PORTFOLIO EVALUATION IN TWO
ENGLISH 12 CLASSES
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The University of Alberta, 1972

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION
in
CURRICULUM

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
July 2000
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Abstract

Recent educational research has stressed the importance of developing authentic means of assessment and evaluation. Portfolio assessment in language arts has been approved by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia as an alternative to testing. The purpose of this project is to devise a portfolio evaluation assignment suitable for use in English 12, work with two classes on its production during the term of one semester, and evaluate with them its effectiveness as a learning tool.
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Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to those steadfast friends and patient colleagues who make academic tasks such as this one a pleasure. Thank you to Dr. Judith Lapadat, my project supervisor, for her good-humoured and careful criticism, to Dr. Edward Harrison and Geoffrey Straker for sponsoring and encouraging my entry into a Master's program, and to all the sessional and program instructors, who were unfailingly professional and supportive in my coursework. Finally, thank you to my wife Elaine, whose emotional backing and partnership make all the work worthwhile.
Introduction

The purpose of this project was to devise a semester-long evaluation portfolio assignment for two English 12 classes, to work with them on its production, and to assess with them its effectiveness as a learning tool for English 12. Although the students did not assist in the initial design of the assignment, they did participate in its necessary modification as the semester progressed. As instructor, I intended several related instructional purposes for the portfolio, with the overarching purpose that students take a greater personal responsibility for their own learning. As researcher, I wished to analyze student responses to the portfolio as a learning tool, as well as to reflect upon my own satisfaction with it as an instructional resource.

Students' responses in the portfolio itself, and in discussion and written response at the end of the semester were used to answer two groups of interrelated questions. First, did they find the portfolio, as assigned, a satisfactory method of learning English 12? What did they like about it? What did they dislike? What difficulties did they encounter that were specific to the portfolio's design and structure? Second, what modifications would students make to the design of the assignment to make it more efficient and effective as a learning tool?

As instructor, I wanted the opportunity to examine the student work assigned and to evaluate its quality as a representation of English 12 work (predominantly written) to be expected of students in their last year of senior high school. In so doing I would have a tentative qualitative measure of the value of a new instructional tool that could be adapted and modified, if suitable, for future classes.

Background to the Evaluative Portfolio

Portfolio use is not a new concept, even in education. It has been used by graphic artists for decades in promoting their work. More recently (B.C. Ministry of Education, Assessment Handbook Series, 1994) the idea has been adopted by educators as a means to encourage more meaningful, more authentic learning efforts from their students.
A portfolio is a collection of representative work created and selected by the student. Portfolios may be ongoing, working collections that serve as guides to continued learning. Conversely, they may be cumulative, presentation collections that serve as a “snapshot” measure of student progress at a particular time. At the end of a course of studies it can thus serve as an evaluative tool. The main purpose of such a portfolio is to demonstrate skill and competence in an area of endeavour based on the best efforts of which the student is capable. The secondary, perhaps more strongly motivating, purpose of this demonstration is the achievement of a credential or grade, something which will in turn enhance the student’s future opportunities for higher education or career options. Described in these ways, the portfolio appeals to an interesting blend of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

Intrinsic motivation is higher when students have freedom to select directions and to control focus and timing in their study. It has been demonstrated (Stipek, 1998) that student learning is enhanced by a level of autonomy. As a consequence, students who have the freedom to choose the content of their portfolio demonstrations should be motivated more strongly to achieve more ambitious goals than students who might be locked into more limited, more precisely directed tasks. However, it is also true that if the schools have a legitimate interest in directing student learning (and we teaching professionals operate our whole educational apparatus on the premise that we do), teachers using portfolio methods must have some say in guiding the directions taken by students. In the study of language arts, for example, we are interested in improving youngsters’ skill with language and communication. It follows that students be required to produce portfolios through methods and in formats that, in the judgment of the teacher, best accomplish this goal. Because of the differential authority between student and teacher based on the different roles which they are assigned or adopt in the classroom, varying degrees of compromise may be required for the student both to achieve his portfolio goals and to fit his work into the requirements of a teacher-imposed portfolio design. “Bounded freedom” might be a useful way of describing such a compromise.
In early grades when autonomous choice and action by the student are first encouraged, experimentation with portfolio evaluations may be less risky than when students will also face a government examination at the end of the term's work. Grade 12 students are all too aware of the examination as a significant event, looming on their time horizon, and some go so far as to prefer only assignments and instruction that provide direct preparation for it. However, there is a strong argument to be made that learning only for an examination is shallow and short-lived, and that it may be experienced as relatively meaningless, except insofar as it provides safe passage through another expected educational ritual. By contrast, it is to be hoped that a well-conceived and prepared portfolio requires comparatively long-term commitment, in-depth exploration and linking of ideas, and careful construction of personally and socially meaningful knowledge that will stay with the student long past his graduation. However, it might prove risky to abandon more traditional, tried methods of evaluation altogether, despite one’s misgivings about them, especially if these are methods with which students have come to be familiar and to expect. Thus, for this portfolio project, I decided that the grades would be apportioned as follows:

1) Forty per cent would be on the government examination, as required by Ministry of Education policy;
2) thirty per cent would result from traditional grading of written and oral work throughout the semester;
3) thirty per cent would be based on the student’s final portfolio.

Further, I made clear that a greater portion of the traditional, ongoing evaluation received as feedback by students would be specifically formative in nature, and that the thirty per cent mentioned in (2) above be derived from clearly defined summative instruments, identified to students as such in advance of their administration. Some of these would be practice government examinations (photocopies of recent examinations written by students during the past several years); these would provide training in dealing with government examinations, potentially anxiety-ridden events without such prior exposure. The remainder
of the traditional evaluation would be summative tests requiring demonstration of general knowledge of English (grammatical principles, literary terms, and so on) and written interpretation or analysis of specific texts from various genres.

However, it is the evaluative portfolio (and its structure and requirements) that is of primary interest for this project. What was it to consist of, and how would its constituent parts be evaluated in order to make up the final thirty per cent of the students' grades?

The Structure of the Portfolio: Four Sections

I initially conceived of the portfolio as a means of achieving several ends. One was that the portfolio be a long-term project that would require cumulative development with periodic opportunities for reflection during the course of its construction. The second was that it should provide maximum opportunity for student choice within a common, bounded framework. Third, it would provide an authentic, representative sample of student work for evaluation in a format that would allow students to be graded predominantly on what they conceived of as their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Fourth, its design should encourage, if not require, the students to generate mental models that connected their own lives both to the textual and discourse content of the English 12 course and to their experience of the world outside of school. Appendix A is the initial portfolio assignment outline that was proposed to, discussed with, and approved by the students. The four parts of this portfolio structure are different but complementary ways of achieving these ends.

The Autobiography. The first section of the portfolio consists of a series of autobiographical essays. These were assigned as multi-paragraph compositions of 300 to 500 words on the topics of family, motivation, landscape, decisions, and identity. In Acts of Meaning (1990) Jerome Bruner explores how the 'self' might be formed through its narrative interactions with family and with the wider culture (pp. 105 to 109). I hoped that students could use their autobiographical topics (see Appendix A) to explore themselves and linguistically 'to construct' themselves in ways which would assist in their maturation and increase their self-confidence. Late adolescence is a period during which our students
often face many important decisions. These decisions may concern personal priorities such as future career and study, immediate job pursuits, personal romantic attachments, changing family relationships as personal independence expands, and so on. It is to be hoped that improved self-knowledge engendered by the portfolio's autobiographical section might ease the burden of some of these decisions or might clarify the often conflicting impulses and motives that can make such decisions difficult, even emotionally threatening. In the process of composing these autobiographical essays students would not only gain valuable self-knowledge but would also continue to learn to write in essay format while grappling with expository and narrative topics of a challenging level of difficulty.

The Theme Park. The second section of the portfolio is called the 'Theme Park.' Its purpose is to encourage and guide the student to explore the literature of the course through the conceptual 'lenses' of several themes (see Appendix A). The outcome of this section was to be two major (and perhaps one or more minor) essays exploring the themes of interest in the light of the student's experience of the course literature. Additionally, the instructor encouraged students to make conceptual connections with their own experience and with art or literature they might have encountered beyond the classroom.

The Weekly Summaries. The third section of the portfolio is developed through the semester as of a series of weekly summaries of course content and activities. Each summary is to be a series of notes, in either paragraph or point form, outlining the main events of the previous week's classes. As such, it is intended to be a conceptual review, one that would encourage students to revisit specific English concepts that have been taught, or to review literary terms that have been part of their discussion. As well, it can serve as a reassurance that we do, in fact, accomplish many things in English classes.

A final, and equally important aspect of the weekly reviews is that each student is charged with composing a question. Real questioning promotes higher level thinking in a way that merely summarizing does not. These questions could be to the instructor, to the class, to other students, to characters in literary works, or to authors. They could be
mundane and practical or fantastic and metaphysical. I left the nature of these questions open to the questioners. Each week as the summaries were collected I would compile the questions by class and select several that were of broader interest or of clearer relevance to current curricular text or emergent social topics. These were used as introductions to class discussions in an attempt to enrich the discourse component of the course.

The Creative Project. The fourth section of the portfolio requires the composition of a creative project by each student, one suitable to the level and direction of his/her ambition and ability. In previous years one of the traditional assignments for English 12 was that each student research and compose a ‘term paper’ on a topic to do with language or literature. This was a particularly useful assignment for those students moving on to post-secondary studies after high school. However, it proved an unsatisfactory experience to those students who lacked such academic skills, plans, or ambitions.

Accordingly, I modified the creative project section of the portfolio by expanding the range of options available to students. The class discussed such alternatives as writing an original story, compiling a poetry anthology (to include professionally written poetry with student analysis and response, as well as poetry composed by the student), writing a children’s story, doing a short piece of historical fiction by researching a historical event and creating a story about it, or writing an extended book review based on a novel agreed-upon by student and instructor.

Theoretical Contributions to the Portfolio’s Design

The Significance of Autobiography. Several authors and researchers contributed ideas that led to the structure and management of this project. The first, and perhaps most important of these is Jerome Bruner. Acts of Meaning (1990) records Bruner’s preoccupations with meaning-making, and large parts of the book explore the role of narrative in this process. He suggests that the requirements of narrative may drive the order in which children master certain linguistic processes (p. 77), i.e. that language itself develops in response to the need for narrative. He agrees with Bakhtin, a Russian theorist,
that “single voices are abstracted from dialogues,” a principle which emphasizes the social nature of meaning-making (p. xii). The importance of this observation underscores the importance of social interaction in the process of learning. The third section of the book proposes that we use narrative to define and defend ourselves within culture, that is, to create socially acceptable models of our personalities and behavior. In turn, it is the multiple exchange of narratives that is the vehicle through which a culture negotiates an understanding of itself, and accommodates to and assimilates its disparate elements (pp. 88 - 94). In the fourth section of the book Bruner explores the idea that personal autobiography, no matter its level of formality, is the psychological ‘tool’ through which the self, itself, is formed (pp. 99 - 138).

These are very abstract ruminations. Their essential contribution to the portfolio project is to justify, support, and even recommend the autobiography section. Late adolescence is a time fraught with emotional and psychological uncertainty. Youngsters are then, more than ever, struggling to define themselves, to justify themselves in the face of an experienced and often unsympathetic culture and to adapt to its demands. In the last year of secondary school they realize, often suddenly, that childhood is falling away behind them and adult social roles are waiting with an immanence that is sometimes a welcome part of a planned future, but that is also sometimes a chilling uncertainty. When designing the portfolio I intended to provide the students an opportunity to explore this existential reality a bit, both together, in sympathetic discussion with the class, and alone, in the composition of the suggested essays.

The Importance of Encouraging Achievement. An assignment of this size may seem daunting, even overwhelming to some students at first. Its successful completion includes a great deal of reading, co-operative discussion, serious reflection, and written composition. I determined to design the portfolio in such a way as to be as encouraging as possible for students of all calibres within the class.
Deborah Stipek's Motivation to Learn (1998), Chapter 7, deals with techniques for developing and maintaining positive achievement-related beliefs in one's students. (An abridged summary of instructional principles that research recommends be applied with respect to students' assignments is included as Appendix B.) Many of the principles outlined therein were essential to the construction of the portfolio and to the management of the class in such a way as to enable that construction. Consider the following.

The portfolio assignment as a whole was challenging for all students. The variety of opportunities, particularly in the creative project section, allowed students of varying ability to address the project at their own levels. The autobiography, the summaries and the theme park are all broken down into subunits. By working on them throughout the semester the tasks are 'chunked' into parts whose initial evaluation by the instructor allowed the student to observe improvement in his own performance. Students are allowed considerable freedom in selecting their own goals within the overall portfolio structure. The teacher may address students' summary questions with substantive comments, and I took advantage of this opportunity (see Appendix C). Evaluation standards are discussed with students at the outset of the project, including a flexible plan that enables students to focus on their strengths or greater interests to achieve their highest possible grade. Very little evaluation need be done in public, and when it is, it can be limited to practice work that students check themselves. Students may be given progress forms for the portfolio and other course work so that they can monitor their own assignment completion and success. Students encountering difficulty on certain assignments, the term paper, for example, may be referred to the librarian or other professionals in the school for extended assistance. Peer discussions may be used to enhance students' comprehension of theme park explorations. These discussions can also serve as temporary instructional groups. Students who are weak at writing, for example, nonetheless may often contribute to the classroom discourse in a positive way. All these practices reflect concern for points raised in Stipek's chapter.
The Requirement of High Level Thought. I was also determined that the intellectual
tasks of compiling the portfolio would require some high level thought processes.
Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren discuss four levels of reading in their classic text
*How to Read a Book* (1972). These levels are basic decoding, inspectional reading
(systematic scanning for overall structure and central ideas of a text), analytical reading
(interpretive reading) and syntopical reading (synthesizing ideas on a specific theme from
disparate texts). Most class literary study tends to be analytical reading (with assistance in
decoding where vocabulary, contextual or syntactic difficulties are encountered). Adler’s
syntopical reading refers to approaching multiple texts from the perspective of a unifying
theme or idea, with the goal of informing one’s own thinking. The theme park discussions
are to enable students to approach syntopical reading through group work. The creative
project of writing a research paper is also an assignment requiring a syntopical approach;
this time, however, the student is more on his own to seek out supportive texts related to his
topic. Both are high level tasks.

The Selection of Texts. Harold Bloom, through his *The Western Canon* (1994), also
influenced the direction of this project. Bloom’s sturdy defence of canonical literature is not
always popular nor is it universally deemed politically correct, but it rises, nonetheless, as an
influential argument for retaining the texts of canonical ‘giants’ like Shakespeare for study.
Some current wisdom would have us abandon these authors for current writers whose
subjects address such topical and relevant issues as gender, nationality and race. To further
compound this drift from the canon, student preferences are often expressed requesting
simply something that is ‘fun,’ which usually implies lots of action and/or sex, in the best
traditions of Hollywood and cable television. However, as Bloom argues, “A purported
poem may have the most exemplary sentiments, the most exalted politics, and may also be
not much of a poem” (p. 35). The same essential argument may be raised with respect to
any genre. Bloom goes so far as to state unequivocally that we “are destroying all
intellectual and aesthetic standards in the humanities and social sciences, in the name of
social justice," and that we are "systematically devaluing learning" (p. 35). He argues that it is not a particular set of political privileges that he is defending; rather he claims to affirm the universal value of what he sees as historically having been the greatest artistic presentations of individual and collective human struggle. It may be a historical misfortune that the two arguments, different in intention, often function as one; hence the strength of criticism of canonical theory.

