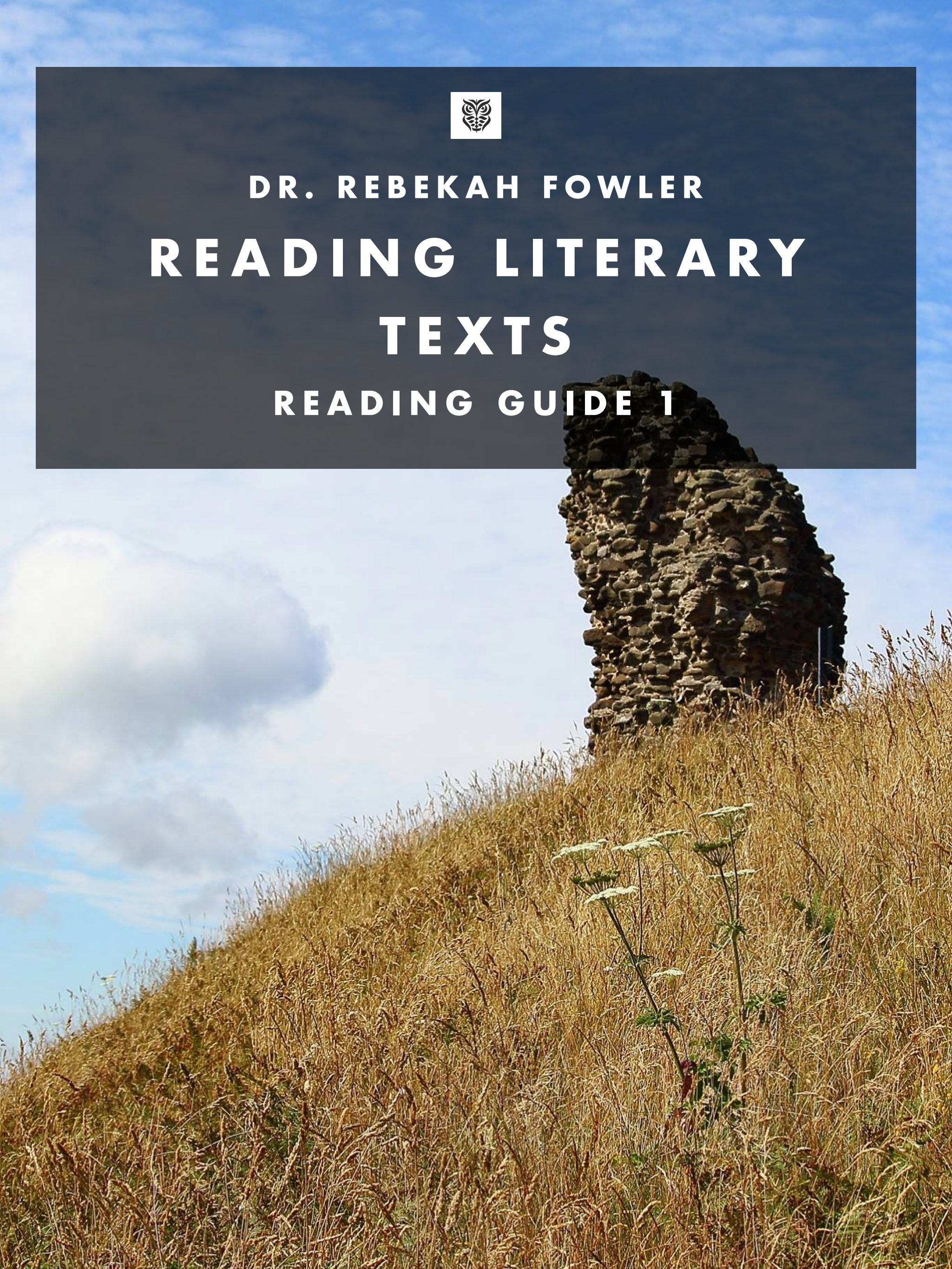

DR. REBEKAH FOWLER

READING LITERARY TEXTS

READING GUIDE 1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to ENG 205: Western Literature I!

Coming into this literature class, you likely have an expectation that there will be a significant amount of reading involved. With a title like "*Western* Literature I," you may also be thinking about the content of what you will be reading: important literary works of early Western culture, whatever that means. On both accounts, you would be correct. This is a course that involves readings in some of the great early works of Western culture, including works from Europe and the Near East.

As college students you are expected to be highly literate, to read at a post-secondary level that would presumably make the task of reading copious amounts of early Western literature less daunting. But, the reality is that reading literature, and especially the literature in classes like this one, comes with some unique challenges, including the fact that much of the works read for this class are from cultures far removed, historically and geographically, from our own, that many of them are in translation, and that those that aren't translated use words and phrasing that are unfamiliar to us in the 21st century.

The uniqueness of this reading experience causes us to (re)think (about) ***how we read literature***, or ***how to read literarily***. When was the last time you really thought about ***how you read*** and ***how prepared you are to read*** in a multitude of ways, for a multitude of purposes, and in the multitude of styles and formats that college reading demands of you? With these questions in mind, you may observe that not all reading tasks are the same.

What this means is that, while some reading ***strategies and approaches*** may remain the same across different types (genres) of texts and for different purposes (e.g., reading an epic for this class as opposed to reading a biology textbook), others need to be adjusted to match the task at hand. That's what the series of guidelines in the reading packets for this class are designed to help you do.

This semester our primary focus will be on ***reading***, with an emphasis ***how*** we read and practicing strategies to help us read more effectively. In particular, we'll be practicing strategies for ***reading literature*** more effectively. Below are some general guidelines to help you navigate reading, generally, and reading literature, more specifically.

The following sections provide tools to help you to **recognize what kinds of texts you're reading, get more out of your reading by using various strategies, manage the reading load for school, read literarily,** and **find purpose in reading both in and out of school**.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE READING

Cathedral? Castle? Fort? Lighthouse? Knowing what you're looking at can change your perception of what the object does, why it does it, and how it does it. How does knowing that this is a castle tower impact your knowledge of what it was used for and by whom? The same is true of texts: knowing what kind, or genre, of text you're looking at can alter how you approach reading it.

Texts come in a variety shapes, forms, and styles, and are written for a variety of purposes. Below is a list of five general types of texts, ranging from the literary to the non-literary. "Litera***ry***" texts generally fall under the categories of narrative, drama, or poetry, while non-literary texts encompass nearly everything else. For the purposes of this class, we define litera***ture***, in overly simple terms, as "creative/imaginative writing in prose and verse." The other forms of writing listed below are generally not considered to be literary, though, since the 20th c., especially, it's not unusual for literary texts to break the "rules" and play with traditionally non-literary styles.

