Website Project Guidelines

In this course, you will create a personalized, individual website that engages various aspects of Twentieth-Century and Contemporary American literature through exploration of both critical and creative approaches. Your website will consist of three main sections: 1) an ongoing blog providing reflective responses to assigned readings in poetry and drama; 2) a Media page that explores historical and cultural contexts of *Lolita*; and 3) a Mapping page exploring *Paradise* or *The Underground Railroad* through place-based research that examines the interrelationships between characters and setting. Blogs will be submitted from Weeks 3-7 and you will also be expected to read and respond to other students' blogs (see syllabus, "Online Participation," and class calendar for blog and peer response due dates). You will work on the Media page from Weeks 8-10 and the Mapping page will be completed at the end of the semester. This handout provides you with directions for setting up your website and outlines general expectations for each section of your site. There are additional handouts that provide useful tips for writing and responding to blogs; a list of resources and tutorials for digital storytelling and literary mapping; and rubrics that identify how you will be assessed for each section of this project.

Getting Started

By the end of Week 3, you will need to have your website set up with a clear template/design and your first blog posted either to the homepage or in a dedicated blog section. You can choose to host your website through any platform of your preference; however, since you are creating this for a class assignment, your website *must* be separate from your personal website if you already have one, though you may certainly use the same platform. If you created a website for a previous literature survey that you took with me, you may build upon that website as long as you clearly designate separate sections or pages for the work completed in this class.

Choosing A Platform[1]

Several user-friendly blogging platforms are commonly used in classrooms. No one platform is better suited to a specific discipline. Mostly the choice depends on your comfort level and personal preference when trying out each platform. Please do not use Tumblr for this project; although it works well for sharing images or brief chunks of text, it does not work well for blogging and can be quite confusing, including following the threads of each other's posts.

I recommend Weebly if you have little to no experience with creating websites. This is the platform that I use for my own website and I think it's a good option for students. Weebly is a free web-hosting platform that does not require any coding, provides multiple templates or design themes, and generally functions through drag-and-drop components; with a basic account you should be given enough space to create the main pages/sections required for this class. Here are links to the Weebly Beginners Guide and Weebly Tutorials.

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[1] Some of this adapted from Gayle Morris, "Using Blogs in the Classroom," Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan, https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teaching-resources/using-blogs-in-the-classroom.html.

Other user-friendly platforms include Google's Blogger, which is intuitive, easy to start up, and allows for flexibility with color palettes and multiple fonts. WordPress is one of the more popular blogging platforms; it is an all-purpose platform with multiple free design templates ("themes") and high capacity for text, images, and video. Users appreciate the extensive how-to support features and video tutorials available on the WordPress site.

Other Helpful WSU Resources for Creating Websites and Digital Media Projects
WSU STAC: http://guides.libraries.wright.edu/stac
WSU New Media Incubator (Inc): https://liberal-arts.wright.edu/about/new-media-incubator

Creating your Blog Homepage
Once you've chosen your platform, you will need to create a homepage for posting your blogs and also include a brief introduction of yourself—basically, an "About Me" blurb of 3-4 sentences (see below). Ideally, your blog page should be your homepage so that this is where readers first land when they connect to your site. Most blogging platforms provide templates and themes for creating your homepage as a blog page; the main thing, though, is that visitors to your website can easily see/find your blog posts. You will need to choose a template design that reflects your personality/personal tastes. You are creating a public website, so beyond what you write, viewers should get a sense of who you are (or at least a sense of your media presence and style) through visual aspects such as design/layout, images, and color choices. Also, the more successful blogs keep things simple — don't overload your site by making it too "busy" or chaotic. Overall, then, the main thing that I want to see in your initial website set-up—**due Friday, September 13**—is that you are using a clear template or design theme, that you've created the homepage as your blog page, or a designated section for your blogs, with the first blog posted, and that you've provided a brief "About Me" blurb or Bio page.

