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SIXTEENTH EDITION

**MELISSA A.
GOLDTHWAITE**

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FERNALD**

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Title: The Norton Reader (Sixteenth Edition)

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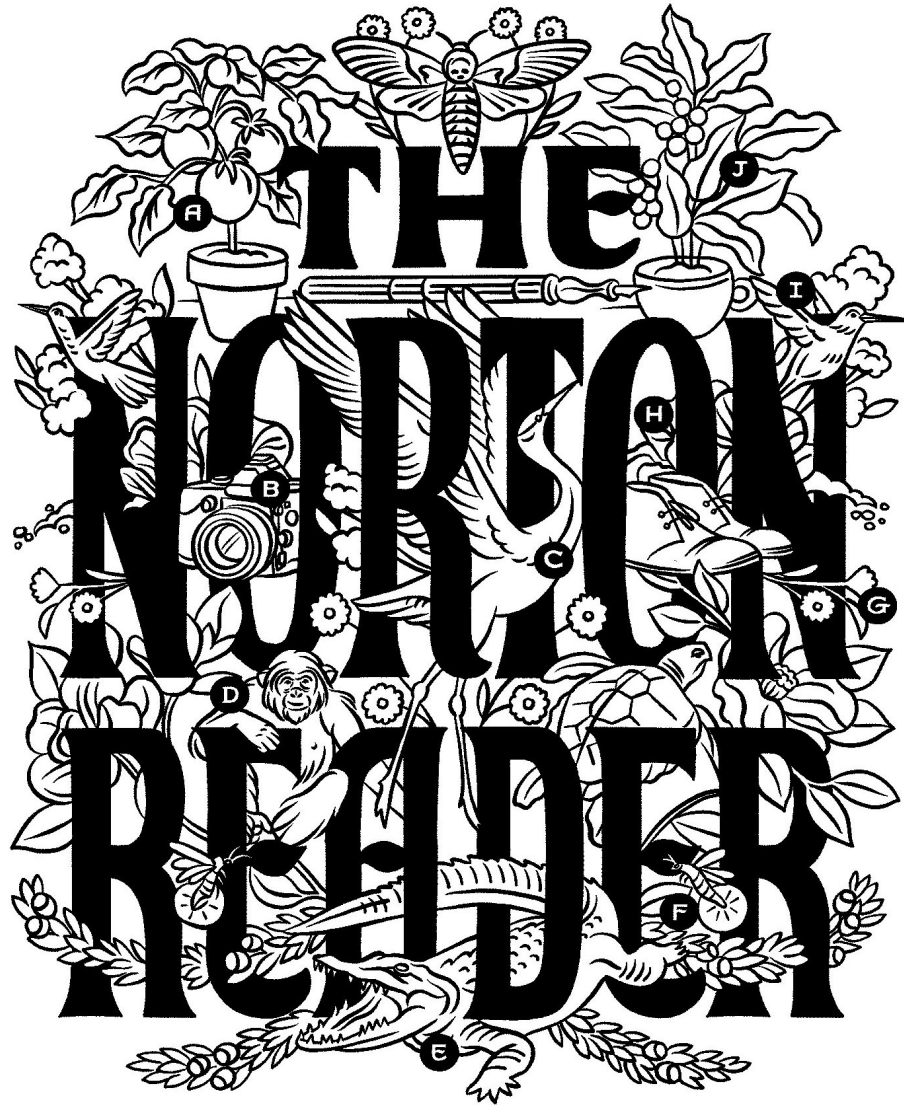
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THE NORTON READER
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THE NORTON READER

An Anthology of Nonfiction

SIXTEENTH EDITION

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Printed in the United States of America

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Composition: Westchester Publishing Services

Manufacturing: LSC Communications

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ISBN: 978-1-324-04707-0 (pbk.)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

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“A bad neighborhood. An infant child. A Ruger GP .357 with speed-loader.”

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“The irony about the evil eye is that while it lurked everywhere in my childhood, no one admitted to having it.”

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“I was a disabled black girl. The truth, for many years, sat at the entrance of my throat—a lump so large that I could start breathing and living in my body only when I was finally able to swallow and accept it.”

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“For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of people’s culture,

their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer.”

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“Language is my medium. It is the thing that has borne me up and out of every valley, the thing that has tied me to other people and made my life large.”

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“We left a place that was not healthy. We adapted. We adjusted our expectations of time, space, and one another.”

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“Five hours in, I had finished sorting the first box of citations for ‘take.’ ”

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“It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female-sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms.”

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“Almost everyone I know is busy. They feel anxious and guilty when they aren’t either working or doing something to promote their work.”

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“The photographs are indeed sensational. They are pictures of death in action, of that split second when luck runs out. . . .”

