

INTRODUCTION

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IN HIS ADVICE to students on “How to Read Like a Renaissance Reader,” Adam Hooks discusses the early modern practices of active reading and annotation frequently popularized in educational and advice books. Citing from John Brinley’s *Ludus Literarius: or, The Grammar Schoole* (1612), Hooks highlights that becoming a dedicated reader is not simply an intellectual matter, but a question of making the most of the money and time we invest in our learning: “merely reading without actively engaging with, and therefore coming to an understanding of, a text means the ‘loss of our precious time, and of all our *labour* and *cost* bestowed therein.’”¹ Hooks’s blog is a useful reminder to students that the literacy and reflective practices required by college courses—especially courses focused on far-away periods like the Renaissance—need to be carefully honed. As those of us who regularly teach courses engaging with premodern and early modern texts will know, students can find literature and history courses alienating and insurmountably foreign, and fostering intellectual curiosity in our classes begins by showing students entry points that help them relate to their reading materials. Active reading practices can be extremely productive for managing and accessing large and complex reading loads, but making the most of students’ intellectual labour means our assessment process must also support and reward engaged learners. In fact, even early seventeenth-century writers and publishers fretted over the goals of commonplacing as

1 Adam Hooks, “How to Think Like a Renaissance Reader,” *Anchora*, August 2012, www.adamhooks.net/2012/08/how-to-read-like-renaissance-reader.html.

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an activity which, when done casually, might result in readers who “could amass quotations from books but could not figure out how to use them” and whose “readerly skills lay not in accumulating quotations and anecdotes, but in digesting extracts...into a unique whole.”² We see this often in students who may have been extremely engaged in class discussion but end up turning in final papers that simply copy quotations from the text or their research without finding ways to effectively join the conversation with their own unique perspectives. If pedagogy research has consistently emphasized the shortcomings of exam-focused teaching,³ and even research papers can reinforce elitist assumptions that only published scholars have access to the “true” meaning of a text, how else might we help our students develop a personal connection to the text they read while simultaneously practicing careful, historically grounded scholarship?

Using Commonplace Books to Enrich Medieval and Renaissance Courses proposes that commonplacing as a formal assignment can be especially productive for the modern student encountering the challenges of reading medieval and early modern texts. While discussing annotation practices can itself be helpful to students, the essays in this book suggest that commonplacing needs to be anchored in critical thinking activities to support active learning. Designing specific course work, learning outcomes, and graded assignments around commonplacing encourages and even demands active engagement with texts in ways that empower students as critics and interpreters. These are essential practices, both for students from a range of majors taking literature surveys to fulfill the humanities core and for students majoring in literary studies. Furthermore, commonplacing skills, such as gathering and organizing information, experimenting with new technologies, and leveraging new ideas from old texts and practices, are crucial to the modern-day job market, and therefore must be used responsibly when creating assignments in the classroom. As we consider how our virtual and hybrid practices might continue to be useful after the COVID-19 pandemic, commonplacing assignments can provide a way for students to focus on and make sense of classroom texts in a range of classroom environments.

Emerging out of the rhetorical traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome, commonplace books promoted a blend of excerpting, memorization, cre-

2 Jillian M. Hess, “British Commonplace Readers, 1706–1879,” in *Edinburgh History of Reading: Common Readers*, ed. Jonathan Rose (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 9–29 at 9–10.

3 For one recent example, see Ken Baines and Marsha Marshall Baines, *Super Courses: The Future of Teaching and Learning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

ative writing, and journaling, making them the analogue equivalent to modern-day tools like Tumblr, Evernote, or Pinterest. This book covers a variety of methods for introducing students to commonplacing and provides instructors with concrete guidelines for using historical and student-generated commonplace books as a teaching and learning tool. The language and historical contexts of pre- and early modern literature can feel quite alien and inaccessible. This volume presents practical strategies for overcoming this barrier, challenging students to go beyond traditional notetaking through the engaged use of commonplace books. As this volume demonstrates, commonplacing can be an iterative and dynamic assignment that allows students to relate more closely to course material in a hands-on and creative way. Additionally, commonplacing offers students a sustained practice of experiential learning, encouraging the development of a knowledge-creation community that aims to question textual authority and actively join critical conversations as confident scholars. In the next few pages, we provide an overview of the history of commonplacing and its relationship to humanistic pedagogy before turning to examples of how contemporary scholars have reinvigorated the practice of commonplacing for the twenty-first-century classroom.

