Alex—

Perhaps of all the portfolio cover letters I read, yours spoke to first year students as a fellow student with struggles they will recognize. I appreciated—though I didn’t at first see—your distinction between personal writing in, say, a journal, and the kind of pre-writing you might do for an academic paper. You suggest to them that writing before you write, essentially, about your topic, your plan, your idea, your research, will produce a better paper. I would of course agree. You don’t talk about the revision quote or the criticism quotes. I would have been interested in seeing what you had to say about those. You do, however, talk about the Hemingway—and I appreciate the Dickens reference. Because just like Dickens was paid by the words, students are too sort of. Students imagine that length is the goal and not really good information of any academic paper they write, but it is not the case. Only time and a lot of reading will help them to see it.

Your selection of your reading journals was thoughtful and interesting to read. It is exactly the point of your reading notes that you should learn something about what to do in your own writing from what we read. Your reading notes have at times been quite brief and/or not reflected the content of what we read. These were strong in comparison. Your writer’s notebook seems to be a bit of a lost cause with you Alex. The decision to switch from the fountain pen/journal seemed like a good idea, but it has not resulted in a lot of product. I don’t really know what to say about that beyond this. You’ve got some absences, watch that. You seem to do work you like and work you know you absolutely have to do, but it’s pretty clear when you aren’t all that interested.

I don’t know if I get everything I should get about your final project, but I think I like what I’ve read. I’m going to suggest you stick to a short story for this project. I think that a novel is a lot to think about and a short story will help you develop your characters, and this seems like a piece that revolves around character. I very much liked reading about the process of this assignment. I like that it comes of a real life experience with your brother and some ideas you had about a story, and how you brought it all together. I think it’s got great promise. I am not really interested in you reading craft writing (the Stephen King you mention), but more *examples* of what you want to write—this strikes me as a kind of fantasy, ghost-story kind of piece. I was wondering if it might work as young adult? I say this because there is not a lot out there for young boys to read, and this sounds like a story that would have appeal. Something to think about. I look forward to seeing drafts in your writer’s notebook.

Your revision project: I think this is a very solid and competent undergraduate paper. Having said that, I didn’t know why you selected the text you selected or what you thought of it or what *you* wanted to do with it until the portfolio letter. I see my job as to help you move this paper from undergraduate to as close to graduate as possible. You say you don’t want to work on this anymore, so this will not really apply, but if you wanted to try to submit this to the *Undergraduate Review* I think you could. If you did revise, I’d want you to focus on three things. First off, and this is easy, your habit of positioning the stanza all together at the top of each section is a not how a professional scholar would do it. They would employ the appropriate parts of the poem next to the explication that it related too. And it wouldn’t hurt to spend more time—a bit more with the explication.The bigger thing is that in a graduate level or professional paper, it is the sources that distinguish it from lesser papers. I think that if you are serious about bringing up the level of this paper, you should try to bring in other sources. We could talk about informational and bibliographic footnotes. The would help thicken this argument. Connected to the above, you talk in your opening about a particular zeitgeist of the Irish. While I don’t doubt you, the fact that you just say it does not inspire confidence. This opening argument is crucial to your paper. For this to be of professional quality, you must draw on the writers and theorists that help you make a statement about an entire nation and people.

Semester Grade So Far: B

Colin—

This is a tough letter to write. As I look at what you’ve turned in to me here, as I look at what my grade book for class indicates you’ve turned in in terms of writer’s notebooks and reader’s notes, I am at a loss for how to proceed. Factoring in absences, and the limited work on this portfolio, I have some concern about whether it is possible for you to pass this class.

I know that you had computer problems this semester that made it difficult for you to find and revise any of your writing. But that problem seems to be the only thing that you’ve solved. I will have more to say on your revision later in this letter. But right now I need to address the fact that you have not turned in a single writer’s notebook nor a single reading as a writer’s notes. I can understand how having no computer of your own might make getting this work done more difficult, but it would certainly not be impossible. I can not at this moment understand your decision to simply not turn in any work from over half of the semester. This is compounded by absences—not excessive, but, given your situation, not helpful. Additionally, there has been nothing in your in-class performance—not in conversation, not in in-class writings—that leads me to believe you’ve done any of the work for class.

