



GRADES

[repeated]

I have received a lot of emails, phone calls, and other communications regarding grades. Allow me a little time and space to offer global comments.

My first recommendation is to have a conversation with your student(s). Communication with a middle-school student can be difficult (to put it mildly). It is the best starting point. I ask the students to do the same thing—communicate with the parents. Going around people, asking not to tell “so-and-so”, and other tactics do not support good communication. Please do not ask me to do something I would not do with my children.

Communicate...communicate...communicate. If at first you do not succeed, try again, but use a different approach.

My second recommendation is to use Synergy. I spend a lot of time entering grades and comments in a timely manner. Please read the assignment description (the narrative explaining the assignment) and any comments I entered regarding the assignment of the student. In most cases, if the grade is 79% or below I enter specific comments about the student's performance. If the assignment was a multiple-choice quiz, however, I just enter the score. There is little comment necessary.

Synergy will provide a sensible and appropriate snapshot of the student's grade. At the beginning of a new grading period it is a little skewed, however, owing to the lack of assignments. A poor performance on one of the two assignments at the beginning of the grading period will have a large influence on the grade at the time. If you do not have access to Synergy, check with the office for instructions on how to access the system.

Third, and final suggestion is to communicate with me. Please do your homework before contacting me (the first and second recommendations) so that we can discuss grades from an enlightened position. You will have to complete the first two steps anyways, so you might as well get them over with before communicating with me.

I have met and had fantastic conversations with a good number of parents and students in the past several weeks. It is wonderful to sit down and make sure everyone is on the same page and to hash out any issues. Please let me know if you would like to have a conversation, but please do so sooner than later. My schedule is a bit hectic and I want to work with you to schedule meaningful time together.



CONFERENCES

[repeated until conferences]

If you missed the PTSA meeting on Thursday (10/17) then you did not get first crack at signing up for a conference. Parent and teacher conferences are:

- Thursday, Nov. **21st** from 4pm-8pm
- Monday, Nov. **25th** from 8am-8pm
- Tuesday, Nov. **26st** from 8am-4pm

Please call the **da Vinci front office** (503-916-5356) to schedule a conference. I do not have the conference sign-up sheets, nor do I know which slots are available. It is easier and better for the front office to handle the conference scheduling. I am sure I would mess up my schedule somehow.

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 PREPARATION

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



"He keeps invading other children's space."



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.

READING READING "LOGS" 4-6

The "logs" for the second quarter will be projects for those who have not been successful with the reading logs. Those who have **successfully submitted** reading logs may, if they so desire, continue to read, summarize and submit a log of their reading. The rest, however, do not have that choice.

Reading Log #4 will be bookmarks for the **current** reading of those who have not had success with the reading log. Students will have to create several bookmarks for the novel. Bookmarks will focus on characters, setting, plot, vocabulary, literary devices, and theme. Each bookmark needs to contain the author, title, and number of pages read in the novel. I will review and practice the new assignment with the students next week, as well as provide handouts and upload items to the website.

SHORT STORIES

This week students will be reading an Anthony Berkeley Cox short story, "The Avenging Chance." The short story is part of a collection of possible solutions contained within Berkeley's novel, *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*.

The Poisoned Chocolates Case is a detective novel by Anthony Berkeley set in 1920s London in which a group of armchair detectives, who have founded the "Crimes Circle", formulate theories on a recent murder case Scotland Yard has been unable to solve. Each of the six members, including their president, Berkeley's amateur sleuth Roger



Sheringham, arrives at an altogether different solution as to the motive and the identity of the perpetrator, and also applies different methods of detection (inductive or deductive, a combination of both).

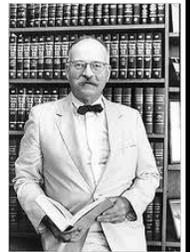
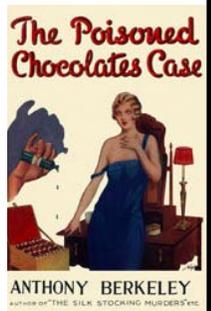
Completely devoid of brutality but containing a lot of subtle, tongue-in-cheek humor instead, *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* is one of the classic whodunits of the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction. As at least six plausible explanations of what really happened are put forward one after the other, the reader—just like the members of the Crimes Circle themselves—is kept guessing right up to the final pages of the book.

After arriving at his London club at 10:30 am precisely, which he has been doing every morning for many years, Sir Eustace Pennefather, a known womanizer whose divorce from his current wife is pending, receives a complimentary box of chocolates through the post. Disapproving of such modern marketing techniques, Sir Eustace is about to throw away the chocolates in disgust but changes his mind when he learns that Graham Bendix, another member of the club whom he hardly knows, has lost a bet with his wife Joan and now owes her a box of chocolates.

