Incorporating Digital Archives into Secondary English Curriculums

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## Acknowledgements

"The affection of your pupil once gained, you have their interest in every scheme for their improvement and advantage. Never give a child the impression or idea that you wish to rule over it." – Julia C. Collins, "School Teaching"

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**Introduction: Generating New Entry Points with Digital Archives**

  *The Chistian Recorder*, established by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1852, prominently displayed literary works from Black authors on its front pages throughout the nineteenth century. These authors included women such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Julia C. Collins, and it was on these scanned pages that I first encountered their works.[1] During the Fall of 2021, I took my English literature undergraduate capstone course at Auburn University under the instruction of Dr. Benjamin Fagan. Before taking his course, the Early Black Press, not only had I never read anything by these female authors in other classes (secondary or undergraduate), but I had also never investigated literary texts through a digital archive. Dr. Fagan's course opened up a new world of study through this digital investigation, successfully aiding the class to draw literary interpretations based upon the texts' physical presentations to readers during the time they were published. Dr. Fagan also had practical reasons for our usage of such digital archives as *Accessible Archives*, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*, and *Chronicling America*. Auburn University, despite its extensive special collection holdings, did not possess any extensive nineteenth century Black newspaper collections for us to examine in person.

  Having to work with the newspapers through a digital archive elicited both excitement and challenges. Through my research in that course, I learned how to navigate vast digital archival space, manipulate the scans so as to best be able to read them, and interpret how each archive gathered materials and presented them. Reading within a digital archive enabled me to

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[1] Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Julia C. Collins were two prominent African American women authors who wrote for *The Christian Recorder* from the 1860s to 1890s. Harper had three novels serialized in the newspaper (*Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Sowing and Reaping*, and *Trial and Triumph*), while Collins had one novel serialized, *The Curse of Caste; or the Slave Bride*. The two novelists also wrote several essays for publication in the *Recorder* during their relationships with the paper.

easily compare different newspapers' approaches to serializing novels and publishing short stories and poems, expanding my analysis significantly. However, I also had to overcome the difficulties of acquiring this digital literacy in one semester—knowing how to make the best of missing or blurry scans, not being overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data gathered into these online repositories, and recognizing the (sometimes frustrating) interpretative limitations of not having the material object directly in front of me. Nevertheless, the positives far outweighed the frustrations as these archives exposed me to a great deal of nineteenth century Black literature that I had not known existed and generated a thrill of discovery for the capstone project.

This experience nurtured a fascination within me about how English curriculums could expand to include teachings through digital archives. I find the immersive qualities of reading literary works in their original forms to be rich ground for pedagogical potentials in the English classroom, and these potentials do not have to be limited only to undergraduate coursework. Secondary English classes can also reap the benefits of these online repositories, improving the immersive qualities of reading older literature and increasing student entry points into the educational content. I am particularly invested in how these tools can be incorporated into secondary English curriculums due to the struggles I know schools face in improving students' English/Language Arts (ELA) proficiency scores, especially in my home state of Alabama.[2] For schools in counties with lower socioeconomic medians, such as Randolph County, trying to stretch education budgets to address improving scores proves difficult.

However, even in rural Alabama, public schools are equipped and ready to incorporate digital archives into their curriculum. The current English Language Arts standards in Alabama,

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[2] According to The Nation's Report Card government site, which is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, Alabama had a ranking of 250 for eighth grade reading in 2024, putting Alabama in the midst of twelve other states considered "significantly lower than [the] National public average" of 257.

(updated in 2021), reflect the expectation that all schools throughout secondary education meet digital literacy goals through the "use [of] technology" (2020-2021 English Language Arts Committee 131). Across the state, all children have access to school laptop "labs" that are either checked out each day or school-issued for the academic year—including Randolph County, which gives out Chromebooks to secondary education students—in order to meet state educational standard assessments conducted online, such as I Ready and TeachTown (Spurlin). Knowing that students in under-resourced areas have access to the technology necessary to engage with digital archives means that weaving digital archives into English classes is a realistic and achievable goal.

Our students today come to their high school classes with a wealth of digital knowledge and skills, with ninety-six percent of teenagers in the United States claiming daily internet usage ("Teens and Internet, Device Access Fact Sheet"). Recognizing students' usual discourse spaces, I believe that incorporating digital archives into their state standard curriculums will reinvigorate the English classroom for each student. Utilizing the equipment already available to them and focusing on digital archives that are free to the public, high schools can easily provide an expanded array of entry points for their students. This expansion comes from raising the number of authors represented through the digital scans while also building upon and improving students' current interests and expertise base in online skills. In this thesis, I argue that by bringing digital archives into conversation with preexisting canonical texts, secondary schools can increase representation of authors that share a wider range of students' backgrounds, increase the accessibility of material objects not readily accessible to children in lower socioeconomic areas, and further digital literacy. In turn, these reinvigorations of the English classroom will allow for students to have increased personal stakes in their learning by opening up more areas of

inquiry for each student. Additionally, students can express these personal stakes through assessments which reinforce the skills and strategies seen in digital archives, such as multimodal projects. Through this more expansive approach to curricular materials, schools can shift to a student-centered view, allowing students to connect to the historical voices available in the archives and the literary lineages from which they came.

To begin, I will discuss the current landscape of digital archives studies, examining the stance scholars have on its uses and pedagogical value. Through my analysis of the scholarly literature, I will show that there exists a strong foundation for which digital archives are a practical tool for schools, especially in bridging the traditional values of English education with the changing necessities and opportunities of the digital age. In addition, I will point to the need to expand these conversations beyond colleges and universities, extending the scholarship to secondary education. After establishing the scholarly basis of this work, I will then outline the details of a proposed English 12 course that would effectively include digital archives alongside traditionally canonical texts already offered in most standard high school classes. In this description, I will provide details of the daily activities, readings, and assessments that would exist in a digital archival unit. Following this overview, I will end by sharing the pedagogical rationale behind my decision to implement digital archival studies in the classroom, particularly focusing on how it increases student agency, reflects students' varied learning styles, and generates excitement for learning and writing.

