

# Scantrons out, projects in

“Kanye West is right. Donald Trump has dragon energy,” or, “The Canadian tuxedo is the only tuxedo worth wearing.” McClain Herman’s IB Lit II students will be writing and delivering speeches on absurd topics such as these for their final exam grades this year. However, Herman isn’t the only teacher trading in traditional final exams for alternative projects.

Julia Hanneman’s IB English I students will be selecting and researching a poet, annotating three of the poet’s works, and selecting one of them as the subject of a five to seven minute presentation. “Our class is so focused on presentations that it’s the most appropriate final assessment,” Hanneman said.

While teaching AP English Language at Chantilly High School, Herman assigned the writing of college essays as final exam grades. Her English 12 students this year will be composing and declaiming graduation speeches as a final exam. Although these two projects are fairly straightforward, Herman said that her students’ creativity is reflected in the content rather than the form.

The English 12 students thought that the graduation speeches were a more meaningful “exam” because it reflected on their time in high school. IB English student Maria Cisneros-Gomez said, “A final project gives me the ability to better demonstrate the lessons I have learned throughout the year.” Hanneman said that her project is, “focused on one finite thing that can be practiced, planned, and controlled,” as opposed to a test that would require her students to memorize information from the whole year.

Most students prefer projects over tests because they are not completing them in pressured environments and are more open-ended, allowing for more choice. Primarily because of the time

they had to work on the project in class, Herman's students told her that it was less stressful than a test or in-class essay. "Students that did the poetry presentation in IB Lit I were slightly more stressed, but Hanneman still thought that her IB students performed better on a presentation than they would on an exam.

In order to do well on the project, students still need to manage their time wisely and stay organized. Herman said that she has been assigning projects for the two years that she has been teaching because they assess the skills taught in class and those outlined in FCPS' Portrait of a Graduate more accurately than a traditional test.

Teachers sometimes give fact-based, traditional exams because of how quickly they are required to grade them. Herman proposed that teachers can make projects due a week or so before the final exam day. The assignments can be graded beforehand and then presented by students during the last week.

Sometimes, especially at the end of the year, students deserve to do something not only educational but also challenging and thought-provoking.