* JESSICA GROSE • *What It Means to Raise an American Girl Now* 440

“I’ve been thinking a lot about what it means to raise an American girl in this moment, when continual progress—for my daughters, for all girls—doesn’t feel inevitable.”

[* J. DREW LANHAM • *Red-headed Love Child* 445](#)

“In some ways I used to see myself as a pioneer of sorts, a first among the throngs of seekers in far-flung places wandering underneath big skies or windswept vistas.”

[JAMES BALDWIN • *Stranger in the Village* 452](#)

“But I remain as much a stranger today as I was the first day I arrived, and the children shout *Neger! Neger!* as I walk along the streets.”

[TEJU COLE • *Black Body* 461](#)

“I . . . feel myself in all places, from New York City to rural Switzerland, the custodian of a black body, and have to find the language for all of what that means to me and to the people who look at me.”

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“There is, however, a central truth in medicine. . . . *All* doctors make terrible mistakes.”

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“As I worked my way through graduate school studying writing, I became fixated on the idea of someday telling Henrietta’s story.”

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“My response to this metaphor—‘we are the virus’—is to ask what, in this imagining, is a virus and who, in this metaphor, are we.”

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“In a museum, imagine that you have a magnetic repulsion to everyone else. Move toward empty space. Indulge your misanthropy.”

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“Listen to what makes your hair stand on end, your heart melt, and your eyes go wide, what stops you in your tracks and makes you want to live, wherever it comes from, and hope that your writing can do all those things for other people.”

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[L YNDA B ARRY • *The Sanctuary of School* 547](#)

“[F]or us, as for the steadily increasing number of neglected children in this country, the only place where we could count on being noticed was at school.”

[* V ICTORIA C HANG • *Dear Teacher* 551](#)

“The language of poetry reminded me to stay alive.”

[* S UNGJOO Y OON • *I’m a High School Junior. Let’s Talk about Huckleberry Finn and Mockingbird* . 553](#)

“How we as Americans approach restrictions on literature curriculums is not only flawed but also wholly reactionary.”

[* D AVID S EDARIS • *Me Talk Pretty One Day* 557](#)

“ ‘If you have not *meimslxpr* or *lgpdmurct* by this time, then you should not be in this room.’ ”

[S TEPHEN K ING • *On Writing* 561](#)

“[W]rite with the door closed, rewrite with the door open. Your stuff starts out being just for you . . . but then it goes out.”

[N ICHOLAS T AMPIO • *Look Up from Your Screen* 563](#)

“Human beings learn with their eyes, yes, but also their ears, nose, mouth, skin, heart, hands, feet. The more time kids spend on computers, the less time they have to go on field trips, build

model airplanes, have recess, hold a book in their hands, or talk with teachers and friends.”

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[F REDERICK D OUGLASS • *Learning to Read* 580](#)

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[* E LISSA W ASHUTA • *Picture Books as Doors to Other Worlds* 585](#)

“I decided to read every book in the library, looking for instructions I could use.”

[M ICHAEL H AMAD • *Song Schematics* 589](#)

“If you make music theory something fascinating to look at, will more people become interested in learning about it?”

[T ARA W ESTOVER • *from Educated* 592](#)

“My loyalty to my father had increased in proportion to the miles between us. On the mountain, I could rebel. But here, in this loud, bright place, surrounded by gentiles disguised as saints, I clung to every truth, every doctrine he had given me.”

[W ILLIAM Z INSSER • *College Pressures* 595](#)

“What I wish for all students is some release from the clammy grip of the future. I wish them a chance to savor each segment of their education as an experience in itself and not as a grim preparation for the next step.”

[10. N ATURE AND THE E NVIRONMENT 602](#)

[B RIAN D OYLE • *Joyas Voladoras* 603](#)

“We are utterly open with no one, in the end—not mother and father, not wife or husband, not lover, not child, not friend. We open windows to each but we live alone in the house of the heart.”

[J OHN M UIR • *A Wind-Storm in the Forests* 606](#)

“Winds are advertisements of all they touch, however much or little we may be able to read them; telling their wanderings even by their scents alone.”

[C OLSON W HITEHEAD • *Rain* 612](#)

“The first drop is the pistol at the start of the race and at that crack people move for shelter. . . .”

[R OBIN W ALL K IMMERER • *Goldenrod and Asters: My Life with Plants* 616](#)

“There was a time when I teetered precariously with an awkward foot in each of two worlds: the scientific and the indigenous. But then I learned to fly. It was the bees that showed me how to move between different flowers—to drink the nectar and gather pollen from both.”

[* A NNA L OWENHAUPT T SING AND N ILS B UBANDT • *Swimming with Crocodiles* 621](#)

“What might have caused the crocodiles to turn into demons?”

[C ORMAC C ULLINAN • *If Nature Had Rights* 631](#)

“What might a governance system look like if it were established to protect the rights of all members of a particular biological community, instead of only humans?”

