



## CONFERENCES

Parent, student, and teacher conferences were last week. Thank you to those who were able to meet with me and who took time out of their schedule to

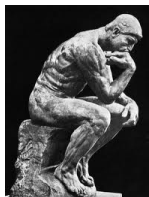
I will be honest...heading into conferences I was suffering from a dichotomy, I was a little defeated and I was a little ecstatic. It has been a rough transition for some students—not only from elementary school to middle school, but even within middle school (from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> and from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>). Others, however, have had a fairly smooth transition. I have been trying to reflect and ponder how and why the transition was rough or smooth and what can be done to make it better for all. I will be handing reflection sheets to students after conferences and will be sifting through the information during November.

I put a lot of information out...too much for some and not enough for others. This has been one of the problems. Students, in particular, are not reading the newsletter or directions. I have always said that I hold students accountable for the information. The lack of awareness or follow through is a little concerning.

I try to put information in the newsletter or directions to supplement and supplant the “wisdom” provided orally in class. I want and need students to take ownership of the information. I do not want to waste several hours of class time each week going over details and messages—that feels too much like a staff meeting. It is a skill in life that they need. I have changed the format and method of presentation, but I need some help with the reading part of the information.

The other major concern is planning. There was a good yearlong plan provided at the beginning of the year. I provide detailed weekly plans with each newsletter and a “look what is coming up” weekend section in the planner. I need students and parents to use the planner more effectively to avoid missing significant work and/or to help know what to make up if absent. I fully support and encourage family vacations and trips, but look ahead and plan or notify accordingly so I can help to work things out or rearrange others.

I recommend that students develop a habit of looking at their planner three times. The first is before they leave school to see what they need to take home. The second is right when they get home to see what they need to work on that night. The third and final time is before leaving for school to remind them what they need to take with them. I guarantee that it



works if it is a habit.

I cannot even begin to tell you how many times a day I hear “We are doing what?” or “I did not know that.” when clearly the student should have known if s/he looked at the daily assignment board, monthly calendar, planner, or listened to what is going on or being said in class. I hope to reduce (eliminate would be too harsh a term) such “ignorance is bliss” situations with your help.

There are a silent minority, however, who do a terrific job of planner, using their planner, communicating, and helping other.

Back to the feeling defeated... like you, I suffer when a student struggles. A teacher is a fool if s/he does not care. I care. I want all of my students to achieve the success that they are capable of. Many times it does happen, but many times students, parents, and teacher are left a little discouraged and heartbroken. I have to keep reminding myself that it is a process. I have to keep my eyes looking ahead and focused on where I am trying to guide the students. I have to keep reminding myself that it is a three legged stool and that if one leg is not working then the stool will keep falling over—but it has to get back up and not quit the game otherwise Little Miss Muffett will have nowhere to sit.

I had a lot of good feedback from parents and from returning alumni. Yes...from alumni. I had eight Binder classroom survivors come to West Sylvan for conferences. They all echoed the same sentiments. Portland Public School taught them well and their middle school experience was harder than their freshman year of high school. The benefit is that they were getting mostly “As” and the transition to high school was easy. They watch as fellow freshman struggle with the academic expectations and keeping track of things—and most of the “others” are sinking rather than swimming.

My expectations and demands are lofty, but achievable. I do hold students accountable, but I do support and alter tasks as necessary. The payoff is amazing. I beam each time a former student is in a production—dramatic, musical, dance, or art show. I jump for joy (on the inside...it would just look weird if I did so in real life) when they brag about their grades.

We have the best students; both academically and artistically. I believe that to my core. Please continue to communicate successes and struggles so that we can work together to achieve success.

Okay...I think I have stood on my soapbox long enough.



# READING

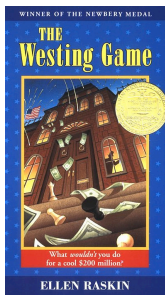
## THE WESTING GAME

Ms. G, our wonderful cooperating teacher, continues to guide students through a read-aloud novel focusing on character development. Over the next couple of weeks students will be comparing and contrasting character change within the text, describing character development, and identifying and explaining the purpose of literary devices.

