

### **Reflection Journal Entry – September**

I have been working diligently the beginning of this school year to improve my yearbook curriculum. This is the class that I love to hate, because it is so much work, but it is also the most gratifying because I see the wide spectrum of student development throughout the course, as well as have a final product to demonstrate my teaching abilities and my students' efforts.

I met a lot of resistance when I first introduced my curriculum. I utilized a curriculum developed by Jostens, my yearbook company, and I have tweaked it to meet the needs of our yearbook at JB. I developed various PowerPoints and lectures to help students to gain book knowledge of the various skills developed in the yearbook prior to actually getting on the website and designing pages. My rationale for doing this is that students need to understand certain concepts before they can actually put the book together.

Various lectures included Theme Development, Captions, Headlines, Photography, Design, Interviewing, and Advertising Sales, to name a few. These lectures provided hands-on activities, as well, developed by myself, so that students got first-hand practice of these skills prior to putting them to use in the yearbook.

I also instituted a vocabulary curriculum this year, so that a basic listing of terminology would be understood by all students from the very beginning of the year. This gives us a common language to use in our classroom so that students will understand what I mean and vice versa when using technical language pertaining to yearbook.

The first month met with much resistance, but the outcomes so far are looking up. I feel that students may have been resistant because most people feel that yearbook is a class where they get to get out of class to take pictures. I have consistently been raising my expectations for the course each year that I have been advisor, and this year is certainly no exception. Students

know that I expect the highest-quality work, and, after a class meeting about this resistance, they finally understood that I'm not working against them, but working for them. We all have the same goal in this classroom: to create the best yearbook possible. Now that we are working together, and have a foundation to build upon, I think this year will present itself to be one of the best yearbook crews that I have had the privilege to work with! ☺

### **Reflection Journal Entry – October**

This month I have been really focusing on improving my tenth-grade Vo-Tech class. One of the major focuses of the VT class was always the graduation project. I was slightly distressed when Mr. Benedick informed us that we would be changing the requirements because I knew I would be teaching something different, as well as changing one of the major components of the class. I must say, though, that this has forced me to re-evaluate what I have been doing the past few years in my classroom with this class and helped me redefine it.

One of the biggest benefits of the change in graduation project was my decision to move *Julius Caesar* to September and October. I would normally have taught this unit in December, towards the end of their time with me, but I changed it to provide more time to find out the graduation project requirements. Through a chance conversation with my colleague, Ann Heckman, we discovered just how much of our curriculum lines up. Since Ann and I both work with the tenth grade VT students for two periods each, we see them 4 of their class periods each day, opening up vistas of possibilities. We started discussing overlaps, realizing that we could work with ancient Rome and tie it to *Julius Caesar*.

This collaboration honed a project that I am very proud of and one that I'm completely astounded by the abilities of our students. We designed an advertising campaign project where students would need historical information from Ann's classroom along with persuasion techniques from my classroom to complete. Collaboration with Ann was effortless because we are both enthusiastic and willing to put time in after school to do the work. We met frequently to design the project and have provided class time. The culminating activity will be on Friday with their presentations in front of a panel of judges, including Mr. Burkett (vice-principal), Ms. Rockwell (guidance), Ms. Stoner (science), Mrs. Miller (special education), Mrs. Landis

(assistant), Ms. Heckman, and myself. I am greatly looking forward to this project because I have seen what the students have been working on in class. I knew they would be able to do a good job, but I am astounded by what they are coming up with. Some people write off the VT students because they are more career-minded, but I feel this project shows the academic side of the students, as well as utilizes the best of their creative and workmanship skills.

Ann and I already searching for ways to continue our collaboration next semester. We hope to align her medieval unit with my King Arthur unit, as well as working on a novel, *The Joy Luck Club* along with China. I know that Ann and I have the potential to create amazing cross-curricular lessons and we do hope to keep this going for the future.

### **Reflection Journal Entry – November**

November is the month that yearbook really gets busy. This is the time when the students first get in the computer lab. This year it was a bit overwhelming since we finally got Photoshop CS4, but none of us really knew how to use it, including myself. As a class, we had a huge learning curve to overcome in order to accomplish the goals that we had set forth for ourselves at the beginning of the year in our class. Mrs. Erin Martin proved to be an invaluable resource as we relocated to room 207 as our yearbook headquarters. She was our Photoshop guru, along with former student Sawyer Hollenshead, as we struggled to learn various skills of cutting out images, making collages with feathering, cropping of photos, various lighting effects, the creation of advertisements, bringing out a certain color from a black and white image, etc. as major skills that we would like to incorporate into the yearbook.

Major scheduling headaches of picture retakes, setting up the winter sports and club picture day, Senior Superlatives, Senior Siblings, Then & Now collection and organization, and the beginning of the underclassmen pages. November is the make it or break it month in the yearbook class, and the class went into overdrive and plowed full steam ahead to meet the first deadline.

