

Submit a Lesson Plan on Intellectual History!

Feel free to base your plan off of one of JHI's articles.

Subject/Theme/Figure/Book: Paratexts

Sources used to create lesson plan: 'Report: Paratexts and Print in Renaissance Humanism –

The 2019 Panizzi Lectures'

Age of students (7th-12th grade): 10th-12th grade

Learning Objective:

What will students be able to do by the end of this lesson? What new skills will they have gained?

1. Main learning objective: Students will gain an enhanced sensitivity to paratext as historical sources
2. Secondary learning objective: Students will reflect on the purpose and function of contemporary paratext
3. Skill students will have learned and practiced: identifying, analyzing and producing paratext

Materials needed: books, essays, pens and paper

Discussion Questions:

Specific Comprehension Questions

1. In which ways did the introduction of printing affect the quantity and content of paratexts?
2. For which purposes did Renaissance humanists write paratexts?
3. What can paratexts teach us about the social world behind Renaissance book production?

Analytical Questions (how does this study relate to broader historical questions?)

4. Why do texts have paratexts?
5. What are the advantages and pitfalls of using paratexts as historical sources?
6. How are paratexts changing in the context of increasing digitization?

Activities:

How can this history come to life in the classroom? Think role-play, making art, creating campaigns, group work, etc. How can students enter the history they have read about?

1. (Individual) Pick a book from the library and identify its paratexts. Which different types of paratext can you find? How do they influence your impression of the volume, and what kind of information can you glean from them? What is their purpose in the book? Whose needs do they serve (reader, author, publisher, librarian etc.)?

2. (Individual) Imagine that you are a Renaissance humanist and write a preface for an essay that you have recently written.
 - a. First, read Erasmus's letter to Thomas More, which precedes his *Praise of Folly*, as an example of a preface:
<https://archive.org/details/erasmusinpraiseo00erasiala/page/n21/mode/2up>. Then, read the 'Preface to the First English Edition' of Johan Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 1924, to get a sense of a more modern model of a preface.
 - b. Reflect on the research and writing process behind your work and explain any methodological or editorial decisions that you have made.
 - c. Is there any friend, teacher, family member, author or other figure that has influenced you and your work in particular? This is an opportunity for you to acknowledge and thank them for their contribution and support!
 - d. Are you concerned about any mistakes or weaknesses in your work? Use your preface to explain, take responsibility and apologize for them. Alternatively, you can follow Erasmus's example and find creative ways to blame others for imperfections in your work – did your dog chew on parts of your notes? Did aliens hack your word processor to tamper with your grammar and spelling? Tell your readers about it!
3. (Pairs) Swap essays with your partner and produce a piece of paratext for the other person's essay. You can design an appropriate cover page for it, write a catchy blurb, write a preface, or even invent a new type of paratext.

Teacher to Teacher:

What are the major impediments to teaching this lesson? What are the major pay-offs? Any advice to fellow teachers as they utilize your lesson plan in their own classrooms?

Paratexts may seem dull, but students are constantly confronted with a great variety of printed and virtual paratexts. This lesson invites students to reflect on the nature, role and development of paratexts and encourages them to think creatively in producing their own pieces of paratext.

It is important to discuss what we mean by 'paratext' at the beginning of the lesson. There is no set definition for the term (there are so many and they can vary so greatly!), but most students get a feeling for it when we list a couple of examples of texts that are somehow different from the 'main text' of a book. It would be good to start with some well-known examples (e.g. title page, index, preface) and then move on to overlooked types of paratext (e.g. colophon, list of figures). This should alert students to the range and variety of paratexts that they can encounter both in historical books and in contemporary publications.

For more information on paratexts, see the [first](#), [second](#) and [third](#) of Ann Blair's Panizzi Lectures, 2019.

For even more information, see Renaissance Paratexts, eds. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge, 2011).