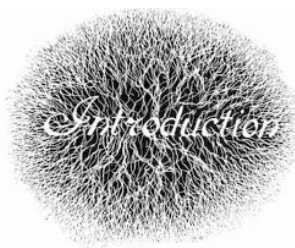




## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to West Sylvan Middle School. My name is Patrick Binder and I will instruct your son/daughter in reading, writing, and history this academic year. I have taught in the Midwest, Alaska, Hawaii, and Portland. I am a highly energetic teacher with very **lofty expectations**, but I tend to walk on the sarcastic side of the fence. Rest assured, I am very professional and I care deeply about each student.

I do my absolute best to help each student realize his/her potential and I craft assignments, projects, and tests to challenge a student's faculties...not rote memorization or busywork. I hold the students **accountable** for their learning. This can come as a shock to students and parents, but it is a lesson I would rather have them learn sooner than later. It is their education and it is the only time in life that it will be free.



## RESOURCES

### NEWSLETTER

I create and send out a **weekly newsletter**. It contains a blurb about each subject in Block (reading, writing, and history), a planner page, and general information or updates. The newsletter appears in both a paper and an electronic format, but in order to save trees, and cost, I only send a paper copy home the first week of school. There are, however, printed copies of the current newsletter available for students to take home on the **"information"** board in the classroom.

I will do my best to notify you via Synergy when I post current newsletters to my website. Synergy does not allow me—at least not in the past—to include attachments. If you have a question about the newsletter, send a note to my **school email** address. Please include "Binder newsletter" in the subject line.

The newsletter provides an excellent framework for knowing what is going on, expected, and due in Binder Block. It is only a newsletter. It will not do the work for you, nor will it provide in-depth and analytical treatises on the pedagogical underpinnings of assignments. It is merely written to provide a **snapshot** of what we will be doing. I cannot recreate 2.5 hours off classroom instruction each day (12.5 in one week) in a weekly newsletter.



## UPDATES

All things **change**—it is the only constant. I provide students with a fairly comprehensive year-long, monthly, and weekly schedule. That being said...please refer to the first line of this paragraph. I do my best to keep changes to a minimum. There are times, however, when assemblies, absences, time constraints, and a barrage of miniature gherkins forces me to change a due date, cancel an assignment, or alter the expectations. I inform students of these changes and I expect and hold students accountable for keeping an up-to-date and comprehensive planner.



## WEB PAGE

I used to maintain a web site through Portland Public Schools' server. The program used to create the webpage, however, is the most obtuse and time-consuming software imaginable. I now maintain a web page through **"Weebly"**. You can access my pages via the following link:

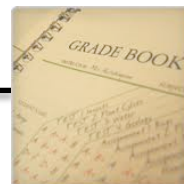


<http://733257565503770808.weebly.com/>

I keep the website as simple and straightforward as possible. History assignments are located in the **HISTORY** page, reading assignments are on the **READING** page, etc. When applicable, items will be sorted by 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade block.

You can tell the subject (reading, writing, or history) by its location on the **planner page**—which row it is in. I am constantly adding to, revising, and deleting sections of the web site. The **welcome page** will inform you of the most recent updates.

The pages have **downloadable** versions of the weekly newsletters, vocabulary lists, assignment sheets, history chapters, links to current event sites, project related handouts, etc. Even if you/your student forgets something at school the web site provides a way of getting the work done. It takes away one more excuse.



## GRADES ONLINE GRADES

The district purchased and mandated a new online program called "Synergy" to maintain grades last year. It is a web-based grading program that allows parents and students **access** to their grades. You can only access your (or your student's) grades and will not have knowledge or

awareness of how anyone else is doing. This has undergone a few updates and changes and I am sure there will be a few kinks along the way. Hang in there.



Parents and students will have immediate access to Synergy's "ParentVue" and "StudentVue", unlike last year when you did not get access until late September or early October. If you are new to the district they will send a letter outlining how to access your account shortly. Please contact West Sylvan's front office if you lose or do not receive your account information, or if you have forgotten how to access Synergy.

I have found online grades an invaluable tool to help both students and parents track "submitted" versus "not handed in", scores, and overall grade in each subject. Please keep in mind that it is **only a tool**. It is kept up-to-date, but if an assignment is submitted late it will take up to **ten days** for me to assess the online grade. I will at least mark the assignment as "submitted," but please be patient.



## DIFFERENTIATION

I provide a **variety of levels** within my lessons and present the material in a diversity of ways. Students have different abilities and learn via assorted means. It is complex way of saying that I tailor my assignments and expectations according to each student. A more rigorous vocabulary program might challenge a Talented and Gifted Student or a student who continues to struggle with reading comprehension could be paired with same-level readers for a discussion group.

It takes me a while to get to know the students. Even when I do get to know the students their **needs, aptitudes, and motivation** change. Please let me know if something is too hard, too easy, or just not working. The student does, however, need to make an honest effort at the task. I am not afraid of change—unless it sneaks up on me and says, "boo."

I am demanding, but I have been doing this for almost twenty years in a half dozen different schools. I am aware that I set the bar pretty high, but I am keenly aware that my expectations are not out of line with the abilities of students throughout the country. It does, however, necessitate communication between all three—**student, parent(s), and school** to get the job done. We are all integral parts.



