

Zine-ing It Out: DIY Approaches to Content Application and Comprehension Checks

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Zine Introduction and Activity Overview

Zines are DIY magazines that allow creators to share their knowledge through reflective, critical, and creative writing, drawing, and collage. There are a plethora of zines on many topics including social critique, media analysis, new discoveries in STEM, and more. Many zines embrace an imperfect aesthetic, which has several benefits for learners. Firstly, students who are self-conscious about their creativity are more likely to embrace creative communication if perfection is not expected. Secondly, students become more accustomed to sharing work and thoughts in progress, thus reinforcing that they are welcome to participate even if they are not sure they have a 'complete' or 'right' answer.

Audience

While this activity has been designed for 1st-4th year arts, humanities, and social science students, I see this activity as being more broadly applicable because it is customizable. This activity can be revised for many disciplines.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

- Independently define and find examples of core course concepts and/or vocabulary
- Work together as a group to present course content in novel, creative ways
- Develop comfort in sharing 'ideas in progress' or partial knowledge
- Practice presenting mini research findings to peers

Materials

- Paper
- Writing materials and coloring tools
- Suggested, but not required: magazines, copies of important course materials, adhesives, scissors

Time Allotment

This activity can be time consuming. I recommend devoting an entire tutorial to the activity. In a 50-minute tutorial, I recommend using 35 minutes for zine making and 15 minutes for students to share their work. One might also choose to devote an entire tutorial to the activity and ask students to present their work online or at the next meeting.

Instructions

Break students up into groups of three or four. Groups smaller than this may not be as effective at practicing teamwork skills, while groups larger than this might make it difficult for every student to have an equal impact. Briefly explain the history and form of zines and share that this is an opportunity to creatively engage with and disseminate their knowledge of a given course topic. Students might all be given the same topic to explore as they make their zines, or they might be assigned different, smaller chunks of the lesson content to cover. This activity is best suited for complex, nuanced topics.

In My Classroom: A Concrete Example of the Activity in Action

I might use this in a first-year Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies course. Students could be asked to comb through magazines and compile a series of images and phrases that demonstrate the objectification of women's bodies. This prompt is intentionally open-ended, allowing students to critically examine the provided magazines and interpret how they will represent the concept of objectification in their zines. Students may choose to create a zine filled with advertisement slogans, objectifying magazine covers, or their own experiences of objectification. The desired outcome of this iteration of the activity is for students to make connections between abstract theories of objectification to media representations and/or personal experiences of objectification, thus allowing them to independently apply and mobilize this theoretical knowledge. I would either ask students to present their work to the whole class or form sets of two groups that share their work with one another.

Additional Uses and Adaptations

Instructors might ask students to create a zine that defines vocabulary from a unit, compiles written or visual examples illustrating a theory or concept, teaches a novice reader a complex topic in plain language, presents and analyzes a case study, or summarizes information learned throughout the course, thus creating a study guide for exams or papers.