

Zines
&
English Comp.
sort of
A[✓] Love Story?



Heads up* I wanna do ALL these things, but I also have a limited amount of time, so if I don't get to it all, it's not because I forgot, I'm working on it, will continue to work on it...



DEAR READER,

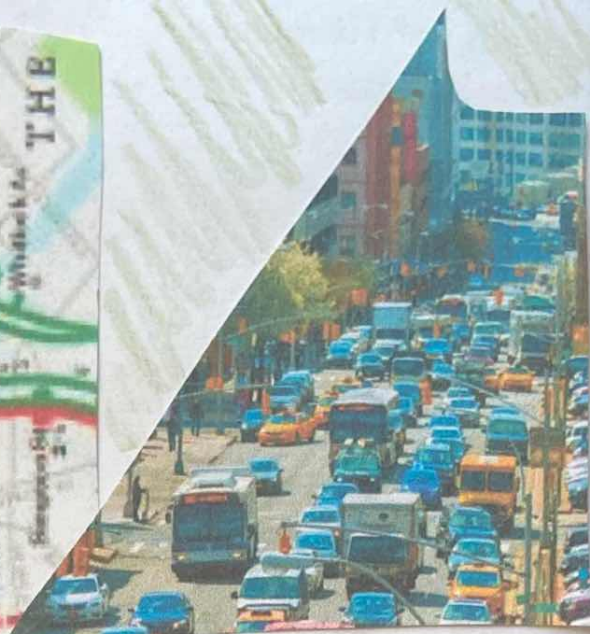
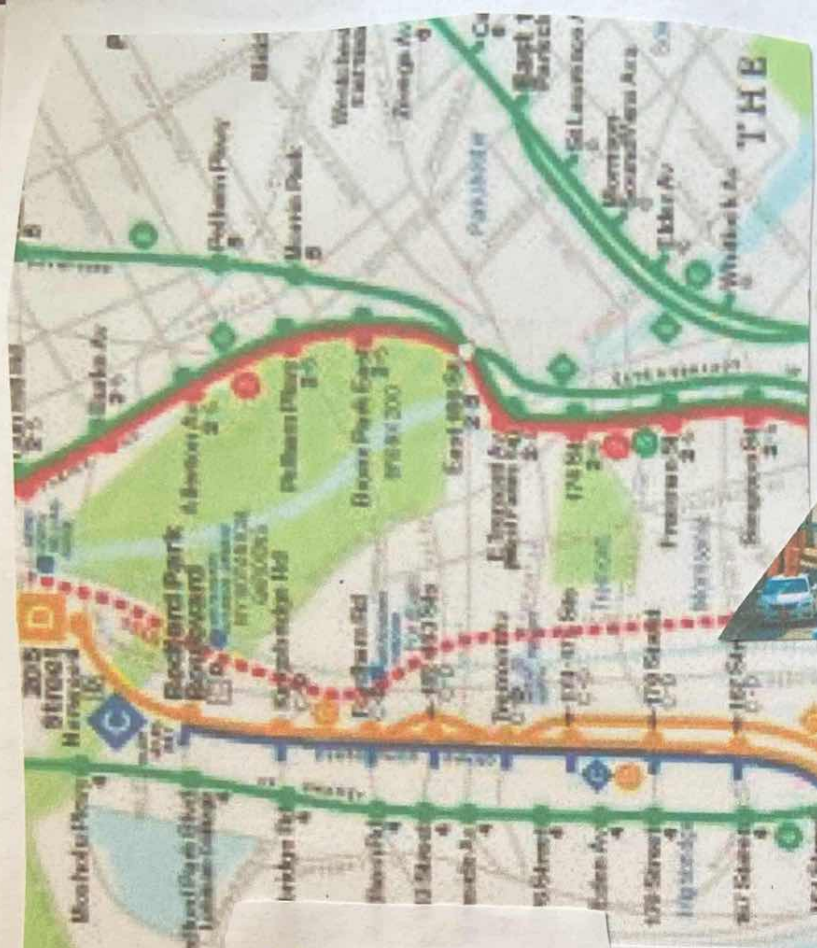
THIS ZINE IS FOR YOU AND FOR ME. I WANTED A SPACE TO THINK ABOUT THE WAY ZINE-MAKING CAN TEACH ME ABOUT WRITING, WRITING PROCESS, AND WRITING INSTRUCTION.

