

MRA Independent Projects

The end of the year at Molalla River Academy includes the opportunity for all of our students to put together an Independent Project. Independent Projects, or IPs, allow students to choose a topic based on their own curiosity or interest, conduct some amount of research, learn relevant skills, create visual aids, develop written reports, and share findings with classmates and parents through an oral presentation. The overarching goal is to allow students the opportunity to share their own interests, creativity and strengths without teacher directed constraints. Projects, written work, and demonstrations are structured as developmentally appropriate for each age group.

General Independent Project Guidelines:

- 1) This should be a project that is completed by the student. Parent help should be minimal.
- 2) The project should focus on something that interests him or her.
- 3) On the day of the presentation, the student should present what he or she has learned in a creative and engaging way.
- 4) Clarkia, Alders, Cedars should expect a written component. Written pieces can be of any nature: creative, narrative, expository, poetry, captions, pamphlet, website, power point, how to book, etc.. Expectations should be developmentally appropriate (see the MRA writing continuum and rubrics). See Cedars expectations for more detail on expectations.
- 5) Rubrics and expectations on all components should be given to the student when they select their topic. Students may participate in the development of the rubric.
- 6) It should be clear to students that all visuals, demonstrations, written work, etc. should be their personal best. Independent projects are designed to provide all students the opportunity to challenge themselves and present their finest work.
- 7) You are encouraged to have your students (Clarkia and Alders especially) check in with you at some point prior to presentation day. Please see the attached check in sheet for a sample. If you have a student who is not progressing at home, please do your best to help him or her at school so that they are successful.
- 8) Classmates are expected to provide feedback to each presenter. These are developmentally appropriate in nature, becoming more detailed as the students get older.

Presentation Component

All students are expected to present their project to their classmates, parents and guests. Presentations time are listed below under General Expectations. Before students present they should be encouraged to practice at home. Students should be instructed to speak clearly, loudly, and slow enough to be understood. They should be working on eye contact, physical presence, and voice. Students may choose to dress for the presentation.

Visual Component

Every presentation includes a visual piece. We prefer students stay away from the traditional poster board visual aid when possible. All visuals should be neat and attractive in appearance. It should be apparent that the student did his/her best work at putting this together. For example if they are bringing in an animal the animal and the cage should be clean and well cared for; if they are putting together a tri-fold board cut-outs should be as neat as possible for that student, the writing should be their personal best, backgrounds and pictures are encouraged, etc.

Written Component

All students are expected to include some writing with their project. Their name and the project title may be plenty for a Trillium or young Huckleberry. Students at all levels may choose their writing genre, and any written

piece should be developmentally appropriate to the student. Similar to the visual all writing should be demonstrative of the student's personal best: grammar, spelling, handwriting, organization, tone, etc. Students will work with their teachers to determine the most appropriate written piece for that individual.

General Guidelines Per Class:

- Trillium: A 5-10 minute presentation on something that interests them. The goal is to allow them the opportunity to practice getting up in front of group and sharing knowledge. Their presentation should include a visual of some kind.
- Huckleberry: A 5-10 minute presentation on a topic of interest. Students need to have a visual that shows their learning, as well as key talking points.
- Clarkia: A 5-10 minute minimum presentation with a creative visual and a writing component appropriate to the presentation/project and demonstrative of the students personal best.
- Alders: A 10-15 minute presentation with a creative visual, a writing component appropriate to the presentation/project and demonstrative of the students personal best, and possibly an interactive component for classmates.
- Cedar- 8th grade Independent Projects are yearlong and start in September. 7th graders are encouraged to begin in the fall as a 'practice' for 8th grade.

Timeline:

- Cedars: Eighth grade Independent Projects are introduced in September with a packet of information. Students select topics, obtain mentors (8th graders only), and begin work toward specific deadlines/check in's.
- Alders: Independent Projects are introduced in February, at the start of the second term. Students select topics with two or three scheduled teacher check in's in the spring.
- Clarkia: Independent Projects are introduced in February, at the start of the second term. Students are not expected to choose a topic or begin work prior to May, but can if they choose.
- Huckleberry and Trillium: Similar to Clarkia, although depending on the class and the teacher team, projects may be introduced later in the spring, but no later than the first week of May.
- All school themes and projects conclude the day of the MRA Showcase. Project presentations begin in all grades except 8th starting the following week. Presentations occur during the first and the last hours of the day. All classes have abbreviated schedules during those last couple of weeks, and specials are cancelled with the exception of needed assessment time. Classes are devoted primarily to presentations, math, final assessments, wrap up of student work, and end of the year events.
- On the day of the presentation, students should present what he or she has learned in a creative way. This could be a poster with pictures and information, it could be a video or slide-show, it could be a presentation of something made or built, or some other venue of their choosing. The presentation for Clarkia and Alders should include:
 - Why did you choose to learn about this topic?
 - What materials did you use? How did you go about getting your information?
 - What did you learn about your topic?
 - What problems or challenges did you encounter? What might you do differently next time?
- Presentations end with a short Q and A. Students need to be taught how to write and ask well thought out questions using social imagination language and growth mindset. Examples:

- Instead of saying “I liked...” Say, “Your approach to was interesting, can you tell me more about it?”
- “What was your biggest challenge, and how did you overcome it?”
- “It looks like you used a lot of math in your project, is that a strong intelligence for you?”
- “I can tell that you worked really hard on... what was that like?”
- “What part are you most proud of?”

Project Ideas (encourage parents in your letters home to read through these ideas with their child):

-Food projects are always fun. Learn how to make cheese, create your own recipes together, learn how to make different types of desserts, and bring your samples in to share!

- Study a topic that has always interested you. Perhaps you want to know more about the coral reef, or elephants, or how airplanes fly. Check out books from the library and read as much as you can. Teach us what you've learned on the day of your presentation.

