



Thinking Outside the Desk Every Friday

Letter to Students & Parents: Finding Your Way in Community Orientation

August 8, 2023

Greetings, New Students -

Welcome to Aldo! Thanks for choosing our school, and the risk of something new. Our namesake, Aldo Leopold, famously said that *“one of the penalties of an ecological education is to walk alone in a world of wounds.”* At our school, we hope that you, as an Aldo student, realize you are not alone. After all, with the conservationist Aldo Leopold as our inspiration, we are a community united by wanting to create a more sustainable world and training you to be a leader. As a part of learning how to lead, you will have the opportunity to call many of your teachers by their first name so long as you do so respectfully and so long as you are comfortable doing so. If you helped with mini-villages in the Aldo Middle School, the high school is your chance to scale-up and take those sustainability-based ideas and these leadership skills to the next level. This class is one of your first steps on that journey.

In a few weeks, we will find ourselves in the Gila Wilderness on our yearly 4 day back-pack trips, taking out our compasses & figuring out where we are standing, as well as where we are heading. The trip will have its challenges, and the ever-present opportunity to get “disoriented” in a wilderness free of road signs (& very few trail markers). We call the art of traveling with a compass—of finding your destination and moving yourself there—“*orienteering*.” Community Orientation is a course that allows you to find your way in our community—both in our Aldo school community as well as in our larger Grant County community and the world beyond. It will, we hope, help to point you in the right direction toward (i) making resilient choices as an individual & as a collective; (ii) succeeding at this school, and (iii) taking a lead role in the many communities you will likely encounter on your life’s journey.

Some of you might already know a good deal about how Silver City operates. As we formulate our norms here at ALCS, you will learn more about the “Aldo vibe” and the “Aldo family.” Ours is a school that treasures individuality; we love quirkiness; we celebrate diversity of opinion, experience, background, and orientation. As you must know, any good school must balance the **celebration of individuality** with a **commitment to community**. We all want to shine; but at the same time, we want to make sure that we don’t block the light from others as we do so. In that spirit, this course is dedicated to learning about, building, and enjoying community.

We will leave campus nearly every Friday. We’ll *talk* a little about community at the start of each day, but for the most part we’ll *be* there, working, playing, discovering, & reflecting on what we’ve learned. We’ll be piling onto the bus & traveling to places like the Gila River, Little Cherry Creek, the San Vicente Trail, the “Wave Climbing Wall”, Pitchfork Ranch, & art galleries. Many weeks we’ll be hiking, plunging our hands into the soil, doing trail maintenance, & sweating in the sun. Will you enjoy every minute of it? Probably not. Will you be glad you did the work you did, once the course is over? Probably so. One thing you should always remember: C.O. *always* beats sitting in class listening to a lecture.

As part of our educational system, teachers are required to give grades. We attempt to motivate students with the grades we give. The grading system in this course is relatively simple, and you will be able to check your class

average every week on our internet gradebook called powerschool. Every Friday you will receive 4 grades, each worth 25 points, for a total of 100 points per week. Below, the 4 grading categories are explained in detail:

Preparedness & the Big 5: Did you bring everything you needed for the day's work? Count on being checked for having these 5 items every week: (1) at least a liter of water; (2) a hat with a brim; (3) a sack lunch; (4) sturdy walking shoes (absolutely no flip-flops!); (5) your journal. If you bring all 5, you'll receive 20 points. If you're missing one or more items, you will lose approximately 4 points per item. You will also earn 5 preparedness points for on-time check-in with your group leader and leaving your cell phone at home or in your backpack. Your group leader will be one of the following excellent teachers: Orien, Antoinette or Maria.

Participation: Did you join in with the day's activity? Did you show up on time? Did you respect your classmates & teachers in the field? Did you clean up after yourself on the bus & at our work site? Did you show respect to the speaker at the work site (even if they were "bo-ring!")? Did you summon a little enthusiasm for the day? The more you participate, the more points you earn. It's possible to earn all 25 points if you really take advantage of the day's learning opportunities.