**Section I. Opening the Door: Digital Archival Studies and Student Experiences**

In this literature overview of digital archives, I will cover two areas of focus within the scholarship: digital literacy and student engagement. I will first focus on scholarship that demonstrates the necessity of digital literacy skills being a focus in the classroom and point

toward digital archives' effectiveness at achieving this literacy acquisition. Next, I will examine research that highlights the usage of these archives to improve student engagement with course materials and overarching learning goals. My main intervention within the current scholarship surrounding digital archives will be to emphasize the benefits of bringing these tools into the secondary education realm, enhancing students' quality of education through the personal connections digital archives enable students to have with literature.

*Digital Literacy's Place in the Classroom*

I find it necessary to briefly discuss what educators understand digital literacy to mean. Luci Pangrazio points out that the varying definitions surrounding digital literacy highlight its prominence across disciplines and the differing ways scholars and students in distinct fields might utilize digital literacy to further their work. She further discusses how digital literacy as a concept must maintain multitudes and complexities within any working definition in order to work across these various fields, yet she narrows the term down to concepts of mastery, evaluation, curation, collection, integration, individualization, personalization, design, and interpretation (Pangrazio 164, 166-72). Zac Chase and Diana Laufenberg go a step further in boiling down the definition of digital literacy by calling it "a genre, a format and tool to be found within the domain of standard literacy" (535). These definitions show that the term still remains somewhat nebulous, yet this "slipperiness" of the definition underscores its vitalness in children's growth and education. Considering that digital communications permeate young students' lived experiences, it is crucial that their skillset to read and analyze this content is honed, ensuring students are fully equipped to navigate the world.

Before moving beyond definitions and understandings of digital literacies, I think I would be remiss to not include The New London Group's position on multiliteracies. In their article "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures," The New London Group strongly opens by declaring, "If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life. Literacy pedagogy is expected to play a particularly important role in fulfilling this mission…leading to full and equitable social participation" (60). The Group finds that diversity in cultures, languages, and life practices all affect student learning experiences and shape students' common discourse spaces. Educators should account for these various factors that impact and influence students' literacies, recognizing the abundance of communicative and interpretive practices students engage with across the spaces where they work and play (89). Meant as an opening point to this type of work, the New London Group's article demonstrates how English teachers must expand the scope of texts and assessments to reflect the multiliteracies that students possess. Digital literacy is an important and pervasive type of literacy for students today and most certainly falls under The New London Group's directives to engage with materials, tools, and forums that interest, engage, and aid students, both within and outside of the classroom. While these ideas are now commonplace at the college level, they still remain more the exception than the rule in secondary education.

Next, I want to examine the ways that reading digital archives supports the same sorts of processes and goals as traditional literary teaching. In their article "Archival Literacy: Reading the Rhetoric of Digital Archives in the Undergraduate Classroom," Jessica Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma outline that to be able to properly read digital archives requires "understand[ing]

and anlyz[ing] their *rhetorical* properties…because they are created in time and space by human beings who make decisions about the selection, preservation, and presentation of materials" (218). Questioning, investigating, and interpreting this decision-making process requires the same sorts of skills and critical thinking required of students when investigating "normal" types of literature. Therefore, digital literacy learning enhances the skills which students practice in primary school, expanding their ability to critically examine beyond a more academic text to the types of materials they encounter more in their day-to-day. By understanding that digital archivists utilize rhetorical strategies to tell a particular story of materials or reflect the priorities and standards of the current period, students can mine archives by looking for the answers to the same essential questions asked of fictional stories and other literature.

Building upon this move to incorporate digital literacy within standard literacy practices, Jane Greer discusses how digital archives contribute to the expansions of these literacies. In her book chapter, "Arranging Our Emotions: Archival Affects and Emotional Responses," Greer claims that breaking down the structuring of archives helps students understand the "affective attachments" they form to the materials housed within them, similarly to how they form (or do not form) attachments to traditionally presented literary works. She pinpoints that improving literacy surrounding these digital spaces displays to students "[archives'] power to align or alienate us from possible communities" (71-72). This focus on students' affective experiences with the preserved materials and the archives themselves points to an expanded array of entry points for educators to access; the number of materials arranged together in an archive necessarily increases the potential for students to connect with a wider range of literary lineages. Essentially, Greer's claims demonstrate that reading these digital spaces is essential work for

keeping students abreast of literacy's contemporary landscape, as these archives shape students' affective experiences in seen and unseen ways.

Dialing in on digital literacy specifically within the English classroom, I turn to Janelle Newman's analysis of an English language bridge program that she further developed at her institution after adding a digital literacy course. Newman describes having students utilize digital spaces and tools to "develop their oral and written communication skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)." She also provides a working definition of literacy in this particular context stating, "like literacy, [digital literacy] involves ways of seeing, doing, being, and using language in connection to the secondary discourse [which] involves the practical thinking and behavioral skills required to navigate the digital world" ("Understanding Others' Stories to Find Our Own"). Newman's clear connecting of digital literacy to the stakes of the English classroom accentuates the validity of integrating these skills alongside the typical literacy goals of college institutions. However, I think that what she pushes for here could begin earlier in secondary educational classes. She explains that the aim of her course is to achieve baseline goals of an English secondary classroom, that is "develop academic communication skills," while also making sure that students are adept at utilizing and "critically engag[ing] with the 'digital tools'" that make up their lived experience ("Understanding Others' Stories to Find Our Own"). Having students learn to read digital archives furthers the same sets of goals required of teaching both standard and digital literacies at the same time. This approach creates opportunities for students to practice the two types of reading and also provides examples of digital materials that students could model in their own digital creations, meeting the aims that Newman outlines in her article.

*Increasing Student Engagement through Digital Archives*

I now want to pivot toward the pedagogical approach to incorporating those archives and how they improve student engagement. Digital archives provide a wide array of entry points for students to form personal stakes with the learning materials in their classes, magnifying the likelihood for genuine student engagement. For instance, Jenna Morton-Aiken and Robert Schwegler break down archival pedagogy and infrastructures as a transformative site for students. In their book chapter, "Recursion and Responsiveness: Archival Pedagogy and Archival Infrastructures in the Same Conversation," Morton-Aiken and Schwegler detail how the practice of reading the archives easily goes hand-in-hand with critical discussions and practices of archive making. The two found that emphasis on these archival spaces generated a "classroom based on discovery and change rather than a unidirectional transmission of accepted procedures and practices" (Morton-Aiken and Schwegler 137-38). This concept is crucial to understanding how digital archives can reinvigorate the English classroom; students can feel they hold more active stakes by including them in the process of discovery that reading digital archives affords. Exploring digital archival material when physical material is not readily available or affordable enables students to generate a deeper engagement with older texts. By investigating, say, a serialized novel within the newspaper facsimile it appeared in, students may be drawn to particular aspects of the newspaper that pair with the story, giving each student greater potential for individualized discovery.

