**English Literary Studies**

**Inquiry Project**

**Unit checklist:**

* Initial, **colour-coded brainstorm** of topics
* **Mini lessons:**

What is Inquiry?

Narrowing a Subtopic

Developing a Question

Finding and Evaluating Sources

Note taking

MLA format.

* One week immersion: includes **Project Checklist, Visuals, and Rubric.**
* Two events: one for school audience and one for parents: see rubric
* Post Event: Share out and **reflective feedback sheet.**

**Inquiry Mini Lesson #1: What is Inquiry?**

**WHY?**

**The Animal School:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5n3glkOLOw**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5n3glkOLOw)

The Animal School: A Fable by George Reavis

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a “new world” so they organized a school. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects. The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming. The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. He also developed a “charlie horse” from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and D in running. The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there. At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceeding well and also run, climb and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian. The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful private school. Does this fable have a moral? Note: This story was written when George Reavis was the Assistant Superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools back in the 1940s! This content is in the public domain and free to copy, duplicate, and distribute.

**TED talks:** <https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_grant_the_surprising_habits_of_original_thinkers>

**WHAT?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Projects . . .** | **Project Based Learning . . .** |
| Can be done at home without teacher guidance or team collaboration. | Requires teacher guidance and team collaboration. |
| Can be outlined in detail on one piece of paper by the teacher. | **Includes many “Need to Knows” on the part of the students and teachers.** |
| Are used year after year and usually focus on product (make a mobile, a poster, a diorama, etc.). | Is timely, complex, covers many skills and learning outcomes, and takes a team of highly trained professionals’ significant time to plan and implement. |
| The teacher work occurs mainly after the project is complete. | The teacher work occurs mainly before the project starts. |
| The students do not have many opportunities to make choices at any point in the project. | **The students make most of the choices during the project within the pre-approved guidelines. The teacher is often surprised and even delighted with the students’ choices.** |
| Are based upon directions and are done “like last year.” | **Is based upon Driving Questions (Big Picture) that encompass every aspect of the learning that will occur and establishes the need to know.** |
| Are often graded based teacher perceptions that may or may not be explicitly shared with students (like neatness). | Is graded based on a clearly defined rubric made or modified specifically for the project. |
| Are closed: every project has the same goal. (As in the example above, the end result is always creating a diorama or building a popsicle fort.) | **Is open: students make choices that determine the outcome and path of the research.** |
| Cannot be used in the real world to solve real problems. | Could provide solutions in the real world to real problems even though they may not be implemented. |
| Are not particularly relevant to students’ lives. | Is relevant to students’ lives or future lives. |
| Do not resemble work done in the real world. | Is just like or closely resembles work done in the real world. |
| Do not include scenarios and background information or are based on events that have already resolved. | The scenario or simulation is real or if it is fictitious, is realistic, entertaining, and timely. |
| Are sometimes based around a tool for the sake of the tool rather than of an authentic question. (Make a Prezi.) | Use technology, tools, and practices of the real world work environment purposefully. Students choose tools according to purposes. |
| Happen after the “real” learning has already occurred and are just the “dessert.” | **Is how students do the real learning.** |
| Are turned in. | Are presented to a public audience encompassing people from outside the classroom. |
| Are all the same. | Are different. |
| Make a model (or diorama or mobile . . . ) of Fort Victoria. | Design a fortification that would take your community through a bio or other non-traditional attack and make a recommendation to the city council for future planning. |

**HOW?**

Adapted, and with excerpts from, *8 Essentials for Project Based Learning* John Larmer and John R. Mergenholler

**What every good project needs:**

1. **Significant content**

* A project is meaningful if it fulfills two criteria: You must feel it is a task that matters to you and that you want to do well with it. It is more than simply a package that your teacher has handed out and asked you to fill in the blanks.
* You will understand the content more deeply if you take what the teacher has offered in terms of a starting point, but you make it relevant to your own life and interests.

