



Big Questions, Bigger Answers: North Branch Self-Evaluations

Three times a year, all NBS students write long self evaluations. Each self-evaluation has 15-35 questions. The questions are serious and comical. They require students to think deeply about how they are doing in school and in life. Some of the questions require them to remember meaningful moments in school where they learned or understood something. Other questions ask them to assess their strengths and areas for growth. Yet other questions ask about the peers they admire, goals they are setting, struggles they are having. On this year's Ye Olde Mid-Year Self Evaluation, they were required to come up with three questions of their own, and come up with their own answers. Here is a list of some sample questions, followed by some answers:

- *How have I changed from being someone who has been taught, to being someone who is teaching in my time here.* —Rupert
- *Why do I not say anything in meetings even if I have something on my mind? How can I make myself better at just saying what happened?* —Simon
- *How can I help myself stay focused instead of procrastinating?* —Innis
- *Why do I never ask for help even when I need it?* —Alexandra
- *Why do I keep pushing away thoughts about my future?* —Edward
- *What has made me feel like North Branch has made a large impact on my life since last year?* —Scout L.

I have noticed my mental state has changed a lot. Last year was really hard for me and I would have mental breakdowns often. Now, I get them a lot less often because I like NBS SO much better. Before coming here, I was really worried it would be even worse than last year because I thought I would struggle academically and I wouldn't like the people any better but I was wrong. Even though the academics are hard, it's a challenge I enjoy and I really enjoy the people here. I think I have been looking at life through a more positive lens recently and I think that has made all the difference.

- *Why do I stay silent in moments when I know what others are doing is wrong?* —Oli

The main moment I think about when I read this question is a day earlier this month. I was walking out of the CVE (Champlain Valley Expo), leaving soccer practice, with a few of my friends from soccer. As I walked out the door, a girl came running towards it, obviously in a rush to get to her practice. Right as she got to the door, she tried to curve her run and fell down, slipping on the ice on the cold day. Everyone around me started laughing, but I stayed silent. I didn't know what to say, or what to do, and I knew that what was happening was wrong but I didn't know how to deal with it. As we kept walking, and they kept laughing, I distanced myself from them. I still wasn't sure how to act.

I was really confused after that. I knew that I should have done something, but I didn't know what I could have done, or how I could have helped her. I knew that I should have stood up for her, but I didn't know how, because I didn't want any of my friends to be mad at me. This has happened a lot. I knew what the right thing to do was (tell them to shut up) but I didn't do it because I was scared of the repercussions that it might cause. I was scared to deal with it because I thought that if I did I would lose friends. This goes into school, and into everything else, trying to improve myself so that I can be better, reach higher heights.

- *In what ways do you think your writing skills could improve over the next half-year?* —Odin

I think that my writing skills could improve by not procrastinating on my writing and also trying to write with detail and on a train of thought. I think that I could definitely improve by working on focusing on writing and not using filler scenes so much. My first story about Norway didn't really show much, it just kind of introduced me, but I hope to show something in my next story and actually have a moral and a point of writing.

- *How have I changed from being someone who has been taught, to being someone who is teaching in my time here?* —Rupert

- *What is my definition of being a 'good' ninth grader, and what does 'good' mean? —Carina*

When I was in seventh grade I had so much ahead of me, and so much to look up to. My sister had been my role model for forever, and she and her class were amazing ninth graders. I've always thought of them in a positive light, but I didn't think about what that 'amazing' actually meant. It's a broad and vague statement, and now I am in ninth grade. I find myself thinking about this question all the time.

In seventh grade, my definition of a "good" ninety sounded something like this: A good ninety is someone who is kind, caring, intelligent, and a leader. These are all great traits to have of course, but it doesn't actually explain anything. I used to think that ninth grade would be perfect. I would love everyone endlessly, and I would learn all the secrets of the world. But this is not the truth, not even merely. Ninth grade is not perfect. Because we learn as we go along.

At the start of this year, my sister Lila gave me advice. She said that no matter how many lessons I learned from others, or advice I took to be a "better" ninth grader, it wouldn't change how I am. Because I am me, no one else. My year looks completely different to everyone else, even my own classmates. And this piece of advice stuck with me. Nothing anyone would say would affect my year. I had to affect my year, because I am making it into something I love, and am incredibly grateful for.

