

Adlerians therapy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

All good personal essays, short stories, novels, and poems contain conflict. Without conflict, there is little reason to write creatively. What is conflict? If we break the word into parts, we discover it means con, or with, and flict, fiction, or pain. With pain. Go back to the essays you read in Lesson One. Sanders explores the mental anguish of alcoholism, the torments of his father and of his family because of his father's drinking. Didion explores the physical anguish of migraines. With pain. Leaf through your text and read some opening lines. "Of course all life is a process of breaking down" Fitzgerald begins in "The Crack Up." "On the Twenty-ninth of July, in 1943, my father died," is the first line of Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son." And Hoagland starts his essay "The Threshold and the Jolt of Pain" with "Like most boys in their teens, I wondered once in a while how I would take torture." All of these openings indicate that the writer is about to reflect upon a certain kind of pain, whether physical, emotion, or spiritual. Much fiction also deals with this same type of conflict, whether it be divorce, low self-esteem, spiritual emptiness, disease, etc. Another kind of conflict that we find most prevalent in the personal essay is what I call conflict of idea. For instance, in his famous essay "Walking," Thoreau opens with: I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, to regard man as an inhabitant, or, a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. Here, it's easy to see the conflict because Thoreau outrightly opposes one claim or idea to another. Conflict is inherent in opposition. But even if Thoreau had not blatantly presented two opposing forces, his idea "to regard man as an inhabitant, or, a part and parcel of Nature" is amply conflictual because it goes against what was commonly held true by a majority of 19th Century

Americans. (Actually, this very same conflict is more alive and a part of our public discourse today than ever.) So, any idea that is not commonly accepted by the culture at large is conflictual. If, for instance, you have anything positive to say about communism or socialism, considering the cultural climate in the U. S. today, you have a conflict on your hands. Not all ideas have to be radical to create conflict, friction, or interest. As a matter of fact, most personal essays do not broach the extremes, but instead reveal the idiosyncratic nuances of a character, situation, event, or lifestyle. In this course you'll find Wendell Berry writes of the pleasures of solitude. Adrienne Rich examines the difficulties of growing up Jewish. The novelist Carlos Fuentes reveals to us how he started to write. There is no end to the subjects that can be explored in the personal essay. Your father who refuses to sell the family farm to developers is an excellent topic. Your uncle who buys farms and develops the land is just as good. Or how about a story of your mother who taught you to play the piano, or of your brother who, on his twenty-first birthday, won \$500 from a Las Vegas slot machine, and who, 10 years later, lost his home in a card game. The stories are waiting to be told. Some are more dramatic than others. All are important. Seek your own. Ask yourself, what is it I believe? What are my struggles? What are my temptations? What are my fears? What are my confusions? Don't be surprised if some of your ideas are ready for an essay.