



INTRODUCTION

I was a bit remiss in the "Introduction & Syllabus 2013-2014" in that I failed to introduce Ms. Lily Hom, the student teacher who will be with us throughout the academic year. Ms. Hom comes to us from the University of Portland and she is a fantastic addition to our classroom. Please welcome her warmly.

This is the last ginormous newsletter of the year. I used to parse out the explanations and expectations of the different subjects between the first three "regular" newsletters of the year, but time is money. Outdoor School is coming up quickly and I need to get the information to you. Sorry for the verbosity.

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READING DAILY READING

Students are provided twenty minutes a day of reading time during class. Additionally, I expect students to read for **twenty to thirty minutes at home** every day. Generally, we begin each core session with a silent reading period. Students should bring a reading of their choice to class, but I do have a meager classroom library for them to peruse and a newspaper. They are expected to read during the provided time.



READING LOG/PROJECTS

The reading log is a simple tool to keep track of how much a student is reading. Students are expected to read 1500 pages a semester—or whatever reading goal they set. I do adjust the goal to fit the abilities of the student and I will meet with each student at least once a month to track their progress.

The "log" sheets are fairly simple. A student only needs to fill in the title, author, and genre when s/he begins to read a book. When the student finishes the book (or abandons it) they fill out how many pages they read and a one to two paragraph summary of the entire reading.

Students do have an alternative. They can complete projects instead of keeping a reading log. The projects are due at the same time as the logs. The log and project instructions are detailed in a "Reading Log" handout I will provide the students this week.

The logs (or projects) are 25% of their overall reading grade. Students receive an A for achieving 90-100% of their goal, a B for 80-89.9%, a C for 70-79.9%, a D for 60-69.9%, and a F for anything below 59.9%. The reading logs/projects are due in five separate installments beginning Monday, September 24. Two or three logs/projects are due each quarter.

There are 149 days from the beginning to the end of the first semester. There are an average of 25 days between the start of the semester and the due date of each log/project. If a

student averages 10 pages of reading each day s/he will receive an "A" for his/her reading log—achieving 100% of the reading log goal.

SHORT STORIES

I will present ten (or more) short stories during the first semester. Most stories are in pairs—two stories from the same author. Author pairs are presented in successive weeks with an alternating read aloud and individual read format. There are several "stand alone" stories.



This semester we are focusing on short stories within the mystery and detective genre. We begin with a wonderful Dorothy L. Sayers story, "Suspicion". I read, "Suspicion", aloud to the students last week (9/4-6). We reviewed and discussed the story—plot line, characteristics of the genre, literary devices, etc.

Dorothy L. Sayers was a renowned English crime writer, poet, playwright, essayist, translator and Christian humanist. She was also a student of classical and modern languages. She is best known for her mysteries, a series of novels and short stories set between the First and Second World Wars that feature English aristocrat and amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey, that remain popular to this day.

Students will be asked answer a question or questions about the readings in both a written and artistic format. 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. Please refer to upcoming newsletters for due dates of reading journals and for authors we will be reading.

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WRITING VOCABULARY

We work on vocabulary twice a week. We take two weeks to work on each vocabulary list. There are currently two main vocabulary groups in core: a Binder (or regular) vocabulary group, and a word within the word (W³) vocabulary group. The W³ group is further divided into a first year W³ group and three different second year W³ vocabulary groups. Additionally, the regular vocabulary group is differentiated by grade level with increasing expectations for each successive grade.

6th grade students and many 7th grade students are in regular (Binder) vocabulary. Advanced 7th graders and 8th grade students are in Word Within the Word (W³). Students are aware of their assigned vocabulary group and should be able to answer parent questions. If things are not clear, please let me know.



During the first week of a vocabulary list, I work with the regular vocabulary group to review ten words from the current list each workday. Twelve words of the regular vocabulary list are alphabetical and are from a list of, “the most commonly used words to know.” The other eight words are from short stories, history text, or some other class reading. W³ students work independently on their assignments while I direct the regular vocabulary students.

The W³ and the regular (Binder) vocabulary assignments are due at the beginning of class at the end of the first week of vocabulary. The regular vocabulary group’s assignment includes: 1. the vocabulary word list with parts of speech, definition, two antonyms and two synonyms for each word, and 2. contextual and thoughtful usage of any of the five vocabulary words in sentences. The W³ assignment includes: the word list, decoding stem usage in sentences, and analogies. On the second Thursday, the W³ and the regular vocabulary students take a quiz.



PROJECTS

We will be engaged in several writing projects this semester. An example of a project is the “My Summer Movie Poster” project that was introduced last week. An upcoming project is the “Detective Story” that we will be starting in a few weeks.

Projects are divided into smaller, more manageable chunks. There is usually a guidelines sheet to go along with each project and due dates for the chunks. Please pay attention to the planner pages for due dates and newsletters for expectations.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are the last component of the writing grade. The students will often get the first 5-10 minutes of each day to work on the day’s opener. Sometimes the openers are part of an assignment/ project on which we are already working, and at times the openers are a separate task challenging their creativity, writing skills, problem-solving skills, and artistic fortitude. Additionally, any other “assignments” are lumped into this category.



HISTORY CURRENT EVENTS

Current events constitute a big part of our history curriculum. Students have chosen a day of the week to present a current event. The school day **before** their current event is due; students select and prepare an article during silent reading time. On the day that the current event is due, students present a basic summary of the article (who, what, when, where, why) and they locate the event on the world map for the class.

The “who,” “when,” and “where” should come straight from the article—there is no paraphrasing New Orleans. The “what” needs to be in the student’s words. It is difficult. I recognize this. It is imperative, however, that students learn to rephrase

factual information using alternative words. Plagiarism is not permissible and will result in a zero for the assignment and a conversation with the student, parent(s), and Binder.



Students present articles during the first week of a two-week current event cycle. The first day of the following week is for any make-up or missing presentations. We spend most of the rest of the second week updating and reviewing the significant/interesting articles and on the Friday of the second week students take a quiz over the ten to fifteen most important news items. The quizzes alternate between group and individual quizzes.

Students will complete a total of eight current events this semester. They will be given a handout (which is also available on the “History” page of the Binder Core website) that explains how to complete the current event assignment and another handout with an example article completed for them.

The first current event presentations begin this week, but they are for returning students only. Students new to Binder Core (whether they are 6th, 7th or 8th graders makes no difference...new is new) will observe & learn. **All students** will take a group current event quiz next Friday (9/20).

QUIZZES

There will be quizzes, a test, or major project for each unit of study. This year we are studying American History. We will be studying Geography of the Americas, Colonial Life, American Revolution, Constitution, Manifest Destiny, Civil War, and Reconstruction & Industrialization. Please pay attention to the planner for updates on readings, assignments, quizzes, projects, and tests.



Quizzes/Tests can, and often do, follow readings and lectures. I try to impress upon students that paying attention the first time (whether in reading or listening) is essential to long-term success. Being purposeful, rather than just getting the task done as soon as possible, lends itself to better understanding or, at the very least, asking good questions that can help lead to better understanding. Quizzes are normally short and sweet—ten to fifteen critical multiple-choice questions.

ASSIGNMENTS

We will be doing a lot of map work, some note taking, answer reflective questions, and a host of other various tasks. The shape, form, and due date of the assignments is wide-ranging, so please pay close attention to the planner sheet.

Additionally, the quantity, breadth, and depth of assignments vary from unit to unit. During the Geography of the Americas unit students will complete several assignments and a test. During the Civil War unit, however, we will be doing a lot of reflective questioning and completing a few larger projects. Student diligence in the completion of the assignments in a timely manner will help their grade immensely.

