



MIDTERMS

Midterm grades are due on Tuesday (10/7). Work must be submitted by the end of the school day on Friday, October 3 in order to provide me sufficient time to evaluate the task(s) and update Synergy. Unfortunately, absent students are evaluated based on what has come across my desk. This may create problems, but we have the rest of the quarter to rectify things.

The reality is that many middle school students will complete the least amount possible. We are lucky that at West Sylvan our students often buck the trend of normality. There are, however, a few stalwarts who wish to test the boundaries of "how little can I get away with doing." Do not take lame excuses or shrugs for an answer. Look over the planner. Ask them what they are working on and ask for explanations—not simple responses. Ask to see the work and have them explain what they are doing and why. Ask...ask...ask. Part of parenting is staying informed. You will be impressed by the work and the challenge that you may have in doing the work yourself.

SYNERGY UPDATES

From the district...



ParentVUE & StudentVUE: Parents and students who do not have access to Synergy should have already or will soon be receiving their login information. Parents who have an email address on file will be first asked to validate their emails and then will be sent their login information electronically. Remaining parents will be mailed home their login information. Please visit the [Spotlight Family](#) page for more information.

READING CEREAL BOX

The first reading project is a cereal box. Students will have to create a cereal box book report for a novel to represent 250 pages of reading. Students will create a cereal box book report. Decorate a real cereal box with illustrations and information related to the book you read using the directions below. Use pieces of white or colored paper to cover the cereal box. (You will probably want to measure, cut, and create the different sides of the cereal box before gluing them on to your box.)



On the front of the box, students need to include the name of the cereal and a picture. Invent a name for the cereal that is related to the storyline of the novel and sounds like cereal. Do not use the exact book title.

Choose a shape for the cereal as well as colors and ingredients that all relate to the book. For example, for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, you might invent a cereal called Wizard Wands, a toasted oat cereal in the shape of miniature lighting bolts and brooms with marshmallow cauldrons and wands.

On the right side of the box, make a list of ingredients that includes the story elements of "Characters" and "Setting". Under the heading "Ingredients," list the main characters and write a sentence about each one. Then describe the setting under the same ingredients heading.



Create a "Nutritional Facts" chart that rates the book by giving the percentage of the RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance) in several categories (humor, drama, suspense, action, education, vocabulary, etc.) Make sure you include these and at least **one** category of your own.

On the left side of the box, write a "teaser" summary that describes the main problem and the solution of the book. Try to use words that will "grab" the readers' attention and make them want to buy your cereal. Unlike a real teaser, you will provide the climax to the novel.

For the back of the box, design a game that is based on the story. It can be a puzzle, a hidden picture illustration, or any other fun activity that might be found on the back of a cereal box. Make sure it includes information from the book.

On top of the box, include the title, author, number of pages, and number of stars you would give this book if you were a book critic. The maximum number of stars would be 5. Include at least three quotes from "famous" (made up) people who endorse the novel.

Finally, a good cereal often includes a prize. Your prize must be something that the main character could have used in the book or something that reminds you of the main character. You can either include a picture of the prize on the front of your box to let the reader know what is inside the box or an actual replica of the prize (that you create) that rests inside the box.

The cereal box book report is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday (10/15). Cereal boxes should be edited and revised. They should not be first drafts.



SHORT STORIES

Students will be asked to answer a response concerning the next three readings ("An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", "The Bet", and "The Witch") in both a written and artistic format for reading response #2.

The written prompt is: Which of the protagonists was developed the best? What tools has the author used to develop the character? Cite and explain a specific example from the story.

The artistic prompt is to draw the scene being cited and provide a caption to explain the scene.

Written answers should be focused (not rambling) and clearly explained. The written answers should not be first drafts. Students should revise, edit, process, and proofread their answers.

Artistic responses should demonstrate effort but not hours of work. The artistic side should employ a draft and a finalized product of the student's "best" skills. Overall, each side should take at least 30 minutes of time and effort.

The first "reading response" is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, September 23.

We continue our regularly scheduled short story program with Anton Chekhov's, "The Witch". The story, on its surface, is a simple tale of a man and a woman who do not love one another. Thus, they lash out at one another. Underneath the story, buried in symbolism and allusion, is another tale. It is the story of oppression and fear. We will do our best to stay topical in our discussion and review of the story, but if the topic is brought up I will discuss with the students the underlying struggle between the genders.

So...is she a witch? Why? Do we think she is a witch because she lives in the middle of nowhere with a filthy fool.

"Witch" was a term thrown about during medieval and post-medieval times in regards to a woman who could not be dominated—one who could tap into powers beyond the realm of ordinary men.

Many women in the middle ages were called witches and burned alive because they were perceived to have extraordinary powers. Women possess the magic to give life – and, some say, the intuition rooted to the earth giving them insight men can only dream about. Male fears of women led to countless and perverse ways to contain it.

Not much has changed since the Middle Ages. "The Witch" takes place in 19th century Russia -- but it could be taking place in plenty of countries in the twenty-first century.

