Introduction

An Excellent Product-based Assessment

For learning to be highly successful, I believe any projects assigned by the teacher should be hands on and meaningful to students. Our brains learn best when they "do" rather than "absorb." It is important for teachers to help students actively display their thorough knowledge and understanding of a text in a creative and original manner.

Constructing original books offers an especially creative way for students to demonstrate their response to a literary work. Interactive literature-response keepsakes structure activities in different ways, including the use of visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic modes of learning. Having these varied components in an assignment increases academic performance and improves attitudes toward learning. When students create, assemble, and present captivating and comprehensive books that implement the literary benchmarks and several critical-thinking levels, their individual voice, style, and originality are encouraged.

These are not little craft projects. They are challenging and hands on. They require students to express themselves individually and, at the same time, work toward specific language-arts objectives using Bloom's Taxonomy of higher-level critical-thinking skills, core curriculum content standards, and other enrichment features, such as life skills and technology.

This integrated approach offers students a wide range of strategies to comprehend, understand, assess, and appreciate texts. Students can respond to several rhetorical situations, addressing specific audiences for certain purposes. Additionally, by using technology, students can integrate images, art, and graphic designs to compose their responses, merging the verbal response with the visual representation.

Supplies for these interactive books are relatively inexpensive and easily available in schools: card stock, brown lunch bags, large grocery bags, or file folders. Students feel quite accomplished by producing essential responses in a compact book because these handmade wonders look so complex and impressive, yet they are incredibly simple to make. Teachers enjoy evaluating these innovative products that emphasize critical thinking, modes of writing, and artistic expression.

The projects described in this book are comprehensive, reflective, evaluative, and creative but easily accessible and dynamic . . . and isn't that what learning is all about?

How to Use This Book

PART I: SIX KEYS FOR DESIGNING AMAZING ASSIGNMENTS explains all of the strategies and tips you need to plan and design amazing literature-response projects while keeping in mind state standards, varied critical-thinking levels, supplemental texts, student supports, student choice, and a design template.

PART II: TWELVE AMAZING BOOKS TO CREATE provides step-by-step instructions, diagrams, photos, and templates for a dozen different literature-response projects that will amaze you and your students.

PART III: ASSESSING AMAZING HANDS-ON LITERATURE PROJECTS offer the rubrics and guidelines you need to grade these meaningful projects in an equally meaningful way.

SAMPLE PROJECTS AND WORKSHEETS is the final section, which includes supplemental handouts for enrichment and specific project samples for *The Odyssey, Romeo and Juliet*, and *Of Mice and Men*.

The **SUPPLEMENTAL CD** included with this book contains all the necessary project reproducibles, handouts, and rubrics. Full-color photos of all twelve projects completed by real secondary students are also included and can be shown in class to guide students from starting their projects through completion. To view photos in a slideshow format in Windows, simply open the folder with the photos, go to the View menu, select "Filmstrip," and click the arrows to move from photo to photo, step by step.

Objectives for *Amazing Hands-On Literature Projects for Secondary Students*

Students will:

- meet state core curriculum content standards;
- develop and apply different levels of critical thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy so that they comprehend, analyze, and create new materials;
- read, analyze, and synthesize information from multiple sources such as editorials, historical texts, maps, and more;
- use multiple intelligences to understand a text;
- experiment with different forms of writing such as newspaper articles, letters, and essays;
- consider purpose, audience, and tone in writing;
- receive differentiated instruction and be given choices based on their specific needs; and
- follow oral and written directions to create a handmade keepsake book as response to a literary work.

Designing Amazing Assignments

When you select a text, begin thinking about it in broader terms. Ask yourself what concepts you want students to preserve not only this year but also in their lives. A great place to start is to examine your state's core standards. These serve as a foundation for purposeful assignments.

Next, decide the number and types of assignments you want to create. Based on that, generate three different levels of critical-thinking assignments. Start with the foundational level; these are concrete questions based on knowledge and comprehension. Then move to the analytical level, which poses investigative questions that require higher-level thinking skills—the *how* and the *why*. The third and most challenging level is the transformational level. Here, students synthesize and evaluate the text through creating, combining, and assessing.

In addition to the assignment itself, you should consider distributing several short non-fiction or fiction supplemental works at the beginning of and throughout the reading of the text. These help emphasize themes found in the main work, such as current teen issues a character shares with students, conflict-resolution strategies, or character education. Having students make connections with the original text, these outside works, and their lives is a crucial part of the literature project.

When designing amazing assignments, often teachers want to push students out of their comfort zones. In order for students to be successful, teachers may need to provide frameworks prior to beginning a particular assignment. These scaffolds fall into three categories: content, writing, and communication. These scaffolds and all of the design strategies are explained further in **Part I: Six Keys for Designing Amazing Assignments**.

After you have decided the number and variety of responses your project will contain and which way your students will accomplish the designated tasks, select the type of keepsake to accommodate your agenda. It's best to start with a simple book such as the Traditional Bag Book.

You can then work your way up to more challenging projects. Remember: It's your book, your project, your way.

Classroom Management Tips

Designing your questions based on critical-thinking level and purpose takes much preparation. However, once you generate your assignments, you can organize and distribute the material easily with your timetable in mind.

At the start of each unit, let students know to save all their work because it will be compiled into a handmade book. To begin, you can give supplemental reading and research-based questions that students can complete for homework. Consider designing a template for the assigned work that students can download and complete to fit into the space in the handmade book. Then, as the class is reading, provide both foundational and analytical questions. Toward the conclusion of the unit, provide transformational questions.

Once the reading is finished, set aside one or two class periods to make the actual handmade book. During this time, have students cut the bags and paper and assemble the actual keepsake. For a week thereafter, students can use their time to complete their content requirements for the book. They can answer the remaining questions alone, in groups, or guided by you if necessary. They can work in the computer lab or in the classroom. Allow time for students to decorate the book at home so it truly can be amazing and reinforce all the concepts stressed in the project. Finally, have a show-and-tell day when students orally present their responses to the class.

To ensure that your project runs successfully, have a checklist of assignments with specific, intermittent due dates. Many students can handle long-term projects; however, some students are not good planners and need to be held accountable frequently. If the project is due all at once, these students often leave the work to the last minute and submit incomplete or careless work.

Most students love these amazing projects. However, if you meet resistant students, have them write their responses in a report format and add simple clip art for each response. Remember, the most important component in their projects is the quality of the response.

Using Technology to Create and Access Assignments

It may be a significant amount of work to place all assignments and templates on your school website or wiki for students to access and complete at school and/or home. However, in the long run, this advanced organization will cut down on much time and confusion.

Grading Projects

When students know what is expected of them, they strive to reach those goals. Therefore, it is important to let your students know beforehand exactly what makes a good final product and why. In fact, many experts believe using assessment rubrics to measure students' work is more valuable than assigning a single numerical score because students' performances are based on the sum of a full range of criteria (Andrade). Rubrics especially match the comprehensive nature of these literature projects.

Decide what criteria you would like to employ for grading. Students can be evaluated on the following features: requirements, sources, content, organization, conventions, design, and creativity. Grading values can range from superior mastery to poor performance. You will enjoy seeing the effort, creativity, and thought that went into your students' projects as much as they enjoyed making them.