



Geostock/Getty Images

“Her eyes are bright with a cold, steady patience. I have stared into them and tried to see into her arachnid mind but what stared back at me was nothing I knew or understood.”

—Patrick Lane, “There Is a Season”



1 NARRATION

AND THEN....

Telling a story, or *narrating*, is an appealing and natural way to convey information. Every time you tell a joke, trade gossip, invent a ghost story or tell a friend what you did on the weekend, you are narrating. In both speech and writing, telling a story can also be the most direct way to make a point. If your idea or opinion was formed by an experience, a clear account of that experience can help others understand and believe your point.

For example, in this chapter George Gabori narrates his experience of a schoolyard fight. At age nine, the Jewish boy has just moved to a public school in his village in Hungary. A new friend, Tivadar, asks him one day whether it was the Jews who killed Jesus. They had not, young George's father informs him that night. But the next day when George relates this information to his friend, Tivadar hits him and bloodies his nose. A crowd gathers, shouting to "kill the Jew," but in fact it is young George who gets in a blow that sends Tivadar sprawling and helpless. Later, he assumes his father will be angry,

especially when the father muses, “Jews don’t fight.” George asks, outraged, “Then why did you put me in a Christian school?”

“That’s why I put you there, my son,” the father replies, then kisses him and adds, “You’re learning fast; only next time don’t hit him quite so hard.”

So why did George Gabori, years later living in Canada and writing his autobiography, retell this event? Why, in fact, did he use it as the opening passage to his whole life’s story? The answer is clear: this was the day he learned what racism is, and that knowledge would be central to his later life. It turned him into a scrapper who blew up German trains in the Resistance, and who survived both Nazi and communist concentration camps.

Notice that nowhere in this passage does Gabori editorialize on what it was he learned that day. There is no official thesis statement, as there normally is in the essays we write. But there is what could be called an “*implied*” *thesis statement*. It is simply the fact that this short reading, like all effective narratives, has a point.

In “There Is a Season,” later in this chapter, Patrick Lane offers another kind of implied thesis statement. After reporting on the whole mating ceremony of the orb-weaver spider, after showing us the male strumming on the web, the female charging to make a meal of him, then his escaping as she tears off one of his legs, Lane ends the passage with his own resolve to give the food gift of a moth or a fly to “one of the great mothers of the garden.” In this envisioned act, Lane “implies” his sense of respect and wonder at the lives of these spiders.

Of course narratives don’t have to be violent or tragic or even dramatic. When Carol Shields in “Encounter” tells of her memorable walk in the rain, sharing an umbrella with a total stranger in Tokyo, we quickly grasp her underlying point that communication is a universal desire.

Narration is such an all-purpose tool that many authors in other chapters of this book use it too. Emily Carr narrates three painting expeditions to coastal native villages. Paul D’Angelo narrates a personal encounter in an elevator. Both Hugh MacLennan and Kildare Dobbs narrate the details of dramatic human-made explosions. Dr. Mark Bernstein narrates a brain operation, and General Roméo

Dallaire narrates an incident that, for him and for us, sums up the tragedy of genocide in Rwanda. (See below for page numbers.)

(By the way, the term “narration” can also refer to pieces of speech quoted in an essay or in fiction. In this chapter, though, we are using it mostly in its larger sense of telling a story.)

Many *examples* given by writers are really bits of *narrative*. To show how Canadians love risky water sports (in “This Boat Is My Boat,” p. 216), Drew Hayden Taylor takes us out on the waves of the Georgian Bay, briefly narrating an experience that makes the point very clear.

In some ways narrating is easy. For example, the only research Shields required was her own experience; and her basic plan of organization was no more complicated than the chronological order in which the events occurred. (A flashback to the past or a glance at the future may intervene, but basically a narrative is the easiest of all writing to organize.) Yet a narrative, like any form of writing, is built on choices:

CHOICE OF SCOPE: Time stretches infinitely toward both the past and future—but where does your narrative most logically begin and end? Include only parts that develop your point. Do you need to dwell on getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing your teeth and catching the bus, on the day you became a Canadian citizen? Or did the event really begin when you opened the courthouse door? When facts about the past or future are needed, sketch them in briefly so you interrupt the least you can.

Note that different narratives can have different time spans: while Shields shares maybe half an hour of her life story with us, Lane shares several hours, Gabori shares two days and Carole Geddes (“Growing Up Native”) shares her whole lifetime so far. Of course the challenge increases with the span of time: Geddes is very careful to choose details that convey her main life experiences without consuming too many words.

CHOICE OF DETAILS: Which details count? Reject random or trivial ones and seek those that convey your main impression or idea. When on that school playground young Gabori experiences racist violence, he tells us how he tastes his own blood. What could more clearly

convey his experience that day? Choose details that are vivid. Reject weak ones and select those that help the reader *see, hear, feel, smell* or *taste*—in other words those which, by appealing to the senses, help readers live the event.

CHOICE OF CONNECTIONS: Readers love to be “swept along” by narrative. How is this effect achieved? Partly just through a good story. Time signals, though, increase the impact of any narrative. Like road signs for the driver, terms like “at first,” “next,” “then,” “immediately,” “suddenly,” “later,” “finally” and “at last” show the way and encourage progress. Use these road signs, and others like them, at every curve. Choose carefully, so signals speed the reader to your chosen destination.

So far we have been discussing mostly the first-person narrative. There are many advantages to writing about yourself. You know your subject well (in fact, is there any subject you know better?), yet in writing about yourself you may better understand your own ideas and actions. Your vital interest in your subject will motivate the writing. And finally, readers appreciate the authenticity of a story told by the very person who lived the event.

But of course writing in third person opens up many more possibilities. Only by writing about others can one discuss past eras, places one has never visited, and events one has never experienced. Kildare Dobbs does this masterfully in his narrative “The Scar,” in Chapter 9. He was not in Hiroshima the day it crumbled beneath an atomic blast, but his research and his imagination almost make it seem so; more importantly, reading his narrative almost makes us feel we were there too.