This portfolio does not include, obviously, work you did not do. It also, therefore, does not include any of the reflective work on why you selected certain writer’s notebooks or reader’s notes. On the other hand, it also does not include any information on your revision decisions, a plan for a final project, or a portfolio cover letter. All of these things were possible to include. So I’m not clear why you didn’t turn them in. Colin, this is a lot to detail in a letter, and I do not write all this to be cruel, but, rather, to articulate what is missing so that we are both on the same page and you understand the basis for my evaluation.

You’ve included here a draft and a revision of your piece on *McTeague.* I am going to direct my comments not so much on how you revised, but on the product of that process. I think that you are developing intriguing ideas in the opening paragraphs about several ideas—if characters have free-will; if the characters exercise it; if the characters are ruled by “obsessive natures”; if the characters have any sort of self-control. This is a more complex argument than you are starting to develop in the original. I do feel, though, that you are using these terms and ideas interchangeably, and that doesn’t work. Self-control and free-will are not at all the same. Understanding how they work together is quite intriguing, and brining them into conversation with each other as a way to discuss the characters could be a very mature, scholarly paper. If I had one more revision out of you I’d want you to more carefully define terms and develop the relationship among terms in your introduction. Your organization suffers in the revision a bit because you are developing these big ideas—your second and third paragraphs seem un-anchored as written and positioned, though I can easily see how they could come together to develop more precisely your point. I appreciate the time you spend with Marcus as a character in the body of the text. I do think, though, that in your discussion you move from Marcus having free will to Marcus being ruled by some more animalistic traits, but this blurs together in the actual text. I think this goes back to setting up your argument, defining your terms, and, then, tweaking the transitional sentences that are rather sparse in the text to connect the shifts in Marcus’s behavior to this more complex thesis. I think that the most mature writing happens in the final three paragraphs of the paper. The focus is tight; the definitions clear; the connections made. I don’t know what your plan is for this text, but with some work at the beginning, I think you could submit it to *The Undergraduate Review.*

Semester Grade So Far: D

Kelly—

My first year students would be well-served by reading your cover letter. I appreciated not only what you said, but how you said it, particularly the way you write in response to that opening quote. You get at how we write to figure things out—writing as a way of knowing—that I want so much for my students to understand. I liked how you talked about the transformation of an ideas from brain to page particularly. I think my students would respond with sympathy to your second quote. I don’t know that they think writing is ever fun, but I think they think that successful writers find it easy to do—which is exactly wrong. You bring together that second and third quote nicely by talking about the process of writing and the role revision plays in it. You talked about the reader in response to the next quote—both listening to them and not—and that’s a tough lesson for new writers to learn. I *loved* your curtain/wall imagery. That’s exactly right. You don’t entirely need the curtains but you always need good walls. And sometimes when the walls are nice enough you don’t need the curtains at all to pretty them up. They stand on their own. Good letter!

I could read your reflection letters all day long. They are very serious and thoughtful. I like what you say about understanding more what nonfiction is. Reading more non-fiction will help you develop a working understanding of the genre. That’s one way to get fresh ideas about the piece. I was interested in what you had to say about the ending—about being in a new place. That says something about the *genre* as much a it says something about your text. Nonfiction is about reflection and about understanding events, and so you might consider how you might read the ending now, and write about that. A second thing I noticed is what you said about growing up in an all female home—that *is* interesting, and it is your angle. So you want to develop that.

As I read the text proper, I still think that the vestiges of fiction cling closely to this text. Showing is vital in nonfiction, but it must be balanced by telling. Particularly at the beginning—and in those places you feel like you are jumping around, orienting us with your current perspective on things. This is also a place to help develop what you want me to understand about this essay. The first sections seem to be a kind of loving memory of the very womanly, girlie things that your mother did when you were a kid. Then we have the longer scene talking about the boyfriend. These are all scenes. I love the description of the bathroom stained glass window, and wonder if perhaps it belongs at the opening of the essay—it sets up what you want me to understand about this being a community. The closing is a problem here. It’s so abrupt. I think you could cut it and the piece would not be hurt at all. But you need some narration—reflection on what you want us to understand about your mother—and I think it is useful to see this is a piece about your mother, and what sort of life she gave you. You need to consider carefully where to include it and how to give an arch to this piece without that last bit. If you want to continue to work on this before you submit it to *thebridge* I will work with you.

