

REBUILDING THE BRIT LIT I SURVEY AROUND THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

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IN MY POSITION as an associate professor of English, I'm lucky enough to teach the first half of the British literature survey, or Brit Lit I, every other fall semester. The approach to Brit Lit I that I inherited as a graduate instructor featured an intense reading load and a handful of high-stakes assessments in the form of exams and papers. After teaching the course this way a few times, however, I saw that it left students overwhelmed and frustrated. This situation led me to reconsider my overall course design and specific assignments, in light of the needs of the actual students in my classroom and with an eye to current teaching scholarship. I realized that I had been using assignments primarily as means to assess students' learning, rather than tools to facilitate learning. To swap these priorities, I dropped the traditional exams and long papers and replaced them with a commonplace book and other frequent, lower stakes assignments. Early modern readers used commonplace books to process and store ideas for later use, either in their own writing or as a guide to daily life, and one's commonplace book could serve as a reflection of oneself. I thought I could adapt these practices to my pedagogical goals and incorporate commonplacing into my Brit Lit I course. Although there were a few struggles along the way, the commonplace book helped students read actively, retain and transfer what they learned throughout the course, and develop greater self-awareness of their own reading and writing processes. In this chapter, I explain how and why I initially rebuilt my survey course around a commonplace book assignment and offer guidance to readers who might want to adopt the same approach. While I made these changes to my course prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the assignment has proven effective in supporting students' learning and general well-being through these tumultuous times.

I teach at Siena Heights University (SHU), a small, private liberal arts college sponsored by the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Most of the people in my classes are first-generation college students and have significant responsibilities outside of coursework. They work hard. Given the competing demands on their time, I have to acknowledge that my class is not always their top priority and figure out how to support their education in ways that

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accommodate their lives as whole people. Students in Brit Lit I tend to major or minor in English or History, often with a double major in Secondary Education.¹ I feel responsible for getting these students through the texts that they'll need to know for certification tests and in their future work as educators. And truthfully, knowing that my students are training to become teachers gives me extra motivation to step up my pedagogy game. Lastly, students come to Brit Lit I not having read much early literature and not expecting to connect much with it. To better suit the course to the people in it, I proposed three goals. I wanted to take out the spikes in student workload and stick to a steady, manageable level from week to week. I wanted students to engage more meaningfully with more of the course material. Lastly, I wanted them to carry their learning forward across course units and beyond to other contexts. Based on my previous experiments with commonplace book assignments, I thought it had potential to meet these goals. I was inspired by other professors' use of this assignment, particularly after reading Vimala Pasupathi's "The Commonplace Book Assignment," and set about designing a version adapted for my course.²

In addition to what I learned from reflecting on my teaching experiences, I consulted current scholarship on teaching and learning to further identify gaps in the previous course design and figure out how to provide what had been missing. To begin with, I wanted students to retain more of what they read. Research by Peter C. Brown, Henry Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, among others, has shown that regular retrieval practice—having to recall from memory what one has learned—helps students retain material through what is known as "the testing effect."³ To activate this "testing effect," students need regular opportunities to reach back into course texts. Spacing out these opportunities over time can increase the effect. In his 2015 book *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and*

1 This course covers British literature from roughly the eighth to the eighteenth century. Regularly assigned texts include *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, excerpts from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, excerpts from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, and Eliza Heywood's *Fantomina*, along with a selection of shorter works.

2 Vimala Pasupathi, "The Commonplace Book Assignment," *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, March 11, 2014, <http://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-commonplace-book-assignment/>.

3 Peter C. Brown, Henry Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 39,43.

Why It Happens, Benedict Carey extols the value of spaced learning: “People learn at least as much, and retain it much longer, when they distribute—or ‘space’—their study time than when they concentrate it.”⁴ Though frequent quizzes could serve this purpose, I thought commonplace book entries could work as well, as they require students to retrieve and use what they’ve read. In addition to helping students build up knowledge, regular cumulative retrieval practice in place of exams can lessen performance anxiety because students see that their grades don’t depend on a handful of major assignments. With this new approach, I would have even more opportunities to see how students were handling course material, which would allow me to adapt lesson plans to meet students’ needs in a timely manner.