Note: Many authors in later chapters combine narration with other ways to develop their material. For more examples, see these selections:

Margaret Wente, “Busy, Busy, Busy,” p. 61

Rudy Wiebe, “The Bull,” p. 101

Emily Carr, “D’Sonoqua,” p. 117

Charles Yale Harrison, “In the Trenches,” p. 108

Paul D'Angelo, "The Step Not Taken," p. 144

Crisanta Sampang, "Trading Motherhood for Dollars," p. 176

Hugh MacLennan, "A Sound Beyond Hearing," p. 296

Dr. Mark Bernstein, "Yes, It Is Brain Surgery," p. 311

Kildare Dobbs, "The Scar," p. 361

Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire, "*Cri de coeur*," p. 414



GEORGE GABORI

Coming of Age in Putnok

Translated from the Hungarian by Eric Johnson with George Faludy

*For much of his life George Gabori (1924–1997) drove taxi and ran a cab company in Toronto. Like many immigrants to this country, though, he had a past he would never forget. Gabori (pronounced Gábóri) was born to a Jewish family in the village of Putnok, Hungary. His childhood was happy but short, for when the Germans overran Hungary and threatened the existence of the Jews, he joined the resistance. He led daring sabotage raids, blowing up German trains, till the Gestapo sent him, still a teenager, to a concentration camp. When later the Russians drove out the Germans, Gabori was as troublesome for the communists as he had been for the Nazis: soon after his release from Dachau, he was breaking rocks in a notorious Soviet labour camp. Always outspoken in favour of democracy, Gabori played a part in the 1956 Revolution, then escaped from Hungary to Canada, a “decent land,” where years later he wrote his memoirs in Hungarian. With the help of Hungarian poet George Faludy, Eric Johnson condensed and translated the enormous manuscript, and in 1981 it was published. Since then, *When Evils Were Most Free* has become a minor Canadian classic and has been translated into many other languages. Our selection is its opening passage.*

1 **W**hen I was nine years old my father, victorious after a long argument with my grandfather, took me out of our town's only *cheder* and enrolled me in its only public school. Overnight I was transported from the world of Hebrew letters and

monotonously repeated texts to the still stranger world of Hungarian letters, patriotic slogans and walls covered with maps.

Grandfather rolled his eyes and predicted trouble, but it seemed he was wrong. I sat beside a boy my own age named Tivadar, a gentile—everybody was a gentile in that school except me. Tivadar and I got along famously until, after two or three weeks, he approached me in the schoolyard one day and asked me if it was true what the others were saying, that “we” had murdered Jesus.

Strange to tell—for this was 1933 and we were in Hungary—I had never heard about this historical episode, and I left Tivadar amicably enough, promising to ask my father about it. We met again the next morning and I told him what I had learned: that the Romans had killed Jesus, and that anyway Jesus had been a Jew, like me, so what did it matter to the Christians?

“That’s not true,” said Tivadar menacingly.

“My father does not lie,” I replied.

By now a crowd had gathered around us and there was nothing for it but to fight it out. There were cheers and laughter as Tivadar hit me in the nose before I got my jacket off. It was not the first time I had tasted my own blood, but it was the first time a Christian had made it flow. Tivadar was flushed with pleasure and excitement at the applause and not at all expecting it when I lashed out with my fist and sent him sprawling backward on the cobbles. The crowd of boys groaned and shouted to Tivadar to get up and kill the Jew, but poor Tivadar did not move. Frightened, I grabbed my jacket and shoved my way through the crowd stunned into silence by this overturning of the laws of nature.

They were silent at home too when I told them what had happened. My father sent for me from his office in the afternoon, and I entered cap in hand. He always wore a braided Slovak jacket at work and looked more like a peasant than a Jewish wine merchant.

“Well, who started it?” asked my father, wearing an expression I had never seen on his face before. I was not at all frightened.

“He did. I told him what you said about Jesus and he challenged me.”

My father clamped his teeth on his cigar and nodded, looking right through me.

11 “Jews don’t fight,” he finally said.

12 “Then why did you put me in a Christian school?” I asked in a loud, outraged whine.

13 “That’s why I put you there, my son,” he said at last, then swept me up and kissed me on the forehead. “You’re learning fast; only next time don’t hit him quite so hard.”

14 Then he sent me out quickly and I stopped on the landing, startled to hear loud, whooping, solitary laughter coming out of my father’s office.

EXPLORATIONS:

George Gabori, *When Evils Were Most Free*

George Faludy, *My Happy Days in Hell*

Adam Horvath, “Lives Lived: George Gabori,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, December 7, 1997

Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank*

Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*

Barbara Coloroso,

The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander

Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide

<http://www.bullying.org>

<http://www.cyberbullying.org>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_Hungarian_Revolution

<http://ftp.nizkor.org/ftp.py?bibliographies/biblio.04>

STRUCTURE:

1. What overall pattern organizes this selection?
2. Point out at least ten words or phrases in this *narrative* that signal the flow of time.
3. Scrutinize Gabori’s opening paragraph: has he prepared us for the selection? Name every fact revealed about the setting and about the author.

STYLE:

1. How economical of words is this opening passage of Gabori's life story? How clearly does it reveal the author and his times? Would you predict with any confidence his character or fate as an adult? Do these pages tempt you to read the whole book? Why or why not?
2. *When Evils Were Most Free* is translated and condensed from the Hungarian original. Does this act separate us from Gabori's thoughts? How exact can translations be? If you are bilingual or multilingual, how precisely can you put sayings from one language into another? Can translator Eric Johnson even be seen as a co-author of these pages?
3. In paragraph 6 Gabori states, "It was not the first time I had tasted my own blood...." What makes this image strong?

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING:

1. What exactly is the "overturning of the laws of nature" at the end of paragraph 6?
2. Was Gabori's father right to move the boy from a Hebrew *cheder* to a public school? In disproving the STEREOTYPE that "Jews don't fight" (par. 11), has the boy learned a worthy lesson? Or does he merely copy the worst traits of his opponents, thereby becoming like them?
3. Every ethnic group in Canada—including English Canadians—is a minority. Has your minority been persecuted here? If you have been a victim, *narrate* an actual incident, including your own reaction. Like Gabori, give many specifics.
4. In taunting and hitting his Jewish classmate, Tivadar is a bully. Have you seen bullying in your own school years? Visit the <http://www.bullying.org> and <http://www.cyberbullying.org> websites above, and report to the class if these materials bring to mind experiences of your own.
5. What are autobiographies for? What do you think writing your own life story would do for you? For others?
6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Write a chapter of your own autobiography. Select one key incident in your life, then freewrite on it for a few minutes. Look*

over what you have produced, keep the best of it, and from this write your first draft. Have you begun and ended at just the right places, narrating the event itself but omitting parts that don't matter? Enrich the next draft with more IMAGES and examples, following Gabori's lead. Now share your narrative with a group of classmates, and adjust whatever does not communicate with this AUDIENCE. Finally, read your narrative aloud, with expression, to the whole class.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing on the Online Learning Centre at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/conrad.



