

OUSD History Assessment Newsletter

Volume V, Number 2

Oakland Unified School District, Oakland, California

February, 2008

A Note on the Fall Semester Implementation

Spring 2008 Assessment Questions

World History

Evaluate the motives for Japanese imperialism in the first half of the 20th century.

U.S. History

Were America's policies and actions (1945-1975) toward Vietnam in the best interests of the American people?

We want to thank all the Oakland Unified high school history teachers for their terrific response to the fall semester history writing assessment. Over 90% of the teachers participated in implementing the assessment in classrooms throughout the district. This demonstrates their deep commitment to improving student writing and thinking and achievement in history.

This assessment asks students to demonstrate their ability to write a coherent and thoughtful historical essay. Beyond increasing students' knowledge and understanding of history, success on the assessment also means that students have taken great strides towards mastering the academic skills necessary for success beyond the K-12 classroom. One way to get a "big picture" of student writing across the district is to help score the student papers. We want to thank the more than 20 teachers who gave up a cold Saturday in February to work on the scoring. (Their names and schools are listed on page 2 of this newsletter.) For those teachers who were unable to come, or who have not yet participated in a scoring session, we encourage you to participate in scoring the spring semester assessments. Administrators and site coaches are also welcome to participate. This work provides participants, along with a \$200 stipend, a great opportunity to talk with colleagues from across the district about what constitutes strong work in a history paper.

The DBQ (document-based question) assessment raises many instructional challenges because it is a rigorous assessment. Many of our students struggle with its demands, but that does not mean it is not an assessment worth teaching to. Teachers want students to do well and to that end over 40 teachers are currently participating, or have participated, in an on-going professional development series designed to provide concrete strategies for improving students' ability to write this type of essay. Some of these same teachers have generated a list of instructional suggestions that are briefly summarized on page 3 of this newsletter. We hope you find them useful.

Please let us know if you have additional suggestions that could assist your colleagues in this work. We look forward to seeing you at the district mini-conference on March 5th (2:30—4:00) at Oakland Tech.

Shelly Weintraub and Stan Pesick

Spring Assessment Support : OUSD Mini-Conferences

Wednesday, March 5
2:30—4:00

Oakland Technical High School

World History

Topic: Japanese expansion prior to World War II

U.S. History

Topic: American policies towards Vietnam 1945—1975

District Scoring Committee

Raven Abraham - Farwest
 Patricia Arabia - Mandela
 Christie Blakely—Architecture
 Sam Brewer – Oakland Tech
 Sherry Coleman—Independent Study
 Richard Charlesworth - BEST
 Gordon Danning - Oakland High
 Dianne Denman—Independent Study
 Cameron Fredrick—CBITS
 Patrick Friedman—Oakland Tech
 Deborah Gordon— Independent Study
 Sarah Goudy - CBITS
 Kita Grinberg - Dewey
 Elizabeth Haugen—Oakland Tech
 Jack Herman – CBITS
 Tania Kappner - Oakland Tech
 Robert Kenney—Frick
 Daniel Manske – Independent Study
 Thea Marston—Architecture
 Harry Pasternak – Oakland Tech
 Stan Pesick, OUSD
 Theresa Stinson, Independent Study
 Neha Ummat - Mandela
 Linda Wadley—Roosevelt
 Shelly Weintraub - OUSD
 Maryann Wolfe—Oakland Tech
 Jonas Zuckerman – Oakland Tech

School by School Implementation (Fall Semester, 2007—08)

school	#10th and 11th grade teachers	# teachers administering assessment	% teachers administering assessment
Castlemont Community			
• Business and Info Tech	3	3	100
• EOSA	3	3	100
• Leadership Prep	2	2	100
Dewey	2	1	50
Farwest	2	2	100
Fremont Federation			
• Architecture	2	2	100
• Mandela	2	2	100
• Media	2	1	50
• Robeson	2	2	100
Life Academy	3	3	100
Metwest	4	4	100
McClymonds Community			
• BEST	1	1	100
• EXCEL	2	1	50
Oakland High	9	8	90
Oakland Tech	9	9	100
Rudsdale	1	1	100
Skyline	9	9	100
Independent Study	5	5	100
Youth Empowerment (YES)	2	1	50
District Totals	65	60	92%

Please contact Shelly Weintraub or Stan Pesick if you have questions, or for more information about the assessments and related professional development.