In addition, Morton-Aiken and Schwegler also synthesize various viewpoints on archives within the classroom. One viewpoint is the idea of archives as "not simply an accounting of the past (and revisionist past), but of the future, shaping, altering, and revolutionizing, especially in the classes they describe where archival work builds a future history" (Morton-Aiken and Schwegler 139). Conceptualizing the archives as a space for students to make an impact on

future history is an extraordinary idea, one that empowers students to create actionable, generative personal learning objectives from the learning material presented to them. Students can see a real-world application of digital literacy skills by understanding the critical thinking necessary for creating, maintaining, and continually contributing to a digital archive, which can manifest in their class assessments and personal work beyond the classroom.

Continuing on this theme of digital archives as an area for students to manifest robust contributions to the classroom rather than simply receiving sets of information, Enoch and VanHaitsma turn to how the reading and reproduction of digital archives impact student learning. For example, they point out that a ripe area of inquiry is for educators to have students draw comparisons across archives that cover or focus on the same topic(s). Students not only then access the primary reading material available through these resources, but also, they receive the opportunity to practice their digital literacy skills by critically examining the formation of each archive and how each one addresses the topic(s) concerned (Enoch and VanHaitsma 221, 223). Students can develop nuanced readings of the archives by asking what the purpose of a particular archive is or who has funded the digitalization of the materials. Including such reading exercises in secondary education will prepare students to become more critical investigators of the materials they will continue to encounter as college students, employees, and adults consuming media and materials. Students recognizing that this comparative reading strategy is useful beyond their time in the English classroom will provide a sense of purpose to their learning while in school.

Further, Enoch and VanHaitsma explain how working with the archives themselves can be incorporated into students' learning, especially in emphasizing the collaborative nature of such work. They outline that students can take direct part in data creation and improvement of

the archives themselves, including such "homework" as transcribing sections of primary

materials or contributing to "narratives" of the archive by tagging (229). Such skills like tagging

then transfer outside of the English classroom while still directly contributing to students'

engagement in and learning from the literary materials presented to them. These technical skills,

paired with the "practical" reading skill outlined above, demonstrate to students that their

learning does have real world implications, infusing the work with a greater level of urgency.

Seeing that their English classes can prepare them to tackle later life activities and challenges

better will provide students a direction with their reading, raising the potential for more personal

stakes.

Adding to the discussion on student contribution, Catherine O'Donnell and Mark Tebeau

in their summit seminar, "Teaching for the Future: Digital Archives as Pedagogy," concentrated

on the truly collaborative nature of archival material creation, curation, and maintenance. Their

seminar discussed the substantial growth of digital archives; the project they discussed, for

instance, had 16,000+ artifacts and 175,000 unique site visitors. While their digital project

focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, the takeaways of the project spread into any sort of digital

archival space, most notably the idea that digital archives "collaborate with and empower diverse

communities to collect, share, and interpret" (O'Donnell and Tebeau). The seminar demonstrates

a successful application of this approach in tertiary education but has yet to be executed at the

secondary level. Extending their findings into the English classroom, I believe students can see a

more active presentation of literature from the past when it is presented in a digital form, crafting

a temporal bridge into creation potentials today. This link across past, present, and future

generates a more "real" feeling of meaning creation, which students can locate across collections

or within one archive. Students can also see this link reflected in their own work as they

contribute to the materials presented to them and engage in preservation work, supplying their personal story to the collaborative narrative constructed within archives.

Madeline B. Gangnes also investigates how digital archives produce stronger ties between students and the literature of the past. In her article "Togetherness with the Past: Literary Pedagogy and the Digital Archive," Gangnes describes the act of investigating the archive, comparing the "profound and often gratifying aloneness" of the traditional archives with the added "collective experience" that digital archives afford scholars through "examin[ing] archival materials in facsimile simultaneously" (112-13). However, this unique experience of the digital archives does not have to be limited to only scholars and college students; this sense of collective investigation can permeate the high school English classroom. Educators could have students individually looking at the archives on their own laptops, fostering the separate but collective affective experience of discovery for students, though the collective could also be made hyper apparent through projections onto a screen for class-wide examination or in small group work.[3]

This collective experience also aids in students' immersion into the texts of the past. Gangnes states, "drawing on archival materials helps students engage with the historical, cultural, and material contexts of the time periods in which works of literature were published" (113). Essentially, students can recreate the reading experience of the past through reading the primary materials within the digital archive, such as seeing paratextual elements not included in modern printings. Additionally, students could potentially find more localized entry points by

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[3] Ganges outlines such digital learning pitfalls such as student fatigue from looking at small screens for extended periods of time (121-22) Varying the ways that teachers require students to engage with digital archives is one approach to overcoming such struggles. I propose that assigning larger facsimile scans, such as serialized novels, alongside a bound printed edition could be a way to help students have structured breaks from screens, improving the learning experience.

investigating materials uploaded in geographically relevant archives—inscriptions with names, dates, and town names could prompt myriad lines of inquiry for students. Gangnes goes further in her claims by seeing this sort of pedagogical approach as community learning, which "enhances students' understanding of a text" by helping them "recontextualize fiction" (114). Educators can scaffold the creation of personal stakes for each student by expanding students' ability to draw for themselves the goals and ideology that informed the texts' creations. By constructing steppingstones for students to feel individually engaged and invested in their own learning, teachers can make sure that secondary students do not feel as if they have to follow a disconnected and uninteresting set plan of literacy acquisition.