CAROL SHIELDS

Encounter

*American by birth, Carol Shields came at age 22 to Canada and went on to be one of our nation's best-loved authors. Though she taught at several universities, notably the University of Manitoba, and though she often wrote on academic subjects—as in her acclaimed 2001 biography of Jane Austen—Shields also became a novelist gifted in showing the mysteries of everyday life. Drawing richly on her own experience as wife and as mother of five children, and beginning to publish only after the children were all in school, Shields had a gift for uncovering what The Guardian called “the dramatic in the domestic.” Believing there is no such thing as “ordinary” life, Shields breathed such force into her everyday characters that to thousands of readers they came alive on the page. She also wrote and published poetry, but it is her fiction that raised her to the first rank of our authors. Her first novel, *Small Ceremonies*, appeared in 1976, then in 1987 her novel *Swann*. But it was in 1993 that she stunned the critics and won both the Pulitzer Prize in America and the Governor General's Award in Canada with *The Stone Diaries*. Many thousands of readers in 17 languages around the world followed its main character, Daisy Goodwill, through each stage of life as a woman in her society. Then in 1997 Shields depicted another “ordinary” character, this time a man, in her best-selling novel *Larry's Party*. The last novel before her untimely death in 2003 was *Unless*. Then in 2005 appeared her *Collected Stories*, introduced and edited by Margaret Atwood. Our own selection, from Katherine Govier's anthology *Without a Guide: Contemporary Women's Travel Adventures*, is *autobiography*—and, as always, examines the ordinary things of life, which in the vision of Carol Shields become remarkable.*

1 I was in Tokyo to attend a conference, one of a thousand or so
delegates—and that probably was my problem: the plasticized
2 name card and the logo of my organization marked me as some-
one who desired only to be cheerfully accommodated.

3 The allotted two weeks had passed. A single day in Japan remained,
and at last I admitted to myself that I was disappointed. The terrible
banality of tourist desire invaded me like a kind of flu. Walking the
broad, busy boulevards, I caught myself looking too eagerly, too pre-
cisely, for minor cultural manifestations—the charming way the bank
teller bowed when presenting me with my bundle of cash, the colourful
plastic food in the windows of restaurants; these were items I was able
to record in my travel journal, touching them up in the way of desper-
ate travellers, shaping them into humorous or appreciative annotation
on the Japanese people and the exotic city they inhabited.

4 But Tokyo with its hotels and subways and department stores was a
modern industrial complex. Its citizens went to work in the morning,
earned money, and travelled home again at night. These homes, to
be sure, were impenetrable to me, but the busy working days bore
the same rhythms as those found in any large North American city.
The traffic noises, the scent of pollution, and the civility of people in
the street made me think of—home.

5 I had hoped for more; what traveller doesn't? Travelling is expen-
sive, exhausting, and often lonely—the cultural confusion, the acres
of concrete, the bitter coffee, the unreadable maps, and the rates of
exchange that are almost always unfavourable. And then, like a pun-
ishment at the end of the traveller's day, there waits a solitary room,
and a bed that, however comfortable, is not your bed. What makes all
this worth the effort is the shock of otherness that arrives from time
to time, rattling loose your bearings and making you suddenly alert
to an altered world. But Tokyo was determinedly polite, fulsomely
western, a city with a bland, smiling face, ready to welcome me not
on its terms but on my own.

6 I already know that the banquet that was to conclude the conference
would be a model of French cuisine. Seven courses, seven different
wines. No rice, no noodles, no sushi, no hot radish. It was to be held at
the famous Imperial Hotel, which was fifteen or twenty minutes' walk
from the somewhat less expensive hotel where I was staying.

I started out in good time. It was a soft spring evening, and the thought of a leisurely stroll was appealing. I would be able to look around one last time, breathe in a final impression that I could perhaps test against my accumulated disappointment, acquiring some fresh point of perception with which to colour and preserve my Japanese sojourn.

At that moment it began to rain. A few drops at first, then it came down in earnest, spotting the silk dinner suit I was wearing and threatening to flatten my carefully arranged hair. I looked about for a taxi or a roof to shelter under, but neither presented itself. The only thing to do, I decided, was to run as quickly as I could the rest of the way.

But a tall man was standing directly in front of me, a man with an umbrella. He was smiling tentatively, and gesturing, and his mouth was moving. But what was he saying? I wasn't sure, since the accent was unfamiliar, but it sounded like "Imperial Hotel?" With a question mark behind it. "Yes," I said, nodding and speaking with great deliberation, "Imperial Hotel," and at that he lifted his umbrella slightly, and invited me under.

The umbrella was large and black, resolutely standard, the sort of umbrella found in every city or backwater of the world. "Thank you," I said in Japanese—the only phrase I had mastered—but he only repeated what he had said earlier: "Imperial Hotel?" And tipped his head quizzically in an eastward direction. "Yes," I said again. And we began walking.

It seemed only polite to make an effort at conversation. Where was he from? Was he with the conference? Was he a stranger in Japan like myself? He shook his head, uncomprehending, and released a shower of words in an unidentifiable language. Now it was my turn to shake my head. After that, smiling, we continued our walk in a contained silence, as though we had each admitted to the other that language was absurd, that rhetoric was a laughable formality that could be set aside for this brief interval.

Suddenly careless of social taboos, and because it's difficult for a short woman to walk with a tall man under an umbrella, I took the stranger's arm. (Thinking about this later, I theorized that he must have gestured minutely with his elbow, inviting my intimacy.) Now, arms linked, we were able to walk together smoothly, stepping over

and around the puddles without losing our stride, pausing at traffic lights, stepping down from curbs.

12 We had arrived quickly at our congenial gliding pace, left foot, right foot, left foot again, a forward rhythm with a very slight sideways roll like a kind of swimming. Our mutually constrained tongues, the sound of the pelting rain, and our random possession of a random moment in time, seemed to seal us in a temporary vacuum that had nothing to do with Japan, nor with gender or age or with Hollywood notions about men and women walking in the rain. This was good walking, though, I knew that much—walking that transcended mere movement. Hypnotic walking. Walking toward the unimaginable. And I found myself wanting it to go on and on.

13 But there we suddenly were, at the brilliantly lit entrance of the Imperial Hotel, caught in a throng of people arriving and departing, people who had come from every corner of the globe, and trailing after them their separate languages, their lives, their ribbons of chance connection. The stranger with the umbrella abruptly disappeared. I looked around for him but was unable to recall his face, how he had been dressed. One minute he was there and the next minute he'd vanished, leaving me alone with that primary shiver of mystery that travellers, if they're lucky, hope to hang on to: the shock of the known and the unknown colliding in space.

