

Engaged Learning Project Draft

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ITEC 7400

Title of Project: Defining “The Laws of Life” with an Online Writing Portfolio

Subject(s): English Language Arts

Grade Level(s): 9th grade

Abstract:

High school students will create an online writing portfolio situated around a central theme. Three of the pieces composed will be submitted for publication in either statewide contests or the school literary magazine. Students will assume the professional role of journalists conducting interviews, writers of original content, and editors of their peers’ work as they produce writing to be read by various audiences. This document will describe in detail part one of the yearlong project and will only briefly describe additional elements to be included.

Learner Description/Context:

My school is a low-income school with a student demographic ratio of approximately 70% African-American, 25% Caucasian, and 5% other minorities (Hispanic, Asian-American, etc.). Most students come from middle to lower middle class families where both parents must work outside of the home or single parent families where parents work overtime in order to provide. Therefore, we have little parental involvement in day-to-day school activities (such as classroom volunteering, etc.); however, we have large amounts of parental support for teacher and administrator decisions. Parents and other community members from sports teams, churches, and other organizations, in which are students are very involved, will serve as resources for students completing this project.

Our school technology resources are growing, but still remain limited, so many of the assignments for this project would need to occur on days in which a computer lab or mobile computer lab can be reserved. Some writing may first be composed by hand and then transferred to a word processing program, even though this process is less than desirable for using word processor to draft. The media specialist, who is also serving as my mentor, is very willing to assist students with technology related issues and to assist students finding research as needed

In the past year, our school’s writing scores on the Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT) dropped, primarily because of low scores from our students with disabilities and some pedagogical content knowledge deficiencies within our department when it comes to how to teach writing. As the new CCGPS-GHSWT is implemented in two years, our department wide goal is to address these writing deficiencies without resorting to “teaching to the test.” Therefore, the inspiration for this project came from several of my department chair’s goals for the English department in our upcoming school year: (1) to submit more student work for publishing opportunities and essay contests, (2) to create a school-wide literary magazine, and (3) to create a cohesive, department wide, Common Core-aligned plan for increasing the quantity and quality of students’ writing.

All students, in all grade levels, at my high school, will ideally complete this online writing portfolio project. However, ninth grade students will pilot the project and other grades will use a roll-out plan over the next four years, allowing upper grade level teachers the option of incorporating the portfolio fully or partially into their curriculum during the pilot. Although there may be some differentiation between grade levels because of standard differences and student maturity level, the project will provide students with the opportunity to create an online writing portfolio for each year of high school and produce writing for the purpose of publication or contest submission and would provide teachers with a framework for ensuring that students meet all Common Core writing standards. In many ways, this project encompasses several smaller Engaged Learning Projects, the first of which will receive the most attention here.

Time Frame:

The project in its entirety (the completed writing portfolio) will take the entire school year to complete, with teachers devoting approximately a week to two weeks of instruction in each unit for students to complete each portfolio piece. The portfolio writing assignment will serve as the summative assessment for the specific writing genre discussed in the unit. Three weeks of instruction (though not necessarily 15 consecutive days) will be needed for part one of the project since it will require context to be established.

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Standards Assessed:

Common Core—English Language Arts Standards

I have used the College and Career Readiness anchor standards, rather than the specific 9th-12th grade English Language Arts standards, since multiple grade levels of students will ideally complete this project. Also, I have only included the standards addressed in Part 1 of the yearlong project. All writing, speaking and listening, and language standards will be addressed by the end of the school year through various writing portfolio assignments.

CCW3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCW4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCW5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCW6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCRR4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCRLS1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCRLS5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCRL1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCRL2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

CCRL5: Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

National Educational Technology Standards for Students:

1. Creativity and Innovation: Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology. Students:
 - a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes.
 - b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression
2. Communication and Collaboration: Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning, and contribute to the learning of others. Students:
 - a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media.
 - b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media formats.
 - d. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems
3. Research and Information Fluency: Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information. Students:
 - a. plan strategies to guide inquiry.
 - b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.
5. Digital Citizenship: Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior. Students:
 - a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.
 - b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity.
 - c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning.
 - d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship.

