Writing Project #2: Soldiers in the Archives

➢ **First Research Log Entry Due**: Wednesday, October 2; posted to Course Blog <u>no later than 5:00pm</u>
➢ **Complete Research Logs Due**: Friday, October 11; posted to Forums page on Sakai (under Complete Research Log) <u>by 7:00pm</u>
➢ **Group Conference Responses**: Bring to your group conference (bring enough copies for entire group); conferences will be held between October 16-18
➢ **Websites Due**: Thursday, October 24

From Project #1 to Project #2

In your first writing project, you started to develop your own critical perspective by crafting arguments about our literary texts and putting them into dialogue with our scholarly essays. With its focus on primary archival materials, this second project provides a different set of sources with which to engage that conversation anew; it offers another opportunity to rethink our relationship to the writers we've been reading and, for that matter, to <u>rethink our relationship to sources</u>. We will continue to practice writing moves like forwarding and countering, but in a less formal manner than previously. Like many of the soldiers we will study, you will write a series of letters/diary entries/scrapbook entries about your research in the archives, writing that will form the basis for the group work with which this project will culminate. The final writing assignment for this project asks you to collaborate with your peers to produce a <u>different kind of writing</u>, a group website (using our WordPress blog format) which will be shared with the class on October 24.

Step I: In the Archives

Archival research is an important element of the work of the humanities. Here at Duke, we have a wonderful opportunity to learn more about this kind of research. We will begin this unit in the David M. Rubinstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where Elizabeth Dunn, one of our Writing 101 librarians, will introduce us to the library's collections and the specific protocols for working with archival sources: how to work with the special collections librarians to find materials, how to handle historical materials, how to take notes in the reading room, how to photocopy or photograph fragile materials, etc. Each group will select a war for which the library has materials and begin their own investigation. Considering that an individual soldier's correspondence can contain hundreds of letters and years of diary entries, I don't expect you to read every possible letter, diary, or journal from your chosen war. Instead, you should explore and read in order to develop an initial understanding of soldiers' perspectives on the experience of war. This might mean reading an entire soldier's correspondence, surveying letters from numerous soldiers, or focusing on a particular exchange of letters between a soldier and his correspondent.

We will meet at the Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library's temporary space in Perkins 318 on Tuesday, September 24. Take the stairs/elevator near the Perkins/Bostock entrance and go to the third floor. Although we will spend class time in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, you should plan on spending some time there <u>on your own</u> as well. You can find information about the library including its hours here: <u>http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/</u>. Note: <u>food and drink are not permitted</u> in the Rare Book Room and Special Collections' reading room; please plan accordingly.

Step II: Research Logs

The first part of this project asks you to write informally about the research you are conducting in the archives. Like the soldiers you explore in the archives, you will craft your own letters, diary entries, or scrapbook entries. You may address these to your peers, your parents or siblings, me, or some imagined correspondent. Each entry should certainly describe what you found in your trip to the archive (the name of the collection, soldier, correspondent; where the soldier was stationed; where the correspondent lived; purpose of the letter/diary; subject of letter/diary; etc.). More importantly, however, each entry should put these historical sources into conversation with our critical essays (either from the first unit or the new essays on war letters) by using the writing moves we have been discussing this term. Aim to employ at least one of the writing moves in each entry. I think you'll get the most analytical traction from using these letters to forward or counter our other authors' ideas. Some questions to consider:

➢ To what extent do the claims made in our critical essays, particularly those made about fiction, hold up when tested against your historical sources?
➢ Do the historical sources offer new or alternative perspectives on the experience of war to those we have seen in our critical essays or fictional stories?
➢ Do soldiers writing from the battlefield have different concerns than literary artists like Tim O'Brien, Wilfred Owen, Ambrose Bierce, etc.? How do they make meaning out of their war experience?
➢ How does the form/genre affect its meaning? To what extent do scrapbooks, diaries, and letters enable writers to tell different stories about the war experience?

By **Friday, October 11**, you should have crafted 3 entries that record what you discovered in the archives; you will post these to the Forums page on Sakai (under Complete Research Log) for your group members (and me) to read. Please post the Complete Research Log as one document. So that we can talk about your entries in class, you will need to post your first entry by **5:00pm** on **Wednesday, October 2** on the Course Blog as well. We will use these initial entries in a couple of ways in class:

1) On Thursday, October 3, we will use them to discuss our research so far and talk about strategies for analyzing historical sources.
2) On Thursday, October 10, we will use them for a group brainstorming workshop.