This is a story of a weak and silly man who has lost his



grip on his woman and will use any means necessary to keep her under his control; if he has to resort to labeling her a witch -- why not? If she can't be tied down and domesticated—then she is wild. Raissa Nilovna, is beyond wild -- she's perpetually warm -- because all around her is cold and frozen.

Raissa Nilovna needs love and her dud husband is not going to provide it. So she hopes to find it any way she can. The more desperate she becomes—the scarier she is to Savely Gykin, her husband.

Instead of fearing his wife, Savely Gykin should look in the mirror and realize if anything in their home is evil—it is his own stench.

Chekhov effectively evokes the atmosphere and tone of the story. We really feel they are living in a remote and bizarre environment. We can easily believe that witches and devils reside there—and that reality blends with the supernatural.

When you think about it –loneliness is the world we are dealing with. Anyone as lonely as Raissa Nilovna feels like they are living isolated from the warmth of companionship—whether it's in the winter wilderness of this tale, or in the center of Manhattan.



WRITING VOCABULARY #3

All vocabulary students should be reviewing their lists for **five**

minutes each day. Repeated exposure to the words or stems will help in the long-term retention of the meaning and lead to greater success. Students who cram the night before or day of generally do not score as well, nor do they remember the meanings down the road. I keep repeating this paragraph for a reason....hopefully it creates a movement that sweeps the nation.

This week students have time to work on their third vocabulary assignments. The assignment directions are online and students should have a copy of the directions. Please help out by reviewing the directions and expectations with your students. I do not just write the directions to kill trees, but even after repeated reteaching, small and large group conversations, and even sitting down individually with students and reviewing (and often helping to complete) vocabulary assignments the same mistakes continue to be made—often by the same individuals.

The vocabulary #3 assignments are due at the beginning of class on Thursday (10/10)—a day earlier due to no school on Friday. I am hoping and dreaming that we have all assignments completed and submitted on time.



VEGGIE TALES PROJECT

Students will be introduced to the modes of writing: descriptive, expository, narrative, and persuasive. They will use a prewriting strategy (web diagram, fast write, outline, etc.) to help them craft a draft for each mode of writing. Students will workshop the idea and then move on to the next mode of writing.

Eventually, students will submit a finalized—often referred to as a “published” copy—of one of the modes of writing at the beginning of class on Wednesday (10/15). The published copy needs to be double-spaced. It can be typed or written in blue or black ink and using one’s best writing. The published copy should be free of grammatical mistakes, and presented in a logical order.

We will be going over story development, writing skills and techniques, and a plot line. The final version should be at least a page, but not more than three pages. It should be a thoughtful story written with their best effort.

Students will submit a finalized—often referred to as a “published” copy—review at the beginning of class Tuesday, October 14. The published copy needs to be double-spaced. It can be typed or written in blue or black ink and using one’s best writing. The published copy should be free of grammatical mistakes, and presented in a logical order.



HISTORY

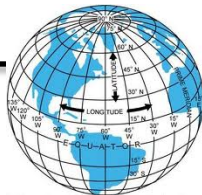
CURRENT EVENT #3

Students who would normally present a current event on Friday can present any day, but must present by Thursday (10/10). All missing or make-up current event #3 presentations will take place Monday (10/14).

Students are doing very well with the presentations, but their understanding and summarization of the news item needs a little work. If you want to help...have the student practice the presentation. See if you can understand the news item and ask them questions to hone their comprehension of the event. You might even be able to provide a little background knowledge that your student can use in the presentation.

Another area that needs help is paraphrasing. Students can copy the “who, when, and where” directly from the article. It is fairly impossible to restate Portland, Oregon in any other comprehensible way. The “what”, however, needs to be in the words of the student. This aspect is not going well. Simply rearranging the words or substituting one word is not using one’s own form of expression. It is still plagiarism.

I have been highlighting, underlining, circling, etc. the offending “paraphrasing” and lines from the actual article. I have had a lot of individual and class conversations. I reinforce, reteach, and offer my services to help summarize the article in one’s authentic phrasing. After this, students will



receive a “0” for the summary. Plagiarism is not allowed.

You can help by working with the student and checking their wording. I have even added a “quote” portion to the assignment for students to properly attribute credit and use a particularly well-worded sentence or statement. I do take this seriously and students do have class time to complete this work, but ask to see their summary if you have concerns or questions.

The group current event quiz is next Friday (10/17). The quiz will contain questions about the most significant/interesting news items presented in the last two weeks and the most recent short stories. Groups quietly and discretely discuss their answer before determining the best choice to write on their answer sheet. Students need to pay attention to the current event presentations as well as the updates and review of the current events in order to be successful. If nothing else, students should be reading, watching, and/or listening to the news on a daily basis.



BARBARIANS (7TH)

We are venturing forth into our next unit of study, “Barbarians”.

