

Keeping Pace: Planning in Senior English

(with thanks to Barb Lane, St. Catharines Collegiate)

General Planning

- Establish start and finish dates of the 4 months of a semester
- Set the date for the final exam.
- Clarify the major content in the course.....Suppose, for 12U:
 - Hamlet
 - The Stone Angel (or some novel we've read in common)
 - Streetcar Named Desire (or some play we've read in common)
 - Independent Study Project
 - Decision: How to cover Poetry, Short Fiction, and Non-Fiction (essays)? Should they be done as a separate unit, or tucked into the study of the other works?
- Once a final list of "units" is established, determine the number of weeks of instruction available in the semester.
- Estimate days lost to holidays
- Resolve to the number of weeks and days of instruction available
- Examine a course Expectation Checklist for 12U. Problem: Which constitutes course content, the Expectations, or the books? Will the "units" of work be the books or clumps of expectations? (Clearly, the former. The checklist can help you track your coverage of the course knowledge and skills)
- What would be your starting unit? Why?
- Set out a time line and sequence for all the units, giving to each the amount of time you feel it would need/deserve. The total time should agree with the week / day total we've established.

Planning Specific Units

Assume that the major longer works (two plays and the novel) are to be covered "intensively" - i.e. students will be expected to know about themes, structures and connections made between the works in the course. They will demonstrate some critical understanding of those works, and a final exam and/or Performance Task will be based on these works.

Assume also that most of the reading of the major works will be done by the students, on their own time.

Sample: Planning the *Hamlet* Unit

- What time have you allotted?

- What are the central things to be learned? Consult the *Reading and Literature Studies* expectations for the course for some assistance. Narrow to just what is key.
- Which of the “strands” of the course do you expect will have the greatest emphasis in this unit?
- What can you assume the students will be able to do independently, given previous study of Shakespeare’s plays?
- How (and to what extent) will the play get read?
- What are the key scenes of the play?
- Which (if any) of the following strategies could you employ to reduce time on the play?
 - Establish some very firm purposes for study and stick to them
 - Watch a filmed version first to establish the entire story and characters
 - Move then to the text for some very specific learning about language / themes / structure / characters
 - Avoid assigning an essay to be done
 - Study only certain scenes or speeches
 - Make the focus an “awareness” of the play, rather than a complete understanding
 - Other: _____
- Return to your “central learnings” and decide what work you will have the students do to demonstrate them.
- Return to the course checklist and make some tentative decisions as to which expectations will be addressed (checkmark), and which will be assessed (mark with an “A”).
- Write out a time line and sequence of work to be done for the unit.
- Write a single page “Introduction” to the unit for students, in which you set no more than 3 main purposes for studying the play, and the work that will be done to achieve these purposes.

Planning for the Novel or Drama Unit

Here are some key questions you may want to answer as you plan for one of these units.

- How many instructional days are you allotting for the work?
- Assuming the students will be asked to read the work on their own time, when will you hand them the book? (At the beginning of the course? Some time *before* starting the study of the book? On the day the study begins?)

□ Whenever the reading is to begin, it is critical that you “launch” it to ensure that it has the best chance of being a good reading. Will you employ some, or all of the following methods to start the reading?

- **Establish purpose** for reading (e.g. essay questions or topics if a critical essay is to be a central outcome)
- Read some portion of the introduction and spend time making predictions about the people or story that is likely to ensue
- Read some scene(s) from the middle of the work and use them to make predictions or extensions
- Pose some controversial statements related to themes of the work and manage some class reflection/discussion around these
- Raise Media issues or texts for discussion, knowing that the recollection of such other texts might spark some deeper understanding while they read
- Set some questions for reflective reading of various chapters or scenes, and to be answered during the reading (at home)
- Discuss “marginalia” and how some sort of note-making might be done during reading without defacing the text
- Describe how students might create an “index” to the work while reading, and as an aid to their final writing about the text
- Establish groups to address key “problems” raised by the novel or play when study finally begins
- Other: _____

The specific activities of the unit will likely fall out of the above planning decisions. Set the time line and sequence of work. Gather or create the assessment tools you will need to use.

Assessment Note:

Most every unit plan should include activities, strategies and tools dedicated to giving students feedback on their work before final marks are established. This is the particular meaning of “assessment” - feedback, and the opportunity to improve. Good teaching always encompasses this.