I ALSO WANTED TO SHARE THE RESULTS (THAT ARE STILL IN PROCESS SO SUBJECT TO CHANGE) OF DESIGNING/IMPLEMENTING A ZINE PROJECT IN AN ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASSROOM. SPOILER ALERT: IT'S MESSY!

THE QUESTIONS THAT GUIDE THE DESIGN AND CONTENT IN THIS ZINE:

- 1. CAN THE "BURSTS" OF EMOTIONS REQUIRED IN ZINE-MAKING HELP GUIDE LARGER CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE "SITUATEDNESS" OF WRITING PRACTICES?**
- 2. CAN THE PRACTICE OF COLLAGING ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE WAYS OF COMMUNICATING + BEING?**
- 3. DO ZINES CARE MORE ABOUT BUILDING A COMMUNITY?**
- 4. HOW CAN ZINE-MAKING OFFER NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT IMPORTANT TERMS LIKE: REVISION, COLLABORATION, LITERACY, ORGANIZATION?**





Context

Part I. Why I like zines.

Some people roll their eyes when I explain my interest in zines. I get it. It sounds super self-involved. I like zines because I feel free to express myself using an aesthetic that might be ugly to a Vogue editor. I like zines because it's a tactile process that involves cutting, gluing, photocopying, and then distributing from my hands to someone else's. It's a pretty self-satisfying interest. But one that I'm okay with because as Amy Wan describes "Zines are a perfect example of an information source that was not created by a corporate conglomerate (unlike almost all news from mainstream television and newspapers).... Their mere existence disrupts the monotone drone of mainstream media; they say something different and their agendas are self-imposed, rather than dictated by advertisers or corporate owners"

②

Part II. Zines and teaching.

I usually teach writing by assigning students to write about/within places, people, science, history, and data. These pieces of writing usually end up on a

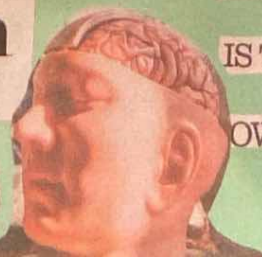
class blog or some other public-facing digital platform. It has been a great way to think about writing communities. But in the Fall of 2019, I started learning about literacy, citizenship, and discourse communities at the Graduate Center. So I decided I wanted to practice other ways of creating, composing, writing, and publishing that considered some of the challenging questions brought up in class like: What possibilities come from decentering *writing in one language* as the standard literacy practice? Also, what possibilities come from thinking about + engaging with writing practices that involve text, visuals, and collaging? And yes, why do we say we want students to write for someone other than the instructor but then grade these pieces of writing based on our responses, our connection to the writing, etc.?

I figured zines would be a cool way to try to answer some of these questions. So for the Spring 2020 semester, I designed a "group zine" project for English Composition students.

STUDENT COLLAGE



a
fresh
start



ARGUING THAT COMING
TO TERMS WITH
WHAT YOU FEAR MOST
ABOUT YOURSELF
IS THE ONLY WAY
TOWARD FREEDOM

During the first week of the semester, I asked students to read through zines and summarize the content and style. I made vague mention of a group zine project they'd have to complete, wanting the

project to hover over most of our class discussions but not wanting it to completely take over.

In my mind, zine-ing involves three practices:

1. Conveying an idea through text, images, or sound & understanding that these ideas are connected to the world we live in. So, every class (for the most part), I asked students to bring in a word, a sentence, or a picture that represented their reaction to that day's assigned readings.
2. Collaging. Assembling a narrative through different pieces of text, images, conversations, etc. I asked students to collage in class about five times. Every collaging activity was focused on answering a particular question like: "Who are you?" or "What is higher education" or "Who is the person I just interviewed?"
3. What bin would you want your zine in? I wanted students to think about zine-ing as a focused, deliberate, and organized endeavor, that yes, sometimes ended up seeming unfocused, reckless, and chaotic. So, I "themed" the first half of our semester. All of our readings related to higher education, #FreeCUNY, and Open Admissions. I also required their group zines fit into the theme of

higher education. My hope is that by providing a very loose framing for the zine project students could create comfortably within that deliberate/reckless continuum.

