

Portraits of the WKU WP
Iowa by Slipknot

The Student:

10th grade, Arts & Humanities, Glasgow High School

The Teacher:

Mary Fye, 10th grade Arts & Humanities, Glasgow High School, 1997 Project

The Assignment:

Students were asked to select a CD to review—any CD. We read numerous reviews from the library's collection of music magazines. Students analyzed these reviews, paying close attention to purpose and audience, tone, organization, and content. Next, we examined a unique characteristic of music reviews: descriptive phrases (e.g., "ceaseless, ultra-rapid drum riffs"). Students found examples of these phrases in model reviews. We then listened to music and created our own phrases for practice. Armed with numerous models, the students started to draft their reviews. I allowed several class periods for drafting, conferencing, revising, and sharing.

The Text:

Iowa by Slipknot

They're back! And God help us, they have evolved! Slipknot has obtained new masks, better equipment, and a new-found insane aggression for their hit follow up to their debut album *870621345*. Trust me on this one, folks, "it's a scream!"

Just like their previous c.d., *Iowa* is profusely profane, but not to the point where all of the songs are like "Surfacing." However, they still wear their parental advisory label with pride as if it were a victory flag. Don't be too paranoid, though. There are actually five curse-free tracks . . . for the most part. Well, five out of fourteen isn't too bad is it, considering one of those is an intro track of nothing but a solid minute of tortured screams of "death!"

But the "dirty words" are but one of the lyrical aspects I shall share with you. The songs vary from the ultimate anti-social theme "People=Sh*t," to the slightly narcissistic declaration of the band's originality in "I am Hated," to singer Cory's twisted view of love as portrayed in the title track "Iowa." The c.d. is laden with morbidity, self-pity, and pure, undiluted anger. Slipknot has really taken a step forward with their writing. Even those who, impossible as it may seem, are unfamiliar with Slipknot, will notice some of the elaborate and descriptive language. With lyrics such as ". . . megalomaniacle tab on my tongue . . ." and ". . . to see your thalidomide robot face . . .," it is easy to see time and effort went into this sweet sequel, right down to even the ever-controversial "Heretic Anthem."

Lyrics aside, let us take a dive into the roaring torrent of the music itself. Think of the hardest, loudest, and fastest band you have ever heard. Multiply it a hundred-fold. Now you have a general idea of the essence of Slipknot. On top of, under, and on all sides of Cory's nonstop painful screaming are the three drummers, two guitarists, bassist, d.j., and media sampler. Yes, you read right. Nine members including Cory. Throughout the ceaseless, ultra-rapid drum loops are threaded searingly quick guitar riffs. When they hit, THEY HIT! Anyway, I'm not sure if the bassist is a finger player or uses a pick, but he

also burns up the strings at light speed. The d.j. and media samples are also nice touches to the crunch.

The whole c.d. is not completely fast-paced if that is what you are wondering about. There's such a cutting speed contrast with slow songs such as "Gently," "Skin Ticket," and "Iowa." These few are at a much slower tempo mostly, but that doesn't mean that they aren't still teeth grinding compositions.

These guys really live up to what they say in "I am Hated." No one can compare to this masked nontet from Iowa, U.S.A. The drop-tuned heavy artillery of Slipknot beats out, by far, "all the mediocre sacred cows [they] spawned."

Student Commentary: What about this assignment helped me learn to write.

This assignment probably would not have been as good had I not had the freedom to choose what CD to review. I think freedom has a lot to do with good writing. Writers do write best about what they know.

Teacher Commentary: What I do to help students learn writing.

I give students an opportunity to explore numerous models. In addition, I believe in giving students plenty of class time to write. This was not easy—as a content teacher I've struggled with balancing content and writing time. In the end, I've discovered that allowing ample time in class—drafting, revising, conferencing, etc.—is the only way to get successful student writing.