[W ILLIAM C RONON • *The Trouble with Wilderness* 637](#)

“Wilderness can hardly be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationship with the nonhuman world, for wilderness is itself a part of the problem.”

[E DWARD A BB EY • *The Great American Desert* 641](#)

“The Great American Desert is an awful place. . . . Even if you survive, which is not certain, you will have a miserable time.”

[T E R R Y T E M P E S T W I L L I A M S • *The Clan of One-Breasted Women* 648](#)

“I belong to a Clan of One-breasted Women. My mother, my grandmothers, and six aunts have all had mastectomies. Seven are dead.”

* [H E A T H E R M C T E E R T O N E Y • *Collards Are Just as Good as Kale* 655](#)

“Black women are everyday environmentalists; we are climate leaders.”

* [A I M E E N E Z H U K U M A T A T H I L • *Firefly* 661](#)

“When the first glimmer-pop of firefly light appears on a summer night, I always want to call my mother just to say hello.”

[11. D E C L A R A T I O N S 665](#)

* [G R E T A T H U N B E R G • *There Is Hope* 666](#)

“And how do you communicate this without sounding alarmist? I would really like to know.”

* [M A L A L A Y O U S A F Z A I • *Nobel Lecture* 669](#)

“When my world suddenly changed, my priorities changed too.”

[T H O M A S J E F F E R S O N A N D O T H E R S • *The Declaration of Independence* 674](#)

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

[E LIZABETH C ADY S TANTON • *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* 680](#)

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . .”

[S OJOURNER T RUTH • *Ain't I a Woman?* 683](#)

“Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?”

[A BRAHAM L INCOLN • *Second Inaugural Address* 685](#)

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in. . . .”

^{*}[M OHANDAS G ANDHI • *Nonviolence Is the First Article of My Faith* 687](#)

“I wanted to avoid violence, I want to avoid violence.”

[J OHN F. K ENNEDY • *Inaugural Address* 691](#)

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

[M ARTIN L UTHER K ING J R. • *Letter from Birmingham Jail* 695](#)

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. . . .
Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

* [AUDRE LORDE • *Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism* 708](#)

“Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures.”

* [IMANI PERRY • *Racism Is Terrible. Blackness Is Not.* 715](#)

“To identify the achievement and exhilaration in black life is not to mute or minimize racism, but to shame racism, to damn it to hell.”

12. LIVING VALUES 719

[HENRY DAVID THOREAU • *Where I Lived, and What I Lived For* 720](#)

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

[SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS • *Hooks Baited with Darkness* 729](#)

“Great books read us as surely as we read them, revealing, by the aspects of our character and personal history they illuminate, who we are.”

* [VIRGINIA WOOLF • *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid* 737](#)

“We must create more honorable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun.”

[ANNIE DILLARD • *Sight into Insight* 742](#)

“Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won’t see it.”

[* MARGARET R ENKL • *Christmas Isn't Coming to Death Row* 752](#)

“Until August, Tennessee had not put a prisoner to death in nearly a decade. Last Thursday, it performed its third execution in four months.”

[T ERESA M. B EJAN • *The Two Clashing Meanings of “Free Speech”* 755](#)

“The conflict between what the ancient Greeks called *isegoria* , on the one hand, and *parrhesia* , on the other, is as old as democracy itself.”

[M ATT D INAN • *Be Nice* 761](#)

“If the goal of social justice is in part to help us understand the full extent to which solidarity is an ethical necessity, then cultivating the virtue of being nice is not a barrier to justice, but a path toward it.”

[* I BRAM X. K ENDI • *Definitions* 764](#)

“To be an antiracist is to set lucid definitions of racism/antiracism, racist/antiracist policies, racist/antiracist ideas, racist/antiracist people.”

[* L EAH P ENNIMAN • *An Afro-Indigenous Approach to Agriculture and Food Security* 774](#)

“My belief is that the work of this moment is to return maize, both literally and metaphorically, to her sisters—to restore the covenant, restore the polyculture, and put carbon back in the soil while honoring our ancient and powerful ways.”

[A UTHOR B IOGRAPHIES 781](#)

[C REDITS 813](#)

[C HRONOLOGICAL I NDEX 825](#)

[G ENRES I NDEX 829](#)

[R HETORICAL M ODES I NDEX 837](#)

Endnotes

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- [illegible]

PREFACE

The Norton Reader began as an attempt to introduce students to the essay as a genre and to create an anthology of excellent nonfiction writing. This new edition continues that tradition, offering a wide selection of essays on a broad range of subjects and including examples of the kinds of writing students are most often assigned, from profiles and arguments to narratives and analyses. With 126 selections in the Full Edition and 77 in the Shorter Edition, *The Norton Reader* offers depth, breadth, and variety for teaching the essay as it has developed over time, including selections from the classic to the contemporary.