Concentrating specifically on how these digital practices apply to nineteenth-century American literature, Catherine Waitinas presents her approach to teaching students Walt Whitman through a digital archive. She highlights how teaching her students Whitman through the archive helps them be "present, active, and communicative with him," finding that her students end up having "an intimate ownership" of Whitman's work (Waitinas 153-54). Notably, she talks about the ease of implementation when only focusing on one digital archive. She emphasizes that by only working with *The Whitman Archive*, she was able to balance the digital humanities content with the traditional literary objectives, "push[ing] our students into different and often more advanced ways of engaging with texts" (155, 157). Waitinas here focuses particularly on elements such as handwriting and physical deterioration/preservation of Whitman's manuscripts. By having students incorporate the physicality of texts into their analysis of nineteenth-century literature, we can have students reach that "intimate ownership" that Waitinas describes. In addition, when considering comparative work across manuscripts or

various publications, students can draw connections about how authors reacted to reception of their work through tracking changes across time.

Finally, I want to consult Tisha M. Brooks work on inclusive classroom practices in combining print and digital materials in English curriculums. In her book chapter "Merging Print and Digital Literacies in the African American Literature Classroom," Brooks explains the need to bridge the reading practices students bring from outside the classroom and the practices educators attempt to facilitate within that space. She centers her class around meaning making, encouraging her undergraduate students to take charge of their education by incorporating her students' multiliteracies into the assigned readings and assessments throughout the semester. She also discusses how her course's structure "push[es] students to see themselves as agents in the world…as critical readers, producers, and users" (Brooks 229, 230-31, 237). Incorporating digital archival work into studying print canonical texts provides Brooks with a foundation to support many different types of learning and performance. Brooks demonstrates a model for celebrating the practices that students have when they enter the classroom and fostering critical literary skills with which to sharpen the expertise students already possess.

Developing the conversations outlined above further, I contend that secondary education students would also significantly benefit from such practices being integrated into their English curriculums. The encouragement adolescents would receive from such an expansion in access to representative authors, increased proficiency with digital and traditional literacies, and flexibility in demonstrating knowledge could fundamentally change many students' relationship to the English classroom. Such a shift in student engagement will aid students to recognize the impact that literature has on them and the formation of the world in which they live. Students already do use varying levels of literacy practices as meaning makers outside the classroom; incorporating

digital archival work earlier in their learning careers will more quickly help them see themselves as meaning makers capable of enacting change. Most importantly, inclusion of digital archives will enhance the probability of more students having a vested interest in their English classroom learning by making explicit connections between classroom literacy practices and skills and the work students do in their daily lives and future careers. Gaining such interest in the English content and its connections to work beyond the classroom will ameliorate the misconception students have that their coursework is inapplicable to the "real world."

**Section II. Course Design: Implementing the Digital in the Physical Classroom**

Following the scholarly grounds for this work, I will now provide an overview for an imagined course that incorporates digital archives. For this imagined course, I will be pulling some materials from the first-year writing course I have taught this past academic year, namely readings, writing assessments, and multimodal projects.[4] I will supply more details for an imagined course unit on *The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride* by Julia C. Collins to demonstrate how digital archives can be effectively paired with other print texts in a high school English class.[5]

The main concept behind this course is that for each literature unit, there will be an anchor text read within a digital archive paired with other texts accessed both as print and digital reading material. When considering the ease of implementation for this shift in English curriculums in secondary education, I find it important to consider that there could be pushback for the "replacement" of print materials or canonical texts with not as well-known novels or

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[4] My first-year writing course was titled Writing about Emotions and did not incorporate digital archives, though I believe multimodal writing practices I used in my class reinforce the conversation thus far on digital literacy and will pair well with digital archive engagement.

[5] Please see Appendix A for a sample syllabus of this proposed course.

authors. In order to counteract this potential drawback of digital archives, there should be more

of a balance between the two forms rather than a total substitution.

For instance, in the example unit, the anchor text, *The Curse of Caste*, is available as a

print bound copy for anywhere between fifteen and twenty-two dollars, which might be an easily

acquired text for more well-funded schools. Beyond the printed edition, students will be

investigating the serialized novel in its original form, through its publication in *The Christian*

*Recorder*, available in digital facsimiles on *The Internet Archive*.[6] Even if schools cannot afford

to widely purchase *The Curse of Caste* in print, students will still be able to read the novel online

via the digital scans. In addition to *The Curse of Caste*, students will also examine such canonical

texts as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs and *Narrative of the Life of*

*Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass. As two more prominent texts in

the African American literary canon for the nineteenth-century, it is much more realistic to plan

for most schools to already hold these works in the library and as student textbooks. Other

reading materials that will be paired with this anchor text include *Minnie's Sacrifice* by Frances

Ellen Watkins Harper, *Magnolia Leaves: Poems* by Mary Weston Fordham, and *Southern*

*Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* by Ida B. Wells. These works are readily available for free;

*Minnie's Sacrifice* also was serialized in *The Christian Recorder* (and therefore available as scans

in *The Internet Archive*) while the following two texts have been transcribed into open access

site, such as *The Digital Schomburg* and *Project Gutenberg*. Consequently, the class will have a

balance between print texts and digital texts while also augmenting the literature students are

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[6] The scans for *The Curse of Caste* in *The Christian Recorder* begin on February 25, 1865, at this location in *The Internet Archive*: https://archive.org/details/christianrecorder_1865_v5_no1_to_13/page/n24/mode/1up.

already expected to read, which in turn will keep educators from having to completely restructure current curriculums.[7]

Since my main focus in this imagined English course is to provide as many structured "choose-you-own-adventure" entry points for students, I want class time to be a place of investigation and sharing of discovery. With that in mind, students will be asked to do a first reading of specific sections of *The Curse of Caste* as homework in the early part of the unit. To scaffold comfortability with reading in digital archives and knowing how to work with them, we will start the first week of the unit by navigating *The Internet Archive*, learning about its mission and collaborators, and beginning to understand the significance of reading the novel within the context of the newspaper. In the following days, class activities will be structured around reading the content surrounding the novel in the newspaper (and paying attention to the actual construction of the paper itself), talking in small groups to share ideas on the text and the archive, and small, low stakes writing assignments to consolidate beginning areas of inquiry for students. Moreover, students will use their free writes to track their ideas over time and begin larger assessments by keeping their writing in an individual journal, which will ensure that students see the long-term purpose behind such "unstructured" writing. I think that student-centered classrooms are incredibly generative for the students, so I prefer to have students begin discussion with each other and the class as a whole before I provide too many opening remarks, empowering them to know that their voice is just as valid as mine within the academic environment.