As you review the list below, think about the types of texts you encounter in college and determine what types of writing they fall under.

NARRATIVE WRITING

Narrative writing includes such genres as **novels, short stories, memoirs, epics,** and **plays**. In this class, we will be reading **epics**, **plays**, and both **prose and verse narratives**. **"Prose"** is writing that **mimics speech**, with sentences that generally include a subject, verb, and object, and paragraphs that indicate changes in topic or focus. **"Verse" is poetry**, which does not usually follow natural speech patterns, but rather, creatively plays with language. Note that some poetry can be narrative, but a great deal of poetry is not, which is why I've designated poetry as a separate writing type.

Narrative writing:

- **Entertains**
- **Tells a story**
- **Has narrative elements like character, plot, and resolution**

POETRY

Poetry includes such genres as **epics, lyrics, sonnets, ballads,** and **odes**, though there are many more sub-genres. As noted above, "poetry does not usually follow natural speech patterns, but rather, creatively plays with language." In this class, we will be reading **epics**, Classical Greek and medieval **lyrics**, Renaissance **sonnets**, and **verse romances**. **Epics** are long narrative poems, which sparked another **verse narrative** form in the Middle Ages: the **verse** (and prose) **romance**. **Sonnets** are a sub-genre of **lyric poetry**, which is short, emotionally charged, personal verse.

Poetry:

- **Is not written in prose**
- **Uses language creatively, as an art**
- **Comes in a variety of genres and sub-genres**

PERSUASIVE WRITING

Persuasive writing includes such genres as **proposals, editorials, critical essays,** and **speeches**. While we will not be reading this type of writing as primary reading, you may be writing some persuasive pieces in your weekly assignments and blog posts and may read persuasive works, like critical essays, as secondary research. You are likely to encounter this type of writing in your Communications and College Writing classes, in the humanities and social sciences, generally, and in many areas of daily life. For example, political punditry, or opinion-based political analysis, is a type of persuasion, whether in writing or on the news, and editorials in newspapers are written for the express purpose of persuading others.

Persuasive Writing:

- **Tries to convince readers to take a certain action or position**

EXPOSITORY WRITING

Expository writing includes such genres as **news articles, reports, textbooks,** and **histories**. As with persuasive writing, we will not be reading much of this type of writing as primary reading, though Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which we will read in excerpts, falls under this category. Likewise, you may be writing some expository pieces for this class, and will certainly be engaging with some in your secondary research, including our use of Mark Musa's notes to Dante's *Inferno*. It should be evident from the list above that expository writing is a form you encounter often in college. It's useful to be aware that ***news stories*** and ***opinion pieces*** related to news stories, like op eds and editorials, are two different types of writing done for different purposes. Op eds and editorials are written to persuade; news stories are written to report and inform.

Expository Writing:

- **Focuses on facts/information**
- **May have text features like headings, bold words, charts, graphs, captions**

TECHNICAL WRITING

Technical writing includes such genres as **user manuals, instructions, workbooks, study guides, textbooks,** and **exams**. Note that "textbooks" are listed both under expository forms and technical ones; this is because some aspects of textbooks focus on informing while others aspects, such as application or discussion question sections, encourage you to perform a task. This guide, likewise, falls into both genres. The difference, then, between expository and technical writing is in the purpose: expository simply informs while technical informs one in how to complete a task.

Technical Writing:

- **Provides information to perform a task**
- **Has steps**

A CHALLENGE

As you read different types of texts, start to observe how your reading strategies and habits change to accommodate different types of writing and how the purposes for reading impact how you approach texts (e.g., how does your reading change when you read for an assignment as opposed to reading for fun?). Also, be aware of how some texts, such as textbooks, mix writing types.

MANAGE THE READING LOAD FOR SCHOOL

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles to reading *in* college is the act of reading *for* college. In other words, required reading for a class and for a grade, frequently in fields far outside of students' majors or minors, poses challenges to reading. Some of these challenges include **reading loads, having to read texts because they're required, coming into texts or courses with no prior knowledge of or experience with the content, being "forced" to take a class that does not interest them, and/or being graded for something that they see as "not mattering,"** especially if it is perceived as impacting the GPA. Sadly, these **challenges bias readers against literary texts.**

In this section, I provide tips and suggestions for coping with the challenges above with the hope that you will come to see reading literature as something other than a chore.

ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

One observation my fellow instructors and I have made concerning student evaluations is that students are sometimes disappointed with aspects of a class because they **did not live up to their expectations of or assumptions about** what the class would be. All of us come into new situations with some preconceptions and each of us with varying levels of prior knowledge. Sometimes, our preconceptions are deeply rooted and/or inaccurate and prior knowledge may be challenged or not as fully built upon as we'd hoped. When this happens in college courses, it could be because student **expectations are out of line with the stated description and goals of the course**. That is, what the student and professor each believes the course should be and do may not match up.

One way to avoid being disappointed in a class is to **read the course syllabus**, especially the **course description and student learning outcomes**, carefully. If, upon reading the syllabus at the beginning of the term, the class is not what you were assuming or expecting it to be, and if the reality of what the course offers means you are no longer interested in taking it, you can **drop the course** through the first week with no penalty.

If, on the other hand, you decide to stay in the course, **you have agreed, either explicitly or tacitly, to a set of expectations and assumptions that is in line with the instructor's**. Keep these expectations in mind as you work through the course. Is the course offering what the syllabus said it would offer? By the end of the term, did it fulfill the objectives outlined in the syllabus? If so, then it has met the expectations of the course. If, on the other hand, it does not offer what it claims to offer in the syllabus, it has not met expectations. If at any point you feel like this course isn't delivering what the syllabus has promised, please let me know and we can try to fill that gap to ensure both that you are getting what I promised and that I, as a result, am getting a good end-of-term score for "meeting expectations" from you.

Keep in mind that **courses cannot possibly be tailored to all of each student's individual preferences**. For example, with 33 students per class section for ENG 205, and an offering of 3 sections this semester, I have 99 students, all but one or two of which are complete strangers to me coming into the course. What are the odds, then, that all of your preferences can be met? In summary, adjusting your expectations to meet the reality of what the course is able and promising to deliver will result in reduced likelihood of disappointment.

BEING OPEN-MINDED

Being open-minded is part of altering assumptions and expectations. **Consider each new text to bring something new to the table and be willing to learn what that something is**. **Welcome unfamiliar styles, subject matter, language usage, and anything else that is new to you** rather than shutting down because it's "weird" or challenging. **Be willing to be challenged** by the materials, strategies, and practices introduced in the class.

