



Literary Detectives: Discover and Recover a Neglected Woman Author

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Teaching Materials Developed/Used by: Tracy Fernandez Rysavy, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Recovery Hub Collaborator/Peer Reviewer: Dr. Jessica DeSpain, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville; Recovery Hub Director

Introduction:

This activity was a late-semester project for my 200-level Women in Literature class. We had been discussing women's place in the literary canon—and the reasons for their exclusion and neglect—throughout the semester. This project allowed students to put on the hat of a women's-literature scholar as they worked on a project aimed at recovering a neglected woman author.

Students appreciated the creativity and element of personal choice involved in this project, and many were very passionate about the scholarly and entertainment value of their chosen authors by the time they finished their work. While the vast majority of the students completed this assignment on their own, I did have one who quite obviously relied too heavily on an AI tool for their project. I had elements of my rubric to address this possibility, but I may add a personal "book review" component when I do this again in the fall to further ensure personal engagement. In addition, I have begun adding instructions mandating that students be transparent about any AI use and demonstrate how they added their own

research and analysis to build on such use. This new section is a work in progress and is at the end of this document; it was completed after I used this project in spring 2024.

This activity was inspired by a project created by Dr. Jessica DeSpain, Director of the Recovery Hub for American Women Writers and a professor at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. It was submitted with her permission.

Activities:

Task:

As a class, we will create a multimedia, digital Padlet anthology of neglected literature by women, including trans women and nonbinary authors. Each student will research and choose a woman or nonbinary author whose work has survived but has been neglected by scholars, mainstream publishers, and educators. You will also choose one short text to highlight by that author. Then, each student will create a digital-anthology entry aimed at educating the public about your author and encouraging further study of her works.

Purpose:

Literature by women and people of color has often been neglected by scholars, educators, and those whose voices were most influential in proclaiming a literary canon. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars began “recovering” women’s literature en masse, bringing it into the sunlight and making a case for its value in terms of teaching and scholarship.

As a class, we will be putting together a digital anthology, or a collection of neglected women authors. We will brainstorm together what kind of works we should include to ensure a diversity of voices—women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, geographic and cultural diversity, and more. Then, you will put on your literary detective hat and individually find a woman author and at least one of her texts. You will write an entry on her to go into our digital anthology, with the aim of reinforcing your author’s value to literary study.

As a reminder, here’s Professor Deborah Gussman (Stockton University) on why literary recovery is necessary:

Literary recovery brings to light and analyzes works that do not fit into the androcentric, white-washed canon. This discipline amplifies the voices of individuals from different races, genders, social backgrounds, abilities, and sexualities. Literary recovery allows scholars to fill in gaps in literary history and to piece together cultural puzzles by uncovering themes, beliefs, and conflicts from the nineteenth-century. Literary recovery is able to uncover a more complete and complex literary heritage, one where every person who has ever put pen to paper at all is essential.

Criteria:

See [rubric](#).

I have also included a sample blog entry project in the top left corner of our [digital anthology Padlet](#). [Note: This links to my spring 2024 class Padlet.]

Learning Outcomes:

After completing this activity, students will be able to do the following:

- Recognize the value of recovering women's writing.
- Learn how scholars begin a feminist literary-recovery effort.
- Sharpen research skills as you discover and research a neglected woman or nonbinary author.
- Use what you learned this semester about the systems of power and privilege to make a case for what may have led to neglect of your author.
- Use the feminist, race, and LGBTQ+ critical lenses we've been employing all semester to evaluate the significance of your chosen author and her/their sample text.
- Understand how anthology editors compile a collection of works with an eye toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Write a persuasive anthology entry making the case to the public and to the academic community that your author is worth studying.

Directions:

- Consider what type of voices should be represented. Do you want to find an author of color? An LGBTQ+ author? Authors from different countries? Authors for whom social class or disability was a primary concern? Anything else? Use our class discussion on this question to make your choices.
- Search for an author. See "[Appendix B: Resources for Finding an Author](#)" for helpful resources.
- Find and read at least one work by your author. (You are welcome to make it a short one, like a short story, poem, brief essay, short play, etc., though feel free to pick a novel or other longer work if you wish!) Please link to an online version of the text or a bookstore, library, or archive link.

