

Teaching with Zines

Advice and ideas
about using zines
in the classroom
from your friendly
neighborhood zine
librarians



Introduction

Welcome to the Teaching With Zines zine! We put this together because, as zine librarians, we often ourselves teach with zines, or help others do so. Zines can be a powerful part of learning, whether you are teaching about zines themselves, using zines to explore how specific communities share their stories, or using zines for students to showcase what they have learned about a topic. Based on our experiences teaching with zines (and indirectly supporting others who teach with zines), we wanted to share some best practices, discuss ways to develop activities and do meaningful assessment, highlight student experiences, and share resources. (Hey, we are librarians.)

To be honest, we are writing this zine in part because we have seen how zines in classrooms can go bad. Because zines are often so personal, there are great opportunities to connect with students more personally...but that also means that, done carelessly, there's potential to hurt students, too. (This zine takes inspiration from "Let's Talk About: Zines in the Classroom -- Pros and Cons by Liz Mayorga", available from the POC Zine Project at <http://poczineproject.tumblr.com/post/53116350336/lets-talk-about-zines-in-the-classroompros-and->.)

Teaching with zines is taking a risk -- even if just a small one -- so this zine invites you to consider how to do this thoughtfully, to get the most out of it for your students and yourself, and to minimize the potential to do harm. The following are suggestions based on our own experiences, but they hardly encompass the total potential of teaching with zines. We hope, instead, that it can serve as inspiration and guidance as you figure out how zines fit into your own teaching.

XO,
A bunch of zine librarians
(Namely: Kathleen Aragon, Deanie Adams, Jolie Braun, Emma Fernhout, Juli Huddleston, Kelly McElroy, André Wenzel, and Kelly Wooten)

This zine was written collaboratively & designed/published in June 2018, Durham, NC. Updated February 2022.

Further reading

"Educating with Zines" by Lindsay Gibb

This article highlights some important considerations for educators when creating assignments, devising activities, and grading student-produced zines.

<https://brokenpencil.com/news/educating-with-zines/>

"The Zine Project: Innovation or Oxymoron?" by Tobi Jacobi

This article discusses a zine project for undergraduates intended to explore ideas about literacy and promote community engagement. Jacobi's ethical questions about using a radical medium like zines in a classroom setting will be useful to anyone teaching with zines.

<http://www.english2point0.ca/engl1130/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/30047164.pdf>

"Engaging the Othered: Using Zines to Support Student Identities," by Chelsea Londale

A composition instructor reflects on using zines as an outlet for students to explore their identities and interests.

<https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2066>



Other resources

Barnard College Zine Library's Librarian Discourse

These two bibliographies on zine librarianship and zines in academia have lots of excellent suggestions from both academic and popular sources. Site includes direct links to the articles when possible.

<https://zines.barnard.edu/librarydiscourse>

The Book of Zines: Readings from the Fringe by Chip Rowe

The online counterpart to this classic book has tons to read, including zine history, articles and essays, interviews with zinesters, and how-tos.

<http://www.zinebook.com>

Zine Librarian Code of Ethics

<http://zinelibraries.info/code-of-ethics/>

Created by a group of zine makers and librarians, this set of suggested guidelines for acquiring, managing, preserving, and providing access to zines in a library setting is an essential resource.

Zine Librarians Email Listserv

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/zinelibrarians/>

A relatively low-traffic email list, where folks post questions and updates about all things related to zine libraries of any and all kinds. Supportive whether you're new to zine librarianship or have been doing it for ages.

Zine Wiki

Like the name suggests, Zine Wiki is an "open-source encyclopedia devoted to zines and independent media." In addition to entries on specific zines and creators, it includes lists of distros, zine events, and libraries.

<http://www.zinewiki.com>



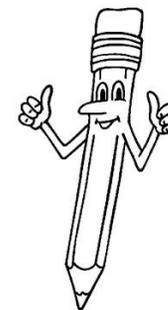
Best Practices, aka Do's and Don'ts

Do Provide choice within a specific topic. While the instructor may have a general theme or learning outcomes in mind, students should have choice in the particular topic. This could fit especially well with learning outcomes related to how to conduct inquiry/research, because the processes of that research would be what is actually being assessed, though you could do it for something more specific, too -- basically be thoughtful about the learning outcomes you're tying to a student making a zine.