You write some of the best Reader’s notes in the class, and your reflection was equally thoughtful. It’s my hope that people use the reader’s notes to figure out how to do things in their own writing. Your respect for the research that went into *Empire* is palpable. And I felt it too, that level of respect. You are a clear voice in our class and these documents support that. It was interesting to read your reflection on your writer’s notes, because I thought you *were* writing fiction. Your writer’s notes are always written with energy and purpose. I feel certain any of it could become more formal work. I feel like a lot has changed since you wrote that proposal for a final project. I’m going to refrain from going into it since you know what my concerns are. Let’s see where we are at after your workshop.

Before I get to the end, I want to thank you for being such a good and conscientious student. And even more than that for being genuinely interested and engaged in the class experience. If you are faking thinking about the stuff you say about the readings, than you are a good faker. But I’m thinking that it is not fake, that the connections you make between texts as well as the observations you make about texts are very genuine. I appreciate that you very fearlessly ask and answer questions. I appreciate that you are so thoughtful in your interactions with your classmates. I appreciate that you take the work seriously.

Semester Grade So Far: A

Jessica—

At first, I was tempted to say unconditionally, that I loved how you wrote your cover letter. You wrote with a real audience in mind, and you developed a real character to narrate to them. I didn’t really have any issue with your bulleted list. Many of the bullets dealt with the kinds of ideas that the quotes on the website dealt with: not fearing revision; appreciating critique even though it is hard; writing to figure out what you think about something; writing as process—and a tough one; writing every day; needing structure more than fluff. All these are things that I think the quotes say. Some of what you’ve got here is all you—the love hard everyday line (which I liked) is all you. I don’t really talk about writing as a form of communication (though of course it is), and that is reflected in your piece as well. So my only qualification here is that I wish you had addressed the quotes quite specifically. Perhaps that wasn’t clear to you from the instructions, but, despite that, strong letter. It is a future teacher’s letter.

I liked most of all your last line about what you’ve learned from the readings you included reader’s notes for. I appreciate that reading kinds of reading that you might not have had that much exposure to led you to think about what was important in your own writing—the balance between, as you say, imagery and information. It is funny that we don’t see eye to eye on your writer’s notebook. I noticed my comments on the original and I wondered what these entries were leading too. Your response confirms that this notebook was not about your writing so much as it was about things that caught your attention. I have to admit, that’s not what I hope the writer’s notebook to be for—at least not all of the time. It’s not that what you’ve written here couldn’t become something, I think that we both agree, though, that that wasn’t what they were meant to do. I wonder if you’ve thought about how you might teach texts—some that we read, others that perhaps wouldn’t be covered in our class. Particularly since it might be helpful to you as a future teacher. I wish you would contribute more to class discussion and conversation Jessica. You have good ideas, and class would benefit from you sharing them. Other than that, watch your absences from here on out.

I haven’t spent much time with your revision beyond what I have here, so I’m going to respond to the finished text. But I want to comment on the fact that you wondered at some point if it *could* get published, but now feel it is too dated—and are probably right. But that’s an awful feeling, isn’t it? To wonder. If this piece had been published, how much better for your portfolio that would be. You are nearing the end of your college career and so this advice might not be so helpful, but let other people tell you know. Published work in a portfolio speaks more powerfully than the most elegantly written unpublished stuff. In terms of the text proper, I think that you’ve got it basically down. The piece is at its best when you are not assigning motives or qualities to the place but instead providing concrete details about the place. Hen you assign motives you make it sound sort of overly sweet and good. Who believes that? It feels too easy. Those concrete details tell me in much more convincing ways that something is true or not rather than you suggesting some is true. Here is an example: on the first page you say that the volunteers are “all dedicated to improving the lives of the needy.” But in the next line you tell me that some are there as part of a requirement. So how dedicated could they be? If you had just listed all the reasons and then talked about the mission of the kitchen itself then followed with the good quotes from actual volunteers, I think you would have come to a more subtle and nuanced reading of why people are there. Cody doesn’t start out being dedicated, he becomes so. I think that this piece *could* be relevant if you consider that more people are using soup kitchens in 2011 than they did when you wrote it. And if you brought in statistics about who is using food assistance and why it would make this piece immediately relevant. This reads a lot like a PR piece for the kitchen, and I think it could be broadened to be about food insecurity generally and how this food kitchen is positioned at the frontlines of it. That would bring it up to 2011.