EXPLORATIONS:

Carol Shields,

The Stone Diaries

Larry's Party

Swann

Coming to Canada (poems)

Marta Dvorak, ed., *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary* (literary criticism)

<http://opr.f.com/Shields>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Shields

http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~morton/Telecourse/Stone_Diaries/eb_on_carol_shields.htm

http://www.nwpassages.com/author_profile.asp?au_id=1234
<http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-shields-carol.asp>
http://www.cbc.ca/news/obit/shields_carol

STRUCTURE:

1. This *narrative* is really two in one: a summary of the author's stay in Tokyo so far, then a real-time narrative of her "encounter" with the stranger. How does the first prepare us for the second? Where does the first end and the second begin? Which of the two phases of *narrative* is more powerful, and why?
2. How does Shields' two-part structure of *narrative* exploit the device of *contrast*?

STYLE:

1. Carol Shields has been one of the nation's best-loved novelists. Does this nonfiction selection seem at all in the vein of fiction? If so, how?
2. Does Shields' **STYLE** excite admiration, or is it more like a clear window that shows us the events? Which approach do you prefer when you read? When you write? Why?
3. Point out the best **FIGURES OF SPEECH** in paragraph 12. Also analyze the power of the images that close this selection.

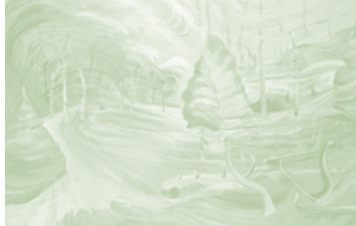
IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING:

1. "Encounter" narrates a small event, two strangers sharing an umbrella. In what ways, though, may this event be larger than it seems? What truths may it reveal about our lives in general?
2. Many writers seek sensational topics such as disaster, murder, adventure and romance. Were you attracted, though, by Shields' modest tale of "walking toward the unimaginable" (par. 12) with a stranger? If so, what does this show about focus and development in writing?
3. The two strangers of "Encounter" are thrown together by rain. When have you had close communication with strangers through

events such as floods or earthquakes; ice, rain or snow storms; accidents; or power blackouts? *Narrate* an incident to the class. What does it show about life?

4. Shields discovers “the terrible banality of tourist desire” (par. 2) in a far place that turns out to be “fulsomenly western, a city with a bland, smiling face, ready to welcome me not on its terms but on my own” (par. 4). Why do we become tourists? Why do we seek far away places? Are they disappearing? If so, why?
5. Can you communicate, as Shields did, with people who do not speak your language? If your family has immigrated, can your own grandparents speak your language? Suggest communication techniques to the class.
6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Shields’ closing words describe the mystery that travellers seek, “the shock of the known and the unknown colliding in space.” Freewrite on this topic for at least five minutes, never stopping the movement of your pen or keyboard, remembering a time when you felt this “shock.” Now write the quick discovery draft of a narrative based on this material. Let your words cool off for a day, then take stock: Does your introduction prepare us for the story? If not, add. Have you described the persons and the place well enough to help us live the story too? If not, add SENSE IMAGES. Do TRANSITIONS speed us on? If not, add. And does the action sweep us towards a CLIMAX? If not, rearrange. Last of all, check for spelling and punctuation before you print off your best version.*

Note: See also the Topics for Writing on the Online Learning Centre at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/conrad.



PATRICK LANE

There Is a Season*

Patrick Lane had always loved gardening, in the mild climate of Vancouver Island. But in 1999 when his worsening drug and alcohol habits threatened to kill him, he took a new step: he would spend a whole year of rehab in his garden, tending the plants, observing the birds and animals and insects, putting his life in order. It worked: the garden saved his life. Then in 2004 he published an account of that beautiful year, There Is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden. From it comes our selection.

Lane had many issues to work on during the therapy of his garden year. Born in 1939 in Nelson, British Columbia, he grew up suffering the anger of a brutal father, who was himself later murdered. After high school Lane worked in the logging industry, as a choker, Cat skinner, first aid officer, trucker and sawmill worker, jobs that convinced him working people are exploited cogs in the industrial machine. When in the sixties Lane began to write poetry, readers noticed his dark vision of solitude, violence and death, informed by his early experiences. For decades Lane was a rolling stone, living in places as far away as South America, and serving as writer in residence and teacher at many universities, such as Concordia, Victoria, Toronto and York. By now he has published over 20 books, including Poems New and Selected (Governor General's Award, 1978), Selected Poems (1987), Syllable of Stone: Selected Poems (2005) and Last Water Song (2007).

*We have given this free-standing but untitled selection the title of the book it came from, *There Is a Season*.

1 **A** small, thin spider peers over the lip of a Mexican orange bush leaf. He wants to pluck the dream-catcher's^o strings. Below him is a cluster of fragrant white blossoms. Their scent is citrus, a slice of orange perfume that cuts the air. Attached to one of the petals is a single strand of webbing. It is tied to the leaf by six tiny anchors of thread. The main filament stretches over a gap, an opening the light breeze moves through. The small spider's long legs touch the leaf's glossy surface for a moment and then he pulls himself up out of his hiding and crosses the leaf to the flower and places the tip of one of his long legs on the string of web.

2 He is a male orb-weaver spider and across from him in space is the dream-catcher of a female. She is huge, her body swollen from months of steady feeding. She has moved her web around the front garden, sometimes among the bright, thorned leaves of the holly, sometimes in the lilac or the ivy that shoots out from the walls of the house, its berries slowly turning purple in the fall sun, anywhere insects gather to feed or dance in the bright air. For the last week, her web has floated here, anchored by the Mexican orange, the laurel, and the holly. It hangs at just the right height to catch the last bees, flies, and other tiny flying things of the season. She rebuilds her web once a day, usually in early evening after the sun has set, but sometimes in the morning if some passing creature has torn it in the night. It takes her an hour.

3 Each web has been a little larger as she has grown larger, and now it is almost fifty centimetres in diameter. It is a spiral nebula, a swirl that is a massive killing ground. In its lower left quadrant hang the rolled-up carapaces of a wasp and a crane fly. She injected a killing poison into them earlier in the day and it has turned their internal organs to liquid. She will drink them dry when she gets hungry again. Right now she hangs in the centre of the web from her two back legs. Deep in her abdomen lie hundreds of unfertilized eggs. The female and her unborn offspring are waiting for male sperm to bring them to life. Her front legs rest on walking strings, the long filaments of web that radiate from the centre. Only the circling strands are sticky.