Do Show examples of various formats and types of zines to provide inspiration to learners. Some zines have a lot of illustration, but you totally don't have to know how to draw to make a zine. Also show various skill levels or production qualities— you don't need to be a professional artist, designer, writer, etc. to make a great zine.



Do Encourage collaboration and sharing. Creators can meet with others to see what they're working on and have time built in for sharing throughout the process as well as after. Part of this culture is about sharing freely to the degree the creator desires.

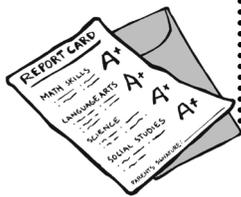


Do Integrate zines with other resources. People often don't think of zines on the same level as other texts. Use them side by side. This is especially important in regards to #ownvoices* content.

*The #ownvoices hashtag was created by Corinne Duyvis in 2015 "to recommend kidlit about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group" and continues to be used to share all types of writing by and about people with marginalized identities: www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/

Don't

Grade zines. If you *need* to assign a grade, work with learners to develop a set of standards that everyone agrees to meet, incorporate their own self-assessment of their work, or ask them to do a write-up about their process which can then be graded. Basically, you don't want to be in the position of attributing value to someone's personal story—yuck!



Don't

Use rigid definitions I saw an assignment once where the professor said that all zines had a review. Uh, what???? The idiosyncrasy of zines is part of what makes them so wonderful. It can be hard to roll with the ambiguity, but it is more helpful to talk about trends/frequency than really firm boundaries. Because someone will 100% break your definition with their awesome zine.

Don't

Attribute zine culture to a specific subculture. Zines and similar self-publications don't belong to any one group of people or geographical location.



Don't

Reify zines This can happen if you lionize a specific zine, or talk about how much something could sell for on ebay or whatever. Yes, it is rad that your library has zines that Kathleen Hanna made, but they're still just zines (even if they're awesome ones)! A zine made by a famous person isn't better than one made by someone not famous.

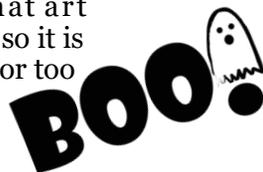


Don't

Allow students to not make copies. If they just turn in the one original copy to you, in some ways it isn't a zine. Don't force learners to share copies if they don't want, but at least talk about distribution. The project shouldn't END with turning in a single copy to the instructor—it's also about what happens after that original is created.

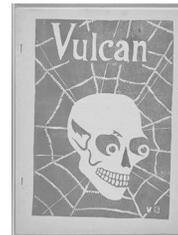
Don't

Intimidate people. Remember that art projects and new media can be scary, so it is important not to come off as too cool or too artistic or too whatever.



Digital Collections

While we recommend having plenty of hard copies of zines to share with students, older ones can be hard to obtain, and for some projects, it may be helpful to have access to other kinds of zines than what you have on hand. With that in mind, here's a few digital collections to check out.



Hevelin Collection of Fanzines

The University of Iowa's digitization project features science fiction, fantasy, and horror fanzines.

<http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/search/mode/all/?searchterm=hevelin>

POC Zine Project

Although it hasn't been updated recently, the POC Zine Project's website is an essential resource for zines by people of color. Includes digitized zines, interviews with zinesters, and white ally FAQ, and scene reports.

poczineproject.tumblr.com



Queer Zine Archive Project

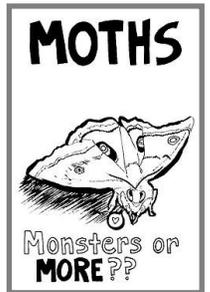
Founded in 2003 to document and preserve the history of queer zines, QZAP's site provides access to hundreds of digitized zines.

<http://archive.qzap.org/index.php>

Small Science Collective

Science zines created by a collective of artists, students, and scientists that can be read online, downloaded, and printed.

