

This is a peer-reviewed manuscript version. The final version was published in *Pedagogy* (2021) 21:3: 533-548.

**From the Margins to the Center:
Introducing Self-Published American Literature to Undergraduates**

Introduction

Self-publishing is commonly dismissed as the domain of bad writing and irrelevant authors. Yet some of the most interesting, important, and beloved works in the history of American literature were self-published. Within the classroom, exploring self-published works can be an opportunity to highlight voices from the margins, think critically about publishing methods, and promote the study of the book as a cultural artifact. This article draws on my experience teaching self-published American literature within a special-collections setting and will provide ideas on how readers may incorporate some of these concepts into their own instruction.

As a Curator at The Ohio State University's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library (OSU; RBML), I am part of a small but active unit that regularly teaches with special collections materials. Founded in 1965, RBML is the largest of the university's special collections and best known for its Charvat Collection of American Literature, which is particularly strong for the period of 1870s-1920s. We draw on these collections to provide instruction to several undergraduate and graduate classes in various humanities departments as well as classes from nearby universities and local community groups. During the fall of 2016 I found myself preparing lecture notes for a class on Walt Whitman, researching late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century materials for an African American literature course, and reading about mid-twentieth-century underground poetry movements for my own research project on Beat Generation poet and publisher Diane di Prima. While working on these very different subjects, I was struck by the common thread of self-publishing and began to wonder: Who has self-published and why? What would an exploration of American literature with a focus on self-publishing look like? What could it show us?

My interest in this topic led to my curation of a library exhibition exploring these questions. *Poets, Punks, and Pioneers: Self-Publishing in American Literature* ran from February–May 2018 in OSU’s Thompson Library gallery. The exhibit highlighted the stories of writers who published their own work from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (2014).¹ The exhibit was arranged chronologically and thematically, and included cases highlighting nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American writers, self-published works of the Progressive era, modernist publications, mid-century underground little magazines, and late twentieth-century LGBTQ novels and zines. During preparation for the exhibit, I realized that the topic of self-published American literature could work well in the classroom and repurposed some of the materials and content for sessions with undergraduate English students.

Admittedly, readers will not have access to the same set of materials I have. The aim of this article, rather, is to provide a framework for finding and selecting self-published works and thinking about how to use them within the classroom to stimulate discussion and provoke new insights. Throughout this article, I will provide recommendations on how readers can adapt these ideas for their own teaching purposes and the benefits of doing so.

Why Teach Self-Publishing?

At present, the history of self-published American literature is not well documented. Although there has been scholarship done, it has focused on specific works, authors, or literary movements, and there is little that takes a broader approach to the subject. An obvious reason for this is that works produced outside of the traditional publishing channels, by their very nature, are difficult to track. But perhaps too, the topic has received little attention because it has been assumed to be unimportant. Beyond academic writing, information on the topic is available, if partial and imperfect. Web

¹ Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* has had an unusual trajectory. It was first published in 1993 by the small press Firebrand Books. By 2012, however, Feinberg wanted to regain control over the book, successfully reacquired the rights and self-published the work online, making it available for free. Feinberg said of this decision, “I give this novel back to the workers and oppressed of the world.”

searches produce numerous results, the majority of which are articles concerning the growth of self-publishing and its current impact on the publishing industry or promotional content of print-on-demand (POD) companies.² Another common search result is lists of famous writers throughout history who have self-published. These lists often are intended to inspire the potential self-published writer, legitimize self-publishing, and, if featured on a POD site, sell the company's services.³ While they ostensibly gesture toward creating a literary lineage, the lists typically do not identify the work(s) the author self-published, making it difficult to verify the information or trace its source. The lack of attention to self-published American literature means that we are unaware of this history and fail to know the stories or see the patterns that would emerge from taking a wider, historical perspective.

