

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.1 In This Issue...

*Denise Stephenson*

Like so much else, the Collection of GIFTs took a back seat during the pandemic. It's not that new and engaging ways of teaching were not emerging, rather there wasn't time to codify them to share. I know it's still an overwhelming ride for many of us, but I hope you've got a few minutes to look at these bite-sized great ideas for teaching which are focused in the online arena. As you'll see, some have been transitioned from face-to-face classrooms, some challenge us to address equity, and all are about engaging our students in learning. Thanks to Jim Julius and Sean Davis, who encouraged me to invite the faculty online mentors for submissions to this special issue.

When teaching ESL, the world is your oyster—provided you like seafood, that is. **Nadia Kahn** explains how focusing on home remedies allowed her students to tap into their own knowledge, a great equity practice, and to deliver that knowledge in multiple ways which built their English language skills.

Capitalizing on self-knowledge but applying it in a new way is the centerpiece of **Angela Beltran-Aguilar's** GIFT which engages students in sharing meaningful objects. While building community and empathy top the list of objectives, helping students see that they can apply the discipline and persistence from other areas of their lives to their math class can also increase their success.

**JahB Prescott** builds community by setting classroom norms with his students and then reminding them frequently what those norms are so everyone adheres to them. He also keeps them simple: be respectful, be present and assume positive intent of each other. While this may be similar in an online environment, there are some shifts for students and the instructor both in synchronous and asynchronous classes.

Group work can be challenging, especially online, but **Joanne Carrubba** describes how she has created a deep dive into content for her course, which requires students to work together to create presentations for their classmates. Not only do students learn about course content in their research preparation, but working and presenting with others develops soft skills needed in any field.

### 20.1 In This Issue...

*Denise Stephenson*

### 20.2 Culturally Responsive Learning Activity

*Nadia Khan, Noncredit ESL*

### 20.3 A Meaningful Object

*Angela Beltran-Aguilar, Math*

### 20.4 Setting the Norms

*JahB Prescott, English*

### 20.5 Student-Led Presentations

*Joanne Carruba, Art*

### 20.6 The Online Discussion Two-Step

*Lisa M. Lane, History*

### 20.7 Transferring Skills to Create Pathways

*Nadia Khan, Noncredit ESL*

#### Submissions

Submissions are always welcome. There is rolling on-line publication.

Please submit work to M/S 9 or [dstephenson@miracosta.edu](mailto:dstephenson@miracosta.edu)



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# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

Don't like reading the discussion board posts you've assigned students to write? Find they are short and perfunctory? That needn't be the case. **Lisa M. Lane** demonstrates how moving beyond the one-post-two-response norm can infuse purpose. Lisa has a couple of targeted moves she makes with discussions which create engagement between students and instructor as well as students with each other. Take a read!

Academic and Career Pathways (ACPs) remind us that our community college students are headed into many fields at many different levels. We not only prepare students with content knowledge and critical thinking, but with a whole host of skills to take to transfer or the job market. To that end, **Nadia Khan** describes a project-based activity which centers around metacognitive assessments of students' skills in and beyond the classroom.

And now a call—for the next issue of a Collection of GIFTs, consider showcasing your teaching in all its glory, with more than words on a page. Use video, audio, images, text as individual materials or combined with one another. These could live in a Canvas shell or be a website or a PowerPoint with all of the above. Give us an insight into your best teaching practices in a way that makes sense to you. Interested? Reach out to me or curry about how you might contribute to this new type of showcase of Great Ideas For Teaching. 📺

# A Collection of **gifts**



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### **20.2 Culturally Responsive Learning Activity**

*Nadia Khan, Noncredit ESL*

As part of the conversation section of our ESL class, students learned about and shared common home remedies used in the US and in different countries. The activity comprised different mini-lessons where students learned about home remedies while working in groups. Prior to this activity, a lesson was designed to establish that we go to a doctor for health problems, but people sometimes treat minor problems through home remedies.

The instructor first introduced the topic by sharing a home remedy that she used to treat headaches. The learners were introduced to relevant vocabulary and were then asked to form groups of three and share information about some home remedies they use or share information about the healing properties of some plants used in their culture or country. Learners brought the plants/herbs to class and told their groups what the plant or home remedy was, what it was used to heal or cure, and how they used it as a remedy. If the learners did not know of any plants, they were asked to share a home remedy or a health tip.

In the next lesson, students watched a video where an indigenous knowledge holder shared how various indigenous peoples used plants and herbs to cure or heal various ailments. The knowledge holder also shared information about the medicinal properties of plants used by the indigenous peoples.