In selecting texts for English 12, always with the portfolio partly in mind, I was faced with reconciling these often conflicting preferences. Is it the job of a contemporary language arts teacher to maintain a long and noble cultural tradition and to assimilate our youth to that culture? Bruner would argue a qualified yes to that question, although he uses the term 'canonical' to refer to the dominant or unquestioned beliefs and traditions of any culture. As he puts it, "One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common... is by the joint narrative accrual of history... It is our sense of belonging to this canonical past that allows us to frame our self-accounts" (Culture of Education, 1996, pp. 146-147). We cannot know about ourselves without knowing about our culture. Bloom would argue that Western civilization as historically defined from the pre-Socratics through to such moderns as Beckett is the dominant world culture and that attention to its literary canon is a sine qua non of education. A strong case has also been made that it is our job to enhance our students' literacy (in the broadest sense of that term) in order to empower their futures in an uncertain world (Roberts, 1997, and Luke, 1998). Thus Luke, who is opposed to Bloom's canonical views, makes a strong argument that teachers should be attending more aggressively to the socio-political side of education to ensure that students not only can read and write in the ways needed by an urban industrial labour market, but also can access and utilize various forms of capital that will provide them with greater personal autonomy and opportunities for civic responsibility.
The Integrated Resource Package for Language Arts 11 and 12 (p. 1) states that we should

"provide students with the opportunity to study literary and informational
(including technical) communications and the mass media and thereby experience
the power of language. Students [should be] presented with a window into the past,
a complex portrayal of the present, and questions about the future. They also come
to understand language as a human system of communication -- dynamic and
evolving, but also systematic and governed by rules."

This catch-all description enables teachers to provide language arts instruction in a broad
variety of formats and texts, and even pays lip service to grammatical instruction.

I do not believe that any of these priorities need be excluded. One may pay his
respects to Western canonicity without ignoring the realities of current political conflict.
One may admire the tropes and figures of literary history without blinding oneself to the
purposes of deconstruction and modern literary theory.

For my English 12 classes I selected a broad range of texts and audio-visual
presentations (see Appendix D). Some were canonical as Bloom defines it; most were not.
Some were 'windows into the past'; others were contemporary. Some reflected the biases
and perspectives of our cultural tradition; others called them into question. Probably the
ultimate criterion of selection was my own professional judgment as to whether or not each
work would engage the students and provide them with ample thought-provoking ideas to
fuel their own mental constructions within the portfolio’s framework. Some works were
likely better choices than others. Students did not hesitate to inform me when any selections
were less than satisfactory.

**The Crucial Contribution of Discussion.** A final paper informed and inspired some
of the discussion format of the project. Sara Allen (1992) highlighted the importance of
student discussion and made it a central feature of her class for many months. Discussion is
a powerful tool for broadening our perspectives on issues, for seeing other viewpoints, and
for using these experiences to modify our own thinking. Frequent discussions are central to
the class activity that makes student construction of their portfolios possible.

Method

It is important to make a crucial distinction at this point. Method in this project
refers to two different but related streams of activity. First I will discuss my research
method. This is a summary of the steps I took to set up the project, obtain permission for
the research, solicit the co-operation of students, gather data at the end, and analyse it with
respect to the questions asked in the introduction to this paper. Second, but important to the
reader's understanding of the project, I will discuss generally and with examples of some of
the actual teaching and learning activities that took place in the class, the way that the
portfolio required the classes to change, and the ways in which I and the students met those
challenges. It is important to note, as well, that many of the instructional arrangements were
methods agreed upon by negotiation with the class, not solely methods either inherent in the
design of the portfolio or imposed by me through my role as instructor. The teaching and
learning methods resulted in the student portfolios; the research method resulted in this
report. Consequently, the discussion of the results will respect the same distinction.
The Research Method

The portfolio project was first conceived and designed a month before the classes
were to begin. I knew I would be responsible for two English 12 classes in the spring
semester. As well, I knew I would have a preparation block during the semester, which
would ease the anticipated burden of any increase in tasks that might emerge during
implementation of the portfolio.

Although the portfolio promised to be an interesting assignment for a formal
research project, it was always my intention to begin using portfolio evaluation with grade
12 English classes this year, whether it would be accepted for research credit by the
university or not. However, the anticipated research approval caused me to be extremely
careful in keeping records and noting observations about the procedures in both classes so
that an accurate report could be generated. I signed a standard research agreement with School District #82, which outlined the kind of research I intended to do, how my records would be kept, and how children would be protected. The ethics committee at the University of Northern British Columbia vetted my research application, which consisted of an outline of my intended project, copies of my consent/assent forms and information letter to parents, the consent of the school district (a copy of the signed research agreement), and provided approval in due course.

The classes were composed of a normal range of youngsters with a representative range of ability and ambition. There was a fairly even mix of genders and a considerable variation in ethnicity, including more than one Asian immigrant, a Brazilian exchange student, and a number of First Nations students. Two students were pregnant; another was a father. One was a high-functioning autistic youth. Another had returned to senior secondary after a year of home schooling. The ages in the groups ranged from 16 to 19.

I introduced the portfolio concept to the two classes on the second week of the semester. It was always understood that after class discussion and democratic modification of the idea (if necessary), everyone would participate. I also introduced the idea of the portfolio’s being part of an organized research project through the University of Northern British Columbia and that in order for a student’s work to be part of the research, consent would be required from the parents and assent from the student. I distributed a letter of explanation and consent/assent forms to be signed. I made it clear that failure or unwillingness to participate in the research project would not jeopardize any student’s grade in any way, but that willing participation would be of valuable assistance to me and to the university. Most students indicated readiness to participate, and thirty students ultimately signed up to allow quoted material from their portfolios to be used in the project report. All such consent was conditional on the guarantee of all participants’ anonymity.

Initial discussions to do with the project were largely procedural. How would the portfolio ‘fit in’ to the regular operation of the class? What was a theme park, anyway?
How would the autobiographical essays be marked? What options existed in the creative project? Many questions needed to be addressed. Over the first three weeks I gradually introduced the class to the four portfolio sections so that they could begin to generate a concept of the work that would be required of them in its construction. We agreed through class negotiation that we would devote approximately one class period a week purely to portfolio activities. These would be loosely structured classes during which, as teacher, I could conference with individual students while others made use of the library or spent their time reading, writing, or pursuing other portfolio tasks. The remainder of class time would be spent on the activities of a ‘traditional’ English 12 class—learning finer points of grammar and writing, reading and discussing literary texts from a variety of genres, writing diverse responses such as essays or short answer questions (typical tasks on the government examination), and involving ourselves in the occasional dramatic simulation or panel discussion.

By the time the portfolio had been fully introduced students were well aware of the ‘dual’ but mutually reinforcing parts of the course. As well, they understood that they would participate in evaluating the newer, portfolio part in a session devoted to its evaluation after its completion in June. I would use the evaluations (and some portfolio contributions) of students who had signed the consent agreement to inform my own report on the project.

Thus, on Tuesday, June 20, after the completed portfolios had been handed in, we devoted all of each class to a discussion and written evaluation of the portfolio project by the students. Unfortunately, many students were absenting themselves from classes during the last week in order to study for the government examinations that were also beginning that week. Thus, only eight students were present to participate in the evaluation in one class and eleven in the other. However, many comments that addressed the same evaluative questions from below were to be found in an overview page in the summary section of students’ portfolios. Thus there was still a broad representation of opinion and judgment to include in the results.
Students were asked to respond to the following question clusters.

1. Did the portfolio project accomplish what it was designed to do? Did it require long-term planning with periodic review of accomplishments? Was it sufficiently individually oriented? Was it a good tool for demonstrating personal knowledge and skill?

2. What were the advantages and disadvantages of each section—the autobiographies? the summaries? the theme park? the creative project? Was the evaluation system, which allowed students to stress their strongest performances, fair?

3. Should I continue to assign this project? Why? How might it be refined to work better in future? What final advice would the student give any instructor regarding this project?

I collected the evaluations and checked to see that all of them were written by students who had submitted consent forms to have their ideas published in the project’s report. In order to compile student comments on the above questions, I created summary comment sheets, each devoted to positive or negative comments on autobiography, theme park, weekly summaries, creative projects, and the portfolio as a whole. Student comments from the evaluation sessions or from the internal portfolio overviews were transcribed verbatim onto these sheets so that I could pull out common ideas about what was beneficial and what was unsatisfactory with respect to each of these sections. (See Appendix E for the original transcriptions.) The results of this compilation follow. Before getting to their evaluative comments and my analysis, however, it is worth examining some of the procedures, tasks and ideas we shared throughout the semester that contributed to the portfolios’ construction.

**Instructional and Learning Methods**

In conducting these classes in pursuit of the research I was forced to recognize that several factors were different from ‘normal’ classroom practice. Some students (and perhaps their instructor) were prone to ‘romanticize’ the portfolio a bit. Its appeals to student creativity and the ‘mystery’ of academic research gave the project a cachet that may
have contributed to student effort. Indeed, this can be used as an intentional instructional strategy for drawing increased engagement from students. Another teacher in the English department commented during a department meeting that some of her drama students had expressed excitement about working on their English 12 portfolios.

A second factor that complicated the process was the fact that two different classes were involved in the research. Although both were English 12 classes, each was quite different in character to the other. One class was relatively quiet and purposeful, characterized by relatively academic, polite, more reserved students. The other class was more boisterous and enthusiastic, composed of less introverted as well as less academically focused students. Instruction was easier to deliver and more easily absorbed in the first class. However, the discussion and participation were more diverse, animated and interesting in the second class. The first class more readily understood and adapted to the requirements of the project. By contrast, the second class expressed more overt anxiety about it. Because of these differences I altered my selection of and approach to some of the curricular tasks; although the two classes shared most of the curriculum with which they dealt, there were some differences. The imposed curriculum was not uniform, which may have contributed somewhat to differing student experience and success with the project. However, given the amount of freedom within the options in the portfolio assignment, this difference was probably not particularly significant.

A third complication was that the ‘learning curve’ for both students and me was something of an obstacle. I had to provide instruction not only on standard curriculum content, using processes and materials that were familiar to me, but also on the new tasks specifically necessary to the portfolio’s construction and to a lesser degree on the students’ classroom practices that supported that construction, which were a bit more novel. I was forced to use differing approaches with the two classes to motivate the students to enter into discussion. The more active class described above also required a greater degree of instructor control, as they were prone to allow their discussions to develop into free-for-alls
in which four or five students were attempting to speak at once in spontaneous disregard for
common courtesy or order. By contrast, the more ‘academic’ class was slow to engage in
discussion, and often had to be prodded with a variety of questioning techniques to get them
started.

Table 1. outlines the activities traditional to the previous curricular approach to
English 12. These were loosely based upon the Ministry of Education Integrated Resource
Package (1996) for senior secondary language arts. Class time was apportioned first to
reading and viewing activities based on texts or audio/visual presentations chosen primarily
by myself as teacher according to various idealistic and pragmatic criteria. Ideal criteria
included such factors as thematic content, ‘canonical’ status, student and instructor interest,
and currency. More pragmatic considerations included availability of the text in sufficient
quantities for class work, suitability to examination preparation, and genre (standard genres
include the essay, the novel, the short story, the drama and the poem). Guided discussions
were Socratic in structure, focusing on ideas embodied in the texts. Oral simulations and
presentations were based on the texts and on student invention or research related to these
texts’ themes. Class time was devoted to didactic instruction providing historical or
sociological information as contextual background to texts. Direct instruction was also used
to address principles of grammar and editing whose common breach showed as obvious
gaps in student writing skills. Further, specific instruction on facets of writing such as
diction, sentence structure, transitions, coherence, and so on was presented in order to assist
students to enhance their own compositions. None of these practices could be simply or
easily abandoned, and although the amount of time available to them was now going to be
decreased, some class time had to be kept devoted to them.

Table 2 shows how in addition to handling this instructional load, the class
and teacher had to learn to handle increased student-generated discussion, to devise
constructive approaches to the summary sessions, and to cope with the added
### Table 1.

#### Traditional Classroom Practice in English 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Tasks and Objectives</th>
<th>Teaching/Learning Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving Reading</td>
<td>Teacher and students select texts from various genres. Teacher provides necessary contextual background and teaches analytical tools for discussion and understanding. Students learn terminology and apply analytical skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Writing</td>
<td>Teacher assigns various forms of written work and teaches principals of their construction and cultural uses. Often assignments are literature-based. Assignments included a written term paper for academic students. Periodically grammatical principles are taught and worked on in focused practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Listening</td>
<td>Teacher lectures while students take notes. Teacher leads Socratic discussions in which students discuss in an interchange with the teacher and among their classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Speaking</td>
<td>Teacher trains students in principles of public speaking. Students select or are assigned topics or roles and participate in presentations, discussions, panels, debates, dramatic readings, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for Government Examination</td>
<td>Teacher creates or duplicates examples of questions students will face on the government examination. Students practice for the examination by doing these questions. Students also write practice examinations from previous years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Teacher grades written and oral contributions by the students. Occasionally students participate in grading or their own or other students' work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.

**Additional Practices Due to Portfolio Assignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Tasks and Objectives</th>
<th>Teaching/Learning Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving Reading</td>
<td>In addition to decoding and analytical reading, students encouraged to do inspectional reading to seek information, and selections for syntopical reading to inform their Theme Parks and Creative Projects. Teacher instructs in required new skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Writing</td>
<td>Students compose a large project, dominantly in essay format, but also making use of abbreviated forms (e.g. note-taking for Weekly Summaries) and creative genres such as poetry and fiction in the creative project. Teacher explicates requirements and provides models and other forms of 'scaffolding.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Listening</td>
<td>Students participate in student-driven discussions, and enrich the idea content of their own written work through their engagement with the ideas of their peers. Teacher regulates and encourages discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Speaking</td>
<td>As above, students test their ideas against the criticism of their peers. Teacher encourages broad participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Portfolio</td>
<td>Students engage with the various portfolio sections and apply their own time-management to ensure its completion. Teacher provides guidance and support including conferenceing and recommended timelines. Organizational work is a significant challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Students select which sections of portfolio to overweight in the grading. Teacher and librarian grade submissions according to agreed-upon standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responsibilities of the shared and syntopical writing tasks. These additions were necessary but time-consuming, and it occasionally seemed to some students that some important curricular objectives, especially those directly concerning the government examination, might be neglected. In a final complication, the students were unfamiliar with the
boundaries of their own control over the project. A clear example of this is the degree to which their priorities could drive the discussions, for which there were ample opportunities. For both the students and myself those boundaries were being defined as we progressed, despite the fact that we were in general agreement on the overall design of the portfolio as defined in the initial assignment outline.

The traditional curricular practices and the portfolio-driven practices shared class time in a dynamic kind of interplay. Texts from original curriculum often ‘fertilized’ ideas and discussion in the portfolio curriculum, as they were meant to. Lack of knowledge of how to proceed with portfolio tasks often led back to didactic instruction or guided discussion that would have been more characteristic of traditional practice. Frequently student suggestions became the foundation for our proceeding. These forms of interplay were a fascinating feature of the way the classes developed. The practices relating to the construction of the portfolio were not completely novel, but they were different enough in their focus as to require consistent attention by both students and teacher in order to keep the class functioning as a unified whole.

A fourth complicating factor was the irregular and destructive pressure inflicted by external interruptions to the semester’s schedule. Immediately following Spring Break in March a week-long strike closed the schools and cut the semester’s length by six class periods for each class. This interruption was further complicated by a series of prank bomb scares, the results of which were several more days of school closures at unplanned intervals; the fear and uncertainty, and later annoyance, generated by these threats of violence were quite disruptive. Developing and maintaining class coherence and momentum in the face of these obstacles was a difficult matter. Predictably, some students celebrated the opportunities for time away from class; equally predictably, others bemoaned loss of instruction and expressed greater fear than ever of the upcoming government examinations and the portfolio submission deadline.
Other more common interruptions included some students’ leaving the community for a week to participate in the provincial drama festival, other students’ participation in out-of-town sports tournaments, the usual illnesses and funerals, family holidays scheduled to take advantage of low air fares, ‘normal’ truancy on one or two of our sunniest days, student pregnancy and childbirth. Although all these interruptions would have affected a more traditional class as well, they made it particularly difficult to introduce new patterns, directions, and approaches. Students who had been familiarized to boredom with classroom routines they had experienced for years would return from one absence or another only to discover that they now faced a real gap in progress or had missed some crucial piece of instruction. It was not always easy to recover from such absences. Some students became demoralized by their situations, and occasionally I felt overwhelmed with the detail of trying to provide a myriad of personal catch-up services as an adjunct to the already complex classroom responsibilities.

