can stand alone or accompany a written option. If the graphic stands alone, write a short explanation of your use of symbols and colors for your portfolio.

For graphics, try to use good quality paper. You will need marking pens, crayons, or watercolors. You do not need artistic ability to begin working with graphics; your goal is to translate your ideas into symbols and images, using both drawings and words as they are appropriate. You are not simply illustrating the work; you are showing how you understand the work through color, symbol, shape, line, or texture. Here are some suggestions that may stimulate some ideas:

- Map the events of the poem.
- Design a graphic presentation of the story of the poem.
- Think of symbols to represent the speaker, the idea of the poem, the doe, or the journey. Draw these symbols in a way that shows their relationships to each other.

### **Performance options**

Performance options may include written work and graphics as well as performances, if they are part of the presentation. You may want to work with a partner or in a small group to prepare a dramatic performance. You may, of course, design a solo presentation. Following are some suggestions:

- Look closely at your log entries for Angle 6. Working with a partner, write out and refine one of the suggested dialogues or one of your own. Present your dialogue to a larger group or to the class.
- Look back at the logs you have written for Angles 2, 3, and 6. Working with two or three classmates, prepare a storytelling session, with all of the stories dealing in some way with the relationship between a person and an animal. Refine your storytelling by listening to each other and making suggestions. Decide which order works best for your stories. Then present your stories to the class.
- Reread the Stafford poem. With a partner serving as a director, plan “freeze frames” for significant points in the poem. Plan how

you will physically represent the speaker at each point. What facial expressions? What gestures? What stance—standing, kneeling, bending over? Using the director's suggestions, polish your performance for the class. The director will read the poem aloud as you present your interpretation and move from frame to frame.

## **From Process to Product**

The success of your final product—written, graphic, oral, or a combination—depends on your ability to see something through to completion. There are several factors that will help you learn how you work best and how you can take advantage of that knowledge as you develop an idea into its best possible form.

The following steps in working through a major paper or project will help you present your ideas in their best possible form.

### **1. Messing around**

You need to be able to tolerate the “messing around” stage. Often this stage will begin in your journal or log entries. To find out exactly what you want to do, however, you need to be able to make a number of starts, often in different directions. You can explore your own best way to get started by trying out different strategies such as clustering, mapping, listing, or brainstorming. Each of these suggestions will be explored as we go along in this book.

### **2. Making a rough draft, notes, and sketches**

Once you have decided on your idea, you need to cultivate your own space in which to write or draw. In your first draft, try to develop your ideas as fully as you can in a short period of time. Once you have your ideas roughly sketched out, you can begin the revising process, seeing the work and your ideas anew. Throughout the book, we have included many ideas to show you how to turn a rough draft into a finished product you can be proud of.

### **3. Collaborating**

We cannot stress enough the value of collaboration once you have a rough draft of your first ideas. This is the time for response groups, for sharing your work and getting feedback from others. Because you are the one who knows what your goal is, you are the one who

must tell your partners what you need from them. Sometimes you may want just to have them listen; other times you may want specific suggestions for revising your work. From time to time, we present specific response-group suggestions and guidelines. For now, use your best understanding of what you need from your group, and be sure to give back to the others what they ask of you.

#### **4. Revising**

Again, after the collaboration, you will need a quiet time for further revision and refinement. Regardless of the help others may offer, each word or placement of design is ultimately your decision; you will take both the praise and the criticism. This part of the process is often the most satisfying, when you see your work really taking shape and becoming more than you even dreamed of in the beginning.

#### **5. Editing**

With written work, this is the final step before publication. At this stage you may need the help of a partner, or you may need to consult a dictionary or writing handbook. If you are using a word processor, be sure to use the spell check, but remember that it does not catch certain kinds of typographical errors (*on* for *one*, for example). You need to proofread carefully and, if possible, get someone else to proofread for you (not because you wouldn't recognize a typo, but because your eyes see what your brain expects.)

#### **6. Publishing**

This is the next-to-the-last step. For classroom projects, publication can take many different forms. Finished written projects go into your course portfolio, the collection of works you consider ready for publication. Finished graphics should be accompanied by a presentation to the class and be displayed on the wall of the classroom. Finished performances can be presented to other classes as well as your own. Several of you may plan to take your performance "on the road," presenting it for your school open house, a PTA meeting, or an elementary school assembly. (Our students say that children are often the best audiences.) For finished work that cannot go into the portfolio, write a short, concise explanation of the graphic or oral performance that you created for your project. Include the chapter title, the assignment that you chose or your teacher gave you, and a description of the finished work.

## 7. Evaluating

Although your teacher will evaluate both your finished product and your work throughout the process, your own evaluation is an important key to your growth as a self-sufficient reader, writer, and performer. It is important to step back and reflect on your accomplishments. Before you can do that usefully, you need to think through what your goals were in the beginning, how they changed as you worked, and how your final product reflects your thinking. Your teacher may provide specific suggestions for self-assessment throughout the chapters. For now, try writing a very short assessment of your final product for this one chapter. In it, state what you hoped to accomplish when you began and how your final work measures up to or exceeds your expectations.

As your portfolio grows, you will be able to trace the record of your best work. At the end of the course, you will have a substantial body of your own work to serve as a record of your growth as a reader, writer, graphic artist, and performer.