As always, *The Norton Reader* has aimed to uphold a tradition of anthologizing excellent prose, starting with Arthur Eastman, the founding editor, who insisted that essays be selected for the quality of their writing. As he put it, “Excellence would be their pillar of smoke by day, of fire by night.” With this vision, the original editors of *The Norton Reader* chose classic essays that appealed to modern readers and that are now recognized as comprising the essay canon. We have aimed to continue this practice yet have also adapted the *Reader* to new pedagogies and have updated it by adding new writers whose work appeals to new generations of student readers. We believe that the essays in this volume are well written, focus on topics that matter, and demonstrate what all of us tell our students about good writing.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- Forty-eight new readings from a diverse array of today’s most influential and exciting voices, including Hanif Abdurraqib, Jia Tolentino, Annette Gordon-Reed, Audre Lorde, Michelle Zauner, Emily Wilson, Ibram X. Kendi, Greta Thunberg, Cheryl Strayed, Imani Perry, and many others.
- Four new chapters—“Caring for Self, Caring for Others”; “Body Language”; “Insider Knowledge”; and “Declarations”—will inspire

- and inform students' reading and writing about issues that matter.
- Refreshed questions at the end of each reading ask students to annotate, consider, and write at the lively intersection of personal writing, civic conversations, and academic ideas. These features help students connect the relevance of their individual experiences to the broader cultural context.

H ALLMARK F EATURES OF *T H E N ORTON* *R EADER*

- *The Norton Reader* offers the greatest breadth and depth of any composition reader, with an abundance of contemporary essays anchored by classic and canonical selections. For example, a selection from Tara Westover's best seller, *Educated*, appears alongside Frederick Douglass's "Learning to Read" in the "Education and Learning" chapter. And in "Cultural Critique," James Baldwin's essay "Stranger in the Village" is in conversation with the essay it inspired from Teju Cole, "Black Body."
- Apparatus provides just enough detail—but not so much as to overwhelm the essays themselves. Contextual notes indicate when and where the essay was published; annotations explain unfamiliar persons, events, and concepts; study questions for all essays prompt analysis, discussion, and writing; and biographical information about the authors appears at the end of the book.
- Four expanded indexes organize the readings according to genre, rhetorical mode, date of publication, and additional themes. This feature helps teachers structure courses that meet crucial goals of the WPA Outcomes Statement, which urges that students learn to write in several genres, identify conventions of format and structure, and understand how genres shape reading and writing.

D I G I T A L R E S O U R C E S F O R I N S T R U C T O R S A N D S T U D E N T S

- *The Norton Reader* ebook, now available for both versions of *The Norton Reader*, lets you and your students highlight and annotate within the digital text. Links make it easy to navigate between—and make connections among—the readings. Instructors can embed notes and links for their students to see.
- InQuizitive for Writers supplements *The Norton Reader* with activities to help students learn to edit sentences and work with sources. Question-specific feedback and links to the *Little Seagull Handbook* provide students with extra instruction for these crucial first-year writing skills.
- For instructors, *The Guide to The Norton Reader* includes new sample syllabi, suggested classroom activities, and general advice on planning your course. The *Guide* also includes teaching suggestions and writing assignments to accompany each reading.
- Comprehensive LMS-ready resources provide additional support, including documentation guidelines, model student papers, and customizable grammar and language quizzes.

A CKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would like to express appreciation and thanks to the many teachers who provided reviews and invaluable feedback for this edition: Ashley Allee (Louisiana State University, Shreveport), Jennifer Baine (South Arkansas Community College), Marion Bright (Marymount High School), Stacy Brouillette (University of Massachusetts Global), Cleo Cakridas (Quincy College), Virginia Callahan (Niobrara Public High School / Northeast Community College), Frederic Colier (Lehman College), Ashli Cooper (Highland High School), Debra Daniels (California State University, Fullerton), Bradi Darrah (Indianola High School), Sam Forsythe (El Paso Community College), Denise Gordon (Towson University), Ashley Hogan (Meredith College), Dana Horton (Mercy College), Misti Hughes (Franklin High School), Kathi Johnson (Spartanburg Christian Academy), Melissa Jones (University of Massachusetts Global), Clifton Kaiser (Franklin Road Academy), Heather Kauk (Paola High School), Alissa Keith (University of Lynchburg), Elizabeth Ketner (Colby College), Peter Landino (Terra State Community College), Carol Mitchell (Mercy College), Jennifer Novotney (MMI Preparatory School), Kelli Offenberger (Medina High School), Irene Oujo (Fairleigh Dickinson University), Shelley Palmer (Catawba College), Gina Caponi Parnaby (Marist School), Gavin Paul (Kwantian Polytechnic University), Ruth Prakasam (Suffolk University), Ann Rea (University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown), Evelyn Reynolds (Parkland College), Jayme Ringleb (Meredith College), Joshua Salisbury (United States Military Academy), Danielle Sellers (Trinity Valley School), Eloise Stewart (Fairleigh Dickinson University), Charles Adam Tarlton (Wingate University), Star Taylor (Riverside City College), Vikas Turakhia (Orange High School), Rachel Willis (University of Lynchburg), Chris White (Westland High School), Charles Wuest (Averett University), Cory Youngblood (East Los Angeles College).