^odream-catcher: In the Ojibwa tradition, a small willow hoop enclosing a loose net. Sometimes called a "dream snare," it hangs on the wall over the beds of children, to catch and deter nightmares. Dream-catchers resemble the spiral wheel-shaped web of a spider, and in fact, in Ojibwa are called *asabikeshiinh*, meaning "spider."

The straight support strings are what she walks and runs on when prey crashes into her aerial trap.

Her huge abdomen is beautiful with shades of grey and brown and there are two pale stripes that arch up from her head and over the high curve of her back. They are shocks of light, a pale yellow-white against the deeper browns and tans. She has survived the wind, the drought, and the rare rains. She has also survived the birds of spring who eat young spiders. No bird would touch her now. She too large, too formidable. Her eyes are bright with a cold, steady patience. I have stared into them and tried to see into her arachnid mind but what stared back at me was nothing I knew or understood.

The male spider's body is small, one-tenth the size of the female's. His legs are much longer than his abdomen and they move in front of him, constantly testing the surfaces and textures that confront him. As I watch, he places one of his two longest legs on the thin strand of web and, bracing himself, plucks the string. The bit of webbing vibrates and he plucks it again like a guitar or violin that has one pure note.

The vibrations travel up the anchor string to the web and when they reach her the female tenses. She comes fully alive in a startled vigilance. She turns quickly to face the direction his message comes from. It *is* a message. It is unlike the thrashing struggle of an insect caught in her web. She knows this song. It is one buried deep inside her, passed on to her by her mother and all the mothers before her.

The male plucks intermittently for a full five minutes or more and then, not feeling a response, climbs out on the anchor string and slowly, carefully begins to walk along it toward the far dream-catcher. As he gets closer to the perimeter the female rushes to where the anchor string leaves the last circle and stops. The male, feeling her dash, backs away down the anchor and stops as well. He turns to face the female and then plucks the string again. She races toward him and he drops on his own filament and hangs below.

He has carried his escape webbing in a gathered ball beneath him. As she came toward him he stuck it to her anchor and dropped. He swings now below her. She stares down and then retreats to the edge of her web where she waits for five minutes before walking back to

its centre. She hangs there upside down but she is tense for a long time. Finally she relaxes and the male spider climbs up his rope to the anchor string, his escape web gathered in a frizzy ball under his body.

9 He walks slowly up the strand and almost touches the outer perimeter when she attacks. The male drops down again, this time only a hand's breadth from the edge. She squats above him. This time she stays longer. Below her the male swings like a living pendulum in the warm, autumn air. She rises up and moves her body about as if uncomfortable, as if the muscles in her legs are stiff. Then, turning, she makes her way back to her perch.

10 Again, the male climbs back up and walks the anchor to the perimeter. Once there he reaches out with his long leg and plucks the string again. The vibrations are stronger now and it only takes two or three plucks for the female to return. Once again he drops away.

11 This goes on for almost an hour. Each time the male returns he advances a little farther down the gossamer string, and now he is inside the dream-catcher. Each time she rushes at him she moves more slowly and now he doesn't drop away but only retreats to the outside edge until she has returned to her perch.

12 Inside the female are her eggs and inside the male is a small package of sperm. His job, his life's purpose, is to deposit the sperm package into a vent on the side of her abdomen and so fertilize her eggs. It is a difficult and dangerous procedure for she sees him as the source of two things, food and sperm. His job is to get her to sit absolutely still so he can deposit his sperm and then escape. This is not so simple as it sounds. She will poison him in a millisecond once the sperm is delivered. He knows that. It's why he's been so careful, but he is implacable. He knows what he has to do.

13 He sits very close to her now and begins his music in earnest. He plays her a tune, his longest legs alternating on two strings. The whole of this long courtship has been like an opera, a complex and beautiful ballet. This last musical interlude takes place just before his last advance. She has become quieter where she hangs. Her legs have relaxed. Perhaps she is entranced by his playing.

14 Now I understand why his legs are so long. He comes up to her and touches her legs. They tense and then, under his repeated, alternating drumming and stroking, they relax again. His legs are

long in order to allow him to escape if she attacks. The male continues touching her until he can reach past her legs and head to her abdomen. He strokes her flanks, her huge, distended belly. His legs caress her. He is close now, close enough for her to kill him but she is stilled by his stroking, stilled by his gentle touch, his long caresses. She has fallen into a reverie, some place of quiet beauty all her own. Her many eyes stare into his with perfect stillness.

His penis is at the end of his longest leg and as he strokes her he comes closer and closer to her vent. He strokes and strokes and then, deftly, quickly, he slips the tip of his penis-leg into her. 15

Instantly, he withdraws all of his legs. He is going to drop down his escape line. As he pulls back, she transforms from the benign and sleepy female into a killer. Both things happen at once. She is suddenly pure energy, swift and sure. She grabs hold of one of his long legs. He twists and falls away beneath her, leaving his leg behind in her jaws. As he falls she stares down at him, then she drops the leg. 16

The male has only seven legs instead of eight, but he has successfully placed his sperm in her and has done so without becoming a meal. He swings a moment or two longer, then strings out more filament from his spinners and drops down to a laurel berry. There he sits as if exhausted from the long ordeal he has just gone through. It has taken almost two hours. His dance is done and he has his life. Above him the female sits in her web. She too is tired. He waits a moment and then, just before moving away from the huge dream-catcher above him, he plucks the filament of web that still attaches him to the female above. He plucks it three times, but there is no response. This last plucking seems a kind of farewell song. He cuts himself away from his falling string and climbs off the laurel berry onto a glossy green leaf and then under it. 17

I peer under the leaf and see him hanging there in the shade. Then I peer in close at the huge female. Her eyes stare out from above her slowly moving jaws. Soon, she will attach her fertilized egg sac to a nearby leaf. Perhaps a dozen or so of the hundreds of their spiderlings will survive next year to grow as formidable as their mother, as wily and quick as their father. I will watch for them and if I catch a fly or moth I will toss it living into one of their webs. It will be my gift to one of the great mothers of the garden. 18

EXPLORATIONS:

Patrick Lane,

There Is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden

Poems, New and Selected

What the Stones Remember

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

David Thoreau, *Walden*

<http://patricklane.ca>

<http://www.canadianarachnology.org>

<http://www.ojibway.ca/spiders.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orb-weaver_spider

<http://amonline.net.au/spiders/culture/history.htm>

STRUCTURE:

1. Although Patrick Lane presents his account of mating spiders in mostly chronological order, there are places where he looks briefly backward (flashbacks) or briefly forward (flashforwards). Point out five such examples in his *narrative*.
2. Readers like to be “swept away” by a strong *narrative*. One way writers achieve this effect is to use many TRANSITION words and expressions. Find at least ten places in this narrative where time signals such as “then,” “soon,” “right now” or “suddenly” speed the reader on.
3. Read Lane’s final paragraph aloud in class. What technique of closing does he use here to underline the importance of his subject?