To help alleviate some of the stress of the submission deadlines, I established mini-deadlines for each major submission deadline. Each deadline was split into three categories: Layout Mini-Deadline, Headline & Feature Mini-Deadline, and Photography & Captions Mini-Deadline. In prior years, we had major problems getting the pages completed on time, so by separating the pages into smaller chunks, I hoped it made each spread a little more manageable to the students, as well as making grading more efficient and organized. Mini-deadlines were established for all five submission deadlines so that pages would be completed approximately a

week before the submission deadline. This allowed time for changes and editing to take place by the staff, editors, and advisor for each deadline. At first the mini-deadlines were overwhelming to the students, but it also helped with organization. Each student was given a handout explaining the expectations for each type of mini-deadline and the dates for each mini-deadline for the rest of the year. This made all the expectations for deadlines very clear and established the importance. It helped to organize me, as well, and I think it will be a benefit to the yearbook staff for the remainder of the year.

### **Reflection Journal Entry – December**

December is always a difficult month because it rests between Thanksgiving break and the looming Christmas break which kids always look forward to. Sometimes motivation is difficult to maintain with the kids when they are constantly looking forward to a week off, but I used December to end my fiction unit in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes, as well as to incorporate more writing and higher-level thinking.

Students completed an intense project for their Fiction unit entitled “Think Tac Toe.” Students are given a list of three types of projects: artistic, dramatic, and creative writing projects. Under each type of project, there were three different choices for each of the three fiction short stories that we read in class. Students were put into groups of four and each group had to complete a project for each type for each story. This led to a wide range of choices and outcomes for the students as they worked diligently in class to demonstrate their learning in the fiction unit in a different manner than the normal unit test. The application of skills, literary terms, and themes learned throughout the unit was clearly showed in a fun manner as students updated “The Most Dangerous Game,” created a dating show for “The Good Deed,” or created a *Survivor* teaser commercial for “To Build a Fire.” Students were engaged in the project and genuinely showed an interest in all three types of projects to demonstrate their learning and skills.

Another major component of the month of December in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade classroom included the lesson on “Salsa Adjectives.” Students were asked to “spice up” their writing by adding high-quality adjectives. Students were given a plain tortilla chip and they had to come up with a list of 5 adjectives to describe the chip. Then students were given salsa, and students had to come up with 5 different adjectives to describe the chip now that the salsa had been added. Most

of the students noticed that the salsa added to the flavor of the chip and helped to add to it. We discussed how adjectives do this for writing. Students then applied this to a paragraph that they had written earlier in the year to practice “spicing up” their writing. Finally, students’ were assessed on this skill by utilizing a minimum of 10 Salsa Adjectives in their Writing Prompt #4. It was a good lesson because it got the attention of the students with the food, while making the application clear. It helped students understand the analogy of spicing up their writing and what word choice can do for writing.



### **Reflection Journal Entry – January**

January is always one of my favorite months because the kids come back from the holidays refreshed and I have the mid-term to show me student progress. The mid-term is typically my students' first comprehensive test, but it's a good introduction for college preparatory students to the rigors of college. Students are typically intimidated by the review packet when they realize the amount of information that has been covered in the first half of the year, but they are typically prepared and do well on the mid-term in both my years of giving one. I enjoy seeing how my students fare and, since I change it slightly every year, I get to see how my instruction is constantly changing, growing, evolving, and improving.

Also in January I get to begin teaching one of my favorite units to my ninth-grade classes, *Romeo and Juliet*. I have put a lot of time into planning out the unit and incorporating Collins Writing to really increase the rigor, and I always enjoy teaching this to my students to show them that Shakespeare can be fun. Students learn a lot of background information about Shakespearean England, and we discuss the history of the English language, as well. Students understand the plot of the play because many of themes can be related to by modern teens, including family fights, etc. I make the unit into a competition between the class as they are divided into families and they compete throughout the unit for a final prize of an ice-cream or pizza party from me. It's a great way to get personal with my students on down-time, as well, and I enjoy offering this reward.

One of my favorite projects is the day of the Capulet Ball. Students all create a mask and this is their entry into my classroom. This year, I was stunned by the artistic skill demonstrated by my students and I quickly took pictures to show their skills. I taught all the students a dance from the Elizabethan Era to get the students up and out of their seats, and then

we finished reading Act I of the play where Romeo first meets Juliet. It's a great moment, and by this point the kids are typically enjoying themselves despite the difficult language. The precedent has been set for the rest of the unit, and I'm always pleased with the results.

One of the struggles I have is helping students to learn the language and to relate to it. I have continued to try to hone my instruction to help students understand the language better, but it is still something that I want to continue to develop in the coming years.

### **Reflection Journal Entry – February**

The continuation of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit is one of my favorite parts about February. Students are genuinely engaged by the story, while completing numerous Type III Collins Writings about various literary terms throughout the play. For Act III, instead of giving a test, students are assessed with my favorite project of the entire year, their Body Biography project. Based on the Collins Writing standards, students are provided with FCAs where they are asked to demonstrate knowledge of direct and indirect characterization, symbolism, and quotations from the play up to this point.