Maria Popova paraphrases the "mindset" work of Carol Dweck, writing, "A 'fixed mindset' assumes that our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens which we can't change in any meaningful way, and success is the affirmation of that inherent intelligence, an assessment of how those givens measure up against an equally fixed standard; striving for success and avoiding failure at all costs become a way of maintaining the sense of being smart or skilled" (*Brain Pickings*). Coming into any course with a closed mind also engages in fixed mindset, often resulting in avoidance of any task that might fall outside of your known strengths or blaming the task, the text, or the professor when immediate success is not found.

The opposite of the "fixed mindset" is the "growth mindset." Again quoting Popova, a growth mindset "thrives on challenge and sees failure not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities" (*Brain Pickings*). In other words, the student who comes into this or other courses with a willingness to be challenged and to "stretch their existing abilities" has a greater potential to grow as a student and as an individual. I hope you will take a "growth mindset" approach to the learning we do in this course.

If you begin a text or a course with a "fixed" or negative attitude, you increase the likelihood that your reading or course experience will be a negative one. **Try, instead, starting with a positive attitude that there is something to be gained from reading the text(s) or taking the course, *even though the materials don't seem to be directly related to your major or minor***.

THINKING BEYOND THE REQUIREMENT

When you come into a course like this one thinking of it and the reading done for it strictly in terms of a requirement ("something I have to do"), you bias yourself *against* the reading and come at it with a less-than-positive attitude. Instead, **practice intellectual curiosity**: try starting the reading with asking yourself **what you'd like to learn from the text** and **read it for that purpose**. Another option is to **think, as you read, about what you might be getting out of the text if you'd selected to read it on your own** and in your own time frame. Or, try questioning **how the text actually *does* relate to your major, your minor, someone you know, an experiences you've had, or an emotion you've felt**.

Think, too, about the reading strategies and tools below as ways to **give the reading purpose**. Reading with purpose sets you on a positive path toward seeing the reading as something more than "just a requirement."

MORE THAN A GRADE

Understandably, students tend to focus a great deal on grades and GPAs. Keep in mind that **one or two grades that fall short of an A or a B, or even a C, especially in a course that is not in one's major, is unlikely to be the single event that damages one's chances at earning a scholarship, grant, entrance into a post-**

baccalaureate program, **or a better shot at a dream job**, especially if one is able to contextualize that grade through a strong narrative (seeing how strong narratives operate in, say, a literature class can help here!). As a recent member of UWL's Scholarships and Awards committee, I present this as a statement of fact.

Indeed, **worrying overly much about grades often competes with real learning**. **Learning often involves risk-taking, stumbles, and even failures** from which an active learner takes away lessons. At the very least, true learning requires **intellectual curiosity**, and this **is sometimes at odds with a focus on doing everything "by the book"** in order to earn an A. This is certainly true in the humanities and in any field that embraces innovation (e.g., technology and entrepreneurism). To help alleviate some of this concern over grades and "doing it right," we are using a grading contract in this class, which is explained in the course syllabus.

Paired with the concern over grades is the concern many students have over getting a good job, which is, again, a reasonable concern, especially in light of the cost of education. However, **a college education is not a *guarantee* of a good job**. If approached with the belief that a college education is there to . . . um . . . educate rather than to hand the graduate a key to a good job, students will likely get more out of classes like this one that fall outside of their majors, and will, as a result, likely find more creative and productive ways to use what they learn in such classes in the pursuit of "the good job" because **they will be more well-rounded, more capable of making connections across seemingly disparate concepts, and more willing to consider how new information might be thoughtfully paired with their disciplinary expertise (that is, their major and/or minor)**.

The upshot here is for you to think about how you might re-consider general education courses outside of your major/minor as opportunities to learn and expand your opportunities to make connections between disparate pieces of information rather than as just one more thing to check off the list of requirements.

LITERATURE FOR NON-MAJORS

As I am writing this, only one of the 99 students currently enrolled in ENG 205 for Fall 2019 is an English major. **The course is, then, not a class designed *for* Literature majors**. However, **all English Literature and English Education majors and minors have to take a 200-level literature class as a pre-requisite, so this course is appropriately designed *to benefit* English majors and minors**, too. What that means is that it has to be sufficiently open, yet sufficiently rigorous to meet the needs of both groups.

Though there are also no Literature minors in this class, according to the current enrollments, some of you have taken the **Program Option: Humanities Track**, which means that you might opt to take an upper level literature course, which, again, will have a pre-requisite of one 200-level literature course. **Pre-med students** who are planning to go to **UW Madison** for med school should also be aware that **Madison requires all incoming med students to have an upper level writing intensive course in the humanities or social sciences**. So, we may be seeing some of you in upper level literature courses down the road, and, you guessed it, you'll need this 200 pre-req. Similarly, some **law schools** request that incoming students have experience in the humanities, and many English majors go on to become lawyers, so . . . .

More and more data shows that students who graduate with majors or minors in the humanities are, over time, out-pacing business, marketing, management, and tech majors in **promotions to management** levels due to their **creativity and flexibility**. This is not a slam at business, marketing, management, and tech majors; rather, I offer that there is ample evidence to suggest that majors in these areas that have a strong liberal arts foundation also benefit. What this means is that those who do the hiring and promoting in business are **looking for well-**

rounded individuals who learned more than just the technically specific concepts covered in upper-level courses in their majors.

Literature courses also benefit non-majors/minors and those who do not see themselves in the above-mentioned fields because they provide several **skills related to the reading of literature, including:**

- **deep, analytical thinking**
- **problem-solving involving the human element**
- **empathic thinking**
- **flexibility of mind**
- **the ability to cope with ambiguity**
- **willingness to and practice with listening to other points of view**
- **the ability to talk and write clearly about sometimes difficult topics**
- **written and oral communication skills.**

Courses like ENG 205 that are part of a broad Liberal Arts Education (breadth/general education across many disciplines) provide the greatest **potential for future employees, citizens, and humans with knowledge in areas beyond a single focus**, which **benefits society, business, industry, and life,** generally. This is also **what separates bachelors-degree-granting institutions (like universities) from technical collages**.

Don't just take my word for it. In **Appendix A** at the end of this documents are links to several articles on English, the humanities, and a liberal arts education and others on why literature matters.

