**English 1000H—03, Fall 2013**

***Critical Essay 1: Rare Books & Special Collections***

(100 points)

**Why?**

We often read books as literature, but what happens when we read them as objects with intricate histories that wind up influencing how we interact with the stories? The purpose of this assignment is to give you the opportunity to spend more time with one of the book-objects in the Rare Books Room. Keep in mind that the Rare Books Room is only open M-F from 9-5. You may want to alert Ms. Hansen (HansenKB@missouri.edu) so that she can have your book-object ready when you arrive.

**How?**

Choose one of the manuscripts or objects that were displayed during our visit to Rare Books and Special Collections. Ask questions of the object, analyzing it and drawing inferences from your observations. Do not simply go through and answer each question listed below; not all questions will be relevant to all manuscripts. Additionally, your object may raise different questions or give rise to different reflections than those listed below.

*Observe*: this is an exercise to focus your attention on details you might otherwise overlook.

* What materials were used to make the manuscript? What is the size of the manuscript?
* How is the text arranged? Do there appear to be section breaks?
* How wide are the margins? Are there marginalia?
* How would you describe the font? Are the lines thick and heavy, or thin and graceful? Do letters end in serifs? Can you figure out what materials were used to make the letters? Are there illuminations or decorative capitals?

*Reflect*: now, based on the observations you have made, draw inferences about the life of the artifact.

* What impression would it have had on its beholder?
* How was it intended to be used? Was it made for public or private use? Might it have served a ceremonial or devotional purpose? Did it serve a purely practical purpose?
* Can you derive a sense of the history of the object? What use did it have for subsequent eras?

Drawing upon your observations and inferences, compose a formal essay that addresses some of the questions above but ultimately answers the questions: *What does it say to us? What current meaning(s) does this object hold? Does it speak to you at all?*

**When?**

September 6 —*Peer Review*: bring 2 hard copies to class and upload a copy to Blackboard for instructor feedback

September 13 —*Final Submission*: upload your paper to Blackboard by the beginning of class. Any submissions after 10:00 a.m. count as late submissions and will be graded accordingly.

**Your essay must include:**

* A creative and informative title
* An introductory paragraph that includes a focused thesis statement
* A conclusion paragraph that answers the “so what?” question regarding your thesis
* 3 full pages with standard MLA formatting and presentation: 12-point Times or Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, double spaced
* Complete and careful proofreading for spelling and sentence structure