

there is a difference between a Philosophy of education and a Philosophy of Teaching. Teaching is more intimate—it's about what *you* can do. Also, people know who Nietzsche is. Speaking of that quote, that's is the heart of your piece. The opening paragraph has a lot going on in it—some of it is philosophy but some of it is sort of outcomes for students. Then you talk about passion. They feel un-moored, but when I get to the Nietzsche quote, then it feels like it all comes together. I wonder what it would be like if you opened more with that, then move to talk about what that means as a philosophy. Then move to talk about actual practices in a class that would embody this. You've got a section on assessment, and that's good, it's a good practice to talk about in a philosophy, but tie it to a philosophy. You need the why to your teaching and then you can talk about your how, an existentialist philosopher once told me that.

So one thing you did not do is include either a reflection on the book club journals or on your mentor text memoir. Two things that were supposed to be a part of the portfolio. In this way, you are killing me. You write this really thoughtful philosophy, but you don't do two other parts of the portfolio. This is you in this class. You do great stuff when you do the stuff, and then you just don't do the stuff. Killing me.

So, looking at your revision of the mentor text, I appreciate your new opening. Knowing who Adam is is very helpful. I think, generally, that the flow of the piece makes more sense organizationally. The plot is mostly clearer. However, I still feel like the East of Eden part of the story is undertold. You read this one book. Did you read others? Where you still feeling like you were picking E of E because it was the only book you read? We need something there. The next move you make, though, after the discovery of the book again, works well in explaining what was missing from that original experience of the book. I think that if I had another revision from you, I'd push you to articulate how this experience helps you think about what should happen in a classroom. I appreciate the return to Adam at the end—though the shared memory thing is still light. I assumed you were going to make more of a connection to the idea of story-telling as shared memories, but you just don't quite. But more on what this means for the classroom would have been good here—particularly since you are frank about not loving reading still (a valid and important point for a teacher to make—you don't have to like reading to do reading well).

I liked your reflection on the book club. You do a good job of identifying why it works—the accountability of reading in a group, the variety of opinion you get. You talk about valuing people's different experiences, which is a whole other part of book club that we didn't even talk about in class—but nonetheless true. By talking about prediction you identify how groups make a process we always engage in a more active, powerful part of a class. You identify the role writing can play in helping us make sense of a text. You said it: the most important thing we can do for our students is getting them reading and writing in meaningful ways a lot. I always hope book club will show folks one way to do this.

I've already discussed the ways in which you are killing me. Semester Grade So Far: B

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Your experience with Frank Smith was very much like my first experience with the text: that's the reason I continue to include it and teach it. I always felt like I knew there was something rich and wonderful and complicated about reading, but Smith helped me put it into words, and, thus, made me think about how I teach reading to my students. You write a lot about my feedback in this journal—and it was a great journal. But I think you usually write very strong journals—always searching and personal. I see in them that you are trying to figure out the reading and how it applies to teaching.

So I'm sensing a theme. You wrote at the start of your mentor text memoir that you felt like I ripped your paper apart. I hope that, as time has passed, that you really do see that I'm trying to treat you like a writer and not like a student—and that comments are about your writing and not an explanation of your grades. Your paper shows tremendous amounts of work and genuine attention to revision. The opening, putting us right there as you finish this important text for you, is super effective for me as a reader—as you say—it's a great hook. Your work puzzling through how this fiction affected you really works. The organization, in fact, does work better here. I like how you move back to a time when you don't like to read and then through the process that brought you to the experience of the opening paragraph. And then it makes sense to move to talk about what this will mean for you as a teacher of young readers. I wonder—and I'm totally just wondering—what would happen if you did a mash up of your Frank Smith reading journal and that last paragraph. They really could/do speak to each other. Just thinking out loud—always thinking of one more revision. I can't help myself.