The tradition of commonplacing in medieval and early modern Europe traces its beginnings to antiquity. In Aristotle's *Topics*, a work that made up part of what is known as the *Organon*, he refers to common places (*koinoi topoi*) as a set of logical strategies that generate effective arguments.⁴ It was up to the rhetorician to shape this partial information into persuasive arguments. Later Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian would emphasize the importance of *loci communes*, common places of argument, in their rhetorical manuals.⁵ In the Middle Ages, scholars adapted these classical precedents to a Christian worldview, and the idea of the commonplace came to describe specific effective sayings that could apply to various argumentative contexts rather than the rhetorical strategies themselves. Boethius, one of the most important philosophers of the early Middle Ages, played a key role in shaping this early understanding of commonplacing. Suspicious of the use of commonplacing to support elegant style, as Cicero and Quintilian had suggested, Boethius argued for using commonplacing the way Aristotle

⁴ Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

⁵ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 112.

had outlined, as a key component in the crafting of an argument.⁶ Two especially important medieval contexts where commonplacing prevailed were preaching and *dictamen* (persuasive writing, especially of letters).⁷ Medieval authors compiled excerpts from biblical, pagan, and contemporary sources, creating works that later Renaissance commentators described as *florilegia*, from the Latin meaning a gathering of flowers, which writers and orators could consult.⁸ These works were a prototype to the encyclopedia but, as Mary Franklin Brown demonstrates, they were closer to the crowd-sourcing model of Wikipedia's "highly polyvocal nature and tolerance of dissent" than they were to the established expert model of *Britannica*.⁹

By the early modern period, commonplacing was firmly entrenched in the classroom as a pedagogical practice to help the pupil organize and retrieve what could feel like an overwhelming amount of material.¹⁰ Ciceronian emphasis on style, which Boethius and other medieval authors suspected of embellishment for its own sake without sufficient moral emphasis, came back into fashion with the advent of Renaissance humanism. Rodolphus Agricola, an important figure in early humanist education, promoted the use of commonplacing in his short but influential *De Formando Studio* (1508). Placing rhetoric at the heart of a humanist education, Agricola advocated that pupils collect quotations and sayings as they studied. As Crane argues, "Agricola is especially important to a history of the commonplace book because he re-establishes for the later Renaissance the logical basis for the practice of keeping one, and because his text enacts the shifting definition of 'commonplace' as a space or category and as a textual fragment subject to gathering."¹¹ Following Agricola, humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus's influential *On the Method of Study* (1512) contributed to the popularity of commonplacing. Erasmus too advised pupils to keep a commonplace book that would organize noteworthy morsels of information, suggestions

6 David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 38.

7 Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (New York: Pageant, 1962), 46.

8 Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5.

9 Mary Franklin Brown, *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4.

10 Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books*, 134.

11 Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 17.

that were taken up by pedagogical authors across Europe. Commonplace books were a place where the student “recorded useful phrases, effective arguments and particularly successful rhetorical devices noted in the course of his reading, for his own future use (these commonplace books also served incidentally to provide the teacher or tutor with a check on his pupil’s reading progress).”¹²

Renaissance humanists also looked back to the classical precedent of Aulus Gellius, the Roman compiler of *Attic Nights*. Gellius described his notetaking process as an *aide-memoire* to help him find information he had gleaned from sources, whether conversations with contemporaries or reading in subjects ranging from geometry to history. Anthony Grafton argues that Gellius “turned the notebook itself into a literary genre,” and his example served as a model to Renaissance humanists who were eager to find ways to organize the influx of information brought about by the invention of the printing press.¹³ Commonplacing allowed compilers to gather copious references clustered around a single idea, and thus played into the early modern fascination with *copia*, a rhetorical concept that valued energetic plenitude in speech. Erasmus’s treatise on *copia* or “abundant style,” published in 1508, was another highly influential early modern work that contributed to the popularity of commonplacing in the classroom and among humanists across Europe.¹⁴

Commonplacing also played an important role in the Protestant Reformation, which had an enormous impact on intellectual culture and pedagogical practices. Philip Melanchthon, whose ideas about educational reform were equally as important and influential as those of Agricola and Erasmus, was a Lutheran, and his Protestantism was central to his pedagogy. In his *Loci Communes* (1521), Melanchthon applied the theory and practice of commonplacing to scripture, using commonplacing as a central strategy toward theological understanding.¹⁵ The Englishman John Foxe, well known for his

12 Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 12.