SUPPORT THE 5 DEMANDS

An Open Admissions Program for a Democratic University

CUNY Coalition for Open Admissions

1. Defend and Extend Open Admissions
2. Stop the Plans to Stratify CUNY by Race and Class
3. Full Academic Support for Incoming Students
4. Full Financial Support for Full and Part Time Students
5. Full Support for Public Assistance Recipients
6. More Full-Time Quality Instruction
7. Democratic Election of CUNY Trustees
8. Appropriate Assessment of CUNY Students
9. Improve Public School Education
10. Celebrate Open Admissions: April 22nd Will be Open Admissions Day

Play

Part IV. Writing and Zines.

Why do you write? I write to play. As in play around with what it is I'm trying to share with my reader. Play around with how I can say the same thing in different ways. I also write because I so desperately want to connect with someone other than myself. And yet, sometimes I also write because I want to hide. So I write hoping no one will see who I really am and what it is I am trying to say. Audre Lorde wrote, "When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent we are still afraid, so it is better to speak..."

Zines then give me a way to

1. Make something that creates connections between me and someone else,
2. hide if I need to,
3. scream if I want to,
4. confront someone/something, maybe even *break* a connection.

Messy Boots

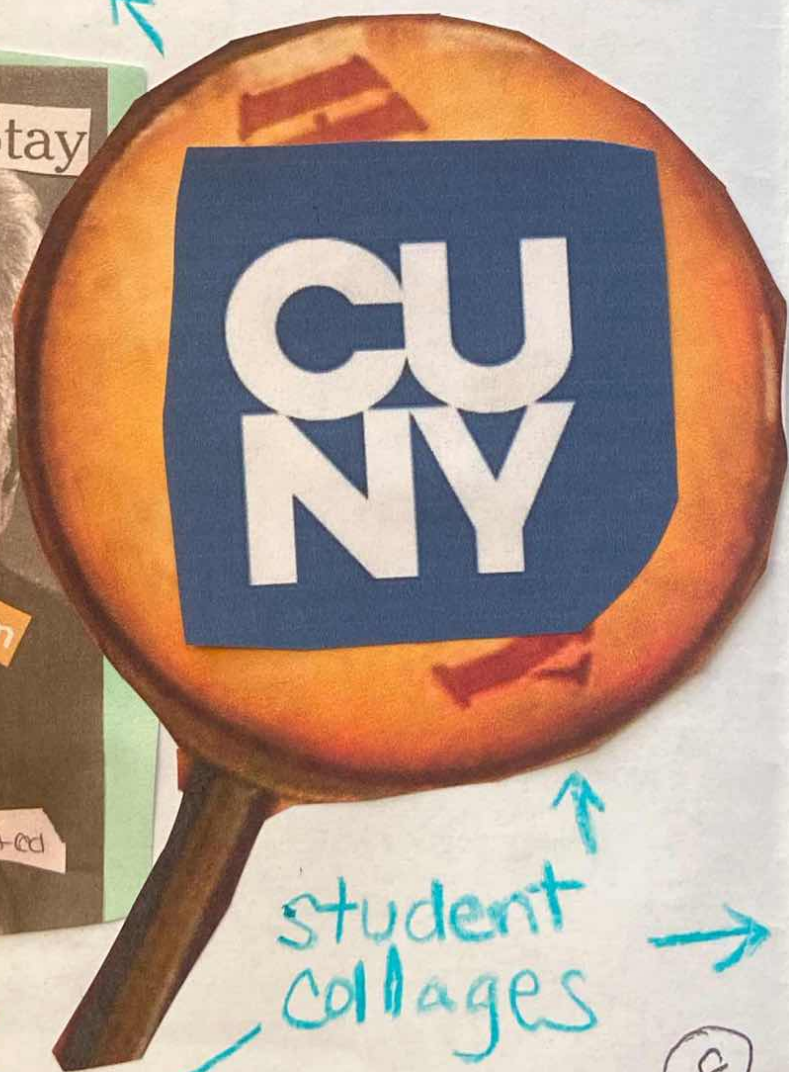
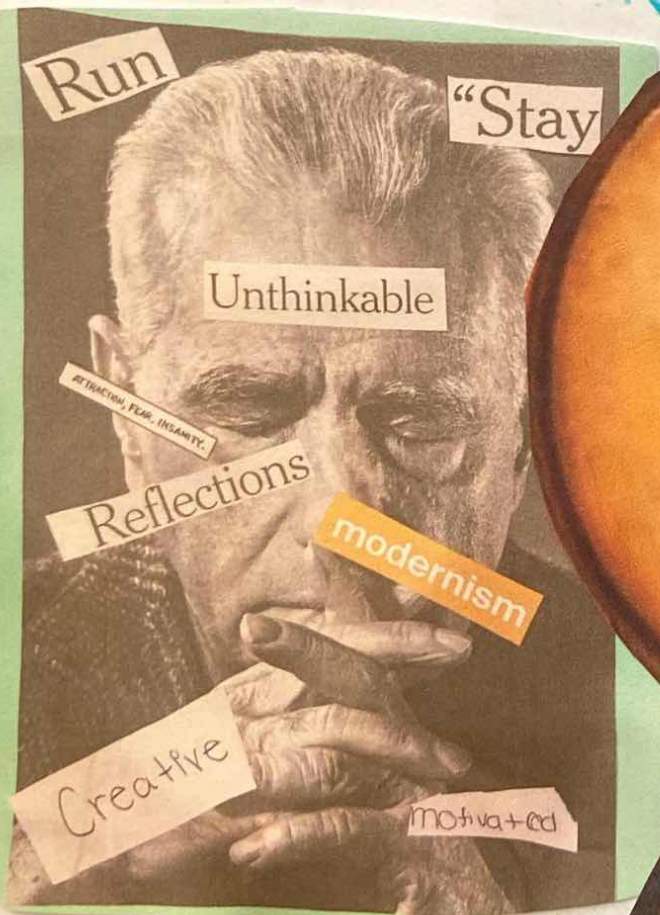
Leonard interviews over twenty migrants in *Writing on the Move*. Several of the interviewees describe the way they navigate between different languages as “a total mess.” Leonard reflects on their use of the term by writing, “While some might assume that messy writing is the result of struggle...quite the opposite: their messy communication signals clarity in their own thinking and close communicative bonds with others” (35). So BOOM! Zine-making is like writing because both are messy! Both involve strange thinking, filtering ideas through different languages, mixing together, and multiplicity.