We would also like to thank the many teachers who provided input on previous editions: Robin Amaro (Cypress Bay High School), Joseph Berenguel (Asnuntuck Community College), Deborah Bertsch (Columbus

State Community College), Paul Bounds (San Jacinto College South), Carla Bradley (Drury University), Mary Dalton (Dreher High School), Gita DasBender (Seton Hall University), Michael DeStefano (Fairfield University), Emily Dial-Driver (Rogers State University), Janet Duckham (Ladue Horton Watkins High School), Michael Duffy (Moorpark College), Christine Ethier (Camden County College–Blackwood Campus), Lori Franklin (Northern New Mexico College), Eva Fritsch (Fontana Unified School District), Jordan Heil (Saint Joseph’s University), Danielle Johannsen (University of Minnesota Crookston), Edmund Jones (Seton Hall), Susanna Lankheet (Lake Michigan College), Kevin LaPlante (Walled Lake Northern High School), Jessica Lindberg (Georgia Highlands College), Martha Michieka (East Tennessee State University), Caitlin Murphy-Grace (Camden County College–Blackwood Campus), Ruth Prakasam (Suffolk University), Lee Romer Kaplan (Solano Community College), Katie Stoyloff (University of Akron), and Cory Youngblood (East Los Angeles College).

We also thank Ira Brodsky for his copyediting; Joel Jordon for his proofreading; Eric B. Chernov for his indexing; and Howard Dinin for his work on the author biographies that appear in the back of the book. At W. W. Norton we thank Editorial Assistant Caroline Fairey Meese for her superb project coordination and editing of our chapter introductions; Karen Romano, Selin Tekgurler, and Rubina Yeh for their expert help with editing, design, and production; Joy Cranshaw, Diane Cipollone, Mica Clausen, and Juliet Godwin for their wonderful work on the website, ebook, and instructor resources; Megan Schindel, Elizabeth Trammell, and Catherine Abelman for their expert permissions work; Debra Morton Hoyt and Jill DeHaan for the new cover design; and our previous editors: Jennifer Bartlett, Carol Hollar-Zwick, Julia Reidhead, Marilyn Moller, and Ariella Foss. We are grateful to the Norton travelers who represent the book on campus so energetically, and to our talented marketers and specialists, Lib Triplett, Elizabeth Pieslor, and Michele Dobbins. A special thanks to our current editor Sarah Touborg, whose kind, savvy, and collaborative spirit helped shape this new edition.

READING THE NORTON READER

Reading and the Rhetorical Situation

How do specific people, experiences, and environments help shape identity? How might we live, care for ourselves and others, and communicate in more intentional ways? How do we have true conversations with others, speaking and listening when we hold different beliefs? What are the changes we should advocate for—and why? These are just a few of the questions and issues explored by essays in *The Norton Reader*. Whether you read many or just a few of the selections, we hope that you will find them thought-provoking. We also hope you will use them to inform and improve your own writing; in this anthology, you will find readings that model a wide range of forms and styles from a diverse group of writers.

The pieces collected here come from a variety of publications, from graphic memoirs and daily newspapers to blogs, online magazines, and books. In an anthology like *The Norton Reader*, all of these selections appear in the same format, with the same typeface and layout; most have annotations to explain references and allusions; and all have questions to urge you to think about major issues and themes.

To help in the reading process, we provide information about the context in which the essay first appeared. In some cases, you may wish to go to the original source to learn more about that context, or it may be helpful to research an event that prompted a piece or to learn more about the time in which it was written. We also suggest some ways to read the different kinds of essays included in this anthology. In the next chapter, “Writing with *The Norton Reader*” ([pp. xxxvii–lviii](#)), we provide guidance to help you with your own writing. Among the goals of a college anthology like this one is to help make your reading enrich, inspire, and improve your writing.

When you begin reading an essay that your instructor assigns, ask yourself some or all of the following questions. These questions—about audience, author, purpose, and genre—will help you understand the essay, consider its original context, analyze its meaning or effect, recognize its organization and rhetorical strategies, and imagine how you might use similar strategies for your own writing.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

An *audience* consists of those to whom the essay is directed—the people who read the article, listen to the speech, or view the text. The question about audience might be posed in related ways: For whom did the author write? What readers does the author hope to reach? What readers did the author actually reach? In what ways are you—reading in the present—similar to or different from the author’s original audience?