Students develop mastery over skills and content when they can identify meaningful relationships across the material they have learned. The authors of *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, explain that as students learn, they form connections between new information and old information they already possess: “When those connections form knowledge structures that are accurately and meaningfully organized, students are better able to retrieve and apply their knowledge effectively and efficiently.”⁵ Students benefit from instructors showing them “the big picture,” and providing them with the organizing principles behind a unit or a whole course. However, students benefit even more when asked to fit information into that “big picture” themselves, or to come up with their own organizing schemes that highlight different significant relationships among material.⁶ In my previous course design, I had not given students enough opportunity to do this on their own. I hoped that a move toward more frequent, spaced-out assignments would prompt students to form these connections gradually, integrating new material into their existing knowledge structures and creating their own, new structures to accommodate new information and ways of thinking.

In addition to being able to make meaningful connections across course material, my students needed to be able to carry what they learn forward in the course, as well as into future courses and beyond to any exams they

4 Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2014), 65.

5 Susan Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 4.

6 James Lang, “Small Changes in Teaching: Making Connections,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 8, 2016, www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-/235230.

might take for teacher certification or graduate school admission, or even to their own classrooms. However, studies have shown that students do not automatically transfer what they learn in one context to other contexts. Fortunately, various means exist to encourage this kind of knowledge transfer. The authors of *How Learning Works* show that helping students develop the kinds of solid, meaningful knowledge structures discussed in the paragraph above can encourage knowledge transfer, because if students can see the deep connections between skills or concepts, they are better able to recognize when to apply them.⁷ Prompts from instructors can help students bridge the gap between contexts, too (“Remember when we talked about heroism in relation to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? How does that compare to what we see in these saints’ lives?”). However, studies have shown that one of the most effective ways to support knowledge transfer is with reflective or metacognitive exercises. In other words, we need to ask students to think about how they learn and how they might apply what they’ve learned.

An added benefit is that reflection enables students to become more self-directed learners and develop good learning behaviors. In her studies of reflective learning, Jennifer A. Moon shows that “learners who achieve well are more often those who are aware of, and able to reflect on, their own learning processes, their weaknesses and strengths.”⁸ This claim echoes Susan Ambrose and her colleagues who found that “learners may engage in a variety of metacognitive processes to monitor and control their learning...When students develop the skills to engage these processes, they gain intellectual habits that not only improve their performance but also their effectiveness as learners.”⁹ We can help students improve in this way by giving them exercises to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, determine how to approach a task, keep track of their progress, and evaluate the extent to which their chosen approach is working to meet their goals. In looking back over my previous Brit Lit I course design, I realized that I gave almost no opportunities for this kind of metacognition.

As I redesigned my commonplace book assignment, and the course around it, I thought carefully about how each feature could best support student learning. In the section that follows, I’ll discuss different elements of my assignment and the rationale behind them. To begin with, I knew that in order for the assignment to enable students’ learning in the way I wanted it to, stu-

⁷ Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 118–19.

⁸ Jennifer A. Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86.

⁹ Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 7.

dents would need to commit a significant amount of time and effort to keeping their books. If I was going to ask them to invest so much in this one, long-term assignment, I would have to make room for it in the course by altering other assignments. Fortunately, the alterations that would give students more time for their commonplace books also supported my goals of getting students to engage with more of the assigned texts, encouraging knowledge transfer, and dispersing the workload of the course. I dropped the exams and papers I had used in the past, and replaced them with smaller, iterative assignments: quizzes at least once a week and short (two- to three-page) “study guide” essays on each unit (eight altogether). This schedule of assignments would allow room for regular work on the commonplace book as well. To further communicate the significance of the commonplace book, and therefore the anticipated labour that would be needed to complete it successfully, I decided to make it worth thirty percent of the course grade. This may seem contradictory to my low-stakes approach, but no single piece of the book can make or break a student’s grade, and they complete it gradually over the course of the whole semester with ample opportunities to revise their approach. No grade is assigned on the book until the end of the course, and that grade is assigned holistically, taking into account how students developed their books over time.