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 Shelly.Weintraub@ousd.k12.ca.us

Stan Pesick—879-8497;
 Stan.Pesick@ousd.k12.cas.us

Score Distribution of Submitted Papers - Fall and Spring Semesters, 2006—2007 (6 per class)*

	Grade/Score (%)**	5	4	3	2	1
10th Grade	Fall semester - # scored and % of total (162 papers scored)	2 (1%)	15 (9%)	50 (31%)	66 (41%)	29 (18%)
11th Grade	Fall semester—# scored and % of total (157 papers scored)	3 (2%)	7 (4%)	49 (30%)	72 (44%)	32 (20%)

* Papers were scored using a five point rubric, with a score of "5" being the highest possible score and a score of "1" the lowest. The district rubric assesses students' ability to write a coherent and well organized historical essay that includes thoughtful a thesis supported by historical knowledge learned in class and analysis of source documents included on the assessment.

** These scores include student papers written during the first semester assessment window. Students in Advanced Placement history classes, due to pacing differences tied to the content of the AP exams, have not yet written to the fall assessment questions. Their scores will be included in our comparison of fall and spring scoring to be distributed at the start of the 2008-2009 school year.

Instructional Strategies to Support Student Success

For the past two years a group of OUSD teachers have participated in a professional development series designed to help support student success on the district assessment. With this goal in mind, they have developed and tried out specific classrooms strategies focused on student historical thinking and writing. Below are some suggestions from the group that can be used in classrooms throughout the district.

I. Before Students Write to the Assessment Question:

- Write the prompt on the blackboard at the beginning of the unit. Keep coming back to the prompt throughout the unit as the class discusses how what they read; what they see or hear in videos, photographs, and other illustrations; and what is said in class connects to a possible response to the question. Ask students what information and evidence they now have to answer the prompt.
- Have students rephrase the prompt in multiple ways. Teachers noted that many students had difficulty in understanding the prompt itself. Therefore time spent “deconstructing” the prompt is useful for students and makes them approach the task with more confidence.
- Teach students a basic formula for constructing an essay; introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion.
- Teach students the use of an “evidence sandwich” in which the top slice of the sandwich introduces a quote or piece of evidence to the reader. This is followed by the “meat “ in which the writer either summarizes or directly quotes a piece of evidence. The is completed by a bottom slice that explains what the piece of evidence means and how it connects to the argument being made.

II. Using the rubric

- Have students score a set of anchor papers using the rubric. This helps students become familiar with the rubric as well as sharpening their understanding of the difference between a strong and a weak paper. (The anchors, with scores, were included with your papers that were returned after the district scoring session.)
- Have students work with the evidence portion of the rubric to analyze and revise a piece of writing assigned in class. Focus on what a “5,” “4,” and “3” require in regards to the use of evidence.
 - ⇒ *Understand author point of view, purpose, and audience*
 - ⇒ *Makes connections between documents by grouping similar positions or identifying contradictions;*
 - ⇒ *Identifies contrary evidence*
 - ⇒ *Draws plausible inferences and conclusions*
- Read a strong or a weak model of a paper to the class and have a class discussion based on the rubric.
- Have students read the anchor papers and using the rubric color code for the large categories. For example, they could color the thesis red, the use of evidence green, and analysis yellow. This might help them distinguish the different parts of the essay for their own writing.
- Have students use the rubric for a meta-cognitive activity. One teacher asked her students to explain, in their own words, one part of the rubric and to then say what they would need to do to improve. Student answers are very informative. For example, one student wrote, “The DBQ rubric says that I’m supposed to be able understand the author point of view, purpose, and audience. I have to make connections between documents by grouping similar positions or contractions. And last I have to draw plausible inferences and conclusions. I really do not know what this means, but what I think it means is that I have to use more than one document.” As teachers, we know that the rubric means more than this, but it is helpful for us to get a peek into our student’s thinking.

If you have additional strategies you’ve successfully used to help your students write a document –based historical essay that you’re willing to share, please send a short description to either Shelly Weintraub or Stan Pesick.

Coming Soon — History/Social Studies Assessment Support Materials on “Oakland Writes” - <http://www.oaklandwrites.org/>

These resources include:

- Practice assessments 10th and 11th grade teachers can use to introduce document based questions to their students.
- Instructional materials, developed to teach specific historical content and specific historical thinking, reading and writing skills. These materials are designed to support the specific skills emphasized on the district writing assessments.
- Current and archived copies of assessment newsletters that report on the progress of students as the assessments have been implemented over the last two years.
- High school and middle school draft rubrics for the district writing assessments.
- Links to additional instructional resources that can be used to support student success in writing the historical essay.

What's Inside

Page 1— A Note on the Fall Semester Implementation

Page 1—Spring Semester Assessment Questions

Page 1—Dates and Topics for Spring Mini-Conferences

Page 2—School by school implementation data

Page 2—District scoring committee

Page 2—Score distribution of submitted papers

Page 3—Instructional Strategies to Support Student Success