

How to Read a Book

Or, Fictions and Histories of Reading

History 84e
English 90ht

Spring 2017
Tuesday 1-3 PM
Robinson Lower Library

Leah Price
English Department
lprice[at]fas.harvard.edu
Barker 145
Office hours: after class, Tuesdays 3-4, and by appt

Jill Lepore
History Department
jlepore[at]fas.harvard.edu
117 Robinson Hall
Office hrs: Thursdays 1-3*

TF: Evander Price
American Studies
evanderprice[at]fas.harvard.edu
017 Robinson (basement)
Office hours: after class, Tuesdays 3-5

Course Description

This hands-on interdisciplinary and arts-making undergraduate seminar is for students who want to think about what a book is and how to read one and who are also interested in how things are made, and kept. Readings include historical and literary narratives of reading in the eighteenth century and today, together with research exercises in Harvard library and museum collections.

The course is offered through both the History and English departments, and can be counted toward a concentration in History and Literature. If you are a History concentrator and hope to count this class as a research seminar, that is possible but please consult with Professor Lepore.

Grading

Your work for this course will consist of careful reading and thoughtful discussion, as well as out-of-class assignments all of which should be submitted to the online dropbox located on the course iSite. Class preparation and participation will count for 35% of your grade. You will also complete three short assignments (worth a combined 30%), and a final project, to be presented in class (and worth 35%).

*Prof. Lepore holds walking office hours; if she's not in her office, she's in the Yard: she'll be back.

Assignments

1. Hard-Boiled

Detective work on a library. Conduct an ethnography of the library of your choice on campus OR of one room there (for example, the Periodicals room in Widener). Describe its physical structures, its web presence, and the behavior of users that you observe there. 2500 words or 3-minute video, your choice. You are encouraged to consider writing or making something that might be useful for the library you're investigating, in one way or another. (For instance, if you are interested in working with elementary school students, we could arrange for you to visit a library in a neighborhood public school, and make a video that might be useful for them to have on the school's website.) 10% of your grade

2. Bookworm

Pick a book, any book. (Just not one that we are reading for this class.) You might want to pick a book you found in the library you wrote about, or one in your possession, or one you looked at in Houghton. Read (in) your book. Investigate it as a text, an object, and an artifact. What questions does it raise? What would you need to figure out, and find out, to answer them? Dig for facts. Come talk to one of the three of us about how you propose to investigate. How was this book made? Who sold and resold it? Who read it? Through whose hands did it pass before it ended up in yours? What can you find out in the library? What clues does the physical condition of the book hold? What kinds of information could you ferret out if you were to interview people who have read or owned or catalogued or bought or sold this book? How would you track them down, or, if they're dead or otherwise unavailable, track down any surviving traces of their interactions with the book? Your assignment is to submit a 2500-word report. Please provide full endnote citation for any sources you use. Preferred citation format is [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Your work should be deliberate, purposeful, and polished. Please submit your file to the course website, under Shared Documents. Before class, please be sure to take a look at everyone's submissions. (15% of your grade)

3. Tristram Out Loud (in class)

Together with two of your classmates, make an audio recording of a short section (around half a page) of Tristram Shandy. This may involve finding a way to convey visual and paratextual elements (page numbers, non-alphabetic characters, spacing...) as well as the words themselves. Note: please bring smartphone or other digital recorder to class if you have one. (5% of your grade)

4. How to Make a Book (final project)

What is a book? Your semester-long assignment for this class will be to answer that question by making one. How exactly you do that is up to you. The idea is for you to experiment with form, content, and meaning. In four workshops over the course of the semester, we will learn how to make paper, mix ink, set and print type, and stitch a binding. All semester, we'll be talking about each book on the syllabus as artifact and document, a work of both art and craft, and a container—maybe even a leaky

container—of ideas. To make your book, we're hoping you'll deploy these tools, and tools of your own, too. (You may decide, for instance, to make a digital book, or an edible book, or an altered book, or an object whose bookishness is debatable. Who knows.) You are very welcome to propose a project that has a civic purpose. You might propose a project that would be helpful to a library in the Cambridge Public Schools, or to the Cambridge Public Library. You might undertake a project that could be useful to the Little Library Project, or to documentary filmmakers working on the film *Free For All*. Please consult with us about those kinds of projects. Otherwise, your only requirements are these:

1. You must make a book. It must be your own original creation. It could, however, be made of made materials, including parts of other books, if you choose.
2. It must have things that books have: a title, an author, and a subject. Your book must contain text (though it can contain other things, too).
3. Your book must be readable.

Optional: use an existing book as a starting-point for your own art project.