Bendix takes the box home and, after lunch, tries out the new confectionery together with his wife. A few hours later Joan Bendix is dead, whereas her husband, who has eaten far less of the chocolate, is taken seriously ill and hospitalized (but later recovers). The police can establish a few facts beyond any doubt: that the parcel was posted the previous evening near The Strand; that the poison that was injected into each of the chocolates is nitrobenzene; and that the accompanying letter was typewritten on a piece of stationery from the manufacturers of the chocolates but not composed or sent by them.

Quite soon in the police investigations it becomes evident that the intended victim was Sir Eustace himself rather than the innocent Joan Bendix: No criminal could have predicted Sir Eustace giving away the box of chocolates to a man he hardly knew who just happened to be present when it was delivered. However, at a loss as to the further details of the crime, Scotland Yard conclude that the sender must have been some maniac or a fanatic trying to rid society of one of its most immoral members.

One of the most unusual, and possibly unique, features of the book is that, while it appears at first sight to be an expanded version of Berkeley's short story "The Avenging Chance", the eventual solution of the crime in the full-length novel is quite different from that in the short story. (In fact, the solution of "The Avenging Chance" is one of the suggested explanations in the novel which turns out to be false.)



WRITING

VOCABULARY #6

We will be working on list #6 this week. The assignment is due Friday (11/22) at the **beginning** of class. The quiz will be next



Thursday we have school...which is a ways off (12/5). This can, and often does, pose the problem. The intervening break—while good for the mind, body, and spirit—often mean that it is hard to get back into the swing of things.

At this point in the game, it is imperative that one examines his/her assignment and quiz scores. Which steps, processes, habits, and rituals have led to success...and which ones have resulted in poor grades? Many are doing very well and should keep being the brilliant and wonderful people that they are. Many, however, need to recognize and realize that a change is needed. I do provide hints, advice, examples, and sure-fire methods to the students, but it is their prerogative to employ such treats of wisdom. Mayhaps you could nudge your student in the right direction (or cattle prod—whatever the case might be) or praise as needed.

Word Within the Word students who have reached list #21 have new assignments. They have entered the “whole word” portion of the book. The assignment consists of only two parts: the list and ideas. The assignment for the list is slightly different than prior lists—please look at the handout and directions. There are no more sentences or analogies, but there is an “idea” section that requires thought and writing. That information has been given to them and the guidelines are online.

W3 students on lists #1-20 have the same assignment as previously discussed (list, sentences, and analogies).

DETECTIVE STORY

We continue the process of writing our first significant piece, a detective story. Students have created the protagonist (detective), antagonist (criminal), crime and setting, plot outline, the solution, clues to embed in the story, the exposition, the initial rising action, and the middle of the rising action. Students will work on the end of their rising action and have an edited and revised copy by Thursday of this week (11/21).



We will be working on:

8. Introduce the suspects and witnesses. (eg. Annie entered the office. She was a tall woman with thin legs and hands. Her face looks like a diamond...). Be sure to give the reader a vivid picture of each one.
9. Build suspense. The more suspense you put, the more interesting the story will be. Make the protagonist get

stuck in a couple of impossible-seeming situations and obstacles. Don't make the mystery too easy to solve!

10. Read some mystery books to get more ideas. There are plenty at your library, or if you are seriously taking up mystery writing, you should buy a good collection of mystery books.



HISTORY

CURRENT EVENT #6

Presentations take place this week. Hopefully, students will present news items Monday through Friday (11/18-22). Missing or make-up presentations will take place the next Monday we have school (12/2) —a bit problematic due to Thanksgiving break and the “out of sight, out of mind” principle of life. The individual current event quiz is Friday (12/6) and it will contain questions about our short stories.

We continue with the same format of presentation throughout the first semester, and then change the type and style of presentation during the second semester. Students still need to prepare a news item (of **at least** ten or more newspaper paragraphs) prior to class. I examine completed summaries at the beginning of class—mainly to provide quick feedback, pronunciation clues, and to partner those who did the same article for a shared presentation. Students then make a thirty to forty-five second presentation to the class and locate the news item on the map.

The quiz will contain questions about the most significant/interesting news items presented in the last two weeks. The quiz is an individual quiz. Students read the questions and determine the best choice from the list of possibilities. I emphasize the key phrases in the question to help the students (ie: **what country**). Included with the quiz, but scored as a “Reading” grade, will be questions on the short stories we have been reading.

EXPLORATION OF THE AMERICAS

The first part of the week will be spent finalizing the diary or journal entry(ies). The “paper” that students will be writing is a 2-3 day vivid diary entry from a fictional member of the exploration team. The diary needs to have historically accurate details and description and not just a telling (list) of generic events that could apply to any time period.



Please review the research paper guidelines that were distributed to students or access it online at my HISTORY web page.