- Research your author, using the resources listed in the research document referenced above.
- Create a written and/or multimedia report on your author and her text. Make the case for why she deserves to be recovered. The piece is going to be shared online for the benefit of the public, so it should be digital, as well as visually appealing to draw in your audience.
- Use the Literary Recovery Anthology Template (included below in [Appendix A](#)) to ensure you have all of the required information. You may reorder or present this information however you wish—just ensure it is included.
- Project options might include:
 - A written report with pictures and links to sources,
 - A written report with pictures, links, and original art/graphics. A digital poster. (Feel free to use this template [[link here](#)], or search Canva.com for poster templates.)
 - A podcast episode. A narrated PowerPoint presentation. (It MUST include a voiceover for credit.)
 - A video presentation. A “BookTok” TikTok video presentation.
 - An interactive [Twine](#) piece.
 - See me if you have other ideas.
- Ensure that whatever your project is, it answers the questions on the report template, included below.
- When you are ready, upload your project to our [digital anthology Padlet](#). [*Submitter’s note: This links to my Spring 2024 class Padlet.*]
- You may have to create an account. After that. It’s as simple as uploading an attachment to an email. To upload, click on the link above. Double-click anywhere on the Padlet board (or click the + sign on the lower right corner). Choose the type of file you want to upload on the popup menu. Then upload. Drop and drag your piece to the appropriate category.

Appendix A: Literary Recovery Anthology Entry Template

Whatever type of media you choose for your recovery project, make sure it includes the following:

Introduction: Introduce your author with a brief bio and photo. Include a list of key works.

Past Status and Reasons for Neglect: How well-known was your author during their own time? How out of circulation have they been since? What work has already been done by scholars, if any, to recuperate their works for new audiences? Why might your author have been neglected by scholars and educators until now? (Looking into the audience and critical reception in her time may offer some clues.) Take your best educated guess, and be sure to give credit to any outside sources you find that address this point.

Significance: Why does this author deserve to be recovered and read or studied by more people.

Sample Text Summary: Read one text by your author. Provide a short summary that tells the reader what the piece is about.

Sample Text Significance: Write a statement that makes the case for the sample text's wider literary study in classrooms and by scholars. Advocate for your author!

Sources: Include a list of your research sources in MLA or APA format (your choice). You should have at least 3-4 reliable sources, with links. I should be able to trace information in your project back to these sources, if needed. (Feel free to use the UWGB library's "Rate My Source" tool to assess whether your sources are solid and credible.)

Visual or audio engagement: This is a public-facing project, so it should be polished and include photos, music, or other elements to make it engaging to the public.

Audience consideration: Again, this is a public-facing project. Your audience is the general public, especially those interested in women's literature and literary recovery. Make sure that the information you provide can be understood by a random person in the general public, not just someone who also took this class.

Methods: If you use an AI tool* to generate text, include a "Methods" section detailing what tool you used and how you built upon the generated text. In this case, it will be critical to detail how you added your own research and analysis to any text generated by an AI tool. The ideas and research in the project should be your own, and you should be able to defend them as such in your note and elaborate on that defense verbally if I were to ask you about it. You may want to save your drafts, as well, as I reserve the right to ask for them.

If you did not use an AI tool, simply add a note at the end stating that “All research and text in this project is my own.”

***A Note on AI Use:**

In some cases, you may be able to input your author’s name into an AI tool like ChatGPT and have it spew out a report for you. As discussed earlier this semester, this is academic dishonesty. Plus, the chances of it generating an A-grade assignment are slim. AI-generated text rarely fulfills the goals of a writing assignment, and it is often mostly summary, with little analysis. Plus, AI tools love to make up fake sources and even fake facts, and it may plagiarize bits of text from outside sources.