The project consists of students tracing a group member on butcher block paper to form an outline of their assigned character in *Romeo & Juliet*. Students then find 6 quotations and identify these as direct or indirect characterization based upon class discussion and they tell us what these quotes tell us about their particular character. Students also must choose four symbols to represent their character and explain why these are appropriate choices. Finally, students have to develop a well-written explanation of why their character plays a pivotal role in the play thus far. Students must demonstrate artistic ability in their project, and then give a presentation with their family explaining the significance of all their choices.

This year I was highly impressed with the project, as well as the modes of characterization that my students picked up on. My students were very attentive and hard working during this time period, and I was very happy with what they came up with. I took pictures of each group during the class time that was provided to document their progress, as well as the finished product of every group because they were simply stunning. I was sad that I was not able to post these in the halls, as I did in past years, because of the renovation process that was started.

### **Reflection Journal Entry – March**

This month was the end of the normal yearbook calendar, and it is one of the most exciting yet intimidating times as a yearbook advisor. First of all, the final deadline must be met by the staff to ensure on-time delivery of the book at the end of the year. Not meeting a deadline means students could possibly not get their book during the school year, something that would NOT be okay with me or with the students. Also, the final deadline was typically one of the most extensive deadlines, but due to prior planning on my part, this deadline was not nearly as stressful. The institution of mini-deadlines in the deadline schedule for yearbook this year helped to ensure that students were on track and completing pages at the required speed.

One of the major problems with the final submission was the fact that we would have to submit on a day that we would not be in school due to a scheduled holiday. This is always a problem for me as the advisor since I cannot be there with the kids to ensure the pages are done. Therefore, we pushed up our final submission to the previous week to ensure we would have enough time, and, thankfully, we submitted all pages on time.

The next stressful part of yearbook always used to be “What do you do with the kids from March until May when we are done with the yearbooks and waiting to distribute them?” With the institution of the Spring Supplement last year, though, this problem was alleviated because 16 additional pages must be completed before the end of school. I assigned the pages for the Spring Supplement and we discussed the differences between the supplement and the rest of the book. But, alas, some of the events, such as Prom and spring sports, would not be happening yet and we still needed something for the class to do to be productive.

Last year, I came up with a project for the students to work on from March until May before they began the Spring Supplement. This project is a Theme Project done in groups where students utilize the skills they have learned throughout yearbook this year to develop a theme packet for next year's yearbook. Students were asked to create a cover, endsheet, opening, closing, and divider page demonstrating theme development utilizing spin-offs and the design skills from Photoshop and Yearbook Avenue that the students had developed while working on the yearbook this year. Students were placed in groups of three to begin and mini-deadlines and weekly conferencing was established to ensure that I would know where each group stood at the end of each week.

Students were given until May 5, 2010 to complete the project with their groups. They will be presenting a "sales pitch" to the rest of the class trying to convince the class as well as outside judges why their theme and design is the best choice for next year's yearbook, utilizing sales techniques that were discussed previously in the year. This project asks students to really demonstrate everything they have learned in the class, utilizing vocabulary, design and layout skills, as well as interpersonal skills to complete the final project. It is better than any final exam test that I could give the students and I'm very excited to see how the students fare this year. I have high hopes that this will prove to be one of the best projects yet so far this year.

### **Reflection Journal Entry – April**

This month I tried to focus on improving my tenth-grade Vo-Tech class, especially in terms of the Advertising Campaign projects. One of the major focuses of the VT class was always the graduation project. I followed the same order as the previous semester, putting *Julius Caesar* before graduation project so that I could still work on my cross-curricular project with Ann Heckman.

Ann and I took time to reflect on the previous semester's outcome of the project and how disappointed in the final results we were. We discussed how we could improve our own instruction as well as the instructional design of the lesson to enable our students to be more successful this time around. I located several videos demonstrating ethos, pathos, and logos in modern-day advertising and we took a lot more time as a class going over these examples to ensure understanding as a whole. The essays for this class came out stronger and we decided to choose the groups to ensure a better "spread of the wealth," so to speak, within each group. We met frequently to design the project and have provided class time. The culminating activity was held on Wednesday, April 7 with their presentations in front of a panel of judges, including Dr. Erb (Superintendent), Dr. Johnson (Director of Curriculum), Mr. Benedick (Principal), Mrs. Ford(guidance), Mrs. Stum (English), Ms. Heckman, and myself.

We were highly impressed with the higher-order thinking skills demonstrated by both groups in their creations of their products, Fracas Footwear and Brute Force Armor. Both groups demonstrated creativity while showing what they had learned from a historical perspective as well as what they learned about persuasive techniques and how to sell a product. The final product of both groups was so exceptional, and the audience left raving that this group did not seem like a vocational group.

I was astounded by their ability to rise to the occasion, and they definitely showed the a change in technique on my part as the teacher can improve the instruction so that my expectations will be met. The delivery of a lesson is very important, and the changes that Ann and I made in our planning and presentations for this unit helped to provide a better result and one that we were both proud to show off.