HANDLING THE READING LOAD

Now to practical matters: how to manage the reading load. One of the most common comments literature professors get in student evaluations is that there was **too much reading**, especially from students in general education literature courses who sometimes add that there was **too much reading "for non-majors."** Most general education literature classes are **literary surveys**, **vast overviews of many texts intended to provide a broad overview** (in the case of ENG 205, this vastness includes many periods and cultures, spanning 3600 years of Western culture!). This means that there is, at the departmental, college, and university levels, **an expectation of coverage**. **"Coverage" means lots of texts being read**. Out of necessity, the number of texts covered is already severely limited and much is left uncovered; however, this does not translate to the student taking the class who may have 100+ pages of reading per week for a general education literature class (I tried to keep it to 80 or less, when possible).

My first piece of advice for handling the reading load in ENG 205 and other courses that have large reading loads is to **go in expecting to read a lot and plan semesters that have large reading requirements with this in mind**. In other words, if you know, for example, that you've got both a literature and a history requirement to get in, shoot for separate semesters to make the reading load more manageable. This takes some thoughtful planning and perhaps some conversations with your academic advisor.

Certainly this isn't always possible, and many of you may also be in majors with heavy reading loads. With this in mind, and knowing that your semester is already scheduled, the next strategy is to **plan your weekly homework load thoughtfully** in order to complete assignments for all classes to the best of your ability.

Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

- **Know your reading pace** and keep it in mind when you plan your study time.
- **Time how long it takes you to read different types of texts**. Some will be quick reads, while others will take you longer, and no two readers read at the same pace.
- **Schedule reading homework times based on the texts that take you longer**. In other words, assume all reading assignments could take the longest period of time. That way, if a reading takes less time, you've just freed up some time for something else rather than having to scramble to find more time or not complete the reading!
- **Plan specific study times for specific courses and be aware of which of those courses need the most study time.** Reading may require more time, because . . .
- **Reading literature is not a quick process**. Reading literature is slow, **unlike reading a FB or Instagram post, a tweet, or even a Wikipedia page**. It's a roast, not a burger, even if both are beef. Sometimes, literature is slow-drying jerky, needing to be chewed on for a while. Be aware of that fact and don't expect literature (a roast, or sometimes jerky) to be something it's not (a burger).
- **Look ahead on the schedule to see what the reading load looks like for the following week**. Note: I give you approximate page counts so you know how much reading to expect for each class period. Not every professor will do this. Looking ahead, though, is a good habit to get into and can help you to plan time for your reading/workload for all classes.
- **Avoid waiting until the last minute** to complete reading assignments. Consider study groups for reading and discussion. You don't have to read silently in solitude.
- **See the section below for pointers** that may help to reduce reading time or, at least, make it more effective and productive.

GET MORE OUT OF READING WITH STRATEGIES

There are a variety of strategies that successful college readers utilize when reading texts. The reading strategies listed below may be familiar to you, and you may even use them regularly. However, for some you, this section may serve as a helpful reminder of strategies neglected to which you might return or as fresh perspective on how to read more effectively. Likely, there are strategies and tips in this section that are new to each of you.

Throughout the semester, I will be encouraging you to use a variety of these strategies with the hope that you will also find them transferable to other courses and reading situations. The strategies in this section are ones that not only work for literature classes, but are general reading strategies useful to all college students and for all types of college reading. I encourage you to experiment with a variety of them outside of this classroom and to determine which ones work best for you and/or for different reading situations.

READ, FIRST, FOR THE STORY, THEME, OR CONCEPT

It's especially easy when reading early literary texts and texts in translation, like the ones in this class, to get hung up on unfamiliar words or phrases, which slows down the reading pace. The same is true when reading textbooks, articles, or other materials in subjects with which you are not very familiar, that are written at a more advanced level in a discipline, or that are written using a great deal of jargon or insider terminology.

Below are a couple of tips for how to handle these situations:

- **Mark unfamiliar or difficult words and phrases and keep going.** Sometimes the word/phrase becomes clearer in context to the rest of the passage. If not, return to the word and look it up.
- **Focus on keeping main characters and the storyline (or central concept in non-literary texts) clear before clarifying details**, such as definitions, words and phrases, or creative use of language.
- **Save interpretations** (what it means) **or analysis** (e.g., how the text does what it does, what the text has to say about x, why main characters makes the choices they make) **for a subsequent, closer reading.** See "Rereading" below for what to do next.
- If you're reading a textbook or text that has section headers, **skim through the headers and take note of information that is new to you or that promises to build upon prior knowledge**. Read the entire chapter/text for the big concepts, but return to these sections for the reread (see "Reread" below).

TAKE NOTES

Note-taking as you read can help to keep you engaged with the text because you are actively working with it. There are a variety of ways to take notes, but I recommend having a dedicated notebook, binder with loose leaf paper, or digital folder for each class. Write the notes in a manner that works best for you. Do you prefer hand-written notes or typed ones? If you operate better with shorthand, bullet points, or incomplete sentences, do that; if complete sentences are your go-to method, that's great. If your note-taking includes quotations for future papers or research, will you write out whole quotes or paraphrase in your notes? Remember to include page numbers so you can find them later! Above all, make sure the notes will make sense to you at a later date.

Some focuses for note-taking might include the following:

- **Ideas or questions that occur to you as you read;**
- **Words or phrases that you find confusing or unfamiliar and want to return to;**
- **Quotes you find especially compelling or potentially useful for papers or weekly writing/ discussion assignments;**
- **Places in the text with which you especially agree or disagree, or find yourself bothered or affirmed;**
- **Places in the text where you noticed significant elements of the text's genre or style;**
- **Places the text where you noticed character change, plot shifts, or other narrative elements;**

- **Points related to weekly writing/discussion prompts that occur to you as you read.**

Some of the suggestions above are geared toward reading in this class, so think of how they might be adapted for other courses. Additionally, these are but a few suggestions. You may find other reasons to take notes that are more or equally relevant to you.

MARK UP TEXTS

Marking up texts as you read is similar to note-taking in its ability to keep you engaged with the text. Marking up can take many forms, such as **underlining or highlighting important words or phrases**, **circling specific words that seem significant or confusing**, or **otherwise marking places in the text that are somehow significant**. **Writing notes in the margins** of the text is a useful accompaniment to mark-ups and serves a variety of purposes, such as **providing a guide to where specific items appear** in the text, **commenting on a point in the text** with which you agree/disagree or otherwise have something to say, or **indicating something in the text on which you'd like clarification**. This is only a small sampling of reasons one might choose to mark up text.

