College-Ready Writers Program

Writing Task

Day 1 Reading Packet

**Grading Policies**

Student first name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Student last name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Teacher name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_\_ Class Period \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**PROMPT FOR WRITING**

Your school uses a number of strategies to ensure that all students are treated fairly. Most of the strategies are directed toward an equal opportunity to speak. Now your principal is considering ***blind grading***, a practice adopted by law schools and under consideration in some high schools and universities, to guarantee that all students are being graded fairly. Do you think your school should adopt such a policy? Why?

Write an argument. Use ideas and evidence from the reading packet to support your argument. Use what you have learned about citing and quoting sources in your writing.

Your audience is your school’s principal.

**DIRECTIONS**

* This packet is part of a two-day writing task.
* Today you will analyze the readings to learn about different opinions on this topic. On Day 2, you will write an argument that supports your opinion in response to the prompt above.
* Annotate the text to mark what is important or interesting. Take notes in the column on the right.
* At the end of the text set, you will find definitions for vocabulary words. These words are ***italicized***in the text.
* Use the space provided to plan your argument for Day 2.

**ANALYZE THE PROMPT:** Consider these questions before you read.

1. What is the topic for my argument?
2. Who is my audience?
3. What is the purpose of this writing task?
4. What strategies will be most effective?
5. What do I do to achieve the purpose of this task?

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| **Better-looking high schoolers have grade advantages**  **[http://www.gannett-cdn.com/-mm-/dd8b1baf67130a1edc52e1868cb7f1ece5f42a54/r=26&c=26x26/local/-/media/USATODAY/staff/images/v2/Jayson_Sharon.png](http://www.usatoday.com/staff/1170/sharon-jayson/) Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY***12:05 a.m. EST December 10, 2013*  Good looks translate to better grades in high school, according to a national survey of almost 9,000 high school students.  Being the most beautiful or handsome is not as important as being above average, sociologist Rachel Gordon of the University of Illinois-Chicago suggests in a book from the Society for Research in Child Development, which she co-authored.  For both girls and boys, being rated as attractive rather than average in looks — what Gordon calls "standing out from the crowd" — is most important for ***adolescents***, she says.  "The attractive do have a GPA advantage (over) the average," Gordon says.  Earlier research has shown that better-looking adults earn higher wages overall. The advantage often stems from adolescence, when the better-looking get better grades and are more likely to get a college degree, setting them on a path for ***economic*** advantages as well, she says.  Those rated below average in looks in high school didn't suffer an overall disadvantage in terms of grades, compared with their average-looking peers. But the ***analysis*** notes that those rated by others as "being on the ugly side of looks" are more depressed and have fewer friends than those average in looks, both in high school and young adulthood.  Gordon says this study is important because most research on looks has focused on elementary school kids or adult earners.  "We did want to highlight the importance of looking at physical attractiveness in high school and adolescents, given that it's been looked at so little in academic literature," she says. "We may be able to help teachers and students get past the way looks affect those first impressions." |  |

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| **BLIND GRADING** by Cherish Kim, Opinions Section Editor for Illinois Math and Science Academy student newspaper, January 8, 2013  In an attempt to make grading more fair, some of our teachers choose to grade essays submitted by their students blindly. In other words, the writers’ names are hidden in such a way that the teacher does not see them until the paper has been fully ***assessed*** and a grade assigned. The idea is that even if the teacher has, ***consciously*** or not, a few favorite students in the class, he or she is not able to allow this favoritism to affect his or her grading.  Although this system is based on good intentions, it blinds the teacher from other factors that should be taken into consideration when assessing any assignment. For instance, when a student pays careful attention in class, asks questions frequently, and comes in to see the teacher, shouldn’t his or her essay be graded from a more favorable view, given all the effort he or she has put into the assignment? By blinding themselves to the students’ identities, teachers also unintentionally blind themselves to the dedication that sets certain students apart from others.  Additionally, individual writing styles are unique to each student. Some students enjoy using a many descriptive words, for instance; others might consistently favor wordy sentences over short ones. The more any reader is exposed to an individual’s writing style, the more familiar he or she becomes with it, and the less “blind” any assessment of it can become. Thus, it is difficult to judge whether this sort of grading truly is blind.  Blind grading might be intended for noble purposes, but it does not and cannot do what it is intended to do because it is unintentionally unfair. Keep the name on the essay; let the writer’s identity help, rather than hurt, the fair assessment of papers. |  |