These four factors -- the romantic novelty of the assignment, the different character of the two classes, the expanded workload and its concomitant organizational adjustments, and finally the unforeseen interruptions -- all had considerable influence on the way the project developed. Insofar as some were serious obstacles to be overcome, they stand as caveats for future practice. Despite these peculiar features of the instructional situation, the students worked their way through the portfolio’s parts to the finished product. Below follows a brief account of our experience with each of the portfolio’s sections throughout the semester.

**Writing the Autobiography.** Students’ first introduction to the autobiography section was through a shared reading of the descriptions of the topics in the portfolio outline handout (Appendix A). Most students seemed content with the suggestions as presented, but I felt obliged to raise for class discussion an issue that could conceivably have caused problems for students or their parents. It was apparent from even superficial reading that such an assignment could be interpreted as an invasion of privacy. I made clear
to students that, if they wished, they could approach the topics from an impersonal perspective, or that they could even substitute other topics if they felt uncomfortable with the autobiographical topics presented. As the essays would be graded only on quality of writing, not on the 'acceptability' of the personal details offered, there would be no grade penalty for declining to participate in the autobiography. Two students offered objections based on their fears of the topics' being too personal. One proposed (and followed through on) an alternative method of achieving credit for this portfolio section. The other changed her mind and participated fully. If some form of perceived peer pressure caused this change of heart, it was not reported.

We decided in the classes that we would broach the separate topics in the autobiography in class discussion to try to open up our memories and to stimulate a range of approaches to the topics. Following each discussion we would spend the remainder of the period writing. Students could then take the essays home to polish and revise for future submission and grading. I graded these polished essays using the standard Ministry of Education 6-point evaluation scale devised for the grading of government examinations (see Appendix F). Classes devoted to the composition of these essays were spread through the semester. We agreed that we would hold off on the 'Landscape' essay until later in the spring when we could go outside for some activity that would, conceivably, inspire us with at least a little bit of natural beauty that is normally unavailable inside a concrete classroom. Thus, during a sunny day in late May, I led the classes on a short nature walk over a 'wilderness' trail along a local creek near the high school. I encouraged students to select (non-destructively) an item from along their walk (e.g. a blossom, a leaf, a stone, etc.) that they could bring back to class with them and use as a key concept to 'get into' their topic. Although the walks seemed relatively noisy and unrestrained to me, it was surprising how sensitive some students' observations proved to be, and what a diverse collection of organic materials appeared on their desks for the writing session. Students were assigned to compose the final essay on identity on their own. After a semester of co-operative struggle
with the other four topics (landscape, motivation, family and decisions), it seemed reasonable to assume that students had begun to develop a more coherent sense of themselves and would be able to address the identity topic satisfactorily without an initial discussion.

**Constructing the Theme Park.** The theme park was a difficult section of the portfolio to get under way, and early during the design of the project I anticipated that it would be the segment of the portfolio that would give students their greatest challenge. Initially, theme itself is an abstract and difficult concept for inexperienced readers to understand. Taking the characters and events of a story and turning them into a statement about life intended by the author or interpreted by the reader is a difficult process, as it necessarily entails inductively generating a single abstract generalization from a series of concrete particulars. It rapidly became apparent to the students and me alike that some careful teaching and concentrated learning would be necessary to enable students to handle this part of the assignment.

I attempted to ‘scaffold’ students’ efforts in this section in numerous ways. First, whenever we experienced a text or audio-visual performance together, I would attempt to draw thematic ideas from it into the open. In some works this was relatively simple to do. When Captain Torres states matter-of-factly at the end of *Just Lather, That’s All* that “killing isn’t easy; you can take my word for it,” there is little difficulty in discerning the theme of the story. However, when a grade 12 student reads a poem like Frost’s *Design*, it is very difficult for him to tease out a statement like, “Are some of the uglier aspects of the natural world the creation of God, the creation of an evil being, or simply an accident?” Thus I felt obliged to clarify some themes for students and to show the linguistic or visual clues that revealed them. I planned that with this sort of assisted experience the students would develop their ‘nose’ for thematic ideas.

A second ‘scaffolding’ process was to provide for the students a sample of some entries to a theme park. These could serve as a model for their own compositions. I selected as a theme the conflict between good and evil, and composed analytical discussions of this
theme based on the way the ideas were treated by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, William Golding in *Lord of the Flies*, Graham Greene in *The Destructors*, and Erich Maria Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (see Appendix G). These were texts with which almost all students had some familiarity, either having read them in grade 11 or early in the grade 12 semester. Several students began work on their own theme parks after exposure to this model. However, many students still felt unsure of what was required.

A third method to assist with this section was to convene small group discussions of students who had selected the same themes to work on. While the remainder of the class were working on other portfolio-related tasks, I met with the small groups in turn, during which meetings the groups reviewed the literature they had covered so far by title and discussed how each work might have commented on the theme upon which the group was focused. Students were encouraged to take notes of the discussion and to use these to assist them in their compositions.

Soon after, several students brought sample theme park entries to me for advice or approval. In almost every such case the students were well under way and needed little from me save reassurance. Students who had chosen ecology and the environment as one of their themes made the relevant point that very few of our texts had much to say about this topic. To assist them I located for their use some outside readings, which included some worldwide web downloads from the Worldwatch Institute (www.worldwatch.com) and other photocopied articles relating to environmental controversies. The majority of students did not test their theme work with me, however.

**Composing the Weekly Summaries.** The weekly summaries were also explored together early in the semester. Once again, at first students were unclear how to proceed. Initially I had conceived of students' working on their own summaries without my interference and without much assistance. However, some students claimed that since they could not always remember all the events of a week, they preferred to have a review discussion together before composing the summaries. That way any chance of forgetting
something important would be minimized. A number of students felt that once a week was
too frequent for these summaries, and that fewer occasions would be suitable enough.
Although I disagreed at first, the pragmatics of class management and the exigencies of
school events (e.g. strike and bomb threats) and timetables proved them right. A few
students wanted to dispense with the section altogether, but when it came to a vote, the
majority of students could see these summaries' potential value as a tool for review, and
most wanted to do them weekly. Despite this majority opinion, it took all our efforts to
manage completing a summary every two weeks or so.

Each time the class completed a review summary I collected them, checked them off
as being completed, and recorded the questions that the students had presented. I tried to
write a personal response to each question, insofar as it was feasible and appropriate to do
so. By personally responding I was able to set up a dialogue with each student, a
motivational strategy which Stipek (1998) recommends. Twice during the semester I asked
that students add to their weekly summaries an explanation or question about any problems
they were having in working on the portfolio. Students occasionally made use of this
opportunity to express anxieties or to ask practical advice, both of which I attempted to deal
with promptly. I recorded all the questions (but not their authors) and selected several each
week to present to the class for general discussion. A collection of these student questions,
in addition to some samples of summary work with my responses, may be found as
Appendix C.

The day following our summary work was often begun with a discussion based on
one or more of the student questions from the day before. I didn’t identify the student who
had raised each question, as often it appeared that this could lead to some personal
discomfort. However, it was easy to see the author of the question perk up with interest or
pride when I raised it for general discussion. I intended that these questions be dynamic
stimuli for classroom discourse, and that in turn, this discourse should fertilize student
thinking for their contributions to the portfolio in any of its sections.
Generating the Creative Project. The fourth section of the portfolio was the creative project. Each class spent a full class period together discussing the assignment alternatives. Most of the academically oriented students initially determined to write a research paper. A number of these backed off, however, as it became apparent that the task would have to be handled largely on the student's own time, and as the research component of the paper became daunting. However, the portfolio offered numerous less stressful alternatives. (Appendix H includes the term paper assignment and two easier alternatives.) It was agreed nearly unanimously through discussion that because the term paper required so much extra work in the form of research that it should be worth a higher grade to start with than any of the other alternatives. However, through class-teacher negotiation we also agreed that a student who attempted two of the other alternatives could have their cumulative grade equal the weight given a term paper.

Little direct instruction was provided students for this section of the portfolio. A full class session was devoted to explaining the formal requirements of a term paper, and students were given the opportunity to read sample papers from the library's collection of 'A' papers from previous years. During classes devoted to portfolio work, students were permitted to use the library for research if necessary. The librarian, a willing colleague in this part of the portfolio (as she had been active in the previous years' term paper projects), was designated as a resource person for students encountering problems in researching or constructing their papers. I stressed the point to the class on several occasions that they should take advantage of the librarian's expertise in their work on this project. A few did, but most did not.

Putting It All Together. About six weeks before the submission deadline I distributed to students a portfolio task checklist (see Appendix I). It was designed to enable students to plan their final weeks' work efficiently, checking off tasks as they were completed. It also asked for two other small submissions to be part of the whole. One was a one-page (or less) introduction to the portfolio. It was to be the student's explanation, in his
own words, of what the whole assignment had been about and what its purposes were in the understanding of the student. The other was to compose an overview of the summaries, a kind of ‘super summary’ that gave a condensed explanation of what we accomplished with this assignment. This overview was often a source of evaluative comments which were useful additions to the students’ later formal evaluations.

It must be pointed out again that all the portfolio work was progressing alongside our more traditional curricular work. Thus, most days we would begin class with a very short grammatical exercise of some kind, often an editing skills question based on the format of the first question on the government examination. Following this we would share literary texts from various genres as the semester progressed (see Appendix D). Prior to reading specific texts there would often be didactic provision of historical or cultural context. Short answer questions (SAQ’s in marking jargon) akin to government examination questions would be assigned, responses would be composed and submitted, and they would be graded and returned as formative evaluation analytical and synthetic writing practice. Literature examinations were conducted on various works (e.g. *Othello*) or genres (e.g. short stories). Two practice government examinations were written, graded and returned. Each student read an A-level novel (*A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving or *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller) or a shorter B-level one (*The Collector* by John Fowles or *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque), so designated because of their relative brevity and lesser difficulty. All students participated in panel discussions before the class about the novels they had read. Some students participated in creative role-playing scenes based on *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. These students were busy!

During all of these activities there was a continual interplay between the ideas, themes and historical contexts presented by the traditional side of the curriculum and the ideas and concerns generated by the portfolio side. In all truth, there was never a complete separation of the two. Each approach enhanced or fertilized the other. However, the separate evaluations (30% on literature examinations, 30% on portfolio) remained in place, and they
were applied at the end of the semester as outlined to the students in the introduction to the assignment.

**Time Constraints.** As was stated at the beginning of the introduction, an overarching purpose of the portfolio was to require students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. An extremely important part of this responsibility was to learn to manage time effectively. By the last few weeks of the semester, careful, cumulative time management had become a significant key to relative success or failure with the portfolio. Throughout the semester I had insisted to students that they should expect to spend up to three hours a week, each week, working on and refining their portfolio. A few students took the advice to heart and managed their assignments well. Many students, some of them otherwise strong academic performers, procrastinated. During the last few weeks these students had very heavy workloads.

Another factor that contributed to an ‘end-load’ on the portfolio assignment was that some assignments could not be completed until we had finished the final literature selections for the year. Due to the sporadic interruptions to our schedule, we studied some major selections (e.g. *Othello*) fairly late in the semester. (We only systematically began to look at poetry during the last week of class, after the portfolio was submitted. We did read some poetry at intervals earlier during the semester, and students were exposed to poetry work on their practice government examinations, but this was minimal exposure.)

This workload condition late in the semester was exacerbated by the fact that from the very beginning of the project the classes and instructor had agreed that there would be no late portfolios accepted. I stated my intention to be scrupulously fair to all students with respect to the amount of time allowed for the portfolio’s completion. I reminded the students several times during the semester to plan their time so that they would be finished a week in advance of the deadline. Then, if there were computer glitches and crashes, personal illness, or some other unforeseen problem there would be time to compensate. (One student who gave birth to a baby girl in the middle of the semester turned her portfolio in two weeks
before the deadline!) I also timed how long it would take to read and evaluate forty-five portfolios at about twenty minutes each (fifteen hours). Given that at year end I would also have to continue to prepare classwork and review lessons for three classes, grade assignments from a grade 11 class, prepare a final examination, administer it and mark it, and prepare grades for all classes, I set June 16 as the final deadline for submission of portfolios. During the last week before submission several students tentatively probed with me and the class the notion of late work. I remained firm on the deadline. Many vocal students in the class agreed with me.

Sharing the Finished Portfolios. The week before deadline the classes discussed the idea of devoting a day to sharing their portfolios. There were pros and cons to this. Some students who had worked very hard on theirs were eager to show off, many with good reason. Some students were sensitive about sharing the autobiographical portions of the assignment. Other students were adamantly opposed to sharing them, often for unstated reasons which may have largely been a reluctance to have their work 'outshone' by the work of stronger students. Further, given the paucity of time remaining for class work, some students wanted more exposure to poetry before the final examination. We agreed that we would set aside half a class period during which those students who wished to could pass their portfolios around and enjoy one another's work.

Afterwards one average-performing student who had participated in sharing the portfolios turned his in with a resigned look on his face and said, "Wow. I'm kind of ashamed of mine, now." I asked him whether or not he had done his best. The student replied that he had. I tried to assure him that he had nothing to be ashamed of, that viewing some of the other portfolios was simply a way through which he had learned how he might improve his work in the future. The student accepted this assurance gracefully, if skeptically, somewhat the way, I must confess, I accepted his assurance that he had done his best. (This was a student who, by his own description, had been warned not to take English
12 by his junior secondary school teachers because they were sure he would fail. When he received his grade on the portfolio he was very happy with the level of his success.

Grading the Portfolios. The last students left the classroom on Friday afternoon, June 16. On the front desk stood two cardboard boxes loaded with portfolio binders. Now the fun would begin. I contacted the librarian, who had agreed to read and evaluate the term papers to ensure one consistent evaluation for these. We selected out the portfolios that had term papers for their special projects, and she took them down to the library office where she worked so that she could evaluate them over the next week. I boxed up the remainder and took them home to begin reading them. As the librarian completed the term papers she would return the portfolios to me so that I could read their other sections and calculate a grade according to the formula selected by the student on his/her evaluation sheet. I also took care to write a cumulative comment to each student about his/her portfolio and activities in the class throughout the semester, focusing particularly on each student’s strengths and positive contributions.

For my own interest, I also examined the theme park offerings and the creative projects to note their relative popularity and diversity. The three most popular theme park items were ‘Value, Wealth and Money’ (18 students), ‘Man in Conflict with Society or the State’ (13 students), and ‘God and Religion’ (12 students). Four students selected themes of their own that were not present on the original outline. For the creative project, sixteen students composed term papers. These ranged from a brilliant senior paper on the declining influence of Christianity in modern life (a controversial topic) to a plagiarized internet offering on works by Mark Twain. Nine students wrote extended book reviews on works as diverse as the Harry Potter novels, Carlos Casteneda’s visionary books on Mexican shamanism, and Frank McCourt’s bestseller Angela’s Ashes. Two students wrote short stories. Nine compiled poetry projects. Five wrote and illustrated children’s stories. Finally there were two short biographies, a clever Brothers Grimm ‘knock-off,’ a story based on a
painting, an artistic representation of 'hate' along with written analysis of the drawing, and a fictional Journal of Adolf Hitler. It was an intriguing mélange of texts.

When the portfolio grading was finished, as well as the summative grading from the other half of the course, I posted the grades by student number outside my classroom and entered them onto the school's computer program. Students could pick up their portfolios along with their report cards on June 29.

Results

Results of the Classwork

All but one of the portfolios were handed in on time. Not every portfolio was complete in all its details, but most students made a serious effort to address all four sections to the best of their ability. Occasionally a student left out a section due to time constraints due to a variety of problems (procrastination, obligations of work outside of school, etc.) These made a serious effort to minimize the damage by overweighting the grade value on those segments of the portfolio that they did complete.