As I read about your final project, I want to say that I think that writing about family stories is a good starting point. Deciding on whether to write it as fiction or nonfiction is the big decision there. What genre you select will affect how you tell the story, the voice, the characterizations, the point. All of it. And, most of all, it will determine if you can make stuff up to make the story work better or not. I think that you are wise to be nervous about being too close to your characters. It is hard to make this not just a hallmark card of happy when you don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. I’m not saying dig up dirt, but I am saying that for any story to work you need to have an actual story—with a beginning, a middle, an end. Our characters needs flaws and real lives. We need to like some of them and not like others. It needs to feel real and not sugar sweet. Tell me, who is your audience for these pieces? That might help figure out how to do theme justice. And what do you want them to understand after reading them? Not just about your mother, but about life and all that good stuff generally?

Semester Grade So Far: B+/A-

Megan—

Your cover letter was simultaneously cerebral and apt. You start with the quote about revision. And I suppose for me too that is the most important lesson I’d like for my students to understand—the value of revision. I appreciate that you wrote to the students in this section in particular. I like that you connect process to the Haygood quote. Sweat and process makes sense to me too. I like how you say “writing is deliberate.” And to connect it to the Didion quote makes sense. The kind of communication that you describe is communication between you and you. That’s what writing to know is. The thing about criticism. What you write is interesting. You say that we are our own worst critiques. That is true for you, but you are a writer with skill. My students think that if it is done that’s good enough. So that quote is really more about getting feedback because we need the voice of a reader and audience to better understand the success of our writing. Finally, the Hemingway quote is about not using words to do our writing for us, but information. A good reporter knows that. You know that. Words don’t really do our writing for us, ideas do.

I liked reading about your revision. I liked your voice, which is a bit ironic given that this piece all started as an exercise in a colloquial voice. I liked that you talked about the challenges and the difficulties and why you stuck with it. I appreciate that you talked about it in terms of audience—*Cosmo.* I think that you are right about it going in a magazine like that, but I can’t help you to imagine it as more polished and professional because if it is in *Cosmo* than it is both of those. What I actually here you saying is that this sort of informal, confessional genre is not your thing. And that might be the thing that says the most. I think that what is successful about the piece is that you certainly thickened it up. You’ve got a lot more to work with. I think the writing is really quite nice. I know you hate dialogue, but I feel like I know Ben a lot better because I hear is voice in this piece. I know for sure he is English and I know what he thinks. Your voice is clear and true as well in and out of dialogue. There is no place that I think, this totally doesn’t work with the exception, perhaps, of the customs scene. What the point of that long bit of dialogue is lost on me. My biggest issue remains what it has been since I first read this: the point needs to be clearer, larger. You are really writing about trying to make an unconventional relationship work. That’s the point. But it doesn’t feel like that for too much of the piece. At first it seems to be about him being British, but that’s not really it (and you do suggest that). Then the piece is about being nervous about seeing him. But the real issue is is how complicated this is and why you still want to do it. That, for lack of a better term, is your thesis. A revision would want to seriously consider the best parts of your story to include to make us see this, what to add, what to cut, what to give as a scene, and what to explain to us like you’d explain anything. I was also thinking about your short movie/TV references. Could that work metaphorically in the piece. This is what movies and TV tell me about how things should go; here’s real life. I wish I had thought of that sooner to tell you, but there it is.

