

# Literature Institute Study Guide

## LIT 514 Enlightenment Literature

**Instructions for the Study Guide:** Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay. Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the “Readings” file.

**Instructions for Essays:** Please write a 1,250 – 1,500 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

**Instructions for Final Essay:** Please write a 5,000 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

- O1. Identify and describe major Enlightenment works of literature and their authors.
- O2. Explain the emergence of themes in the Enlightenment, and discuss examples in literature.
- O3. Analyze the evolution of satire in the Enlightenment and discuss how it was used in drama, prose, and poetry. What was the function of satire?
- O4. Describe the changing role of literature in society, and explore how it was used in political ideas as well as in the transformation of societies.
- O5. Trace the ideas and techniques found in Enlightenment literature, and identify where they persist even to current times.
- O6. Explore the fundamental ideas about humanity and human experience as traced in Enlightenment literature.

UNIT	WEEKS	TOPICS
I	1-3	<b>Drama</b>
		Moliere (1622-1673) Tartuffe
	Overview	Drama as Social Criticism
	Introduction	‘Enlightenment’ is a term commonly applied, in the West, to a cultural and social movement toward rationalism, democratic perspectives, scientific development; broadly speaking to developments unfolding during the 18 <sup>th</sup> century. Our first two texts, however, date from the 17 <sup>th</sup> century, and <i>Tartuffe</i> , in particular, from a world which is some ways replays perspectives of the classical world of drama and satire. Moliere addresses himself to the new social world—middle or upper class—which was flourishing under the favorable economic climate of King Louis XIV.
	Question	Q1. Like other satirists before him—was Petronius one?—Moliere pillories characters who embody a generic flaw—in this play the hypocrite—and whose inherent weakness renders them socially dysfunctional laughing stocks. What kind of social climate seems to you propitious for the raw materials of satire? Is satire a living literary form today? Where do you encounter it, and what function does it seem to you to play in society?
	Question Theme:	Q2: Tartuffe is a hypocrite and a con man. How does Moliere use his character / behavior to criticize the church, clergy, and laity? How does <i>Tartuffe</i> explore the

Satire nature of human relations, appearance vs. reality, and human weakness? If you were to rewrite *Tartuffe* so that it takes place in today's society, what and who would it include? What is the function of the other characters and how do they illustrate these points, comparing and contrasting with *Tartuffe*. Also, something about the structure of the play—how is the dramatic action organized to help Moliere make the thematic points?

**Essay** E1. Satire exemplifies the Enlightenment desire critique and improve individuals and society. What are some of the subjects that the play, *Tartuffe*, satirizes? Describe the characters that help build the satire. What are some of the dangerous areas? How might Moliere have gotten in trouble with the authorities, such as the church and the government?

**II 4-6 Fiction**

Aphra Behn  
*Oronooko*

Overview The Exotic Meets the Quest for Human Equity

Introduction You will have noted the growing presence of 'fiction' in our reading, and you should ask yourself two questions about that development: what is fictional, in the sense you are accustomed to, about the work of Chaucer, Boccaccio, or Marguerite de Navarre?

Question Q1. What place does *Oronooko* play in this growing tradition, and does it seem more like 'contemporary fiction' than did its predecessors? In actuality historians of literature like to call Aphra Behn's fictions early forms of the modern novel; does that sound right to you? Does *Oronooko*, the Surinam slave/king, seem to you to be a realized fictional character? Does the story formed around this character seem to you to summon up a plausible social world, like that socially dense scene we tend to associate with some later fiction? It might also be worth asking whether this fiction of Aphra Behn is closer to 'travel writing' than to 'imaginative fiction.' Did the mediaeval travel writing we read share some of the color and fascinations Behn puts into her fictional work?

Question Theme: Encounter Q2: How does Behn use the characters to establish cultural difference and to show how they are connected to the themes of the noble savage and romantic love.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)  
*Gulliver's Travels*

Overview The Human Condition: Between Banality and Viciousness

Introduction Perhaps you will see the inherent mystery in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The author appears to be creating, in the Houyhnhnms, an attractive model for humanity at its best—until we realize that life among these people is a placid bore. The Yahoos appear malignantly disgusting, yet full of the very life missing among the Houyhnhnms. Swift as author seems to take a bitter view of mankind, yet plainly he is relying on traditional senses of value when he critiques the Lilliputians and the Brobdinagians. We may finally want to say of this work, which fascinates us on so many levels, not least on the childish level, that it betrays our efforts to pigeonhole it as a genre.