The "About Me" Blurb
You may blurb about yourself in whatever way that suits your personality, though typically blurbs should contain three main components: who you are, why you've created this website, and what your interests are as they relate to the website. It's nice to include an invitation to readers to leave comments, but not necessary; if you do, you'll want to phrase this in a way that sets some parameters for feedback, gently reminding readers of the purpose of this website and that this is not an open forum for rants, trolls, or anything else not related to the topics you're discussing. Whether you do the "About" blurb on the homepage or in a separate bio section, keep in mind that you will later revise/expand upon this to include a reflection on the overall website, including the other two sections due at the end of the semester.

Privacy and Sharing Your URL
Remember, this is going to be a public website so you want to make sure that it remains professional and focused on the academic objectives; you are not required to share personal details of your life, only to the extent that is comfortable/safe for you. I also encourage you to make sure you set up your website with whatever privacy settings that are made available by the platform. For example, on my website, I have the privacy tool enabled so that my personal contact details are not openly visible or attainable and visitors can only contact me through

leaving comments or a message on the "Contact" page. In your blurb/bio, it's okay to leave out details that identify where you live or family names/pictures (especially children). In other words, you can be personal but in a way that protects your privacy. If there are extenuating legal/personal safety circumstances where your online identity needs to remain protected or anonymous, then there is no need for you to use your "real" name; you are more than welcome to use a pseudonym or just your first name and no identifying pictures (and any student has the option to do this). More tips on best practices for protecting your privacy are noted below and available in the handout, "Tips on Writing and Responding to Blogs" (in Pilot).

After you've created your homepage/blog page, you'll need to email me submit in the Pilot dropbox a link to your website (and don't forget to publish your site—now or anytime you make updates). Once I have everyone's URL, links for these will be posted on our class website so students can access each other's blogs: http://www.hopejennings.com/student-websites.html. Links will be listed with either the name of your website (if you provide one) or your first name. In blog posts and comments, students are expected to respect each other's privacy. Anyone who fails to respect the privacy of their peers—identifying them by their full or real name if they've kept this private, revealing personal details about someone, retweeting or reposting links to other students' blogs without their permission—will be asked to leave the class, no exceptions.

Blog Guidelines

You must write a minimum of 5 blog posts (50 points each), one for the Tennessee Williams' play and four for the units on modernist and postwar poetry (as designated in the class calendar). You will produce one blog post per week from Weeks 3-7, and instead of meeting as a class on Fridays, this time will be dedicated to writing your blogs. Keep in mind that blogs are a form of public writing (see "Tips for Writing and Responding to Blogs"), so you will want to ensure your writing is as clear and free of errors/typos as possible; in other words, blogs (and peer responses) must meet the general evaluation criteria for academic writing (see syllabus). These guidelines provide you with my general expectations of what is required in your blog; although blogging can take multiple forms and work in multiple contexts, this section of the project guidelines describes strategies for using blogs as a writing tool in the context of a classroom assignment or project.

Why Blogging?[2]

You are likely already used to writing and communicating in the digital landscape whether it be through Twitter, Facebook, email, or a personal website. Blogging is a mode of online communication that can help improve your writing skills and build your confidence as a writer. By blogging, you can take ownership of your writing, become a better observer of others' writing, and develop a more immediate and powerful understanding of audience. Blogs encourage experimenting and risk-taking, seriousness and play, and they foster an increased awareness of private and public writing. Blogging blends both the freeing aspect of short pieces that can be written in a relatively low-stakes environment with the sense of claiming one's own voice and learning how to articulate ideas to a larger public.

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[2] This section to top of p. 8 is adapted from Morris, "Using Blogs in the Classroom."

While reading your fellow students' blogs and comments, and responding online with your own comments, you will come to recognize the value of clarity and what makes for strong and engaging posts. You will be able to see your own writing as something "real" with a practical application. Creating a blog can be a bridge between the familiar digital world and what is being asked of you in academic essays and other university-based assignments. Blogging can be a gateway or learning experience for students who will use digital technologies and media in their future endeavors and/or professions regardless of their discipline.

