



Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared: Explore the Possibilities on *DonorsChoose.org*

During my visit to Dallas in January as RI's representative at the 2012 Teacher of the Year conference, *the People to People Ambassador* program presented each state teacher of the year with a \$50 gift card to the website, *DonorsChoose.org*. The thinking behind the gift was giving teachers the chance to pay it forward by helping another teacher fund a project of need or enrichment for his/her class room. When I returned to RI, I visited the site and found a great literacy project to which I wanted to donate. Since then, I have posted two projects that will allow me to receive electronic readers for my ELA students!

DonorsChoose.org is a United States based nonprofit organization that provides a way for people to donate directly to specific projects at public schools (sometimes known as peer-to-peer philanthropy). *DonorsChoose.org* was started in 2000 by Charles Best, a teacher at a public high school in the Bronx. Since then, it has grown to serve all the public schools throughout the United States.

The organization collects proposals from teachers and makes them available to public schools through its website. Individual donors can select projects and contribute as much as they are prepared to *DonorsChoose.org* then purchases necessary supplies and provides them to the schools, and generates a line-item budget which is sent to the donor. In addition, donors who contribute \$100 or more to a project, or who complete the funding for a project, also receive a "thank-you package" of thank-you notes from students, photographs of the project, and a letter from the teacher.

DonorsChoose.org is supported by fulfillment costs optionally added to each donation, as well as private funding sources.

If interested, check out one of my funded projects as a sample or what you might do over the summer for your class room. http://www.donorschoose.org/project/e-readers-for-literacy/804249/?pma=true&pmaid=1481216&pmaHash=kfDmoFe1wklluNOMpWp0BQ%3D%3D&utm_source=dc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=feedback_donationmessage_teacher



Gr. 12 students present their “Character Rendezvous” projects at CHS.

Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared: Try a “Character Rendezvous” Summative Assessment

A few years ago, I modified an assessment I read about in AP guidebook into an assessment I dubbed “Character Rendezvous.” This assessment has served as part of my midyear exam with my senior English students for a few years and I have been please with the level of synthesis students demonstrated in their work on this project. As the pictures above suggest, the presentations are products are fun to review too!

Recently, when several colleagues at my high school adapted the project as part of their final exam, it struck me that this assessment not only works with multiple ELA grade levels and texts, but can also work really well in other content areas in which it would be neat to register to what degree students have mastered thinking of various key figures. In the assessment, students must imagine a scenario in which 3-4 figures/characters from different texts interact with one another. Emphasis is on highlighting natural “alliances” or similarities in thought shared by the figures as well as differences or possible sources of discord among figures.

Feel free to email me at boylejulie@coventryschools.net with any questions or comments. I am happy to share the guidelines which I provide to my students below:

Rationale: British poet William Blake writes, “What is not too explicit is the fittest for examination because it rouses the faculties to act.” With this in mind, a good method of review for your midyear exam is to create a scenario and script of a hypothetical conversation between characters from different pieces of literature. Recall what you know about characters and author styles to address logically each of the following components.

This exercise should encourage us to ponder the myriad comparisons and contrasts possible. The big picture of literature as a structured, timeless body of knowledge with universal themes, characters, conflicts, and archetypes should come into focus.

Requirements: Imagine FOUR characters from literature we have read this semester have gathered in one place. Working in groups of four, each group must:

- Choose the four characters and the setting. Choose at least one pilgrim from Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, one character from *Macbeth*, one character from *Beloved* and one other. There are so many great possibilities from which to choose: Randy Pausch, King Arthur, Mordred, Sir Gawain, the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, the Parson, the Knight, Hamlet, Claudius, Horatio, Macduff, Lady Macbeth, the Porter, Malcolm, Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Baby Suggs just to name but few!

Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared – Vol. 3: *DonorsChoose.org* and Try a
 “Character Rendezvous” Summative Assessment 6/2012

- Choose a setting that will encourage interaction among the characters. The setting does not have to be grandiose. Simple can work well—a psychiatrist’s office waiting room, a subway train on the way to a political rally, in line at a book signing. You can also make use of a more dramatic scenario IE an episode of “The Dating Game” in which Hamlet must select a date from the choices of the Wife of Bath, Lady Macbeth, and Denver.
- Develop an interesting script that well reflects the personalities of the chosen characters as well as the writing style of his/her author. Before scripting, review characters; recall “signature” quotes and historical perspectives. What types of conflicts will naturally exist among the characters? For example, would the humble Parson be good company for an act five Macbeth? Likewise, what types of natural alliances might form? For instance, the sly Pardoner might love the scheming Lady Macbeth. Type the script, indicating setting and other stage directions for submission.
- Perform or tape the scene for the class. Select props and costumes to reinforce character and thematic understanding. How will these elements help contribute to the 4 C’s of Drama (Character, Conflict, Conclusion, and Containment)? Once again, simple can work quite well. Let me know if there are any special needs for your group.

Scoring:

- ✓ Groups must submit a copy of the script that will be scored for content, form, and mechanics.
- ✓ Admittedly, working in groups on a midyear, high-stakes exam can heighten the “normal” tensions of working in groups. Choose partners carefully and with the understanding that the group’s score on this portion of the exam is your score.
- ✓ The performance will be judged using the following criteria:

EXCEEDS STANDARD <i>Tony Award Winner!</i>	MEETS STANDARD <i>Tony Award Nominee!</i>
Role is memorized. Voice is audible. Tone is appropriate and inflection is evident.	Role is somewhat memorized. Voice is audible. Tone is appropriate and inflection is evident.
Performers adhere to stage directions and present accurate and interesting depictions of characters.	Performers mainly adhere to stage directions and present accurate depictions of characters.
Props and stage setting are appropriate and significantly enhance the audience’s understanding of the scene.	Props and stage setting are appropriate and contribute to the audience’s understanding of the scene.
(School appropriate) Costumes are highly appropriate and inventive for the character and scene.	(School appropriate) Costumes are appropriate for character and scene.
Written portion reveals truth or insight regarding themes and characters.	Written portion is accurate and addresses all facets of the assignment.