13 Anthony Grafton, “The Humanist and the Commonplace Book: Education in Practice,” in *Music Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Russell E. Murray Jr., et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141–57 at 143.

14 Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 173.

15 Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). See especially, “The Debate and the Reformation,” 126–52.

martyrology of Protestants, also published an influential work on commonplacing. Foxe's *Locorum Communium Tituli* (1557) offered readers a formal structure for their notetaking to help with memory development. The book featured a preface followed by more than 600 blank pages pre-populated with 768 headings to allow the reader to develop their own commonplace notes within the structure that Foxe outlines.¹⁶ Commonplacing thus serves as a tool for managing an overwhelming amount of information, but it could also play an important spiritual role.

The seventeenth century witnessed several shifts in the practice of commonplacing. Previously a central tool of the humanist classroom with a goal-oriented pedagogical focus, commonplacing increasingly found its way outside of the formal classroom. This shift, combined with rising literacy rates, opened up commonplacing to women, who were not typically educated in formal settings.¹⁷ Scholars have struggled to define this type of commonplacing without downplaying it as merely "recreational."¹⁸ Adam Smyth argues that commonplacing becomes so versatile and widespread as to merit the description of an entire "commonplace book culture" in which women were active participants.¹⁹ Commonplacing offered more opportunities for women to engage in active reading and become authors in their own right. Recipe (or "receipt") books, often collected by women, engaged in textual gathering similar to the practice of commonplacing.²⁰ These recipe books were sometimes printed, and those that remained in manuscript form

16 Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 194; Grafton, "The Humanist and the Commonplace Book," 147.

17 On women and literacy, see Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 145 ff. For further context on commonplacing and manuscript culture, see Steven W. May and Heather Wolfe, "Manuscripts in Tudor England," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 125–39; George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds. *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

18 Fred Schurink, "Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73(2010): 453–69 at 455–56.

19 Adam Smyth, "Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits," in *Women and Writing, c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2010), 90–110 at 91.

20 See, for example, chapters on Caterina Sforza and Isabella Cortese in Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

only were often treasured and passed down in the family.²¹ Recipe books contributed to early scientific processes; and women's commonplace books were also spaces to practise religious devotion and even created space for women to process the emotion of mourning a child.²²

Commonplacing did not end with the advent of the Enlightenment, though the older humanist pedagogical approaches were subject to critique. One of the most prominent examples of such critique is Swift's satirical *A Tale of a Tub*, which explicitly mocked "contemporary compiling manias."²³ Yet, as several critics have pointed out, it is unfair to assume that commonplacing was in decline merely because it was no longer restricted to elite practices.²⁴ No less a thinker than John Locke wrote *A New Method of a Common-place Book* (originally published in French in 1686), which outlined a strategy for commonplacing that he had been using in his own studies. Locke rejected the classical focus on memorization in favour of an organizational strategy that combined alphabetization with rigorous indexing. Locke's method proved quite popular in the eighteenth century, and critics have connected his emphasis on rigorous order with British political emphasis on "order and stability" as well as "new notions of individuality and self control."²⁵

21 For an overview of the relationship between recipe books and the practice of medicine, see Leigh Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1800* (London: Palgrave, 2011), especially chapter 8, "Motherly Medicine: Domestic Healers and Apothecaries." See also Elizabeth Spiller, Betty S. Travitsky, and Anne Lake Prescott, eds. *Seventeenth-Century English Recipe Books: Cooking, Physics and Chirurgery in the Works of W. M. Queen Henrietta Maria, and of Mary Tillinghast* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

22 Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), especially chapter 4, "Recipe Trials in the Early Modern Household," 99–123; and Siobhan Keenan, "'Embracing Submission'? Motherhood, Marriage and Mourning in Katherine Thomas's Seventeenth-Century 'Commonplace Book,'" *Women's Writing* 15 (2008): 69–85.

