

A Rhetorical Biography

As we spend the semester studying women and rhetoric, we'll also be engaged in helping to compose the history of women as speakers and writers. Your major task for the semester will be to undertake a rhetorical biography of a woman you believe should be studied as a significant rhetor.

Your first challenge will be to find and identify a woman that you want to spend a lot of time studying this semester and locating source materials upon which you can draw. In class, you'll receive a list with nearly fifty women for your consideration, and of course there are kjillions of other possibilities. You should someone in whom you have a genuine interest--A religious figure? An activist for the working class? An educational pioneer? An abolitionist? A pioneer in science or medicine? Find a reason to care deeply about the subject about whom you'll be writing! We'll also talk about how to take advantage of the resources at Miller-Nichols Library, and various finding aids (Merlin/Mobius, RLIN, WorldCat) and databases (MLA, America: History and Life) to locate material relevant to our work.

Your next decision will be to decide upon a format for your project. Do you want to compose a traditional research paper or attempt to construct a Sophie Book, which is a multi-media composing platform that allows authors to include visual images, audio tracks, and videos? More information about Sophie Books is available at <<http://www.sophieproject.org/>>. We'll all be working some with Sophie in class, but you may decide that a Sophie book provides you with rhetorical opportunities that will allow you to best communicate to readers what you've come to learn about the women rhetor you are studying. Some things to consider as you make this important decision: How comfortable are you with new technologies and processes of trial and error? Do you work mostly with PCs or Macs? (Sophie is still pretty buggy on PCs.) What digital composing skills do you already have—audio-editing? I-Movie? Photoshop? What are your goals as a learner? There are great reasons to do a traditional research paper and great reasons to experiment with Sophie Book—make the decision that feels right to you.

If you choose to compose a traditional research paper, several of the texts on our syllabus can serve as models for your rhetorical biography, including Heidemarie Z. Weidner's essay on Lydia Short, Maryan Wherry's essay on Elizabeth Bacon Custer, and Susan Wells' essay on Hannah Longshore. Your final paper should be approximately fifteen pages. If you choose to compose a Sophie book, we'll be working together to define our standards and create models for ourselves.

Regardless of whether you choose to compose a research paper or a Sophie Book you will need to have a strong, clearly articulated thesis about your subject's legacy as a female rhetorician. While you may share the details of your subject's life with your

readers, your essay will need to focus on a detailed analyses of texts she authored and/or speeches she delivered. Your rhetorical biography will also need to acknowledge the work of previous scholars & historians who have also studied your subject. The final paper or Sophie Book you produce from your research will be worth **35%** of your grade in our class.

If at first the notion of composing a rhetorical biography seems daunting, don't panic! We'll all work together to make sure that everyone is able to find materials, and you may find that your initial feelings of anxiety are swept away in the rush of excitement that comes with studying the life of another important woman with whom you may have things in common! You'll also note on the syllabus that we'll be breaking this major project down into several steps: writing a research proposal, compiling an annotated bibliography, and responding to drafts. We'll also be updating each other as the semester goes along on how our work is developing and pooling our developing expertise as contributors to the study of women and rhetoric.