So back to my question, what is my definition of being a 'good' ninth grader, and what does 'good' mean. I would say this: Ninth grade feels like an epiphany, it feels like an opening into the truth; being a good ninth grader means being real, it means standing up for what you believe in, and not being afraid if that thing is judged or controversial to anyone else. It means putting yourself in a place where you can speak, love, see, enjoy, laugh, and lead.

Leading means something different to everyone. My class is wildly diverse and I love that. But the main, most important thing is to keep a balance; remember that everyone around you deserves to feel as though they belong. I think about the quote from Mother Teresa, "We Belong To Each Other" and we do. A good ninth grader means to establish this environment, and it does not mean anything has to be perfect, it just means you have to try. Effort is better than anything else. To care is the core of everything. This is just the start of what I have learned, and it looks different for everyone, but this is what has applied and mattered most to me.

- When I become an eighty, what meaningful advice will I give the new Sevies? —Molly
- *Why do I keep pushing away thoughts about my future? —Edward*



We visited Bristol Village Cohousing Community as part of our study of Eutopia. Simon lives there and he showed us around.

- *How am I treating myself, and how have I improved recently? —Isabelle*

I think I'm becoming more confident. I'm learning how to love myself, and feel like I'm worth something. I think I've always had two voices in my head, one pointing out everything wrong with me and telling me I'm not worth anything, and another one knowing that I don't believe that, and telling me that I have all the worth in the world.

Nothing in the middle, just the two extremes.

Of these voices, I latched on to the first one, telling me that I will never be worth anything. That side of me hungered for validation, but no amount of it could satisfy me. I always needed more. That voice incessantly whispered that I don't deserve anything. I don't deserve to be happy. I haven't worked hard enough to deserve my achievements.

That voice failed to see all the work I've put in. It said that I don't deserve to be liked, I don't deserve recognition. I deserve to hate myself. I deserve the tears brimming in my eyes, that I refuse to show. But under that, a different voice whispered that I could never fully, truly, believe that. Even in the hardest times, it whispered that I deserved the world. That voice sees the truth.

I deserve what I've achieved, because I've worked so hard to get there. I deserve to be loved. I deserve all the acknowledgement that I get. I'm learning to listen to that voice. I'm learning to drown out the other one. I'm so much happier when I do. Of course, there are still times when I forget. But I'm learning that that is okay, I'm trusting the process, and loving myself through it all.

- *Why do I never ask for help even when I need it?*
—Alexandra

I have always been afraid to ask for help, and admit when something is wrong. Like I talked about in my speech, I have always judged people pretty harshly, and have worried about being judged. I think this sort of self-consciousness has been unhelpful for me in many ways. When I was going to Red Cedar, I was pretty much able to fly through work. We were never given homework, and the only class where I felt like I was being appropriately challenged was math class. Since I've come to NBS this self-consciousness has really been more of a problem, and has stood out more, especially in my computer and technology skills. When I was little I wasn't allowed to be on screens, other than my parents computer sometimes. Up until the end of 5th grade I didn't have any sort of device. I think this was probably a good idea in my parents' heads, but in the long run it was a little disabling on how to type and use a computer properly. This is 1 main example of something I don't ask for help for. I think the fear of judgment is why I don't ask questions but I have tried to set a personal goal for myself to ask for help and not get self-conscious about not knowing something.



Odin, Innis, Eddie, Maggie & Jane perform
The Holiday Rocks Song—a celebration of Geology

- *What has made me feel like North Branch has made a large impact on my life since last year?* —Scout L.

I have noticed my mental state has changed a lot. Last year was really hard for me and I would have mental breakdowns often. Now, I get them a lot less often because I like NBS SO much better. Before coming here, I was really worried it would be even worse than last year because I thought I would struggle academically and I wouldn't like the people any better but I was wrong. Even though the academics are hard, it's a challenge I enjoy and I really enjoy the people here. I think I have been looking at life through a more positive lens recently and I think that has made all the difference.