STYLE:

1. Hold your book at arm’s length, and look at Lane’s *narrative*. Is it made mostly of big words or little words? In Shakespeare’s best-known passages do we see mostly big words or little words? In your own essays do you try for mostly big words or little words? Which way is best? Which is used more by poets such as Patrick Lane? Which is used more by bureaucrats? And why?

2. Would you expect an essay on spiders to be FORMAL and OBJECTIVE, as in a scientific article? What is your reaction when in paragraph 14 the male spider “strokes her flanks, her huge, distended belly. His legs caress her. He is close now, close enough for her to kill him but she is stilled by his stroking, stilled by his gentle touch, his long caresses”? Or when in paragraph 16 “She grabs hold of one of his long legs. He twists and falls away beneath her, leaving his leg behind in her jaws. As he falls she stares down at him, then she drops the leg.” Can nature writing be racy, scary, erotic and even violent? Would this express the realities of life in the garden? Or should it be more like the essay about paper and foam cups, by scientist Martin Hocking, in Chapter 9 of this book? Or does it all depend on who is the intended reader? Describe the AUDIENCE that poet Patrick Lane was probably writing for.
3. Why does Lane write in the present tense, when the events he *narrates* happened at some time in the past?
4. Paragraph 2 refers to a “dance,” 5 to “a guitar or violin,” paragraph 13 to “music” and “opera” and paragraph 17 to a “farewell song.” What FIGURES OF SPEECH are at work in these comparisons? And how do they enrich Lane’s view of life in the garden?

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING:

1. As a recovering alcoholic and cocaine addict, Patrick Lane chose his Vancouver Island garden as the place to reclaim his life. Why do so many other people garden as well? Are the reasons economic? Recreational? Spiritual? Give examples.
2. Lane chooses what seems like a very small subject: the mating dance of two spiders. In what ways, though, may this subject be larger than it seems?
3. Do you dread spiders and insects in general? Why? Look at the other side: give at least five examples of insects helping us.
4. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Is the outdoors a healer, as well as a place of fear and danger? Tell of a time when nature healed you. Close your eyes to recall the event, then take a page of quick notes. Now choose the right place to begin the story, and the right place to end it. Narrate the event, moving quickly, not stopping now to fix little things. The next day look your*

narrative over. *Have you tried present tense, like Lane, to make things seem to happen right now? Have you used TRANSITION signals, like Lane, to speed the action on? Have you described how things looked, felt, sounded, smelled and maybe even tasted? Edit for all this. Then after checking your punctuation and spelling, read your best version to the class.*

Note: See also the Topics for Writing on the Online Learning Centre at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/conrad.



CAROL GEDDES

Growing Up Native

Since Carol Geddes tells her own life story in the narrative that follows, we will not repeat it all here. Born into the security of her Tlingit First Nations family in the wilds of the Yukon, she was six when she first knew her country's majority culture and began to see the problems it causes for Native people. Since then she has spent her life integrating these two worlds. She celebrates the current "renaissance" of interest in Native culture, yet also values the rest of North American life. "We need our culture," she writes, "but there's no reason why we can't preserve it and have an automatic washing machine and a holiday in Mexico, as well." Hers is a success story. Despite the obstacles, she completed a university degree in English and philosophy (Carleton, 1978), did graduate studies in communications at McGill, and is today a successful filmmaker and spokesperson for her people. In addition to her films Place for Our People (1981), Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief (National Film Board, 1986) and Picturing a People: George Johnston, Tlingit Photographer (NFB, 1997), she has produced some 25 videos on the lives and culture of aboriginal people in Canada. Geddes is a producer at Studio One of the National Film Board, and has taught other filmmakers at the Banff Centre for the Arts. She has also been a Director of the Yukon Human Rights Commission, the Yukon Heritage Resources Board and the Women's Television Network Foundation, and is the first Northerner and first Native Person to be a Director of the Canada Council. In her spare time she does wilderness hiking and fishing in the Yukon, where she lives. Our selection, from homemakers magazine of October 1990, won the National Magazine Awards Foundation Silver Award.

1 I remember it was cold. We were walking through a swamp near our home in the Yukon bush. Maybe it was fall and moose-hunting season. I don't know. I think I was about four years old at the time. The muskeg was too springy to walk on, so people were taking turns carrying me—passing me from one set of arms to another. The details about where we were are vague, but the memory of those arms and the feeling of acceptance I had is one of the most vivid memories of my childhood. It didn't matter who was carrying me—there was security in every pair of arms. That response to children is typical of the native community. It's the first thing I think of when I cast my mind back to the Yukon bush, where I was born and lived with my family.

2 I was six years old when we moved out of the bush, first to Teslin, where I had a hint of the problems native people face, then to Whitehorse, where there was unimaginable racism. Eventually I moved to Ottawa and Montreal, where I further discovered that to grow up native in Canada is to feel the sting of humiliation and the boot of discrimination. But it is also to experience the enviable security of an extended family and to learn to appreciate the richness of the heritage and traditions of a culture most North Americans have never been lucky enough to know. As a film-maker, I have tried to explore these contradictions, and our triumph over them, for the half-million aboriginals who are part of the tide of swelling independence of the First Nations today.

3 But I'm getting ahead of myself. If I'm to tell the story of what it's like to grow up native in northern Canada, I have to go back to the bush where I was born, because there's more to my story than the hurtful stereotyping that depicts Indian people as drunken welfare cases. Our area was known as 12-mile (it was 12 miles from another tiny village). There were about 40 people living there—including 25 kids, eight of them my brothers and sisters—in a sort of family compound. Each family had its own timber plank house for sleeping, and there was one large common kitchen area with gravel on the ground and a tent frame over it. Everybody would go there and cook meals together. In summer, my grandmother always had a smudge fire going to smoke fish and tan moose hides. I can remember the cosy warmth of the fire, the smell of good food, and always having

someone to talk to. We kids had built-in playmates and would spend hours running in the bush, picking berries, building rafts on the lake and playing in abandoned mink cages.

One of the people in my village tells a story about the day the old lifestyle began to change. He had been away hunting in the bush for about a month. On his way back, he heard a strange sound coming from far away. He ran up to the crest of a hill, looked over the top of it and saw a bulldozer. He had never seen or heard of such a thing before and he couldn't imagine what it was. We didn't have magazines or newspapers in our village, and the people didn't know that the Alaska Highway was being built as a defence against a presumed Japanese invasion during the Second World War. That was the beginning of the end of the Teslin Tlingit people's way of life. From that moment on, nothing turned back to the way it was. Although there were employment opportunities for my father and uncles, who were young men at the time, the speed and force with which the Alaska Highway was rammed through the wilderness caused tremendous upheaval for Yukon native people.