I want to suggest zine-making is a more concrete way of acknowledging the multiplicity of language and identity.

Take for example, a collage a group of students made in response to the question: “What is higher education?” Within their collages are images of boxers, a woman mid-tennis match, musicians, a tourist in front of a construction in progress, a glass building, Trump, and students with protest signs resisting new tuition hikes. This collage embodies the multiple ways higher education intersects with students’ lives. And yet, note the large handwritten text in the center of their collage that reads, “FUNDING?” Though each of these images represent a separate relationship to higher education, they all are embedded within a larger question of how the university is funded.



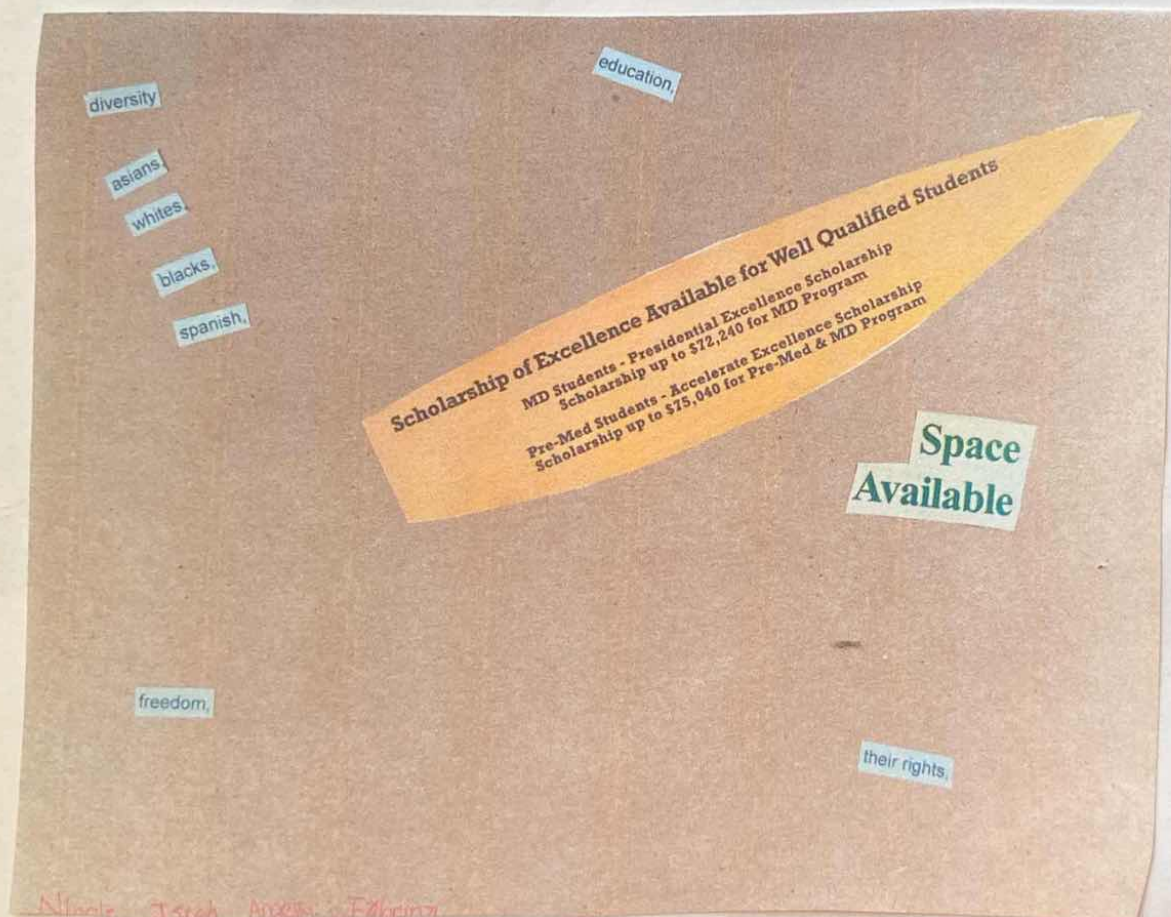
FUNDING



student collages

Take another example responding to the same question. These students chose to use text almost exclusively. Under diversity, we find Asians, whites, blacks, Spanish. Far from these terms, we see education floating on its own, and freedom at the bottom. Most interesting to me is the Scholarship of Excellence ad at the center of the collage, with "Space Available" below. In fact, these students did share this collage with the apology, "It's confusing." Sure, a single interpretation of this collage is impossible. But that's not because it's "confusing." It's because the collage is messy and invites readers to interpret higher education in multiple ways.

Writing is a messy process that involves messy results. Zines are the same, except maybe better since with zines "messiness" is seen as productive and dare I say, necessary!



Collaborative

In English 121, I [always] want us to consider how writing + composing ^{is} collaborative. Not collaborative as in, you write it, I read it, maybe we'll talk about it. Collaborative as in you think about an idea, write about it to learn more, share your thoughts and writing with someone, they offer their perspective, you take it into consideration and continue writing, sometimes incorporating what that someone has offered, other times incorporating what you've read/seen, then you share some type of completed product with someone, they offer their interpretation, questions, etc. and the process continues. In other words, writing practices are simultaneous, on-going, and never happen in isolation.