Sometimes the audience is national or international, as in an op-ed for a newspaper like the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*. Often the audience shares a common interest, as the readers of an environmental magazine or the buyers of books on food or history. To help you understand the original audience for each essay, we provide *contextual notes* at the bottom of the first page of each essay. These notes give information about when and where the essay first appeared and, if it began as a talk, when and where it was delivered and to what audience. As editors, we could swamp you with information about publication and authorship, but we prefer to include more essays and keep contextual information focused on the original audience and publication history—that is, on where the essay appeared, who read it, and (if we know) what reaction it received. For example, Maya Angelou’s “Graduation” ([pp. 74–83](#)) comes from her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969); Angelou then continued writing her life story in six sequential volumes, concluding with *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013)—a sequence that testifies to her book’s success and its appeal to a wide variety of readers.

In each contextual note, we try to explain a little about the magazines, newspapers, and books that printed these essays—whether it’s *MAKE*, a small literary journal published twice a year; the *New York Times Magazine*

, a Sunday supplement of the daily newspaper; or *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, a freestanding book.

Although the contextual notes provide some clues about the original audience for each piece, you might also think about yourself and your classmates as the current audience. What has changed since the essay was originally published? What experiences or knowledge do you bring to your reading? Are there ways in which you feel you're not the best audience for a specific essay? Understanding the ways you are or are not the best audience for an essay can help you articulate your response, can enliven class discussions, and can give you ideas for your own writing.

WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

If the audience is those who read the essays, the *author* is the person who writes them. Through their writing, authors introduce themselves to their audiences, revealing personal experiences, preferences, and beliefs that bear on the subject at hand. In “Always Knew I Was Adopted; Just Found Out I’m Gay” ([pp. 40–45](#)), the title gives us important facts about the author Sandra Steingraber and her perspective.

Not all authors are as direct as Steingraber. You don’t really need to know that Brian Doyle was editor of *Portland Magazine* and the author of several novels to appreciate his meditation on hearts—from those belonging to tiny hummingbirds to huge whales to humans—in “Joyas Voladoras” ([pp. 603–5](#)). Nor do you need to know that Florence Williams, author of “ADHD Is Fuel for Adventure” ([pp. 571–79](#)), also wrote a book about breasts. Such biographical facts are interesting but not essential to understanding the essays included.

Because we believe that essayists prefer to introduce themselves and reveal details of personality and experience that they consider most relevant, we do not preface each essay with a biographical note. We think they, as authors, should step forward and we, as editors, should stand back and let them speak. But if you want to learn more about the writer of an essay, you can check the “Author Biographies” at the end of this book. Putting this information at the end of the book gives you a choice. You may already

know something about an author and not wish to consult this section, or you may wish to know more about the authors before you read their writing. Or you may just prefer to encounter the authors on their own terms, letting them identify themselves within the essay. Sometimes knowing who authors are and where their voices come from helps readers grasp what they say—but sometimes it doesn't.

WHAT IS THE RHETORICAL CONTEXT AND PURPOSE?

The *rhetorical context*, sometimes called *rhetorical situation* or *rhetorical occasion*, refers to the context—social, political, biographical, historical—in which writing takes place and becomes public. The term *purpose*, in a writing class, refers to the author's goal—whether to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to analyze, or to do something else through the essay. We could also pose these questions: What goals did the writer have in composing and publishing the essay? What effect did the author wish to have on the audience?

For some selections, the rhetorical context is indicated by the *title*. Abraham Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address" ([pp. 685–86](#)) and John F. Kennedy's "Inaugural Address" ([pp. 691–94](#)) were speeches that marked the beginning of their terms of office. An inauguration represents a significant moment in a leader's—and the nation's—life. The speech given on such an occasion requires a statement of the president's goals for the next four years. In addition to the title, you can discover more about the rhetorical context of a president's inaugural speech in the *opening paragraphs*. Lincoln, for example, refers back to his first inaugural address and the "impending civil war" (685); then he acknowledges that the war continues and that he prays "this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away" (686). In the midst of the American Civil War, Lincoln knows that he must, as president, address the political conflict that faces the nation, offer hope for its resolution, and set the moral tone for the aftermath. That's his purpose.

Like the presidential speech, many essays establish the rhetorical context in their opening paragraphs. Editorials and op-eds begin with a *hook* —an opening reference to the issue at hand or the news report under consideration. You might even say that the writer “creates” the rhetorical context and shows us the purpose straightaway. Kwame Anthony Appiah opens his op-ed “Go Ahead, Speak for Yourself” ([pp. 164–67](#)), with the lines, “ ‘As a white man,’ Joe begins, prefacing an insight, revelation, objection or confirmation he’s eager to share—but let’s stop him right there. Aside from the fact that he’s white, and a man, what’s his point?” (164). Readers know that Appiah is writing about speaking as a member of a group, and in the title and opening, he establishes his position right up front (he wants others to speak for themselves rather than use some aspect of their social identity to gain or undermine authority).