Introducing students to self-published American literature can accomplish several objectives. It provides a venue in which to explore voices and experiences from the margins, to study works by authors who were excluded from the traditional publishing channels. This may include African American writers, LGBTQ writers, writers who did not have access to the publishing world because of age or circumstances, writers whose work was decidedly non-commercial either in ideas, style, or experiences, and writers who for ideological or political reasons did not want to participate in the established system.

Studying self-publishing is also an occasion to think critically about publishing methods and the construction of the American literary canon. Reception studies and publishing history are not often part of undergraduate literature classes yet providing this kind of context can enrich students' understanding of a work and its author. Such an

² An example of self-publishing's impact on mainstream publishing is Damien Walter's "Self-Publishing: Is It Killing the Mainstream?" <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/feb/14/self-publishing-mainstream-genre-fiction>. Bowker, an affiliate of the information and data provider ProQuest, has been tracking the growth of self-published books for the past several years: <http://media.bowker.com/documents/bowker-selfpublishing-report2017.pdf>.

³ The POD company Bookstand Publishing's "Famous Authors Who Have Self-Published" <http://bookstandpublishing.com/famous-authors-who-have-self-published/> is one example. John Kremer's *Self-Publishing Hall of Fame* is more extensive than most and can be purchased as a book through Kremer's marketing site: <http://bookmarket.com/selfpublish.html>.

approach also begins to make visible the trajectory of a text from radical to canonical. Students often are surprised to learn that important, well-regarded writers self-published. This realization can help them reconsider what they knew about these writers and recognize that the means of getting one's work into print is more complicated than we often realize.

Lastly, allowing students to work directly with self-published materials helps them reflect on the relationship between publishing methods and the physical object as well as understand the book as a cultural artifact. According to Bahde et al., "Object-based pedagogy...uses the close study of artifacts to prompt nuanced observation and to generate further lines of inquiry" (xvi). Self-published materials can prove particularly enlightening for a discussion about how these items break from conventions in ways that call attention to their materiality. Furthermore, within the special collections setting, hands-on time with materials enables students to envision themselves as special collections researchers.

Finding and Selecting Self-Published Works

Self-published materials are not uncommon but finding them can require unique search strategies. When starting my exhibit research, using the search feature of Google Books was helpful for identifying authors who had self-published, particularly if I was pairing the term "self-publish" (or some variation) with one of the exhibit topics. For example, searches for self-published modernists helped me identify Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, e.e. cummings, and Djuna Barnes as writers who had published their own work. When searching a library catalog for materials, there are a few tips to keep in mind. Consider doing keyword searches for "self-published," "published by the author," "published for the author," and "printed for the author." "Publisher not identified" and its predecessor, "s.n." (Latin for "sine nomine" or "without a name"), the standard phrase within a catalog record indicating that a publisher is unknown, may also provide leads (Library of Congress). While many relevant materials will reside in special collections, some may be discovered in a library's circulating collection. For example, while researching Diane di Prima's publishing venture Poets Press for another project, I

discovered that some institutions kept these works in special collections while at others the books were part of the circulating collection, and some libraries had the works divided amongst the two. Additionally, it may be worthwhile to consider developing a small teaching collection on this topic. Some self-published works such as zines—self-published, small-circulation magazines made for passion rather than profit—can be purchased inexpensively online.⁴

While having students work with physical materials is ideal, some situations, such as larger classes, may call for digital surrogates. If scans will be used in lieu of physical objects, instructors should try to find as high-quality images as possible. If the items are available at one's institution, work with the special collections staff to request scans. Many older books are available online in some capacity, but their quality varies widely. For example, the Gutenberg Project, Internet Archive, and HathiTrust are excellent resources for full texts of out of copyright books, but their files may be black and white scans. A better source may be digital collections of special collections and archives or well-known digital projects such as the Whitman Archive, which provides access to full-color jpegs of every single page of *Leaves of Grass* as well as the covers. If an instructor identifies an item for his or her session that is only available at another institution and not online, he or she should consider requesting a few full color scans to use in class.⁵