It cracks me up that your first line of your book club journal is that you were convinced you wouldn't like it. Well, at least you know the feeling your students will feel. The way you talk about how the love story of Sebastian and Amabelle dominated how you were thinking seems right. I think I read the exact same way—hoping that it would have a happy ending, but knowing it wasn't—because it just wasn't that kind of a book. You talk about the fun of making predictions in a book—and I think that gets at what our reading theorists would say about the experience. But you also read knowing that it wasn't going to end up the way you thought it would—and that speaks to Iser. A good book, in his idea, doesn't rely on correct prediction and plot. It's more about the why than the how. You talk about the role of writing to keep us on track and attentive to texts that we may not love. That's important to remember as a future teacher. You do a good job of articulating the role group plays in making a reading experience like this manageable. I like thinking I'm the “higher educated” group member, though I don't know that I've got any extra skills in this department than all of you. You do a good job of covering what a book club can do for students; something to remember as a teacher.

As I read your philosophy, this is what I learn. You want to be prepared. You want to create a comfortable classroom. You want to be organized. You want to decorate your classroom. You want to include a “wide variety of teaching styles, texts, and genres.” You are going to use scaffolding and lesson modification. What I want to suggest that these are all practices. These are the things you want to do in your classroom. What is missing is that I don't know why you want to do any of this in your classroom—what is the *why* of what you intend to do in your classroom? That's what a philosophy is, the *why*. In a revision, you want to shape what your piece says with an overarching sense of what you think is important in a classroom. Then you want to organize your practices, I would say, in order of most surface to most deep embodiment of your philosophy. And you want to make sure your audience remembers how the practices are a part of the philosophy. That might mean that not all the practices you list here will get included. But that's OK. You can't cover everything in a philosophy. Focus is powerful.

You seem sort of hard on yourself in your assessment. And I will be more sensitive to how my comments affect you—that's not my intention. Trust that you are doing well. ██████████ I know you are an active member of our class.

Semester Grade So Far: A-

It's fine for the purposes of the midterm to write this as a document coming out of this class and read by other people that are in the class (including me), but, in the final portfolio, you should think of this as a document that will be read by others and not by people in the class—write it that way even if it turns out that you don't use it. If you even just start with the third sentence, you'd do that. Though, I'm not sure that is the kind of space in a short document that you want to expend on questions that don't particularly move your philosophy forward. One of those questions, might work if you spend some real time on it, but right now they just feel like filler. You suggest that your philosophy will actually be teaching with compassion. You don't teach with encouragement. You encourage students to learn. Do you see that difference? Also, encouraging student to learn is more of what you'll do in your classroom, rather than why—and, frankly, who wouldn't encourage their students to learn. I'm more interested in hearing about why you'll do what you'll do, what does compassion actually look like? And how will it be made manifest in your classroom via practices and policies? I think less filler and more real discussion—connecting to the idea of students not wanting to learn (I don't even think it's that well thought out. Students don't even think about learning or not—they just want to get by without getting into too much trouble or too much work). At the end you talk about a classroom where students speak up. That's a whole new practice, and not really a conclusion to a philosophy. In a revision, it would be nice to see a clear articulation of a philosophy and a way for you to have the practices feel highly connected to that philosophy.

I think that this work is possible for you because of your reflection on your reading journals. I never read the reading journals you included with this portfolio, so I never had much of a sense of what you thought about the material. So it was a pleasure to see how Mike Rose affected you. Like I said in class, I continue to use Rose because of the effect he has on us. What you have to say connects to this idea of compassion you focus on in your philosophy draft. That line about changing your thinking about the classroom being an entity of one versus an entity of 25 really struck me. That's powerful. Perhaps that's the image to start with in your philosophy? The way you describe what you felt like when you read Frank Smith very much mirrors my own experience of reading Smith. I always felt like I knew there was something rich and wonderful and complicated about reading, but Smith helped me put it into words, and, thus, made me think about how I teach reading to my students.

I feel like you talked more about what you intended to do in a revision than what you actually revised in your mentor text memoir. As I look at the actual draft, not that much has changed in the body of the piece. The last paragraph is brand new, and it's a good start. In some ways you are clearer about what you are thinking in the reflection than what you have to say in the paragraph. The paragraph feels like a start. The stuff about Gatsby—the factoids as you call them—are great. I wonder here too if there is a connection to your work in your philosophy. Is this a kind of compassion? Not expecting students to like a book, working hard to earn their interest? I don't know; I'm just thinking out loud.