Students will learn how to research and prepare a formal research paper. We will be spending most of the rest of the quarter and part of the next working on the project. I will introduce the project and go over due dates. Students should have selected a Barbarian group by the end of class last Friday (10/3)—if they have not we will finalize groups at the beginning of this week.

I will be teaching students the process of a research paper, but the end result will be something else entirely. This week we will focus on the basics...I will teach them how to find information in various sources (print and electronic) and how to credit that source for the information gathered. Later in the week students will learn how to take notes and organize it within categories.

Most of the week will be spent researching. Students need to bring in research materials to help supplement our meager library stock and computer access. Students do need a variety of sources—reference books, online resources, and other print media. Students are required to have a minimum of 5 bibliography sources of at least three different types. Please review the research paper guidelines that were distributed to students or access it online at my HISTORY web page.

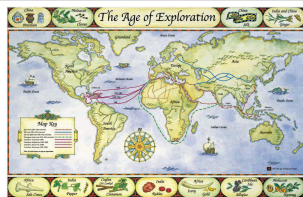
EXPLORERS (8TH)

We are venturing forth into our next unit of study, “Explorers of the Americas”.

Students will learn how to



research and prepare a formal research paper. We will be spending most of the rest of the quarter and part of the next working on the project. I will introduce the project and go over due dates. Students should have selected an explorer by the end of class last Friday (10/3)—if they have not we will finalize groups at the beginning of this week.



I will be teaching students the process of a research paper, but the end result will be something else entirely. This week we will focus on the basics....I will teach them how to find information in various sources (print and electronic) and how to credit that source for the information gathered. Later in the week students will learn how to take notes and organize it within categories.

Most of the week will be spent researching. Students need to bring in research materials to help supplement our meager library stock and computer access. Students do need a variety of sources—reference books, online resources, and other print media. Students are required to have a minimum of 5 bibliography sources of at least three different types. Please review the research paper guidelines that were distributed to students or access it online at my HISTORY web page.



CONFERENCES

Parent, student, and teacher conferences are:

- Wednesday, October **29th** from 9am-8pm
- Thursday, October **30th** from 9am-8pm

A message from the administration:

At long last, the day that you have been waiting for is finally here! Our online conference scheduling system is now live and ready for you to sign up. The link below will take you to the login site where you can create your username and password. You will need to do this even if you used the system last year because we discontinued the service after conferences were over last school year.

Here is the link:

<http://www.appointmentquest.com/scheduler/2200099634/login>

Once you have logged in:

- Click on the button that says "Make Appointment for Conferences"
- Click on the button next to the teacher name that you would like to make a conference with
- Click the button that says "Check Availability"
- Click on the date and time that you would like to schedule the appointment. (For all but one of the teachers, the only dates that are available are October 29 and 30).

The Block teachers are the only teachers using this system. The math and science teachers will have sign-ups outside of their door on the conference days. The elective teachers will be

available both days and you will just need to wait in line.

If you have any questions about scheduling, please communicate with your Block teacher first. If they do not have an answer, they will come and talk with me (Mr. Ferraro) and we will try to get it figured out for you. Our 6th grade teachers used the system last school year and it worked fairly well.



There are a few notes regarding the scheduling of conferences. If you have met with me once or several times prior to conferences you might want to consider whether you need more face time. I am not trying to dissuade you, merely asking you to reflect on the limited time available for conferences and whether someone else could use the time with me.

Additionally, if your student is doing very well you might want to reflect on needing time with me. I love my overachieving and brilliant students. They deserve lots of compliments. All students deserve lots of compliments. If, however, you are only coming in to get a pat on the back and a "good job" from me...another family might need that time.

Again, in either situation (prior meetings or successful student) I do not want to scare you off from a conference time. I love meeting with all families. I am just asking you to think about the purpose and intent of the time you want with me.

CONFERENCE PREP

Please come ready to discuss specifics. I generally find myself spouting the same message—[insert your student's name] needs to use his/her class time better, use his/her planner more effectively, read and follow the directions, and give him/herself enough time with the work to be successful. There...that part is done.

Now what I want you to do is focus on an assignment, project, or aspect of the curriculum as related to your child's educational, emotional, and social development. How comfortable are they with reading? Can they make an independent and age-appropriate choice? Can they summarize what they read? Can they make connections, inferences, analyze, synthesize, recognize use of a variety of literary devices, etc.? Do they know the parts of speech? Do they have a grasp of how words work together to create engaging and effective sentences? Can they write for a variety of purposes and audiences? Do they know how to read a textbook for information? Can they understand and relate the significance of a historical period? Do they know where places are in the world? Do they know their name?

The list can go on and on, but I think you get the point. Please come prepared with specific questions or you will get the generic experience instead of the individualized one. If you are unfamiliar with the work of your student or what we are doing in class then you have some homework before conferences. Ask your student about their work. Look it over with him/her to determine what s/he did well and what s/he needs to work on. Additionally, read the newsletters and handouts for assignments. Good luck...there will be a quiz.