That said, I don’t mind if you use AI responsibly. Here’s a reminder about how to use AI responsibly, based on the information that I’ve included in your course syllabus:

- Feel free to use an AI tool like ChatGPT or Grammarly to proofread or suggest clarity edits to your original text.
- Be transparent about any use of an AI tool to generate text. As stated in the criteria template section, above, be sure to include a “Methods” section at the end of your project noting where and how you used an AI tool like ChatGPT to create text in your project. In this case, it will be critical to detail how you added your own research and analysis to any text generated by an AI tool. The ideas and research in the project should be your own, and you should be able to defend them as such in your note and elaborate on that defense verbally if I were to ask you about it. You may want to save your drafts, as well, as I reserve the right to ask for them.
- As noted above, your sources should be solid, credible, and actually exist. (AI is notoriously terrible on this front.) I should be able to trace the information in your project back to your sources.
- You have your own special writing “voice” that I will start to recognize as the semester goes on. If your project differs vastly from your voice, you may be relying too much on AI and not enough on your own research and writing capabilities. (And I will probably ask you to come in and discuss with me.) Trust yourself and put in your own work!

Finally ...

If you have further questions or concerns about completing this project or using AI responsibly, please feel free to pop into office hours or set up an appointment with me.

Appendix B: Resources for Finding an Author

These resources will help finding an author much easier, though you may feel free to search on your own:

1. **[Just Teach One](#)**: A site that collects neglected early American texts and challenges educators to “just teach one” in their courses to aid the texts’ recovery.
2. **[Hathi Trust](#)**: A digital library of thousands of texts, some in need of recovery and some not. You may find it helpful to look at specific collections under the “Collections” tab.
3. **[The Electronic Literature Organization’s Individual Author Collections](#)**: If you’re interested in the new field of digital literature, the ELO collections are the place to start.
4. **[Google Scholar](#)**: All the power of Google but concentrated on academic texts.
5. **[25 Forgotten Books by African American Authors](#)**: A listicle by Abe Books. A Google or Google Scholar search for “neglected women authors” + any subcategory you like should yield similar lists.
6. **The research librarians at the UW-Green Bay (UWGB) library**: They love to help with this kind of thing. You are paying them with your tuition, so take advantage of the expert help!
7. Our librarian Carli Reinecke has compiled a list of UWGB library databases and other resources focused on historically marginalized communities & women in this **[Library Guide for researching this project](#)**.
8. **[UW-Green BayArchives](#)**: Our archivist Debra Anderson sent this list of materials from the Archives that would be appropriate for this project. Contact her directly and mention you’re in this class to get access. Students choosing archival items need to be able to visit the Archives in person on the Green Bay campus.
 - We have the **papers of Roberta Dix**, which include the writings of her mother, Myrtle Cook Jackson, who was a prolific poet, and her poems were often illustrated by her daughter, Roberta. She published 1940s-1970s
 - We have a collection of family papers, **Waldo-Henderson Papers, in which one of the family members (Susan Brown) has an unpublished**

autobiography. Physically, it is kind of cool because the book cover was handmade in the 1940s.

- We have a smaller collection of papers from **Dorothy Carey, who was a local writer of fiction, poems, and almost memoir types of writings.** She was also an officer of the [State] Regional Writers Association. Her work seems to be about 1970s-1990s.
- We also have a collection of papers from **Betsy Foley, who was a local writer of nonfiction, mostly in the realm of local history.** She also was very active in the [State] Regional Writers Association. I think her writings were mostly 1970s-1990s.

Additional Research Tips

Use the resources above to find an author for your project. Here are some quick tips to make your selection:

- Choose a resource above that interests you. Don't just pick the first one you see—read the descriptions carefully.
- Input keywords around elements that interest you, to narrow your search within the resources above. For example, a previous student of mine was interested in finding a Samoan author, so she entered the keyword “Samoa” in a couple of the resources listed above, and she found an excellent Samoan author. Are you interested in LGBTQ+ literature, literature by someone from a specific community of color, Midwestern literature, horror literature? Try those keywords!
- Need to know how to choose a keyword? The UWGB librarians offer these tips:
 - A keyword is a word that you commonly use to describe your subject. When you search a catalog or database, your search results are a list of books or articles that match the keywords you used. **Finding the right words is the “key” to successful research!**
 - Ways to brainstorm keywords: 1) Ask yourself questions about your topic and write down words that you use. Do some background reading on your topic—from encyclopedias, news articles, text books, etc. Add words you find to your list. Consult a thesaurus or dictionary for synonyms for your terms, such as [Bartleby Reference](#). 2) As you begin searching, look at the “subject terms” or other terminology in the records you find. Use these terms in new searches.

- Once you make your choice, don't forget to ensure that your chosen author is actually a neglected woman author. If you're unsure about your choice, please see me.