In the assignment guidelines, I present the commonplace book as an opportunity for students to engage intellectually and creatively with our assigned texts and, in the process, to generate a new text that records their path through Brit Lit I. Everyone starts the semester with the same black and white composition notebook, purchased by me with department funds, and gradually transforms it into their own. To this end, I ask students to include at least fifteen entries in their commonplace books over the course of the semester. An entry consists of a quoted passage or passages from a text and the student’s response to it. While I give some guidance on how they might select passages, for example choosing passages that they love, passages that seem to do something really interesting or weird, passages that challenge their thinking, or passages that remind them of something else, I leave the choice of texts up to them. Likewise, I ask students to choose the form their responses will take. They can respond in standard prose, but they can also try other forms, like drawing, poetry, collage, or rewriting the original passages. Regardless of the form they choose, I ask that responses comment on and interpret the quoted text beyond the superficial elements, and that, at least sometimes, they make connections with other texts. Instead of giving a length requirement, I focus on what an entry should accomplish. In order to meet the minimum requirement of fifteen entries, students need to engage with most of the texts assigned for class. Through the challenge of presenting their

response to each text, I hoped students could come to understand them better. The requirement to look for relationships across texts could also encourage students to apply what they learned from one reading or in one unit to a new context later on in the course. In this way, I could encourage students to synthesize ideas as a habit throughout the semester, rather than waiting until an exam or essay to give them the opportunity. Students would need to write in their commonplace books on a pretty regular schedule, which would give them frequent opportunities for retrieval practice, especially as they tried to recall elements of previous texts to connect to the current one.

I require students to create some system of thematic headings or keywords to help them keep track of the content in their book and identify relationships between entries. Students choose the themes based on patterns that emerge from the passages they've chosen to include in their books, and they choose how to present this information based on what seems most useful to them. Some students used their themes to create a table of contents. Others set up a table of contents based on the authors and titles of the works they excerpted and then created an index to organize their themes. One student used multi-coloured tabs keyed to important themes in her book and stuck them on the top of relevant pages. This aspect of the assignment asks students to identify patterns they find significant and create the kind of variable, meaningful organizing structures that increase the likelihood of knowledge transfer.

The assignment requires students to share their books four times during the semester: twice with me and twice with classmates, prior to submitting the final version. This system created a monthly check-in schedule which helped keep students accountable for making steady progress in their books. In addition, it provided them with regular opportunities for feedback and reflection on their work at different stages in the process. Lastly, sharing the books helped remind students that they were public texts, not private diaries. For additional incentive, I made participation in all four of these check-ins part of the criteria for an "A" book on the rubric.

Sharing books with me and exchanging them with each other fulfilled related, but different purposes. When I met with students after reading their books for the first time, I intended to preview their work, ask questions to find out how they had approached the assignment so far and how they felt it was going, and answer any of their questions that might have arisen. I found that in the first round of meetings, most students were off to a fine start, but they didn't feel confident with their work, something I will discuss in more detail below. Thus, my purpose became to assure students and to remind them that the assignment left room for figuring things out. These initial meetings also helped me identify any students who had not quite gotten

into the assignment yet, figure out why they hadn't, and get them on track. For the most part, these students were engaging only superficially with the texts, so I would ask them questions to draw out more ideas, and then encourage them to include those kinds of ideas in their entries going forward. When I read students' books again later in the semester, I approached our conversations as a way to foster critical thinking in preparation for their final reflections. We used this time to revisit concerns they brought up at the first meeting and to discuss how the book had developed over time.

In between sharing their books with me, students exchanged their books twice with two different classmates. My intention was for students to build further connections among course texts and complicate their understanding of the literature by seeing how others responded to it. Sharing books this way also prompts students to reflect on how their commonplacing process compares to that of their classmates. On exchange days, I set aside a few minutes of class for students to trade books. Then on their own time, I asked students to read their partner's book, annotate it, and then choose a passage from it to include in their own books. Students copied both the passage and a part of their partner's response, then added their own thoughts about what they'd copied. Back in class we took a few minutes for students to return books and debrief with their partners. After both rounds, students said they liked this practice as a written parallel to class discussion. Regarding process, they said that their classmates' work encouraged them to try things with their books that they might not have on their own, but also made them feel more comfortable about their own choices.

In addition to the fifteen standard entries, I require students to include two special reflective entries in their commonplace books, one in the middle of the semester and one at the end. These entries ask students to return to material from earlier in the semester, reconsidered in light of what they had read and thought since. From this perspective, they could see changes in their interpretation and understanding of the literature and look across texts and periods to make broader observations. In this respect, the mid-term and final entries correspond with one of Jennifer Moon's explanations of the place of reflection in learning: "When there is no new material of learning and the learner is attempting to develop her understanding on the basis of what she already knows, reflection occurs...in situations in which there is reconsideration of existing ideas that may be meaningful in order to seek additional or deeper meaning."¹⁰ In previous versions of the course,

10 Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, 87.