BAILE DE BOMBA

PUERTO RICO



PUERTO RICO

BOMBA DANCE

BREAKING THE SYSTEM




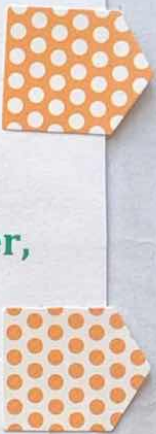
**WRITING IS ONE
OF THE WAYS
I PARTICIPATE IN
TRANSFORMATION.**

-TONI CADE BAMBARA

TAKES CARE



While collaging, collaboration looked like:

1. I posed a question and asked students to collage a response.
 2. Students talked to each other in pairs about their initial reactions.
 3. Students asked me to clarify if I was looking for anything in particular.
 4. I confirmed that it was meant to be as open-ended as it might've felt.
 5. Students then collected images and words separately
 6. Students shared their images with one another, defending their choices, explaining what it suggests.
 7. Students then assembled images/words on a piece of paper.
 8. Students moved the assembled pieces around until it contained their response.
 9. Students glued everything to the piece of paper.
 10. Students observed the completed product and shared their impressions.
 11. Sometimes students added handwritten words.
 12. We studied completed collages and offered our interpretations.
- 
- 



And the beat goes on.

Community

Riot Grrl, to me, is the OG collective that started the zine, punk-rock, feminist zine movement. Though technically zines were around since the 20's, Riot Grrl's zine manifesto really encapsulates the importance of community in writing:

"BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings"

Zine-making activates the kind of community-building I think of when I say to a class, "Write for a community beyond this classroom." Mathieu reminds me that the public turn in Composition studies "asks teachers to connect the writing that students and they themselves do with 'real world' texts, events, or exigencies." **Zines are material pieces that will be distributed to the community it is meant for. Community, then, feels less abstract and more immediate. Of course, with this more concrete notion of community comes undoing traditional conceptions of community. Whereas in the**

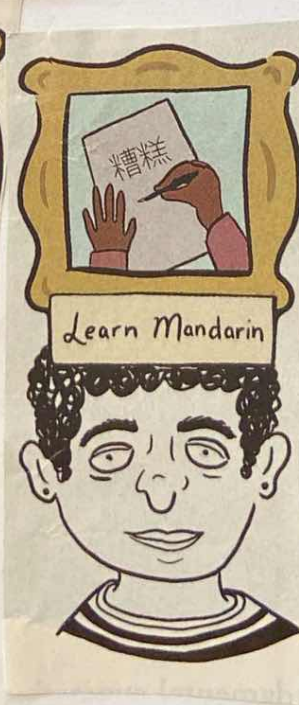


Reality

abstract we might think of communities as “people who study the brain,” or “teachers preparing for exams,” Zines make room for communities like, “people I see at my local grocery store,” or “elderly women I meet at the gurdwara.”

When thinking about who a zine is for, communities don't have to be made up of *one kind of group*; rather, zines can connect different people, different groups while still maintaining intimacy.

Take for example, a student's collage that responds to the question, “Who are you?” His collage, if part of a larger zine about identity and higher education, would *create* a community of its own. A community of college students, faculty, middle-schoolers, mindfulness scholars, etc.



ANSWER

graduate

trust



EXPANDING BEYOND

explore

100%



The future.

falling
doesn't
equal
failure!

You will
evolve

You have the ability to get your hands in everything. The school teaches you to find your own voice and your own identity as an artist. It's your fingerprint whether you take

BACK

Revision

Part of the writing process involves revision. However, often, due to time constraints, revision feels like a 15-minute period of prescriptive checks. "Did I do what the instructor told me to do?" "Did I make sure to get rid of any fragments?" While this kind of "check-up" is useful, in English 121, I want to think about revision as a holistic thing that happens throughout the composition process. The process I described under "Collaboration" illustrates the way zine-making makes room for rethinking + revising.

But stuff's glued on! So in a very real way revision *has to involve* more than just copy-edits. It involves redoing certain pages, strategizing how to make what's already glued on work more effectively (since you've revised your argument or tone or perception).