Students, in table groups, are keeping track of pairs of heirs (nice assonance). Individually, however, they will be creating a character detective log of six of the significant characters from *The Westing Game*. Students may choose any of the 16 characters.

The character detective log will include illustrations and information related to the characters in the book. Students have been given a handout and the project guidelines are online.

Let the game begin...



# WRITING

## VOCABULARY #5

Students will be getting the pages for vocabulary #5 at the beginning of this week. They will be given time Monday and Tuesday (11/3-4) to work on the sentences and analogies in class. The assignment (list, sentences, and analogies) are due at the beginning of class this Friday (11/7).

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.

The vocabulary #5 quiz is next Thursday (11/13).

After finishing list #5, we will take a week to review lists #1-5 and students will take a trimester test of lists #1-5. The test will be Thurs and Friday (11/20-21). It will include 100 stems, 10 mystery questions, and "other" sections (could be antonyms, synonyms, labeling a cartoon, "math", etc.).

## FAIRYTALE NEWSPAPER

Students are in the midst of their "Fairytale Newspaper" project. In small groups, students are taking on the roles and responsibilities to complete a newspaper.

The task is a "fairytale" newspaper, but groups need to focus their articles, images, advertising, etc. on a particular theme. Some groups chose Disney princesses, Grimm fairy tales, Pixar, mythological creatures, etc. I am still hoping and



dreaming to have a group choose Star Wars as a theme. Until then, the "Star Wars Main Theme" shall hum in the background in the dim recesses of my dorsolateral, medial, and orbitofrontal cortex.

This week, students will start drafting their article. The opening paragraph(s) is (are) due at the beginning of class and we will workshop the draft on Thursday (11/6). The opening paragraph(s) need the "5 journalistic Ws" (who, what, when, where, and why).

At minimum each student will be responsible for one article and one visual. Beyond that, the tasks and complexity will vary.

There are several smaller tasks due throughout the project (as noted in the planner). The overall project is due before winter break (12/17). If you are planning on vacationing early please plan accordingly. The groups, and I, need the articles, images, and other aspects before the vacation is taken. As always, if a student is absent or "forgets" about an assignment, please use the planner to see what s/he has missed or what needs to be submitted for the project.

We will also be looking at examples of newspapers and set the groundwork for the vernacular of the newspaper this week. NIBs, NAGs, mastheads, subtitles, bylines "oh my".



# HISTORY

## CURRENT EVENT #5

Students will be presenting current events all week (11/3-7). All missing or make-up current event #5 presentations will take place Wednesday (11/12), due to the shortened week. The current event review will also be on the Thursday (11/13). The group quiz will be taken at the beginning of class next Friday (11/14).

A major concern is that many students need help 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 (termed "cutting and pasting"). 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 particular 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.



## BARBARIANS (7<sup>th</sup>)

Please review the research paper and historical fiction paper guidelines that were distributed to students or access it online at my [HISTORY](#) web page.

Students have completed research; submitted 50 organized notes from 5 different sources. They have also created a fictional historical persona. This persona is the perspective from which they will write their historical fiction narrative.

Students will create a title page, bibliography page, and a 3-5 page diary of their own work. The diary needs to vividly and accurately describe the exploits of the barbarians, rather than a vague listing of the entirety. The diary can cover several hours, but no longer than two to three powerful days of a journey.

This week students are drafting and workshopping the exposition of their diary, drafting the cover of their project, and work on expanding beyond the exposition.

## EXPLORERS (8<sup>th</sup>)

Please review the research paper and historical fiction paper guidelines that were distributed to students or access it online at my [HISTORY](#) web page.



Students have completed research; submitted 50 organized notes from 5 different sources. They have also created a fictional historical persona. This persona is the perspective from which they will write their historical fiction narrative.

Students will create a title page, bibliography page, and a 3-5 page diary of their own work. The diary needs to vividly and accurately describe the exploits of the explorer, rather than a vague listing of the entire journey. The diary can cover several hours, but no longer than two to three powerful days of the journey.

This week students are drafting and workshopping the exposition of their diary, drafting the cover of their project, and work on expanding beyond the exposition.



As a deterrent, we're finding "not by the hair on my chinny chin chin" needs backup.