As noted above, the sessions I have taught grew out of an exhibit that took an expansive, historical approach to self-published American literature. This scope offered the opportunity to think broadly about shifts in American literature and publishing over the last 150 years and consider how these materials revealed the priorities and concerns at different moments in US history. My goal in selecting works for the session's activity was to present a range of materials in terms of time period, aesthetics, and motivation for self-publishing, with the idea that each item would provide a different perspective on the topic. (A list of materials I have used in various sessions is provided in Appendix B.) I

⁴ Etsy is a potential resource for purchasing zines directly from the creators. Microcosm and Pioneer Press are two major clearing houses for purchasing a variety of different kinds of contemporary zines and smaller, niche “distros” or zine distributors may be found by doing web searches. Older zines may be found on eBay.

⁵ Hi-res scans of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is available at: <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/index.html>.

learned to prioritize items that would facilitate productive discussions and about which students some understanding of the historical context. For example, I realized after using Djuna Barnes's anonymously published *Ladies Almanack* in a session that, although a complex and fascinating object, the book—a satire of the lesbian community in 1920s Paris—can be difficult for undergraduates unfamiliar with the context to analyze in this setting. (Barnes's book could work well, however, in a session focused on self-published LGBTQ or modernist writers.)

While some items may not be the right fit for a hands-on activity, they can still be worth including in a session. Drawing from my previous research and exhibit inventory, when I teach this session I display additional items in the front of the room to show the wide variety self-published material. What these materials lack in the grandeur typically associated with special collections they make up in accessibility. Students typically do not need to be encouraged to look through them, as the selection of underground publications and unusual-looking books appear approachable and often are visually intriguing.

It is important to choose items, then, that will strike a balance between accessible and challenging, ones that emphasize the value in studying the book as a material object and cultural artifact. Given that undergraduates typically encounter literary texts as Norton editions, Penguin paperbacks, photocopies, or online, inviting them to see works in their original manifestations can be an eye-opening experience and stimulate new modes of thinking. Studying a self-published work can be particularly fruitful for thinking about how intent and resources shape the format and aesthetics of a publication, the ways in which a writer working outside of the mainstream may have both more and less control over the final product, and how the work itself may be a response to or rejection of mainstream writing and culture.

Classroom Session and Hands-On Activity

The following outlines a 90-minute session on self-published works in American literature that I have taught several times with the undergraduate English course

“Introduction to Literary Publishing.” This is an upper-level course capped at 16, typically taught by a different instructor each semester. The class focuses on editing and publishing, and students learn about navigating the market, identifying potential venues for their writing, and preparing their work for submission. They also gain practical experience by working on the department’s literary journal. Consequently, this group has discussed publishing more than the typical English class, yet they have not considered it through a historical perspective nor explored self-publishing.

I begin with an ice-breaker activity, asking students to reflect on and write down their thoughts on self-publishing (Questions included in Appendix A below). After a few minutes, I ask for volunteers to share their reactions. Students often comment that they think writers who have self-published did so because their work was not good enough to be published through mainstream channels. I note that this could be a factor, but also encourage them to think about other reasons a writer might have self-published. Interestingly, this response sometimes seems slightly at odds with the responses offered in reply to the question about reading a self-published work, as students often state that they had read something they recognize as self-published and enjoyed it, such as a friend’s zine, a relative’s book, internet comics, or blogs. Such comments suggest that self-publishing is ubiquitous but unexamined. This opening discussion serves a few purposes. It allows me to gauge what students know and think about the subject, discuss expectations, and set the tone for the rest of the session. I stress that they are not expected to know anything about this topic and explain that it was not a common field of study. However, I tell them that I think self-publishing is an important subject and that I hope our session will convince them that it is a worthwhile topic that warrants more attention.

