

**Alliya Dagman**  
**Teaching Philosophy**

How would the Luddites communicate their protests if they had access to Reddit? What would the privileged buffoons of *Mansfield Park* sound like in an elite 21<sup>st</sup> century prep school? Why is fanfiction conducive to the formation of queer online communities?

The work my students create allows me to indulge in such provocative exploration. In addition to assessing the evolution of literary forms, their projects effectively highlight that the struggles of the “the past” live in the present in varied guises: social inequality, workers’ rights, gender imbalances, racial capitalism, identity and belonging, etc. My aspiration is to create environments in which this kind of dynamic thinking becomes possible, enjoyable, and rewarding. I encourage projects that think across time periods, disciplines, and media, to enable students to experiment with methods of critical analysis, theoretical models, and technical tools. I am continually inspired by the richness and rigor of the work that arises from such intellectual flexibility.

I model different modes of close-reading in the classroom—tracking citations, setting texts in the syllabi in dialogue with each other, approaching genres as *thinking and feeling* forms, exploring continuities and discontinuities from biographical detail, investigating authors’ social position and reading histories towards assessing their innovations etc. Literature is legacy: bringing this home to students has involved setting Dickinson’s cheeky ventriloquism in her “Master Letters” against Billie Eilish’s “Bad Guy”. I offer such contemporary resonances to foreground the *portability* and *ubiquity* of rhetorical forms in daily life, as well as the ways in which they both structure and resist social power dynamics. Simultaneously, I incorporate brief deep dives into sociohistorical locations of literary texts to indicate the production, and thus the possibility of reinterpretation, of crucial concepts: freedom, citizenship, justice. I emphasize the symbiotic relationship between texts and their contexts using publicly available materials: the Houghton Library’s digitized images of Emily Dickinson’s herbaria to consider her poems’ ecological affiliations, the “Posters and Portraits” collection from the Museum of the City of New York to assess anti-war rhetoric in World War I writing, the treaties between the US government and Native peoples collected by the Museum of the American Indian to interrogate narratives of progress.

My attention to form and content extends from the texts I teach to the ways in which I structure discussion. I integrate reading responses into my comments, highlighting overlaps and tensions to generate conversations between students. Assignments typically involve in-class workshops with classmates: students are evaluated on enthusiastic, thoughtful responsiveness to their colleagues. In classroom exercises on presenting their peers’ work, responses overwhelmingly include appreciation, generosity, and generative questions. Such collaborative practices not only deepen students’ understanding of course materials, but also enable a rich diversity of perspectives to emerge from shared camaraderie and trust. I have witnessed repeatedly that positive reinforcement from peers helps students contribute more confidently to class discussions and improve their writing. My hope is that students learn that working thoughtfully with each other widens, deepens, and joyfully renews the ways in which they attend to literature.