Once students have had the opportunity to grow more confident in reading the anchor text within the newspaper facsimile, I will begin to show them how to put the newspaper in

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[7] Please see Appendix B for sample course unit materials showing how the texts would be read together.

conversation with other digital materials, increasing the potential for students to locate entry points in which they are personally invested. If this English class were taught in Alabama, one readily accessible archive to students is the *Alabama Department of Archives and History*, which would be a localized archive compared to the vastness of *The Internet Archive*. In turn, the likelihood of students finding materials more closely connected to their lives will grow. Comparing the holdings of *The Christian Recorder* in *The Internet Archive* with the collections assembled by the *Alabama Department of Archives and History* is an excellent moment to further develop digital literacy skills. We will take class time to discuss the motivations behind the two archive projects, the ways in which they are funded, the intended audiences, and the possible messages a state archive might want to communicate versus a much wider open resource. In this way, students will not only be learning how to read literary texts in relation to other media of the time but also how to read the repositories in which they receive information, whether in "academic" pursuits or while consuming current news and information delivered through digital mediums. The rise of technology within every aspect of life means that students will be receiving digital information whether they seek it or not, and improved digital literacy has the secondary effect of improving their critical analysis of such non-academic content.

Another aspect of daily class activities that is reinforced through digital archives is the myriad ways a student can participate in the classroom and beyond. The materials gathered within the archives span letters, songs, short-form videos, webpages, government documents, local folklore, and so much more. By seeing these materials legitimated as worthy of preservation and collection, students can recognize their own contributions to society as valid and useful in all kinds of forms. This conceptualization of participation is incredibly important to me as an educator, as I want to make sure that students of all backgrounds and learning styles

feel comfortable and confident contributing to the class in any way they can. With this in mind, I

will give students the opportunity to participate in think-pair-share partnerships, small group

discussions, class wide popcorn style discussions, private free writes, and online discussion

boards.[8] Students can think through the effectiveness of conveying their thoughts and ideas in

different forms and/or styles, reflecting the ways we will see how people produced and

disseminated literature in the past. As well, by thinking more critically about the span of archival

materials—folklore, songs, transcribed oral histories, and the like—students will gain exposure

to communicative practices that have not primarily been esteemed in Western academic contexts

in the past, better diversifying their perspective and legitimating their own practices. To manage

the expanse of potential participatory applications, I will aid students in establishing individual

goals for participation improvement, which will make certain that students push themselves to

grow in this area.[9]

      Building upon these scaffolded daily and weekly activities, I will provide two summative

assessments for each unit, one in a more creative style and the other in a more traditional style.

Similarly to how I described combining digital archives with print literature, I consider the

inclusion of both a creative and traditional summative assessment to be a reinforcer of the

guiding goals of this course. For the first, I will have the creative summative assessment begin

earlier in the unit and incorporate students' free writing and reflections on *The Curse of Caste* in

conversation with the newspaper, other media elements, and the archive. In this way, students

can begin crafting a multimodal project that will utilize a combination of digital and nondigital

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[8] This array of participatory activities currently reflects how I conduct my first-year writing class.

[9] For example, a student who does not like to speak in front of the class might establish a goal of speaking aloud only three times in the semester (challenging but still doable for that particular student). Another student who struggles with articulating their thoughts quickly in written word might make a goal to refine their free writes over the course.

tools and skills through the creation of a newspaper front page or a podcast of equivalent labor.[10]

Through these assessments, students will demonstrate both their ability to read, analyze, and

interpret the rhetorical moves happening within the newspaper while also practicing their hand at

those same sorts of rhetorical moves (for example, integration and juxtaposition). This type of

assessment best reflects the goal of this proposed English course in including students as

meaning-makers and showing them the opportunities they have to contribute to archival

materials (even if it only ever remains in their own private archive).

Moving on to the more traditional summative assessment, I plan on having students

conduct a shorter analytical research paper. Considering the hefty nature of this assessment, it

will be an end-of-unit piece, which will enable students to include work they have already

completed on the creative assignment into their ability to meet learning objectives for the

research paper. By including an analytical research paper in the course assessments, I aim to

show how students' acquisition of digital and standard literacy skills contribute to adept

performance on conventionally accepted markers. However, I still want students to exert agency

over their assessments; I will make sure that students can stick with the entry points that immerse

them within the literature we are reading and the areas of inquiry that most excite them. This

agency will appear in their designing of a prompt or research question within structured

objectives for the project. Again, those materials that pique students' interest the most within the

archival collections will be utilized as contributing historical and social context to provide a

framework with which to conduct literary analysis of the anchor text.[11] Through the linked class

activities and assessments, I hope to provide students with a sort of "structured freedom" to find

points of contact with the voices of the past, consistently feeling supported to push themselves to

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[10] Please see Appendix C for the creative assessment handout.
[11] Please see Appendix D for the traditional summative assessment handout sheet.

question, analyze, and interpret the works in front of them, and possess the confidence and excitement to take an active role with the material as meaning makers.

**Conclusion: Tying the Elements All Together**

In this section, I will show the pedagogical reasoning behind why I decided to construct this imagined course as I did, concentrating on the application of the digital literacy and archival work described in Section I. I will mainly explain how my emphasis on the formation of personal stakes for students informs my decision making and how it combines with the prominence of incorporating digital archives.