The student who missed turning in his portfolio was absent from class for the three days preceding the due date, as well as for the remaining days of class. His portfolio mysteriously appeared in my staff room mailbox on June 23 with a note requesting special consideration, due to his having endured unspecified computer problems. There was no simple way to check the veracity of the story, as a telephone check failed to contact the student. Further, to have given the student special consideration would be to have broken the agreement made with the classes as a whole. On the other hand, the student had completed a large amount of work during the semester for which, conceivably, he would gain no credit at all, also an unfair situation. I found it an unpleasant dilemma to face. I decided to give a failing grade to the portfolio such that the student's performance on the government final examination would determine the course outcome for him.
Results of the Research

I decided to compile the student evaluations of each of the individual sections of the portfolio separately, and then their evaluations of the portfolio as a whole. I have thus treated them separately below, trying to give a clear summary of the major positive and negative features of each section, along with quoted evidence drawn from student writing. (The pages of compiled comments and the original evaluation responses from the last week’s evaluation classes are in Appendix E. Other quoted material is from various students’ original writing collected from various portfolio sections as Appendix J.) It is impossible to get the true flavour of what the students accomplished and later reflectively evaluated without at least a few samples of their original work. Third, in places I have included descriptions of relevant processes, as well as my own evaluation of the portfolio and its sections, in my own attempt to clarify answers to the same questions that they addressed.

The Autobiography.

Overall, students strongly favoured this part of the assignment. Positive comments outnumbered negative ones more than two to one. Some students had reservations about how to get started; as one said, “Ideas slowly came to me and then I enjoyed writing them.” Students consciously appreciated that they need never run out of content. “They weren’t far-fetched topics.” “[They were] something everyone could relate to.” “[We] had lots of information to draw on.” Students also valued strongly the personal learning the exercise helped them experience. “It gave me a chance to really dig into myself.” “[They were] a good way to evaluate our personal lives.” “I think the most important thing we learned was what we learned about ourselves.” “I have learned an incredible amount about myself through writing my autobiographies.” Finally, some students simply enjoyed the process as a legitimized form of self-indulgence. “I loved looking at myself,” said one. “I loved this section! I loved it!” exclaimed another.
Some students, by contrast, did not enjoy the autobiographies. More than one student found it difficult to get started. “The only problem was knowing where to start.” A few felt it was “hard to open up about personal topics.” “Some people can find it hard to write about themselves.” Other students were critical of the autobiographies, not because as youngsters they were shy, but because they didn’t see any educational connection or purpose to them. “[I] didn’t see the point because I didn’t see the reasoning behind them.” One student stated straight up, “As for the autobiographical essays, I thought that it was too much sharing of personal feelings.”

Some of the observations that students recorded about themselves were really remarkable. Consider some of their candid insights into family life.

“Who am I?” wrote one. “Who do I want to be? How can I change myself for the better? I am seventeen and I am looking for answers to these questions. I think that a lot of people, even at age 35 or 40 are still looking for answers to these questions.”

Another student demonstrated remarkable forgiveness and acceptance. “I believe that everything happens for a reason . . . all the unexplained issues with my father and with my family . . . it’s not my fault . . . and if they start to explain themselves later on in life or not, you just have to move on and let things be what they’ll be.”

A third showed a mature understanding of the concomitant difficulties and emotional victories that families can share, whatever their structure. “There is no one definition of a family, and although nobody wants to admit it, we are all dysfunctional or inefficient in some way . . . I am proud of my family, and even though it is tough at times, I love them all. Can you say the same about yours?”

A number of students candidly expressed that they did not particularly love their families. Some were distressed by this fact, or expressed anger toward their families. Others were stoically observant that the family ideals presented in our culture are simply unrealistic and dishonest. “There seems to be this common misconception among older people that families are these ‘happy-go-lucky’ groups who spend all their time together
and value each other's company. Who made that lie up? *Leave It to Beaver* was forty years ago.

The essays on personal motivation were enlightening as well. In the schools we tend to focus on academic motivation in our students, but these essays expanded the concept to encompass a much more holistic view of how our youngsters are motivated.

Ambition was a common motivator, particularly among more academic students, but fear was also powerful. One ambitious youngster wrote, “What motivates me is something deeper and even more difficult to admit -- the fear of failure, of not measuring up. It haunts me every day, like a dog nipping at my heels. ... It makes me focus so much on my future that I almost forget where I am now. ... “I am a person who feels just as small in the world as you do. ... I want to be myself, and be the best at it.”

Another student wrote an equally powerful description of fear as a motive, but showed how it can have different results. “I noticed [another student’s summary] question which asked, ‘Has fear of failure caused millions of people to become lazy?’ I realized that it could be used to describe me excellently. ... It’s embarrassing to get things wrong ... you then start to believe you’ll get it wrong. You end up feeling like sh*t and you don’t want to bother trying any more. And all this trouble stems from fear.”

Students found it very puzzling to describe how they made decisions. I suspect that many of us would have equal difficulty. What is the added weight that pushes the metaphorical scale down in one direction or another? One likened life to a casino. “Decision-making is nothing more than a sort of gambling. ... you’re gambling on the future. You can get rich gambling, but it is inevitable that you will also lose.”

Students described their connections to the landscape in many ways. There were frequent, verbal celebrations of the wonderful mountains and lakes, descriptions of opportunities for outdoor recreation. The large number of these led to some fairly repetitive, almost trite reading. In a departure from this picture, one student questioned whether or not a gloomy landscape could induce gloom in the people who inhabit it. Another used her
walk along the Howe Creek Trail to introduce this observation. "That bridge [on the Howe Creek Trail], in my mind, symbolizes change and bravery because it leads you somewhere different and asks if you are brave enough to go there." A third burst out with this exuberant description. "I'm there [in the landscape], surrounded by it all: the mountains, the trees, the water, each a pure creation. Then I start to think. My thoughts begin to run wild and I'm filled with a strange kind of realization and excitement! This was all made for us . . . for me, to enjoy, to discover and to love!"

The essays on identity were of great interest to me. For five months these were 'my kids,' and to get to know them in this intimate way was quite a privilege. Students often expressed awareness of their own confusion, and some of them did it in very original ways. "A good analogy for me would be a puzzle," stated one. "I am a million pieces, all jumbled up, lying in a box. Some are upside down and others are covered up. I'm just waiting for someone to put me together, but someone has lost the box cover with the picture on it."

Some serious personal distress was expressed by this student. "There are times when I have no clue what I'm doing or who I am. You see, I live two lives, if not three . . . . Having these other lives is stressful, and sometimes I crack with the pressure that it takes to be these other people. . . . It's like I have been living a lie my whole life, and I don't know what the truth is or who I am any more. It's a real setback in my life not knowing who the real me is. This is why personal exploration is a real challenge, but it also allows me to get a better insight of which I really am."

Finally, a student who had been a bit of an enigma all semester made the following unequivocal declaration of a 'take-it-or-leave-it' personality. "I think that I am a rude, bad-tempered, impatient, honest and trustworthy person!"

As a teacher, when dealing with students one part of you always remains a skeptic, depending on your own experience and personality. Thus, when I read these autobiographies I was constantly alert for what I felt might be put-on or artificially composed. (If an essay was well-written, this would not matter for purposes of grading.)
But I found as their teacher I had a personal in loco parentis feeling about all these youngsters, not merely a legal obligation. I wanted to read the truth.) After all, it was a school assignment, and as they do with so much else in modern society, teens often have a tendency to treat school with a sort of bemused aloofness or from a position of ‘armed’ defence shown through apathy, deception, or downright hostility. Others play a successful game of ‘please the system,’ without really risking much personally. Despite my wariness for evidence of these postures, I was far more often than not struck by the authentic voice in their writing, the blossoming of language that seemed impossible to be other than spontaneous. I was really impressed, not because the essays were brilliantly written (they contained the same writing flaws of organization and style one would expect of ordinary grade 12 writing), but because they were so incisive and thoughtful. Even students who were struggling to identify what they wanted to say were clear about expressing their confusion.

The Theme Park. Students had little good to say about the theme park section. Four or five commentators mentioned that the “topics were interesting” and that it “allowed you to connect your personal experiences to literature.” It “made us think about the stories we read.” One student conceded the value of its difficulty. “You really had to work at it.”

However, there was a chorus of discontent. Despite my efforts to ‘scaffold’ student skills to enable them to succeed at this, many simply did not ‘get it.’ “I didn’t really know how to do it,” was a common statement. “I did not particularly enjoy the section because of how little I understood it.” “I’m still not sure I did this section right.” Some students felt they could have been successful, but that they needed more direction and assistance. “The concepts needed more explaining and practice.” “[There was] no direction and it was worth too much.” The value of class discussion as a vehicle for improving understanding was strongly expressed. “There should be in-class time to explore themes immediately after a work is read . . . get it out and expressed right away.” “More class discussion would have helped.”
Despite their unhappiness with the process, most students who completed the assignment (three or four simply did not attempt this part) were quite successful. I suspect that when they picked up their graded portfolios many were nearly amazed at the high level of their real success compared to their anticipated success. Sometimes students were a little surprised by how much their readings had informed their thinking and personally affected them. One wrote, “Death of a Salesman left an unforgettable imprint on my mind.” When students were writing about the themes they were perfectly willing to use the forum as an opportunity to express their own opinion about the issue. In a discussion of the theme ‘God and Religion’ one confidently averred, “[God] will accept you for what you are and not for how much of your life you waste devoted to him.” Another writing on the same topic claimed, “Religion should be a way of personal expression, not a way of personal repression.”

The Weekly Summaries. The summaries were striking in their variety, as well as in their utility to the class, to the students who wrote them, and to me. Predictably enough, some were simple and sloppy, lacking either information or attention to detail, carelessly done. Others were neat and scrupulously detailed, clearly useful as reviews. (Some may have been composed with the intention of impressing the instructor.) When it came to composing questions, few students attempted the fantasy of questioning an author or character, but many had direct questions for their instructor. These ranged from questions about the text currently under study, to questions about pragmatic issues concerning their course or general schooling, to questions of personal opinion and even to queries about the instructor’s personal life. In responding to all these questions I was forced to try to see the issue from the perspective of the questioning student. Often composing a response required thoughtful reconsideration of a text, for example, or tactful comment on the general nature of a problem that was obviously at least potentially personal in nature.

The discussion follow-up aspect of summary work was an area of the portfolio’s classroom practices in which the classes differed greatly. In line with the classes’ earlier
descriptions, the more reserved class was occasionally somewhat reluctant to pursue discussions very far, although they were by no means unresponsive. Still, by contrast, the other class would only require the starting question followed by a “What do you think?” and they would greedily chew up half a period with their arguments and comments. This reinforces Allen’s (1992) evidence that students are not reluctant to discuss issues which are real to them (as opposed to externally raised issues that may fail to capture their imagination, despite the best efforts of their well-meaning instructors).

Students’ evaluations of the weekly summaries and how they were conducted were roughly divided, but students were generally positive about their overall value. On the positive side, many students commented on the summaries’ utility as a review tool and a means of directing personal reflection. They were “are really good chance to remind ourselves what we had learned,” “a good idea, because it made me rethink about everything what we did.” They kept “personal records on track” and were “a chance to keep track of everything we did.” They were “super helpful.” In addition, the discussion questions added interest to the class. Discussions “on questions were fun.” “Questions at the end got you thinking about everything.”

Some of the negative comments were actually backhanded compliments about the summaries’ value. We “should have done them more regularly.” “Do one every week with due dates.” There were some perceived inherent weaknesses though. One student “never really got that much out of doing them; [he/she] always felt rushed.” Another felt they “shouldn’t be graded for content, as each student does it for individual needs.” Other objections were that they created more work, or that some people didn’t take them seriously.

Students raised some really serious questions and concerns in their summaries, and as a regular feedback forum the summaries proved quite valuable to me. Appendix C contains the two classes’ lists of questions posed over the semester, in addition to several
photocopied excerpts from randomly selected portfolios. Note the high level of abstraction of some of the questions.

Some inquiries were social in nature, that is, they attempted to address how we get along socially and politically with our fellows. “How are stereotyping and first impressions harmful to us as a whole in society?” “Is prejudice human nature, or is it learned individually?” “Why do some people insist on making you feel like a disappointment because you never did things that they would like to have done?” Gender concerns were not uncommon. “What would the world be like if it were run only by women?” War and violence were interesting to many, not surprising, since many students selected Catch-22 or All Quiet on the Western Front as novels to read. “If we all know the dangers and consequences of war, what drives us to it?” One student was troubled by the immaturity she was beginning to see in her friends and acquaintances. She wrote pragmatically, “What are the consequences of growing out of your peers?” One young man was fascinated by the social impact of visionary individuals. He asked, “How do we define a prophet? In contemporary society, how can we distinguish one such as opposed to a schizophrenic? Are prophets even real?” The ethics of and distinction between selfishness and integrity were reflected in, “Is it always a good thing to stand up for your beliefs, even if others will suffer from your decision?” The following question about the link between romantic love and jealousy was raised while we were reading Othello. “If you love someone, does that make you jealous? If you can’t feel jealousy, does that mean you love them less? Or that you love them more?” Many questions reflected individual concerns with personal identity and character. While we were studying Death of a Salesman one student asked, “Biff felt he was lost and had to find himself. How do we know if we are lost or if we have found ourselves if we don’t know where to be looking or when?” A student who showed a fascination with violence wrote, “Is it true that if you don’t fear death, you don’t fear anything?”
During the fall semester the school enjoyed a visit from a Tibetan Buddhist monk. As well, I place daily quotes from all aspects of life on my blackboard under the current date. Sometimes these come from Lao-Tzu or other Eastern sources. One student asked, "Is meditating being deep in thought or being without thought?"

Many students showed a sensitivity to our greater environment and our relationship to it. "Is the greater man a man who can adapt to his environment, or a man who can adapt his environment to him?" "Do you think that the earth belongs to humans or humans belong to the earth?" "Why do people think that just because we can speak and act, we are automatically better than any other life form?" All these questions reflect serious, ethical consideration for the environment.

Some questions were related to puzzles of language and literature. "How do the themes we address in our portfolio affect our everyday life? Is the major impact on us the authors' reason for choosing these themes?" When we read the essay, In Defence of Prejudice, an impassioned argument for free speech, one student wrote, "If we begin to monitor the public's use of offensive words, who will monitor the monitors? Should sensitivity be the downfall of language?"

I found these questions as a whole to be a fascinating blend of philosophical profundity, practical query, and puzzling observation. They ranged from being good-humoured ("Do you ever get the feeling that you're standing up there talking and nobody's listening?") to personally frightened ("Why does the road ahead of me scare me to death?"), from concretely practical ("How do you talk to someone that doesn't want to listen?") to abstractly universal ("Does life allow for enough time to really find out who we are?"). I thought their discussions were good learning experiences for them, and as moderator, listener and participant, I had great fun.

The Creative Project Section. The creative project, too, was subject to mixed reviews, although most of them were positive. Academic students appreciated the opportunity to do a term paper, "good to prepare for university" as one put it. It "should definitely be part of
the portfolio” said another. It “tends to different strengths.” Those students who enjoy creative writing or similar projects really found it appropriate. It “allowed my imagination to soar!” “I really like the creative project. I spent most of my spare time with my friends developing the story behind the story.” Although one critic thought that there should have been more options, a different student was unequivocal that “the different choices instead of doing a term paper were a really good idea,” and still another felt it was “great that you gave us a choice on what we could do.”

A repeated criticism was that there was inadequate orientation to or instruction on the term paper. Students “always seemed to be rushed” and wanted “more class time.” Another who pays close attention to evaluation and grades noted that it was “difficult to set marking criteria.” One student who felt somehow threatened or too strongly challenged by more than one part of the portfolio wrote, “I found this project rather unfair. . . . this project is rather large. I have been pressed for time. . . . I have no real idea what exactly you are looking for in the term paper. . . . I have made myself literally sick over this project.”

The section yielded some marvelous creative work, though, often from sources where I would least expect it. Some very ‘average’ students produced some startlingly interesting pieces. One poem began, “I walk/ in the shadows of others,/ blinded by smiles and grades.” In the introduction to her poetry project, one girl wrote, “I still have all my old poems -- I kept them in a box. Sometimes I go back and read them over and it’s weird, because I start to feel all the feelings that I felt back then.” Now there’s a Proustian concept.