The learners then researched common home remedies used in the US and looked up certain plants and herbs used as medicines. Each learner only had to find information about any one home remedy. Learners had the choice of searching online or asking their friends, teachers, or neighbors.

In the final lesson, the learners in groups of three (different from the groups formed in the first lesson) compared the home remedies and looked at similarities and differences in the various home remedies they had learned about. They identified which remedies were new to them and which ones they had heard of or tried before.

As a follow-up activity, learners shared a home remedy that was new to them and told why they would like to try it out. They could share it in one of the following ways: class presentation, video, poster, picture story, or writing.

This culturally-inclusive activity provided students a platform to showcase their culture and norms. It also gave them a chance to learn about various culturally diverse perspectives related to the topic of home remedies and healing properties of plants. Many students were able to find multiple similarities and understand areas that were different. This activity was a success as we prepared for Diversity Day at the college. Students were able to use their presentations to present a home remedy on Diversity Day. 🎁

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.3 A Meaningful Object

*Angela Beltran-Aguilar, Math*

#### **In a face-to-face classroom**

The first time I tried the “Meaningful Object” assignment in an on-campus Precalculus with Support class, it was presented with flexible parameters. Students could pick in advance one day when they would do a quick presentation in front of their classmates. They would share an object or a picture of an object that was meaningful to them because it represented something they felt proud about or something they worked hard for. Then, they would expand on how the qualities that led them to their past accomplishment could be used in their math learning practices. It was up to each student how deep or personal their presentation was. For students who didn’t feel comfortable sharing in front of their classmates, there was an option to submit a video or image with a description in a Canvas discussion. This class met for 6 hours each week, and much of that time was spent in groups that I shuffled every couple of weeks. The Meaningful Object activity was done half-way through the semester, not as an ice-breaker. My students were already somewhat comfortable with each other.

My objective was to strengthen the sense of community and empathy among my students. I also wanted each student to realize how much they have already accomplished and to feel valued in our class for their whole identities, not just their math experiences. I wanted my students to realize that the same work ethic, persistence, and discipline they put into that past accomplishment could also make them great math learners. Finally, I wanted students to feel a stronger sense of connection with each other.

I wanted to model the assignment for my students, so I was the first one to present my meaningful object. I was surprised by how vulnerable I felt but also by how much my students appreciated it.

Some students seemed nervous or anxious about their presentations, and when I reminded them that they had other options, they replied that they still wanted to share in front of the class. I noticed that what I perceived as anxiety was also intertwined with excitement. Before sharing their object, many expressed how nervous they felt, but after they were done they seemed to feel proud and also more connected to the class. As a group, we all felt like we understood each other so much better after the presentations concluded. In terms of the learning process, my students seemed to be more open to working in different groups with classmates they wouldn’t normally talk to. Also, they were all more willing to be vulnerable and ask math questions during lecture and help each other while in their groups. I also noticed that more of them started hanging out together during break (instead of being on their phones!).

#### **Adapting the Assignment to the Online Environment**

In the Fall 2020 semester, I decided to try this activity with my asynchronous online classes. I set it up as a Canvas discussion. I asked students to embed either a video or an image. The image would be accompanied by a written explanation. I required students to embed their video or image for two reasons: they had practiced both tasks in previous assignments, and I didn’t want anyone to have to download a file to their computer to view the posts.

As with the face-to-face version, as long as they followed our community norms, it was up to students how deep or personal whatever they shared was. Some students shared images of an art piece they created or video of a house they built. I could sense their pride in their written and video stories. Students were required to reply to each other, and because they were watching/reading each others’ posts, this assignment increased the sense of community in the online class.

When I adapted this community-building assignment for an online asynchronous environment, I continued to use it half-way through the semester because I wanted students

# A Collection of **gifts**



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

to feel comfortable enough to share something meaningful and be vulnerable with each other (if they chose to). I didn't want students to do this at the beginning of the semester because in my online teaching and learning courses I learned that ice breakers should be light, fun, and low-risk.

