

# Uses of Literature: How to Solve Problems with Books

English 11  
Winter 2019  
M/W 9:30-10:45  
GIRV 1119

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Office Hours W 12:30-2:00  
(and by appt)

Should literature be applied to current social issues? If so, how? If not, why not? In this class, we'll consider the pros and cons of "solving problems with books" as we build a dialogue between major works of the Victorian era and pressing debates in the twenty-first century. Our particular focus will be the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath, including topics related to climate change, economic inequality, and education reform. Through readings of nineteenth-century British authors, we will ask whether "relevance" is the right question, or whether "art for art's sake" is a valuable alternative. As a final project, we will put on a half theatrical/half analytic public colloquium, in which teams of students impersonate different Victorian figures and act as a "board of advisors" for current issues. What would Elizabeth Gaskell have to say about environmental policies? How would Charles Dickens implement an after-school tutoring program? Our main goal will be to discuss and debate whether or not we should take such advice, whether "advice" is an appropriate outcome of literary study, and what relationships we might draw between historical literature and present problems.

## Required Texts

- ❖ Charles Dickens. *Hard Times*. Ed. Kate Flint. London: Penguin, 2003.
- ❖ Elizabeth Gaskell. *North and South*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. London: Penguin, 2003.

Both texts are available at the bookstore. (Should cost present an issue, students may also access the texts on Project Gutenberg.) All other readings will be posted on GauchoSpace.

## Learning Goals

In this class, I hope you will learn:

- ❖ How to imagine new applications and audiences for literature, make connections between books and social issues, and engage authors in dialogue, even across centuries
- ❖ How to consider all sides of an issue in order to reach thoughtful conclusions
- ❖ How to ask questions of the past in ways that might guide the future

## Schedule

**Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.**

### *Week 1*

January 7 – Introductions

January 9 – Thomas Carlyle, “Signs of the Times”; William Wordsworth, “London 1802,” “The World is Too Much with Us,” “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802,” “The Tables Turned”; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Cry of the Children”

**Team sign-ups**

### *Week 2*

January 14 – William Morris, “Useful Work versus Useless Toil”; John Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic” (including Morris’s “Preface”), *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, “Lecture 1”

January 16 – **Research workshop [Class held in the Library, Room 1312]**

### *Week 3*

January 21 – **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: No class**

January 23 – Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, “The Great Towns”; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Economic and Social Bill of Rights”

### *Week 4*

January 28 – Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, 9-46; Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 7-52

January 30 – **Research Memo and Annotated Bibliography due** (in-class presentations)

### *Week 5*

February 4 – *Hard Times*, 46-82; *North and South*, 53-93

February 6 – *Hard Times*, 83-108; *North and South*, 94-124

### *Week 6*

February 11 – *Hard Times*, 111-150; *North and South*, 124-164

**Archival Workshop [Class held in Special Collections]**

February 13 – *Hard Times*, 150-186; *North and South*, 164-204

*Week 7*

February 18 – **Presidents' Day: No class**

February 20 – *Hard Times*, 187-212; *North and South*, 204-246  
**Advice from the Victorians due**

*Week 8*

February 25 – *Hard Times*, 215-247; *North and South*, 246-293

February 27 – *Hard Times*, 247-288; *North and South*, 293-334

*Week 9*

March 4 – *North and South*, 334-374; George Eliot, “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt”

March 6 – *North and South*, 375-425

*Week 10*

March 11 – Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” “Preface” to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “The Possibilities of the Useful,” “Letter to Clegg” (1891)

March 13 – **In-Class Presentations of Research** (you are welcome to invite guests)

**Final assignments due: March 20, 12 pm**

### Affiliated Projects

This class is affiliated with WhatEvery1Says (WE1S), a Mellon-funded, collaborative project at UC Santa Barbara, CSU Northridge, and the University of Miami that uses digital methods to explore how the humanities have been portrayed in popular media since the 1980s. The project then uses this research to inform humanities advocacy work. Our course intersects with the goals of WE1S in that we are trying to figure out how the humanities might engage new audiences and inspire conversation and connection between reading communities. I am working this year as a postdoctoral scholar for the project and will be posting regular public updates about our course to the WE1S research blog, in my role as the Director of the project’s Curriculum Lab. The blog is mainly meant to document my own planning process throughout the class and to maintain a steady dialogue between teaching practice and the project’s research goals. My posts are **NOT** meant to report on the performance of individual students.