I had intended to create such situations on midterms and final exams, but without giving students the opportunity to build up to this kind of thinking along the way, many struggled. I hoped that with regular commonplacing, students would be able to find deeper meanings in the reconsideration of ideas from earlier in the semester when they paused and looked back from the middle and end of the course. An additional, and equally important, goal for the midterm and final entries was for students to articulate and evaluate their commonplacing processes. As mentioned above, this sort of metacognitive exercise hadn't really had a place in my previous version of the course, but the commonplace book seemed like an ideal vehicle to foster it.

Although I had clear goals for the midterm and final reflections, and informed students of these components of the assignment from the beginning of the semester, I waited to develop specific prompts because at first I wasn't sure exactly what they should look like. In the end, this turned out to be a blessing because it left room for me to respond to what my students were doing, and, as the semester progressed, for them to take the lead shaping the requirements. I came up with a list of four midterm questions based on what I had seen emerging from my students' books and what I wanted them to accomplish with this component of the commonplace assignment. The questions were: Which of our readings have you responded to most strongly and why? What connections can you make between the passages you've chosen to include in your book? What general observations can you make about medieval English literature based on what you have in your commonplace book? How has compiling your commonplace book helped you engage with and process readings in the first half of the semester? Students had a standard seventy-five-minute class period to respond to the prompts in their books.

For the final reflection, we took a more collaborative approach to developing the prompts. The students and I came to the final class period with a list of potential questions, which we compiled on the board and then revised together. Then I typed up the final list we had devised and shared it with students. Having gone through the midterm, students were prepared to take on a bigger role designing this component of the book assignment. Additionally, this exercise gave them yet one more opportunity to generalize from the specific work they had been doing all semester long. It allowed them to work backwards and figure out what kinds of questions would best allow them to reflect on what they had learned, both in terms of course content and their own learning behaviors. Some questions were: As you look back across the book as a whole, what connections, patterns, or common themes can you see emerging? Did your commonplace process develop or change over the

course of the semester and if so, how? What difficulties did you run into as you were putting your book together? How did you resolve them? How has compiling your commonplace book changed how you engage with readings, for this class or in general? As a result of their involvement in the process, students were more invested in this final reflection than I've ever seen students be in a final exam.

By the end of the semester, I was thrilled with the work my students had done and delighted that the assignment seemed to support their learning in the ways I had intended. From what I could observe in their entries and from what students told me in their midterm and final reflections, I saw several specific outcomes that convinced me to continue using the commonplace book assignment. First, students read more actively and sought out connections between what they were reading. They successfully transferred knowledge from one part of the course to the next. As a result, they also engaged more fully and consistently with readings across the semester. Students told me that the commonplace books entries made it harder for them to fall behind or get lost in course material. Having a space for personal reflection also allowed students to find resonances between older literature and their daily lives, something many of them were not expecting. In addition, students figured out how to use their commonplace books to complement other aspects of coursework: study guide responses, quizzes, and discussion. Rather than the commonplace book becoming "extra work" on top of everything else they had to do for class, it became integral to their other assignments. They used it to test out ideas for study guide responses and discussions, dig into texts in ways that prepared them for quizzes, and respond to ideas that had been raised in class. In other words, keeping a commonplace book helped them become better learners. They let me know that the commonplace book required significant effort and time to complete, but overall, because students could see the relationship between the different kinds of work they were doing for class and because the workload was evenly dispersed throughout the semester, they seemed to feel less anxious and overwhelmed than in previous semesters. Having discerned the value of commonplacing in their learning, a few students even stated intentions to keep up the practice outside of our class.

My first experience with the commonplace book assignment convinced me to keep it at the core of my Brit Lit I course, and to encourage other instructors to adopt this approach. However, this new course design was not without its challenges. Although research suggests that students learn better when they have the freedom to make choices, my students needed some sup-

port to embrace this freedom.¹¹ Early on in the semester, I learned that students can panic when given this amount of authority to make choices about an assignment that makes up thirty percent of their course grade. On the day we first discussed commonplace books and went over the assignment guidelines, my students expressed excitement at the opportunity to write something other than the usual literary analysis essay and what I would call joyous disbelief at the prospect of no midterm or final exam. However, when it came to actually starting their books, students were hesitant. Even though we discussed various options, when it came down to it students expressed uncertainty about what to put in their commonplace book entries. Their fear of getting it wrong held up their progress.