One of the main impediments that I see to student participation and engagement in the classroom is a belief that there are only a few "right" ways of learning, reading, and writing. From my time as an aide in high school, to tutoring student athletes at Auburn University, to working as a writing consultant and first-year writing instructor here at the University of Virginia, I have consistently seen students afraid to move beyond whatever will secure them "the A." I also have come to recognize this debilitating perfection in myself, and one of my missions as an educator is to prevent future generations of students from falling into this same trap. Jane Tompkins neatly outlines the permeation of the performance model throughout all stages of academia and schooling, generating a profusion of "false selves" for students. These false selves lead us to seek validation from others, such as peers and instructors, to know if we are performing well, rather than actually learning for the sake of personal growth. Yet Tompkins provides potential solutions to counteract this model in academia, such as including her students in classroom management, which encourages several lines of thinking instead of only her own (654-655, 657). This agency in building the classroom is why I decided to have participation be largely up to student discretion, providing them with multiple avenues to demonstrate daily

learning in class. It is also why I find it vital to student engagement that each student identify their stake in the material and locate a personalized entry point into the readings, connecting the course objectives to their own goals, interests, literacies, and backgrounds. I also do not want students to be overwhelmed with a, perhaps, perception of unlimited (and therefore overwhelming) choice, which is why I will work closely with students to establish guidelines and learning "bumpers" so that they can remain confident in their choices.

Building upon this idea of eradicating the "false selves," I find bell hooks's articulation of engaged pedagogy particularly striking, giving me the language and framework to voice my desires for the classroom. hooks writes, "Education as the practice of freedom was continually undermined by professors who were actively hostile to the notion of student participation. Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor (14). Trying to keep student participation, engagement, and knowledge at the core of my course helped me to develop my overarching aims and write my summative assessments. Behind all these elements is the belief that each student comes with some sort of knowledge and skill—each student reads, interprets, and produces meaning on a daily basis in a multitude of ways. I want that knowledge to come through in student-led assignments and excitement for literacy acquisition and content creation as an on-going process. Students have their own voices already; the English classroom should be a place for them to develop those voices further and investigate styles or questions that interest and challenge them. By having students read the literature within the context of a digital archive, I will expand the field in which students can locate their claim to knowledge and successfully apply it to their interpretations of the text.

This expansion will also apply to their ability to express this knowledge through varied assessments, such as multimodal projects. When discussing the impact of engaged pedagogy, hooks states, "Engaged pedagogy necessarily values student expression…Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process" (21). To foster this bilateral relationship of learning with my students, I want to make sure that I provide them with clear scaffolding and gentle guidelines so that they can acquire skills from me but so that I can also learn from their developed lines of inquiry. Reading within digital archives means students will have the opportunity to incorporate content, skills, and forums that I may have not yet come across myself, building an incredibly generative classroom for everyone who takes part in the English course.

Jody Shipka's *Toward a Composition Made Whole* informed me of my desire to include multimodal projects such as the creative summative assessment into my course design. Shipka advocates for the integration of multimodality in the classroom, writing,

> I was positioned…in ways that allowed me to see, and so to understand, the final product *in relation to* the complex and highly rigorous decision-making processes the student employed while producing this text…bridging the gap between the numerous and varied communicative practices in which students routinely engage outside of school versus the comparatively narrow repertoire of practices typically associated with the writing classroom. (3, 5)

Seeing how Shipka highlights the value of multimodality encouraged me to move forward with my course design. I decided to place a multimodal project in the midst of the literature unit, giving students the ability to explore the texts in personally invested ways, while also having

them include a critical written piece that accounts for their choices. This piece will reinforce that students are actively making choices of communication in their project, reinforcing the standards of secondary English classes to effectively demonstrate acquired literacy and improve communicative practices. Students will be better able to see the ways that they can apply this learning outside the English classroom, giving them more investment in obtaining those skills during their time in school. In addition, they can also begin their community contributions of meaning making while procuring these skills by publishing or disseminating their pieces at community centers, recreational or extracurricular spaces, or in local media outlets.

While on the topic of multimodal projects, I want to further elaborate on my adherence to student choice in how they approach the readings and investigation of the digital archives. Kevin Gannon discusses the transformative nature of considering student choice as a foundational aspect of course design. He says, "By allowing students the freedom to concentrate on creating and expressing knowledge, as opposed to fitting their work into a format they had no hand in defining, we give them the space to produce some spectacular results…[and] grant students the agency to construct a meaningful narrative of their learning" (93-94). By exposing students to the flexibility and expansive nature of digital archives, I want them to witness the methods and literacies available to them to contribute to meaning making and also narrate their experiences, stories, and futures. This desire also extends into the decision to utilize specifications grading, which is outlined in my assessment handouts. I want students to have the framework and guideposts to not be lost or overwhelmed by choice, but I also do not want them to be overcome by the false self through focusing on what they think I want in pursuit of the A. By providing students the freedom to find resonate entry points into English literature, I hope to empower students to see themselves as equal and capable contributors to the formation of future narratives.

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**Appendix A: Sample Course Syllabus**
# English 12 Syllabus
**American Literature and Widening Understandings of Textual Lineages**

<u>Teacher Information</u>

Zana Christjohn                                                                          Time: TBD

<u>rma8wn@virginia.edu</u>                                                        Location: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

## Course Description

In this course, we will bridge the literary practices you have garnered in reading traditional texts to those that you use in digital spaces. We will spend the next semester investigating what we learn from investigating the literature of the past in their physical manifestations, whether that be bound books, newspaper serialization, manuscripts, or pamphlets. We will hone our ability to extrapolate information about the past and formations of our culture and society from putting canonical texts in conversation with these digital facsimiles. English 12 will enable each student to engage fully and critically with world, whether in preparation for further education at the college level or in the workforce. We will collectively explore different ways of communicating through critical inquiries into our texts and various presentations of learning. Through our class, we will aim to generate answers to these guiding essential questions:

- How do our readings of these texts evolve when considering them on their own merit and then in relation to the other texts/printed materials being produced during the same time?
- How do our authors subscribe to or deviate from norms/expectations for their chosen genre/form? What do those choices tell us about the strategies, opportunities, or challenges they faced?
- How do these texts reveal the social and political moment of the time? What applications can we make of these themes as potential commentary in our understanding of this period?
- How do the additions of these texts into our knowledge base complicate or challenge our understanding of textual lineages in the United States of America?

Our readings, discussions, writings, and creations will expand our understanding of the literature that forms our identities, communities, and practices. We will build upon this expansion of literacy to see ourselves as active meaning makers, contributing to the narrative formation happening around us all of the time.