What stymies students the most about this process is knowing **what to mark up**. As with note-taking, this depends on your preferences, but it also depends on **the purpose of your reading**. Why are you reading this piece? Is it to retain information for a quiz or exam? To gather information for a paper or report? To better comprehend a text? To prepare for in-class discussion on a specific topic? To better cement a concept in your mind? **Mark up the text deliberately with your purpose(s) in mind.**

For example, if you're trying to memorize facts for a quiz, you'll likely want to mark up main concepts, important terminology or names, or plot points and character names (in literature). If, on the other hand, you're reading in preparation for in-class discussion on a specific theme or concept, you'll want to read and mark up for that theme or concept. If for a paper, you'll read and mark up with your paper topic in mind. **The list above of items on which to take notes can also help with ideas for what to mark up.**

Note: Since Textbook Rentals discourages writing in rental texts, you are more limited in using this strategy in many of your classes. However, that doesn't mean that there aren't ways to "mark up" texts. **Consider writing on sticky notes and tabs** and sticking them in relevant places in the text instead of writing directly in them. You can **write notes on the stickies just as you would in the margins** of the text. For handouts, mark them up! (On some handouts for this class, you'll see my idiosyncratic method in action, which can serve as a model for what you might do, or for what you might not to do. Everyone has their own best methods!).

REREAD

As noted earlier, a first read-through should be for overall comprehension of the big picture concepts or plot of the text, though you may be a reader who also picks up significant amounts of detail along the way. **Rereading** of texts is when you **read for more detail, interpretation, and analysis.** Granted, reading and workloads in college often make this strategy more difficult; however, **note-taking and/or marking up texts during the first reading makes rereading manageable**. Here's how:

- Rather than rereading entire texts, **start with revisiting your notes and/or mark-ups and rereading those sections where you had questions, confusion, or reading challenges or items you want to analyze** in reading logs, papers, or for other reasons.

- Make sure that **if you're isolating a section of text, you're keeping the concepts in context to the whole work.** Pulling concepts or quotes out of context can sometimes lead to misreading and weak interpretations of and arguments about texts.

- **When you have more time, conduct a more thorough rereading**, especially if you're writing a paper, blog post, or other piece about that text.

- **Share your questions, confusions, challenges, and ideas with the class** to make it more likely that a section you hoped to revisit and reread is chosen for in-class reading, discussion, and guided practice. While you should make time to reread on your own, this will provide even more opportunities for rereading small sections of text.

- As noted in the first point above, if you're reading a textbook or other document with section headers, **return to those sections that share new information or promise to build on what you already know as the focus of a rereading**. If the whole chapter or text was new to you, **mark the sections that were most confusing for a reread**.

- In other words, especially if you're pressed for time, **you don't have to reread entire texts or assigned sections of texts** (unless you're planning to publish something or write a thesis or dissertation on them!).

USE THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOLS

Think-aloud protocols are used to **record your thought process as you work through a task**. They are frequently used in the teaching of writing, but also work well as a mindful reading exercise. The idea is for you to **verbalize out loud what is going through your mind as you read a text** (or write a paper), while your **verbalization is being recorded**. This can either be done with audio recording equipment (the one on your phone or computer works fine) or by having someone else write down what you say as you share you ideas. Then, you **return to your recording and reflect upon your process** and its effectiveness or what you notice about it. This thinking about your thinking is called "metacognition" and is an important step in deep learning.

The basic process for think-aloud protocols is as follows:

- As you read, read near your computer, phone, or other audio recording device and record your thoughts as you read a section of text (e.g., a page or two, a chapter, a short story or poem). Alternately have a roommate, classmate, friend, or family member write down what you say.

- Read the text aloud as you complete this activity so you can hear where you are in the text as you comment.

- Use the separate guidelines found in Appendix A below for a more thorough explanation of protocol questions or prompts, but as a short overview, "think aloud" about such things **as where you are confused**, **where you have questions**, **what you'd like to return to upon rereading**, **where the text angers or pleases you**, **where the text challenges you**, or **where you see evidence of genre or narrative elements working well or not so well**.

- **Play back your recording and note those items that you'd like to take up in class or in face-to-face conversations** with the professor and/or peers.

- Also upon playback or review of your peer's notes, **notice what types of things you tend to comment on and what they suggest about your reading practice**.

READ ALOUD

Whether you record yourself or not, **reading aloud can help with focus and comprehension**, as well as **with articulating the mood or tone of the text**. Reading aloud can also help **to better understand phrasing and words that are no longer in common use**, such as with Shakespeare's plays. BTW, literature throughout most of the periods covered in this class was meant to be shared aloud, not privately and independently; books (or scrolls or tablets in earlier periods) were handwritten and very expensive, so individual copies of texts like we have today weren't very common.

If you read aloud, try the following:

- **Play around with different voices or accents** for different characters! Talk in a bad British accent as you read!

- **Read aloud to your roommate or a friend**. **Or ask a classmate** to join you in reading the assigned readings aloud. This option works really well paired with the final point in this section of the guide: "have conversations" about the texts.

- Try reading aloud only those **sentences or sections that you find especially confusing**.

This strategy can also works really well with non-literary texts.

QUESTION THE TEXT

Although identifying questions you have about the text through note-taking or text mark-ups has been mentioned already, what I'm getting at here is something slightly different. I'm asking you to **go into the text with questions before you even begin**. Simple questions like "what do you have to tell me?" or "what are you about?" are good starters. Others might be "why did the author or editor give you this title?" or "why are you in the epics/poetry/drama/narrative unit of this class?" If you're determined to see every assigned text for a class as boring, you might also start with the question "what evidence can you reveal to me that you are, indeed, boring (or not!)?"

Questioning the text also means **asking what the text is saying, how it's saying it, and why it's saying it** as you read. **Question how different readers in different times and places might read the text** and how their reading might be different from your own. Similarly, you can likely think of many t**hings you'd like to ask the author** if he or she were living.

If you start with some questions in mind, the note-taking, mark-ups, and/or think-aloud protocols are already given some purpose through which to drive your reading.

READ WITH A DICTIONARY

As noted above, in the interest of reading first for the story, it may be best to **come back to confusing words, phrases, or contexts**, but be prepared to do this by having **handy access to reference works**. The **Oxford**

English Dictionary (OED), available online through Murphy Library, is the best dictionary choice, as it has excellent background info on words and their origins (etymologies). Handy web access is also a great idea if you need more **background information on cultural, social, historical, political, religious, or other contexts**. And yes, Wikipedia counts as a quick, handy, fairly accurate reference (check the quality of the sources the article uses as a guide), as do sites like Shmoop, Cliff Notes, or Spark Notes. **Note: These latter three sources are not a substitute for reading the actual texts.**

SUMMARIZE

After you've finished reading assigned texts or sections of texts, either **write up or verbalize a summary in your own words** to test and cement your comprehension. **For more complicated texts or ones that are more confusing to you, stop and summarize smaller sections as you read**. One note-taking/text marking strategy you might try if comprehending the plot/story line or major concepts of the reading is a challenge for you is to **summarize each paragraph or cluster of 2-3 paragraphs**, then work out the **bigger picture in a summary after each section** of reading, and then **summarize the text in total**.

