

NEWNHAM COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE CB3 9DF

The Woolf Essay Prize 2020-21

The Woolf Essay Prize is open to all **girls currently in Year 12** (Lower Sixth) at a UK school. It is designed to give students the opportunity to think and write about women in literature, history, society and culture, while developing their independent study and writing skills. Through exposure to the type of work they might be expected to do at Cambridge, we hope high flying students will be encouraged to consider applying to the University – and hopefully to Newnham, where women’s history and educational excellence are, of course, central.

This prize may be of particular interest to those studying English Literature, History, Politics, Philosophy or Sociology; but we welcome entries from interested students studying any combination of subjects. Entrants are invited to submit a response to any **one** of the questions overleaf, which should be between 1,500 and 2,500 words (including footnotes and captions). All sources must be appropriately acknowledged and cited, and a bibliography – including websites consulted – should be attached (though excluded from the word count). Up to **five** entries may be submitted per school.

The winning entries from previous competitions may be found on the Newnham College website and may be useful to you as you decide how to answer your chosen question. However, it is to be noted that there are many angles from which to approach each question and those available on the website are only a limited sample. Good essays will present a clear argument using specific examples, but outside of this many different approaches are welcome.

Each of the Newnham Essay Prizes has a first prize of £400, a second prize of £200, and third prize of £100.

It is **strongly advised** that students read *A Room of One’s Own* before answering any of these questions. The quotations used are all taken from this text, and knowledge of their context will almost certainly be helpful (at least initially). An uncluttered, easily accessible and comparatively cheap edition of the text can be found in the Penguin ‘Great Ideas’ series, though it is by no means compulsory to use this version.

Entrants should upload their submissions to the webform, found here:
https://cambridge.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d0jlQUfoNT1f7g1

The **cover sheet** should also be uploaded to this webform. Please ensure that a school/college representative has completed the appropriate section. Entries will not be valid without this information.

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The deadline for receipt is **12pm on Wednesday 10th March 2021**. For any queries not answered here, please contact Lucy Rogers (Schools Liaison & Outreach Officer) by email at slo@newn.cam.ac.uk or by telephone on 01223 330471.

The Woolf Essay Prize 2020-21: Questions

- 1) *‘However, the majority of women are neither harlots nor courtesans; nor do they sit clasping pug dogs to dusty velvet all through the summer afternoon.’*

Should we focus on studying ordinary or extraordinary women? Explain your answer with reference to an academic discipline of your choice.

- 2) *‘Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand, all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man’.*

Do male pseudonyms represent repression or liberation when used by female writers? You should discuss at least two writers in your answer.

- 3) *‘Hundreds of women began [...] writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded even in text-books, but are to be picked up in fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road’.*

How should we decide which books deserve to be studied at school or university? Your answer should feature at least two female writers, one of whom you have *not* studied as part of your schoolwork.