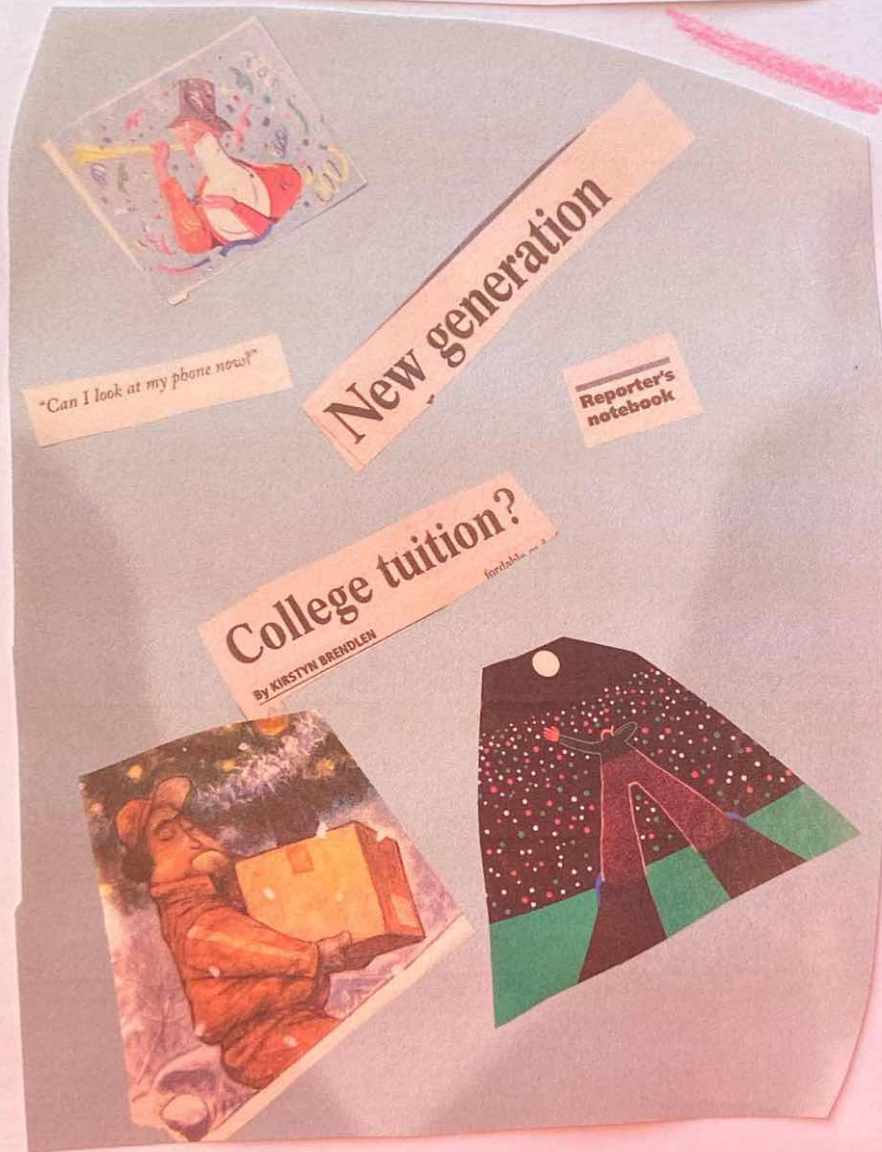
OR, if you decide not to alter pages that are already glued on, zines can become a "witness" of the revision in your ideas/thoughts. And you can easily attach a note at the end explaining why showcasing this evolution is so important.