I think there are a couple of reasons why students responded to the assignment in this way. First, by the time they get to Brit Lit I, they've written a lot of literary analysis essays and taken a lot of exams. Even if these kinds of assessments can be stress-inducing, they are familiar and students will have developed strategies to approach them, though with varying degrees of success. On the other hand, most students have not kept a commonplace book before, and so they have neither familiar strategies to fall back on nor a sense of how much time and effort the assignment will require of them. Even though my students knew how to think about literary texts in the way the commonplace book assignment required, they felt uncomfortable putting that into words in this new format. In particular, they seemed unsure about an assignment that didn't start with a thesis statement but instead led them on a semester-long process of discovery. This assignment confronted my students with the reality that every new writing task requires re-learning how to write. As Elizabeth Wardle writes, "every new situation, audience, and purpose requires writers to learn to do and understand new possibilities and constraints for their writing."¹² In addition to unfamiliarity with the genre, I think some students' trepidation came from previous experiences with professors who told them "you can do whatever you want for this assignment!" but didn't really mean it when grading time rolled around. Even when I told students that there is no one right way to keep a commonplace book, they hesitated to believe me. Their scepticism

11 James Lang, "Small Changes in Teaching: Giving Them a Say," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 3, 2016, www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-/235918.

12 Elizabeth Wardle, "You Can Learn to Write in General," in *Bad Ideas About Writing*, ed. Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Libraries Digital Publishing Institute, 2017), 30–33 at 30.

was rooted in previous learning experiences where successfully completing an assignment depended on cracking a professor's secret code.

I found several strategies to help students overcome their initial hesitation and jump into commonplacing. First, I stressed that the book was always meant to be a work-in-progress. In her work on the transfer of writing skills, Elizabeth Wardle suggests that we can help students manage new writing situations by letting them know that "failing and struggling are a normal part of writing" and by creating assignments that leave room for these parts of the process.¹³ I knew I had left room for some struggle in the assignment, but I had to convince my students that I really meant for them to do it. So, we sat down together and reviewed the guidelines and rubric to remind them that trial and error were built into the process. In their work on rubrics, Danelle Stevens and Antonia Levi articulate what many instructors know from experience: rubrics are valuable in part because they allow us to "make our implicit expectations explicit."¹⁴ If we give rubrics to students in advance and discuss them together, we can help clear up some ambiguity and uncertainty from the writing process. In this case, I wanted students to recognize that certain ambiguities were built into the assignment for them to work through in whatever way seemed right to them. In particular, I pointed out sentences like "Take chances with ideas even if they aren't fully figured out" or "You may find that your first system of organization doesn't work and you need to adopt another one—some messiness is okay in this project. Work through the mess," and, finally, "Books will be assessed holistically and with an understanding that it may take time to get the hang of commonplacing and that some messiness is inevitable." Next time I might add "and even desirable" to that last statement, because I do believe that in struggling a little bit with how to represent their ideas in their commonplace books, students thought differently about the readings and practised problem solving.

Second, in conversations throughout the semester, we focused on the utility of the commonplace book over its aesthetic value. Students are used to the expectation that they turn in polished work, but in my version of the commonplace book assignment, I wanted students to preserve the evidence of the labour that went into its creation. It helped to look at some early modern books that featured scribbles, crossed out lines, and various inventive solutions to the problem of running out of room for entries under a certain letter

13 Wardle, "You Can Learn to Write in General," 32.

14 Danelle D. Stevens and Antonia Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*, 2nd ed. (Sterling: Stylus, 2012), 22.

in the table of contents or index. In addition, several students were concerned that if they tried to respond to a text with anything other than analytical prose (for instance a drawing, a collage, or a poem of their own) that I would grade their work on its artistic or literary merits rather than my stated criteria of thoughtful engagement with the readings. Although a student's book might end up being beautiful, it is more important that the book is useful for students and that the act of keeping the book helps them "do" the class. This focus on the purpose of the book as a guiding rule helped students feel that they could try new things in their books, especially as we moved further along in the semester, and they got more comfortable with the routine of the course as a whole. As mentioned above, seeing their classmates' commonplace books also helped them embrace the possibilities of the assignment.