Question Q1. Once again the questions. Is *Gulliver's Travels* fiction in the sense you usually understand? If not, what is this text? Satire on Mankind? Fantasy travel literature? Do you see here some traces of the fascination with exotic lands, which is highlighted in *Oronooko*? A lot of questions, yes, and none susceptible to a black and white response.

Question Theme: Satire Q2: How does Swift use *Gulliver's Travels* to satirize English society? Where does Gulliver encounter the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms? Why does he not see the Yahoos has human physical form at first? When does he start to see that they are,

in fact, also humans, like Gulliver himself? How do the Houyhnhms behave?

Voltaire (1694-1778)  
*Candide*

Overview	Innocence at Grips with the Problem of Evil
Introduction	Voltaire's <i>Candide</i> , in any case, spoke straight from its time, in pillorying naïve faith in the universe, ignorance (Candide's) which leads to massive denial, and mankind's reluctance to use good sense in evaluating and in interpreting human affairs. To proclaim that all is for the best in the best possible world, when disaster is everywhere, seemed to Voltaire the height of insanity. Do you agree with him? In the face of natural disaster do you feel that faith in the order and plan of the universe is undermined? What do you think Sophocles or Virgil would have said to this proposition? After all they too dealt with, and interpreted, crushing tragedy.
Question:	Q1. Have you begun to note the Enlightenment penchant for correcting/critiquing human behavior, in the light of reason? Would it be correct to say that Moliere, Behn, Swift, and Voltaire all work around a reformatory view of human nature? If you accept this broad general idea, which would follow from the thought of a century given to clarifying life, would you then agree that this reforming penchant was less apparent in the earlier texts we have read?
Question Ideas: Satire	Q2: How does Voltaire use <i>Candide</i> to satirize French society? Discuss the functions of Pangloss, Cacambo, and Martin. Compare Swift and Voltaire's ideal societies (the world of the Houyhnhnms vs El Dorado). Voltaire's views on the philosophy of Optimism (Leibniz). Contrast the optimism of Pangloss and the pessimism of Martin. Discuss echoes of courtly love in Candide's pursuit of Cunegonde. What does Candide believe at the beginning and end of the story? How is he criticizing utopianism?
<b>Essay</b>	E2. Discuss the use of fiction during the Enlightenment to criticize various social institutions. Discuss the role of the journey, or encounters between contrasting societies to further level criticism of institutions and/or human nature. What do the authors gain when they satirize attempts to put together ideal societies?

### III 7-9 Poetry

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)  
*The Rape of the Lock*  
*An Essay on Man*

Overview	High Society, Elegant Language, Miniature Violence
Introduction	Would you agree that comedy, and its nephew satire, operate on the assumption of authorial superiority? Were not Petronius, Cervantes, and Moliere, to pick examples from our course, all in a sense 'looking down' on mankind (or segments of mankind) as they drew their social portraits? (If so, how does comedy differ from tragedy in the relation of its author to his/her 'material'?)
Question	Q1. Alexander Pope is a master of satire, which he generates searing hot from his faultlessly clever Alexandrine lines. But exactly what kind of 'looking down' takes place in <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> ? Is the focus on human social pretension? Is it on the pathos of woman, who is here in a wider sense victim of social rape? Would Voltaire have been comfortable with Pope's brand of satire? What do you think of the particular relation of satire to comedy in general? Is satire intended to amuse or to instruct?
Question Idea: Cosmology	Q2. Discuss Pope's ideas in "An Essay on Man." What is God's vision in creation? Describe "the Great Chain of Being." What are the hierarchies and the basic organization of the cosmos? How well do Pope's ideas accord with those of Voltaire's Pangloss?
<b>Essay</b>	E3. How do the ideas in "An Essay on Man" help to explain the basis of satiric criticism in "The Rape of the Lock"? In "The Rape of the Lock," how are epic conventions used to make the characters and the action ridiculous? How are

certain elements deflated and others inflated to make it both comic and satiric?  
How does *The Rape of the Lock* satirize the life of the elite?