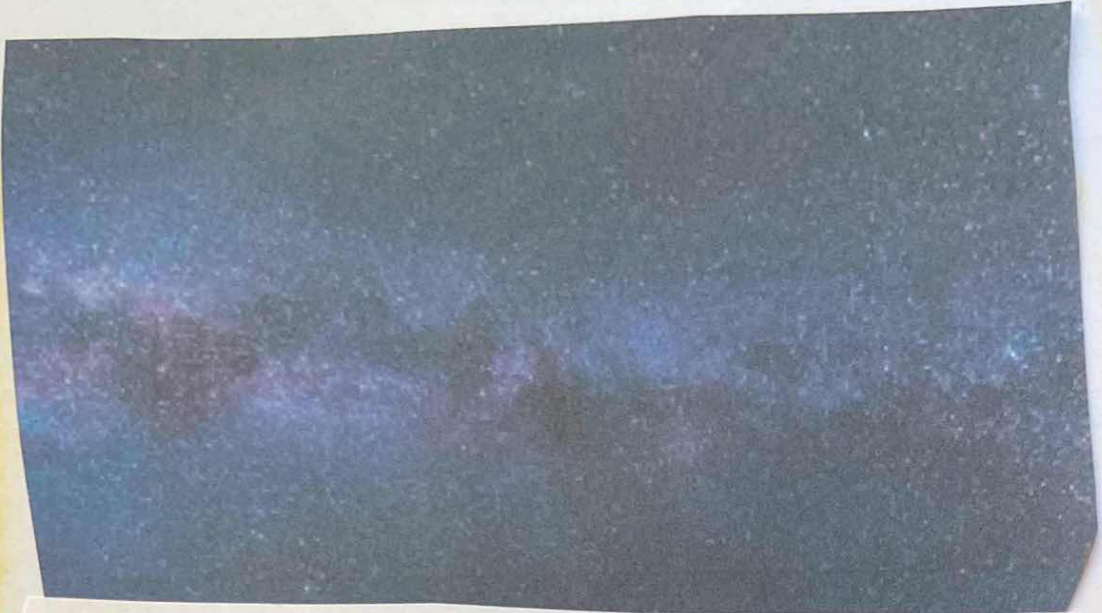


Dope

+ Last semester, 17/25 students completed required mini-writing assignments. This semester, 21/22 students have completed collages, image responses, and text responses.

+This collage.





+I was prepared for students to resist the arts and crafts element of zines, but for the most part, I met no such resistance!

+Zine-ing is a *great way* to talk primary sources. I had such a great time looking through CUNY's Digital Archive and locating pamphlets (very close to zines) made and distributed by Black and Puerto Rican Student Activists.

+I know we all have feelings about making the classroom a space for activism, but I don't see a way to talk about writing without thinking about transformation. Zines felt like an easier way to make a connection between activism, transformation, and writing.

+Once group zines are completed, I'm hoping we'll be able to distribute them to the specific communities they've selected since most communities are local, accessible.

Fail

- + Collaging takes *so much time*. By the time students found their images, text, talked through their ideas, we were already at minute 20. I've learned that a more efficient strategy might be to have students bring in images ahead of time or think about having students create digital collages (less cutting and gluing)
- + This might paint me as a complete amateur, but I only assigned students to read zines the first week. Afterwards, students read articles and watched videos. I realize now that more assigned zines for reading would have created space for more zine-specific conversations.
- + Maybe theme-ing isn't necessary? This is like a partial fail because I'm not totally convinced a completely open-ended group zine project would be that much different, but I'm thinking about it as I look forward to future semesters.
- + Groups of 2 are ideal. I had students create groups of 2 to 4, but then I went to dinner with three other friends and I realized how difficult it was selecting an appetizer for the table. How difficult would it be to get us all on the same page about a collage for a zine? Unless that's the point?



Dear reader, again,

I'm thinking about this quote: "Self-sufficient alternative media projects that do not engage in wider political projects will become individualistic spaces of withdrawal, whereas networks of alternative media that develop political visions and practices and act together to form a larger political counter-public sphere have the potential to support larger-scale political change processes" (Sandoval and Fuchs).

Zines must engage with larger political + cultural projects. Yes. But not in that Graff, They Say, I Say way. In the literal cutting up pieces of current political practices and transforming it into something else way.

Finally, the premise for all of this has always been to center community-based writing pedagogy. Teaching and writing that is in service of the communities within, outside of, and at the in-between parts of the classroom. Zines are just one way of engaging with this pedagogy. I hope to learn from you about other ways & I hope you'll be on the look out for zines students from this course are in the process of producing + distributing.

Until then,

dh

dhipinder



DEAR READER AGAIN,

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Where I got some of my ideas from

**Angelly, Rewan, Sewar, Kelyng, Hillary, Tracey,
Nai, Sianni, Melanie, Israh, Deandra, Miguel,
Nicole, Kenjel, Camila, Fabrina, Royada, Brian,
Aiza, Lhamo, Quentin, Edwin**

**Why Diverse Zines Matter: A Case Study of the
People of Color Zines Project by Melanie
Ramdarshan Bold**

**Engaging the "Othered": Using Zines to Support
Student Identities by Chelsea Lonsdale**

**Not just for kids anymore: Using zines in the
classroom by Amy J. Wan**

**Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics
of Alternative Culture (Zinester's Guide) by
Stephen Duncombe**

**Colleagues in Documenting Communities Focused
Inquiry Group at the Graduate Center, CUNY**





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