Students may use blogging for various reasons and modes of writing:
- responding to readings, maintaining a writer's notebook or journal
- posting personal, reflective, exploratory, or open entries
- sharing student-generated research or links to class-related articles
- exploring visual rhetoric and digital media/writing
- practicing writing by:
  - developing voice and considering tone
  - working on titles, conciseness
  - brainstorming, drafting, facilitating peer review
- creating a showcase for final projects
- crafting an on-line image or presence

Content/Style
- Although you have plenty of leeway in determining *what you say*, it's important to keep in mind my expectations for *what you're aiming to accomplish.* I want you to use the blog to reflect on course readings. There are multiple ways in which you might do this:
  - exploring specific themes and/or literary devices in the readings;
  - analyzing a text's stylistic choices, genre, structure;
  - researching any relevant historical/cultural contexts;
  - making connections between the readings and your lived experiences;
  - or, posing questions for further reflection/exploration.
- Your blogs might take more than one of these approaches or any approach not included above. Blogs should be analytical and reflective. You should attempt to show different ways of looking at or understanding aspects of the readings through your personal lens and/or insights. Blogs that only provide summaries or opinions limited to what you liked/disliked or were confused about, will only receive partial credit.
- Remember your audience; assume that they too have read the texts. Your blog is intended to invite and encourage comments and participation from readers. Your writing style should be interesting to read; do not not just regurgitate what was discussed in class.
- Write in a clear, engaging manner that develops **YOUR** voice—not necessarily an academic voice; this includes writing comments in response to each other's blogs. Peer responses can be lively, debating different views, but in all instances should remain respectful and professional, following course guidelines for conduct (see syllabus).

See: "Tips for Writing & Responding to Blogs" (in Pilot) and "Blogging Basics"

Basic Blog Requirement Checklist
- **Title:** For each blog post, provide an <u>engaging title</u> to attract readers.
- **Formatting:** Make sure your blogs are formatted in clear, readable font with single spacing; be consistent with this font and formatting style throughout your website.
- **Length:** Each blog post should be <u>at least 300-500 words</u>; anything below the minimum length will be marked in the rubric as incomplete.
- **Links:** Good blogging etiquette includes linking to sources or other bloggers, news articles, etc. wherever you discuss these in your post or want to provide readers with further related resources or information. I expect you to provide <u>at least 1-2 links</u> in each post.
  - **NB:** You should embed hyperlinks within the content of your blog rather than listing them at the end of your post as a Works Cited. See samples of what I mean by this on my website in the Brit Lit Blog section. If you do not know how to embed hyperlinks, I will be happy to show you.
- **Images:** Each blog post should be <u>visually appealing</u> and not consist of just text; images help break up the text and help illustrate key points of your discussion or topic. You must include <u>at least one picture</u> in each blog post: either photos you take, hand-drawings, an original meme, or relevant images found online (be sure to credit the source).
- **Submission:** Type your blog post in a Word document, upload this to Pilot by the dropbox deadline, then, copy and paste into the appropriate location on your website. Blogs will not be graded if they are missing from your website and/or Pilot.
- **Timing**: Successful blogs remain consistent and are frequently updated with new posts. For this class, you are expected to make weekly posts responding to each of the units, from Weeks 3-7. For each unit, you will also need to provide two comments on other students' posts for a total of 10 peer responses (see syllabus).

*Participation***:** Reading and responding to each other's blogs can help create a more interpersonal classroom community. Addressing peers by name in comments on each other's blogs and commenting on specific points in someone's blog can instill a sense of responsibility to, respect for, and familiarity with each other. Engaging with the material together will help you learn from each other through a lateral, peer-to-peer process. I will refrain from commenting directly on your blogs, since from my own experience, instructor prominence or high activity in online discussions/projects can often stifle student participation.