<http://asyang.wixsite.com/small-science>



Solidarity! Revolutionary Center and Radical Library Zine Collection

A digital collection that includes hundreds of zines on gender, race, anarchism, environmentalism, activism, social justice, and more.

<https://archive.org/details/solidarityrevolutionarycenter>



Teaching with Zines

Here are a few lesson plans and ideas for teaching with zines, in addition to resources mentioned throughout.

Barnard College Zine Library's "Teaching with Zines"

Three lesson plans aimed at middle school to college students that explore zines as a medium for marginalized voices and activism. This page also includes suggested readings and resources.

<https://zines.barnard.edu/teachingwithzines>

"DIY Publications and Media Literacy: Zines in the Classroom," by Jenna Freedman

PowerPoint presentation that provides lesson plan ideas for using zines to teach media literacy to a variety of groups, including elementary school students, ESL high school students, and undergraduates.

<https://zines.barnard.edu/sites/default/files/inline/zinesinclassroom.pptx>

Teaching Info Literacy with Zines, Kelly McElroy

This zine includes ideas for using zines to discuss authority, copyright, and free speech with students.

<http://zinelibraries.info/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Teaching-Info-Lit-with-Zines.pdf>

"Zines in the Classroom: Critical Librarianship and Participatory Collections," by Robin Potter and Alycia Sellie, from *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook*

Lesson plan focused on encouraging students to examine and discuss zines, designed as a one-shot for undergraduate classes but flexible enough to be adapted for other audiences. Includes appendix of resources for starting and building a zine library.

https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1274&context=gc_pubs

"Engaging Participatory Literacy through Science Zines," by Andrew Yang

Article by one of the founders of the Small Science zine collective discusses the benefits of using a zine-making assignment to promote science literacy among students of all ages.

<https://nabt.org/files/galleries/Nov2010ABTOn-0001.pdf>

I can't wait to start using zines in the classroom—these tips are going to make this amazing!

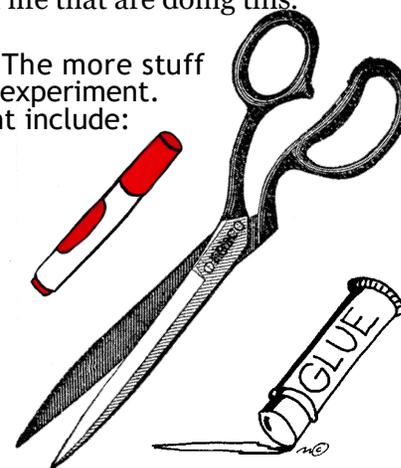


DO: Discuss history of zines. And furthermore discuss whose voices have access to mainstream publishing and the context surrounding this.

DO: **HAVE FUN!!!** Show that zine-making is fun and can be silly. If you have any sort of community in your area that make/exchange zines highlight that or show other examples of people in real life that are doing this.

DO: Bring lots of fun materials. The more stuff there is, the more folks can experiment. Your workshop supplies might include:

- ★ Old magazines
- ★ Clipart
- ★ Variety of pens, crayons
- ★ Glue sticks
- ★ Scissors
- ★ Plain copy paper
- ★ Fun patterned paper
- ★ Washi tape
- ★ Stickers
- ★ Rubber stamps



DO: Identify what needs to be assessed from your learning outcomes. Find places outside of the zine itself to make those assessments/scores (i.e. are you teaching a process of how to research? Use the documentation leading up to the production of the zine to actually mark.)

Student focus

Zines make projects and papers more interesting and fun to create- and more satisfying, a thick and attractive object to hold, rather than a stack of paper. Ask your professor or teacher if you might make your paper or project in the form of a zine; often they are happy to let you invest more effort into the project, as long as the content fits the standard. Especially in a class dealing with visuals, literature, websites, capstones, or other forms of media, zines are a happy alternative.

Because of this, it can help to write the content first, and then, if you have time, make a zine from your work. Have a conversation with your teacher about what, visually, is acceptable. Since many have preferences in terms of style (MLA? ALA? Chicago?), font and type size, line spacing, and page count, they may offer some parameters. Even if they do not, it is helpful to include standard information in the standard format (such as the standard five line header including name, date, class, etc) on the back pages.