23 Lucia Dacome, "Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004): 603–25 at 624.

24 Both Ellen B. Brewster, "Locke, Stock and Booksellers: Commonplace Book Fashions in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Oxford Research in English* 6 (2018): 11–37; and Allan, *Commonplace Books*, 20, push against Ann Moss's argument that commonplace books were in "decline" by the seventeenth century. See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 266 ff.

25 Dacome, "Noting the Mind," 606.

Although the formal practice of commonplacings has largely been recorded and studied across Europe, it is worth keeping in mind that this tradition extended into colonialist occupation of the Americas. Commonplacings continued to be widely practised into the nineteenth century. Kenneth Lockridge has documented the disturbing misogyny of Virginia “founding fathers” William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and argues that private commonplace books offered these men a place to vent a hatred of women that was becoming unfashionable in the context of Enlightenment thought. In these instances, commonplacings created a private persona that allowed patriarchal slave owners a way to maintain worldviews that allowed for “patriarchal rage” and support of slavery, which would seem to contradict with Enlightenment values.²⁶ Commonplacings continued to be an important feature of identity formation for residents of the United States up through the nineteenth century, and such textual self-fashioning included women.²⁷ Commonplacings was also a central aspect of colonial education in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Craig Dionne offers a fascinating discussion of how colonized cultures might have appropriated commonplacings by analysing the way that participants in a festival on Carriacou island, the Shakespeare Mas, rework the commonplacings of Shakespeare forced on islanders by a colonial education into a parodic critique of that pedagogic system.²⁸

The term “commonplace” thus has a dizzying array of meanings in its long history. Is it a strategy of argumentation, a memory art, a theme, a saying that can be applied to multiple scenarios, an aphorism, a cliché? Whether we look at the concept’s place in ancient rhetoric, its elaboration in medieval scholastic philosophy and *florilegia*, or its use as an early modern reading tool, the slipperiness of the term “commonplace” is useful for the modern teacher. The history of the commonplace’s broad interpretation allows for a range of uses in the classroom and also gives students the latitude to engage with the concept in a variety of ways that result in creative and intel-

26 Lockridge connects these sentiments with anxieties about class as well. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 29, 94–95.

27 Susan Miller, *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

28 Craig Dionne, “Commonplace Literacy and the Colonial Scene: The Case of Carriacou’s Shakespeare Mas,” in *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*, ed. Parmita Kapadia and Craig Dionne (New York: Routledge, 2016), 37–57.

lectually engaged assignments.²⁹ In each of its historical manifestations, commonplacing has provided readers with a strategy for staying active as they encounter, respond to, and even modify new work. By integrating the notetaking process into classroom assignments, instructors introduce students to elements of literary history while also encouraging deep critical engagement with the course's texts.

For all the reasons cited above, it is perhaps no surprise that adapting the commonplace book to the modern classroom has become a popular subject in pedagogy research. In the field of composition, Gayle B. Price argues for teaching students how to organize ideas by topic in the style of Tudor commonplacing,³⁰ and more recently Laura R. Micciche's "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar" touts the benefits of commonplacing as emancipatory pedagogy that invites students to question how meaning is created and participate in the construction of their learning.³¹ In particular, digital spaces where students can collect and manage information are particularly useful for modern-day commonplacing. In "Pinvention: Updating Commonplace Books for the Digital Age," Cory Geraths and Michele Kennerly propose that Pinterest can help students visualize and organize their academic research, as well as expand what counts as a reliable source amid blog posts and op-eds.³² More broadly, in *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments* Rebecca Frost Davis and colleagues consider a range of techniques under the broader keyword, "Reading" that can be categorized as a form of commonplacing (including a link to an assignment by Vimala

29 David Parker cites the work of Cameron Lewis, who laments that the term commonplace book "has been used with a great lack of inhibition in library catalogues and scholarly articles as a catch-all for any manuscript of a miscellaneous nature." What is frustrating for researchers and librarians seeking order and easy findability in the catalog is an opportunity for the classroom instructor. The commonplace book's loose definition and vast possibilities are precisely what make it a classroom tool filled with exciting potential. David Parker, "The Importance of the Commonplace Book: London 1450–1550." *Manuscripta* 40 (1996): 29–48 at 29.