Media Webpage

During Weeks 8-10, you will create a section for your website that explores historical and cultural contexts related to Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Lolita*. Again, during these weeks, instead of meeting as a class on Fridays, this time will be dedicated to creating the components for this section of your website. Like the blogs, you are allowed complete creative freedom but should still follow the general guidelines outlined here. You are not expected to provide the equivalent of a literary research analysis paper. Instead, you will research material/cultural history produced during the decade when *Lolita* was written and eventually published in the U.S. (1948-1958). *Lolita* is a novel that deeply engages with the material culture of its time; viewed through its narrator's outsider perspective (much like Nabokov who emigrated to the U.S. in 1940), the novel

is immersed in, fascinated with, and often repulsed by postwar American pop culture, mass consumerism, and kitsch. Humbert Humbert often equates Lolita with America, and *Lolita* itself has become an enduring pop culture icon in the decades after its publication.

For this section of your website, you will research and showcase specific cultural items from 1948-58 (or, you can focus on just a single year) that help illustrate American life during the time period in which *Lolita* was produced. You may research specific items mentioned in the novel though it might be easier to find things independent of the novel since you will be working on this page as we read and discuss *Lolita*. You will need to select and write about the following types of cultural artifacts related to American culture:

- **Week 8:** 3 audio media, such as popular songs or radio shows
- **Week 9:** 3 visual media, such as films, television shows, ads, comic books
- **Week 10:** 3 news media, such as magazine articles or newspaper clippings

Using these materials, you will design a kind of digital almanac or diary for that decade (or a single year), integrating the use of text, images, and/or audio and identifying how each item relates to passages or themes from *Lolita*. Ideally, your research will place the literary text in its historical contexts by demonstrating its connection to other cultural artifacts or material history; you will have until the end of the semester to finalize your descriptions of the media objects. The final presentation of your research in this section of your website should be coherently organized, visually appealing, and clearly explained in its relevance to the novel. You must submit a copy of all written components of this page in a Word document to the Pilot dropbox.

Mapping Webpage

During Weeks 11-14, we will resume our Friday class sessions while we discuss two contemporary African-American novels, Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*. Both novels are intensely engaged with the importance of place in the characters' lives and relationships as embedded in American history and geography. For this third section of your website, you will focus on either *Paradise* or *The Underground Railroad* to explore literary mapping as a form of textual analysis. Literary mapping incorporates place-based research through visual and digital approaches that examine connections between narrative, language, space, time, and/or form. You are expected to create a conceptual map that visually represents and describes characters' relationships and/or interactions with significant historical or fictional landmarks, locations, and settings described in the novel. Suggested approaches might include a geographical map with pop-up or appended descriptions of key places, a map that tracks characters' movements between different places, a scrapbook or photographic album of images and captions that identify important places in the novel, or even a 3-D gameboard of the novel's world and its characters. You are encouraged to be as creative as possible and the New Media Incubator and STAC have a number of digital resources; there is also a range of free graphic design software available online. The last week of class will be dedicated to working on your mapping page, with the class meeting on Monday for guided tutorials and/or feedback and independent work on Wednesday and Friday. You should, however, begin drafting the components for your mapping page prior to Week 15. Your finalized website will be due Wednesday 12/11 by 6 pm, with all written components uploaded to the Pilot dropbox.

Bio Page

You will need to create a bio page if you didn't already do this page when you wrote your "About Me" blurb. Here you might say more about your background, interests, accomplishments, future plans; look at some of the student samples on the course website. You should also reflect on the overall content of your website—its aims, interests, thematic scope, approaches, thoughts on American literature in general or major themes and topics (as explored in this class and your website), and so on and so forth—signaling to readers what they can find in each section, discussing what you've accomplished/created, or even where you might go further with this project. Maybe you'll plan to keep blogging on other literary periods, narrative artforms, or personal interests. Ideally, the objective of this entire project is not to be something static, created for a grade in a class, but something that allows for further exploration and engagement with literature, online/creative writing, and/or professional/personal blogging. Even if you don't continue this website you might decide to start a new blog. Also, you might use the blog and research pages that you created for this class as something you can show to potential employers.

Thus, the overall assessment of your "final" website will include consideration of its cohesive, appealing, public presentation. See the specific rubrics for each part of this project and be sure you carefully review these. Always communicate with me if you have any questions or need advice about how to approach any component of your website. More than anything, make something you can be proud of and something that will foster or sustain lifelong exploration!