Therefore please plan on reading all of the First Research Log Entries (on the Course blog) before class on October 10.

Each entry should:
➢ Briefly describe your research: What materials will your entry focus on?
➢ Make a focused claim about the materials
➢ Use at least one of our course readings
➢ Be no longer than 2 pages

Like your earlier blog entries, each research log entry will be graded on a check, check minus, or zero scale. I am always happy to discuss your work at greater length during office hours.

Step III: Conferences

Your research logs will serve as a kind of first draft for your subsequent work as a group. We will have group conferences to discuss your research logs. For these conferences, I would like you to print out and read each group member's research log; these will be available for download on the Forums page. After you have read everyone's entries, please craft a **1-2 page response paper** in which you synthesize what you think are the primary points of connection in your group's research. This is your chance to put yourself into dialogue with your peers, treating them as you treated the academic authors we read during the first project. Think about the ways in which your peers' ideas may add to, complicate, or otherwise intersect with your own or with each other. You might find that your group shares a perspective, but you might also find that members of your group diverge on key points. The response paper is the opportunity to start mapping your conversation and ultimately determine the focus of your group website.

This paper should:
➢ Make a claim that clearly articulates a relationship between your group members' research
➢ Support this claim with evidence you draw from your own and your group members' research logs (this evidence could include their arguments as well as specific materials they discuss)
➢ Conclude with a paragraph that looks forward to your group website, *making at least one suggestion for the website*. This suggestion could touch on organization and structure, visual design and layout, specific letters to be discussed, etc. We will use these papers as the basis for our conversation, so please bring enough copies for the entire group.

In preparing your response paper, keep in mind the following questions:

    a) What common themes emerge in your research logs?
    b) What ideas or perspectives do you share with your group members?
    c) Is there anything upon which you all agree?
    d) Do your group members offer different perspectives on a common theme?
    e) Do your group members emphasize different points, ideas, or themes?

You do not need to answer all of these questions; use them to help you brainstorm about what your group's perspective is. One way to think about this is: if you were sitting in a room with your group members (which you will be doing during our conference), what would you have to say to each other about the soldiers or wars you are exploring?

Step IV: Group Website

After our conference, your group will create a website that showcases your research and your conclusions about this research. Each group will have a WordPress subsite that can be accessed through our Course Blog (I will set these sites up for you). During class we will spend time talking about different possible formats for organizing your research on the WordPress site. We will also devote most of class on October 3 to learning about how to use the WordPress site.

While I would like to give you some freedom in how you design your website, I do ask that each website include the following:

➢ A clear description of your group's archive with a brief description of its historical context (which collections you researched, who is represented, and what time period they are from)
➢ Interpretation of passages from at least three of your sources
➢ A complex claim about what your archival research reveals about either the historical/cultural context of your chosen war or the theoretical/critical issues about war writing from our scholarly essays. In other words, your website should explain how these primary archival sources inform, challenge, and/or complicate the conversations we've been engaging through our readings this semester.
➢ A visually compelling presentation of your materials that showcases your research. Be creative! Don't just use the default format or color schemes. Spice it up by incorporating images, maps, or documents from the period or your research.
➢ A group website: everyone should contribute to and be responsible for the research and design.

Your WordPress site could take many forms. You may choose to create one continuous webpage or a series of webpages. You may organize your website by genre, gender, geographical region, source type, etc. You may devote separate pages to particular individuals or you may organize the site topically, devoting specific pages to the various topics your website examines. You may wish to include images of a letter or diary page with your transcription and analysis alongside them. You may choose to include supplementary material such as timelines and genealogies, maps and diagrams of battlefields, drawings from contemporaneous newspapers, or political speeches from the period. The point is to create a visually compelling website that not only showcases your research, but also puts your archival sources into conversation with our course's critical texts. That said, do not get bogged down in the design aspects of the website; your group will graded on the content of your presentation (i.e., how successfully you put the archival material of this project into conversation with the larger questions and issues of the course).

We will chart a plan for your website during our conference and you will have time in class on Tuesday, October 22 to work on your website. Because we are using a Duke WordPress site, you should be able to share information and collaborate virtually. That said, I would still plan on meeting with your group during the weekend of October 19-20 to finalize the details.

Suggested Timeline for Group Presentation Details:
▪ September 24, midnight: Email me with your top two choices of wars to study
▪ September 25: Groups determined; exchange emails
▪ October 8-11: Meet/email with group to begin talking about website design ideas
▪ October 10: Sign up for group conference no later than this date
▪ October 17-24: Meet with group to work on website