I then explain the objectives for our session: to explore examples of self-publishing in American literature from the 1850s to the present; to consider how publishing methods impact format, reception, and audience; and to learn about the different ways we can “read” a book. Essential to our discussion is providing a clear definition of self-publishing. I tell the group that for our purposes, we will define it as a writer releasing a work independently, without the support of a traditional publisher. This could mean financing the production of the book, but also include taking on other duties typically

overseen by a publisher, such as design, printing, marketing, and distribution.

Additionally, self-publishing could denote an individual who published his or her own work alone or one who ran a small enterprise that published other writers as well, likely friends or colleagues. I did not delve into reasons one might have self-published, as I wanted them to make their own discoveries during the activity.

I did, however, want to provide a bit of context. In a TeachingArchives.org article, historian Julie Golia and archivist Robin M. Katz have discussed the importance of determining beforehand the right amount of context to give students as a key part of a session's success:

Some teachers may want to limit the amount of information they provide to students to foster a student's "naïve encounter" with a document. But rarely have we seen a successful archives visit in which a student receives no context at all. Some teachers may refrain from providing advanced information about specifics – for example, biographical information about a Civil War soldier mentioned in a document – and encourage students to conduct follow up research to identify that person. But they should provide more broad background information.

With this in mind, I wanted students to have some information about publishing and self-publishing, but there would not be enough time to talk in-depth about publishing history or printing technologies. Furthermore, I also did not want to lead them to specific conclusions by saying too much at the outset. However, I did want to explain that we would use Whitman's publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 as a starting point in part because American publishing functioned differently in the early nineteenth century, as the writer was sometimes expected to be partially or financially responsible for publication and could be involved in the printing, production, and distribution of his or her work.⁶

Before having students work with materials, I wanted to model the kind of questions I hoped they would consider and the kind of analysis I wanted them to do. Essential to this was introducing the concept of paratext—aspects of the book beyond the author's written text, such as the title page, preface, advertisements, blurbs, cover design,

⁶ For more on this topic, see William Charvat's *Literary Publishing in America, 1790-1850*.

layout—that French literary critic Gerard Genette has identified as the “the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to readers” (261). These components are familiar to students, yet most have not considered how they help make the meaning of a text. In a *TAL* article about working with archival materials, Matthew Steven Bruen described teaching this concept, noting that:

paratexts are...the domain of the printer and publisher, those individuals who seek to ‘present’ the work to audiences. Often, authors themselves were removed from the process of the paratextual presentation of their works. Paratextual elements thus reveal how the producers of print, often acting as gatekeepers and upholders of a given culture, self-consciously framed and mediated literary work (5).

Bruen’s assertion becomes complicated when we look at self-published works, which are fugitive publications that exist outside the traditional publishing channels and therefore do not “present” in the same way as their mainstream counterparts. Yet they can tell us not only about the dominant culture to which they are responding but also about the creator and context in which they were created. Given this, the questions we must ask are slightly different: In what ways do these works align with our expectations? In what ways do they rebel?

For the group discussion I use the first edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Whitman’s book works well for a variety of reasons: English students usually have some familiarity with his poetry and *Leaves of Grass* is not only a canonical text of American literature, but arguably its most famous self-published work. Furthermore, a discussion of the book’s publication history easily intertwines with talking about how to examine a book as a cultural artifact. As noted earlier, while having a copy of the first edition is ideal, using images via the Whitman Archive also will work.

Whitman self-published *Leaves of Grass* so he could have control over its content and appearance, but likely also because he recognized that a deeply unconventional work by a relatively unknown writer would not interest any publisher. As Ed Folsom observes,

No publisher was interested in producing what seemed an odd and inelegant group of twelve untitled poems. So Whitman did it himself: he designed the

cover, chose the binding, and set some of the type himself. He talked a friend, Andrew Rome, who was a job printer with a tiny shop...into printing the book.