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6. Technology Operations and Concepts: Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations. Students:
- understand and use technology systems.
 - select and use applications effectively and productively.
 - troubleshoot systems and applications.
 - transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies.

Learner Objectives:

Students will compose effective and coherent writing in a variety of genres (literary nonfiction, argumentative, informational, analytical, narrative) and present this writing for an authentic audience using technology tools. Each genre of writing will be assessed using a specific writing rubric.

Students will engage in collaborative writing efforts including brainstorming, editing, revising, and sharing rubric-aligned feedback with peers. Collaboration will be assessed using a checklist of demonstrated skills.

The “Hook” or Introduction:

Students will be introduced to “The Laws of Life” Essay contest as an opportunity to earn class-level, school-level, and state-level prizes, as well as a way to demonstrate writing competency throughout the year. Students will brainstorm positive and negative human traits (abstract nouns such as patience, honesty, selfishness, etc.) as a class thus generating a list of possible topics for each writing assignment. Students will choose three words with which they most identify and spend time free writing (or free thinking) about each topic. From this free-write, students will choose the “word” that will serve as their focus for writing throughout the year. For example, if students choose “honesty,” each summative writing assignment will somehow be connected to the concept of “honesty”—an informational essay about a historical figure who embodies “honesty,” an argumentative essay about the prevention of cheating in high schools, etc. Students will be encouraged to choose a topic about which they can identify in some way and that they feel passionately about (either in support of it or in protest of it). Teachers will offer students guidance to choose words that are broad enough to complete multiple writing assignments, yet personal enough to resonate with individual students. The personal connection to this writing project, as well as the tangible incentives for exceptionally produced writing, will serve as motivation for high school students who can exhibit both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Process:

The following timeline is merely a suggestion for the first written assignment in the portfolio and may not occur on consecutive days. The first written assignment should take longer than the others because of the need to establish context. Because this project is designed for high school students, some activities may be completed at home. Those suggestions are made in the timeline.

Day 1: The teacher will introduce “The Laws of Life” Essay contest by having students read and reflect upon the winning essay from the previous year. He or she will then explain the rules of the contest, the possibility for prizes, and the way that this particular essay and its topic will serve as an anchor for writing throughout the entire school year. Students will then engage in a Think-Pair-Share activity during which they brainstorm positive and negative human qualities, categorizing each trait as positive or negative and negotiating those traits that seem to fall into both categories.

For homework, students will self-select three words from the class-generated list and spend 10 minutes free-writing (or about 5 minutes talking using Voice Thread (www.voicethread.com)) on each topic. Students will be given relatively few guidelines for this free-think, aside from the directive to write (or talk) about whatever this particular “word” brings to mind. The format, length, and type of writing will vary with each student. By the beginning of the next class period, students will choose the topic that will guide each summative writing assignment throughout the school year based upon the ideas generated during the free-think.

Day 2: The teacher will introduce the interview portion of the assignment. Students will interview at least five individuals of varying ages and ask the individual what the student’s topic (the chosen word) means to the specific person. Students will practice using handheld recording devices either on their personal electronic devices or recorders from the school library.

Students will review the following interview tips (<http://www.sparkminute.com/2011/11/07/30-tips-on-how-to-interview-like-a-journalist/>). Students will work in pairs to create a 1-minute mock interview and perform this interview for the class. Each performance will be critiqued by classmates so that students may approach their other interviews in a professional manner.

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Students will work in small groups to generate a list of acceptable questions to ask each interviewee. Students will conduct their first interview by selecting a classmate to interview and record.

The remaining student interviews will occur outside of class time and should all be completed by an assigned date. The interview recordings will be assessed using an assignment rubric.

Day 3-4: Students will reflect upon the interviews by re-listening to the recorded interviews and selecting several quotations from each interview that epitomize the individual's experience with the selected topic. The teacher will model how to complete this process using one student's recorded interview (ideally an interview conducted by a special needs student or English language learner as a means of scaffolding). Students will work with teacher-selected partners in this task in order to allow another listener to hear the interviews and help identify important quotations.

