**20% Essay Topics 2017**

These are formal essays which should be properly cited, typed, proofread. The first two are based on the visit to the MMFA. 1250 words. Due Feb 28th.

**A. Hutchins, Nochlin and Solomon-Godeau Walk into a Museum…**

No, it is not a joke! You are asked here to imagine how these three authors would analyse the permanent collection. Linda Nochlin explains in her famous 1971 essay why there have been no great women artists. Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains the mechanisms by which an artist and his/her work can enter into the canon. Robert M. Hutchins explains the concept of the "Great Conversation" and the role the canon can play in education. (You will need to compile some rough statistics to support any claims about the presence or absence of women artists, for example.)

**B. WWRMHS? (John Abbott Edition)**

What would Robert Maynard Hutchins say about the Liberal Arts DEC at John Abbott college? He describes in detail his vision of a good education that helps a person become the most fully human version of him or herself. Referring explicitly to material in both of his articles, explain what changes he might be tempted to make to the Liberal Arts DEC to make it fit more closely with his ideals, and what elements of the existing DEC already reflect those ideals. The key to success in this essay is working VERY closely with Hutchins’ texts.

**C. Hutchins versus Hutchins**

A little more than a decade after the Great Books of the Western World series in 1952, and the accompanying essay, "The Great Conversation", Hutchins and Adler published a new series called Gateway to the Great Books (1963). Compare the tone, content, and scope of the two projects. What do they have in common and where do they differ? Which makes the better case for the project of reading the Great Books?

**Shorter Assignment Topics (worth 10%) Due: March 4th by LÉA**

Here is an opportunity to do an assignment worth 10%. (750 words). Though short, these are formal papers and all arguments should be supported by reference to your sources. If you fall in love with one of these topics, you may approach your teacher for permission to use write an extended version as your 20% paper. It is vital that there is no significant overlap between the two papers you write. If you write about the MMFA and the canon for your long paper, choose another topic for your shorter paper.

**A. Oprah's Book Club as the New Canon?**

Oprah Winfrey's book club is one of the most influential forces in determining what North Americans read today. Compare and contrast Winfrey's project with Robert Hutchins'. In terms of their goals, their ideals, their conception of what it means to be a reader, and the kinds of books which appear on their lists. How are they alike and how do they differ? Cite the sources of any material you refer to concerning Oprah Winfrey, as well as Hutchins' article.

**B. Great Books Program Proposal**

Using material we have covered in class, Robert Hutchins' writings, as well as any other outside research you care to conduct, plan a reading list that would serve as a syllabus for a two-year DEC in Great Books (which is a mythical DEC, not necessarily identical to Liberal Arts). Then write a paper in which you discuss the criteria you use to select the "great books" that will be on your list, your goals in including or excluding certain works or certain kinds of works, as well as how you have chosen to organize them (theme, chronology, discipline, etc.) and why.

**C. Creative Option—Reading the Great Books in the 21st Century**

There are a number of things about Hutchins' text, both stylistically and in terms of content, which clearly mark it as being a product of 1950s America. Using what you see as the strongest of his arguments, can you rework his document into one which speaks to us in the early 21st Century? (For this exercise you probably will want to consult some "self-help" books to make sure that you are familiar with the aesthetic and stylistic features of this genre in the present day. Put them in your bibliography.

**D. Defining the Canadian Art Historical Canon**

It is clear that the MMFA is an important institution in the definition of the Canadian Art Historical Canon. Focus on the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilon where much of the Canadian collection is housed. Discuss how the Canadian canon is defined in terms of rhetoric (the kind of information presented about the material), curation (what is displayed and how), architecture, the subjects featured in the artwork and the identity of the creators.

**E. Who Gets to Play?**

Do a precise analysis of the identity of the artists displayed. Is it all “dead white males”? Have times changed? How much? For this one you will need to choose several collections and compile some statistics. You will need a phone/laptop/tablet to research the artists as you go (MMFA has free Wifi). It can be a little easier to focus on gender since we live in a culture where that is often signaled by a person’s first name. (Although there are a lot of men named “Andrea” in the design section, so don’t be fooled!)