ENG 342:
A Reflection Zine on Teaching Zine-Making During COVID-19

Justin Wigard
Welcome!

I taught a course called "ENG 342: "Studies in Popular Genres" in Spring 2020 at Michigan State University. This was a special topics seminar on 'Playful Literature and Literary Games' where students critically engage with games and literature in different ways, particularly by making a zine. My students' final projects were 12pg zines that they created over the course of the second half of the semester in stages.

This zine, then, is a toolbox of approaches, examples, activities, assignments, text and tool suggestions, and insights based on my experiences teaching zine-making in a popular culture course, as well as teaching during a unique semester.

A Note On Spring 2020 and COVID-19

On March 12th, 2020, Michigan State University went online for the rest of the Spring Semester due to the looming threat of COVID-19. I pivoted my course online, puntet some activities, and streamlined the project down to just the bare essentials. As this happened, I also reached out for aid to help keep the special nature of this course intact for the students.

I would like to thank:

- Julie Taylor, MSU Library Publishing Services Coordinator, for publishing these zines during COVID-19.
- Dr. Justus Nieland, English Dept. Chair, for generously funding a hard copy zine for each student.
- Sara Allison, English Dept. Supervisor/Fiscal Coordinator, for facilitating zine funding and delivery.
- Joshua Barton, MSU Library Zine Collection Specialist, for introducing my students to the zine collection and accepting their donations into the zine library.
- Adam Vass, aka WorldChampGameCo, for skyping in to my class and speaking with my students.
- My students, for being brave, and making their own zines. You all are rockstars.

Justin Wigard ("Why-Guard")
PhD Candidate, English, Michigan State University
wigardju@msu.edu
wigardju.msu.domains
**Zine Project Guidelines**

For the rest of this semester, you will engage in an act of critical creation by creating your own game-zine as a demonstration of your understanding of ludic and literary conventions. The purpose of this assignment is for you to showcase your learning to its fullest extent by making a critical product, taking your place among the community of authors and creators we have studied this semester. This project will take the form of a distributable zine, a handmade small-circulation publication. Your zine will be informed by research, have a defined critical purpose, and go through a drafting/revising process.

This project must be related to our course themes of "Playful Literature and Literary Games" in some way.

**Possible Approaches Include:**

1. Zine dedicated to some aspect of games history
2. Zine dedicated to some aspect of games culture
3. Zine dedicated to some aspect of play
4. Close reading of a game in zine-form
5. Game in the form of a distributable zine.

More importantly, this zine must mean something to you and it must tie in to our course themes of playful literature and literary games. This is your opportunity to make your voice heard, to ensure your identity is represented, to create something critical and powerful and meaningful.

**Format**

1. Must be connected to our course themes in some way.
2. Must be 12 pages, 8.5"H by 5.5" wide (1 cover, 10pgs content, 1 back cover)
3. Must have the four writing sections embedded within the zine.
4. Must be in PDF format.
5. Must be in Reading Order (meaning you have the cover, then page 1, then page 2, and so on).
6. Must have all images captioned with original author and either be Creative Commons or be original artwork.
7. Must have all sources included somewhere. This includes the 5 works consulted (2 academic and 3 popular), as well as a source for all images used.
8. Must have your name on the front cover.

**Contents**

P. 4-5: In-Class Activities
P. 6-7: In-Class Assignments
P. 8-9: Sample Zines & Digital Tools
P. 10-11: Class Tips & Zine Journal Structure
IN-CLASS ACTIVITY TOOLBOX

These are activities that I was able to implement prior to going online. While these are centered around my experiences teaching a course on games & literature at Michigan State University, they can be modified to fit any number of pedagogical themes, approaches, and environments.

1) READ & SHARE ZINES (1 CLASS PERIOD)
"Bring one zine to class that you have found. Share it with a classmate. Read their found zine on your own. Share your experience."

INTENTION: There is an intimacy with zines not found in most other media, a closeness. Students should find a zine that means something to them, and reflect on who that creator is/might be, what making this zine means, and how their own voice can be heard.

SUGGESTED USE: Discussion prompt; participation; think-pair-share option.

MODIFICATIONS: Have students write up a short reflection on their zine, and/or on the zine that a classmate shared with them; have students create a 1-pg zine (p. 6) in response to their chosen zine.

2) INTERVIEW A ZINESTER (1 CLASS PERIOD)
"For this class period, we will speak with Adam Vass, creator of Preparing the Ghost, about his experiences, successes, and struggles into making zines. Please come prepared with several questions and come prepared for an enlightening conversation!"

INTENTION: Get students to speak with and learn from somebody who makes zines on a regular basis, both collaboratively and as an independent zine creator. Get insights into the creative process, ask an expert in-depth questions, invite somebody new into the classroom for a short while.