1. **A need to know**

Your teacher will give you an “entry point” such as a brainstorm, a video, an event, a guest teacher, a field trip, an activity, etc. Many students find school work to be meaningless because they are not motivated by “it’ll be on the test,” or “you need it for university,” etc. You will find the project compelling if you can say, “I need to know this to meet the challenge I have set for myself.”

1. **A driving question**

A good driving question captures the heart of the project in clear, compelling language, and will give you a sense of purpose and challenge. It should be **provocative, open ended, complex, and linked to what you want to learn.**

1. **Student voice and choice (Goldilocks Method)**

The more your own voice and choice, as student, the better you will feel about your project and the more you will learn. You can apply the Goldilocks Method to this:

Level one: Limited choice. Your teacher can facilitate the driving question for you, under your chosen subtopic OR you decide on the question and the teacher gives you the design and criteria around the product.

Level two: As a middle ground (most students choose this route), your teacher will provide a framework that you work under, and you guide the project through your own inquiry and curiosity. This can be helpful to avoid getting overwhelmed.

Level three: (experienced students and/or highly motivated, self paced individuals): Students decide what product they will create, what resources they will use, and how they will structure their time, including their own topic and driving question.

1. **21st Century Skills**

This type of work is based on collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and the use of technology, all of which will serve you in the workplace and in life.

1. **Inquiry and Innovation**

You will find this project to be the most meaningful if you conduct real inquiry, which does not rely on information taken directly from books or websites and simply posting it together on a poster. In real inquiry, you follow a trail that begins with your own questions, leads to a search from resources and the discovery of answers, and which ultimately leads to generating new questions, testing ideas, and drawing your own conclusions. With real inquiry comes innovation: a new idea, a new product, a new solution.

The classroom culture needs to value questioning, hypothesizing, and be open to new ideas and perspectives.

1. **Feedback and Revision**

Student teams will review and critique each other’s work and individuals will present briefly to the class the day before the event.

1. **Publically presented product**

School work is more meaningful when it’s not done only for the teacher or a test, but for a real audience.

**How do students feel about it?**

Here are some things my previous students have said about this project:

* I get nervous around people, but I actually found talking to people about a topic I am passionate about was a lot easier than I expected.
* Choose a topic that you have strong views about and don’t feel pressured to stay in the box. Pick a controversial topic that could possibly upset people if you feel it is necessary to talk about.
* Knowing that people would walk away knowing more about my topic feels good.
* I loved the different styles of everyone’s work; it wasn’t generic. There was such a wide range of inquiry questions.
* I really enjoyed getting creative, thinking over my subject and the philosophy surrounding it. The more I thought, the more breakthroughs I had.
* You CANNOT find your answer by Googling it.
* I learned that everything is dynamic and there are so many opinions- nothing is black and white.
* Everyone went the “extra mile.”
* I care a lot more than I thought I did.
* I won’t be afraid to use my brain as a resource- some of the most valuable information came from it.
* Everyone was so interested and excited about their work- so unlike regular school!
* I learned how to find reputable sources and not rely on the internet as truth.
* I feel like I can teach people.
* The most significant highlight for me was listening to different people’s stories and their opinions.
* I know I can take this learning to motivate myself to do something great one day.
* I learned I love inquiry but need to do more of it to get used to it!
* I found it strange that I enjoyed answering questions and explaining my subject, because I tend to not open my mouth.
* The amount of freedom was scary.
* Developing a question was the most challenging. There is so much I wanted to learn about and it was hard to answer my question well enough.
* The stories I learned about real people will stay with me and their responses to my project.
* This will challenge me to ask my *own* questions to add to my research in the future.
* Make sure you start early and learn as much as you can about your subject.
* I began to question what my own statements say about me and the movements I am a part of.
* This project changed me because I was terrible at research and now I know ways to do it and not be overwhelmed.
* I learned I am good at talking about uncomfortable subjects and making people feel comfy when they discuss it.
* Don’t give up! The topics are hard and emotional, but they are worth it.