

# ANTHONY D'ARIES

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## Statement of Teaching and Research Interests

“You’ve changed the way I read,” said Mary, a student in my creative nonfiction workshop. She reached into her backpack and opened her psychology textbook. “See,” she said, poking at her annotations. “Even when I’m not reading for your class, I feel like I’m reading for your class.”

After working together in my writing and literature courses, many students like Mary tell me that they no longer “see words the same.” One of my goals is to help students understand the difference between reading as a reader and reading as a writer. As readers, we let the narrative lead us. If the writing is working, we no longer see the words but live the writer’s story. When we read as writers, we see words as the raw material of literature; we question how the author built the text so that we may build our own. Though I teach these two modes as distinct techniques, over time they meld into a single reading habit: one where students simultaneously examine and experience a text.

I believe it is crucial, especially for emerging writers, to realize that they don’t have to understand every aspect of their articles, stories, poems, essays, or plays before they begin. It can be detrimental to try to know too much too soon. If by the end of their pieces students do not feel that they have learned something about themselves and the characters, if they have not asked themselves questions they couldn’t have articulated before they started writing, then they still have work to do. While writing may offer catharsis, I hesitate to apply that term, particularly to

creative nonfiction. Putting words on paper, “getting something off your chest,” is not enough. Through revision, an emerging writer learns to blend experience with reflection.

But experience must come before reflection, which is one of the reasons I think it is important for emerging writers to engage with underserved populations off-campus. Since my writing and research interests include the interconnection of literacy, identity, and communication, I often draw from my experience teaching literature and creative writing in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections to help students design internships and independent studies not only within correctional facilities, but also in halfway houses, nursing homes, and shelters. My additional teaching and research interests include gender roles in 20<sup>th</sup> Century film, television, and autobiography as well as coming-of-age narratives and writing for new media.

I often think about Mary’s comments in our creative nonfiction workshop. She was slightly older than the other students and often wrote essays about her eight-year-old son or her journey from Uganda to Boston. She wrote a humorous and piercing essay comparing the sound of her parents’ sneezes. Her mother, a demure woman, held her sneezes in, “guarded them like secrets;” her boisterous father, a story-teller and womanizer, let loose “a tornado of sound.”

*A tornado of sound.* Mary and I talked about that phrase at length. She laughed and said her English was weak, that she couldn’t “grab” the words she needed to tell her story. To me, her language barrier was not a wall but a doorway through which she exchanged stale phrases for unique expressions. Mary naturally possessed the three characteristics I strive to nurture in emerging writers: a curiosity for words, a healthy relationship with doubt, and a desire to communicate with the larger world.