- *How can I help myself stay focused instead of procrastinating?* —Innis

I have found that I get distracted very easily sometimes I just can't focus on one thing so I either check my chat every five minutes or I will just space out and stare off into space for long periods of time, not thinking about anything really, just spacing out. Some things I have done that I have found that help me focus are; putting relaxing music on, like calm, instrumental saxophone. I also make it so I can't see the search bar so I don't get distracted by

- *Why do I let others' judgment of where/who I am affect how I see myself so much?* —Pema

I made a new year's resolution to stop focusing so much on things people who I barely know have said about me. I also promised myself I would let go of people who didn't make me feel good and put time and effort into my relationships that make me feel good and allow me to be fully myself. I guess I thought it would be something that happened overnight and changed quickly....I still constantly find myself falling back into hearing the words people have said about me behind my back ringing in my ears, and I'm still worrying about what people think about me, even if that person is one who I wouldn't want to be friends with in the first place. I think it's a constant thing, trying to remind myself that I deserve people who are happy for me and give me the love I give them. Because the pain of growing out of someone who hurt you is so much less than the joy of being understood by the people you choose to keep growing with.

- *Why does it feel like everyone else is moving ahead, improving, when I feel stagnant?* —Yaz

I often feel that I have not been improving on my work or on talking during class, or on branching out and making connections with new people. I feel like everyone else is moving ahead and getting way better at writing, and making new friends, and beginning to talk in meeting more, but I am still in pretty much the same place I was at the end of last year. I think part of the reason I feel like this is because there is so much more that I could be doing to go 'all in.' In order for me to feel like I am improving I need to take the beginning steps of doing more. I need to stop holding back and start going out of my comfort zone. I need to start talking in meeting, and commenting on peoples' writing, and start opening up more. I think when I start doing more things like this I will start feeling better about how much I have learned and improved this year. I guess I am the only person who is holding me back, and it isn't that I can't get better at writing, it is just that I am not taking the extra steps of trying hard to improve it.

- *Things I'm proud of and why I'm too scared to show them.— Scout H.*

I am often scared to show, or tell people about something that I feel proud of, as it might come off as I'm bragging or self-centered. A question I often ask myself or the world is why can't it be normalized for someone to show or tell someone about something they feel proud of and that they accomplished without people thinking they are bragging or something along that line. It can also relate to the question of who are real friends? People who support you and your accomplishments, and are proud of you instead of putting you down.

Going back, I sometimes want to share what I feel proud of so badly, but most of the time I think no one will care, but why can't I just tell people about things I'm proud of, whether it's something I did or someone else. I hope if someone would want to share something they are proud of, I would respond appropriately, in being happy for the person. I feel as a thirteen-year-old girl I have done a pretty good job at balancing everything between school, homework, friends, family, and sports, I too am also pretty happy most of the time, but also I'm a normal human being, who has emotions for the better or worse. I must not be the only person who feels this, but as soon as someone takes the step, maybe another will follow?



*Top--Pema leads her team in the tug-of-war (or is about to be pulled into the wall)
Bottom— Molly & Alex lean back into it*

Learning About the Art of Frankenweenie

By Steve Holmes, Math Teacher

Students filtered into the basement and sat around paint-covered tables as I plugged my computer into the projector.

“Today we will learn about the nuances of shading and tonal value in an art project I like to call ‘Tim Burton Self-Portrait’,” I said to the group as images of Tim Burton’s characters appeared on the screen. “Does anyone know who Tim Burton is?”

“Oh! Oh! Oh! He’s the guy who did the restaurants in Canada!”

“No, that’s Tim Horton. Anyone else?”

“He did the movie with the guy with scissor fingers. Like Eddie Scissor Fingers or something.”

“Edward Scissorhands. Yes. That was one. Did anyone see that movie?”

I was met with blank stares.

“What about this one?” I showed a scene from “Nightmare Before Christmas.” A couple of kids knew that one. “How about this one?” An image of a small boy and a stitched-together dog appeared on the screen.

“FRANKENWEENIE!”

“Oh! I know that one!”

“It’s with the kid and the dog and the dog dies and the kid tries to bring it back to life like Frankenstein and stuff like that.”

“Yes. Frankenweenie. So, today at North Branch School we are going to study the art of Frankenweenie,” I said.

I couldn’t help but think, so this is art class in middle school: the Art of Frankenweenie...

more to follow on pg 5

Following a few drawing sessions in the basement, the students later summarized their experience in quickly written Haiku because we all know that Tim Burton and Frankenweenie are traditional subjects in ancient Japanese poetic arts.

TIM BURTON

Long necks, spiked beanie.
Darker shading, two big eyes.
Skulls, spiders, and blood!

IH

Big eyes, pointy chin.
Carefully shade the lines in.
Hats, scars, blood, and cats.

YSU

Dark, grim, unsettling
Inspiration for drawing.
Masterpieces made.