Furthermore, having spent several years working as a newspaper publisher, printer, editor, and journalist, Whitman was well prepared to produce his own book (Folsom).

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* offers numerous aspects for a discussion about self-publishing and the material object, but during a 90-minute session, there is time to highlight just a few. I begin by asking who has read Whitman and what they know about him or his poetry in order to get a sense of the group's familiarity and begin to flesh out our conversation as needed. I then walk around the room while holding the book, making sure each student has a chance to see it, and ask for reactions to the cover. Students comment that the title looks wild, weird, and hard to read. Whitman's unruly-looking, hand drawn phrase suggests life, growth, and unconventionality. It signals to a reader even before opening the volume that this is an unusual book. Students typically do not notice the lack of the author's name on the front, so I will point this out and ask them what they make of it. This question, admittedly, is a difficult one that can be best to ask toward the end of the discussion after they have a better sense of how Whitman's democratic ideals manifest in the physical object. Even when they are stumped, they recognize it as an unorthodox choice that a mainstream publisher would not have approved.

Next, I show the group the frontispiece. I ask them what they think a nineteenth-century poet looks like. Often, they describe someone older, regal, formal, and elite. I then ask for reactions to Whitman's portrait, how it differs from what they just described a nineteenth-century poet to look like, and what they can tell about Whitman from this image. The portrait, which Whitman commissioned, depicts him wearing a hat at a jaunty angle, looking rugged in street clothes with his hand on his hip in a challenging pose. Students usually identify these aspects and note that collectively they create a persona that is a stark and deliberate contrast to the polished image of a respectable, conventional poet. Both the book's cover and frontispiece, then, signal the freedom Whitman had in creating this work and the ways in which *Leaves of Grass's* physical characteristics defied conventions of mainstream publishing.

Lastly, I ask students what they think of the book's unusual size. Often several observe that it looks more like a scrapbook than a volume of poetry. I note that while Whitman had the ability to control many aspects of his publication, historically self-publishing meant that a writer had to work with what was available. The book's size was due to the paper that Rome, Whitman's friend and a job printer who printed legal documents, had on hand (Folsom). I also show the group a page or two of the text so they may see that the long, sprawling lines and frequent ellipses suggest something very different from the typical poetry of the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly, when it was published in 1855, readers had not seen anything like it, and the poetry was as daring as Whitman's unusual-looking book. I wrap up the discussion by briefly telling students about how, despite the public's initial lack of interest, Whitman continued working on, adding to, and revising the collection throughout his life, publishing six editions over nearly 40 years. During that time, *Leaves of Grass* gradually shifted from relative obscurity to being read and recognized as innovative, and in the process became one of the most significant works in American literature.

After this discussion, students begin the hands-on activity. I provide some basic care and handling information about working with the materials and tell them that they will have 15-20 minutes to examine one item in-depth in pairs or groups of three before sharing their findings with the class. In an effort to foster focused dialogue, I provide handouts with questions about self-publishing and the book as a material object (Questions in Appendix A below). I remind them that they may want to read the first page and last pages of the works to get a sense of the content, style, and tone, but that this exercise is not about having a deep knowledge of the text. After students have time to explore, I ask for volunteers to present their object to the group and briefly highlight what they encountered.

After having time to work with a historical self-published item and reflect upon it, students have a more nuanced understanding of the subject and are more likely to identify a variety of reasons an author might have self-published, such as wanting to have control over the work and not needing to alter ideas or language or vision to cater to or

