



Beyond the Five Paragraph Essay

Kimberly Hill Campbell, Kristi Latimer

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Love it or hate it, the five-paragraph essay is perhaps the most frequently taught form of writing in classrooms of yesterday and today. But have you ever actually seen five-paragraph essays outside of school walls? Have you ever found it in business writing, journalism, nonfiction, or any other genres that exist in the real world? Kimberly Hill Campbell and Kristi Latimer reviewed the research on the effectiveness of the form as a teaching tool and discovered that the research does not support the five-paragraph formula. In fact, research shows that the formula restricts creativity, emphasizes structure rather than content, does not improve standardized test scores, inadequately prepares students for college writing, and results in vapid writing. In *Beyond the Five-Paragraph Essay*, Kimberly and Kristi show you how to reclaim the literary essay and create a program that encourages thoughtful writing in response to literature. They provide numerous strategies that stimulate student thinking, value unique insight, and encourage lively, personal writing, including the following:

- Close reading (which is the basis for writing about literature)
- Low-stakes writing options that support students' thinking as they read
- Collaboration in support of discussion, debate, and organizational structures that support writing as exploration
- A focus on students' writing process as foundational to content development and structure
- The use of model texts to write in the form of the literature students are reading and analyzing

The goal of reading and writing about literature is to push and challenge our students' thinking. We want students to know that their writing can convey something important: a unique view to share, defend, prove, delight, discover, and inspire. If we want our students to be more engaged, skilled writers, we need to move beyond the five-paragraph essay.

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