## Course Goals

Learning Goals for this course include:

- Developing personal critical lines of inquiry on our class texts

- Strengthening writerly voice and identity through class activities, papers, and projects
- Gaining proficiency in research, language, and digital literacy through practice of the ongoing writing process
- Understanding and analyzing texts in conversation with other materials of its time
- Engaging with digital archival spaces and growing confidence in reading and interacting with digital archives
- Building a more diverse view of American textual lineages
- Collaborating with classmates to discern cultural and social values from the literature we read
- Contributing to the community as meaning makers

## Course Readings

We will be reading from a variety of texts, such as novels, short stories, newspaper articles, pamphlets, letters, manuscripts, songs, diaries, and other sources. Our readings will be provided as physical textbooks, printed handouts, and digital materials (including learning to read digital archives, which house these materials). Since we will be reading both print and digital materials, please bring your school laptops to class charged each day, so as to be prepared for any individual reading or small group work.

A note on language: reading literature extensively means that we will frequently encounter words that are now considered out-of-date, offensive, or even harmful. In our class, we should only use certain words when quoting or directly in context to the text. Other harmful words, such as slurs, should **never** be used in class, whether in spoken discussion or in written work. For each unit, I will make sure we are all on the same page about the terms we will encounter in our texts.

## Course Activities

**Daily Activities:** Our daily work will include a variety of approaches to the course content. We will have a mix of reading in class, investigating digital materials, working in pairs and small groups, and engaging in class-wide discussions. We will also have opportunities for unstructured "free" writes, collaborative group/board writing, outlining/drafting/revising workshops, and peer review during class periods. Participation will be key for our daily activities, and with the variety of opportunities to do so, each student can and will establish challenging but reasonable goals for themselves at the beginning of the semester to grow in class community engagement.

**Weekly Activities:** At the end of each week, we will spend some time reflecting on the learning we have undergone, our questions and interests about the readings/content, and where we would like to explore next week. These summary, reflective writings will be done in class in our course journals so that everyone can track their thoughts, interests, and writing progress throughout the school year.

**Unit-long Activities:** Each unit will have two summative assessments, one creative and one "traditional." These assessments will allow each student to demonstrate their learning on the unit goals and enable them to answer our guiding essential questions and their personally developed lines of inquiry. Unit activities will be evaluated according to specifications grading, which we will go into more detail for each assessment. Creative assessments will typically look like some form of multimodal project, while traditional assessments will look like a shorter analytical, argumentative, and/or research papers.

**Appendix B: Sample *The Curse of Caste* Unit Materials**

(Proposed to cover five weeks of instruction)

Learning Objectives:

- By the end of this literature unit, students will be able to identify, analyze, and explain the significance of the key literary elements that contribute to the sentimental novel, autobiography, the essay, and the serialized form, with a particular focus on Black women's strategy in selecting particular genres to convey their messages.
- By the end of this literature unit, students will be able to put all of the texts in conversation with other materials of this time, extrapolating the common themes presented to a larger reading of the historical moment and applying the real-time impact of those themes through their dissemination in printed materials.
- By the end of this literature unit, students will have begun establishing a more comprehensive understanding of African American women's textual lineage, building a more diverse literature set to trace the trajectory of Black women's writing during this period and into the modern day.
- By the end of this literature unit, students will gain proficiency in reading and navigating digital archives, drawing comparisons across archival spaces and incorporating that analysis into conversations about how our society views particular texts, authors, and literary lineages.

Central Themes:

- Performance, questioning, and ambiguity of racial identities
- Complications of racial violence with the intersectional impact of gender
- Women's leadership role in the home and community
- Explicit and subversive forms of social censuring by Black women and directions/directives for change
- The long memory/impact of racial violence generated by slavery

Unit Materials:

- *The Curse of Caste* by Julia C. Collins – novel serialized in *The Christian Recorder* (located in *The Internet Archive*) and available as printed novel
- *Minnie's Sacrifice* by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper – novel serialized in *The Christian Recorder* located in *The Internet Archive*)
- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs – printed novel
- *Magnolia Leaves: Poems* by Mary Weston Fordham – digitally transcribed small book of poems (located in *The Digital Schomburg*)
- *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* by Ida B. Wells – digitally transcribed pamphlet (located in *Project Gutenberg*)
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass – printed novel

- "Forever Free" by Edmonia Lewis – neoclassical sculpture (located in *SmartHistory*)

Unit Week One
Reading:

- Chapters 1-15 of *The Curse of Caste*
- Collins's essays for *The Christian Recorder*

Unit Week Two Reading
Reading:

- Chapters 16-31 of *The Curse of Caste*
- *Magnolia Leaves*
- *Southern Horrors*

Due end of week:

- Draft of creative assessment

Unit Week Three
Reading:

- Chapters 1-10 of *Minnie's Sacrifice*
- "Forever Free"
- Selections from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Due end of week:

- Creative assessment
- Proposed topic for traditional assessment

Unit Week Four
Reading:

- Chapters 11-21 of *Minnie's Sacrifice*
- Selections from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Due end of week:

- Draft of traditional assessment

Unit Week Five
Reading:

- Peer review partner's paper draft

Due end of week

- Traditional assessment

**Appendix C: Creative Summative Assessment Handout Sheet**

**Reenacting the Press:** *The Curse of Caste* **in Conversation**

**Due Date for Class Presentation: To be determined by sign-up sheet**

**Due Date for Submission: #/#/#**


**Purpose**: In this creative assignment, you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your learning on our second learning goal (by the end of this unit, students will be able to put this text in conversation with other printed materials of the time in order to extrapolate the themes presented to a larger reading of the historical moment). You will accomplish this by creating either a front page of a newspaper or a podcast episode, both to be imagined as something you own and produce regularly. In either of these modes, you will have the main article or talking segment centered on your personal "takes" on *The Curse of Caste*. Other pieces of media will be either verbally or spatially discussed around the main piece of "writing," which can take the form of past or current political news, advertisements, poems, short stories, op-eds, etc. Essentially, you are reenacting the practices and strategies that we have examined in *The Christian Recorder* for this piece, demonstrating how you understand literature/writing to interact with other pieces of media to convey a particular message or angle on an issue. (If for any reason you feel very strongly that another mode would better suit your learning, please meet with me individually so we can discuss if that will be possible, and, if so, outline what those particular parameters and goals will look like.)