I’m so happy to revisit your letter about your sister. I seriously think this could be something. It makes all the right moves, and it has a poignant side as well. So I feel like with some thoughtful revision, you’d have a funny, sweet, sad essay. If you wanted to work on it, I would help. You didn’t include anything about why you picked what you picked for your readers notes. And just because I like how you reflect, I would have liked to have read that. You write honestly and with great gusto about all that we read—even when you aren’t sure you get it (maybe even especially then) or if you don’t love it. I appreciate that level of engagement in the text, and I appreciate your voice in class. I’m not sure where we’d be without it.

Your final project sounds like a great one. I like real immersion writing, where students go places and talk to real people. I think you should see if *The Comment* would publish a series on it. Reading the newspaper writing earlier in the semester really did get you fired up, and I think this is a logical outcome. Your concerns are sensible, and we should keep in touch about how this is going. I know it’s scary to take this on. I’ll support you however I can.

Semester Grade So Far: A-

Brian—

The way you wrote your cover letter tells me that, if you wanted to be a teacher at any level, I think you’d be a good one. You write reasonably and honestly about the difficulty of the writing process in a way that will not, certainly, make students feel like it’s something easy but will also not make them feel like it is impossible. That’s the right balance. The line about writing to get by and writing to write was a very good one. That is something new writers in college have no concept of. It takes time to develop that understanding. I appreciate that you connect the Haywood and the Brandeis quotes—the hard work of writing is, for most of us, centered in the revision of work. Though idea generation holds it own horrors. You connect revision to the quote about critique as well. Helping students to see how hard work, revision, and critique work together is one of my chief goals in first year writing. I was impressed that the Didion quote most spoke to you—this idea of writing to figure things out, to figure out what we know and why we know it. It’s the most elusive part of writing, a sign of a mature writer. It is the quote my students are most likely to ignore because they are not in a place where it speaks to them yet. The Hemingway, for me, is about how information and ideas do our real writing for us, not so much fancy words. Excellent letter.

You write good reader’s notes. They are authentic in their reaction to the texts. They also always articulate what you learn from them. You capture this in your reflection on your notes here. Your reflection on your writer’s notebook was interesting to me because I didn’t realize that free-writing for the notebook was actually hard for you. You always produce. I think that it’s the calling it free-writing that is part of the problem. You never really wrote free. You always had a clear purpose. And that’s fine. That’s what writing should have—a purpose. So I’m glad you figured that out early on. You are right about sports writing not really being balanced the way other writing is. It’s always a little bombastic and big. It’s what anyone who reads a sports column regularly loves about it. So what do I know. I said it before and I’ll say it again, Alex missed out on his moment of fame for missing the day we read these. It reads like a great, short profile. I wouldn’t say that you were the most talkative person I class, but I know that you contribute when you have something to say, and no one could ask for more.

You wrote incredibly thoughtfully and with detail about your revision. Tense seems like a small thing, perhaps, but writers struggle with the choice. Because it is a choice and what is right in one place might seem wrong in other places. It takes a good eye to catch everything. And it gives you a headache while you are doing it. You know, I know that I’ve seen this before and believe that I commented on it extensively. But I don’t see it in your revision materials, and I know you sent me an email on this. I must have shoved it somewhere that I have not seen yet. I apologize for that. I appreciate what you say about trying to know what to trust about your readers and what not to use. It is a delicate balance of listening and not listening. Your piece is very timely, whenever it was originally written, and that alone should encourage you to try to publish it. I think that opening, with the natural dialogue and the shift between the discussion of the mundane and the vital works well to set up the atmosphere of working in corporate America today. I do see why your reader’s might object to the section where you critique your colleagues. Perhaps a better frame there—one that makes the reader feel like what you are doing is rationalizing what happened rather than just ripping on these people (who are already down on their luck). The second place where you talk about your coworkers works great for me. I flipped the page when I read they walked Renee out of the building because I was worried it was the mother with the kid in private school. Or Brandy. The Renee/Giant Bitch thing, again, think about it. Feels too hostile. You are all part of the 99%. I don’t have a problem with the end. I do think you might tighten up the race to the final set of layoffs. I’ve been debating on whether or not to have you make some bit more of commentary on how this sort of thing happens in business today. Not a lot of preaching—perhaps even just a statistic or two about who keeps their jobs and who doesn’t and what happens to them after they lose those jobs. I think you’d say that isn’t your project. But it sort of is, and that tiny add might do a lot for the piece. But I think it’s very successful and that you should continue with your plans to try to publish.