The Portfolio as a Whole Project. Because any individual student may have enjoyed one part of the project more than another, I decided to ask them about the project as a whole, as well. Then positive reactions and negative ones in the same student could be weighed, and an overall judgment of approval or disapproval come to. Based on volume of response for each side of the equation, a majority of students approved of the method, for a variety of reasons.
The first aspect of student approbation was toward the project’s novelty. They saw it as a “very different and creative method of teaching.” The idea was “very original and interesting.” A corollary of this was that it was different to the educational model of ‘teach and then test.’ It was seen as being “way better than notes and doing tests all the time,” “so much more helpful learning than textbook work (BORING!).” “It was much more interesting because of the opportunities for choice open to us.” A more eloquent student wrote, “It allowed people to reflect upon themselves and meet with more success, both in learning and in marks than they would with the ordinary factory model of education.”

A second positive feature was its appeal to individual learning. “It was personal and ‘not academic;’ not everyone is a genius; this enabled the creative thinker to do better.” Another voice reported, “I learned a lot about myself. I’m not sure that counts for much in English, but it did quite a bit for me.”

A few students commented on the discussion component of the course, which I thought was one of its more important features. Perhaps because the discussions weren’t represented directly in the written portfolio, many students tended to forget about them. However, one wrote, “For classes such as ours the discussions were supremely important—they opened up new regions of thought to us.” Another commented, “Conflicting viewpoints among our class made open discussions all the more interesting. . . . I didn’t think an English class could involve so many discussions, but it worked well.”

The method of variable evaluation was important to some. “The chance to choose how we would be graded was more than fair.” “I liked . . . how [each student could choose] how heavily . . . certain parts would be marked.” “Variable evaluation is definitely good because each of us has strengths and weaknesses.”

A fifth positive feature students discerned was that it forced them to develop certain strengths or important skills as a by-product, a sort of hidden curriculum. One student noted that the portfolio was “a good way of seeing and testing students’ responsibility levels.” Several students observed the significance of time management in handling the
project. The “most important thing [was] **TIME MANAGEMENT**.” “The most important thing I learned was that I need to manage my time more carefully.”

Finally, for almost all students it was a strong challenge that everyone could succeed on at one level or another; thus it helped build confidence. “[This course] gave me the courage to do the best I can. Thank you.” “We all have aspirations, but they seem easier to reach when they’re down on paper.” A student whose writing was often extremely weak recorded in his overview, “English 12 was the best class I ever had. It was fun and Mr. Lehmann always ask what we thought about certain things. It was hard for me but I gave it my best plus more.” “This class helped me build confidence.”

There was no lack of criticism of the portfolio project, though. Even though some aspects of it worked well for some people, there were features of its design and delivery that were not popular or helpful for numerous students.

Students were critical of my time management. The portfolio “needs better organization and stricter deadlines.” “Many [important] parts of the portfolio couldn’t be completed until the year’s work was over.” “Give more time!”

However, to take time for the portfolio was to take it from some of the more traditional instructional tasks we engaged in. Many students were critical of this. “We should have been learning more knowledge and skills.” “We didn’t do enough fundamental work; I guess that it is really hard trying to impress both parts of the scale, but there needs to be a balance.” “[I] would have liked to cover more of the basics to prepare for the provincial exam.” “I would prefer to go back to the teach/test method (other people seemed to enjoy the project).”

A number of students commented on the need for better instruction and modeling, particularly on the sections that were causing confusion. “Give many examples of how to do each section.” “[There was] confusion associated with various sections.” The instructor should “elaborate a lot more, explain more clearly.”
Finally, several students were disappointed in my lack of hard-nosed discipline on a few students who had the inclination to be rather disruptive from time to time. "Kick the annoying students out!" exclaimed one. "They ruin it for those of us who enjoy English." A bright student stated, "Unorganized students infect a whole class. SMITE THE UNCO-OPERATIVE ONES!"

Students varied considerably on how difficult they found the whole business. One reliable youngster recorded, "This English project was probably the hardest assignment I have ever been faced with... we are all faced with challenges that create who we are and what we do." By contrast, another remarked, "I thought that English 12 would be a lot harder than it was... I think that I am rather disappointed in the amount of things that I feel that I have learnt... I personally don't relate quite as well as Mr. Lehmann had hoped to some of the portfolio topics." A final stoical comment was, "The biggest problem is just making yourself sit down and do it."

Discussion

In examining the above results I would like to discuss several major areas. First, some observations are drawn from how I conducted the research. I would likely change a few procedures in any future application of this project. Second, it is important to answer directly the criticisms that were raised by the students in their evaluation. It may be pleasant to enjoy the praise when strategies were successful, but one must recognize that some students were not happy with the process. There are serious implications for instructional practice here. Finally, I feel this project opens a window on numerous other forms of related research. I will mention some possible directions this might take. Readers may think of others.

Possible Alterations to Research Procedure

This project could be improved through more careful scheduling of data collection. At the end of the year, after the portfolios had been turned in, it was important to the research to get a broad spectrum of student opinion on how well the project had worked for
them. However, by the time we were prepared to do this, many students had begun writing
government examinations, and low attendance on our evaluation days seriously depleted the
number of responses from which I could draw evidence. I was fortunate that many other
consenting students had made evaluative comments within the portfolio itself, comments
which tended to ‘flesh out’ the skeleton of judgments that were submitted as formal
evaluations. Another feature of student absence was that those students who did appear to
do the evaluation were likely not as random a mix as the full class groups would have
provided. Although I was not sampling for statistical purposes, the groups who filled out the
evaluations were likely composed of students who were more predisposed to be
‘responsible’ by attending all classes through to the end of the class schedule. It must be
pointed out, however, that some of the equally ‘responsible’ students were also away,
studying for or writing government examinations.

Another form of data gathering would be to do an interim evaluation at the mid-point
of the semester. This first time through this project, events seemed to flow too quickly to
have all of these plans operative and in place, especially given the two interruptions of the
strike and the bomb threats. However, in a repeat of the research I would plan a formal
evaluation for the end of first term in the semester.

Certain quantitative procedures could have been used to investigate student learning
in this project. For example, a researcher might correlate student grades on the traditional
aspect of the course with their portfolio grades. Did those students who find ‘teach-test’
methods ‘boring’ achieve significantly higher results on the portfolio section? There could
be a further correlation with their grades on the government examination (when they become
available). I might have used a Likert scale to investigate statistically the student responses
to the various parts of the portfolio. Such a process could have added a much more precise
measure of student satisfaction than the more ‘fuzzy’ process of interpreting written
comments. I certainly would not replace the student comments with such an instrument,
though. I am far more interested in the students’ actively constructed evaluations, their
intended evaluative meanings, than in their relatively passive filling in of multiple choice options.

The real reward that students received in constructing the portfolio and in evaluating the process was the learning they went through in meeting the challenges involved and in struggling to overcome them. Forming and expressing their own evaluative comments was part of this process and part of the reward. The grade each received, a numerical reward after the fact, is incidental to this, although it, too, may have created another experience for their learning.

Possible Alterations to Instructional Procedures

I would like to address instruction for the portfolio portion of the course alone, first, and then broaden the discussion to connect it with the course as a whole. Attending to the course as a whole is necessary because so much of the instruction 'crossed over' the skills and activities of both course foci. Further, any increase in focus on one part of the course or the other would necessarily have an impact through time reduction on the other part of the course.

The Autobiography. For writing the autobiography to achieve its full benefit a student needs either courage or trust. Trust that the instructor will not judge him harshly or abuse access to private thoughts and ideas about relatively intimate topics enables the student to open up to himself. Without this trust, the student may or may not generate the kinds of self-knowledge that often emerge during the exercise. Some students lacking such trust but determined to participate in the project may have completed the exercise on raw courage. Naturally any instructor who might intend to use this portfolio method should do all that is possible to create an atmosphere in the class and a relationship with each student that will generate such trust.

There are some group exercises available that can help generate such an atmosphere. They are varying types of 'ice-breaker' activities whose design utilizes minor forms of self-disclosure and interpersonal positive reinforcement. By using some of these activities at the
beginning of the semester I believe that much mistrust can be dissolved and much courage built. Another source of improving trust is for the instructor to share some personal details of his or her own life with the class. To be trusted, the teacher has to trust as well. Naturally it is important to be tactful and selective about how this is done, but by doing so the instructor models the kinds of topics and ways of presenting them that are suitable to a school class.

Text selection of one or two superior, published autobiographical essays could really inspire some students. This could be particularly true if the essay were composed by someone in a minority group and it demonstrated success in the face of difficulty, for example. Course readings can also be selected with the autobiography in mind. For example, the essay In Defence of Prejudice which we read this year was an unusual approach to the topic of the limitations put on free speech in order to eradicate hate language through political correctness; the author defended prejudicial language strongly, this despite the fact that he was a Jewish gay man who had first-hand experience at being a victim. Although the essay was a difficult read for many students, it showed how personal narrative could be brought to bear on abstract issues of justice and equity. Such texts can also serve as models to help the students structure and develop their own compositions.

Other instructional activities might include posing a decision-making problem to the class, discussing with them how we should make the decision (voting is a very common catch-all method), deciding, and then evaluating the process from both individual and group perspectives. We might ask the class, perhaps in small groups, to come up with some motivational strategies to accomplish specific classroom tasks, debate them, test them, and so on. Such activities might assist students who have difficulty attempting the motivation and decision-making topics.

The Theme Park. It is difficult to recommend abandoning this segment altogether, despite the fact that most of the students found it unappealing. I believe that the bulk of their demoralization was due to inadequate instruction, not to inappropriate content or skill
requirement for a grade 12 level. Some of the student recommendations could be carefully applied to improve instruction. For example, greater attention could be paid to theme right away as we study each text, and students could be given more specific instruction on how to find themes, how to recognize them, how to relate them to details within the text, and how to connect multiple texts and life itself to these generalizations. Further assistance on this might be more readily rendered through individual conferencing and more small group work.

On the basis of this project’s results it is apparent that thematic work is abstract and difficult, even for grade 12’s. However, we wouldn’t put up the bar at all if we didn’t want the horse to jump. Once a reader gets past the superficial rewards of information or entertainment, the more high-level rewards of thematic discovery and construction are waiting. I believe we owe it to our students to give them a better chance at access to these rewards.

The Weekly Summaries. Insofar as the weekly summaries reviewed specific skills (e.g. pronoun agreements, inspectional reading, etc.), in future I would link their production to follow-up review activities to reinforce the learning. I think I would make the summaries a bi-weekly feature; they have the potential to consume a lot of time, especially if the class is prone to plenty of discussion. As one student suggested, it would be useful to post or announce the questions coming up for discussion a day or two in advance. This would be particularly helpful to groups that find discussions more difficult. Again, small group introductions to these questions might facilitate the discussion, where this is necessary.

The instructor could be a little more demanding regarding the content of the summaries. I do not think it is too much to ask each student to reflect briefly on each listed activity (many students did, but many did not this time). As well, for one or two summaries when we are in the midst of a particularly complex piece of literature, it could be very helpful to require the questions to be focused on the literature itself. However, one must
remember that any such limitation may lessen commitment to the process by students who have not been successfully engaged by the text.

The Creative Project. I would retain this segment of the portfolio and leave it largely untouched in the diversity of its format. Students were pleased by the numerous choices available to them. I would, however, try to ensure that the librarian was available within the classroom to be of more ready and familiar access during the days devoted to portfolios. This would encourage students working on term papers to enter into a design dialogue with the librarian, a dialogue that would assist them in their research and help them to structure their initial papers. I would also generate completed models of all the alternatives. Those writing term papers could read ‘A’ papers submitted in previous years, sample student stories could be provided, and so on. As well, I would create a mini-library of shorter texts—poems, essays, and stories—that could serve as a source of adjunct material for each of the themes under discussion. This ‘library’ would be organized by theme. Students would have access to its contents directly through me.

The Portfolio as a Whole. Many students argued in their evaluation that I should have assigned deadline dates for parts of the portfolio as we went along. They felt that this would have lightened up the workload at the end of the semester. I hesitated to do this, as in my experience, a majority of students ignore due dates much of the time anyway, for a variety of reasons, some more justifiable than others. We are encouraged by the ‘I’ grade strategy of the Ministry of Education to tolerate late work on the humane assumption that the student simply needs more time to practice and to learn. The whole deadline strategy has the capacity to backfire, as the instructor is faced with devising all kinds of positive reinforcements and punishments for breach and compliance. The instructor becomes a kind of ‘mother’ figure, making sure her kids have done their homework. As well, I think that such an approach runs contrary to the goal of getting the students to learn time management. One learns to manage time by managing it, not by having someone else watch the clock for you.
I think it would be appropriate for the instructor to generate a suggested timeline of completion for various tasks and to inquire publicly and periodically if the class in general are reaching their goals. I would also inquire about progress during individual conferencing.

Individual or small group conferencing is something that should be utilized more fully in the instruction for this project. Conceivably students could work in support teams, even in competition with other teams, and this could have a beneficial effect provided that no student was directly dependent upon another for anything crucial. Too many high school group assignments are spoiled by the irresponsibility of a single group member. Many students dislike group work for this very reason—they’ve had enough experience being demoralized by working hard on a project, only to have its anticipated success deflated by the laxity of an untrustworthy classmate. However, group processes should be used where they can be effective and, at the least, harmless.

Several of the academic students suggested that the value available for the creative project be expanded at least to equal that for the theme park. One student stated that he spent at least twice as much time on his term paper as on his theme park. It is a good point.

Finally, it might be useful to ‘float’ the idea of sharing the portfolios earlier in the semester. If we shared our work earlier on, perhaps at mid-term, students would be better prepared for and perhaps better disposed toward the idea of sharing the finished products at semester’s end. I believe students can learn a great deal from one another once they get past the obstacles of their shyness and insecurity.

Implications for the Traditional Portion of the Course. The more instructional strategies and instructional time that are directed at the portfolio and its tasks, the less is available for those items specific to traditional tasks (see again Tables 1 and 2, pp. 19 and 20). One way around this dilemma is to draw more of those traditional tasks and processes into the portfolio itself. This would, of necessity, alter the design of the portfolio somewhat.
Further, it is hard to see how grammar exercises and practice government examinations really fit into the goals that were set for the portfolio.

When determining to do this year's portfolio I was careful to make sure that it counted for no more than half the school's portion of the student's final grade. I was sure that students would be quite intimidated by the prospect of facing a government examination on the strength of an experimental project alone. I think that it would be possible to expand the portfolio further, perhaps in negotiation with a class. However, I think it would be unwise to abandon those segments of the traditional curriculum that serve to prepare and reassure students for the mandated government examination. Many students would likely be uneasy and unhappy about such a situation. An instructor doing so might face criticism from school administration or parents on this issue, as well. It would be advisable to do so only under a carefully prepared plan that provided the same preparation in other ways.

Conclusion

This project was a complex and intense experience for the students and me alike. There was great variability in the skill and finesse with which the students completed their final production. In addition, each student found challenges, disappointments or satisfactions in an individual, unique way.

The portfolio assignment itself had four main purposes. One was to provide a learning opportunity in the form of an assignment requiring long-term planning and offering periodic opportunities for review and summing up. The portfolio did these things. The second was that as an assignment it should be individually flexible within a common framework. It was. The third purpose was that the finished product should be a demonstration of knowledge and skill. Every student completed one that could be evaluated in some way. The fourth purpose was to provide a way for the students to connect their real lives to the literature and writing that were a part of their course. The portfolio provided that.

My purpose for this project was to devise an evaluation portfolio assignment, work with the students on it through the course of a semester, and evaluate it with them at the end.
With their co-operation I have done that. The students who completed the evaluation sheets were asked the question: Should we continue the portfolio project (with refinements based on their input), or should we go back to the ‘teach-test’ method of providing the English 12 course? Of the nineteen evaluations which were returned, all but one recommended unequivocally that the portfolio assignment be continued. Such an endorsement seems reasonably conclusive to me.
References


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Appendix A. Outline of Portfolio Assignment

English 12 Portfolio Project and Evaluation Outline

The portfolio project for English 12 will count 50% of your in-class grade. Given the significance of this, students should begin planning their portfolio contributions early and be well under way by mid-term.

The portfolio project will consist of four major compulsory sections within each of which there is broad freedom of choice. Thus while all portfolios will appear alike in their general structural organization, no two will be much alike when it comes to the detailed selections and contributions students will make.

