



## Writing Exhibit Labels for This Beautiful Sisterhood of Books

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### Introduction:

This assignment was originally part of a final writing project for a 400-level English Literature course on Topics on Contemporary American Literature. Students conducted research on one work from the Women's Literary Department at the 1884 New Orleans World's Fair. Originally, students created three pieces of scholarship, drawn from this research: an oral presentation to be delivered during the final week of classes, a longer paper that documents and reflects upon your research results, and a short exhibit label that will be published as part of the [online \*Beautiful Sisterhood Exhibit\*](#). But the exhibit label portion of the assignment could be separated out by instructors for a shorter activity.

**Key words:** Contemporary American Literature, exhibit labels, original archival research, contextualization.

## Activities/Handouts/Discussion Questions:

### Learning Outcomes:

- Learn to conduct original, archival research
- Practice contextualizing primary materials
- Write for a variety of audiences, including a more public audience with a short exhibit label
- Gain an understanding for the use of searchable keywords in the creation of online databases/digital archives
- Collaborate with a digital edition project team to help produce a larger, online recovery project

**Task:** Students will create three pieces of scholarship, drawn from this research: an oral presentation to be delivered during the final week of classes, a longer paper that documents and reflects upon your research results, and a short exhibit label that will be published as part of the [online \*Beautiful Sisterhood Exhibit\*](#). For more detailed, step-by-step instructions, see the assignment sheet in Appendix A.

**Purpose:** This three-part activity will help you practice three different genres of scholarship: the research paper, the oral presentation, and the exhibit label. But the exhibit label portion of the project, in particular, will help you learn how to introduce and contextualize under-acknowledged archival materials to public audiences.

**Criteria/Grading:** Below is a list of what I looked for in the written and oral components of this project while grading; for a more detailed description of this list for grading purposes, see Appendix A.

- Evidence of a thorough and creative research process.
- Original ideas – in content and presentation style.
- An effort to interest and engage your audience (especially in the exhibit label, but also the research paper).
- Logical organization, clarity, beautiful and fascistically-proofread prose.

## Contextual Materials/Resources/Further Reading:

*Note: This list is organized by the names of those involved in the Sisterhood students could choose from.*

- Caroline W. Horton: *Architecture for General Students*

- Chapters on diff styles, eras, national architectures. Available through Internet Archive.
- Clara E. Clement: *A Handbook of Legendary and Mythological Art*
  - Available through Internet Archive
- Clara E. Clement: *Artists of the Nineteenth Century, 3 Volumes*
  - Available through Internet Archive.
- Clara Erskine Clement: *Paintings for Beginners and Students*
  - Published 3 years later is *A History of Art for Beginners and Students* that covers Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. Could use that. Available on Gutenberg
- Clara E. Clement: *Painters, Sculptors, Architects, Engravers, and Their Works*
  - 700+ page encyclopedia. Available through Internet Archive
- Eva Marie Niles: *Fancy Work Recreations: A Complete Guide to Knitting, Crochet, and Home Adornment*
  - Not a lot of narrative. Mostly very minimalist instructions and patterns. Internet Archive.
- Ednah D. Cheney: *Gleanings in the Fields of Art*
  - Opens with her own poem. Essays on national traditions, etc. Available through Hathi Trust.
- May Alcott Nieriker: *Studying Art Abroad, and How to Do it Cheaply*
  - Alcott's sister. Criticizes other books about art. She will tell you how to study art and learn to make it yourself. Assumes a "she" artist. Available through Internet Archive.
- M.M. Ripley: *The World's Worship in Stone: Temple, Cathedral, and Mosque.*
  - Engravings with text by Ripley. Available on Hathi Trust.
- J.L Pollard: *Artistic Tableaux*
  - Josephine. Collaboration w/ artist husband Walter Satterlee. Reviewed in *The Nation*. World Cat lists it at University of Chicago, LOCO, and elsewhere. Request borrow or scan and deliver via special collections?
- Miss [Maria] Oakey [Dewing]: *Beauty in Dress*
  - Painter, and married to a painter. Available via Google Books.
- Miss [Maria] Oakey [Dewing]: *Beauty in the Household*
  - Painter, and married to a painter. Available via Google Books.
- Catherine Janvier (maiden name Drinker): *Practical Ceramics for Students*
  - Published as *Practical Keramics for Students*, author Charles Janvier. Available as Google Book.
- Mrs. H.R. Haweis: *The Art of Beauty*
  - Advice on and philosophy of beauty by a Chaucer scholar. Available Internet Archive.
- Jennie J. Young: *The Ceramic Art: A Compendium of the History and Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain*
  - 700+ pages. Illustrated. Available through Internet Archive and Hathi Trust.
- L.W. Champney: *All Around a Palette*
  - Children's book. Stories/chapters each linked to paint color. Available on Hathi Trust.