This course is also part of a series of courses that will form a new project of my own, called “Reading With.” The idea behind this project is that we might fill in the blank with any number of audiences: reading with engineers, reading with economists, reading with environmental scientists, reading with policy makers, reading with inner-city communities, etc, etc, etc. I hope that this course can begin a much longer thought process about how books might build bridges between specialized communities otherwise isolated from each other. To this end, I’ll be asking for volunteers willing to post some of their finished class assignments to a fledgling website I’ve created: [readingwith.com](http://readingwith.com). (Volunteering or not in no way affects your grade.)

Key links:

<http://wells.ucsb.edu/>

<http://wells.ucsb.edu/curriculum-lab/>

<https://www.readingwith.com/>

This course also counts towards the Literature and Culture of Information (LCI) specialization in the English major.

### Assignments

All assignments for the quarter will be done in teams, though individual contributions will be marked throughout. The premise of the entire class is that we can treat our Victorian authors (and their characters) as a “board of advisors,” with whom we can be in dialogue about current issues.

At the beginning of the quarter, we will group ourselves into teams of three or four students, with each team oriented around a different current issue related to industrialism and its effects. We will be concerned with several major themes: climate change, economic inequality, and education reform. Within these macro-categories, each team will focus on a proposed **solution**, which students will then evaluate through independent research. The following list contains some suggested topics, but I am certainly open to your own ideas as well.

#### Climate Change

Reducing carbon emissions

Science communication

Conservation efforts

Reparations to impoverished countries most affected by climate change

#### Economic Inequality

Universal Basic Income

Affordable housing

Job security and the future of work (could include automation and artificial intelligence)

International development

#### Education Reform

Increased affordability and student loan forgiveness

Curricular changes (either at college or K-12 level)

Increased communication between disciplines

**Once your team chooses an issue, that will be your focus through all three assignments, so it is important that you pick something meaningful and interesting to you. More detailed assignment sheets will be handed out in advance of each due date.**

**1.) Research Memo and Annotated Bibliography: Due January 30, 9:30 am**

For our first assignment, each team must imagine that it is preparing a briefing for its advisory board members about its central issue. The team should prepare a 1000-word (min) memo about the key points that are at stake in the issue and lay out some of the pros and cons for adopting this particular solution. Each team member must then contribute three sources to an annotated bibliography (each annotation must be at least three sentences long). Students will present their work to each other in class.

**2) Advice from the Victorians: Due February 20, 9:30 am**

This assignment consists of two parts. First, each team member must choose to impersonate a different author or character from our readings, and, in that voice, give advice about your team's central issue. (For instance, you could write from the perspective of Dickens himself, or from the point of view of one of his characters, like Louisa Gradgrind or Sissy Jupe.) When your team's impersonations are aggregated, they will form a series of responses to your initial Research Memo, told from a variety of perspectives, and the collection of people you have picked will be your Board of Advisors. You are essentially imagining what Victorians would say if they came face-to-face with the impact of industrialism now. What solutions might they propose to the questions you are investigating? Your impersonation should be 500 words. Second, in an additional 500 words, I want each team member to reflect on why you made the decisions that you did when impersonating the author or character you chose. What passages in our readings guided your tone and word choice? What convinced you that this person would respond in this way?

**3.) Creating a Five-Year Plan: Due March 20, 12 pm**

Now that we have imagined what advice we might receive from the Victorians, we must decide whether or not to take that advice. In this final assignment, you will engage your Board of Advisors in dialogue about your key issue and respond to their advice in your own voices. This is your chance to give your own opinions about the best way forward in the wake of industrialism. If you would take the Victorians' suggestions, tell us why. If you would not take them, tell us what you would do instead. Each team member should respond individually to another team member's impersonated Victorian advisor in 500 words (so you aren't responding to your own). Collectively, each team should then write a 1000-word Five-Year Plan, in which you highlight the top priorities to be addressed and the best actions that you recommend should be taken.