accommodate a publisher, editor, or audience; the work being rejected, ignored, or misunderstood by mainstream publisher; and the work being produced by a marginalized writer that may have deemed it unsellable or undesirable by a mainstream publishers. I like to include at least one item that helps students see that some writers may have opted to self-publish because they had no interest in working within the established mainstream publishing channels. In each session I have conducted, multiple students have observed that they had never considered reasons why someone might self-publish beyond the commonly accepted one: that the work had been rejected because it was bad. If we recognize that works have been rejected for reasons beyond “bad writing” many possibilities emerge and the histories we are able to tell become richer and more complicated. Students also have noted the power of discovering that historically writers might have self-published because who they were or what they had to say prevented them from having direct access to the traditional, mainstream publishing channels. Lastly, another a common comment has been regarding the surprising overlap between materials. Seeing Whitman in the same space as zines can help students make connections and consider similarities between seemingly unlikely or chronologically distant authors and texts. It is useful to conclude the session by summarizing the different motivations students have identified for writers to have self-published and then asking the group what they think studying self-publishing can reveal. Although this is a challenging question, students provide thoughtful answers, often noting that it can be a way to celebrate the history of the radical and unconventional and study voices and works not represented in the mainstream.

Examples of Self-Published Works for Class Discussion

I now want to examine some of the self-published works I have used in these sessions. My intent here is to highlight a few of the possible thematic options for teaching about self-published American literature and consider some potential points of discussion and insights that can come out of working with these materials. Because the categories I use to think about, plan, and select materials grew out of my exhibition, my focus here is on items related to African American authors, modernism, women writers, mid-century underground writing, and LGBTQ literature. The ideas underpinning the session I have

described are flexible enough to be adapted to focus solely on one of these subjects or a related, broader topic such as American poetry or American identity.

I like to give one group an example of experimental writing and have found that modernist examples work well in part because students have some familiarity with this literary movement, the major writers associated with it, and its impact on American literature. To this end, I often use e.e. cummings's *No Thanks* (1933). During group discussion, students working with this example point out the key characteristics that mark it as an unconventional book, such as being bound along the top like a notepad, an unusual dedication page, and unorthodox formatting. By considering the book's title alongside a dedication to fourteen major publishers, they are able to piece together that cummings's manuscript had been rejected many times before he decided to fund the publication himself. They also often note that a quick scan of the book reveals experimental poetry that a publisher possibly would have found difficult to produce or to market. It is helpful to encourage students to think about a work's publication date and consider historical context. With this reinforcement they often observe that cummings's work, published in 1933 at the height of the Great Depression, made it a particularly challenging book to sell.

There is a long tradition of self-publishing in African American literature and a nineteenth- or early twentieth-century example is vital to include in this session as a means of discussing the power structure inherent in publishing and how aspects such as race, gender, and sexuality have impacted what stories have been deemed marketable or worthwhile. My preferred book to use is Sutton Griggs's *The Hindered Hand*. At the turn of the century, Griggs "wrote, edited, published, and disseminated books so that African Americans living in the South might experience the pleasure of reading a book that made them feel as if they had the power to change their circumstances" (Chakkalakal 148). As with the cummings book, it is useful to ask students to consider the publication year—1905—and describe what life and publishing opportunities possibly were like for African Americans. Comments emphasize the difficulties that they inevitably faced. Students recognize that African American writers likely had limited options to see their work in print and consequently may have decided to self-publish, particularly ones like Griggs,

whose work was critical of white supremacy. Another reason I like using this item is because of the nature of the physical object. Students often comment on the difficulty of identifying this volume as a self-published work. Several advertisements in the back of the book for other works by Griggs suggest that it is self-published, yet the book's exterior is conventionally attractive and Griggs's "Orion Publishing Company" implies a larger enterprise. These aspects are useful for talking about why a writer may want to follow some of the standards of mainstream publishing even while existing outside of it. *The Hindered Hand*, like all of Griggs's self-published books, "reveal[s] an attention to certain production details of an author interested in the book as a physical object and the experience of reading" and a desire to honor his underserved audience with a traditionally beautiful volume (Chakkalakal 146).