It wasn't as though we'd never experienced change before. The Tlingit Nation, which I belong to, arrived in the Yukon from the Alaskan coast around the turn of the century. They were the middlemen and women between the Russian traders and the Yukon inland Indians. The Tlingit gained power and prestige by trading European products such as metal goods and cloth for the rich and varied furs so much in fashion in Europe. The Tlingit controlled Yukon trading because they controlled the trading routes through the high mountain passes. When trading ceased to be an effective means of survival, my grandparents began raising wild mink in cages. Mink prices were really high before and during the war, but afterwards the prices went plunging down. So, although the mink pens were still there when I was a little girl, my father mainly worked on highway construction and hunted in the bush. The Yukon was then, and still is in some ways, in a transitional period—from living off the land to getting into a European wage-based economy.

As a young child, I didn't see the full extent of the upheaval. I remember a lot of togetherness, a lot of happiness while we lived in the bush. There's a very strong sense of family in the native

community, and a fondness for children, especially young children. Even today, it's like a special form of entertainment if someone brings a baby to visit. That sense of family is the one thing that has survived all the incredible difficulties native people have had. Throughout a time of tremendous problems, the extended family system has somehow lasted, providing a strong circle for people to survive in. When parents were struggling with alcoholism or had to go away to find work, when one of the many epidemics swept through the community, or when a marriage broke up and one parent left, aunts, uncles and grandparents would try to fill those roles. It's been very important to me in terms of emotional support to be able to rely on my extended family. There are still times when such support keeps me going.

7 Life was much simpler when we lived in the bush. Although we were poor and wore the same clothes all year, we were warm enough and had plenty to eat. But even as a youngster, I began to be aware of some of the problems we would face later on. Travelling missionaries would come and impose themselves on us, for example. They'd sit at our campfire and read the Bible to us and lecture us about how we had to live a Christian life. I remember being very frightened by stories we heard about parents sending their kids away to live with white people who didn't have any children. We thought those people were mean and that if we were bad, we'd be sent away, too. Of course, that was when social workers were scooping up native children and adopting them out to white families in the south. The consequences were usually disastrous for the children who were taken away—alienation, alcoholism and suicide, among other things. I knew some of those kids. The survivors are still struggling to recover.

8 The residential schools were another source of misery for the kids. Although I didn't have to go, my brothers and sisters were there. They told stories about having their hair cut off in case they were carrying head lice, and of being forced to do hard chores without enough food to eat. They were told that the Indian culture was evil, that Indian people were bad, that their only hope was to be Christian. They had to stand up and say things like "I've found the Lord," when a teacher told them to speak. Sexual abuse was rampant in the residential school system.

By the time we moved to Whitehorse, I was excited about the idea of living in what I thought of as a big town. I'd had a taste of the outside world from books at school in Teslin (a town of 250 people), and I was tremendously curious about what life was like. I was hungry for experiences such as going to the circus. In fact, for a while, I was obsessed with stories and pictures about the circus, but then when I was 12 and saw my first one, I was put off by the condition and treatment of the animals.

Going to school in Whitehorse was a shock. The clash of native and white values was confusing and frightening. Let me tell you a story. The older boys in our community were already accomplished hunters and fishermen, but since they had to trap beaver in the spring and hunt moose in the fall, and go out trapping in the winter as well, they missed a lot of school. We were all in one classroom and some of my very large teenage cousins had to sit squeezed into little desks. These guys couldn't read very well. We girls had been in school all along, so, of course, we were better readers. One day the teacher was trying to get one of the older boys to read. She was typical of the teachers at that time, insensitive and ignorant of cultural complexities. In an increasingly loud voice, she kept commanding him to "Read it, read it." He couldn't. He sat there completely still, but I could see that he was breaking into a sweat. The teacher then said, "Look, she can read it," and she pointed to me, indicating that I should stand up and read. For a young child to try to show up an older boy is wrong and totally contrary to native cultural values, so I refused. She told me to stand up and I did. My hands were trembling as I held my reader. She yelled at me to read and when I didn't she smashed her pointing stick on the desk to frighten me. In terror, I wet my pants. As I stood there fighting my tears of shame, she said I was disgusting and sent me home. I had to walk a long distance through the bush by myself to get home. I remember feeling this tremendous confusion, on top of my humiliation. We were always told the white teachers knew best, and so we had to do whatever they said at school. And yet I had a really strong sense of receiving mixed messages about what I was supposed to do in the community and what I was supposed to do at school.

Pretty soon I hated school. Moving to a predominantly white high school was even worse. We weren't allowed to join anything the white

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kids started. We were the butt of jokes because of our secondhand clothes and moose meat sandwiches. We were constantly being rejected. The prevailing attitude was that Indians were stupid. When it was time to make course choices in class—between typing and science, for example—they didn't even ask the native kids, they just put us all in typing. You get a really bad image of yourself in a situation like that. I bought into it. I thought we were awful. The whole experience was terribly undermining. Once, my grandmother gave me a pretty little pencil box. I walked into the classroom one day to find the word "squaw" carved on it. That night I burned it in the wood stove. I joined the tough crowd and by the time I was 15 years old, I was more likely to be leaning against the school smoking a cigarette than trying to join in. I was burned out from trying to join the system. The principal told my father there was no point in sending me back to school so, with a Grade 9 education, I started to work at a series of menial jobs.

12 Seven years later something happened to me that would change my life forever. I had moved to Ottawa with a man and was working as a waitress in a restaurant. One day, a friend invited me to her place for coffee. While I was there, she told me she was going to university in the fall and showed me her reading list. I'll never forget the minutes that followed. I was feeling vaguely envious of her and, once again, inferior. I remember taking the paper in my hand, seeing the books on it and realizing, Oh, my God, I've read these books! It hit me like a thunderclap. I was stunned that books I had read were being read in university. University was for white kids, not native kids. We were too stupid, we didn't have the kind of mind it took to do those things. My eyes moved down the list, and my heart started beating faster and faster as I suddenly realized I could go to university, too!

13 My partner at the time was a loving supportive man who helped me in every way. I applied to the university immediately as a mature student but when I had to write Grade 9 on the application, I was sure they'd turn me down. They didn't. I graduated five years later, earning a bachelor of arts in English and philosophy (with distinction).