Once students have identified approximately two quotations from each interview, these quotations will be entered into Wordle (www.wordle.com) or Tagxedo (www.tagxedo.com) to create a word cloud in which the most repeated words are made larger. Students will save the Wordle as a pdf for later use and reflect upon the arrangement of words in the Wordle. Students will end this phase of the project by crafting an original definition of the selected word-topic (i.e. honesty) based on the interviews and the resulting Wordle.

Day 5-6: A representative of the rotary club will visit to explain the essay contest and clarify the meaning of a "Law of Life." Students will have the opportunity to ask questions related to the essay and to their individual topics.

Students will analyze winning essays from previous years that are accessible on the essay contest website. The teacher will model analysis using a document camera to project a copy of the essay and the analysis. During analysis, students identify specific features characteristic of literary nonfiction (point of view, word choice, figurative language, syntax, rhetorical questions, tone, etc.) that engage the reader. Students will then work in small groups to analyze and annotate specific essays and present their findings to the class using the document camera. Specific attention will be placed upon identifying the "Law of Life" illustrated in each winning essay.

For homework, students will revisit their interviews and identify a "Law of Life" included in each interviewee's response. Then, students will identify a "Law of Life" related to the chosen word that will be the topic of each student's essay; students may select a "Law of Life" identified from one of the interviews or a different but related "Law of Life." These "Laws of Life" will be assessed during individual teacher-student writing conferences in order to ensure students have chosen an appropriate "Law of Life."

Day 7-8: Students will draft their literary nonfiction (individual essay) using Google Docs and a checklist of literary devices (as identified from the winning essays) to guide their craft. They will begin the day by watching the following YouTube video to review important elements in a personal narrative: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeLcq9HYAvA>). Students will use the following step-by-step tutorial from GreatSource iWrite (http://www.greatsource.com/iwrite/students/s_pers_narr_pre.html) as they draft the essay.

Teachers will provide assistance as needed through individual student conferencing. Students will be encouraged to self-assess using the assignment rubric. Students may continue drafting for homework.

Day 9-10: Students will work in small groups to provide constructive criticism using Google Docs for each group member's essay. Students will use a "coaching checklist" to guide their criticism as well as a teacher-provided model of effective criticism. Teachers will provide additional assistance through individual and group conferences. Students will be assessed on their ability to provide relevant and effective criticism to their group mates.

Day 11: Students will complete rough drafts and email their work to an assigned writer from the local newspaper, *The Henry Herald*. These journalists have agreed to help 3-4 students each by reading their work and providing suggestions from a professional point of view.

Day 12: After receiving feedback from peers, the teacher, and the student's contact at the local newspaper, students will publish a final draft for assessment.

Day 13-15: Students will use PhotoStory 3 to create a movie to accompany the essay. PhotoStory allows students to compile still images and voice recording to create a movie. Students will gather personal photos, take new photos, and find related graphics on the Internet to offer a visual interpretation of the essay. They will then record themselves reading their essay and may also add appropriate music. (Copyright instruction will be included here to ensure students do not infringe on copyright

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laws. All three artifacts (Wordle, essay, and PhotoStory) will be uploaded to the student's EdCanvas portfolio. Final drafts will be assessed using the assignment rubric.

The teacher will link all student portfolios to the class website and create a book containing each student's essay. Students will read the essays of each of their classmates on the EdCanvas portfolio and anonymously select their choices for the top five class essays. From this student-generated list of five, the teacher will select the classroom winner, who will move on to compete in the school-level contest and possibly the state-level contest. At a school-wide assembly, the top five school-wide essay videos will be played and the overall student winner will be announced.

The school newspaper and daily broadcast show for student announcements have also agreed to publish excellent student essays and to air outstanding PhotoStory recordings that might not be highlighted at the school-wide awards ceremony. Moreover, throughout the entire year, teachers will highlight excellent student writing on the English Department webpage. Teachers will make an effort to ensure that each student has a piece of writing published in some form.

Product:

The described project is part of a larger writing initiative that will result in an online writing portfolio for each student, which includes six substantial pieces of writing representing the entire spectrum of writing standards. All writing, however, will focus on the initial topic chosen by the student in part one of the project. Part one of the project is described in depth in this project proposal.