The portfolio will consist of a binder divided into sections in the following sequence. Each of the sections is important. However, students may choose through negotiation with their instructor on how each section will contribute to their grade. Ultimately, the four sections' contributions will add up to 50.

Section One. Autobiography

This section will consist of a series of five autobiographical essays. Each topic is designed to encourage the student to explore his own life and background from the perspective of the last year of secondary school. In the process of writing these essays students may relate their personal experience to that of characters, authors, ideas or participants in the books, essays, plays, movies and poetry that we will be reading in class or that are a part of your everyday life. The value of literature is that it holds up a mirror to life, as it were, and allows us to judge for ourselves the accuracy of its reflections. Do they match or mismatch what we see and experience in our own, real world?

Topics:

"The Landscape" - Where did you grow up? What was/is your community like? What are its physical characteristics? How do they affect you? What do you like or dislike about it? Is the landscape you inhabit psychologically important to you? How does it contribute to your experience and to that of others around you? etc.

"Family" - Describe your family and the significant relationships which distinguish it from your other social contacts. How do you get along? How do your parents and siblings contribute to your daily life? What kinds of things do you do with or for your family? What special occasions mark your family life? How does your family differ from other families with which you have contact? etc.

"Motivation" - People are motivated largely by feelings. What are the dominant feelings of your mental landscape? What do you like? What do you desire? What experiences give you joy? What are you afraid of? What stresses and stress-releases mark your daily/weekly/monthly life? What personal and social ambitions do you have? How does goal-setting (or its lack) contribute to your personal successes and failures? etc.

"Identity" - Socrates said that we should know ourselves. "What a piece of work is a man?" said Hamlet. Now that you are growing into a young adult, who are you? What kind of person are you? Do people like you and vice-versa? What are your strengths and weaknesses (we all have some of each)? What kind or person would you like to be (we all have room for improvement)? What sorts of life habits do you or would you like to
practise to become the person you strive to be? Who are your models or heroes? What kinds of traits would you like to avoid? etc.

“Decisions” - Everyone is forced to explore his own future. No one can spare us our personal journeys to wisdom. We’re “all alone together” said the poet. What sources or guides do you have or are you cultivating to enable you actively to face the future that continually streams toward us? How do ethics and/or morals contribute to your decision-making? Is religious belief an important part of your life? Is decision-making a rational process, an intuitive process, or a combination? How “technical” (relying on technique) is your decision-making? How free are you to manage your life? etc.

Section Two. Exploration of Themes (A Theme Park?)

The purpose of this section is to reflect upon and address some of the themes to be found in the literature that is the reading substance of the course. During the semester we will read short stories, one or two novels, one or two plays, a selection of poetry and some essays. These works discuss and comment upon all kinds of ideas, either directly or indirectly; the students who read them should be prepared to do the same. First, students must be able to discern or infer what themes exist in a work of literature. Second, they should be able to comment critically on how well the work brings that theme into our culture’s common experience. Third, they should think about and discuss those themes for themselves.

This section of the portfolio should be subdivided into thematic areas. The list of areas that follows is not exhaustive, but covers many areas that students should be familiar with (or should become familiar with). Each time we read or view a piece of literature students should be examining it with a view to integrating its ideas into the thematic subdivisions of this section of the portfolio. It should be a section of discussion and commentary.

Themes:

“God and Religion” - What do authors such as Shakespeare and Dickinson, Irving and Huxley, Camus and Conrad have to say about the nature, and perhaps intentions, of God? Why is religion so powerful in cultures the world over? What do you think/feel about this central psychological and philosophical feature of human life and society?

“Man and Society/State” - There is a tension between the individual, desirous of his freedom for opportunity and choice, and the demands of social existence as expressed by others in the forms of family, school, church, law, government. Is “what is good for the hive, good for the bee”, as Marcus Aurelius said many centuries ago? What does society owe to the individuals that comprise it? What do individuals owe to the common society of which we are a part? How is your freedom and dignity compromised or enhanced by your need to fit into a social world? What do the authors of our course have to say about this dilemma?

“Love/Passion and Reasonable Prudence” - How do feelings propel the characters of our stories or embody the expressions in our poems? How do dramatists and novelists depict the passionate and the reasonable? How do we identify with these characters and ideas?
“Value, Wealth and Money” - Does money make the world go ‘round? What other kinds of value and wealth are there? What trade-offs are we forced to make in order to inhabit a cash-driven society? How does money enable or disable people? What do our authors have to say about this?

“Nature and Ecology” - Our technological society has exploited nature and is pushing its boundaries of resilience, perhaps beyond its limits of self-repair. What is man’s natural place in the world? Does the world belong to man, or man to the world? What kinds of models can explain our current challenges? Where might these lead in the future?

“History and Change” - We live in a very driven world in which history itself seems to have speeded up. How did people live centuries ago? Were they happy and satisfied or miserable and despairing? What were the social and cultural preoccupations of people in Shakespeare’s time, in that of Omar Khayyam, in that of Coleridge and Shelley? What are they today? Can we alter history? Should we slow down the present? Can we influence the future?

“Celebrity and the Common Man” - We live in a world of celebrities: sports heroes, movie stars, television personalities, politicians, royalty. Will everyone get his fifteen minutes of fame, as Andy Warhol predicted? Why do some emerge as leaders but most remain content to be manipulated and cajoled, directed and managed? Where is merit in the fortunes of all this?

Ultimately the student is encouraged to make his own comments on these themes, based on his experience with his own life (see Section One) and with the literature of the course.

Section Three. Weekly Summaries/Responses

This section will contain regular weekly entries done on the last day of the week. As summaries, they will list the specific lesson skills, terminology, concepts, etc. that we covered during the week. Thus the student will review at week’s end material that we have done. What did the student learn this week? As well, it will refer to and briefly summarize what literature we have covered during the week.

Before writing the summary responses, the class will have an open discussion of the week’s activities, as suggested by a student and affirmed by the class. In so doing, it is to be hoped that our communal memory and critical comments will nudge all our memories, enabling all of us to write coherently and confidently about the week past.

Responses should include some form of critical comment on the week’s activity. This could consist of ideas for better presentation or instruction of materials, suggestions (both for self and for others) for better discipline (if this is perceived to be a problem), and so on. Further, each response should include a good question. This question may derive from the week’s activity or from other stimuli; however, it should at least to some extent drive the student’s thinking during the following week(s). The question could be to himself, for the instructor, to one of the authors, to other members of the class, and so on. The student would not necessarily expect an easy answer, but despite these questions’ ability to tease and frustrate us, these are the best questions for stimulating learning.

By the end of semester the student should have a minimum of 15 weekly entries. Each should be about half a page to a page in length, concise but fruitful.
Section Four. Creative Project

This section will be devoted to a creative work by the student. This work may be any one of the following (students are not prohibited from doing more than one, but they can get full marks with only one).

“A Term Paper” - This is the old “term paper project” that consists of an original, critical literary paper of between 8 and 15 pages devoted to a topic agreed upon by the student and the teacher. (See term paper handout for details). University or college-bound students are encouraged to select this choice.

“Fiction” - A student can attempt to write a short story of 8 to 15 pages. It should have a well-developed central character, a clear conflict to drive the plot, careful writing with vivid description and logical progression to a sense of completion. Students who wished, but were unable, to take Writing 12 would find this assignment suitable.

“A Poetry Anthology” - Students would create a poetry anthology of personal work and of work collected from other sources. Thus the student would function both as author and as critic, providing his own work and commenting on that of others. It should NOT be a rehash of work done in previous grades or for previous courses, although it could contain SOME repeated, favourite work.

“Other?” - The student could propose a creative project involving language and/or literature, and, with agreement from the instructor, make it the center of this section of the portfolio.

Fitting it into the Course

One day per week will be devoted to portfolio development, perhaps more if need be. This may include library research, but most often will be spent in the classroom. The instructor will spend time reading and assessing student work, conferencing with students, providing advice, etc. Students will have plenty to do to keep up with all that the course work (portfolio and otherwise) requires.

This being said, students should make time to add to their portfolios in one way or another daily. Thus, even if no specific assignments have been given, students are never entirely without homework.

The portfolio should be a central reference point for the student, one around which the remainder of the course revolves. The remainder of the course and the student’s personal life experience should come together in a considered manner in the portfolio. Each week the student should at a minimum:

a) write his summary/response to the week’s activities;
b) add to his discussions in the ‘theme park’;
c) make some progress on his creative project.

The autobiography essays will be written and collected during the course of the semester.
# Student Calendar

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**Theme Park**
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<td>6. History and Change</td>
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7. Celebrity and the Common Man

Other Themes?
Evaluation Form
(NO EVALUATION TOTAL MAY ADD TO MORE THAN 50.)

1. Autobiography  This may take a total value of 10 or 15/50.

   Essay One. Landscape   ___/6
   Essay Two. Family      ___/6
   Essay Three. Motivation ___/6
   Essay Four. Identity   ___/6
   Essay Five. Decisions  ___/6

                  ____/30

2. Theme Park  This may take a total value of 10, 15 or 20/50.

   Content: Writing contributions to thematic areas (minimum of one contribution to each area; no maximum):
           ___/14

   Quality: Sophistication of ideas, evidence of intertextuality, quality of written work:
           ___/6

                  ____/20

3. Weekly Summaries  This may take a total value of 5, 10 or 15/50.

   Number Completed out of Total Required:   ____/____.

   Utility, Relevance and Interest of Questions, including evidence of Follow-up:
           ___/6

                  ____/____

4. Creative Project  This may take a total value of 10 or 15/50.

   ___%  

                  ____/50
Appendix B. Recommended Instructional Strategies for Encouraging Positive Achievement

1. Give tasks that are challenging but achievable for all students.
   a) Vary the difficulty of tasks among students according to their skill levels.
   b) Provide tasks that can be completed at different levels.
   c) Make sure that the highest achievers are challenged.

2. Organize assignments to provide frequent opportunities for students to observe increases in their skills.
   a) Order problems and assignments by difficulty level.
   b) Break down difficult tasks into subunits.

3. Create short-term (proximal) goals.

4. Vary goals among students.

5. Engage students in personal goal setting.
   a) Provide incentives for setting challenging goals.

6. Give students different ways to demonstrate what they know.

7. Point out what is good, right, or shows improvement.

8. Provide clear, specific, and informative feedback.
   a) Avoid global, uninformative praise.
   b) Provide written, substantive comments whenever possible.

9. Base rewards (including high grades) on achieving a clearly defined standard or set of criteria or on personal improvement.

10. Give students multiple opportunities to achieve high grades.

11. Teach students to celebrate their classmates’ successes, at whatever levels they occur.

    a) If evaluation is public, it must be a “fair contest.”
b) Have students keep personal progress records.

c) Give students an opportunity for private interactions with the teacher.

13. Teach students to evaluate their own work.
   a) Encourage students to use their own judgments.
   b) Give students opportunities to check their own work.
   c) Give students explicit instructions on how to evaluate their own work.
   d) Link evaluation criteria directly to instruction.

14. Be clear and consistent.

15. Encourage students to seek help.

16. Give no more assistance than is necessary.
   a) Teach students to use classroom resources to answer their questions.

17. Encourage students to use peers for assistance.
   a) Teach students how to give help.

18. Attribute “failure” to low effort or an ineffective strategy.

19. Attribute “successes” to effort and competence.

20. Differentiate tasks among students and over time.

21. Point out “within-student” variation in skill levels.

22. When instructing in a whole-class format, involve all students productively.

23. Use “ability grouping” flexibly and temporarily to address specific needs.
   a) Create temporary instructional groups.
   b) Allow students to volunteer for skill-based groups.

24. Convey the value of many different kinds of skills.

25. Give relatively poor-performing students the role of “expert.” (Stipek, condensed from pp. 94 - 109)
Appendix C. Student Questions and Sample Weekly Summaries

(Boldface questions were set aside for use in class discussion.)

Block A.

February 24, 2000

1. Could we do less writing and more discussion in class?
2. Am I an investigative reader or a beginner?
3. Can you define autonomous for me?
4. Explain the difference between direct and indirect characterization.
5. How are stereotyping and first impressions harmful to us as a whole in society?
6. Where does equality fit into our society?
7. How do you know when you love someone?
8. Is there a universal value that everyone follows?
9. When faced with a dilemma or moral decision, is it better to stand your ground, or remain passive?
10. Who were the great philosophers of our time and why?
11. Is inspectional reading worthwhile? Wouldn’t reading the whole thing be better?
12. Why do we have to read such old and boring works of literature with language that nobody can understand? How is it supposed to benefit us as we progress through life?
13. Now that we are graduating, how do we know what is best for us and where we belong in the world?
14. Are we absolutely responsible for our own actions?
15. Why is it that we tend to lean toward the opinions or decisions of the majority, rather than stand alone with our beliefs, at times?
March 3, 2000

1. Why is it that the rich seem to require more space than the rest of us? They have huge houses, big cars, and lots of land . . .

2. How are we supposed to know literary terms of which we've never heard, e.g. "juxtaposition?"

3. Explain why anyone would get wrapped up in betting (e.g. The Rocking Horse Winner.)

4. Aren't teachers supposed to make life seem like a happy place so we all don't become depressed?

5. Do you think that people are better off with money or happiness?

6. What are we students supposed to achieve from doing the portfolio?

7. Is the marking going to get harder as we go along?

8. What drives us to be controlled by money so much?

9. How do the themes we address in our portfolio affect our everyday life? Is the major impact on us the authors' reason for choosing these themes?

10. When you stop taking chances, do you stop living?

11. Does writing about yourself allow for better insight on who you are?

12. I would like to ask someone from the era what life was like during the time of Conrad's The Secret Agent. Were prejudices higher then compared to now?

March 17, 2000

1. Is prejudice human nature, or is it learned individually?

2. Is it true that Shakespeare didn't write his plays himself?

3. Do you ever feel like you're standing up there and no one is listening?

4. What does the story of Watergate have to do with an English class?

5. If news reporting can bring around such great change in government, why doesn't society use it more often to get the government to listen?

6. When man fully understands science, what comes next?
7. If we didn't have freedom of speech, who would have the power and authority to tell the world what is wrong and right to say? Would we, as a whole, listen?

8. Why are newspapers like The National Enquirer, that rarely tell the truth, tolerated in our society today?

9. How might we eliminate violence from society? How can we get most people to understand that violence is stupid?

10. For the television version of the news, who decides what would be interesting viewing?

11. Can prejudice be a good thing in some cases?

12. Why is it that schools can have a speech-code when we are supposed to have freedom of speech?

13. If we begin to monitor the public’s use of offensive words, who will monitor the monitors? Should sensitivity be the downfall of language?

May 1, 2000

1. Is the greater man a man who can adapt to his environment, or a man who can adapt his environment to him?

2. What is the best way to cure the flu?

3. Did you watch Simon Birch? Did you find the book and movie exactly the same? If not, which was better?

4. Why did you become a teacher instead of a psychologist?

5. Why do people purposely hurt other people, physically and emotionally? Is it really that enjoyable? Why can’t they just leave other people’s lives alone?

6. Do we have enough time to cram all these assignments in before school ends?

7. Why does the school board panic every time some grade 8 punk calls in a bomb threat?

8. Is A Prayer for Owen Meany a true story?

9. Are we going to have enough time to finish all the stuff we’re supposed to do?
May 17, 2000

1. Can you read and explain the side board quotes some mornings? I think the class would enjoy hearing them.

2. Why do some people insist on making you feel like a disappointment because you never did things that they would like to have done, but you know that you’re not a disappointment?

3. When did the English language really become the dominating language in upper class society?

4. Do you think that the earth belongs to humans or humans belong to the earth?

5. Were some of the events in A Prayer for Owen Meany experienced by the author himself?

6. Can we do some other play by Shakespeare besides Hamlet?

7. There are over 6,000 languages in the world and a lot of these are based in Africa, so a lot of these languages must really be similar to each other, right?

8. Why do you think people even have feelings? For survival purposes is there any necessary feeling besides fear? It’s so weird.