14 It was while I was studying for a master's degree in communications at McGill a few years later that I was approached to direct my

second film (the first was a student film). *Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief* (a National Film Board production) depicts the struggle of a number of native women—one who began her adult life on welfare, a government minister, a chief, a fisherwoman and Canada's first native woman lawyer. The film is about overcoming obstacles and surviving. It's the story of most native people.

Today, there's a glimmer of hope that more of us native people will overcome the obstacles that have tripped us up ever since we began sharing this land. Some say our cultures are going through a renaissance. Maybe that's true. Certainly there's a renewed interest in native dancing, acting and singing, and in other cultural traditions. Even indigenous forms of government are becoming strong again. But we can't forget that the majority of native people live in urban areas and continue to suffer from alcohol and drug abuse and the plagues of a people who have lost their culture and have become lost themselves. And the welfare system is the insidious glue that holds together the machine of oppression of native people. 15

Too many non-native people have refused to try to understand the issues behind our land claims. They make complacent pronouncements such as "Go back to your bows and arrows and fish with spears if you want aboriginal rights. If not, give it up and assimilate into white Canadian culture." I don't agree with that. We need our culture, but there's no reason why we can't preserve it and have an automatic washing machine and a holiday in Mexico, as well. 16

The time has come for native people to make our own decisions. We need to have self-government. I have no illusions that it will be smooth sailing—there will be trial and error and further struggle. And if that means crawling before we can stand up and walk, so be it. We'll have to learn through experience. 17

While we're learning, we have a lot to teach and give to the world—a holistic philosophy, a way of living with the earth, not disposing of it. It is critical that we all learn from the elders that an individual is not more important than a forest; we know that we're here to live on and with the earth, not to subdue it. 18

The wheels are in motion for a revival, for change in the way native people are taking their place in Canada. I can see that we're 19

equipped, we have the tools to do the work. We have an enormous number of smart, talented, moral Indian people. It's thrilling to be a part of this movement.

20 Someday, when I'm an elder, I'll tell the children the stories: about the bush, about the hard times, about the renaissance, and especially about the importance of knowing your place in your nation.

EXPLORATIONS:

Carol Geddes, *Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief* (NFB film, 29 min.)

Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie, eds., *An Anthology of Canadian Native Writers in English*

Penny Petrone, ed., *First People, First Voices* (anthology of writings by First Nations people in Canada)

Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story* (interviews with Native Canadian women)

Brian Maracle, *Back on the Rez: Finding the Way Home* (memoir)

Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (memoir)

Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams* (anthropology)

Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (novel)

http://www.nfb.ca/portraits/carol_geddes/en

<http://users.ap.net/~chenae/natlink.html>

<http://www.nativeweb.org>

http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012001_e.html

STRUCTURE:

1. "I remember it was cold," says Geddes in her opening sentence, and "Someday, when I'm an elder," she says in her closing sentence. Most *narratives* in this chapter relate one incident, but "Growing Up Native" tells the highs and lows of a whole life. Has Geddes attempted too much? Or has she got her message across by focussing on the right moments of her life? Cite examples to defend your answer.
2. Did you have the impression of being *told* a story, rather than reading it on the page? Cite passages where "Growing Up Native"

comes across as oral history, as a tale told in person. Why do you think Geddes may have taken this approach?

3. Does Geddes *narrate* in straight chronological order? Point out any flashbacks or other departures from the pattern.
4. Read paragraph 12 aloud. Analyze its power as a TRANSITION between Geddes' past and present.

STYLE:

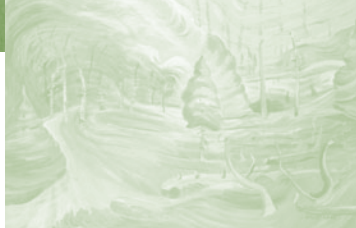
1. Geddes' paragraphs are well organized: most begin with a topic sentence, then clearly develop it with examples. Identify five paragraphs that follow this pattern.
2. Why are paragraph 10 and several others so long? Why is paragraph 20 so short?
3. In paragraph 2 Geddes tells of "the sting of humiliation and the boot of discrimination." Find other good FIGURES OF SPEECH in paragraphs 9, 12 and 15.

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING:

1. Despite the hardships of living in the bush, does Geddes' childhood sound like a good one? If so, why? Give *examples*.
2. Geddes exposes various ways in which First Nations people have been STEREOTYPED. Point out the worst of these.
3. The white high school of paragraph 11 routinely put native students in typing instead of science. How do the high schools of your province advise minority students as to course selection and career? Is a minority or working-class student shut out from opportunity, or encouraged to try? Give *examples* from your own observation.
4. Geddes envisions First Nations people keeping their culture, yet also having washing machines and holidays in Mexico (par. 16). Discuss techniques for achieving such goals in the urban setting where most Native people now live.
5. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** Interview someone who either grew up long ago, or who is from a culture very different from yours, to hear her or his life story. Tape the interview, then at home play it back, taking notes. Now choose either one main event of this narrative (such as the scene in which Geddes realizes she too can go to university), OR choose to give the overall sweep

of the story. Also choose whether to just assemble the best excerpts from the tape to put in writing, OR to summarize the key events in your own words. Load your first draft with the best examples you have. Stay mainly in time order, but do use a flashback or flashforward if they enhance the story. Finally edit your version for things like spelling and punctuation. Read it aloud to the class. If there is time, also play the interview so the class can see how you chose and arranged the material of your narrative.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing on the Online Learning Centre at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/conrad.



PROCESS IN WRITING: GUIDELINES

Follow at least some of these steps in the act of writing your narrative (your teacher may suggest which ones).

1. Search your memory, or search any diary or journal that you keep, for an incident that might develop one of our topics.
2. When you have chosen an incident, test it by freewriting nonstop for at least five minutes. If the results are good, use the best parts in your first draft. If the results are weak, try another topic.
3. Write your discovery draft rapidly, letting the story just flow out onto the paper or the computer screen. Do not stop now to fix things like spelling and punctuation, for you will lose momentum. Consider narrating in the *present* tense, making the action seem to happen *now*.
4. Look this draft over: Does it begin and end at just the right places, narrating the event itself but omitting parts that don't matter? If you see deadwood, chop it out.
5. Now add more SENSE IMAGES to heighten realism. Add more time signals, such as "first," "next," "then," "suddenly" and "at last," to speed the action.
6. Read your narrative to friends, family members or classmates. Does it sound good? Revise awkward passages. Does it communicate with your AUDIENCE? Revise any part that does not.
7. Finally, edit for spelling, punctuation and other aspects of correctness before printing off your best version.