This type of community-building participation assignment helped my students perceive each other as whole individuals. They inspired each other. They inspired me! I noticed that students also felt more connected and comfortable when they had other group assignments. In their groups, my students created and shared videos explaining one or two math problems and then offered peer reviews to two of their group members. It was important that they feel comfortable with each other so their peer reviews would be thoughtful and constructive. By sharing something positive about their lives outside of the math classroom, students developed a more trusting relationship which resulted in a more engaged environment where students' whole identities were welcomed and appreciated. My hope is that students also felt a stronger sense of belonging. 📺

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.4 Setting The Norms

JahB Prescott, English

It seems simple, right? Sounds arbitrary and childish like setting the rules before a game of Duck, Duck...Goose. I mean, surely, this is something only designed for middle school teachers. College students have the capacity to sit and listen. They are adults and I am an adult, so why establish "Rules" for my classroom? There is the unspoken rule that: "I am the professor and they will listen."

Setting the Norms is not about establishing Rules. The Norms provide students with the opportunity to create the culture within their classroom community. The Norms are what students in your classroom community value above all else when entering into the space. It prepares them for what is about to come and provides the community with a set of shared responsibilities for engaging with learning.

I used to scoff at Norms. However, as I reflected on my own experiences, I realized I used the Norms more often than I anticipated. They were in practice in my classroom. I asked more than one rambunctious high school classroom, "What do we do everyday when you enter the classroom, Class?" to calm them down. In unison they'd answer, "Grab our Independent Reading books and begin to read without distraction." I used them to prepare my girls soccer team to battle a rival school on the field. I had established them for myself as an educator. Daily Norms of providing instruction to my classes. Why was I so hesitant to develop them as a team with my students? Maybe it was the HOW that mystified me.

Details:

1. Decide on your personal "dealbreakers." What do you want students to put foremost in their mind in your classroom? I have three.

- a. Respect  
*Respect me, I'll respect you. Respect one another and we will all move forward in learning.*
  - b. Be Present  
*Be present not only in person, but mentally be here with us. Leave your device on silent and interact with the class as a whole.*
  - c. Assume Positive Intent  
*We have already established Respect as a norm. Assuming Positive Intent is about tone and personal experience. We must "assume" that another opinion has some Positive Intent behind it. Before we become angry about what is said, we should question to seek clarification on the positive intent, and attempt not to be angry, but see the new information as a positive learning experience.*
2. Create the space early in your course to allow students to develop their own "Norms." Encourage students to determine what might matter to the community as a whole. Ex: Be On Time, Raise Your Hand to Speak, Be Yourself, Don't Be Afraid to Be Wrong, No Cultural Criticisms, NO Intellectual Bullying.
  3. Remind students you do reserve the right to have final say to avoid "silly" suggestions like: "we can all miss seven class meetings."
  4. Post the Norms for everyone to see and remind students to use them.
  5. Return to the Norms to acknowledge positive demonstrations of your Norms.
  6. Remind students of the Norms if they continuously break a Norm. "Remember, we decided to Be Present, so I'm going to ask you all to put your cell phones away."
  7. Reevaluate the Norms if needed.

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

The Norms shape my classroom culture. I'm surprised to find that sometimes my students are harder on themselves than I would have been. The beauty of the Norms is, as you begin to conduct professional development and lead committees, they work extremely well with your colleagues to establish a shared experience of teamwork before the community begins unpacking the remainder of the work for the day.

### Digital Norms

Zoom and Canvas have become spaces where our students interact. Digital interaction may be new for many of us, but we can standardize this space with Norms as well. There are Norms that are more suited to a physical classroom space than a digital space. For example, if I am unable to see a student, how do I determine that they are Being Present? In a physical classroom we can see their body language, the visual confirmation of a cell phone in use, or a head down. I've attempted to teach in Zoom-Name-Box-Room where speaking to black screens with only student names displayed takes a tremendous amount of energy. I'm an educational extrovert and even I find it daunting at times.

My Norms for a digital space did not have to shift so much for a Zoom or Canvas space. I think the educator moves of Noticing and Naming work well to engage your digital community that may be synchronously live in Zoom or intermittently participating on Canvas.

"Respect" remained the foundation of these communities. In establishing this as my cornerstone I was able to Notice, Name, and Invite students to engage with the other Norms. While I think this came naturally in a physical space, I had to be more deliberate in a virtual space. At the start of a Zoom session I display the Norms as the opening slide for all my presentations or post them in the chat to greet my students. I transition this into Noticing who has a camera on and Naming that "A camera on helps me and our visual learners to make a connection. It demonstrates Being Present and is a clear indicator of our second Norm." I remain realistic with my students, an-

nouncing that I recognize everyone's situation may not be ideal to have a camera on, but as we move forward in the course I hope that at some point we will see you Be Present.