- Mrs. Julia A. Shedd: *Famous Painters and Paintings*
  - Brief biographies. Illustrations. Available via Hathi Trust.
- Mrs. Julia A. Shedd: *Famous Sculptors and Sculptures*
  - Brief biographies. Illustrations. Available via Hathi Trust.
- Mrs. Julia A. Shedd: *Raphael's Madonnas and Holy Family*
  - Brief descriptions. Illustrations. Available via Hathi Trust.
- Mathilda Blind: *George Eliot*. Literary biography (available on Google Books)
- Bertha Thomas: *George Sand*. Literary biography (available on Internet Archive)
- Miss Helen Zimmern: *Maria Edgeworth*. Literary biography (available on Google Books, Hathi Trust)
- Mrs. Ann Gilchrist: *Mary Lamb*. Literary biography (available on Internet Archive)

# Appendix A: Sample Assignment Sheet

## Beautiful Sisterhood Research Paper, Presentation, and Exhibit Label

For your final writing project(s) you will research one work from the Women's Literary Department at the 1884 New Orleans World's Fair. You will create three pieces of scholarship, drawn from this research: an oral presentation to be delivered during the final week of classes, a longer paper that documents and reflects upon your research results, and a short exhibit label that will be published as part of the online *Beautiful Sisterhood* Exhibit.

Your research process won't necessarily require reading the whole book (so don't freak out about the 700 page encyclopedia). But you should definitely read all prefatory materials and enough of the work's body to reliably summarize and characterize the contents. Take note of how the material is organized across the work as a whole. What degree of detail is provided, and what tone does the narrator convey? For what audience does the work seem intended? What uses? Including exemplary passages and quotes in your research paper and exhibit label could be very effective.

What can you learn about the author through casual online searches, or through more methodical searches in the databases available at Howard-Tilton? Do you find the author or her work mentioned in late-19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers (check out **Historical Newspapers** via Howard-Tilton, the **American Memory** collection via the Library of Congress; the **Making of American** collections via Cornell and Michigan)? Is the work reviewed or cited? Do you see it offered for sale? For what other works was the author known?

Finally, consult academic research databases (MLA bibliography, Project Muse, J-Stor, Academic Search Complete, etc.) to see if any recent critical scholarship is available.

*What else?* What other sorts of information can you imagine someone hoping to learn from our exhibit?

**The Research Paper** (8-10 pages. **due Friday 12/4** by 5pm) this should include the following:

- full and correct bibliographic information (Julia's report is NOT reliable on this): full title, author name, publisher, and location and date of publication.
- all information you discover concerning your work's content, author, publication and marketing circumstances, contemporaneous reception, and critical and scholarly treatment since.

- a list of keywords (see below) we should link to this particular work, and brief explanations for each.
- any help you can provide in locating high-quality digitized images from a late nineteenth-century edition of your work: cover, spine, frontispiece, especially interesting illustrations, etc. Interesting images of the author would also be welcome!
- a focused (though not necessarily thesis-driven) discussion of what you find noteworthy about this work appearing in this particular context (the Literary Department of the Women's Department of the 1884 Nola World's Fair). How might we imagine visitors to the World's Fair reacting to and/or interpreting it in this setting? What connections can *we* make between the literary text and that historical context as readers and scholars today?

**The Oral Presentation** (5-7 minutes. **due Monday 11/30 or Wednesday 12/2**):

- approach this as an opportunity to try out ideas for you exhibit. You'll need to compress and select information even more (since you won't want to read full synopses and biographies). Give us a cogent overview of what your work is, and why it's significant to us. Then hit the highlights.

**The Exhibit Label** (300-500 words. **due Friday 12/4** by 5pm) this should include the following:

- a brief synopsis/characterization of the work.
- a brief biography of the author (feel free to collaborate with others working on the same author).
- some indication (synthesized with the above) of the work's and author's relationship to the keywords you have identified as relevant to them.
- a compressed treatment of your thoughts on what's noteworthy to audiences – then and now – about this work appearing in the Literary Department of the Women's Department of the 1884 Nola World's Fair.

**Specifications for Written Components**

- typed and double-spaced with 1-inch margins.
- MLA style citation and documentation of sources.
- hard copies to my mailbox and ecopy to SafeAssign by deadlines.

**What I'll Look For in Written and Oral Components:**

- evidence of a thorough and creative research process.
- original ideas – in content and presentation style.

- an effort to interest and engage your audience (especially in the exhibit label, but also the research paper).
- logical organization, clarity, beautiful and fascistically-proofread prose.

**The following keywords will be available as search terms on the *Beautiful Sisterhood* Exhibit site.**

**Genres:** Poetry \* Novels \* *Bildungsroman* \* Stories \* Music \* History \* Biography \* Memoir

**Topics:** Education \* Reform \* Religion and spirituality \* Natural history \* Music \* Fine arts \* Literary biography and history \* Physical culture \* Health \* Science and invention \* History, historiography \* Children's literature \* Industry \* Housekeeping, domestic science \* Cookbooks \* Travel narratives \* Gardening \* Conduct manuals \* Suffrage