Do not procrastinate! Finishing a zine the night before is not as easy as finishing a paper... cutting gets messy, binding becomes more hurried. Always plan ahead and do not hesitate to turn in your regular paper if you cannot finish. Your grade matters.

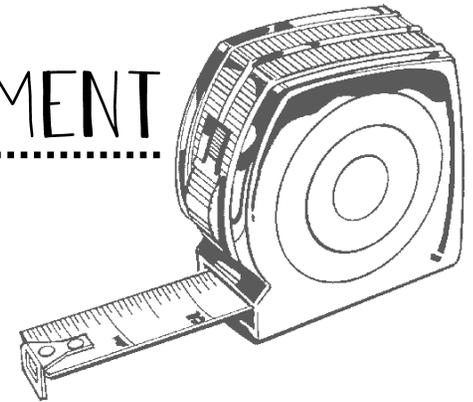
The good news? A zine could look like anything. A zine could be a booklet version of a usual essay. It could be a comic. An art booklet. A combination of words and cut and pasted illustrations. Words on a graph paper background... any way you like- as long as your teacher approves.

So decide which size you would like your zine- the size of half a page? A fourth? Experiment with folding a piece of paper to decide, and then determine the number of pages your zine will require.

Once you're ready, sometimes the easiest way to begin is to print your written project in columns, cut out the words, and paste them into a master copy in any way that you prefer. It is recommended to leave a ¼-inch margin to accommodate copying. It is also recommended to leave your master copy whole; that is, do not cut any edges unless it is a copied version of your master.

Make a copy and bind by staple, needle and thread, or twine. Schools and universities often have free copying and printing options, so take advantage of any opportunity.

AND ASSESSMENT



You may also ask students to help you develop the rubric by brainstorming the characteristics of excellent and unacceptable projects. This process also serves as a formative assessment -- if there is an important element that students leave out, you have a chance to address that with the class. Take the lists that they come up with and provide a draft rubric including how you plan to weight the categories or elements. There may be characteristics that require a shared definition: for example, students may state that zines should clearly have taken a lot of time to make. What does that *look* like?

Another approach is to ask students to write a **final reflection** about their zine and their process making it. This provides an opportunity for students to explain the choices they made and walk through what they learned. It also gives you a more traditional output to grade, allowing the zine to just be a zine.

Also consider that printing a zine can be expensive, especially if it is in color. Are you able to provide a low-cost place for students to print the final zine? For the same reason, avoid requiring a color copy of the zine, which may be cost-prohibitive to folks.



MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Be sure that you are not grading the zine based on personal ideas of what a zine “should” look like. Remember that zines are personal, not only the content, but also the design choices a student makes. A “cut ‘n’ paste” zine is not better or worse than a glossy, polished zine (and vice versa).

You might **consider NOT grading** the final zine, but rather grading the disparate parts. Are there pieces of the project turned in along the way that count towards assessment (e.g.,: research piece of assignment that gets scored, outline that gets scored)? Break into chunks and grade those components. While there may really be a need to assure (and count for) the fact that the student did in fact complete a final zine, then account for completion of final product accounted for.

Consider setting up “**zine neutral**” parameters for students to follow that allow for flexibility in design and layout decisions. Suggested parameters to include in a grading rubric:

- ★ Creating a physical zine (not a digital object)
- ★ Page size (half sheet, 8 page mini-zine, etc)
- ★ Minimum number of pages
- ★ Includes both text and images
- ★ Includes works-cited list; image sources noted in citations or otherwise given credit
- ★ Make a copy for classmates to view (or to trade!)

These parameters remove any judgement on style choice. You can also work with learners to come up with this list together.

Different kinds of learners

Because the subject material found in zines is so broad, you can find an application with almost any learning group! From young kids, to community organizations, college students, older folks--the sky's the limit! Zines should be an empowering medium for everyone, and the way we approach our teaching will positively or negatively affect the experience learners might have.

