

## PLAN FOR USING PORTFOLIOS IN A 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ELA CLASSROOM

### **Why I think portfolios are beneficial**

Portfolios are my preferred method of major assessment because I feel they offer me the opportunity to truly assess my students. Portfolios show growth over time and allow me to differentiate the assessment for each student. I do not give students tests or quizzes because my curriculum is based on skills that I don't feel can be properly assessed in a limited time frame. I also feel that portfolios can show me a student's growth over time. Many of my students are at such a low skill level that they would never have the opportunity to succeed with tests and quizzes as major assessments. A portfolio can show me how a low level student has improved without requiring that the student make such gains as to be equal with his higher level peers.

Portfolios also offer students the time and space to think about their own learning. A long term goal for my students is to help them become life-long readers, writers, and learners and portfolios encourage the kind of thinking that leads to this. Portfolios also show students themselves how they have grown over a period of time and thus can give them confidence in their progress when they may feel less skilled than their peers.

### **How I've done portfolios in the past**

In the past, I've always had students do portfolios at the end of the marking periods and at the end of each semester. I had students include various pieces of work - sometimes being very directive about what pieces of work they had to include and other times giving them total control over which pieces were included. They also wrote a letter to me reflecting on what they have learned in the time period as well as what grade they feel they deserved.

After they were completed, I would read the portfolio letters and glance at the artifacts they included. This helped inform the grades, but for the most part, I already had a grade in mind. I kept the portfolios in a drawer and they were never looked at by anyone other than me at the times when I did grades. The intention has been to pass these portfolios onto the next teacher to have the students, but this has not occurred in part because of the bulk of 100 portfolios, plus the time to look at the work for each student.

### **Why I don't feel they have been working**

Students were not demonstrating true reflection in their portfolios. Often their portfolios would include the most recent work, either because they lost previous work or they could not remember what work we had done previously. It had been my hope that portfolios would help students cement learning, but they often just did whatever came into their minds, rather than really reflecting on what they had learned.

There were occasions when students would make genuine, thoughtful reflections, but these were often the higher skilled and more organized students. The average and below average skilled students did not have the faculties, abilities, and skills to make the process work. They had never been asked to think about their work previously having been exposed only to "being evaluated" rather than "doing the assessment and reflection".

I focused the portfolio making process on what artifacts to include. Thus, their focus was on what pieces are we going to have to include and on whether they had those pieces or not. There was little thought on if the pieces they included actually represented any kind of actual learning or hard work. They based their "reflections" on what work they had, rather than reflecting first and *using* the work as evidence.

### **Goals for new use of portfolios**

I would like portfolios to accomplish the following:

- Provide students with an opportunity to truly reflect and think about what they learned during each semester.

- Encourage students to reflect throughout the semester and take a bigger stake in their learning throughout the whole semester.
- Truly reflect what students have learned and what they struggled with so that I can evaluate their learning and plan next steps.
- Bring in people from outside of my classroom so that students have a wider audience for their learning and reflections and so that I can include others' assessment of students and their work.
- Reduce the paperwork for my final semester grading, but also giving me more insight into what the students learned during the assessment.
- Provide the students' next ELA teacher with a meaningful, yet manageable look at what the students have done during their time with me.
- Provide me and my superiors a method of assessing my effectiveness as a teacher.

### **Brief overview of how I want to change my use of portfolios**

At the beginning of the semester, students will receive a list of objectives for the entire semester and I will outline the portfolio assessment at the onset so that students know what is coming. They will reflect daily or almost daily in order to track their own process throughout the semester so that they can go back at the end of the semester and see more easily what they have learned. At the end of the semester, students will learn presentation skills so that they can make portfolio presentations to me, another adult from the building or community, and a former student of mine. These presentations will be done during Regents week and each of the panel members will contribute a score to the portfolio grade which will be one quarter of their final semester grade. During these presentations, students will speak to how much they have fulfilled the semester objectives and offer evidence to support their claims.

### **Structures and procedures I will need to put into place in order for this to work**

Semester Learning Objectives: I have already written and revised the learning objectives for English 1 (see end of document). These objectives will be presented to the students and displayed prominently in the classroom as we cover them. The objectives will be referred to repeatedly and I will explain how what we are doing in the classroom relates to these objectives.

Regular Reflections: Students will make daily or almost daily reflections on what they have learned. I will give students prompts that reflect the objectives to help them write. When I've tried this in the past, it has failed miserably, but I did not give prompts, nor did I leave enough time. I hope to plan accordingly and figure out how much time students need to make these reflections.

Notebook and Folder System: As my students have extreme difficulties in keeping themselves organized, I must be sure that the appropriate structures are in place for the paperwork.