If an essay does not establish a rhetorical context in its opening paragraphs, you can find additional information in the *contextual note* (described above) or in the *footnotes* to each essay (described below). For example, the contextual note for “The Declaration of Independence” ([pp. 674–80](#)) is:

On June 11, 1776, Thomas Jefferson was elected by the Second Continental Congress to join John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman in drafting a declaration of independence. The draft presented to Congress on June 28 was primarily the work of Jefferson. The final version resulted from revisions made to Jefferson’s original draft by members of the committee, including Adams and Franklin, and by members of the Continental Congress. (674)

The footnotes (marked with small numerals) give further details about the composition of the Declaration of Independence.

Explanatory footnotes are a common feature of a textbook. When the original authors wrote the footnotes themselves, we indicate that in the contextual note to the text. In Terry Tempest Williams’s essay, for example, we state that all notes in this piece were written by the author unless indicated otherwise (648). This tells you that the author wished to cite an expert, add information, or send the reader to another source. In most cases, however, we have written the footnotes to help with difficult words,

allusions, and references. We provide information about unfamiliar people, places, works, theories, and so forth that the original audience may have known. For example, for Maya Angelou's "Graduation" ([pp. 74–83](#)), we footnote Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner, but not Abraham Lincoln and Christopher Columbus. Many of Angelou's readers would have known that Prosser and Turner were executed for leading rebellions of enslaved and free Black people in Virginia in the nineteenth century. But because not all readers today know (or remember) this part of American history, we add a footnote.

Although reading the footnotes can facilitate the making of meaning, it can never take the place of reading carefully. Reading is an active process. Experienced readers take responsibility for that action—reading critically, constructing meaning, interpreting what they read. If our footnotes help you read critically, then use them; if they interfere, then just continue reading the main text and skip over them.

Just as authors have a purpose in writing, readers have a purpose for reading. You will read differently depending on your purpose. Are you reading a piece to prepare for classroom discussion? If so, you might consider your position on or experience with the topic being written about. You might assess the author's argument and mark the parts of the essay that seem most and least successful in getting across a point. If your purpose is to gain inspiration as a writer, you might note the stylistic elements (metaphors, similes, varying sentence length, precision of language, and so on) and the rhetorical strategies the writer uses. If you're reading more than one essay on the same topic, you might compare and contrast the authors' positions and approaches. Later in this chapter, we provide sample annotations to model active reading.

WHAT IS THE GENRE AND ITS CONVENTIONS?

Genre is a term used by composition and literature teachers to refer to kinds of writing that have common features and certain conventions of style, presentation, and subject matter. Essay genres include the memoir and the

profile, the visual analysis and the op-ed, the literacy narrative and the lyric essay, among others. Genre partially determines the form's content and organization, but it should never do so in a cookie-cutter way.

Conventions are practices or customs commonly used in a genre—like a handshake for a social introduction. Genre and convention are linked concepts, the one implying the other. Articles in a scientific journal (a genre) begin with a title and an abstract (conventions) and include sections about the methodology and the results (also conventions). Op-eds, by convention, begin with a hook; profiles of people or places include a physical description of the subject; literacy narratives include a key episode in the acquisition of reading or writing skills; lyric essays are often written in sections or organized by association rather than by employing explicit transitions. But in reading and writing essays, conventions should not be thought of as rigid rules; rather, they should be seen as guidelines, strategies, or special features.

As you read an essay, think about its form: what it includes, how the writer presents the subject, what features seem distinctive. If you read a pair or group of essays assigned by your teacher, you might ask yourself whether they represent the same genre or are noticeably different. If they are the same, you will recognize similar features; if they are different, you will notice less overlap.

The Norton Reader includes four categories of genres, some of which may overlap:

- **Narrative genres** tell stories. They include personal essays, memoirs, graphic memoirs, and literacy narratives. If you're reading a narrative, note how the author structures the story. Does the narrative begin with a dramatic moment, unfold in chronological order, or have a different structure? What is the balance between scene (putting the reader in the moment) and reflection (making sense of an experience)? What is the effect of the organization the writer chose?
- **Descriptive genres** give details about how a person, place, or thing looks, sounds, and feels, often in a larger framework. These include profiles of people and places, essays about nature and the environment, lyric essays, reportage, and pieces of humor and satire. If you're

reading a descriptive genre, note the author's use of language and sensory imagery. What strategies does the writer use to draw the reader in—to make a person, place, or situation come alive for the reader?