(cont’d on next page)
Suggested Use: Implement after zine-making process has been introduced; Can be repeated with multiple zinesters (even used with a panel of zinesters);

Modifications: Have students send their zine to the zinester at the end of class; bring in other content creators whose work/approaches might be relevant to the course (comics creators, writers, artists, publishers, etc.); report on the experience of interviewing the zinester. Bring students to an existent zine fest with zinesters that students can talk with and explore the zine tables.

3) Visit a Zine Collection (1 class period)

"Meet in the library on the 1st floor, where we will meet Joshua Barton, Zines Special Collection Librarian, who will introduce us and bring us to the Zines Special Collection."

Intention: Provide students with an opportunity to experience a wide range of zines; Hear from an expert curator and engage with zines collected across different locations.

Suggested Use: Try to set this up for the first month, if not the first three weeks of class. This proved immensely informational for my students as they had this important and powerful shared experience.

Modifications: This can be modified to bring a zine collection to the classroom, or to have a zine expert do a virtual tour of a zine collection, even conduct an online presentation of what a zine exhibit looks like.
IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

IN THIS SECTION, YOU WILL FIND SEVERAL IN-CLASS ZINE EXERCISES. THEY INCLUDE MY ORIGINAL APPLICATION & OUTCOMES, ALONG WITH SUGGESTED USES AND POTENTIAL MODIFICATIONS. I ONLY RAN THE FIRST ACTIVITY, SO THE REST ARE POTENTIAL EXERCISES I PLAN TO IMPLEMENT IN THE NEXT ITERATION OF THIS COURSE.

1) FLASH ILLUSTRATION (7-8 MIN)

"Write your definition of play, and illustrate the definition. Fill the page. Then share."

INTENTION: I wanted to show students how many different approaches there are to illustrating the same subject, that they each have their own perspective and skill, and to assess their understanding of the core class concept of play. I provided 1/2pgs and markers.

SUGGESTED USE: Top-of-the-hour attendance, pulse-check on informal assessment, exercise recent visual/artistic skill, etc. Assign these at least once a week, if not once a class period.

MODIFICATIONS: Use different media (crayon, colored pencil, paint, graphic design); scale up/down with concrete or abstract topics; try with different sections of zine (cover, intro, etc.)

2) SHEET-O-PAPER/8-PG ZINE (30-60MIN)

"For this exercise, you will create an 8pg zine out of one sheet of paper by folding into 8 squares, and cutting between 3&8, 4&7. It will have a front & back cover, along with 6 interior pages. This zine can be about anything, as long as it is something you are passionate about."

INTENTION: Get students to work together to create a miniature zine within one class period; provide a low-stakes entry point into creating a zine for class.
Suggested Use: Content Review (Distribute to rest of class as study material); Layout Exercise (how do you use 8 pages of space effectively/efficiently?); Reflective Project.

Modifications: Scale up for a mid-term project (must replicate X number of copies); assign as a test for students' understanding of visual/textual layout; scale down to focus on content over craft; turn digital and post to D2L.

3) ZINE SHOWCASE (60-90 MIN)

"For this task, you will present your zine to the public alongside your peers at the MSU Museum. You will work a table, talk through your process, and showcase your work.

Intention: Provide students with an opportunity to show their work beyond the classroom, to share these personal, handcrafted, and unique zines.

Suggested Use: Fulfilling a class presentation requirement; networking opportunity for the students; end of semester celebration.

Modifications: This can be scaled up to include students presenting their projects in local games/comics shops or at a comics/zine fest, or scaled down to tabling within the classroom (half the students table on Day 1, half on Day 2, etc).
MOTHERSHIP:
Sci-Fi Horror RPG
Published by Tuesday Knight Games

Very unique layout and clever use of font sizing to maximize content. Monochrome for easy B&W printing.

Sample Zines (and one book)

These are my recommendations for zines to start with, whether due to the content, the form, or the layout. However, there's nothing like finding zines to read, use, and share. Each one is unique, valuable, and personal. I recommend hunting for them yourself and having your students look for/through some as well.

Teaching with Zines by Kathleen Aragon, et al.
I can't recommend this zine enough for including zines in the classroom. Insightful, educational, and written by a team of librarians and educators.

Make a Zine! When Words and Graphics Collide by Bill Brent and Joe Biel

Brent and Biel's book was super helpful for me, particularly the first half. Pick and choose the chapters that will be most helpful and assign them in stages.

Preparing the Ghost by WorldChampGameCo

Print-at-home, 1-pg zine. Thematic, effective, and shows how content is packed into one sheet of paper. Great example of a 1-pg zine.

Escape from Dino Island by Sam Tung and Sam Roberts

Clean layout, uses headers well, and is monochromatic. The game is simple and easy to run (plus, it has DINOSAURS!!!)