About midway through your opening paragraph of your book club reflection you talk about how, in the end, what you predicted and what ended up actually being the case did not really matter. I think that Iser would say that that is how we know it's a good book. It's not what happens, but what we think about what happens. And you do a nice job of thinking about that in writing by thinking about the author's intentions. You talked about the role of group in helping you to think of new ideas that you brought to your own reading of the text. You point out how both in-the-moment experiences with a text are useful and how also having time to slow down and think slowly about the material (for the presentation) helped in a different way. You make a good argument for a range of experiences to help students be good readers—the best argument I can think of for book club.

I'm rooting for you. You had a slow start to the semester, and you continue to sometimes not really be prepared for class. But your thinking and work is thoughtful and earnest.

Semester Grade So Far: B

It gives me such great pleasure to write to this letter. What a pleasure it's been to work with you so far. Your opening few lines of your philosophy of teaching were just like you. Full of your voice and your humility and anxiety. It's really pretty charming. From your philosophy you are putting a value on relationships between teachers and students, creating opportunities for creative writing and thinking, a colorful organized classroom. Some of this is more philosophy than other parts of it—making connections between students and teachers strikes me as a philosophy. The stuff about structure and decorating, that's more a practice. Creative writing is different than thinking creatively. In a revision, you will certainly need to cut. I think keep some of your opening, but not too much of it. I think that the next step is to think about what *is* your philosophy and what is just a practice. Not that the practices and the philosophy aren't related. They are. But the philosophy is the reason that you enact certain practices. I'm willing to believe that is the case with you, but it's something that has to come through more in the actual document. The connection needs to be clearer. I think that the last paragraph is where your philosophy lies. That and perhaps some of the opening. That's a place to start. Think about what you've got here and how you might organize it. Don't forget that you can include some theorists to make your point.

As I would expect, your reflection on our revision process of your mentor text was thoughtful and useful. I get a sense of where you are moving forward and where you are still struggling. One thing I immediately noticed was how you brought in small bits of the texts that you included. I know you said you struggled with that, but just those small moments, that kind of detail, makes the piece richer. For your final piece, you might think about how you would maybe even try to do some analysis—not like you would for a research paper, but in a more conversational way. I know that sounds ridiculous, but we can meet and talk about it. I don't know how much nonfiction you read, we can look at some examples. I like that last paragraph. I like it a lot. I like how you talk about what reading does for you. I think that you *start* to do that, but you've got to admit it's a little rushed. That's the place to develop more completely for a final piece. You don't have to have it all worked out. You can even write about what you don't know for sure yet, but you want to bring this more to the classroom. Some of the work you've done in your reading journals would be useful for that. Again, we can talk more about that. It's a thoughtful revision.

You always write great and authentic reading journals. You do an excellent job of summarizing the important points, but you also give real and serious thought to what it means to you. That balance is exactly as it should be. Rose always resonates with me too, no matter how many times I read it. Your thinking about Rose and Rosenblatt are not unrelated. You are talking about making space in the classroom for students to think more and memorize less. Thinking more makes it possible for young brains to grow and become resilient. It is what I mean when I say we need to help our students learn to be students. When you talk about Rosenblatt, particularly, I feel like you are talking about how we help our students to stretch and become who they can be.

One thing that is so interesting about your book club reflection is where you document your own practice. It's so you; it just made me chuckle. I like that you put in to practice all of the things that you do when you are trying to read for school, even though they were not working as you expected them to. But, of course, they did work in that they gave you a written record of your thinking as you read. I liked your move to talk about Rosenblatt—nice connection to your reading journal reflection and even your mentor text memoir too. All that note-taking that you did during the reading process made it possible for you to bring all those thoughts together in your in-class writing. You do a good job of differentiating between the work you did in the in-class journals and the web. You point out how well a group can work together—when a group works well together. I'd like to think that the group format itself helps to make the group work. But that isn't always the case. So I'm glad that your group went well. I appreciated that you thought about how this affects the classroom—and could affect a future classroom.

