**Writing an English Essay with Secondary Sources**

**Introduction**

Up until now in your English courses the emphasis has been on taking control of your essay from the beginning and putting time and effort into your own analysis of the text. In grade 11 you wrote a comparison essay using point-by-point organization looking at the connections and differences between two texts. The next step is to introduce secondary sources into your writing.

**What is a secondary source?**

For an English essay, a secondary source is anything that you use for information or for insight in your essay that is outside the primary text. Secondary sources can be

* books
* articles or chapters in books
* introductions or afterwards to edited text editions
* articles in electronic/print journals.

There is a huge amount of information out there on just about anything, and any of this information could potentially be a “secondary source”.

**Why use secondary sources?**

An essay always belongs to you. It is your informed opinion backed up by analysis of the text. However, it is also possible to consider what others - literary critics, historians, or theorists - have said about the concerns you are dealing with in your essay.

Some literary secondary sources provide background information on literary texts, such as a text’s reception by critics on its publication, or events in the author’s life that may have influenced the text, and so on. However, you may find that you turn to secondary sources more for critics’ interpretations of the texts you are writing about than for background information.

When you write an academic essay on, for example,The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, you are, in a way, joining into an ongoing conversation about the novel that has been going on for years and will continue for years. Undergraduate and graduate students, as well as professors, all participate in this conversation, by reading essays, articles, and books, and by writing them, in response to the literary works and in response to the ongoing conversation.

This is not an anonymous discussion. Who is speaking is important, because, as time goes by, reputations and credentials are built up, and the scholars and critics gain a certain “authority”. When you do your research for an English essay, who says something is almost as important as what she says. That is why you have to cite your sources by name and say where you found them.

The critics you use have had to submit their work to a publisher, and their work has had to meet a certain standard in order to be published in a scholarly journal. These sources are considered, then, to be valid, trustworthy and good secondary sources.

**Finding Sources**

* Many instructors provide lists, sometimes in their course outlines, of good secondary sources. Your texts, as well, may have forewards, afterwards, introductions, glossaries, background information, and further reading lists. Get to know your texts well.
* Critical, edited editions of a literary work usually provide a wealth of references to secondary sources in the form of "further reading" lists. With the names on the list in hand, you don't have to approach the library catalogue or online index cold but have some interesting, perhaps helpful titles to look for.
* At a University Library you can use the library online catalogue to find where a particular author’s works are located in the library stacks. Go to this location and browse through the books there; as well as the author’s works, there will also be books by critics on the author’s works as well. Browse through these for relevant articles and books.
* Related Websites – The subject guide also lists websites related to the study of English literature. Take some time to browse through the sites listed. Note how they differ from essay selling sites in their emphasis on the free dissemination of knowledge and on the people and institutions behind the knowledge.
  + If you do wish to use material from a website, make sure you thoroughly evaluate it before you use it.

EG:



* + Kelley Griffith in *Writing Essays About Literature* gives the following advice to keep in mind when evaluating web sites for academic use:
  + In general, websites are best when they meet the following criteria:
* Google Scholar can get you started finding scholarly sources online.

**Adapted from:**

"Writing the English Essay: Substance and Style: Using Secondary Sources." *Trent University: Academic Skills Centre*. Trent University. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

**Heart of Darkness Secondary Source Essay**

For this particular essay, your first secondary source essay, the direction that you take has been laid out for you. Each topic has one or two secondary sources as a start. You must find at least one more and quote it in your paper.