Visit a Zine Collection, Encourage Students to Explore Online Zine Archives, or Cultivate Your Own Zine Collection

There won't be a perfect zine; that's okay. Find ones that mean something to you, that feel good, and go from there.
Digital Tools

When we went online, I had to pivot from handmade zines to digital ones. My students needed to convert their final projects to PDF, so these are some of the digital tools I used with some insights.

- **Suggested Digital Programs:**
  - MS Word: Straightforward and highly common, doesn't convert to PDF easily.
  - MS Publisher: Slightly more powerful (and therefore more complicated), typically included with MS Office.
  - Canva.com: Freely available, but has some content locked behind paywalls.

- **Free PDF modification:** ilovepdf.com
  - Sometimes, PDFs can be a real pain: .docx files don't always convert to PDFs nicely, sometimes additional pages get added, etc.
  - I found sites like ilovepdf.com to be exceedingly helpful for quick fixes and conversion practices.

- **Dafont.com**
  - Incredible collection of downloadable fonts; will most likely be a primary source of creative application for zine creation.

- **Creative Commons sites**
  - Unsplash.com, flickr.com, and searching via Google's advanced search will yield creative commons images for use within these zines.

- **Adobe Scan App (android and iOS)**
  - Downloadable app that converts pictures to PDFs; helpful for students who create handmade zines and need to digitize without adequate access to a scanner.
**Zine Journal: Asynchronous Scaffolding**

I designed these zine journals as scaffolded entries. They naturally progress into the succeeding week, so that in theory, the students are primed to finish out the zine by the end.

**Zine Journal #1: Brainstorm**

Create three unique 100w zine project ideas. These ideas should include each of the following: Title, Topic, Inspiration, Objectives, Content, Aesthetic, and Tone.

**Zine Journal #2: Layouts**

Upload a plan of each of your twelve pages in rough detail through thumbnail sketches. Readings, Text blocks, Image blocks, White Space, etc. Also include a mockup of your cover at this stage.

**Zine Journal #3: 1st Draft of One 2-pg Spread**

Upload your first draft of one spread (i.e. one left and one right page), with as much of the text, images, and layout complete.

**Zine Journal #4: 1st Draft of Covers and 1st Draft of Essay**

1) Upload your 1st draft of your covers.

2) Upload your 1st draft of your essay, which will end up being contained in your zine.

**Zine Journal #5: Rough Draft of Entire Zine**

Upload as complete of a draft of your complete zine as you can. There must be content on each of the 12 pages.
**Final Tips**

- Go read *Teaching with Zines, right now* (p. 8 of my zine). I found this way too late in my course, but I wish I’d started with it for my own sake.

- Foreground the zine as a medium that blends textual elements with visual layouts, but is significant as a construction all its own. These are process-oriented constructs of form and content, design and aesthetic.

- Keep the requirements straightforward and enforce standardized formats. While zines are a unique and DIY medium, these boundaries help instructors and students stay on the same page.

- I used 12pgs. 1/2 letter-size (8.5”x5.5”) as the format due to printing and content constraints. Consider what grade allotment goes towards the format of the project.

- Consider a scaffolded approach to build the zine in stages. Devote classtime to workshops, to introducing steps, and to sharing progress. This will decrease the amount of last-minute procrastination (in theory).

- To be flexible, I also offered students the opportunity to turn in a 12-pg version alongside a full version, if they truly felt the need to create a longer zine.

- Think about requiring writing components. I used a 250w Description and 250w reflection, which can either fit on the same page, or bookend the zine. These help fill out the zine content and help students think about a cohesive product.

- Be prepared to offer troubleshooting advice for any digital programs/tools you implement, and to offer design advice at different stages.

- Learn, experiment, and grow with your students. I learned something new each week during this process, and adapted my teaching approach as we progressed.

- Make your own zine! You’ll learn what works best by going through the process yourself.
JUSTIN WIGARD ("Why-Guard") is a PhD candidate in the Department of English, where he works with and teaches popular culture, game studies, comic studies, children’s literature, and digital humanities in the literature classroom.

This zine was created as a supplement to the traditional academic syllabus, but also as an exercise in playful literature itself. Justin’s always been inspired by 16-bit art, so most of this zine follows that aesthetic.

His work covers a wide range of subjects, including the Hallmark Channel’s Garage Sale Mystery film series; professional wrestling and Street Fighter; chronotopal representations of feminism in Marvel’s Jessica Jones; the visual rhetoric of dinosaurs in Calvin and Hobbes; monstrous motherhood in Neil Gaiman’s Coraline; and more.

Justin’s dissertation, Level 101: A Video Game About Video Games, focuses on utilizing, and developing, video games as learning tools within the classroom.

email: wigardju@msu.edu
Twitter: @wigardJu
website: wigardJu.msu.domains

Typical Wigard attire: Thick glasses, red flannel, messy hair, shaggy beard, and cheesy grin.