9. Do you think we will all be ready for the final exam when it arrives even though we missed so much class time?

10. Would it be possible to devote more class time to portfolio work?

June 2, 2000

1. How long do you think it will be until we can’t live on earth any more?

2. Why does the road ahead of me scare me to death?

3. How do you talk to someone that doesn’t want to listen?

4. We all grow up thinking we’re going to be famous athletes, rock singers, movie stars, and just now we’re realizing we’re not and we’re pissed off. What do you think?
5. Does our landscape affect the way we grow up? (For example: gloomy landscape = gloomy childhood.)
6. Is loneliness created by society (for example, being in a huge crowd can make you feel lonely) or by isolation? Or is it only the effect of a transfer from one to the other?
7. Why do people think that just because we can speak and act, we are automatically better than any other life form? People think they have the right to use and abuse any other living creature just because they can.
8. Why do Americans stereotype us so strongly?
9. How do you know when you are happy/satisfied? Do you need to force yourself to be?
10. Is it just fate that decides who becomes lower class, middle class or upper class? If not, then what does?
11. Is meditating being deep in thought or being without thought?
12. What would the world be like if it were run only be women?

June 15, 2000

1. How long have you been teaching? How much longer do you plan doing this?
2. Back in Shakespeare’s day the play Othello probably seemed like a possible situation. Do you think that today people have such strong values that they could be used against the people with the same tragic effect as in Othello?
3. Is loving someone worth the pain of having him break your heart? Does it always feel like this?
4. Why is everything in the year crammed into the last two weeks? (Seeing’s how the rest of the year is lazy . . .)
5. Did you learn anything new or achieve anything from teaching this class this year?
6. Was Shakespeare aware of the unfair attention paid to the women in his plays?
7. Is it worth taking a chance on destroying the perfect image for a chance to find the perfect person? Is it worth risking destroying an illusion?
8. Why is it we are so eager all our lives to graduate, yet when it's almost over, we don't want it to end?

Block B

February 24, 2000

1. Is appearance so important that we should hide reality to stress its importance?
2. How accurate is analysis of stories and poetry?
3. What are some good ways of preparing for a test besides simply looking over your notes?
4. Is there an afterlife?
5. Who was the one character in Death of a Salesman who should be credited with driving Willy over the edge?
6. What do you think was the most significant point, with respect to Biff, in the play Death of a Salesman? How did it change him?
7. Is it possible to recognize someone's justification to himself in killing himself? If we can recognize it, does that mean that it was a justified suicide?
8. Why can't dreams come true for those people who spend their whole life striving for just that one special dream? Don't they deserve it?
9. Is there a 'Canadian Dream,' and why isn't it talked about like the 'American Dream'?
10. Why do we have to talk so much? Why do you feel that public speaking is important? Can you make this class more interesting and teach us things for the exam?
11. Since American culture is so pivotal in world history, why don't they try to change the corruption and poverty?
12. Biff felt he was lost and had to find himself. How do we know if we are lost or if we have found ourselves if we don’t know where to be looking or when?

13. Why are we here?

March 3, 2000

1. Who determines if a book is a “good” book or not?
2. How can someone pick out insanity? What determines this character trait?
3. Was the history of language really important? because it went over my head and there’s no way I’d be able to remember it all.
4. What is it about money that makes one feel so powerful and that he can do anything and that he is better than others?
5. When there is war, why do the soldiers that fight sometimes come out of the war with some disdain for mankind?
6. What are the origins of the title “Catch-22?”
7. Would the kidnapping in The Collector never have happened if it wasn’t for the money, or would he have found another way anyway?
8. If we all know the dangers and consequences of war, what drives us to it? What forces cause this to happen?
9. Why don’t we have a book about W.W.I like All Quiet written through the eyes of an American?
10. Any tips for faster reading?

March 16, 2000

1. Is there an easier way to learn punctuation?
2. Why are questions such a big part of our lives?
3. In the “Theme Park” section, exactly how does it work?
4. Who’s the most intelligent person you’ve ever met?
5. Why does society find it necessary to genetically engineer food which has been grown perfectly well and has fed civilizations for centuries?

6. Why is 'success' so important to mankind?

7. What makes items or fashions appealing or not appealing?

8. If a strike goes on for a long period, will the due dates for major assignments be set back?

9. Is it always a good thing to stand up for your beliefs, even if others will suffer from your decision?

10. How do we define a prophet? In contemporary society, how can we distinguish one such as opposed to a schizophrenic? Are prophets even real?

11. Is there a difference between Canadian French and European French?

12. Do you think there's a line or age where teenagers can become parents? Do you think I'm too young? Why or why not?

May 8, 2000

1. What can we do for the loss of school? Is there a way to regain the lost time?

2. Do you think The Secret Agent started Hitler's 'reign of terror?'

3. What drives some people to push themselves and others not to? Self-fulfillment? Pleasing others? Is anyone ever completely content with what they are or who they are?

4. Why does money and wealth associate itself with the feeling of power and being greater than the average man?

5. Why is it the key to every English class to analyse writing as if this was a psychology class?

6. Do people who make bomb threats realize the severity of the situation?

7. Is it true that, if you don't fear death, you don't fear anything?
8. Why do we live our lives in such a rush? It seems that we are always running for something or to do something. We are always driving ahead to get or achieve something.

9. What are the consequences of growing out of your peers?

10. Can a slide show be part of the portfolio?

May 25, 2000

1. Does life allow for enough time to really find out who we are?

2. Will we always have goals and plans to drive us ahead? Is there ever a time when we aren’t working to accomplish something?

3. Who is going to be in the next war? Who will win?

4. Was Shakespeare racist himself, or perhaps was his intent to mock the accepted attitudes by writing them into his plays?

5. What are Chomsky’s points of view? Is it possible to be both communist and anarchist?

6. Why can’t Canada join with the States and take over the world?

7. If James Dean, Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Marilyn Monroe, Jim Morrison, Tupac Shakur, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens had never died young, do you think they’d be as famous or considered idols or icons?

8. Why is it in the nature of some people to follow your orders and trust in you totally when in a dire situation, but to spite you in any other circumstance because of something so insignificant as skin colour? *Othello* is a prime example of this.

9. Can we go a bit slower on *Othello*, and could you maybe explain the words more?

10. Do we bring stress upon ourselves, or is it applied upon as in outer influences, and if so, is stressing yourself a huge part of success?

11. Why do people feel this weird urge to complete stuff on deadlines? They know life will not end if they don’t meet the deadlines.
12. Why do we allow a few people to have so much wealth and money that they couldn’t come close to spending it in three lifetimes, while millions of people starve to death and can’t afford a pair of shoes? I know that communism, where “everyone’s equal” doesn’t work, but what will happen in the future if our society is more accustomed to fork out millions of dollars to make a good movie than to save a homeless person’s life?

June 15, 2000

1. What can we do in life without diction?

2. Why would someone drop out of school two months before grad? These are not people who are intellectually incapable. Rather they are talented folk who shouldn’t be scraping bottom, but . . .

3. Why is jealousy such a strong and dominant feeling that can grab hold of people?

4. Why does time slow down when you want it to speed up, and vice-versa?

5. Are we in control of our destiny?

6. If you love someone, does that make you jealous? If you can’t feel jealousy, does that mean you love them less? Or that you love them more?

7. Why do we have to learn things for ourselves when others have shown us so many examples?

8. How big do you think heaven or hell is?

9. What is so important about the English curriculum that we have to do it for five years?

10. Now that the school year is coming to an end, and we’re about to graduate, is the so-called ‘new life’ we’re going to start going to teach us more about ourselves?

11. Can there be absolutely no thought at all in somebody’s mind?

12. Why is it that no matter how close exams are and how much work there is to do we still don’t assert ourselves and do it??!!!
Appendix D. List of Texts Used in Classes

Novels
A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving
All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque
Catch 22 by Joseph Heller
The Collector by John Fowles

Poems
It Is Dangerous to Read Newspapers by Margaret Atwood
When In Disgrace With Fortune by William Shakespeare
Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town by ee cummings
Hurt Hawks by Robinson Jeffers
Original Sin by Robinson Jeffers
The War Photographer by Carol Ann Duffy
Democracy by Leonard Cohen (from CD The Future)
Design by Robert Frost
Glory Be to God by Gerard Manley Hopkins
A Charm by Emily Dickinson
The Silence by Wendell Berry

Essays
Neither Morons, Nor Imbeciles, Nor Idiots by Sallie Tisdale (reprinted from Harper's)
Journal of the Uninvited by Paul Hawken (reprinted from Whole Earth Review)
English: the Killer Language? Or a Passing Phase by Joshua Fishman (from Whole Earth Review)
The Pleasures of Abstinence by Roger Shattuck (an analysis of Dickinson's A Charm, reprinted from his book Forbidden Knowledge)
The Improbable World by Neil Postman (from his book Technopoly)
In Defence of Prejudice by Jonathan Rauch (reprinted from Harper's)
A Brief History of English (reprint, source unknown)
The Owl Has Flown by Sven Birkerts (from his book The Gutenberg Elegies)
Drama

*Othello* by William Shakespeare

*Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

Reviews (of *Death of a Salesman*)

*The Success Dream of the American Stage* by Harold Clurman

*Old Glamour, New Gloom* by Eleanor Cook

Short Stories

*Identities* by J. Valgardson

*In the Shining Houses* by Alice Munro

*The Rocking Horse Winner* by D. H. Lawrence

*The Guest* by Albert Camus

*Holding Things Together* by Anne Tyler

*The Destructors* by Graham Greene

*Just Lather, That's All* by Hernando Tellez

Movies

*All the President's Men* by Robert Redford, based on investigative journalism by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

*The Secret Agent* based on the novel by Joseph Conrad
Appendix E. Transcriptions from Student Evaluations of Portfolios

**Autobiography**

**Positive Comments**

- I loved looking at myself
- personal ideas not as difficult
- interesting getting to know yourself
- a good way to evaluate our personal lives
- they weren't far-fetched topics
- something everyone could relate to
- I really enjoyed these. It gave me a chance to really dig into myself.
- had lots of information to draw from
- ideas slowly came to me and then I enjoyed writing them
- I think the most important thing we learned was what we learned about ourselves when we did the autobiography essays.
- can truly realize who you are
- self-exploration is my favorite type of writing
- expands our horizon
- broadens writing techniques
- I loved this section! I loved it!
- allowed you more freedom than usual; in your writing there would be some private memories
- made me think about myself AND improve my writing skills

**Negative Comments**

- topics too broad; not easy to know where to start
- sometimes hard to open up about personal topics
- the only problem was knowing where to start
- some people find it hard to write about themselves
- can be easy for people to slack off
- didn’t see the point because I didn’t see the reasoning behind them.

**Theme Park**

**Positive Comments**

- made us think about the stories we read
- topics were interesting
- allowed you to connect personal experiences to literature. You really had to work at it.
- great! Let’s us expand our thematic ideas.
- it was good for improving syntopical reading skills

**Negative Comments**

- Because I was absent when it was introduced I was lost. I regret no being able to do it.
- didn’t really know how to do it.
- would have been better if we discussed it more in class . . . did not particularly enjoy the section because of how little I understood it
- didn’t really understand exactly what I was supposed to do
-I’m still not sure I did this section right . . . more class discussion would have helped
-could be very difficult for some students to grasp
-was a bit scary. If we need to learn to analyse in school, we should learn to analyse
something from real life instead of poetry and novels
-there should be in-class time to explore themes immediately after a work is read . . . get it
out and expressed right away
-it was hard to remember works over the year
-there should be a full class discussion so that everyone knows what to do
-the concepts needed more explaining and practice
-no direction and it was worth too much
-tough identifying themes

Weekly Summaries

Positive Comments

-very helpful
-reflect on learning
-think and ask questions
-discussions on questions were fun
-super helpful
-a really good chance to remind ourselves what we had learned
-good idea, because it made me rethink about what we did
-questions at the end got you thinking about everything
-helpful to remember
-keeps personal records on track . . . past work we could reflect on . . . associate new ideas
-a chance to keep track of everything we did

Negative Comments

-need to be more strict with due dates
-didn’t have enough discussions in class
-do one every week with due dates
-should have done them more regularly
-I never really got that much out of doing them; I always felt rushed
-shouldn’t be graded for content, as each student does it for individual needs
-creates more work
-people didn’t take it too seriously
-I almost lost them

Creative Project

Positive Comments

-tends to different strengths
-should definitely be a part of the portfolio
-great that you gave us a choice on what we could do
-allowed my imagination to soar!
-I really liked the creative project. I spent most of my spare time with my friends developing
the story behind the story.
-very creative! I like creation.
-term paper good to prepare for university

Negative Comments

-more options?
-always seemed to be rushed; more class time?
-difficult to set marking criteria
-term paper: very little orientation (or so it felt)
-should have had more instruction on the term paper

Portfolio as a Whole Project

Positive Comments

-a very different and creative method of teaching
-It’s a good way of seeing and testing students’ responsibility levels
-It was personal and ‘not academic’; not everyone is a genius; this enabled the creative thinker to do better
-I learned a lot about myself. I’m not sure that counts for much in English, but it did quite a bit for me.
-It was fun; with some work, could be even better than it was this year
-way better than notes and doing tests all the time
-It is worth refining and you should continue on with it.
-It was my kind of work.
-If the intention was to have us do more homework, it worked.
-the chance to choose how we would be graded was more than fair
-should be kept for future classes
-was more interesting than using tests
-a project that can be added onto in the future
-the idea was very original and interesting
-I liked ... how ... choose ... how heavily certain parts would be marked
-The portfolio was quite an enlightening experience
-It was a lot harder than teach and test. You had to prioritize and plan. But it felt easier because information was accessed from your life.
-much more interesting because of the possibilities of choice given to us
-variable evaluation is definitely good because each of us has strengths and weaknesses
-Continue the project!
-most important thing TIME MANAGEMENT.
-individual work meant out-of-class time was important, but this is also reflective of the real world, and as such is important for any person wanting to be successful.
-For classes such as ours the discussions were supremely important; they opened up new regions of thought to us.
-It allowed people to reflect upon themselves and meet with more success, both in learning and in marks than they would with the ordinary factory model of education.
-Very worthwhile!
-The most important thing I learned was that I need to manage my time more carefully!
-It was a good idea. Before you do this again, discuss it with your new class.
-Definitely continue! I enjoyed it very much. More for an honours English class.
-Learned what a term paper was: learned time management
-so much more helpful learning than textbook work (BORING!)
-this class helped build confidence.
Negative Comments

-needs better organization and stricter deadlines
-many important parts of the portfolio couldn’t be completed until the year’s work was over
-we should have been learning more knowledge and skills
-we didn’t do enough fundamental work; I guess that it is really hard trying to impress both parts of the scale, but there needs to be a balance.
-I would have appreciated more class time to work on it
-didn’t do much for me because I was very busy and wound up rushing at the end
-would have liked to cover more of the basics to prepare for the provincial exam
-I would prefer to go back to the teach/test method (other people seemed to enjoy the project)
-need concrete dates for all parts of the portfolio so people don’t fall behind
-give many examples of how to do each section
-confusion associated with various sections
-unorganized students infect a whole class. SMITE THE UNCO-OPERATIVE ONES!
-the project was quite overwhelming
-I think there should be a set evaluation so we know what you expect us to spend the most time on
-Kick the annoying students out. They ruin it for those of us who enjoy English.
-Give more time, refine the thematic part
-Elaborate a lot more, explain more clearly
Appendix F. Ministry of Education Marking Scale for Essays

ENGLISH 12 COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

6
The 6 paper is highly articulate, manifesting sophisticated, wide-ranging vocabulary, perhaps employing literary and rhetorical devices purposefully and/or demonstrating masterful control of a range of sentence structures. It draws upon either a depth of knowledge or a lively imagination. The reader is engaged by the use of language, perhaps by wit or humour and/or by the quality of the mind’s work.

5
The 5 paper displays some manipulation of language to achieve a desired effect. Voice is established and maintained; structure is essentially controlled and purposeful; variety is evident; emphasis is deliberate. It is a good first draft worthy of reworking. The reader is attracted to the thoughtful content.

4
The 4 paper offers conventional personal narrative with identifiable beginning, middle, and end and often some purposeful dialogue. Alternately, it offers a standard (five-part) expository structure with suitable but predictable introduction and conclusion. Some variety is evident in diction and sentence structure. The reader follows the paper’s meaning and purpose with relative ease, if not interest.