I acknowledge that certain aspects of the commonplace book assignment that I implemented in my class may need revision for larger classes. Literature survey courses at SHU are small, usually six to ten students. On a practical level, the fact that I had so few commonplace books to read and respond to meant that I could take plenty of time with each one and reasonably meet individually with every student in just a couple of days. The relatively small number of students also meant that we could easily have a conversation about the books during class with enough time for everyone to ask questions and participate, and still get to that day's planned lesson. Additional changes could be necessary to adapt the assignment to different student populations.

Nevertheless, I found that the commonplace book could be both an effective learning tool and an effective means to measure student learning when I made it the central work of my course. Although the impetus for the course redesign and the revised commonplace book assignment came from a desire to deepen my students' experience of the course, an added bonus was that it enriched my experience as well. The commonplace books were so much more interesting to read than even the best exams or papers ever are, in large part because my students made them their own. As a result, I also learned a lot more about my students from their books than I had from any previous assignments. In turn, I felt comfortable sharing more of myself with them. Most rewarding have been conversations with my Education students who are eager to think through how they might adapt commonplacing in their future English Language Arts classrooms. This potential to foster community and cooperation, while also facilitating learning, has come to be especially valuable in these pandemic years, in ways that I could not have foreseen when I first designed the assignment, and has ensured that the commonplace book will continue to be at the core of my Brit Lit I course.

Appendix

COMMONPLACE BOOK GUIDELINES AND RUBRIC**ENG 343: Brit Lit I — Commonplace Book Project**
100 points; 30 percent of course grade

As you have learned, reading and writing were linked activities in early modern England. Educational manuals urged readers to annotate their texts and to keep commonplace books as means of processing and storing ideas for later use. Passages quoted in a commonplace book could make their way into one's future writing or guide one through daily life. This assignment asks you to read and write like an early modern student by compiling your own commonplace book over the course of the semester. Your book provides a space to engage intellectually and creatively with our assigned texts and, in the process, to generate a new text that records your unique path through Brit Lit I.

How to approach this assignment: Before we get into the details, some advice from former students that I fully endorse: Use your book to help you do the other work of our class, rather than approaching it as a totally separate assignment. Your commonplace book entries are a great space for you to work through ideas for a Study Guide essay, to prepare for class discussion, or to reflect on what is said during discussion or right after. This assignment works best if you build your book little-by-little over time. **Bring your commonplace book to class every day.** I'll try to incorporate it in class as much as I can, and you should also make it a regular part of your weekly class prep.

Expect that it might take a few entries before you get into a flow. You may find that your first plan doesn't work, and you need to adopt another one. Some messiness is to be expected and is totally okay with this project. Work through the mess and just keep going.

What goes into an entry? The core elements of an entry are (1) a quoted passage or passages from a text and (2) your response to it/them. By the end of the semester, your book should include at least 15 entries of this type, plus a mid-semester and final reflection (more on these below).

How to find passages for your book: As you read in preparation for class, underline and annotate passages that speak to you in some way. Maybe you

love the language. Maybe it relates to a key theme of the text. Maybe the passage does something really interesting or weird. Maybe the ideas challenge you. Maybe the passage reminds you of something else you've read/seen/heard (either in this class or elsewhere). Choose the most important (to you) passages to quote in your book. When you quote a passage, you should copy it word for word, though you have some wiggle room for creativity/individuality in formatting if you want to use it. Give the author, title, and other info that might help you or your book's readers find the passage in the original text.

How to respond to passages in your book: Responses should be exploratory. Take chances with ideas even if they aren't fully figured out or use your response to figure them out.

Responses should:

- comment on and interpret the quoted text (e.g., why did you pick it? what does it mean? what does it do? what puzzles you about it? how does it make you feel? how does it relate to the text as whole?);
- demonstrate careful attention to the effects of language in the quoted text (e.g., why do the *words* in the passage matter, not just the general ideas);
- make connections with other texts (at least sometimes);
- raise questions that you want to discuss in class or investigate on your own as you go forward.

Responses can be in standard prose BUT they can also take other forms: drawings, poetry, collage (with pictures or other things pasted into your book), marginalia, rewriting, writing back—whatever you can think up, as long as, across your book, you meet the requirements bulleted above. You can also mix up any of these forms in a single entry.

