

## PORTFOLIO

Our role here is not to debate portfolio use. Nor can we present, quickly, a comprehensive description of portfolio use in the classroom. What follows is a brief explanation of why and how to use them in the context of our curriculum. If you would like to learn more about them, there are many books and Web sites devoted entirely to portfolio creation and use. One such book is Nancy Atwell's *In the Middle*. Another is Lucy Caulkins's *Living between the Lines*. But first, to get an idea of how you will use portfolios with this curriculum, if you choose to, continue reading.

The portfolio is a means of assessment that enables students to present what they have accomplished and mastered, the work they are most proud of. The portfolio, which students are responsible for maintaining, is the compilation of finished products that students feel represent the best of their efforts from a specified time period. Even if students present their portfolios at the end of each quarter or semester, they can continue to build them as the year goes on, and then add to them in future years. The portfolios are not really ever completed works in themselves, but demonstrations of the students' progress over time.

With this curriculum, the students will eventually post their portfolios online in the format of their choosing (within their and the school's limitations!). One of the objectives with this type assessment is that students will post work from all subject areas and teachers will eventually be able to work together to create a fuller, more rounded assessment of each student. This provides teachers with a much clearer sense, too, of student's individual learning styles and strengths. For example, an English teacher who knows only that a particular student is struggling with reading and writing will have the opportunity to see that this student excels in space concepts associated with geometry or hypothesizing and empirical research in science classes.

Equally important is the role the portfolio plays in teaching students to take both responsibility for and pride in their work. The hard copy of the portfolio always stays in the school building. This is to say that students do not take it home with them. But they are responsible, ideally for four years, for its content. It is from this folder that their writing/art/etc. samples will come for their college applications. It is from this folder, you hope, that they will choose some of the expressions of themselves that they want to post on their Web pages once they design them.