## LETTER GRADES

We will be following the traditional **A-F scale**. An "A" is 90-100%, a "B" will be 80-89%, a "C" will be 70-79%, and a "D" will be 60-69%. Anything below 60% will receive a failing mark ("F").

Assignments, tests, and projects all have a determined point value. To determine a student's grade,

divide the points s/he has earned by the points possible to determine the percentage. Keep in mind that I am a **difficult evaluator** and I do expect students to read and follow directions. A "B" is above average and a "C" is not a failing grade.

Please understand that students might be assessed at a different level (and often different point value) than others. A student's aptitudes and effort are also taken into consideration, but the expected mastery of skills and information is paramount. If the level seems too challenging, please communicate with me sooner than later to arrange alternatives. There are always **alternatives available** if arranged beforehand and not after the fact.

If your student is struggling with grades please do not wait to contact me. I would much rather get an early jump on helping a student than have their egos take repeated beatings.

**I WANT YOU**



**FOR FEEDBACK!**

## EVERYTHING ELSE FEEDBACK

Please email/contact me with at the bottom of all correspondence I send home and on the main page of my web site. Do not hesitate to **communicate**. I would not provide my contact information if I did not want it used. I may not be able to answer right away, but at least the communication has started. If I do not respond in a prompt manner, **please try again** or try an alternative means to contact me.

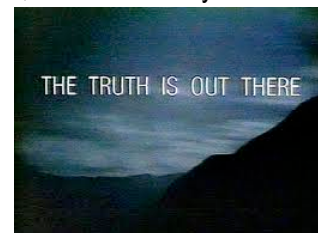
Additionally, you can help by pointing out issues with the web site or information in the newsletters (which are only resolved because I am alerted to the situation). Your help is greatly appreciated. Please keep in mind that because of **time constraints** most of my communication (in written form) is a first draft and there will be mistakes. So, save it having a profound impact on the fate of the earth, my grammatical errors do not need to be relayed to me. You are more than welcome, however, to make snarky remarks.

## COMMUNICATION?

There are almost **sixty-five** students between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Binder Blocks. There is only one of me. I have a lot of experience, but I continue to learn how to be a better teacher every day. I do welcome and value your feedback, but keep in mind that you may not be getting the **whole story** from your child. Miscommunication happens—whether by a lack of all information or omission of certain details.

Please do contact me, but please communicate with

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE



me in a way that allows us to have a **meaningful dialogue**. I am often shocked by what “adults” think is appropriate communication with a teacher. I am more than happy to schedule face-to-face time with you or phone conversations to address and resolve any issue or dilemma. I do have to work around my wife’s work schedule for afternoon meetings, but I will do my best to talk with you in a timely manner.

## PHILOSOPHY

7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders are entering that delicate time in life between handholding and independence. They want freedom, but not necessarily the responsibility that goes with it. Their minds are becoming aware of things beyond the “me”, but they struggle with the interactions and understanding of it all. They are energetic and still accepting of one another. Their brains and bodies are going through a radical change and the smallest thing can make them jubilant or break down in tears. I do not envy the parents of teenagers, but I also think it is the best age. It is a tough path to follow and there are **no absolutes**.

Each of us raises our children in the best way that we can, but our expectations and rules are not universal—with the exception of a few. I do, however, employ a few simple guidelines:

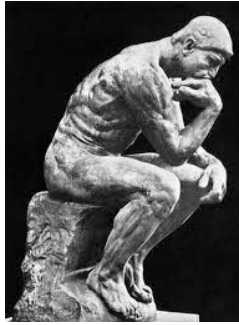
- problem-solve
- act accordingly
- communicate
- time-management



It seems to work pretty well with my children and it makes them think first. I do not coddle my children and I will not coddle yours. They are amazing individuals who are capable of brilliance. My job is to give them the tools and skills and then step out of their way as they dazzle the world.

I am a parent myself. All three of my children are now in school (a third grader, a second grader, and a preschooler). I treat my students how I would want my children treated. I provide them with boundaries, humor, guidelines, intense energy, a challenge, and an ear. Your children are important to me. Their academic, emotional, and social development is important to me. Like a parent, however, I will make mistakes. I do my best to learn from what has worked and what does not and I apply it to the next opportunity.

We have the best school with the best students and I am excited for another great year. Your presence is always welcome in my classroom and in our school.



## CLASSROOM ITEMS NEEDED

- art supplies
  - colored paper
  - clothe scraps
  - scissors
  - glue
  - pencil sharpeners
  - washable markers
  - rulers
  - watercolors
  - paintbrushes
  - other?
- word games—Scrabble isn’t the only one
- Brita water **filters**—not the pitchers, but the replacement filters
- plants
- technology?
- other?



## Contact Information for Binder

### PHONE

**West Sylvan:** 503-916-5690 ext 72668  
voicemail: 503-916-3600 ext 72668



**Home:** 503-640-5265

### EMAIL

**West Sylvan:** [pbinder@pps.net](mailto:pbinder@pps.net)



### WEB PAGE

<http://733257565503770808.weebly.com/>