- Teach your classmates how to do something. Maybe you're an expert at origami and you want to learn a few designs to teach us. Perhaps you love to make board games and you want to teach us how to play one. Or maybe you have done a particular science experiment and you want to teach us about it. Maybe you know how to play baseball and you want to show us how to throw, catch, bat, and give us other such tips. We can have independent project presentations outside if we need to!

-Make something beautiful and interesting. Perhaps you love to write Haiku poems and you want to create a book of Haiku to share with the class. Maybe you are interested in learning how to paint and you check out a book about painting basics, practicing different techniques at home.

Appendix A – Sample Letters Home

Independent Project Sample Letter Home - 1:

Dear Parents and Students,

We are nearing the end of the school year, and that means that your child should start working on his or her Independent Project to be presented in the last 3 weeks of school. Some of you already have experience with this from past years, but we wanted to give you an idea of what we'll be looking for from your child's project and share some ideas for possible projects. Please read through these ideas with your child in the next week, discussing what he or she would like to do, and return the attached portion by _____ with a note about your child's idea for his or her project and comments on the best presentation days and times.

Independent Project Sample Letter Home - 2:

Dear Parents,

Each year, the Huckleberries have the opportunity to study a subject of their own choosing and present it to the class in the format of their own design. While most of project will be done at home, they will do some thinking about their Independent Projects in class. Of course, these ideas are preliminary and like researchers often do, their topics and projects may change as they delve into their work.

The hope is that this project gives your child an opportunity to extend their knowledge about a topic they have already expressed curiosity. To the greatest extent possible, the work should be your child's. The hope is that this will be a fun and engaging home project. Please contact me with any questions throughout the process.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is my role as a parent in the Independent Project?

While we want the projects to be as much the children's as possible, they will need your help in some ways. You can help by taking your child to the library, by getting supplies, and by helping decipher text as resources for chosen topics are often not meant for the young student. It can be difficult, for example, to find age appropriate sources about the criminal justice system, the concept of zero, or radio signals.

In some cases, children may need help scaling back project to a reasonable scope. Building a rocket that will actually orbit the Earth is inspiring, but not possible.

One of the hardest parts of supporting an independent project can be the temptation to do the project for the child. It is easy to get so involved with the project that adult enthusiasm and expectations get in the way. Projects with a heavy child stamp on them with their unique presentation ideas and designs are completely appropriate and encouraged. By asking your child from time to time what they see as the next step will keep them in the driver's seat.

Also keep in mind that it is not unusual for a child's interest to shift. If your child wants to expand, contract or even change their topic, they should feel free.

What about the presentation?

The presentations range from two minutes to ten. The audience hardly expects everything to go smoothly and will be supportive. Every presentation will receive hearty applause.

Some children feel most comfortable practicing their presentation at home. Other children prefer to present more spontaneously. Follow your child's lead on this.

Appendix B –

Independent Project Guidelines and Sign Up Sheet to Include With the Letter:

1) This should be a project that is completed almost entirely by your child. You can help with checking out books from the library and reading aloud content. You can also help by purchasing supplies and setting aside certain "Independent Project work periods" on the weekend or evenings when your child is expected to work on his or her project. However, please do not do the project for your child. Regular homework will be limited during the month of May so that your child can work on this project.

2) The project should focus on something that interests your child. It could be a traditional research project or it could be a project that involves making or building something. We are very flexible and would love to hear your ideas. The main point of this experience is for the child's passion to drive the learning.

3) On the day of the presentation, your child should present what he or she has learned in a creative way. This could be a poster with pictures and information, it could be a video or slide-show, or it could be a presentation of something made or built. The presentation should focus on the following information:

- Why did you choose to learn about this topic?
- What materials did you use? How did you go about getting your information?
- What did you learn about your topic?
- What problems or challenges did you encounter? What might you do differently next time?

4) Your child is also responsible for a short written component to be turned in on the day of the presentation. This can be handwritten or typed. Expectations are dependent upon the project/presentation. Students should include a proposed written component with their topic of choice below.

5) As of _____ (when this proposal is due), you and your child will have the weekends of _____ as well as afternoons in May that would normally be spent doing regular homework, to work on the project before presentations start the week of _____.

6) If you are finding that you are having a hard time motivating your child to do his or her independent project or if you do not have much time to do it at home, please do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher. We could work out some in-class time to work on the project and we can help motivate. Please do not think you have to do this all on your own. We are here to help!

Thank you for your help with this important school experience!

-----Cut off-----

Please fill this out together and return by:

For my independent project, I, (name) _____, have chosen to

For my written piece I plan to:

Appendix C: Sample Independent Project Weekly Check-In and Log (Due _____)

Name _____

Please keep your teacher posted on how you are progressing on your project. In order to be successful, you should be working on your project at least three days during the week. Please track what you have done each day. Here are some sample entries that you might do this week:

- I went to the library and checked out 3 books on my topic.
- I read part of a book about squirrels.
- I did not work on my project tonight because I had gymnastics.
- I went on the computer with my mom and she helped me find information on my topic.
- I went to Fred Meyer with my dad and he helped me buy a poster board.
- I did not work on my project today because we celebrated Mother's Day!

Please track each day. This will help you stay focused on your project. Remember, this is your only homework for the month of May!

Thank you,

Independent Project Weekly Log

Monday, May 16th _____

Tuesday, May 17th _____

Wednesday, May 18th _____

Thursday, May 19th _____

Friday, May 20th _____

Saturday, May 21st _____

Sunday, May 22nd _____

Parent Signature: _____

Appendix D

Sample Rubrics – to be adjusted to fit your class and grade level

Appendix E

Sample Peer Evaluation/Feedback Forms - to be adjusted to fit your class and grade level