WRITE DOWN QUESTIONS AFTER READING

This is also a post-reading strategy, but can be tied to "questioning while reading," "note-taking," "marking up the text," or "read-aloud protocols." **After finishing the assigned text, what questions are you left with? Write them down and ask them in class or in face-to-face conversations** with the professor and/or peers. You might also have **thoughts or observations that you're left with rather than questions**. The same strategy applies: **write them down, bring them up.**

HAVE CONVERSATIONS

I've already mentioned this a couple of times, but **talk about the texts!** Academics in literary studies tend to talk about the texts they read: at conferences; in scholarly articles; in the classroom; with others who have read the texts. You might:

- Talk about the texts **with your classmates**, both in and out of class. Consider getting together with classmates for reading/study sessions. You don't have to read in solitude, and this is a fun option for reading aloud.
- Talk about the texts **with your professor**, both in class and during office hours.
- Talk about the texts **with your roommate(s) and friends**, even if they haven't read them. Maybe they'll be inspired to!
- Talk about the texts a**t parties, sporting events, Oktoberfest**. It will make you sound smart. ;-)

READ LITERATURE LITERARILY

The strategies above will work with any type of text you approach, literary or otherwise, though some of the examples provided for each of them set you on the path to using them for reading literary texts, too. When we read "literarily" (not the same as "literally"), **there are approaches we take to the text, or methods that we use, that are conventional for the discipline of literary** (not “literacy”*) **studies**. Certainly, other disciplines also use some, most, or all of these methods, but this section of the guide will highlight how they are used, specifically, in **literary studies**. Keep in mind that **reading literarily often combines more than one method/approach**. The approaches that follow are covered in order of complexity.

*It’s easy to confuse “literary” and “literacy,” so here are the OED definitions that are most pertinent to this course:

- Literary: **1.** Of or relating to the writing, study, or content of literature, esp. of the kind valued for quality of form; of the nature of literature. Also in early use: relating to letters or learning (cf. literature *n.* 1).

- Literacy: **1.** The quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read and write. Also: the extent of this in a given community, region, period, etc. Cf. numeracy *n.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

This approach to reading literature foregrounds the **reader's reactions** to the text and may hinge upon personal preferences. More academic approaches to personal response are **grounded in the text itself**; that is, the response **uses quotes and examples from the text to support the response** rather than relying solely on personal opinion.

More academic approaches also **move beyond general statements of preference** (e.g., “I didn’t like it,” “I loved it,” “It was boring”) to **provide a more specific statement** about what the reader did or didn’t like and that **includes reasons why** (e.g., “The language in this text was difficult for me because there were so many unfamiliar words, which made reading it less enjoyable than it might have been with more familiar words”). Personal preference, then, is a starting point, but the response digs a little deeper into **what is impacting those preferences, or how personal preferences impact reading, and why**. Some focuses of personal response might include the following:

- **Connections between a character’s behaviors, emotions, actions, locations, or other textual elements and personal experiences** (e.g., Gilgamesh’s intense grief reminds me of my brother’s grief over the death of his step-son);

- **Reactions to the process of reading** (e.g., encountering difficult language or sentence structure; working through strange story logic);

- **Thoughts or feelings related to what is unfamiliar in texts** (e.g., cultural references, unfamiliar terminology, historical events, names of historical persons or places);

- **Concepts or beliefs represented in the texts about which you have strong positive or negative reactions** (e.g., Dante's punishments for some of the sinners in his *Inferno*).

ANALYSIS

An analytical reading **identifies a pattern, an anomaly, a connection, or something else in the text that warrants closer inspection or raises questions** for the reader, but **does not necessarily involve judgment.** In other words, **analysis goes deeper than a book report or summary** of a text **to read more deeply and closely**, but does not go quite as far as evaluation.

Analysis does the following:

- D**igs deeper into some aspect of a text** (e.g., winter references in *The Wanderer*);
- **Draws conclusions** about what that aspect says about the text, overall (e.g., the poet's use of wintry references enhances the theme of exile and solitude in *The Wanderer*);
- E**xamines the hows and whys** of a text (e.g., how the author uses a particular literary device for a particular purpose; how the structure of a poem enhances its content; how a character's growth is made less visible by the structure of the text; how a character's behavior alters the plot; why the poem uses a particular device; why a character's development or lack of development is significant to the story's outcome; why a structural element of a text makes it successful/less successful as a narrative);
- C**onsiders how the text itself presents evidence** for the aspect of the text that is being examined (e.g., specific wintry words and phrases and words associated with exile and solitude in the *Wanderer* example above).

INTERPRETATION

This method **begins with analysis** and often utilizes other approaches and methods listed below, such as contextualization, critique, or research, but not necessarily. Interpretation **offers a reading of what a text means as a whole, or what the text is"about"** (e.g., *The Wanderer* is a poem about exile), but may also **offer a reading of what *some aspect* of a text means or is "about"** (e.g., most of the poem seems to be about exile, but the final stanza takes a positive turn toward hope and reconciliation with lost loved ones, suggesting that the poem is really about the difficulties of life and the relief of a heavenly reward). In the first instance, the interpretation is drawing conclusions through analysis (see points under Analysis) while in the second, it is "digging deeper into some aspect" as noted above to create an interpretation.

As with analysis, interpretation **must be grounded in a well-supported reading of the text**, meaning that **the text itself offers proof** for the interpretation (e.g., in the example above, lines from the final stanza are used to show a difference in mood or tone from the rest of poem, which is evidenced with lines from elsewhere in the poem that highlight exile and solitude).

Contrary to frequently stated belief, **it is not true that "anything goes" when interpreting literature**. In other words, the phrase, "it's my opinion, and interpretation is all about opinion, so I'm right" doesn't hold water. What *is* true is that **literature allows for more than one interpretation. There are, however, bad**

interpretations (i.e., sometimes a cigar really is just a cigar), which is to say that the **evidence does not support the interpretation given and/or other evidence in the text contradicts the evidence provided**, weakening the proposed reading. Hence, **it is important *not* to use evidence out of context or to ignore contradictory evidence** in order to make an interpretation seem stronger than it really is.