Part 1 of the year-long project involves the entire school participating in "The Laws of Life" essay contest, a character-education essay contest with cash prizes sponsored by the Georgia Rotary Club. To enter, each school must hold a local contest, and the Rotary Club provides small cash prizes for the school-level winner. The principal has already agreed to supplement this cash prize with additional school level prizes and prizes for class-level winners. To participate in this essay contest, students must submit an original piece of writing that describes a personal experience illustrating a "Law of Life." "Laws of Life" are defined as "short [. . .] sayings or quotations that reveal the core values that make up a person's character [and] often serve as guideposts to a person journeying through life," such as "Honesty is the best policy" or "To give is better than to receive" (Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest, 2013). A student's essay submission is essentially a piece of literary nonfiction or a personal narrative. Furthermore, the contest's website notes, "The program challenges students to reflect upon core values such as perseverance, generosity, courage, and compassion, and it rewards those students who are willing to take a stand for their beliefs" (2013). While this essay contest itself is worthwhile, I wanted to find a way to ground the project in the Common Core, which focuses not so much on narrative writing, as it does on informational and argumentative writing. I decided that this essay contest, therefore, would form the basis for a yearlong engaged learning project, acting as an anchor for the additional writing students would complete throughout the year.

Students will engage in the above-mentioned process to create the first portfolio artifacts related to "The Laws of Life" essay (literary nonfiction).

The remaining information describes other writings the students will complete throughout the year, which may comprise additional engaged learning projects. These writings are only briefly described and instructional delivery will vary with each genre. Each writing, however, will be anchored in the same student-selected topic as well as any short or longer readings being completed at the time. Students will continue to use Google Docs for collaboration with the teacher and other students, upload final products to an EdCanvas portfolio, and be assessed using specific assignment rubrics. In addition to the "Laws of Life" Essay contest, students will also choose any writing from the portfolio to be submitted to the Young Georgia Author's contest and to the school literary magazine as further means of encouraging students to write for real audiences.

The types of writing to be included in the EdCanvas portfolio correlate with Common Core Standards for writing:

1. **Literary Nonfiction/Personal Narrative:** This essay will follow the guidelines for "The Laws of Life" Essay contest and will be submitted to the school-wide contest. The winning school entry will be sent to the state competition. This piece will be linked into EdCanvas as a Google Drive document and include a brainstorming Wordle and a PhotoStory video.
2. **An Information/Expository Essay:** Students will create a piece of writing with cited research about a historical or contemporary figure or a specific historical event embodying the student's chosen topic. Much effort will be placed here on cross-curricular efforts with the history department so instruction and research will occur in both classes; 10th grade students will choose a worldwide figure, preferably someone from another country, 11th grade students will choose an American figure, and 12th grade students will choose a political/governmental figure. Students will need to integrate appropriate research and citations according to grade level standards. The piece will be linked to

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EdCanvas as a Word document along with an accompanying multimedia presentation of the student's choosing (PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.)

3. An **Argumentative Essay**: Students will research a contemporary issue related to their chosen topics and present an argumentative essay. For example, a student who chose "honesty" may write about the prevalence of cheating in schools today. The focus, however, must be on argumentation and persuasion so students would need to assert a position related to the chosen topic, rather than purely present an informational essay. Research should be included as appropriate to grade level standards. This piece of writing may prove the most challenging for students especially in topic selection, so teacher assistance may be greater than on other pieces. This piece will be linked into EdCanvas as a Word document with an accompanying video of the student presenting an argumentative speech based on the topic.
4. A **Literary Analysis**: Students will describe how a particular character or work of fiction navigates the chosen topic. For example, if a student chooses "honesty," he or she may analyze how a specific character from a short story, poem, or novel read during the school year embodies (or does not embody) the quality of honesty or what a particular text reveals about the nature of honesty, our tendency as humans to lie in certain circumstances, etc. This piece of writing may be a character analysis or a thematic analysis depending upon the topic chosen. Citations from the selected text should be incorporate and cited.
5. An **Art Analysis**: Students will create an original piece of art or photography or music or choose a famous piece of art, photography, or music that speaks to the topic selected. Students must write an analysis of the artistic work and include the art and the analysis in the EdCanvas.
6. An original **Poem or Short Story**: Students will compose an original literary work related in some way to the chosen topic. While students will be encouraged to include literary elements as appropriate, the qualities of this piece of writing will be determined almost exclusively by the student.