- IC

Off-putting and weird—
Big eyes, sharp chins, pointy noses.
Strange man does strange art.

ER

Graphite shadows dark.
Small pupils, floating wide eyes
faces staring up.

ES

Shading, very light.
Pencils, journeying across.
Drawing, time passes.

AS

Shading, drawing lines.
Big eye bags, and comparing
Music, laughing, finished.

WM



Light against the dark.
Big eyes, small lines, on paper.
Eyebrows are the key.

MH

Sunken eyes, tiredness
Empty, sad, animated
Near death, full of life.

TF

Scratching, sketching, blends
Shadows, sadness, pale, shallow.
Bleak, but happy.

MW

Pencils glide on
fresh, white paper, drawing to
show care— it matters.

OW

Creepy, dark, drama,
Soft pencil over dark figures.
Blenders scratch sharp lines

OL

Deep shadows, blending
That's so good! Says Carina
I blush, but feel good.

GG



Zinga the Greasy Pizza Dough: Or, a Story of Possibly the World's Worst Bakers

By Isabelle Case

Rose was requesting five people to help make pizza dough. I decided that would be more fun than staring at my computer, so I joined Taylor and Alex as they got started measuring flour.

"You should measure 7 cups. DON'T lose count of how many cups you put in," Rose warned. "If you're the slightest bit unsure, start over."

Taylor paused. "Wait, was that 2 cups?" She asked. "Whatever, I think it was."

I measured 14 (+/- 1) half-cups of flour, and added a table-spoon of salt. Rose looked skeptically at me when I told her I was 90% sure I'd scooped the right amount of flour, but she gave me the water and yeast mixture and I began to mix it in.

Georgia, Jane and Yaz came storming into the room and declared that they were ready to help. Rose got them set up with bowls and measuring cups, and they got to work.

Sometime later, Georgia announced that she was done with the flour and salt, and asked what she was supposed to do next.

"You pour in one of those water mixtures," I told her, pointing to the carefully measured beakers.

Scout NG walked in and began helping Taylor kneed her dough. We worked and chatted for a few more minutes.

"Uh...Georgia?" I heard Charlotte say. I looked at Georgia's bowl. In it was a wimpy clump of dough, almost completely submerged in a puddle of water. The water sloshed around as she kneaded, and her dough was all the wrong consistency. It was stringy, bumpy, soaked, and stuck to her hands. It looked revolting. "I think you might have done something wrong," I said.

"What? Was I not supposed to put all the water in??" Georgia asked, gesturing to her empty beaker.

"No, you are. We usually end up having to add way more because it's not enough..." I responded. Charlotte wondered whether she had used enough flour.

"Oh, wait, were you using the half-cup?" Charlotte asked. We looked in the bag of flour next to Georgia, and found that indeed the metal measuring cup inside said "1/2". We all started laughing.

"Okay, just add more flour then, it's okay," Rose instructed.

"You should measure out seven more—" I started saying, as Georgia grabbed the nearest bag of flour with her sticky hands and dumped the whole thing into her bowl.

"Nope, okay that works too!" I laughed. I got back to work kneading my dough.

"Sushi...sushi...sushi! Make her into sushi! Alright, it's flat enough, we can cut it now." I looked to my left to see Taylor and Scout smooshing their dough into a pancake approximately sushi height.

"Oooh, we should name her!" Taylor proposed to Scout.



*Out at the bread oven on a mid-winter pizza day.
Tal burned his hair again.
We made delicious pizzas, We ate. We were happy*

"Hmm...Zinga!" They agreed, and it spiraled into making jokes about Zinga, all whilst referring to their dough as "she."

Halfway through, people started making fun of how my dough and Charlotte's were way too tough. Someone determined that we probably needed to add more olive oil, which I hadn't known we were supposed to add. Rose poured oil onto my dough, which slid right off my dough without being soaked up. My dough now had a coating of oil.

"Eww! Mine's GREASY!" I laughed.

"Oh, Greasy?" Scout asked, and the name stuck. "Gosh, I think Greasy spent too long in the sun."

"Yeah! Greasy got a good tan!" Alex added. Greasy was made fun of some more, as I tried to defend her.

"Ugh, Greasy isn't turning soft! What does it need?!" I asked in frustration.

"Greasy needs HELP," Taylor and Alex kept insisting, and we all giggled.