30 Gayle B. Price, "A Case for a Modern Commonplace Book," *College Composition and Communication* 21 (1980): 175–82.

31 Laura R. Micciche, "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar," *College Composition and Communication* 55 (2004): 716–37. See also Linda Laidlaw, "Commonplace Books, Commonplace Practices: Uncovering the Bones of a Complex Pedagogy," *National Reading Conference Yearbook* 50 (2001): 356–66.

32 Cory Geraths and Michele Kennerly, "Pinvention: Updating Commonplace Books for the Digital Age," *Communication Teacher* 29 (2015): 166–72.

Pasupathi, one of the contributors in this volume).³³ Finally, “Assessing the Impact on Critical Reading and Critical Thinking: Using Commonplace Books and Social Reading Practices in a First-Year Writing Classroom” is worth noting as one of the few quantitative studies to explore the concrete benefits of commonplace book assignments. The authors compare two classrooms, one using traditional essays and another using the commonplace book, to explore “whether adopting commonplace book practices might assist students in developing the kind of critical reading and thinking skills necessary for a healthy civic society.”³⁴ *Using Commonplace Books to Enrich Medieval and Renaissance Courses* contributes to a long and growing tradition of commonplacing pedagogy by focusing on approaches that may be especially relevant for teachers of medieval and early modern texts, but should also be of interest to instructors of history, global writing, and surveys of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. We hope to provide a point of reference for best practices and models for teaching and learning with commonplace books, helping instructors to develop more student-centred, small-scale, and supportive curricula that are mindful of the needs of specific students and teachers.³⁵

Centring students in the medieval and Renaissance classroom requires that all students, but especially minoritized students, feel invited to construct their own learning and to push back against the curriculum in ways that reject white supremacy and academic gatekeeping. This is particularly important in courses that are likely to feature a Eurocentric and largely white, male, Christian reading list. Our classroom praxis must not only acknowledge the recent history of white nationalists appropriating the medieval period for falsely constructed narratives of European superiority but find active ways to reject such narratives by ensuring our syllabi accurately represent a more diverse past.³⁶ Commonplace book assignments can

33 Rebecca Frost Davis, Matthew K. Gold, Katherine D. Harris, and Jentery Sayers, eds., *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments* (New York: Modern Language Association of America). See <https://digitalpedagogy.mla.hcommons.org/>.

34 Anna Maria Johnson and Nusrat Jahan, “Assessing the Impact on Critical Reading and Critical Thinking: Using Commonplace Books and Social Reading Practices in a First-Year Writing Classroom,” *Pedagogy* 21 (2021): 277–94.

35 Of course, each classroom will require some modifications depending on the number of students, learning styles, access to resources, and time expenditures. By offering a range of methodologies and media, this volume attempts to showcase how flexible and customizable the commonplace book assignment can be.

36 See Dorothy Kim, “Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy,” *In*

help make space for students to write themselves into this seemingly far-away culture rather than experience it as perpetual outsiders. Yet, we recognize that there are often institutional constraints to syllabus design and textbook selection, and instructors are not always in control of what texts they teach, especially in survey courses designed to serve both majors and general education students. The essays in this volume offer alternatives that should be of use to instructors in a wide range of teaching contexts, proposing activities that teach students how to engage with material culture (Hagstrom-Schmidt), introduce them to digital skills like encoding (Estill) and critiquing databases (Harper), or that help students see commonplace as an opportunity for play (Corrigan). Instructors may use the commonplace book to model diversity and inclusion through a sample commonplace book (Silva) or use it as a replacement for formal research papers or midterms. The work of commonplaceing can show students productive ways to leverage their feelings of alienation in order to critically analyse medieval and Renaissance texts (Pasupathi), to propose what texts they would rather see in their syllabus (Eckhardt), or to rethink how to customize their reading and study practices (Schumacher-Schmidt). Coupled with lectures on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, these assignments can promote more inclusive environments and combat toxic narratives of white superiority, bringing to light the period's real and diverse readers and writers and making space for students' own voices and critiques.

