

Year-long Course Portfolio

This project should reflect your growth as an English student but also as an individual. It is a cumulative project that will be a running commentary on course readings as well as a commonplace book. I want you to sequentially create this portfolio with each marking period being separated by a divider sheet. You will need to type your commentaries and commonplace book entries as a continuing computer file, but be sure to back up. Occasionally, I will ask you to print out an entry for a section of reading. Your entries may be as long as you wish, but they must be double-spaced in Times New Roman and be no shorter than one page in length (approximately 200-250 words). You should edit and proofread your final entries before you submit the final print out for grade OR the final portfolio. The commentaries are responses of your choosing. They cannot, though, be summaries of the readings or class discussions. I am looking for your insights as well as any connections you can formulate from readings. "Commonplacing is the act of selecting important phrases, lines, and/or passages from texts and writing them down; the commonplace book is the notebook in which a reader has collected quotations from works s/he has read. Commonplace books can also include comments and notes from the reader; they are frequently indexed so that the reader can classify important themes and locate quotations related to particular topics or authors" (The Lyceum). This type of journaling can be traced back to the 5th century and was even common during the 17th century. Your commonplace elements will be two-fold, one entry will be text-based and two entries will be purely personal. They may or may not relate to the readings. They can simply be entries focusing on something that is important during that point in your life.

How should I choose quotes for the commonplace book?

Find a line or passage that offers a powerful statement. You are allowed to define powerful in any way you wish. Sometimes a quotation is particularly persuasive, emotional, descriptive, or meaningful-but there are all kinds of other things that set one line apart from the rest. Decide for yourself what is powerful, and then think about what makes it powerful. Or

Find a line or passage that helps you understand this text. Or

Find a line or passage that confuses you. You find yourself wondering if you might understand the whole text better if you could make sense of this part Or

Find a line or passage that reminds you of another text (or "voice") in the American conversation. (How is this similar to or different from the other, and how can that comparison or contrast contribute to our understanding of the conversation.) Or

Find a line or passage that demonstrates a noteworthy way of connecting with and persuading the audience. Or

Find a line or passage which made a strong impression on YOU. It could be something you seriously disagree with; if so, go ahead and counter the argument. On the other hand, if it's something you like, is this something you want to remember and/or live up to in your own life? Would your life be any different if you do?

So, this portfolio will be composed of three types of entries. Before the close of each marking period, you will review your course work in your writing folder. You must select at least one piece to be included in your final portfolio. This you will designate with the appropriate paperwork and add to your portfolio in June. Before the final submission date, you should uniformly format your contents, create a cover, number your typed pages, insert your self-selected/self-assessed selections and bind the entire portfolio with the completed rubric.

Final Thoughts on the Project

How can I tell what a really good commonplace book should look like?

Choice of Quotations--A really good commonplace book allows us to benefit from the observations of a really attentive reader who notices when there is something puzzling, or when there is a pattern, or when there is a moment of real power in a text. The reader can help the rest of us even by being willing to confess what s/he doesn't understand.

Commentaries--A really good commonplace book doesn't mention what is "boring" or "interesting" or "hard" or "easy" but instead comments on the possible meanings of texts. Instead of paraphrasing what the quotation says, a good commentary comments on how particular words, phrases, or patterns in that quotation might lead us to a deeper sense of the text's meaning. Instead of saying "I agree" or "I disagree" with the text, a good commentary might offer a more thorough explanation of the reasons for agreement or disagreement. Finally, a good commentary takes into consideration the context in which the text was originally written in order to evaluate its possible meanings and effectiveness. Instead of concluding that a text is ineffective (or just plain bad) because of confusing language or politically incorrect thinking, a good commentary will consider whether anything can help us understand how the text might have been received in its own time.

Writing--A commonplace book is serious but it is also a journal--a work in progress rather than a finished "product." Hence, it does not need to meet the writing standards for formal, completed academic projects. However, it usually is a way for the reader to practice his writing and thinking. For this reason it does need to communicate ideas clearly and persuasively. It also needs to be written in a fashion that can gain the respect of readers.

Finally, a truly great commonplace book, although made up of separate entries about separate texts, will reflect the gradual development of the reader's understanding of literature. Logs will sometimes refer back to earlier texts in order to compare and/or contrast works or to consider the evolution of a particular way of thinking or writing. As specific kinds of questions begin to strike the reader as particularly important, the commonplace logs will begin to use those questions to explore those issues on a deeper level.