Here are a few general guidelines for thinking about how to use zines with different groups of learners.:

- ★ Trust that learners of all ages can make a zine, regardless of skills or expertise.
- ★ Remember that most students will be unfamiliar with the concept of a zine.
 - ⇒ One possible starting point is to have students work together to understand this medium and collaboratively create their own definition, ideally by having them look at lots of zines.
- ★ Allow but don't require personal stories (zines can be as personal or as impersonal you want).
- ★ Don't assume specific students should tell specific kinds of stories (e.g. NO: “Tell me about your experiences as a native Hawaiian.” YES: “In this class we're studying colonialism in the Pacific. Your zine will address a topic related to our syllabus.”)
- ★ Recognize your privilege as an educator (race/gender/cultural differences, as well as the authority that comes with teaching).
 - ⇒ There's lots out there to help you think about this topic! We recommend starting with articles by Tobi Jacobi and Lindsay Gibb. (details in the “Further Reading” section)
- ★ Be strategic about the zines you share with students. Certain zines will work better with some groups than others, so consider what's appropriate in terms of language and literacy skills, subject matter, and what you want to accomplish.
- ★ Provide context about the history of zines when relevant.
 - ⇒ Depending on the situation, talking about or creating an activity around the history of this medium, or of a specific genre (such as queercore or riot grrrl), can be helpful.



Creating Meaningful Activities

Zines are a creative outlet for people from all walks of life to share their stories and/or interests with the people they interact with. Even the booklet layout and artwork within can reveal something otherwise unknown about the individual(s) behind the project, making the medium extremely personal.

Teaching with zines can open up a whole new arena in allowing students to express themselves as they wish, letting the product of their efforts act as a conversation piece about their adventures in learning or self-expression. Zines in the classroom may also increase consideration among students, as the zine artist might try to make their materials relatable, or more appropriate, for the specific setting.

Here are a few ideas for ways to teach with zines with different groups:

K-8

Asking students to create their own zines can be an effective way of encouraging research, writing, and artistic skills. (This kind of assignment can work for many different subjects, from social studies to English to science!) Roi Kawai and Jennifer Cody used zines to teach civic engagement by having students research and write a zine on a public issue as well as get involved in a local organization or event.

“Civic Zines: Writing, Discussing, and Doing Citizenship,”
Roi Kawai and Jennifer Cody
https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/yl_280222.pdf

High School

Zines can be used to help students develop research and writing skills. Biography and history zine assignments work well; Glenn Chance asked his students to create zines about African American history during Black History Month. Analyzing zines also can help students strengthen their information and media literacy skills; Rebekah Buchanan had her students compare magazines and zines.

“Using Zines to Promote Black History and Identity Work in the ELA Classroom,” Glenn Chance
<https://theartofforgetting.com/2017/06/29/teacher-innovation-6-using-zines-to-promote-black-history-identity-work-in-the-ela-classroom/>

“Zines in the Classroom: Reading Culture,”
Rebekah Buchanan
<https://rebekahjbuchanan.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/buchanan-zines-in-the-classroom-english-journal.pdf>

College

Zines can be used to help students learn about activism, social movements, and marginalized voices. Rosemary Clark Parsons had students study zines of protest and then collaboratively make their own. Whether asking students to examine zines or create them, the medium can be useful for teaching writing as well. In her composition class, Monica Peck used zines to explore rhetorical strategies. Zines can also serve as an accessible way to discuss issues surrounding copyright and plagiarism. In an archives or special collections setting, students can discover zines as primary source materials that have research value.

“Media, Activism, Social Movements: Teaching with Zines,” Rosemary Clark Parsons
<http://www.clark-parsons.com/blog/media-activism-and-social-movements-teaching-with-zines>

“Developing Instructional Writing with the ‘How-To’ Zine,” Monica Peck
<http://www.sjsu.edu/aanapisi/docs/peckhowtozine.pdf>

Primary Sources

View zines alongside other historical documents, such as journals, correspondence, scrapbooks, organizational newsletters, etc. Have students compare and contrast the two documents, and ask themselves: Who is the creator, who is the intended audience, why did the creator choose this medium? How does this item contribute to our understanding of a moment in history?

“Zines as Primary Sources” by Kelly Wooten
<https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/13350>