Technology Use:

The technologies described relate to part one of the project.

EdCanvas is a web-based program for gathering multimedia tools from the Internet, but students may also upload documents from their desktop; EdCanvas is a simple to use tool and allows for many different types of files to be easily assembled in one central location. As students study various types of writing throughout the year, they will create a piece of writing representing each genre (informational, argumentative, etc.) to add to an EdCanvas Portfolio. Most importantly EdCanvas provides students with a way of presenting their writing to a larger audience, making the project authentic. Any Internet user can read a student's EdCanvas portfolio (therefore, students will only use first names and last initials on the portfolio) and registered EdCanvas users can comment on the student's work.

Google Docs will be incorporated as the word processing program because it provides for easy collaboration between students and their peers and teacher. Students will work in small writing groups and have the ability to directly comment on the work of their group mates. The teacher will also have access to all student work using Google Docs. Additionally, Google Docs supports the indicators of students as producers and ongoing assessment, as students use editing and revision techniques to improve upon their writings.

Wordle is a Web 2.0 tool that arranges a group of text into a "word cloud;" higher frequency words are depicted as larger than lower frequency words. This tool is a creative way for students to analyze the topic and allows for students to view words in a different way since the words are not arranged in sentences. In this project, the Wordle assignment supports students as explorers since it will be used as a tool for students to generate an original definition of the selected topic.

PhotoStory 3 is a multimedia-authoring tool available as a free download with each Windows license. PhotoStory 3 allows students to combine pictures and sound into a digital movie. PhotoStory, like the other technologies, allows the students to be producers and taps into the artistic abilities of many students.

Email will be used as a means of communication between each student and his or her assigned newspaper contact. This technology will foster collaboration between students and an outside expert, hopefully providing students with viable suggestions for improving their work and reinforcing the authenticity of the writing task.

Digital recorders will be used for students to record interviews conducted at the beginning of the project. Ideally, students will use recording devices on their cell phones or other personal electronic devices. The library does have many handheld

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tape recorders available for students to check out if necessary. Recording the interviews allows students to take on the role of explorers as they gather information, but it also allows for the project to be culturally-responsive, since students may find that people of different cultures respond to the word in many different ways.

Some websites containing information and tutorials are used throughout the project; this allows students to act as explorers to discover potential interview questions and to review the important elements of a personal narrative.

References and Supporting Material:

References

- Georgia Department of Education (2011). *Common Core Georgia Performance Standards CCGPS: K-12 Educator Resource* [PDF document]. Retrieved from https://www.georgiastandards.org/Common-Core/Documents/CCGPS_ELA_K-12_EducatorResourceDocument.pdf
- Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program, Inc. (2013). *Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest*. Retrieved from <http://www.georgialawsoflife.org/laws.html>
- International Society for Technology in Education (2007). *National Educational Technology Standards for Students*, Second Edition [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/nets-s-standards.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Links to Technology Tools used in this Project.

EdCanvas: www.edcanvas.com

Wordle: www.wordle.net

Google Docs: www.google.com Select “Drive” on the top navigation bar.

Free Download of PhotoStory 3: <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=11132>

Supporting Tutorials:

- Abeltx (2012). *A narrative essay: STAAR presentation*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeLcq9HYAvA>
- Alexander, A. (2013). *Google Drive Tutorial 2013-Composing Google Docs (2/4)*. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdtHjhJ_350
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- Personal narrative prewriting (2006). *Great source iWrite* [Interactive Tutorial]. Retrieved from http://www.greatsource.com/iwrite/students/s_pers_narr_pre.html
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Teacher-Created Resources:

Before implementing this product, the teacher or department will need to create rubrics for the following assignments. It is suggested that students play an active role in creating the rubrics for the interviews, essay, and collaborative criticism by brainstorming the characteristics of quality products in each category based upon previous instruction. Doing so fosters generative assessment; since students have a role in creating the rubric, they are more likely to fulfill the requirements outlined in the rubric.

- Interview
- Essay
- Group Collaborative Criticism
- PhotoStory recording

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