IV	10-12	Life Writing
		<i>Autobiography</i>
		Rousseau (1712-1778) Confessions
Overview		Holding the Onrushing Dynamic of a Life in Language
Introduction		If you are hesitant to call Rousseau an Enlightenment thinker, and adopt the above reasons for hesitancy, can you not still insist on Rousseau's 'Enlightenment' desire for human liberation from prejudice and dead traditions? Finally, as an overarching question, what seems to you the relation between Rousseau's and Augustine's <i>Confessions</i> ? Does Rousseau turn to any kind of God (or superior power) in his effort to understand and develop himself? Or he is only concerned with himself as the source of his strength, weakness, and salvation?
Question		Q1. The Enlightenment texts we have read have, on the whole, celebrated good sense, reason, and order. Do these traits apply to the work of Rousseau, in his <i>Confessions</i> ? I expect that you will hesitate to say 'yes,' but perhaps you will still insist on the 'Enlightenment' tenor of Rousseau's thought. What will your hesitance derive from? Is Rousseau a defender of 'reason' or of 'passion'? Is he on the whole trying to free man inwardly from restricting controls? And is he not trying to achieve this liberation by displaying the evolution of his own liberation as a self-freeing creature?
Question Idea: Confessions		Q2. Where is Rousseau aware of transgressing the norms of society, and how does he justify it? Is there any progression in Rousseau's understanding of himself and the world? What is the point of discussing this? What kind of human being or society does he envision as ideal?
		Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
Overview		Reason and the Order of Everyday Life
Introduction		The text before us here is an autobiography. Is it the first autobiography we have read? Is an autobiography different from a book of 'confessions,' such as we have seen in Augustine and Rousseau? Questions like these surge upon the reading of Benjamin Franklin, a 'modern voice.' (In discussing Montaigne we mentioned the advent of the first modern tones, and felt that for the first time in our reading we got into the mind of someone whose tone was intimate to us—whether or not we agreed with his ideas.
Question		Q1. But isn't Franklin something else again? Doesn't he seem to exist in a value world we recognize deep inside? Or am I simply revealing the little corner of prejudice that life has brought me up in?) You will note that Franklin, like Rousseau, is immensely self-centered, and glad to appear in the best light—except for carefully staged accounts of his misbehaviors. He is practical, inventive to the max, curious about everything. Do his work and his thought seem to you literary? Does he carry out his work with imagination?
Question Theme: Growth		Q2. As an Enlightenment thinker, Benjamin Franklin found resonance in the idea of a self-made man. What does he consider to be the ideal attributes of a human being? How does he suggest in order to improve oneself and to attain those attributes?
		Equiano (1745-1797)
Overview		Travel, Enslaved Humiliation, and Endurance
Introduction		With this 'interesting narrative' we are drawn back to Aphra Behn's <i>Oronoko</i> , and to that strain of adventure/travel/exoticism which has been a part of our reading through mediaeval travel writers and Montaigne (whose essays include frequent

commentaries on the new worlds being discovered in his time). Now these travel themes blend with the grave theme of slavery and the dignity of mankind, issues which were to become keenly aired during the Enlightenment. (You can easily imagine how unsympathetic such as Voltaire, Franklin, or Aphra Behn were, to the barbarous slave-ownership practices of their day.)

Question Q1. In addition to these themes, which Equiano treats with intelligence and suffering, there is the conversion theme, for Equiano, like Augustine, found in the discovery of God the grounds for his own survival. Do you find Equiano a simple man who does the best in a hard life, or a creative and imaginative writer, who is artfully shaping his own story?

Question Experience: Slavery Q2. Equiano is an early example of a slave narrative that critiques society. What does he say about the slave ship and the conditions? How does Equiano reflect Enlightenment values?

Mary Rowlandson (1635-1711)

Overview Keeping a Cool Head in Indian Captivity

Introduction With this text we withdraw in time almost to the date of *Tartuffe*. Imagine the cultural distance between Louis 14<sup>th</sup>'s court, in which Moliere worked and which he satirized, and the Massachusetts wilderness (for such it then was, heavily wooded, swampy, and perilously cold in winter) into which a wellbred housewife was snatched, hostage to an Indian tribe whose language and culture she can not have known.

Question Q1. After the dreadful loss of her baby, does Mary Rowlandson begin to take an interest in the strange new culture into which she has been thrust? Does she write with literary verve? Do Mary Rowlandson and Equiano both experience the powerlessness of victimhood? Do they deal at all similarly with this kind of victimhood?

Question Experience: Captivity Q2. What happens to Mary Rowlandson? How does being a captive affect her? What are her views and feelings about the people she lived with? Is there any distinction between her experience and her later judgment of it?

**Essay** E4. The Enlightenment held that the improvement of society was possible. Discuss Equiano's criticism of the institution of slavery and how it ties in with the belief that society can be improved by eliminating certain institutions. In contrast, Franklin believed that improvement of society would occur at the level of the individual. Compare and contrast the mechanisms by which they believed society could be perfected.

