



## Modular Structure Exercise

1. Begin with a quick associative word cluster.
2. Study it when you're done, paying special attention to following the *relationships* between the *elements* to infer the deep structure.
3. For each of the elements, quickly write an associative passage of prose (do not compose this willfully—it should be quick and free-associative, as if it is “already there”).
4. Read the text you produced and arrange the modules into a sequence to produce its maximal effect. (This part is you working consciously as reader and editor.)
- (5.) Give it a title that enhances the effect without breaking the “illusion.”

*Joe McCarthy*

Illegal aliens; who came up with that one? When I was a little kid, my mother told me she was an alien. I thought this explained why I was so weird; my family came from outer space. She thought it was hilarious, and said, “Not like that, Achilles. Our family’s from Greece, not space.”

She told me not to be afraid of the unknown, but that didn’t leave me any less terrified when I was in my dark room late at night, expecting some kind of half-dead monstrosity to reach through the window and take me away.

We set off on our adventure into the woods while the sun was still coming up. We brought along some saran-wrapped sandwiches and a few bottles of ice water, but besides that we packed light.

The gravity of the situation hit me, walking down that path from his house to mine that I must have walked hundreds of times. I didn’t know he would take it so hard.

The vacuum upstairs was always roaring, day and night. “What’s with that lady?” he said, “Never leaves the house, never has anyone over; what’s she always cleaning for?”

*Kris Laratta*

I was supposed to do work that night, having already put it off for far too long. But she came into the kitchen asking if I wanted to make apple pie with her. Who was I to refuse? We didn't have any instructions for exactly how to proceed, so we gave it a shot and improvised. First we made the dough, kneading it into the slippery pie pan together, our hands rubbing the dough down into an even coat. While that was heated up, we mixed the ingredients. We added peaches, which we weren't supposed to do, but it seemed right in the moment so we did it anyway. Finally, we poured the pie filling into the crust, and let it sit in the oven for about forty minutes, during which time we found other ways to occupy ourselves.

As I sat chatting away on Facebook in lieu of homework, she pattered around the room. I noticed her take a bottle out of the cupboard and make herself a mixed drink. She was trying to be discrete about it, but wasn't exactly trying to hide it either. She finished it hurriedly, and Dan walked into the room soon after. He made a habit of stopping by every so often to do his laundry in exchange for doing our dishes. As it were, however, he usually couldn't help but eat some of our food as well. Sipping a hard cider, he fashioned himself some tuna salad, pouring obscene gobs of mayonnaise atop his tuna.

"What kind of beer is that?" She asked Dan.

"It's hard cider, actually."

"Ooh, that's my favorite."

Dan was now adding olive oil into his mixture. "You can have some if you want," he said to her.

"Oh could I really? Thank you so much!" She instantly reached for the bottle and took one large gulp.

The house was getting to be a place where you locked the door to your bedroom. If you didn't, who knows what you might lose. Tom, a roommate of mine, was letting all kinds of people stay over; people who would be up all night and still be wide awake in the morning, shaking while rolling cigarettes, asking me if I had any weed. I felt as if I had stumbled into a dark corner of a room, quite unintentionally, put there by my volition. Tom just didn't know how to say no when they came to him, crying that they had nowhere to go.

“Who are you talking to?” Tom asked her one evening. The sun was setting into a sea of red, and the moon came to take its place and welcome the night people to rise and live.

“Just talking to Jeff,” she replied without looking up from her phone.

Tom stood momentarily simply staring out the door to the porch.

“Jeff?”

“Yeah.” She continued to click away on tiny plastic keys.

“Word.” There was a gap in conversation as he walked around the bedroom, changing into a fresh pair of clothes.

“I have to work tonight,” he added.

“I know.”

“What are you gonna do?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Find some people to hang out with,” she said.

“Do whatever it is that people do at night.”

*Maria Cassano*

Too many morals and not enough mockery. That's how they'd describe the storybooks they were made to listen to at night. Still, maybe that was the point, because they sure as hell did their job.

I can't suppose there was much in the woodwork, but the memories were etched there—scratched into the design like words in an epitaph, and he'd contributed to a few of them himself. The kids didn't spend much time at the tables, though, save for breakfast and dinner, and for both those daily occasions, the hall was dark and the memories were covered with dented plastic plates and the mismatched utensils that made up a set of their own.

And then there was the railing on the second floor. A jungle as far as the boys were concerned, and a one-way mirror to everybody else. Things were overheard from above—things like an early bedtime and how much salt goes into the meatloaf—and these things were classified, if only because an eavesdropper was eavesdropping.

Snowball fights were crucial one's placement in the ranks. The superiors had impeccable aim. He who was most often pegged in the face, on the other hand, must never refuse a chore-swap—toilet-scrubbing included.

A woman came in once. Well, women came in all the time, really, but never by themselves. This one did. The potential was there, in her coral red lipstick; in her nails that matched. If she so carefully worshipped her morning vanity ritual, maybe she would just as carefully worship the other facets of her life. She left empty-handed. The boys wondered if it had something to do with the fact that she'd come alone.