The body of the collection is split into two parts. Part 1, "Why Teach Using Commonplace Books?" outlines the extent to which this assignment can change the dynamic and learning culture of survey courses, offering examples of hands-on activities and reflecting on the challenges inherent in semester-long projects. Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt tackles how to best prepare instructors and students for commonplaceing work, sharing a short, student-focused introduction on the history of the commonplaceing genre followed by prompts and resources that can be distributed in the classroom. Dana Schumacher-Schmidt and Joshua Eckhardt each present ways to replace traditional activities like exams, formal papers, and even the course's textbook with work centred around the commonplace book,

the Middle, August 28, 2017, www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html. See also Carla María Thomas, "The Medieval Literature Survey Reimagined: Intersectional and Inclusive Praxis in a US College Classroom," in *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska, and Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei (Santa Barbara: Punctum, 2020), 351–79.

in order to improve student engagement. Finally, Vimala Pasupathi reflects on her oft-cited essay in the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, cautioning against using this project simply to help students identify with readings, rather than challenging them to uncover the uniquely historical and cultural elements of the period.

The authors in part 2, “Adapting the Commonplace Book Assignment,” focus on customizing the project to achieve particular goals, such as expanding the range of readings and teaching digital humanities skills. Andie Silva posits that the commonplace book assignment can decolonize the curriculum and ensure a broader representation of texts and authors, while also giving minoritized students a stronger sense of voice and agency in the British literature survey course. Laura Estill and Alison Harper each propose unique strategies for using early modern commonplace manuscripts to teach students and instructors textual markup and digital repository skills, respectively, while Nora Corrigan employs game-based learning (GBL) to introduce students to the idea of poetic production and circulation as “play.”

Our volume closes with a coda by Sarah Parker, in which she reflects on ways to manage the time and labour investment in assessing commonplace books as major assignments in a course while increasing student engagement with the assignment. Highlighting the connections between the essays in this volume, Parker offers practical solutions for instructors who teach multiple sections of a course or have a heavy teaching load. Changing how students are asked to showcase their learning can be a challenging task, especially in projects that can produce quite unique and idiosyncratic results. By closing this volume with a reflection on assessment and time management, we acknowledge the inherent hurdles of creative assignments, while encouraging instructors to see the approaches in the volume as productive ways to both save grading time and enrich students’ learning.

Though the essays in this collection focus on British literature courses in English departments, the ideas and suggestions can be transferred to other content areas, particularly Italian, French, and other romance languages as well as courses focused on research, theory, and composition, as well as history courses that teach primary texts. Teachers will find fruitful ways to use and adapt the suggestions in this book to a variety of contexts based on critical reading and note taking practices that prevailed in other time periods. Many chapters end with appendices that provide readers with sample assign-

ments, examples of student work, and sample grading rubrics.³⁷ We encourage our readers to use and adapt these materials in their own teaching.

All contributors to this volume teach at the college/university level, but the suggestions in these essays will be useful at the high school level as well. The common core initiative has emphasized the importance of improving “students’ ability to read complex texts independently.”³⁸ Medieval and early modern texts are just such complex texts, and as college instructors we see even very good students struggle with their language, syntax, and thematic content. It is our hope that high school teachers will also find useful tools in this volume and be inspired to integrate more works from pre- and early modern literature into the high school curriculum. High school, community college, and college-level students all tend to find medieval and early modern literature intimidating, and adding a commonplace book assignment is one way to make these works more accessible to a range of students.

The commonplace book, both as a methodology and as a formal assignment, is endlessly iterative, offering teachers a way to make the past come alive while engaging students in active learning and critical thinking. Beyond its practical uses as a form of information management, the commonplace book assignment can promote knowledge retention and encourage originality, collaboration, and creativity. As instructors, we know that our classrooms are all unique; each new cohort of students productively challenges our expectations while changing technologies and approaches to hybrid teaching require a flexible approach to course design. Whether our readers are well versed in teaching new media or simply want a way to encourage more effective notetaking, we hope the strategies and insights drawn from our authors’ experience designing and assessing commonplace book assignments will facilitate more productive, inclusive, and student-centred pedagogies.

37 For examples of sample assignments, see the chapters by Eckhardt, Silva, Corrigan, Estill, and Hagstrom-Schmidt in this volume. Hagstrom-Schmidt also includes a reading that can be used to introduce students to the concept and history of commonplacing. For examples of student work, see the chapters by Eckhardt and Silva. For examples of grading rubrics, see the chapters by Silva and Parker.

38 “Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf. Accessed July 1, 2022.