A few other guidelines for the minimum 15 entries: At least twice during the semester, you should read a scholarly article or book chapter on one of our assigned texts and include an entry on that article/chapter in your commonplace book. Pick a passage or passages that speak to you from the article/chapter, then quote and engage with its claims in your book. For example, what's your take on the source's interpretation of the text? Or how does the new source enhance your own interpretation of the text? Use the library databases or Google Scholar to locate your scholarly sources; ask for help if you need it.

At least once during the semester, you should read something from our anthology that hasn't been assigned for class. Pick a passage or passages from this text that speak to you, and that relate to any text that has been assigned for class. Quote the passage(s) and deal with the relationship to an assigned text in your response. I'm happy to make recommendations based on your interests.

You may include multiple entries that quote from the same text, but across the book as a whole you should engage with a variety of texts.

Organizing your book: Come up with a system of thematic headings or keywords to help you 1) keep track of your content and 2) identify links between content. Above and beyond that basic expectation, how you approach organization is totally up to you. Expect that it might take a few entries before you see recurring topics start to emerge, which you can then use to help organize your entries. You may find that your first system doesn't work, and you need to adopt another one—some messiness is okay in this project. Work through the mess.

Sharing your book: You will share your book at least four times during the semester, twice with me and twice with classmates. When you share your book with me, you'll drop it off to my office and sign up for a time during the following week to talk about how your book is developing. When you share your book with classmates, you'll exchange books in class. After reviewing your partner's book, you'll have a chance to respond to it both in their book and your own.

Mid-semester and Final Reflections: Twice during the semester, you'll complete a special kind of reflective entry (not included in the 15-entry minimum requirement). These should be in standard prose, such as you would use in an essay, though you're free to embellish them with other elements. You will receive more detailed prompts for these reflections later in the semester.

Relevant dates:

October 1—CB Share 1: with me

October 11—CB Share 2: with classmates

October 13—trade back books, complete mid-semester reflection in class

November 12—CB Share 3: with me

November 29—CB Share 4: with classmates

December 15—present completed book and turn in for assessment

Commonplace Book Project Rubric

An “A” commonplace book will:	A “B” commonplace book will:	A “C” commonplace book will:
<p>Reflect a significant investment of thought and time, sustained over the course of the semester.</p>	<p>Reflect some investment of thought and time, perhaps with highs and lows over the course of the semester.</p>	<p>Reflect little investment of thought and time and/or indicate obvious highs and lows over the course of semester.</p>
<p>Present a system of organization that would easily assist the writer to find entries at a later time.</p>	<p>Present a system of organization that would generally assist the writer to find entries, though with a few flaws.</p>	<p>Present a system of organization that is unclear, incomplete, or otherwise would get in the way of finding entries.</p>
<p>Meet the required minimum number of entries (15 + a mid-semester and a final reflection) and basic expectations for entries.</p>	<p>Meet the required minimum number of entries (15 + a mid-semester and final reflection) but be a little inconsistent in meeting basic expectations for entries.</p>	<p>Fall a few entries short of the required number or lacks a mid-semester or final reflection; be very inconsistent in meeting basic expectations for entries.</p>
<p>Reflect participation in all four book-sharing activities.</p>	<p>Lack participation in one book sharing activity.</p>	<p>Lack participation in one or more book sharing activity.</p>
<p>Include ample evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis (connections among texts) that demonstrates deep engagement with readings.</p>	<p>Include some evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis that demonstrates engagement with readings.</p>	<p>Include little evidence of textual analysis, interpretation, and synthesis and demonstrate superficial engagement with readings.</p>
<p>Take chances in exploring new ideas and posing questions for further investigation.</p>	<p>Infrequently take chances on new ideas or pose questions for further investigation.</p>	<p>Lack exploration of new ideas or questions for further investigation.</p>

Commonplace books that fail to meet “C”-level expectations in multiple areas will receive a lower grade. Books will be assessed holistically and with an understanding that it may take time to get the hang of commonplacing and that some messiness is inevitable.

Commonplace Book Presentation 100 points; 10 percent of final grade

During our final exam period, you will give a 7–10-minute presentation on your completed book, explaining the process and results of your work. Your final reflection is a good starting point for presentation content, but we’ll come up with additional guidelines in class.