Literary interpretation, similar to a scientific hypothesis, must be supported with what the evidence shows to be true, or, in the case of literature, which is usually fictional, **what is *plausible***. For example, continuing with the example from the poem *The Wanderer*, which we will be reading later this semester, it would be implausible to interpret the poem as a being about a love affair gone bad, based on the textual evidence. This would be a weak interpretation lacking convincing evidence. (This, by the way, is also why profs might, occasionally, tell you that your interpretation is "wrong," which is not the same thing, usually, as the prof saying that only *their* interpretation is "right.")

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Contextualization considers historical, biographical, cultural, social, political, and/or other **impacts on texts that come from outside the texts themselves** (e.g., how Dante's work is influenced by his political office, wars between factions of northern Italian city-state governments, and increasing corruption in the Catholic Church in the high and late Middle Ages). **Conversely, it may also consider how texts act upon a variety of contexts**, especially cultural ones (e.g., how Machiavelli's *The Prince* is still used today to justify the concept of "the end justifies the means" or how conceptualizations of Hell in the arts are rooted in Dante's text).

"Contexts" might be contemporaneous to the text itself or outside of the text's own time and place, as when we, as 21st c. readers, read texts from the early Western canon. How do we read the text? What do we bring to it from our own backgrounds and experiences? When we contextualize, we need to consider our own **"situated-ness"** in time and place as we consider texts from other times and places and understand that **we bring our own cultural biases and norms into our readings** of texts that have different biases and norms (e.g., our shock at the treatment of women in *Arabian Nights* reflects our understanding that women in Western culture today are not generally viewed as inferior to or the property of men, which suggests a difference in understanding and practice of the roles of women in the medieval West, as well as what the literature might be doing as a commentary of those understandings and practices).

As a result of the above point, we need to work hard to **read culturally different texts on their own terms**, while still recognizing and addressing differences between their cultural place and moment and our own, as well as addressing how and where these cultural places and moments intersect with and inform our own in sometimes surprising ways.

This method is **usually paired with analysis and research, and often with interpretation and critique**.

CRITIQUE

There is a common misperception that "critique" is "criticism" in the negative sense. While it's true that critique frequently points out gaps, imperfections, or other seeming negatives, it may also find in favor of that which is being critiqued. Using this reading method, the reader/writer **evaluates some quality of the text, according to an established set of criteria**, which differs from, but builds upon, analysis. It does this building by **pulling in**

the added elements of judgment (critique) to the examination (analysis) rather than foregrounding examination that withholds judgment.

Critique therefore requires analysis, usually involves **interpretation**, and often engages **contextualization** and **research.** It may be based, initially, in **personal response**, but carries that response further, using **stronger evidence and support**, usually from both the primary texts and outside resources.

Critique **questions or problematizes** the hows and whys of a text whereas analysis simply points out the hows and whys and attempts to explain why they matter. In other words, **critique challenges something about the hows and whys and why they matter.** This challenging of texts **often challenges other readers' and critics' interpretations of the text, taking part in a disciplinary conversation,** and therefore **often uses theoretical perspectives** (e.g., feminism, structuralism, deconstructivist theory, formalism, Marxist theory, gender and queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, ecocritical theory, cognitive theory, cultural studies theory, New Historicism) as the basis of critique.

RESEARCH

When we think of "research," we might first think of writing the research paper or conducting laboratory research; however, research in literary studies begins with reading. A research project in literary studies **poses a question raised by the text that requires research beyond the text itself** (e.g., why are the goddesses in ancient epics allowed privileges and behaviors not usually allotted to human women?). Such a project **makes a claim about the text(s) based on that question** (e.g., both male and female gods in ancient epics behave in ways unacceptable for humans, which suggests that traditionally "masculine" traits and behaviors in goddesses are seen as problematic when exhibited by human women.).

This research then pulls in expert **analysis and critique from scholars in the field or fields related to the research question** (e.g., the above project would likely locate scholarly works on men's and women's roles in ancient cultures, ancient belief systems, modern feminist theory, and/or articles and books on the same or a related topic from other scholars). Such expert analysis and critique is found in **peer-reviewed scholarly articles and books** (i.e., from scholarly journals and books published by university presses and other academic publishing houses) and supplementary **primary texts** that may shed light on the primary source text(s) (e.g., philosophical texts, other contemporary texts related to the issue). All of this, of course, requires intensive reading of outside sources, and rereading of the text to check and double-check claims.

Literary research may also engage **archival research** (e.g., visiting archives to read original manuscripts) if and when time and money allows and when the project calls for it. Note: more and more early texts are being digitized (**the digital humanities**), meaning that scholars can access images of manuscripts online, making the expense and organization of travel to special collections around the world less necessary. The British Library, for example, has a great collection of digitized medieval manuscripts.

Literary research for professionals and independent scholars in the field is usually shared with an audience of peers at **conferences and in published articles and books**. Literary research for undergraduates and graduate students is usually conducted as a prelude to final paper projects for individual classes, though it may also be disseminated through undergraduate, graduate, and disciplinary conferences and journals that accept undergraduate or graduate papers. For undergrads, this includes the **National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR)** and its affiliated journal ***CUR Quarterly*.**

Research papers utilize a combination of the above approaches, but always involve **analysis**. They usually involve **interpretation, critique**, and **contextualization**, as well, though it is possible to research the form or structure of a text analytically. It is, however, very difficult to do so without bringing in the context of other scholars' perspectives!

FIND PURPOSE IN LITERATURE BOTH IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

At the beginning of this guide, we addressed the challenges of reading assigned texts and approaching them with a positive attitude and intellectual curiosity. As I close out this guide to reading literary texts, I want to leave you with some thoughts about purposes for reading that often get lost in the classroom, but that would benefit our reading both in the classroom and outside of it.

Such purposes are those that we might think of as esoteric, mystical, aesthetic, or even, in some circles, "soft" or "elitist," but they are also worthwhile pursuits in the reading of literature that don't have to get lost in a bid to find the utility in it. It's possible for literary reading to do both! Three significant purposes that fit the less-utilitarian bill are the following: **immersion** in texts, **creating worlds** inside and outside of texts, and **making connections**.

IMMERSION

By "immersion," I mean the following:

- Allowing yourself to **get carried away by the text**, even if you're reading it for a class.
- **Worrying less about finding "hidden meanings" or literary elements** of the text while still interpreting for your own understanding and enjoyment.
- **Reading, first, for the pleasure of the story or imagery.**
- **Forgetting the idea that there is one "right" way to read any text** and considering, first, what the text is saying to you, personally.