The final two class meetings will be devoted to 10-minute presentations of each seminar member's book, followed by 5 minutes each of discussion. Your presentation, which you should prepare for carefully, and rehearse, must include showing us your book, explaining your methods, and discussing the meaning of your book. What you say about the book is as important as the book itself. The presentation should teach you, and us, something about bookishness. 35% of your grade

5. Note Taking Through the Ages (and through the semester)

Each week the means by which you will take notes in class will vary. (No laptops, pens, pencils or other writing implements are allowed in the classroom except where indicated.) Please refer to the week's assignments for further instruction. The devices on which you will be allowed to take notes in class will vary by week, but you are always welcome to bring in an annotated copy of the text (in the medium of your choice, on the device of your choice) and/or a printout or manuscript of your reading notes.

Books to Purchase (available at the Coop)

Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*. Oxford World Classics paperback edition, ed. Thomas Keymer. ISBN: 9780199536498. (Please buy this edition only.)

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*. The Norton critical edition, edited by J.A. Leo Lemay and P.M. Zall. ISBN: 9780393952940. (Please buy this edition only.)

Lawrence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*. Oxford World Classics paperback edition, ed. Ian Campbell Ross. ISBN: 9780199532896. (Please buy this edition only.)

Table of Contents

*Readings marked with an asterisk are available on the course website.

Jan. 24 Preface

In this introductory class we will learn about how this course works. We will also watch something together, and do some writing.

Jan. 31 Introduction

Reading

*Inventories of the libraries of Harvard students destroyed during the burning of Harvard Hall, 1764.

*Benjamin Franklin, Agreement between the Directors of the Library Company, March 14, 1734.

Lepore, "[The Cobweb](#)," 2015.

Price, "[Books on the Move](#)," 2015.

[Google v. Hollis Plus](#)

Assignment

Please make a written inventory of the books you keep in your room or in the cloud. Pick one of the books from your inventory and look it up on: Hollis Plus, Ebay, and GoodReads. Take notes on what you can find out about your book from the book itself, and on these three services. Bring your inventory, your notes, and that book, to class.

Note taking

On homemade clay tablets.

Location

Robinson, Lower Library

PART ONE

Feb. 7 Chapter I

Reading

Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*. (Volume 1)

Field trip

Making iron gall ink.

Note taking

On parchment, with quill and ink. Candles will be supplied.

Location

Materials classroom, Harvard Art Museum

Feb. 14 Chapter II

Field trip

Papermaking with the Boston Paper Collective.

Location

Materials classroom, Harvard Art Museum

Feb. 21 Chapter III

Reading

Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*. (complete)

Note taking

On slate and chalk.

Location

Robinson, Lower Library

PART TWO

Feb. 28 Chapter IV

<i>Reading</i>	<i>New-England Primer</i> , 1727. Benjamin Franklin, <i>The Autobiography</i> , 1790. * <i>Spectator</i> 367, 1 May 1712 * <i>Tatler</i> 155 (April 6 1710) *Franklin, Epitaph and Adieu, 1728. *Jane Franklin Mecom letters, selections * <i>The Spectator</i> , sample issues
<i>Field trip</i>	To Houghton library to view issues of the <i>New-England Courant</i> , imprints by Richardson, and the <i>New England Magazine</i> , along with Thoreau's pencil.
<i>Note taking</i>	Paper and pencils and erasers (Houghton rules).
<i>Location</i>	Houghton Library (please arrive a few minutes early if you can).

March 7 Chapter V

<i>Field trip</i>	Printmaking (Bow and Arrow Press)
<i>Assignment</i>	Hard-boiled (due before noon March 10, see assignments above)
<i>Location</i>	Adams House, B-Entry basement

March 14 No class, Spring Break

March 21 Chapter VI

<i>Field trip</i>	Harvard Depository, 1-4 PM.
<i>Assignment</i>	Bookworm (see assignments above).
<i>Note taking</i>	You may bring a camera.
<i>Location</i>	Bus pickup location TBD.

PART THREE

March 28 Chapter VII

<i>Reading</i>	Lawrence Sterne, <i>Tristram Shandy</i> , Volumes 1-3.
<i>Note taking</i>	A cassette tape recorder.
<i>Location</i>	Houghton Library

April 4 Chapter VIII

<i>Field trip</i>	Bookbinding
<i>Location</i>	Materials Classroom, Harvard Art Museum

April 11 Chapter IX

<i>Reading</i>	Lawrence Sterne, <i>Tristram Shandy</i> , complete.
<i>Screening</i>	<i>A Cock and Bull Story</i> . The film has been placed on reserve at Lamont; please watch it before class meets this week.
<i>Note taking</i>	We will bring some typewriters to class and you can take turns. Please bring smartphones or other digital recorder to class if you have one.
<i>Location</i>	Robinson Lower Library
<i>In-class Assignment</i>	

Tristram Out Loud. Together with two of your classmates, make an audio recording of a short section (around half a page) of *Tristram Shandy*. This may involve finding a way to convey visual and paratextual elements (page numbers, non-alphabetic characters, spacing...) as well as the words themselves.

THE END

April 18 **Final Presentations I**
Note taking A smartphone, tablet, or laptop.
Location Robinson, Lower Library

April 25 **Final Presentations II**
Note taking Anything goes
Location Robinson, Lower Library