Specifics:

**Length:** 2000-2500 words,

**Format:** double spaced, twelve-point font, no wacky fonts

**Sources:** primary text and at least two other secondary source (one of your own)

**Citation:** MLA format, parenthetical references, works cited

**Due Date:**

**Secondary Source Essay topics…**

1. How does ambiguity operate in *Heart of Darkness?* The impressionistic ‘fan dance’ that is *Heart of Darkness*
   * **Consider**
     + Ambiguous writing (overheard conversations)
     + Ambiguous themes
     + A wider ambiguity for all humanity
     + Fog…
     + And more…
   * **Suggested Secondary sources** 
     + Fassler, Joe. "The Fine Art of Ambiguous Writing." *The Atlantic.* Atlantic Media Company, 24 Feb. 2015. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.
     + <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/02/the-power-of-omission/385919/>
     + Watt Ian. "Impressionism and Symbolism in Heart of Darkness". Conrad, Joseph, and Paul B. Armstrong. *Heart of Darkness: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. Print.
   * **Background:**

Reading *Heart of Darkness* can be like looking into a fog. Conrad is a master of sarcasm, subterfuge, understatement, ridicule, euphemism, innuendo…

**Conrad’s writing in *Heart of Darkness* is masterful at hinting at a world beneath the surface.**

Whenever Marlow puts things in ‘quotes’ or interjects with an em dash—shall I say—his meaning is more than what his words are saying. For instance:

I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers—and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks.

Moreover, Conrad takes his readers to a symbolic edge “The Horror, The Horror” but does not let us in on what precisely the horrors are.

Like the great Impressionist painter Claude Monet said “to the critics who mocked him about his paintings " Poor blind idiots. They want to see everything clearly through the fog." (Watt, 267)

1. How is Philip Zimbardo’s notion of the psychology and sociology of evil on display in *Heart of Darkness?* 
   * **Consider**
     + Marlow’s warning to the men on the boat “the butcher and the the policeman.
     + Kurtz’ duality. (European Kurtz versus African Kurtz)
     + Prisoner pathology and the native workers…criminals…slaves
     + ‘The society’ of the central station
     + The pilgrim’s ‘jolly lark’
     + And more…
   * **Suggested Secondary sources** 
     + Zimbardo, Philip G. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.
     + Another… a Zimbardo article perhaps.
   * **Background:**

Philip George Zimbardo is known for his 1971 Stanford prison experiment. Zimbardo conducted the Stanford prison study in which 24 clinically sane individuals were randomly assigned to be "prisoners" or "guards" in a mock dungeon located in the basement of the psychology building at Stanford. The planned two-week study into the psychology of prison life ended after only six days due to emotional trauma being experienced by the participants. The students quickly began acting out their roles, with "guards" becoming sadistic and "prisoners" showing extreme passivity and depression… (source Wikipedia)

Zimbardo holds: “the experiment has emerged as a powerful illustration of the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature.” (195)

Moreover, more widely, Zimbardo claims “most of us can undergo significant character transformations when we are caught up in the crucible of social forces.”

Ultimately Zimbardo says situations matter—especially in “novel settings, those in which people cannot call upon previous guidelines for their new behavioural options,” (212).

1. How is *Heart of Darkness* a novelistic remixing of **c**onservative political philosophy?
   * **Suggested Secondary sources** 
     + Hobbes *Leviathan*
     + Burke Reflections *of the Revolution in France*
   * **Consider**
     + Marlow’s warning to the men on the boat “the butcher and the the policeman.
     + Kurtz’ duality. (European Kurtz versus African Kurtz)
     + ‘The society’ of the central station
     + The ultimate message of *Heart of Darkness…*

**Look for:** lack of restraint, hollowness of the people working in Africa (the accountant, the general manager, the Brickmaker, Kurtz) and work as a balm for not losing one’s way,

**Background:**

Political philosophy often starts at the nature of people. In short, the classical liberals: Rousseau, Locke, Paine, Jefferson believed that people were born free and essentially good. Rousseau claimed that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”

Conversely, classical conservatives believed that people needed order and vigilance to protect against chaos and evil.

Marlow, and perhaps Conrad, (along with William Golding) agreed with the conservative view.

Edmund Burke: *Reflections of the Revolution in France:*

When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer. …Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.

Hobbes, *Leviathan:*

Hereby it is manifest that, during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man….[and under such conditions] the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.