While there was not a case in my exhibit that focused exclusively on women writers, their works comprised half of the items on display. It can be worthwhile to encourage students to think about the relationship between gender and publishing, and what kinds of stories have been judged acceptable for women to tell. A class on women writers may want to consider self-publishing through this lens, and the proliferation of women's writing and publishing during the 1960s and 1970s could provide many options. The item I often use, however, is a bit older: a copy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Forerunner*, a magazine she wrote, edited, and published from 1909 to 1916. Often students are familiar with Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and point out that its feminist theme has a clear relationship to the progressive contents of *The Forerunner*. They also recognize that the magazine's articles on women's rights, animal rights, and social issues were likely radical for their time and a clear deviation from what mainstream women's magazines of the era would have promoted. Students sometimes laugh at what seems like overkill in Gilman's credit line of "Author, owner, and publisher." However, such a reaction is a chance to discuss Gilman's decision and how it speaks to both the freedom that self-publishing allowed her and a history of minimizing women's literary contributions, particularly those related to editing and publishing.

For readers interested in mid-century underground self-published work, there are many options that celebrate pushing the boundaries of what writing could be and the era's

inexpensive and fast printing methods.⁷ While students will not know these publications, some of the writers who appeared in them—such as Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, and Anne Waldman—will be familiar. As with Whitman and e.e. cummings, recognizable names are an opportunity to discuss how radical writing becomes canonical. I often use Ed Sanders’s seminal 1960s little magazine, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*.⁸ *Fuck You* is both silly and serious. Students are quick to observe this, and often point to the dedication on the title page noting that the publication is devoted to a virtual laundry list of ideas and things from pacifism to “Queen Marijuana Bestower of Peace.”⁹ Students are particularly interested in discussing the materiality of the magazine, which openly rejects standards. It looks not simply self-published but homemade, printed on construction paper with hand drawn covers and staples along the front cover. They often understand Sanders’s slogan, “I’ll print anything,” as an indication of a writer gleeful about the freedom of existing outside of the mainstream publishing channels.

Because writing about homosexuality—particularly if it was anything other than condemnatory—was censored, controlled, or rejected by most mainstream publishers for much of the twentieth century, I also include a self-published work by an LGBTQ writer. The collection I work with has a strong holding of 1980s and 1990s LGBTQ zines, and I often use one of these for the session. A zine that works particularly well is *Diseased Pariah News (DPN)*, a provocative, humorous publication from the late 1980s and early 1990s “by and for people with HIV.”¹⁰ *DPN* contains articles, fiction, essays, poetry, comics, reviews, and interviews. Typically, students are quick to comment on this tagline, recognizing that a publication created by writers with HIV about their own

⁷ An excellent resource for discovering little magazines and small presses of this era is the website *From a Secret Location*—<https://fromasecretlocation.com/>—which grew out of Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips’s book *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*.

⁸ For readers interested in reading this publication, the William Burroughs website Reality Studio has digitized copies available online: <https://realitystudio.org/bibliographic-bunker/fuck-you-press-archive/>.

⁹ While Sanders’s multi-line dedication changed with each issue, it typically began with “pacifism” and ended with “all those groped by J. Edgar Hoover in the silent halls of Congress,” often including various references to peace, drugs, sex, and anarchy in between.

¹⁰ In 2009, the New York Public Library digitized and made available issues 1-8 of *Diseased Pariah News*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160624103522/http://www.diseasedpariahnews.com/>. Additionally, the Queer Zine Archive Project, which was founded in 2003 to preserve the history of queer zines, provides access to hundreds of digitized older LGBTQ zines: <https://www.qzap.org/v8/index.php>.

experiences would have been crucial during this era, particularly in light of mainstream coverage of the AIDS epidemic. Students are often excited by the accessibility and idiosyncrasy of zines, and including at least one in the session allows for a discussion of why and how they are important, and the ways in which they have been a vehicle for perspectives and experiences absent from mainstream media.