You are a talented student and smarter than you give yourself credit for. You have a good brain, one generally interested in engaging with ideas. This is balanced out by a true and real interest in thinking about what this means in a classroom. You want to really understand how to be a great teacher, how to really teach. It's rare to encounter. You bring this energy every day to our class, and it is a joy to see it. You help the class be quality.

Semester Grade So Far: A

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For the purposes of this portfolio, it is totally fine to address your philosophy of teaching to me, but, in your final, you want to think about this as a document that will exist beyond this class, beyond this assignment (regardless of whether it does or not). So that's a first thing to think about. As I read the document, two things strike me. One is sort of goofy. I know you to have a sort of formal tone as a writer. That's fine if that is what you want to do. Is that what you want to do? Just make sure this is how you want to sound and not the way you think you ought to sound. The second thing is that I want you to think about the difference between a practice and a reason why you will practice something. What marks a philosophy is the *why* you will do something. So you want to think about the chief reasons you will do something in a class. When I look at your document, I feel like it is something about honesty—which I love by the way. I find that idea very powerful. What I would encourage you to do is think about how the rest of what you talk about is a practice of an honest classroom. That will dictate how you talk about practices and in what order—the most sort of surface move to the most in-depth and powerful classroom practice. Perhaps you weren't thinking about honesty as your philosophy, and you don't need it to be, but, whatever you chose you want to select something that helps explain all of your practices.

For the final portfolio, ██████████ you only need one half-page reflection for all of your selections. That was the actual assignment. What I most liked about your observations about Smith is how you point out that the process of using prior experience and knowledge of texts (you call it word choice) helps a student with prediction at any level. What is useful in that is what you point out—that whatever a student is reading, wherever they are at as readers, this is the relationship. I like how you talk about the power of the first read in a classroom. That's lovely and right. What you speak to here, also, is how texts change for a reader across time and space. We are never the same reader we are at any subsequent reading, and, thus neither is a text. What I think you get to at the end of the reflection is how this thinking about a text, about the experience of reading, is the thing we most want our students to understand about reading. And I certainly agree.

Two things: it cracks me up that you use “whilst” in a sentence. Are you British? The other thing that strikes me: how are you not a “well-trained” reader. You are. I have used this assignment in 301 before, and no one has ever really talked about how this may well be the first time they've read a book without the immediate and direct guidance of a teacher telling you, at least in some part, how to do the reading. I appreciate how you made note of that—that's something I'd like to highlight in the future. I appreciate that this shaped how you thought about reading in the classroom. I liked the difference you identified about “live readings” versus the time you had to think about the text. I think live readings could be worked into a classroom if you had more time to with a text. I read aloud to my middle-schoolers a lot. They liked that. You've got a really useful sense of the role that a group can have on the interpretation of a text. I think that you are thinking about is as something that fits into a larger project, and that's, I think, the right way to do it. I don't think that only book clubs could make a class work.

I take issue with one point you make about your revision to your mentor text: the idea that this was not a critical essay based on exterior evidence. Even memoirs are arguments. They are arguments an author is making about his or her life and using the experiences as evidence that they are right. So, thinking that way, that kind of analysis of the scenes you describe is a critical analysis. I hear what you are saying about workshops not giving you the feedback you want, but I don't see how in a first workshop in a class you can naturally pair people with partners that will read their work in a particular way unless you let students pick their friends—and there a lot of reasons why that is not a good way to run a workshop. Students have to learn to become comfortable with each other and to respond honestly and with care to each other. That's not a process that can happen over night—that's why you have a workshop like that on a small and by and large not super heavy-duty assignment. If I had one more revision from you, I'd push you to try to make more of easy connection (easy in the sense that your reader sees it as following logically) to that last paragraph. It feels tacked on to some extent and not integrated or as related to the stories you are telling, which do, in fact, paint this picture of a developing love of complexity and of being smart (and being told you were smart)—and I do still feel sorry for Mrs. Gallant, who I feel certain did not actually believe that our blood was blue.

Semester Grade So Far: A