One of the best parts about establishing Norms is the opportunity to display skills related to my content in congruence with how we establish community. I utilize scholarly articles that discuss absenteeism, being fully present and engaged, and distracted learning in order to drive home how generations of students were able to engage with learning.

In intermittent interaction on Canvas, I encourage students to show how they are using the Norms on our discussion boards or through Padlets and Google documents. Students may use language on a discussion board related to our Norms, like: "I'm not afraid to be wrong but I believe..." or they may respond to a classmate with "I love how you are being yourself by stating..." These encouraged sentence-stems play a role for students who struggle to react to other students for fear of ridicule or retaliation. In addition, it creates dialogue between students who are not in a physical shared space together.

Digital Norms don't have to take on technology or be a complete redesign of what you would use in a physical classroom. They are developed as a bridge to your community space, not a barrier that exists between you and student learning. 📺

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.5 Student-Led Presentations

*Joanne Carruba, Art*

I use this assignment in both remote and hybrid courses. The idea is to enhance student engagement and participation in the course. I let my students self-select into groups, but placing them in groups would also work. I also have a discussion forum, “Class Conversations” for them to be able to discuss groups with each other. Canvas has a “Collaborations” feature, which is useful for these types of assignments.

#### Assignment

Your group, of no more than 4, will lead 30-45 minutes of one of our classroom meeting sessions. Please prepare an engaging and informative presentation based on the assigned reading for that day. Your group is also required to research and locate one scholarly article relevant to the topic you will present. Your presentation should include a discussion of how the author of that article illuminates, reinforces, contradicts, or proposes something new about the content in our textbook.

It is important to lay out the rubric, the overall instructions, and the details of the assignment for students in addition to the explanation above. I also include a calendar with the topics for each class meeting. Here are my additional explanations:

#### Notes

- Only one group may present on each topic.
- Topics are assigned on a first come/first served basis.
- Your instructor will cover any topics left open.
- If problems in your group arise, let your instructor know ASAP.
- Unless major issues arise, each group member will receive the same grade for their group presentation assignment.

#### Requirements

- All members of the group must present an equal portion of your planned presentation.
- Your presentation must address all sections in the reading for the topic you choose.
- You cannot repeat an article another group has already covered.
- You must submit via email your presentation slideshow draft at least 24 hrs. prior to your presentation date. Your slideshow can be Power Point, Prezi, Google Slides, etc. You must submit directly to Canvas your final slideshow by 8 a.m. on the day you present.
- Your presentation slides must focus on the art of the culture(s) you’re discussing.
- Your presentation slides must include images from outside the textbook and proper captions for images you show. Use ARTSTOR.
- Your presentation slides must include a properly formatted reference slide.
- Your presentation must include references to the course textbook and the article you chose. Use the MiraCosta library databases.
- Your group’s presentation should take at least 30 but no more than 45 minutes total.
- Each group member should submit the final presentation, but only one group member needs to submit the draft via email.

My objective for this assignment is student engagement, which I find works beautifully.. I also encourage the students to use the MiraCosta library databases within the assignment for research. This helps students to learn how to use the library databases. I set this up on the first day of class with a class tour, a “meet and greet” portion of the Zoom session, and a tour of the library databases, discussing research strategies. Also, having them submit a draft the day before allows for them to work with me on any missing elements. I can point out any of the pieces the group is lacking and direct them



# A Collection of **gifts**



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## **Great Ideas For Teaching**

towards better scholarly articles. This also gives a chance to mediate any issues that may come up in the group.

Students thus far have tended to love this assignment and be very engaged in the assignment and the process. Examples of this play out in a stronger bond within the course and elevated student engagement. In a recent course, students commented that having to focus on one specific piece of the course and learn in-depth about that piece helped them to better understand the materials.

In GE courses, this assignment teaches students how to work in groups, present, and research, skills they will need in any field. This is adaptable to any field of study at MiraCosta, although you will notice in my PDF that it was designed for my Art Appreciation course at Southwestern. 🎁

Link to PDF: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sHI4colnbLLpm6xsHE86CjEP5pLOeZRn/view?usp=sharing>

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.6 The Online Discussion Two-Step

Lisa M. Lane, History

One of the most challenging things when teaching online is creating a meaningful discussion board. Here's the place we want students to converse or collaborate, where we expect them to participate. And yet, even when we work hard on creating that inspiring opening prompt, conversation can lag or turn into a long list of "I agree" replies.