In the end, Georgia's improvised dough worked well. Yaz's dough got dubbed "Greasy Junior." Charlotte and I failed to fix our dough. Georgia started a new dough, and it too was a temporary disaster. She never finished. I had fun. The bell rang.



Our Morning Meeting: Three Hours Condensed Into Short Form Haiku

From Tal

Every morning we have a morning meeting. Sometimes nothing much happens...Sometimes the true feeling is missing. Something like small talk. Civilized comments about family, vacation, an event coming up. Someone cut their hand the night before slicing a bagel. *I'm going to New York this weekend. My mom got a new job and I'm excited.* Important small talk, piece of ourselves. Other times it is filled with feeling—great sadness, or grief, or a new understanding. A death, a move, an illness. A departure. An arrival. A change, an accomplishment.

And other times the meeting goes long, because something regarding ourselves, as a school family, wants to arise. There may be pressure building. Unsettled feelings. Unspoken conflict. Layers of misunderstanding. Sometimes mistrust. A destabilizing atmosphere has descended, and someone decides to say something, sometimes even when they don't know that the feeling is. Since we are a small school, they sense it, and they say, "Something hasn't been feeling right. I don't know what it is." There may follow a silence, a large space. Someone decides to say something into the space. Another silence. And then, sometimes, the conversation picks up pace. Someone has courage and drops down into a deeper feeling, their own, with no regard to whether others will approve or understand. A new feeling, maybe something scary, something true for them. Something that others are feeling, but maybe afraid to say. Or maybe it's something that "wants" to be said. And maybe the feeling has not full form or order, but it comes forth anyway.

When this happens, as a school we have to go with it. We can go long or late. As hard as this may be, as unsure and unclear these feelings may be, we will pursue them. Sometimes it takes hours. And even if we have a meeting that lasts hours, those hours are usually only the beginning. There will be more meetings, more conversations. And then there will be more learning, more understanding, more nuance, more meaning.

On a recent cold Thursday, one such meeting occurred. From 8:30 in the morning until 11:15 am we talked and listened and tried to see and hear and catch the lightning. At the end of the day, I asked the kids to summarize the Long Meeting into seventeen syllables.

Long Meeting Haiku

Important issues.
People not completely sure
No one ready yet
OL

Time is stretched, drawn out
when can it be over? But, I
understand, I care
OW

Loud, still air surrounds
Voices booming, clock ticking
End at a distance
MH

Thoughts swirling, exposed
Watching, wondering, unsure
Cracked voice breaks silence.
IC

Sit, squirming, waiting
Silence, but then someone speaks
Tears, but so much love.
GG

Heads in hands, my tears
Cry the truth, I've been waiting
Clock ticks, still worth it.
CB

Oval at center.
School is caring, care is love
Problems should not hide.
RS

Twenty-seven bodies
Feelings surrounding the room
Colors, years, Love you.
?

My head, on my arms
Switch posture, over again
Hear all the feelings
SD

A small voice speaks up,
Growing confidence through time.
Silence rejoices.
?

People Talk, Safe.
No danger Is here with us.
We talk, happy, safe.
GC

Clock ticking, no sound
Tears dripping down face
Minds open, words flow
ER

It might get ugly.
Or not. Insight into us.
We fight for something.
T.B

Sit in quiet room.
Loud cautious words opening.
Listening presence.
ES

Sitting, hot and bored
Crashing out is very near
End, finally here.
AS

Commiserating.
Crying, waiting, confused, sad.
Sadness spreads around
?

Walking beneath dirt
Eternal search, deepest root
But I cannot see.
TF

Hard, wood chair, tired eyes.
Needing to go, hold it in!
At last, potty break!
IH

Listening, speaking.
Crying for how much you care.
Importance fills us.
YSU



In February, in the deepest snow, NBS' Winter Olympics takes place on the Doug Walker Field. The Tug-of-War. The goal is to pull the other team through a carefully crafted snowwall—1-2-3, PULL!

The North Branch School, founded in 2001, is a non-profit independent school serving middle school age children (grades 7-9). The school is officially recognized by the state of Vermont and meets or exceeds all licensing standards. NBS is a 501 (c) 3 entity.

Non-discrimination policy
In hiring, admissions and administration, NBS does not discriminate on the basis of physical ability, gender, race, national or ethnic origin, creed, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or religious affiliation.

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**The
 NORTH
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