Authoring Shared Expectations for Student Portfolio Projects
New Millennium Studies: The First-Year Seminar
Columbia College Chicago

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Learning Goals, As Articulated in Course Syllabus

○ Students will be challenged to cultivate the habits of mind and heart characteristic of literate and engaged citizens in the twenty-first century, including, most importantly, openness to new ideas and genuine intellectual curiosity about themselves, others, and the world.
○ Students will practice strategies for constructing and communicating meaning; for making sense of complex ideas and experiences through creative and critical thinking.
○ Students will practice strategies for testing their own assumptions and reasoning; for making connections and distinctions; and for discovering, interpreting, questioning, and evaluating patterns of evidence.
○ Students will cultivate authentic empathy and practice strategies for recognizing, articulating, and questioning their own values and those of others.

Curriculum

Four Units, each with one or two core texts (in 2005–06, all were books or movies):

• Composing a Self / The House on Mango Street (Cisneros); Ray (Hackford)
• Freedom and Responsibility / A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Shakespeare)
• Ethics and Essential Choices / Things Fall Apart (Achebe); Whale Rider (Caro)
• Creativity and Conscience / Frankenstein (Shelley)

Portfolio Requirements

○ Four projects (one per unit), as framed by instructor
○ Each project accompanied by Process Statement (f.k.a. “Artist’s Statement”), which should discuss and explain the piece’s message and content and reflect on the process of creating the piece. It should reflect on “the questions, themes, and ideas that inform the piece and that the piece addresses. It should narrate the student’s creative journey in authoring the piece, describing how the contemplation of those questions, themes, and ideas developed into a vision for, and execution of, the piece. The Process Statement should articulate the choices or difficulties encountered during the creative process and the decision made in each case.”
○ Accounts for 75% of course grade
○ Must contain projects outside of students’ areas of expertise or major field of study
The Portfolio Process (Ideally)

Learning Goal

Text

Learning Goal

Text

Learning Goal

Text

**Theme**

Key Question

Assignment

Feedback, Evaluation, Critique

Reflect, Reconsider, Revisit

Revise, Reformulate, Synthesize

PORTFOLIO

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initial engagement with question; practice

evidence of successful, fruitful engagement with learning goals

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Guiding Questions for Course Curriculum Units

UNIT 1, COMPOSING A SELF
Who are we? What makes us who we are? How do we see ourselves? How do others see us? What informs the ways in which we see and experience the world? In what ways are we connected to other people and communities? How do we convey who we are to others? What is at stake in our portrayals of ourselves and of others?

UNIT 2, FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY
How do we find and maintain balance between our private selves and our public selves; between our imaginative selves and our rational selves; between our illusions and our realities; between our desire for order and our desire to risk chaos; between our desire to be free and our desire to be responsible? What are our responsibilities to ourselves and to others as we seek to be at once different, and the same as, other people?

UNIT 3, ETHICS AND ESSENTIAL CHOICES
In difficult situations, how will we know what to do? How are our actions determined by who we are? How is who we are determined by our actions?

UNIT 4, CREATIVITY AND CONSCIENCE
What does it mean to create? What are the responsibilities of artists to their creations and to society? What are the potential dangers of questing after knowledge?

Excerpts from Sample Student Process Statements

EXAMPLE 1: SOUNDTRACK TO A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM (UNIT 2)
1. The Rolling Stones—“Under My Thumb”: The beginning of the play with Theseus and Hippolyta’s imminent wedding shows the first power struggle here. Theseus “won [Hippolyta’s] love, doing thee injuries,” implying that she had power at one point, but Theseus emerged as the more powerful in the relationship. This is echoed by the line “a change has come, she’s under my thumb,” where Mick Jagger paints a picture of a similarly male-dominated relationship marked by the man winning power over a once-powerful woman by means of violence (just as Theseus “woo’d [Hippolyta] with my sword”).

2. Tina Turner—“Under My Thumb”: The divide between Athens and the “bizarro world” of the forest is apparent in the relationship of Oberon and Titania; their relationship is such an inversion of Theseus and Hippolyta’s that some actors will play both roles. This juxtaposition is signified by the placement of the same song with the genders reversed. This time, it is the woman (Titania) who has the man (Oberon) under her proverbial thumb by Titania’s control of the little Indian boy.
EXAMPLE 2: PHOTO ESSAY (UNIT 3)
The red rose is nature in its pure state. It is unaffected by man. In the next photograph, man discovers the rose; he finds it delicate and beautiful. Man is afraid to touch it even. He spends time with the rose, getting to understand it. In the third photograph, man has the idea of how the rose could be more useful to him, more beautiful. He paints the rose white, his ideal of true purity. In the fourth photograph, the rose suffers from its alteration. It begins to die in the hands of man, altered, never to be the same. In the fifth photograph, the rose tries to rebuild itself, man once more admiring it. In the final photograph man has succeeded in changing the rose to his will though not on his own terms… on the rose’s. The rose is white and it is beautiful, but it had to nearly die to get there. The price man has to pay is to never see that rose red again. […] My project relates back to the novel and movie studied in this unit because it is about change. Both Things Fall Apart and Whale Rider deal with major changes that affect a people and the natural environment around them. In the novel, a new man comes in and tries to manipulate a people to better suit his purposes. The church is introduced and a culture is torn apart and adapted and eventually remade. In the movie, the traditions of a people are changed when a woman assumes the leadership role, bringing modern ideas to a slow-adjusting culture. While my project is rather abstract with its idea, I feel that if you study each picture in its progression it is easy enough to relate to the theme of ethical choices when it comes to nature. It is a cynical outlook, man’s destruction of purity, but it is something we see often. My photographs don’t illustrate the last phase, and that is where the rose dies. The rose dying is its final judgment on our manipulation of it.

EXAMPLE 3: SHORT ANIMATED FILM (UNIT 3)
The first step to doing an animation was a storyboard. I read through the story and sketched a rough storyboard so I would have some basic camera movements planned out…. Developing the characters was enjoyable. I made the birds look unintelligent and gullible, mainly using their eyes (small and beady); and the same with Mrs. Tortoise…. With all the necessary materials, I went to use a friend’s computer. Being that I had never used the program before, my friend did the button-pushing and I directed the animation. It probably would have taken twice as long if I had attempted it all on my own. The main issue with this was that my friend was leaving for Colorado at the end of the week, so we really only had one day to do everything…. The [background music] I chose was called “Niger” by the band Sixuns. I thought it was appropriate because the animation was based on a folk tale from Chinua Achebe’s book Things Fall Apart, which is set in Nigeria. The song is like fusion jazz with some African elements thrown in…. Overall, I think the project turned out pretty well for never having worked in the medium before… The story itself was very good at explaining some aspects of the theme of ethics and choices. It not only explains a natural phenomenon (why tortoises have cracked shells), but also teaches a lesson about not taking advantage of other people. In the future, I think I may try to play around with programs like [Adobe] Premiere to see what all they can do.