

Instructor:

Class: English 10600

Due Date:

Rare Book Examination Assignment

For this assignment, you will choose a rare book from the 16th, 17th or 18th centuries to examine. I have chosen a variety of rare books that will be placed on a hold cart in the Archives and Special Collections for you to view when you visit the reading room. Go to the front desk to register, and then request to see the hold cart for [instructor's name]. Remember that food, drinks, gum, and pens are not permitted and to wash your hands before handling the materials. These books range from science, medicine, economics, literature, art, etc. Please choose whichever book strikes your interest; if you would rather choose a book on your own, please come see me during my office hours, and I can help you search the online catalog. I want you to truly examine the book and take note of anything you find interesting or confusing. Please answer the following:

Binding – What does it look like? What does it feel like? Does it have a particular smell? Does it have embossing, writing, or decoration on it? What is the color?

Paper – What does it look like? What does it feel like? Are some pages thicker than others? If so, why do you think that is? Is it stained, light in color or dark in color? Do you see any shadowy lines on the paper?

Page numbers – Does the book have page numbers? If so, what is the location of the page numbers on the page? Are there any other letters, symbols, or words that are on the page that do not appear to be part of the text?

Title page – What does the title page look like? What kind of information are you able to discern from the title page? Does the title page contain illustrations? If so, what are they? What does the font look like on the title page? Does the font vary in size?

Font – What type of font (ex. italic, roman, gothic)? Is it large or small font? What is the color of the font? Is the color faded or sharp? Is the font difficult to read? If yes, why (aside from it possibly being in a different language)? Is the font spaced nicely on the page, or is it tight? Can you feel the impression of the font on the page?

Illustrations – Does your book contain any illustrations? If so, what do they look like? Are they colored?

Language – What is the language of your book? Is there more than one language in the book? If yes, what are they?

Other things to consider – Is your book large, small, or medium-sized? Does your book contain hand-written notes? If so, is there anything interesting about them? Is there anything written or placed on the inside boards of the book? Does the placement of the margins look different from the placement of the margins in a contemporary book? Is the text of your book in columns or just one column? Also, take a moment to describe the differences and similarities between your rare book and the contemporary books you read today.

Once you have gathered all of the information from your book, I want you to compile your findings into a coherent 2-3 page paper; you should not simply list your findings. Your papers should be in MLA format with 12 point Times New Roman font. You should also have a works cited page that cites the rare book you chose to examine. This assignment will require you to visit the reading room in the Archives and Special Collections. Their hours are Monday-Friday, 10am-4:30pm; therefore, you will want to give yourself plenty of time before the assignment is due to research a rare book that interests you. Please note that because you are dealing with rare books that are delicate in nature, you may **NOT** research your book in the reading room 48 hours before your assignment is due, as I do not want any of you rushing carelessly through these materials. Remember to treat these materials as you would like to be treated if you were that old. ☺

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this assignment. You may also contact an Archives and Special Collections staff member through email at: spcoll@purdue.edu

What students need to know before completing this assignment:

In an ideal situation, this would be a wonderful assignment AFTER the class visited the ASC and attended an instruction session on some of our rare books. That way the students and the instructors will have a better understanding of rare books (binding, paper, font, history of printing, etc) and how to handle them properly. They will also need to have a decent understanding of how to use the online catalog; however, finding rare books in the ASC in the online catalog can be quite tricky. It would be best for the TA to work with us, so that we could pull a variety of rare books and keep them on a hold cart for the students and also show the TA how to successfully find rare books in the online catalog. This also allows for the students to look through a few rare books before deciding on which book they would like to examine, which is always good experience for them.