Proactivity: This category is usually the most challenging of all, because it asks you not only to *participate*, but to *anticipate*. What I mean by that is, *Do you help your team get the most out of their day?* For example, let's say you're working at a community garden; most of the group has been getting their hands dirty, planting the spring crop & enjoying the sunshine. But there's one person who is having a cruddy day—there was an argument at home that morning, & worse than that, she's afraid of worms. Plus she hurt her ankle at soccer practice yesterday. You notice all this, offer to trade jobs with her (you've been manning the water hose all morning & haven't had to squat in the garden rows like she has). You also give Little Jimmy, who likes to dangle worms in front of squatting gardeners like her, the Way Wicked Stink Eye. That's being proactive. Bringing an extra water bottle so that your absent-minded best friend doesn't lose her preparation points. Offering to clean the bus at the end of a work-day, even though you're tired like everyone else. Saying sorry, and meaning it, when you've been inconsiderate or disrespectful. That's being proactive.

Journal: Each week we will ask you to write a page of reflection in your journal. Your physical journal (handed out at the beginning of the year) is due each Tuesday before noon in the blue crate labeled CO in Orien's lair. If hand-writing is an extra challenge, you may type, print out and glue into your journal. Sometimes you will have a specific question as a prompt to guide your reflection. Other times, your reflection will be more open-ended. 25/25 is rare but not unheard of as a journal grade. If you write 250 words & reflect deeply, you can count on earning at least 20/25. Usually, we devote 20-30 minutes after we return to school for journal writing. And, sometimes we have an opportunity to write at the worksite. Some enterprising journalists are able to complete their answers on the bus ride back home. The "Give Me 5" journal rubric is attached below in case this helps you to structure your reflection. If you use the "Give Me 5" rubric, make sure to have 250 words.

More than once we will quote that old Woody Allen in saying that "showing up is 80% of life." As you can see from our grading scale, you have a pretty good chance of being successful in this class simply by showing up & acting like you care. Maybe math class has haunted you for the last 8 years, maybe you're not a great writer—but you can still pull an A in Community Orientation by showing up & putting your back into it.

If you don't show up, that can be a problem because CO only meets once per week. If you're ill, if you're attending a funeral—you won't be attending Community O. We understand that. If you're on a school-sanctioned trip, we understand. To document valid reasons such as these, we do ask that you give a note signed by a parent to our wonderful secretaries, Cathie & Andrea. You can also have a parent call the school no later than the morning of the Community O class you will miss. *You must still do a journal when you miss a class to earn the other 25 points*, by using the template in google classroom. You might ask what is our rationale for placing this extra emphasis upon

attendance? The answer is that Community Orientation class has, among its many purposes, preparation for (1) the YCC & internship program, and (2) adulthood in the working world. Employers want the workers they've hired to show up, & fellow employees want them to show up, too, so that they don't have to do that missing person's job. Do your best to be one of those "people who show up."

Note: **Unexcused** absences will destroy your course grade, since you will receive 4 "0/25" marks in the gradebook for the week you miss. For your **first excused absence**, we will exempt your grade in the gradebook. For your **second & subsequent excused absences**, you will receive a 70%, followed by a zero, in addition to being required to attend a make-up day at the end of the semester. Staff reserves the right to make exceptions for (a) particularly rare & compelling reasons that are (b) proactively communicated.

Cell phone policy: Phones stay in backpacks (NOT pockets!). Don't ask to use your cell phone - if there is an opportunity for students to make use of this tool, teachers will let them know! There are official routes for parental communication: through the front office, who will be in communication with C.O. teachers. If you ignore this policy, your guardian will need to pick up your phone after school in the front office.

There's more to say about this course, but we want to limit our introductory words to these pages. The most important words we have to share: We are looking forward to spending our Fridays with you, to learning about you (as well as our diverse & inspiring community), and to helping you to claim your place as an integral part of both the Aldo Leopold Charter School and Grant County communities.

Thanks for the opportunity!

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Optional format for Journal Reflections & Success: Use this to structure your weekly reflection if you find it helpful.

The “Give Me Five”

1. What did we learn? (*See or listen to the ‘possible prompt’*)
 2. Why did we learn that? (Note: If you don’t have an answer, or did not pay attention to discussions throughout the day, ask a teacher)
 3. How will this help our local and / or global community?
 4. What skills did we practice? Examples of skills include: (a) hands-on skills such as tool-use; (b) mindfulness (eg. **using all five of your senses to recognize, analyze and recall your surroundings**) & naming things; or, © evaluation strategies such as identifying causation, contextualization, continuities - changes, comparisons.
 5. How does it connect to what we have learned in class?
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*Here is a focus list to help you maximize your learning experience with our community:

- i. *Eyes are watching.*
- ii. *Ears are listening.*
- iii. *Mouth is closed.*
- iv. *Body is upright and calm.*
- v. *Hands are empty and still.*