We’ve spoken since you’ve turned this in about your final project. I will remember better what the job of a sportswriter is as I try to help with this. As we’ve talked about, I think that picking a real audience/publication site will help you with this. Reading other versions of this sort of article would be helpful. Thinking of an occasion to write it will help. Reading examples of sports writing from the venue you pick as a kind of target publication would be helpful too.

Semester Grade So Far: A

Betsy—

As someone who works so closely with first year students, I looked forward to reading your coverletter, and I wasn’t disappointed. I appreciated that you both wrote directly to them and that you positioned yourself with a kind of wisdom—imperfect and tremendously valuable. I appreciate your thesis—writing reflects real life. Your work with the quotes entirely supports that. You do a nice job with the Didion quote urging students to see the value of writing to know in both an academic venue but, in a larger sense, as a way to understand their world. You write with real knowledge of the work habits of first year students in reference to the Haygood quote, and I like even more how you connect the Haygood to the Justice Brandeis quote about revision: it all reflects how hard the work is. The line about everyone thinking they have cute baby made me laugh out loud on the train. Not everyone really got what I meant about the Hemingway quote—but you do. I appreciated your direct, declarative commands to know your thesis and do your research. That is good advice. Our students are lucky to work with you. Excellent letter.

You are a great and enthusiastic reader and your choices for your reader’s notes are excellent examples of this. I appreciate so much how enthusiastically you read just about anything, and more than that, how you enjoy talking about it. I’m not entirely sure how class would function without your voice in it. I appreciate here in this reflection how you reflect on what you learned from reading these pieces—how you made connections between genres (a lot of poets also write nonfiction but not fiction, which I’ve always found interesting). I like how the creative nonfiction we read inspired you—essentially inspired your final project—as you say, you were motivated as a writer. Love seeing that. And I like you reflect on your work as a visual artist as well. You understand yourself well as a creative person. Great notes. Great reflection. Your reflection on your writer’s notebook reminds me how you use your writer’s notebook the way I wish all of your classmates would use it. Work that you started to draft here has made it into your final project. That’s how I would hope it would work. I read these selections as images that you might imbue with a particular meaning—something that will help a reader better understand what your experience in Texas at that time in your life meant. Your piece on being, as you say “half deaf” could very much be a piece unto itself. You talk here about the charm of remembering the story, but you also write about this idea of being “half something” and that is a larger, more universal point that I think could really shape an essay. Your writer’s notebooks are the most serious and useful of the class. Perhaps I said that already, but it just bares repeating.

By the time you get this letter back we will have workshopped your final project in class, so I’m going to refrain from spending too much time on what you write here. You’ll have my comments from that workshop as well, and that should give you a better sense of my questions and concerns about where this piece is going.

Your revision project was one of the most successful in the class. As is the case with all things in the class, you took on the project with great energy and enthusiasm. I’m glad my reading helped. I actually do think I’m a pretty good reader, but I think sometimes I over do it with student writing. And so that was my concern there. Oh, and let me say, your reflection on your revision was longer than some peoples revision. And I say that with love and joy. I can’t say enough times how much I appreciate how seriously you take this work. I chuckled when you expressed hesitation to say you loved this story because you feared you were the only one who did. But I get it. I’m glad that the experience made you want to write more (not less), and to think about yourself as a writer and artist. I LOVE the opening line, opening paragraph, the shift to make David our focus. Love it. It’s dark and perfect and it puts the stress on what is most important in the piece. But he’s also a bit of a putz and a goof and that comes through too. The mother is a real piece of work. You could almost tone her down a bit. She doesn’t feel entirely real. The scene where he tries to get a job works for me. Love the chicken moment. Love the small encounters with women who annoy him. I love the slow build to his decision to commit crime generally. We really know David, and both pity him and think he’s totally capable of murder by the time we meet Sarah. And then we meet Sarah. Here she plays the role she should and so even though she’s annoying, it makes sense for her to be so. She’s appropriately a little more cautious but still daffy and that works too. You didn’t change that last line, and all that came before it made it even darker and funnier and more real. Great work. I hope you’ll submit it to the bridge.

