

Context:

This assignment was designed as the final project for a 200-level course titled “British Literary History after 1660.” The instructions below are pulled from an iteration of the course that met asynchronously online during a 5-week summer term, but I have had success with similar assignments offered in face-to-face regular term classes. Note that BIPOC may not be the preferred or even the appropriate term in every context of “decolonizing” curriculum. I recommend having ongoing critical conversations with your students regarding any racialized language that becomes part of the shared vocabulary of the classroom space.

Assignment:

Literary history final project (25% overall course grade)

Inspired by the premise of the course itself, brainstorm, research, and create a Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC) literary history focused on any part of the British-influenced world beginning some point “after 1660” and possibly going up to the present moment. I will provide scanned PDFs of tables of contents from literary anthologies to give you an idea of the authors and texts typically included in literary historical surveys like this course. You may or may not be surprised to see relatively few authors of color represented in these published anthologies.

Proposal

Submit a **300-word proposal** in which you pitch your initial ideas regarding the authors and texts you want to include, a possible through line, the communicative platform you want to use to present your finished project, and your preliminary plans for organizing it. The texts (broadly defined) you mention in your proposal should go beyond what was already assigned for class, but you may utilize additional work by an author we already consulted. Take the time to do some research and be thoughtful, well organized, and polished in your proposal. I will give detailed feedback on the proposals.

Your proposal counts for 1/5 of the total points set aside for the assignment. Both the proposal and the finished project will be awarded full points upon meeting the minimum assignment requirements, so follow the guidelines carefully. And just ask if you have any questions!

Final draft

The final draft of your literary history must include at least 3 different authors of literary texts (broadly defined) whose work collectively spans at least 100 years. It must include brief biographical notes for each author, excerpts from their writing, explanations and/or contextualization of the passages, and discussion of a through line connecting your chosen authors. You may format this assignment in whatever way makes the most sense to you. While polished paragraphs in the mode of a formal MLA style essay are welcome, I can imagine other effective ways to present the required components, such as a YouTube video, a polished set of slides, a recorded speech, an Instagram account, etc.

Appendix: sample tables of contents

If you have never thought about literary history before enrolling in this course, and even if you have, I thought it would be helpful to provide some sample tables of contents of the sort of anthologies that might get assigned in courses like this one. Think of these as road maps to canonical British literary history and see if you can read between the lines to understand the possible rationale for the choices made to include these authors and texts and not others.

I've added Volumes A and B of a British literature anthology I used in my own undergrad coursework. I also added the table of contents from an anthology that is focused on transatlantic Romanticism published only a few years after the Brit lit anthology volumes. The transatlantic Romanticism anthology is not just focused on British literature; it covers Canadian and American literature too.

Rebecca L. Schneider earned her PhD in English at the University of Colorado Boulder and is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Fort Lewis College. Rebecca has taught first-year writing and research, women's literature, semantics, British literature, Caribbean literature, and archival research. In her scholarship, Rebecca positions archival materials within literary studies, including placing runaway slave ads in dialogue with Romantic fragment poems (and vice versa) or reading 18th-century Jamaican place names as epitaphs.