3
The 3 paper features underdeveloped paragraphs, basic and somewhat repetitive transition, and support for obvious and simplistic ideas, frequently in the form of listed details. Some variety in diction and sentence structure is discernible. The reader is aware of a reasonably consistent purpose.

2
The 2 paper shows familiarity with common spoken language in casual conversation or in the writing of one not fully conversant with the language. It sustains a subject focus with some unity of direction. Simple ideas are simply and/or awkwardly expressed, as they might be in casual conversation, or in the written expression of one not fully conversant with the language. The reader can perceive meaning and detect a purpose emerging.

1
The 1 paper displays basic vocabulary without a grasp of syntax. It manages a brief subject focus without a controlling idea. The content, usually far short of the length requirement, may also be repetitive. The reader (sometimes solely on the basis of brevity) puzzles to determine direction, meaning, and/or purpose.
Appendix G. Theme Park Model

English 12 Portfolio: A Model Theme Exploration

Suppose the theme that you as a student wish to explore is the nature of good and evil. Ideas to do with this theme may include attempts to define these categories, philosophical discussions of ethics, and so on. Since most literature involves conflict, the agents in conflict often perceive themselves to be 'good' and their opponents or antagonists 'evil.' Our own identification as readers with protagonists in stories tends to accentuate our experience of these judgments. Sometimes the author explicitly attempts to direct our judgment in this regard, as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good and Evil</td>
<td>Lord of the Flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Destructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Quiet on the Western Front</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these works comments on good and evil with varying degrees of explicitness. Let's start with Lord of the Flies.

This novel has the question of the source of good and evil in society as its raison d'être. The novel is constructed as an allegory for a society of mankind which needs to be protected and 'saved.' The island is the world. The boys are its naive, unwitting inhabitants.

To Golding, evil appears when the will of individuals goes unrestrained. When society fails to regulate the desires of its individual inhabitants to limit them to those behaviors that do not hurt others, then evil is unleashed. Thus, when rule of law (as established through the meetings under the symbolic authority of the conch) is flouted by Jack and the hunters, society degrades into murder, torture, and ritual barbarism. To Golding, good is a social construct that is established and reinforced through social and cultural agreement. Without consensual efforts to maintain good in society, evil wins by default. As Edmond Burke put it, “All that is required for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Shakespeare’s Macbeth creates a slightly different picture of evil. In Elizabethan England, good and evil were all judged relative to the standards established through religious belief. Man fell into sin through the original sin of Adam and Eve; he could only be saved through God’s grace and the good works he committed to earn it. Goodness and evil were clearly defined by the church.

Macbeth (the man) was a great man, but he was tempted by his own ambition and manipulated by agents of Satan (the witches and their demons.) Thus there is a two-fold origin for evil presented in this play: man’s inherent baseness, and the evils continually brought into the world by the devil’s servants.
The questions for modern mankind must be: are we inherently evil but capable of good through the exercise of our wills? A corollary would be, “How can we encourage the exercise of our wills to accomplish the good we desire?”

The Destructors by Graham Greene is similar to Lord of the Flies in that the main characters in the story are little boys. For some reason, the contrast of innocence to do with inexperience and acts adults would clearly classify as wrong creates an interesting tension in fiction, as in life.

The behaviors of the little boys in destroying old Mr. Thomas' house are, perhaps, and example of Hannah Arendt's concept of “the banality of evil.” (Things that are banal are commonplace or ordinary.) To her, evil is a simple state that is often overlooked because it is so common. Nonetheless, its consequences are no less serious for all that.

Although T. is clearly a sociopath with no sense of right or wrong and no remorse, the other little boys who accept and carry out his plan are simple, sheep-like followers. The author provides no reason for their activity, and in fact he illustrates a paradox in that the boys bear Mr. Thomas no personal ill will. They care for his personal comfort while locking him in his 'loo.' Nonetheless, their behavior probably ruins his life. At the end, through the character of the truck driver, we are even shown the option of considering evil to be ‘funny.’

How can these ideas connect to William Golding’s model of good and evil, as well as to that of Shakespeare? Greene’s treatment of events is much more like that of Golding (and they wrote contemporaneously.) In the modern story there is no sense of demonic interference that plagues Macbeth. Golding, however, shows us evil much more dramatically in that it results in murder and terror. Greene is casual about it, and he makes no moral judgments in the way that Golding does.

All Quiet on the Western Front provides a first-person account of the horrors of twentieth century war. (The nuclear weapons and biological weapons now available but so far unused on a large scale belong, perhaps, to the twenty-first century, if to any.) An international war is so much bigger than any of us that the focus on individuals as the source of good and evil could easily be overlooked. Atrocities committed by both protagonist and antagonist seem interchangeable in this book. The men in the lines are the victims of the war; the war itself is the antagonist, the demonic monster that is destroying the lives of everyone involved.

Periodically in the book we see signs of redemption from the horrible state of affairs the war has created. We see remorse, we see international love, we see sympathy with prisoners from enemy countries. Goodness is almost a fragile flower surviving amid blasts of weed killer and the ravages of an uncontrolled weed-whacker.

If the war is the monster in this book, the creators of the monster--governments, states, nationalities, arms manufacturers, etc.--and the ideologies that support these groupthink animosities--are at ultimate fault. Again, evil lodges in the decisions of mankind. The degree to which we are complicit in those decisions is difficult to assess. The degree to which we differ as victims is easier to view.

Now that you have done some analysis of the theme with respect to works with which you are familiar or works that you have recently read and studied,
consider the theme yourself. What do you think of the origins of good and evil? How can we try to become better people, to build a better world? How can we combat the forces of evil in the world by identifying them clearly and opposing their practices? Can we do so without being self-righteous bigots who cause more damage than the problems we identify?

This kind of analytical discussion can be done with respect to any of the themes in this portfolio. Naturally, as students in high school, you haven’t had much practice in this kind of intertextual thinking. However, the more you read and discuss with your classmates, the more experience you have that you can think about and relate to life and literature, the more prepared you will be to manage your world conceptually or navigate your way through it both emotionally and intellectually. This year I’d like you to take a crack at it, at relating your analyses in such a way as to unify your own ideas as informed by your own experience and through the ideas of others.
Appendix H. Term Paper and Modified Term Paper Assignments for Creative Project

English 12 Research Paper

You will be required to write one research paper as part of English 12. Following the directions below, you will be able to break down this assignment into manageable tasks. If you have any questions at any time about any part of this paper, please feel free to see your English teacher or the librarian.

Topics: A topic of your choice in the area of language or literature and approved by your English teacher and the librarian. Suggestions include:
- an in-depth study of a significant author
- a literary genre (the short story, the essay, etc.)
- an in-depth study of a major literary work
- a literary/historical era (e.g. the beat generation, etc.)
- a comparative study
- a topic of your own choice

Content: Your paper will be based on a thesis statement and will show evidence that you have done the following:
- read primary sources such as novels, poems, plays, essays, etc.
- read secondary sources such as commentaries, reviews, interpretations and opinions
- done an analysis of your sources and made reference to them
- developed your own opinions and reactions and supported them with evidence from your sources.

Requirements: - Length 2500 words
- Working bibliography
- Documentation
- Word processed

Time: You will be given some class time to work on your research and writing. We will also be reviewing resources, bibliography format, notetaking, outlining, and documentation in class. You will be given a tour of Northwest Community College Library and will be able to have access to their resources. HOWEVER, YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO SPEND A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF YOUR OWN TIME ON THIS ASSIGNMENT. LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.
English 12 Abbreviated Term Paper Assignment

Select with your instructor a book of significance, one that is reasonably challenging, as well as of interest and entertainment value to you. Read the book, making notes as you go, with the intention of demonstrating your knowledge of the book and its author. You will do this by writing an extended book report that includes the following:

1. **Summary of the book** - Use sufficient detail to enable a reader to have a good general overview of the story and its characters. (about three pages)

2. **Two character sketches** - Provide descriptions for two of the main characters in the book. Make sure you have evidence from the book to back up your description. (about two pages, one page each)

3. **History and context** - Explain the historical context of the story and its author. For example, *Hamlet* is a story about a prince from the 1300’s written by a playwright from the 1500’s. *Brave New World* is a novel about a fictional future written by an author in 1931. How do these contexts contribute to our understanding of the book? (about one page)


Your total report will be about seven pages long. It will require less research and less writing than the term paper, and as such will count for two-thirds the value of a term paper.

Please type this report on a word processor and put on a suitable title page. Hand in for the same deadline as the term paper students. NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.
Appendix I. Portfolio Task Checklist

**General Introduction** This should be a one or two paragraph introduction to the portfolio as a whole. What was its purpose as you understand it? What areas gave you the most trouble? What areas were particularly satisfying? Address the reader as if he/she were a friend, teacher, or family member.

**Part One** This segment of the portfolio should include your five autobiographical essays. Polish all the essays. Use computer word processing or neat handwriting.

**Part Two** This segment should include two major thematic explorations, each of which refers to literary works from the curriculum, as well as to personal experience and to any other works you have read or viewed that are relevant to the themes. As well, it may contain brief discussions of any of the other themes.

**Part Three** This segment should include your weekly summaries. At the beginning, compose an overview of the class activities for the year, based on your summaries. Comment on what you felt was worthwhile, as well as on what you think could or should be changed.

**Part Four** This segment should include your creative project (term paper, abbreviated term paper, poetry project, fiction project, etc.) If you have more than one, include both.

Add any artistic or written decoration or commentary that rounds off the portfolio artistically. This could include photographs related to the themes, personal photos with respect to the autobiography, original art, brief poems or aphorisms that suit the topics, etc. For example, one student previously used the theme of doorways to illustrate movement through a portfolio, beginning each section with a photo of a different gate or door. There are many possibilities. Include your filled out evaluation form at the front of the portfolio.
Appendix J. Samples of Student Writing from Portfolios

1. Perhaps the most eluding thing to myself (and all others) is my own inner mind. The very workings of the mind (what makes us happy, what drives us, how the mind copes with the world) is a complete mystery to me. An objective, outside view of another's mind is perhaps the only that we can interpret what our minds our like. It is like a game that our class once played back in CAPP 8. Each person would have a card taped onto his forehead with the name of a famous person, but he/she wouldn't know who that famous person is. Through questioning others, the only way you can figure out who is on your forehead is to receive hints, and tidbits of who you are. In return, you help them learn who they are. However, you cannot actually directly tell who the other person’s card is; it all has to be done with interpretation. How ironic that a silly little game played out in CAPP class would in fact mean a lot more to us than meets the eye.

What these portfolios are now are a more person version of ‘head card game.’ I honestly am blind to who I am really, as is every other person in this school. The only way we can find out is by having other people to look at the card and give hints as to who you are. Often, these hints are harsh, bitter, and can destroy lives and personalities. Sadly, in a school society of social purity (reminiscent of the Nazi superior race policies), this is not always fair, or reasonable to those people who are less desirable to the others. All I can ask is that when you evaluate me, don’t be too harsh in the hints, and I will not be harsh about yours.

2. I thought that English12 would be a lot harder than it was. I think that I am rather disappointed in the amount of things that I feel that I have learnt. ... I personally don’t relate quite as well as Mr. Lehmann had hoped to some of the portfolio topics. Some of the larger assignments [should have been] due in the first term.
3. While creating this portfolio I had a chance to look within myself. Sit back, relax, and if you're anything like me, grab a couple of munchies for the ride . . . IT'S A GOOD ONE! I have learned an incredible amount about myself through writing my autobiographies. *Death of a Salesman* left an unforgettable imprint on my mind.

4. This English project was probably the hardest assignment I have ever been faced with. . . . we are all faced with challenges that create who we are and what we do.

5. I thought that everything in the portfolio was a good idea except the themes. . . . The different choices instead of doing a term paper were a really good idea.

6. I feel that by having created this portfolio I have learned . . . to understand myself. I felt that the summaries were a very effective way to help me remember all the work I have done. The portfolio was a fun way to cover the course.

7. You were a teacher who truly inspired me, you understood me and gave me the courage to do the best I can. Thank you! My favorite thing we did this year was the autobiography section of our portfolios. We all have aspirations, but they seem easier to reach when they're down on paper.

8. As for the autobiographical essays, I thought that it was too much sharing of personal feelings. . . . The biggest problem [with the portfolio] is just making yourself sit down and do it.

9. I found this project rather unfair. . . . this project is rather large. I have been pressed for time. . . . I have no real idea what exactly you are looking for in the term paper. . . . I have made myself literally sick over this project. . . . Maybe grade elevens should start having to do one as practice.

10. English 12 was the best class I ever had. It was fun and Mr. Lehmann always ask what we thought about certain things. It was hard for me but I gave it my best plus more.
11. The portfolio allowed us to use our creativity without overbearing guidelines and restrictions. ... The flexibility given was really appreciated. Conflicting viewpoints among our class made open discussions all the more interesting. ... I didn't think an English class could involve so many discussions, but it worked well.

12. I walk
    in the shadows of others,
    blinded by smiles and grades; ...

13. I still have all my old poems--I kept them in a box. Sometimes I go back and read them over and it's weird, because I start to feel all the feelings that I felt back then.

14. That bridge, in my mind, symbolizes change and bravery, because it leads you somewhere different and asks if you are brave enough to go there. ... places like the Howe Creek Trail are places I like to go to escape from the insanity of our world.

15. Religion should be a way of personal expression, not a way of personal repression. God will accept you for what you are and not for how much of your life you waste devoted to him.

16. Who am I? Who do I want to be? How can I change myself for the better? I am 17 and I am looking for the answers to these questions. I think that a lot of people, even at age 35 or 40 are still looking for answers to these questions.

17. I believe that everything happens for a reason. ... all the unexplained issues with my father and my family ... it's not my fault ... if they start to explain themselves later on in life or not, you just have to move on and let things be what they'll be.

18. I think that I am a rude, bad-tempered, impatient, honest and trustworthy person.
19. There is no definition of a family, and although nobody wants to admit it, we are all dysfunctional or inefficient in some say. . . . I am proud of my family, and even though it is tough at times, I love them all. Can you say the same about yours?

20. What motivates me is something deeper and even more difficult to admit--the fear of failure, of not measuring up. It haunts me every day, like a dog nipping at my heels. . . . It makes me focus so much on my future that I almost forget where I am now.

I am a person who feels just as small in the world as you do. . . . I want to be myself, and be the best at it.

21. I'm there, surrounded by it all: the mountains, the trees, the water, each a pure creation. Then I start to think. My thoughts begin to run wild and I'm filled with a strange kind of realization and excitement! This was all made for us . . . for me, to enjoy, to discover and to love!

22. I noticed the question which asked, "Has fear of failure caused millions of people to become lazy?" I realized that it could be used to describe me excellently.

It's embarrassing to get things wrong. . . . you then start to believe you'll get it wrong. You end up feeling like sh*t and you don't want to bother trying any more. And all this trouble stems from fear.

23. Decision-making is nothing more than a sort of gambling . . . you're gambling on the future. You can get rich gambling, but it is inevitable that you will also lose.

24. Who am I? . . . If anybody out there knows the answer, please, feel free to fill me in on the joke.

25. A good analogy for me would be a puzzle. I am a box of a million pieces, all jumbled up, lying in a box. Some are upside down and others are covered up. I'm just
waiting for someone to put me together, but someone has lost the box cover with the picture on it.

26. There seems to be this common misconception among older people that families are these ‘happy-go-lucky’ groups who spend all their time together and value each other’s company. Who made that lie up? Leave It To Beaver was forty years ago.

27. The average male lives to be 76 years old. This means I have 58 years for improvement. That’s a lot of time to be the person I want to be. . . . Am I insecure or just too arrogant to listen to the opinions of others? If I give in to what people want, aren’t I losing my own identity right there?

28. . . . there are times when I have no clue what I’m doing or who I am. You see, I live two lives if not three. . . . Having these other lives is stressful, and sometimes I crack with the pressure that it takes to be these other people. . . . It’s like I have been living a lie my whole life and I don’t know what the truth is or who I am any more.

It’s a real setback in my life not knowing who the real me is. This is why personal exploration is a real challenge, but it also allows me to get a better insight of which I am.