Your letter is running to a second page, but I didn’t want to end without saying what a pleasure it has been to work with you in class and in our 101 work. You’ve been a vital part of both, and have made my semester better all the way around for your presence.

Semester Grade So Far: A

Kristina—

I liked how you directly addressed your portfolio cover letter to first year writers, and I appreciate the honesty and energy you wrote to them with. I like that you connected the hard work of writing that Haywood describes, with Justice Brandeis’s quote about revision. They are very intimately connected. I know that for me to revise is really to write, and that revision is hard. It’s something I’m always trying to help my students to see, but it’s a tough sell. Your explication of the Hemingway quote was good. I liked the phrased “showy-off words.” So many of my students think its words that does their writing for them, and that’s really far from the case. I liked that you included the small group of readers as a possible source of help with your writing—not just a professional or a teacher, just a reader. That’s hard for students to get their heads around too. I would have liked to have heard what you have to say about the Didion quote—about the whole act of writing to know. Mostly because I see you doing this as a writer. I like, in the end, that you call yourself a fellow writer. It’s true. First year student to senior to teacher to poet—we are all fellow writers, and it helps students and teachers to see it hat way. Nice letter.

What I liked best about your reflection on your reader’s notes is that you selected notes that helped you as a writer first and foremost. I was very interested to hear the affect that reading *The Watermark* had on you. It affected how you understood a genre, and influenced your idea for a final project; that’s powerful. And you were brave and honest to talk as a person who likes to write poetry but does not do much with reading it. I’m glad to know that reading for the class might have changed this some. And I am most glad to know how it affected how you thought of your own writing in the genre. That’s what I most hope to have happen in the reader’s notes. Your reader’s notes so far have gotten stronger over time. At first they were hit or miss. If you liked the reading (the stuff on creative nonfiction) they were strong, but if you didn’t enjoy it, not so much. But they’ve become more consistent and thorough. So that’s good.

I appreciate that you write seriously here about what you’ve produced in your writer’s notebook—I wonder if you see that your *reflection* on your notebook is much longer than most of your notebook entries—than, frankly, the combined entries. You are such a writer, Krisitna, it surprises me that your notebooks aren’t filled to brimming. So I don’t have that much to say about the notebook itself that I haven’t already mentioned to you, but your reflection was quite interesting. I appreciated that you’ve given thought to where the short texts you are producing in that space might grow. The development you discuss in ambitious and interesting.

We’ve had several discussions about your final project since you wrote this. Here you are moving between poetry and nonfiction, but I think you’ve settled on nonfiction. I did not know about your cousin (and I am so very sorry for that loss—I feel how wasteful it must feel to you and your family). I was interested in reading that and I think that is something you might include in your work in your final project. I think that bringing in your own Deaf culture as a vehicle to understand other things about Muslim culture—particularly in light of your family’s tragedy could be very interesting. We should continue to talk about scope and shape as we near the end of the semester.

I liked most what you had to say about your desire to work on your language. I admire your braveness in combining poems that seemed to be doing the same thing. That takes guts and a willingness to revise. I’m glad you enjoyed the revision process, and I’m glad that you felt you learned something about yourself as writer in the process. As I read the poems, the attention to language is there. We’ve talked extensively about the other pieces. I still am not in love with the formatting of that one poem. I think it is confusing to the reader. I think that the revisions to language and to punctuation really move “Unanswered Prayer” to a new place. I like the poem a lot—until l get to that last stanza that spills onto a second page. What if you cut that? That is my favorite piece.

Semester Grade So far: A-/B+