Asynchronous discussion is a tricky thing, and I have been challenged by it for years. First, I like to make sure I know what my objectives are. Do I want students to do something together, or just post in response to my prompt? Do I want them to learn from each other? What's my goal? Perhaps I want them to get to know each other better, because they'll work together later. Or maybe I just want them to see each other's work.

I've learned that for discussion to be fruitful, it must be *necessary*. If conversation isn't justified, I should be doing something else instead, so I have to ask: what makes a discussion the *best* way to deal with this topic, question, or source? Yes, I could just ask every student to post something they learned from this week's lecture, and that may create some good reflection. But they could do the same with an assignment shared only with me; discussion isn't really needed. When students are creating some knowledge together, or when the discussion is guided so that it becomes meaningful, better things happen.

My trick has been to create a two-step discussion. My initial prompt asks them something designed to generate a gut response, such as "Who was right in the Civil War?" The first reply from students (and this can be a reply to my prompt or to another student's post) is due by Wednesday. Because my question is based on impression rather than knowledge from the reading, they can participate early on with their opinion. And don't we all just love giving our opinion?

Once they've taken that opportunity, it's my turn. I create a reply (to my own prompt) that summarizes their responses, always titled "Take discussion from here, please!" In that post, I pose questions that attach their initial responses to my learning goals, and I cite particular students, always in appreciation. For example:

*What a great first part of discussion! Looks like almost 90% of the class believes the North was right in the Civil War. Keisha brought up an important point, though, when she talks about why the South believed they were right. Enrique expanded on this by talking about slavery and how it was more complicated than just North vs South. So please reply to this post to continue the discussion by looking at the sources we read this week in light of their questions. Why did the South believe they were right, according to our sources? And in what sense was the North vs South divide made more complicated by opinions about slavery?*

My "Take discussion from here" post is always in a larger font, a different color, and bold, so that it stands out on the board. Students have till Sunday to reply before we move on to the next week.

The Discussion Board Two-Step helps deepen discussion. It avoids the problems caused by too much instructor participation, which can shut down student participation. It prevents the automatic "post once, reply twice" pattern that both instructors and students follow out of habit. And by posing an opinion question first, we get the emotions and biases out front, to be nuanced by the assigned readings and materials. Plus, students knowing they might be mentioned in the mid-week post encourages them to return to the Board for the second step.

In the classes where I use the technique, students tell me how much they enjoy the discussions, and that they really got to know their classmates while learning something. I certainly see greater depth in their papers. As the course progresses, students tend to engage more deeply to demonstrate their understanding to their colleagues as well as their instructor, creating a valuable discussion. 📖

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 20, Fall 2021

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### 20.7 Transferring Skills to Create Pathways

*Nadia Khan, Noncredit ESL*

#### Scenario

This project-based learning activity focuses on using students' backgrounds, knowledge, and skills to create pathways to employment or business in the U.S. Multiple mini-lessons scaffold the learning activity as students learn about skills required in the workplace, at school, and in daily life. They also learn how these skills can be transferred to use on the job or elsewhere. ESL learners display their skills and abilities and demonstrate how these skills can help them achieve their future goals related to settlement and work in the U.S. Students use their prior knowledge, build on it, and transfer this knowledge to their current context.

#### Planning and Brainstorming

First, the students took part in a self-assessment activity on skills they possess, then reflected on the skills in writing. Students then chose their strongest skills, searched the internet for images and names of tools required (if any), and planned ways of using these images to showcase their skills. Next, the students used a template that helped them organize their ideas around how they learned the skill, what tools they required, how this skill helped them in life, and how it was related to their future goals (e.g. to gain employment or to start their own initiatives).

#### Showcasing Skills

As the final piece to this project, using marketplace-style demonstrations, students showcased the skill as they shared information about it and explained how they would transfer this skill to their current context and possibly use it to achieve their employment/work-related goal. Students had the op-

tion of choosing how they wanted to present their skills: orally, through posters, physical demonstrations, videos or simple PowerPoint presentations. Students were encouraged to use information from the template that they had used earlier. Skills displayed by the students were as follows: *cooking, gardening, braiding, using American Sign, fixing leaking pipes, changing brake pads of a car, embroidering, crocheting, and applying makeup and nail art.*



*Students showcased the skill as they shared information about it.*

#### Outcome

This project-based experience allowed the students to connect the learning in the classroom to the real world, as students used prior learning, transferred that learning to the present, and built on it to meet their current needs. Students were able to view the skills that they brought with them from their home countries as valuable. Furthermore, they were able to see how these skills could be applied to their lives in the US. 📺