Allowing yourself to get immersed in the text is more valuable in the long-run than worrying about sounding smart in class after reading it. It's good for the soul to abandon yourself for a while to a story or a poem. And it travels beyond the classroom.

In her book *Why Literature? The Value of Reading and What It Means for Teaching*, Christina Vischer Bruns cites the author C.S. Lewis to suggest that immersive reading is akin to how Lewis speaks of viewing a work of art. Lewis says: "We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way" (Bruns 54). Going back to the strategy of "reading first for . . . ," here you might consider **reading first to see what the text "does to you."**

CREATING WORLDS

Every literary text constructs a world. As you read, pay attention to the world that's created. Here are some tips:

- **Pay attention to the world that the text builds.** What does it look like? Sound like? Smell like? Taste like? Feel like? How does it make you feel? Why does it make you feel this way?

- **Consider differences of experiences with this world.** Keep in mind that no two students in our ENG 205 classroom have the exact same experience of the classroom on a given day. Such factors as where one sits, who one is sitting next to, and how hungry or tired or prepared one is all impact that experience. It's the same with fictional worlds. How are you experiencing the text's world? How does your experience of it differ from how a fellow reader experiences it? How are your experiences similar? Why? How is your experience of it upon a second reading or after class discussion similar to or different from your first reading? Why?

- **Pull the world of the text into to your everyday life.** In what ways does the text and its world intersect with your own world? For instance, has it changed your point of view on something? Introduced you to something that you'd never experienced before? Opened up new possibilities for you? Made you aware of something that you weren't aware of before? Caused you to reflect upon your beliefs and ideals in some way?

- **In a nutshell, consider the value of inhabiting other worlds and allowing a text to alter your own.**

Note: I owe much to Catherine Vischer Bruns' thoughts on immersive reading and creating worlds for this information. You will find publication information on her text in the bibliography.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Immersing yourself in texts, inhabiting their worlds, and allowing texts to alter your own world all lend themselves to finding connections between texts and other aspects of your life. There are many places where you might start to see connections, including the ones listed below.

- **The connection between you and your classmates and professor** as you all read and talk about the same texts. How does the shared reading experience create community?

- **Connections between the texts and contexts you've researched or discussed.** How do they impact each other? Why is it important?

- **Connections between the texts and yourself**. Where do you find yourself in texts through characters' actions, behaviors, or emotions? Through a sense of place? Through an experience? Through imagery and metaphor?

- **Connections between the texts and today's world.** What makes these classics, classics? That is, what about them is timeless and recognizable, even in our 21st c. world? What issues or concerns troubled ancient and early modern people that we still deal with today? Why?

- **Connections between concepts addressed in the texts and your major and/or minor.** How might something in a literary text, or an approach to reading, help you to think differently about a problem in your discipline? Or to provide an analogy for that problem?

- **Connections between the texts and your goals for the future**. How might a text serve as an analogy for your goals? Or inform an approach to reaching them?

- **Connections between texts and life outside of school and work.** This might circle back to the connection between texts and you. Where do texts remind you your life? Of something family and/or friends have gone or are going through? Of local, state, national, or world events?

Finally, be open to finding connections between literary texts and lived experience and to ponder the significance of those connections. Literature shouldn't live in a vacuum, existing as a stand-alone phenomenon. Literature courses like ENG 205 shouldn't live in silos, segregated from other courses, disciplines, and experiences. Since this is the sentimental section of the guide, I'll add this: **I'd love to hear from you throughout the semester, and after you leave this class, about ways that you're making connections with and finding purpose in literature.**

APPENDIX A: ARTICLES ON MAJORS IN ENGLISH, THE HUMANITIES, LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION, AND WHY LITERATURE MATTERS

In this appendix are links to popular magazine and blog articles on the value of English and humanities education to such fields as business, law, and the sciences, on the value of a liberal arts education, and on the value of reading literature. You can either type these titles into a Google search or use the online version of this guide to take advantage of the hyperlinks below.

Articles on the value of English and liberal arts courses to STEM and other fields:

- Business Insider: A Surprising Number of Doctors Were Undergrad English Majors
- Boston Globe: Humanities and Business Go Hand in Hand
- The Atlantic: Why America's Business Majors Are in Desperate Need of a Liberal-Arts Education
- Fast Company: Why This Tech CEO Keeps Hiring Humanities Majors
- Forbes: That 'Useless' Liberal Arts Degree Has become Tech's Hottest Ticket
- PBS: What Do Liberal Arts Have to Do with Business? A Lot, Actually
- Inside Higher Ed: Public May not Trust Highter Ed, but Employers Do
- Forbes: Why Science Is Essential for Liberal-Arts Education (and Vice Versa)
- Fox News: What Critics of a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education Are Missing
- Quartz: STEM May Be the Future–but Liberal Arts Are Timeless
- Legal Career Path: The Best Majors for Law School Applications

Articles on why literature matters:

- Boston: Why Literature Matters
- History News Network: Why Literature Matters: A Historical Perspective
- Diane Ravitch's Blog: Why Literature Matters
- The Conversation: Why Literature Matters in Debate about Race and Immigrants
- Al Jazeera: Literature Matters: Does Reading Make You Smarter?

APPENDIX B: THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOLS

Think-aloud protocols utilize questioning techniques to prompt ideas for you to "think aloud" about. To get you started, try using these prompts:

- Why did the author/editor choose this title? How does it relate to the text? Based on the title, what is this text likely to be about?
- What do I know about this text or its subject, going in? What would I like to know?
- So far I have learned . . . .
- Do I understand what I just read? Where am I confused? Why does this confuse me? What can I do to understand it better?
- This reminds me of . . . .
- This passage makes me think of this . . . (describe it in detail). I can see . . . in my mind.
- This makes me think of a time when . . .(make an analogy to something in your own experience).
- This part of the text doesn't seem to fit with the rest because . . . .
- I think the most important, significant, or strange thing so far is or was . . .
- I like the part where . . . because . . . .
- I predict that . . . will happen at some point in the text.
- Why didn't this character do . . . ? How might things have changed if they had?
- When I started this text, I thought it was about x, but now it seems to be about y.
- After reading this text, I now know . . . , which I did not know before.
- I need to look into . . . more fully.
- I need to reread . . . .

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Cox, Janelle. "Teaching Strategies: Think-Alouds." *Teach Hub: K-12 News, Lessons & Shared Resources by Teacher, for Teachers*. http://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-think-alouds. Accessed 15 July, 2018.

Other resources:

Bruns, Christine Vischer. *Why Literature? The Value of Literary Reading and What It Means for Teaching*. New York: Continuum, 2011.

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