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| **Why “Blind” Grading Makes Good Sense, and Should Be Used More** by Vikram David Amar, Professor of Law at the University of California, Davis School of Law  As I was grading exams over the last month, it struck me that the ***“blind” grading*** that is currently the norm in law school exams—in which exams have school-issued identification numbers but no names on them—is uncommon in American colleges, and almost unheard of in high school.  In the space below, I briefly discuss the great advantages (and occasional disadvantages) of blind grading, and suggest that colleges and even high schools consider making wider use of it.  **Some Benefits of Blind Grading**  Blind grading may be just as important in preventing teachers from rewarding “favorites” as it is in preventing graders from punishing “troublemakers.”  Some of the most common grading ***bias*** may involve what I will call here an “expectation effect.”  That is, getting an “A” on the first few assignments could create a belief in the mind of the teacher that future work would also be in the “A” range, even when it turned out to be poor work. And that unconscious belief could give a student the benefit of the doubt down the grading road.  Indeed, performance expectations that affect a teacher’s grading can come from not just individual past performance, but also by family track records.  In K-12, when teachers often teach older and younger siblings within the same family, it is hard to avoid assessing a student’s work without the memory of how well an older sibling performed in the not-so-distant past.  Protecting students from biased assessments of their work may be the most obvious advantage of blind grading, but it is not the only one.  Protecting teachers from accusations of bias is also important.  And blind grading also gives teachers (and students) more ***credibility*** when teachers want to endorse or support students who have done well in a class for admission to higher levels of education or for jobs.  A letter of recommendation discussing a student’s excellent performance on a blindly graded exam has particular credibility.  **Possible Drawbacks to Blind Grading**  So what are the downsides of blind grading?  Some have suggested that blind grading creates an incentive to have fewer midterms and other graded assignments prior to a final exam, because blind grading means that a student cannot talk to the teacher about assignments to prevent the student from being identified prior to the final exam, which means that students and teachers will find it hard to make personal connections.  Another argument against blind grading is that this method makes it harder for a teacher to reward classroom participation. But teachers can be given the power to adjust an overall course grade to reflect classroom performance after the written work has been graded blindly, and those written-work grades have been recorded.  Obviously, blind grading cannot be used in classes where each student’s projects are unique.  If every student is writing a paper on a different topic, then blind grading is impossible.   But most papers in high school and college, and certainly most exams at both levels, are ones in which all the students are working from the same prompts or questions.  Handwriting might reveal a student’s identity, but the vast majority of papers are now typed so that handwriting identification is unlikely to be a problem.  At the end of the day, I can’t really think of any truly powerful reasons not to have blind grading used more broadly at lower education levels. |  |

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| **Five pains of being beautiful** Psychologist Dr. Jeremy Dean on the website *PsyBlog*  Now for the bad news about being beautiful. When it comes to income, in most lines of work it’s better to be smarter than more attractive. The same goes for persuasion, self-esteem and even attraction: other personal qualities can easily outweigh beauty.  Psychologists have also begun to uncover the dark side of being beautiful. Given what we already know about the beautiful it may be difficult to have much sympathy, but here are five pains:  1. Less likely to be hired (sometimes)  Although beauty can help in the search for a job, it’s not always true. When employers are making a decision about someone of the same sex, they can let their jealousy get the better of them. One recent study has suggested that people who are highly attractive are at a disadvantage in the hiring process when the decision-makers are the same sex. It seems we think of beautiful people who are the same sex as a threat.  2. Beauty is beastly  Similarly there’s evidence that female beauty can be a problem in jobs with strong gender stereotypes. For example a beautiful woman may be at a disadvantage when applying for a job which is associated with masculinity, like a prison guard or a mechanical engineer. The same doesn’t seem to be true for attractive men. They can happily apply for jobs as nurses, lingerie salespersons or HR managers without their beauty counting against them.  3. Believed to be less talented  In a study by Anderson and Nida, highly attractive people of the same sex were judged as less talented than average-looking people.  4. Lucky to be pretty  If beautiful people are successful, is it because of their talent, or is it just their looks? After all, people are lucky to be beautiful and we know all the advantages of that. Research finds that when judging their own sex, people are more likely to think beautiful people’s success is due to their beauty, not their talent. So you’re lucky to be pretty, but probably just rely on that rather than talent.  5. Social rejection  Although attractive people are generally more popular socially, there’s some evidence that very attractive people can experience social rejection from members of their own sex. |  |

**Vocabulary**

**Adolescent:** a young person in the process of developing from child to adult

**Analysis:** detailed examination of the elements of something

**Assess:** evaluate or judge

**Bias:** favoritism in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

**Blind grading:** papers are assigned numbers that is not known to the person doing the grading

**Consciously:** aware of what one is doing

**Credibility:** the quality of being trusted and believed in

**Economic:** relating to money

**Planning Your Argument**

Your school uses a number of strategies to ensure that all students are treated fairly. Most of the strategies are directed toward an equal opportunity to speak. Now your principal is considering blind grading, a practice adopted by law schools and under consideration in some high schools and universities, to guarantee that all students are being graded fairly. Do you think your school should adopt such a policy? Why?

**Use this space to do the following:**

* **Write your claim.**
* **Select and organize evidence from the readings that you will use to write your argument on Day 2.**