**Task:**

Part One—Pick Your Mode

To efficiently go about this project, it will be useful to have the mode with which you will be presenting your work in mind. Both options will include the same amount of labor; the main writing segment should be the same length and level of engagement and you will have the same minimum number of additional media pieces arranged around your segment.

Part Two—Write the Main Article/Segment

Unlike our analytical research paper later this semester, your article/talking segment can take a more casual, less academic approach. The main criteria is that it is focused on engaging either directly or indirectly with *The Curse of Caste* (we will discuss further in class exactly how these two approaches can appear). This piece of writing should be entirely **your** take on the topic you

pick, which means you should not be entirely paraphrasing another article or op-ed on *The Curse of Caste* or other related materials/topics (though you are welcome to include other articles in your analysis of your topic—as long as the main voice is yours). The newspaper article should be around 1,000 words, and the podcast segment should be around 5 minutes of talking.

Part Three—Arrange Additional Media

Pick an additional four pieces of media, which can be curated from things that already exist or could be written by yourself (though this is not required). The supporting media pieces should support a cohesive vision for your newspaper/podcast. For an idea of what to aim for in these pieces, written pieces can shoot for between 250-500 words, and verbally discussed media can aim for one and a half minutes to three minutes on each piece. Strategically decide how you will display/discuss these pieces around your main piece of engagement.

Part Four—Presentation

Present your complete-for-now project to the class based upon the day you signed up for on the sign-up sheet. We will spend approximately 8-10 minutes on each project, so it is totally fine not to explain every part of your project to your classmates. This presentation will be an excellent opportunity to seek feedback from your classmates while also getting the chance to show your awesome work! Your project also does not need to be 100% complete (though your main segment should at least be a complete draft).

Part Five—Creative Statement and Submission

After your presentation, take in any helpful feedback and finish your project. Before submitting the creative assignment to me, write a ~400-word creative statement where you explain the critical choices you made to support a certain angle/message regarding *The Curse of Caste* in your project and how that reflects what we have been discussing about *The Christian Recorder* so far this semester.

**Criteria for Success:**

A creative project that meets specifications

- Contains either an original 1,000-word article or 5 minute talking segment directly or indirectly focused on *The Curse of Caste*
- Has at minimum 4 additional relevant pieces of media arranged around the main article

- Includes a ~400-word creative statement explaining how your creative choices support a cohesive angle on the text and reflects what we have seen in *The Curse of Caste*
- Is presented before the class
- Is submitted by the posted due date

**Appendix D: Traditional Summative Assessment Handout Sheet**

**Analytical Research Paper**

**Due Date for Peer Review: #/#/#**

**Due Date for Submission: #/#/#**

**Purpose**: The analytical research paper will enable you to critically engage with *The Curse of Caste* and the historical moment and literary trends of its time. Through a guided approach to research and paper writing, you will be able to utilize this paper to investigate the significance of genre and form for *The Curse of Caste*. For this assignment, I am asking you to 1) formulate a personal research question on genre/form in relation to literary reception, the newspaper, etc. to 2) conduct historical research to provide a framework with which you will 3) conduct an analysis of our text to prove your claim in an 8-10 page research paper. You will work with me in individual conferences to begin your analytical research essay and your classmates in a peer review session on a draft. Work on this paper will provide you opportunities to demonstrate your learning on two of our learning goals for the class: by the end of this unit, students will be able to identify and analyze key literary elements that contribute to the sentimental genre and serialized form; by the end of this unit, students will be able to put this text in conversation with other printed materials of the time in order to extrapolate the themes presented to a larger reading of the historical moment.

**Task**:

Part One—Formulating a Research Question

While your paper has to investigate some element of the genre/form of *The Curse of Caste*, you are not bound by a predetermined prompt. Crafting a generative research question is an important skill to learn, so in order to feel like you are "on the right track," I will have you submit your research question early on in the process. I will meet with you in individual conferences to discuss the opportunities, challenges, and potential directions/resources your question generates in order for you to be on target for meeting whichever grade bundle you desire.

Part Two—Conducting Research

After formulating your research question and meeting with me, your next step will be to utilize the library resources we have discussed in class to find secondary sources on your topic. Due to

the shorter length of this paper, you should aim for a minimum of three secondary sources to help you provide an adequate framework and knowledge base from which to conduct your analysis of the text. More than five will probably prove too overwhelming for a shorter length paper (please meet with me if you think for any reason that you will need more than five so that we can make sure your voice is still strong amidst the other sources).

Part Three—Writing a Draft

Using your research question, research, and observations and analysis from the text so far, write a draft of your paper. Your draft does not need to be a "complete" draft before peer review but aim for at minimum four pages total of writing so that you can reap as much benefit as possible from your peers' feedback. In your draft, make sure to sketch out the direction of your paper, which will include an introduction, research framework, textual analysis, and conclusion; however, you do not have to have fully addressed each section in your draft. My recommendation is to have full paragraphs on both the research framework and analysis so that your peers can provide comments on both types of writerly engagement.

Part Four—Peer Review

A week before submission to me, we will have a couple of class sessions dedicated to peer review. Model the peer reviewing we have done together on in-class writing assignments previously. Remember to be clear with your feedback, looking for ways that your classmate can strengthen their writing rather than if it is only "good" or "bad." Make suggestions about areas of improvement or mark when you think something works really well, and please remember to be kind and considerate in how you discuss each other's work.

Part Five—Revision, Rewrite, and Editing for Submission

After the peer review process, rewrite your draft based upon your own consideration of your writing and peer feedback. Does your analytical research essay answer your guiding research question about the text? Based upon peer review and your reading, does your essay successfully support your claim? This is also an excellent time to meet with me outside of class if you want further clarification on peer feedback or where your paper currently is in the week leading up to submission.

**Criteria for Success:**

An analytical research paper that meets specifications

- Is 8-10 pages long

- Adheres to MLA formatting (or another style guide as long as you specify)
- Directly engages with and investigates questions about form and genre for *The Curse of Caste*
- Conducts historical research on a claim, including 3-5 secondary sources cited
- Has an argumentative claim with body paragraphs that revert back to that claim
- Is submitted by the posted due