**V 13-15 Essay**

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)  
Declarations of Rights and Independence

Overview Ground Rules for Establishing a New State

Introduction Voltaire, Rousseau, Franklin, and Mary Wollstonecraft—who follows—form, with Thomas Jefferson, a perfect Anglo-American Enlightenment portrait. Jefferson, the chief author of the American Declaration of Independence, there sums up the guiding principles of the American Revolution—as well, on the whole, as of the almost concurrent French Revolution. The belief in 'certain unalienable Rights' is central to this document, which shares its time's conviction that the human being deserves the Right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. The particular focus of this assertion, of course, is the alleged misbehavior of the British Crown, but the philosophical point springs from an entire era in which confidence in human reason, societal good sense, and universal order is strong.

Question Q1. Do you recognize the principles Jefferson espouses, as part of contemporary democratic practice in the West? What do you think about the philosophical foundation Jefferson is taking for granted? Is it 'self-evident that all men are created equal'? Is it self-evident that governments derive their power from the

consent of the people? How would Virgil have felt about these propositions, creator as he is of a monumental tribute to the Roman Emperor?

Question Theme: Human Rights	Q2. What do political theorists of the Enlightenment consider to be core human rights? How do these writers go about critiquing current governance and explaining how and why it is inadequate and/or inappropriate for an advanced society? Why are human rights the pillar? How does the Declaration of Independence illustrate these concepts?
	Mary Wollstonecraft Vindication of the Rights of Women
Overview	Early Feminism Insisting on its Rights
Introduction	Mary Wollstonecraft affirms to the max the Enlightenment assumption that every human person is equal before God. It might enrich our view of 18th century enlightened woman, to compare Mary Rowlandson with Mary Wollstonecraft.
Question	Q1. Does Mary Rowlandson share with her later colleague in thought the belief that man misunderstands and grossly undervalues woman? Or is Mary Rowlandson a middle class and god-fearing woman, dignified and honorable, but not on the cutting edge of social thought? How would Mary Wollstonecraft have read some of the other women whose voices we have heard? Sappho? Louise Labe? Margery Kempe? Do you see anything like a common thread running through the thought and feeling of these very different women? Do you think Mary Wollstonecraft would be inspiring to present day Feminists?
Question Theme: Women's Rights	Q2. Discuss key ideas about women's rights, marriage, and education during the Enlightenment. Do you see any relation to today's feminist movements?
<b>Essay</b>	E5: Enlightenment authors critiqued the absolute power and divine right of rulers, and suggested that the actual power of governance rests with the people rather than the rulers. Further, the Enlightenment pointed out that traditional social and family arrangements gave unequal rights to women. How did the Enlightenment aim to establish of all people. Please use the readings in this unit as the foundation of your answer, and support your argument with clear examples.

## VI

## Finals

16 Review, Annotated Bibliography, Research Paper

### **Final Essay Question**

Please choose one question from the selections below for your final essay.

FE1. Discuss the materials from the first half of the course as serving to question or destroy traditional social arrangements. How do they prepare the way for positive declarations of rights of the individual? Who ought to have rights? Should some be denied rights? What do the authors say?

FE2. Discuss the ways, direct or indirect, positive or negative, in which Enlightenment authors explore and enforce social norms. Are there general areas of agreement about the ways in which individuals as well as societies should function? Are there inalienable truths? What are the standards of judgment? How do various authors establish and enforce them? Are the sanctions—that is, punishments for transgression—theological or social/secular? How far do the authors expand idea of individual rights and responsibilities?

FE3. Enlightenment authors differed in their views of human nature. Some believed that humans are / were innately evil, while others believed in the goodness and perfectibility of the human being. Discuss works of Enlightenment literature that illustrate contrasting views of human nature.

FE4 In this course we have read work written over a considerable period of time, from Moliere's *Tartuffe*, in the early 17th century, to the work of Thomas Jefferson,

who lived until two centuries after Moliere's *Tartuffe*. We have grouped all of these thinkers as Enlightenment minds, but of course that kind of large label is bound to miss the important details underneath it. Do you see significant differences in viewpoint/world-view among our Enlightenment authors, according to the time position they occupy in our readings?

F5. The defence of basic human rights is a powerful theme in Enlightenment writing. What are the main texts in the development of that theme? Do these issues, of individual rights, seem to you prominent in earlier works we have read? In Greek tragedy? In Chaucer or Boccaccio?