In the final class period on March 13, students will present key points about their chosen issues and deliver excerpts from their impersonations and Five-Year Plans. This class period will be open to friends and guests who would like to attend. **(Please note:** Although your Five-Year Plan is due in its final form on March 20, I do expect you to be able to speak about it in class on March 13 at our final showcase. You will then be able to incorporate any feedback or ideas that you receive at the showcase before handing in the final assignment.)

With your permission, elements of these assignments may be posted publicly on the Reading With website. You may decline with no negative effect to your grade. In addition to our three main assignments, we will also have a few short in-class assignments, workshops, and presentations throughout the quarter.

### Grading

Your grade will be broken down as follows:

Research Memo and Annotated Bibliography: 25%

Advice from the Victorians: 30%

Creating a Five-Year Plan: 30%

Attendance and Participation (including presentations and in-class assignments): 15%

Late assignments will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day (A- to B+, eg).

### Policies

*Contacting me:* The best way to speak with me is to attend my office hours. I welcome any and all conversations, questions, thoughts, etc, and I much prefer to speak to you in person. **If you are unable to attend office hours**, I can be reached by email at [adroge@ucsb.edu](mailto:adroge@ucsb.edu). If you have a question about an assignment, please ask well in advance (at least 48 hours). I will not answer email on the weekends.

*Attendance and preparation:* Since this is a discussion-based class, it is very important that you come to class prepared, having done the readings and assignments. I expect you to be engaged in class, whether through speaking or active listening. A lot of our work will be collaborative, meaning that your absence will negatively affect peers who are depending on you. Each person's perspective is valuable.

If you must be absent, due to illness, religious observance, or an emergency, please do your best to inform me at least 24 hours in advance. Attendance will be taken at each class session.

Unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade.

*Electronics:* Since many of our texts will be online this quarter, I will trust you to use laptops in class. This is a privilege that, if abused, may be revoked at any time. No cell phones, texting, emailing, Facebook, Instagram, etc.

*Discussion and inclusivity:* My primary goal in this class is to create a welcoming environment where big ideas can be discussed creatively and openly. It is crucial that we all behave with the utmost respect towards our fellow classmates. **However, this does not mean that we will avoid controversial subjects.** I expect all discussions to be handled with maturity and generosity.

## Accessibility

If you need special academic accommodations, please use the UCSB Disabled Students Program (<https://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/>).

## Honor Code

**Academic Integrity:** Be honest and forthright in your dealings as a student. Students are expected to abide by UCSB policy on academic integrity and dishonesty (<http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/academicintegrity.aspx>). Academic dishonesty such as cheating or plagiarism may lead to failing, probation or expulsion.

**Course Statement on Plagiarism:** Plagiarism includes the failure to acknowledge all secondary sources in your work, passing off another person's work as your own, or re-submitting your own work from another class. Plagiarism can be obvious or subtle, intentional or due to negligence. Be diligent in taking notes on your sources as you read; while writing, cite the source of each quote or paraphrase you use. When in doubt about how to acknowledge a source, please consult me or a CLAS tutor (<http://clas.sa.ucsb.edu/>). Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course, and may result in disciplinary action, including probation or expulsion.

**Studying:** Students are encouraged to support one another in discussion groups, note-taking, review sessions, and other collective learning. However, students are forbidden from selling study guides, or from redistributing copyright course material to any person or organization. See UC Policy 102.23: <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/2710530/PACAOS-100>

## Sexual Violence Prevention and Response

If you are dealing with a difficult situation, please feel welcome to use me as a resource. However, you should be aware up front that I am a "Responsible Employee," meaning that if you disclose information to me regarding any acts of sexual misconduct affiliated with anyone from UCSB, **I must report it** to the Title IX office. Alternatively, there are many confidential resources on campus that you can use as well, such as:

Campus Advocacy Resources and Education (CARE): <http://wgse.sa.ucsb.edu/Care/>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <http://caps.sa.ucsb.edu/>

Office of the Ombuds: <https://ombuds.ucsb.edu/>

24-hour confidential advocate: (805) 893-4613

More information about support and reporting options, including confidential resources, can be found here: <http://sexualviolence.ucsb.edu/get.help/>

You can also find further information on the UC Sexual Violence Prevention and Response website: <http://sexualviolence.universityofcalifornia.edu/index.html>