

Assignment 1: A Journal of the Plague Year

ENG 1260W-05/Introduction to Literature and Cultural Analysis: The Archive

Instructor: Jennifer Gutman

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Your first assignment is to contribute 2-3 items to “[A Journal of the Plague Year: The COVID-19 Archive](#).” Named after Daniel Defoe’s eighteenth-century account of London’s bubonic plague, this digital archive was created by public historians at Arizona State University to offer a “rapid response” collective curation of life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The archive’s creators ask contributors to “Imagine, as we are, what future historians might need to write about and understand this historical moment.” Since your contributions will add to an archive that might be taken up by researchers far removed from our present time, this assignment asks you to reflect on the import of what you’ve chosen to share. Why should a future historian or archeologist care about what you’ve contributed? What insight does it offer into the pandemic’s impact on everyday life?

The items you choose may be taken from your surroundings or online; that is, they can be original content or sourced material. For any sourced material, proper citations are required. Please spend some time browsing the Journal’s archive and use the format provided by the website to upload your items. The “Tell us your story” section should include approximately 200-250 words for each post. You will be asked to collect these entries into a single document that includes a 500-word justification explaining your choices and what you see as their value to the archive. Be prepared to discuss your selections in class the day the assignment is due (9/16). In order to convey the importance of your shared entries, I’d like you to focus on three writing techniques in your posts:

- 1) **Description:** what can you tell us about the item you are sharing? What are the elements of the object/document/item/artifact that need to be highlighted in order for the reader to know what it is that they are looking at/engaging with?
- 2) **Explanation:** Here is where you convey what your personal relationship is with the item or object. How does the artifact you chose to share bear some relevance on your life or your experiences during the pandemic year? Feel free to use first-person “I” when sharing these stories.
- 3) **Reflection:** Your 500-word reflection—which will not be uploaded to JOTPY archive—is where you reflect more broadly on what you feel is the historical significance of the objects you chose to share. Why do you think it is important that these items be archived for future readers or researchers? What do you hope it conveys about our time in this troubled version of the present?

Please tag your entries with **#ENGL1260** and **#VanderbiltU** so that all of your posts are connected. I will also upload our assignment sheet as an entry for the archive!

Outcomes:

This assignment is designed to introduce you to the course theme through engagement with an existing and regularly updated archive. By browsing and contributing to the digital COVID-19 archive, students will:

- think critically about choices made in the process of archiving;
- analyze the relationship between personal and public knowledge, history and memory;
- practice descriptive, explanatory, and reflective modes of writing;
- develop understanding of how contemporary events become preserved and recorded in collective consciousness through archival processes.