Conclusion

At first glance self-publishing may seem an obscure topic for an undergraduate English class. However, that I have been asked to teach about self-publishing multiple times by different instructors speaks to a curiosity and interest in this topic. While most students have not given much thought to the subject, it is one they find accessible and engaging. Furthermore, the subject's flexibility makes it adaptable to a variety of different approaches and topics within American literature. The major challenge is identifying and locating materials, but once done, items may be used repeatedly. Teaching with special collections materials enables students to work directly with items and consider firsthand the relationship between publishing methods and the material object. A focus on self-published American literature can open up new avenues for discussion and ways of seeing literary texts.

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Library of Congress. "Descriptive Cataloging Using RDA: Former Cataloging Practices You May See in Legacy Records." *Catalogers Learning Workshop*, <https://www.loc.gov/catworkshop/RDA%20training%20materials/DCatRDA/leg-ans.pdf>. Accessed March 2019.

Appendix A

Ice-Breaker Questions

- What do you think of when you think of self-publishing?
- Who do you think self-publishes now? Who has self-published in the past? Why?
- Have you ever read a self-published work?

Discussion Questions ¹¹

- In what ways does this work signal to you that it is self-published? Or does it? Consider both the exterior as well as the content.
- What evidence do you see that may suggest why the author chose to self-publish?

¹¹ My discussion questions for this session were in part inspired by Kelli Hansen's "The Book as a Cultural Artifact" in Bahde et al.'s *Using Primary Sources: Hands-On Instructional Exercises*.

- How does this publication fit within a broader literary and historical context: what you know about this writer, topic, literary movement, and/or time period? How does it provide a different perspective?
- Does this work fit in with or challenge your initial idea of “self-published” literature? Explain.

Appendix B

The following is a list of materials I have used in self-published American literature sessions.

Barnes, Djuna. *Ladies Almanack*. Paris : Printed for the author, and sold by Edward W. Titus, 4 rue Delambre, at the sign of the Black Manikin, 1928.

Berman, Wallace. 1961. *Semina*. Los Angeles. 2

Johnston, Smith. Pseudonym. Crane, Stephen. *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets: A Story of New York*. New York: Privately printed, 1893.

Cummings, E.E. *No Thanks*. 1935. New York: Golden Eagle Press.

di Prima, Diane. 1968. *Hotel Albert*. New York: Poets Press.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *Oak and Ivy*. Dayton, Ohio, Press of the United Brethren Publishing House, 1893.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Forerunner*.

Grahn, Judy. *Edward the Dyke*. San Francisco, 1970. Women's Press Collective.

Griggs, Sutton. *The Hindered Hand*. 1905. Nashville: Orion Publishing Company.

Harris, E. Lynn. *Invisible Life*. 1991. Atlanta: Consortium Press.

Henderson, Elliott Blaine. *Humble Folks*. Springfield, Ohio: Henderson, 1909

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Written and edited by herself. Edited by L. Maria Child. Boston: Published for the author, 1861

Levy, D.A. *465: An Anthology of Cleveland Poets*. Cleveland: 7 Flowers Press, 1966

Routson, Isabel. *A Place for Us*. New York: Bleecker Street Press, [1969]

Sanders, Ed. *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*. New York, N.Y. : Ed Sanders No 5, vol 3, 1963.

Stein, Gertrude. *Three Lives*. New York: The Grafton Press, [1909]

Thompson, John. *The Life of John Thompson, a fugitive slave : containing his history of 25 years in bondage, and his providential escape / written by himself, Worcester : J. Thompson, 1856*

Williams, William Carlos and Robert McAlmon, editors. *Contact*. New York: William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon, 1920-1923

Wilson, Harriet. *Our Nig : or, Sketches from the life of a free black, in a two-story white house, North, showing that slavery's shadows fall even there / by "Our Nig" [i.e. Mrs. H. E. Wilson]*
Boston: Printed by Geo. C. Rand & Avery, 1859

Zines: *JDs. Outpunk. Diseased Pariah News. Infected Faggot Perspectives.*