



Thinking Outside the Desk Every Friday

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

August 7, 2020

Greetings, Newbies -

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, as an Aldonian, we hope that you look at the faces around you and realize that, in fact, you are not alone. After all, we are a community on this journey of creating a sustainable world. Plus, it is more fun to act than to sit back, complain and do nothing. Aldo’s vision meant something.

Normally, in a few weeks, we would find ourselves in the Gila or Aldo Leopold 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 would have its challenges, and the opportunity to get “disoriented” in a wilderness free of road signs (& very few trail markers) would be ever-present. Now, however, in the first (& hopefully “only”) year of a global pandemic, we have different challenges.

These “hard things” from the Covid-19 virus are indeed testing our community’s capacity to “orient” ourselves in relation to one another and to our school’s mission of getting outside and exploring the mysteries in which we live. So, while we are starting the year 100% online, rest assured that we will be outside as soon as it is safely possible. Also realize that we will honor each family’s comfort level with regard to the virus risk, and there will always be an option to choose 100% online learning.

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. It will, we hope, help to point you in the right direction toward (i) making sustainable choices as an individual & a collective; (ii) succeeding at this school, and (iii) taking a lead role in the many communities you will encounter on life’s journey.

Some of you already know a good deal about how Silver City operates, and as we have begun formulating our norms, you have learned 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 such “Celebration-of-Self” with a “Devotion-to-Community.” We all want to shine, as somebody once put it at an All-School Meeting; but at the same time, we want to make sure that we don’t block the light from others as we do so. Thus, this course is dedicated to learning about, building, and enjoying community.

We will leave campus nearly every Friday this semester *after (and if) risk from the pandemic lessens*. 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, one of the Bessies, Old or New, & travelling to places like the Mogollon Box, Tadpole Ridge, the San Vicente Trail, Boston Hill, the “Wave’s Climbing Wall”, Pitchfork Ranch & Dede Wolf’s wolf sanctuary. 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: Community O *always* beats sitting in class listening to Pete lecture :)

As part of the educational system we have in today's world, teachers are required to give grades, attempting to motivate students with the grades we give. The grading system in this course is relatively simple, & you will be able to check your class average every week on our Internet gradebook. Every Friday you will receive 4 grades, each worth 25 points, for a total of 100 points per week. Below we've listed the 4 grading categories:

Preparedness... the Big 5 (and 6): Did you bring everything you needed for the day's work? Count on needing 6 items every week: at least a liter of water, a hat with a brim, a healthy sack lunch, sturdy walking shoes (absolutely no flip-flops!), a mask for "Covid" & your journal. If you bring all 6, you'll receive 25 points. If you're missing one or more items, you will lose 5 points per item. Without a mask, while Covid is a risk, you will not be able to participate.

Participation: Did you join in with the day's activity? Did you show up on time so that we didn't have to postpone our departure? 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 he was "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 hose all morning & haven't had to squat in the garden rows like she has), & give Little Jimmy, who likes to dangle worms in front of squatting gardeners, the Way Wicked Stink Eye. That's being proactive. Saying, "Hey, I'll drive the wheelbarrow for a while—you look pooped." 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. That's being proactive.

Journal: Each week we will ask you to write a page of reflection in your journal. We try our best to offer you good questions as prompts to reflect on each week and encourage you to ask your own questions. For journals, we gladly throw points at you. 25/25 is rare but not unheard of as a journal grade. If you write a page & reflect on a question, you can count on earning at least 20/25. Usually, we devote 20-30 minutes after we return to school for journal writing, though we sometimes 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.

More than once we will quote that old Woody Allen adage 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 O by showing up & putting your back into it.

If you don't show up, that can be a problem. 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 certainly won't cross words with you about missing class. We do ask that you bring a note signed by a parent or have a parent call the school no later than the morning of the Community O class you will miss. (We always appreciate more advance notice, of course.)

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 place an “X” in the gradebook, which means “exempt.” 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 (with the disclaimer that Pete, Orien and Nathan reserve the right to make an exception for a particularly rare & compelling reason). Our rationale for placing this heightened emphasis upon attendance? Community Orientation has, among its many purposes, preparation for our YCC & internship program, as well as preparation for 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 absolute best to become one of those “people who show up.”

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 community, which continues to impress us), & to helping you become an integral part of both the Aldo Leopold Charter School and Grant County communities.

Thanks for the opportunity!

Pete Rankin, Orien McDonald & Nathan Shay

August 07, 2021

Format for Journal Reflections: The “Give Me Five”

1. What did we learn?
2. Why did we learn that? (Note: If you don't have an answer, look at the prompt if there is one for the day OR ask a teacher)
3. How will this help our local and / or global community?
4. What skills did we practice?
5. How does it connect to what we have learned in class?

-This schedule will be frequently updated in google classroom, based on the best available data & information.

-If and when we are safely able to return to full-time, in-person learning this year (2020 - 2021), class will last until later in the day than 1:30.

Date	Times	Themes & Inquiries	Preparation before Class	Class Activities	Location(s)
Aug 21	10:30 – 11:30	Class Intro, Team Building & Biophilia exercise	Be ready to engage	Intro to C.O. Class / Ice-breaker games	ALCS / Zoom
Aug 28	10:30 to 1:30	What is restoration? Why is it important?	-Check google class for details -Be ready to bring the “Big 5” if needed	Community-building games Guest speaker: Pitchfork Ranch videos about restoration OR the “water-works”	ALCS / Zoom Possibly, “San Vicente Farms”
Sept 4	10:30 to 1:30	Why is meaningful work important in community?	Check google class for details -Be ready to bring the “Big 5” if needed	Guest speaker: making adobe bricks with crushed glass. Use for outdoor classroom?	ALCS / Zoom Possibly, “The Waterworks”
Sept 11	10:30 to 1:30			Possibly outdoors, for ‘restoration’ planning (details TBA , based on health department data, the governor’s orders, and parental perspectives)	