- **Analytic genres** examine texts, images, and cultural objects and trends. They include reflection, textual analysis, visual analysis, and cultural analysis. If you're reading an analytical genre, consider the ways that the author looks closely at a text, image, object, or trend and breaks it down into parts in order to understand the whole. What insights does the analysis provide? How does it make you look differently at the subject?
- **Argumentative genres** take positions and use reasons and evidence to support them. These include evaluations and reviews, proposals, op-eds, and speeches. If you're reading an argumentative genre, identify the author's main point, which may come in a thesis statement or may be implied less directly. Once you know the argument, consider the author's support. What evidence does the writer use? Are the sources reputable? Is the reasoning sound? Does the author respond to counterarguments? Is the argument persuasive? Why or why not?

For more detailed information on some of the common genres included in *The Norton Reader* and some features to consider as you read and write, see [pp. xl–xlviii](#).

WHAT ARE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES?

Writers use a range of strategies to develop and organize their material. Here are some of the most common rhetorical strategies:

- **Describing** something or someone appeals to the senses.
- **Narrating** provides an account of actions or events that occur over a period of time.
- **Exemplifying** provides examples to illustrate a claim or idea.
- **Classifying and dividing** groups people or things based on shared qualities.
- **Explaining or analyzing** breaks a process or concept into its component parts.

- **Comparing and contrasting** considers the similarities and differences between or among people, places, things, or ideas.
- **Defining** attempts to give the essential meaning of something.
- **Analyzing cause and effect** considers the reasons something happened (cause) and determines the results (effect).
- **Arguing** makes a claim and provides evidence to support that claim.

Sometimes authors use rhetorical strategies to structure an entire piece. Kathy Fish, for example, uses definition to structure her lyric essay “Collective Nouns for Humans in the Wild” ([p. 388](#)). But writers most often use a combination of rhetorical strategies to develop and present their ideas. For example, Maya Angelou in “Graduation” ([pp. 74–83](#)) blends narration and description as she tells the story of her graduation from high school. And Frans de Waal uses cause and effect analysis as well as classification, comparison and contrast, description, and narration to make an argument for the presence of animal emotions in “from *Mama’s Last Hug* ” ([pp. 258–64](#)). As you read the essays included in *The Norton Reader* , notice how the writers develop and organize their material—and see if you can get ideas for your own writing. For more details on rhetorical strategies, see [pp. xlviii–lii](#) .

S T R A T E G I E S F O R C R I T I C A L R E A D I N G

The previous pages gave an overview of different questions to consider when reading, from thinking about the intended audience to recognizing genres and rhetorical strategies. Here we offer some general tips for approaching the reading your instructor assigns.

Preview the essay

Think about the essay’s title, read its opening paragraph, and skim the essay to get a sense of its organization and genre. Look at the contextual note on the first page, and try to imagine the experience, issue, or debate that motivated the essayist to write. Previewing is a technique widely used for college reading, but not all writing teachers encourage it. Some teachers explain that it helps readers focus on key issues; others discourage previewing, pointing out that a good essay—like a good novel or movie—

can be ruined by knowing the ending. Whether you preview or not might depend on the genre of essay you're reading. While you might want to know an author's argument before reading more carefully, you also might want to allow a personal or lyric essay to unfold—to see where the author takes you.

Annotate in the margin

As you read, note points that seem interesting and important, forecast issues that you think the writer will address, and pose questions of your own. Note the rhetorical strategies and literary features the writer uses. Imagine that you're having a conversation with the author. Respond to their ideas with some of your own. Most essayists want active readers who think about what the essay says, implies, and urges as a personal response or course of action. Similarly, note points that you don't understand or find ambiguous. Use them to energize class discussion. Puzzling over a sentence or a passage with your classmates can lead to crucial points of debate or provide inspiration for your own writing. Here, for example, is a sample annotation of the first nine paragraphs of James Densley and Jillian Peterson's "The Steps We Can Take to Reduce Mass Shootings in America" ([pp. 155–58](#)).

On October 1, 2015, after a gunman shot and killed his professor and eight students at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, President Barack Obama, who three years earlier, following the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut, had [failed to force](#) Congress to pass new gun safety laws, stood frustrated at the podium. "Somehow this has become [routine](#) . The reporting is [routine](#) . My response here at this podium ends up being [routine](#) , the conversation in the aftermath of it. . . . We have become numb to this."

Fast forward seven years and amid a recent spate of horrific mass shootings—at a Buffalo supermarket, a Texas elementary school, and a Tulsa hospital—it feels like [little has changed](#) . In fact, things have gotten worse—mass shootings are more frequent and deadlier than ever.

It's hard not to feel numb. When comparable nations have suffered deadly mass shootings—Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, New Zealand,