- ✓ I have already used a donation to my classroom to purchase spiral bound, five-subject notebooks for each of my students. I will tear out two of the dividers so that students have two large sections and a smaller section. The two larger sections are for Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop and the smaller is for Language Workshop. These notebooks will stay in the classroom, except for when a student feels the need to take them home and then he or she must clear it with me to do this. I will put one early arriving student in charge of distributing and collecting the notebooks.
- ✓ Students will also have a black folder that stays in the classroom; this will be the place where students store completed and evaluated homework and class work. This folder will never leave the room as it will contain many of the artifacts they will need for their portfolios. This folder will be distributed and collected daily by another early arriving student in the class.
- ✓ A second, white folder will be their homework folder and will be taken back and forth and will contain homework to be completed and turned in. I will not focus so much on this folder as it will not be necessary long term for the completion of the portfolio, but will serve only to help students keep their homework neat.

**The portfolios presentations and assessment**

In the last month of the semester, classroom time will be focused on learning presentation skills, reflecting on the semester, assembling work, and practicing the presentation. Students will use the objectives to write a reflective piece on what they have learned as well as select work which demonstrates the learning. The first step of this piece will be for students to free write and brainstorm on the objectives, using their daily reflections and notebooks. Then, and only then, will they use their black folders to find evidence of their learning. After their brainstorming and collecting is done, they will write their speech. Mini-lessons on presentation skills will focus on using your voice well, body language and posture, and professional dress. Students will workshop and rehearse their presentations, as well as meet with me one-on-one at least once.

During Regents week, students will be assigned a time slot to present their portfolios. They will present in front of a panel made up of me, another adult from the building or community, and a former student of mine. Presentation time slots will be ten minutes long -- three minutes of this is devoted to the actual presentation, two more minutes of questions from the panel, and then five minutes for the panel to look at the work students have offered and fill out their evaluation forms. The evaluation forms will focus on the objectives and how well the student has demonstrated learning in each of those objectives (one of the objectives will include presentation skills). Panel members will rate each objective out of ten and then average their scores. The two adults will multiply their average by four and the student will multiply by two. The panel members' scores will then be added together to make a score out of 100. This portfolio score will be approximately one-quarter of the student's final semester grade.

There will be no work handed in to me to evaluate as this was done during the five minute evaluation period of the presentation. But, I will select one piece from each student which demonstrates the largest gains in learning.

**Using portfolios to inform instruction**

After the presentations, I hope to get a sense of which objectives were fulfilled and which were not during the semester. But looking at the strongest piece for each student, I hope to assemble my own portfolio that demonstrates which objectives my students as a whole fulfilled and which they did not. I will then hone the objectives for English 2 during the next semester, only to start the whole process again. It is my intention that at the end of the year, I will have two binders, each with a list of objectives that have been reached as well as evidence to support the list. These binders will hopefully demonstrate my success as well as my students and help their teacher for the next year plan the curriculum.

## Learning Objectives for English 1 -- 2005-2006

### Reading Workshop

Students will be able to...

- select a book from a menu and explain how it conforms to their interests and reading level
- define the term "character traits" and analyze literature to identify the explicit and implicit character traits as well as identify them as physical, emotional, or mental and distinguish between major and minor traits
- define the term "characterization" and identify the five methods of characterization authors use to give readers information about characters and apply this knowledge to literature
- define the terms "goal," "motivation," and "obstacle" as they relate to character analysis and identify them in literature, as well as evaluate a character's goals, motivations, and reactions to the obstacles
- identify and analyze a character's choices in a story and evaluate them for effectiveness
- define "fate" and identify its role on a character in a piece of literature
- at appropriate intervals, synthesize this information about a character into a deeper understanding of the character, either in written or performance form

### Writing Workshop

Students will be able to...

- use different brainstorming techniques to select a topic and draw out detailed ideas for writing
- define the characteristics of good writing and evaluate a piece of writing based on those characteristics
- engage in peer review groups and demonstrate effective constructive criticism techniques
- revise a piece of writing based on teacher and peer comments

### Language Workshop

Students will be able to demonstrate improvement in the following areas of language use: to be decided based on student needs.

### Presentation/Public Speaking Skills

Students will be able to...

- make a presentation which demonstrates proper posture and dress, as well as effective oral skills, including volume, speed, and variety of tone

### Behavioral

Students will be able to...

- bring the appropriate materials to class, including notebook, folders, loose leaf paper, and blue or black ink pen
- participate equally and maturely in small group meetings, using cooperative learning roles
- demonstrate respect for self and for others by refraining from hurtful or offensive language
- demonstrate proper listening and conversation skills during instruction and whole-class discussions
- attend class on-time and make up any missed work
- maintain a notebook which shows neatness, organization, and daily attention, as well as reflective learning journal entries