

## Grace Fischbach's LIT 335 Reflection Essay

In the spring of 2021, I took Dr. Well's class "Jane Austen and her Readers." For the class we wrote a research paper exploring a topic of interest relevant/related to Austen's novels. I immediately knew I wanted to look into a specific moment in *Emma* where the character Mrs. Elton seems to allude to slavery in her description of how she had picked strawberries at the gathering. Since the basis for my paper was rooted in one line of dialogue I looked within my notes and the novel for one or two more incidents that would add context to the line of dialogue. Once I found a quote about Mrs. Elton's background and its connections to Bristol, I found two overlying topics between the two quotes, Austen's connections to slavery personally and literarily and how slavery is described. I used slavery as the starting point for my research.

I started by making slavery related keyword searches in the JSTOR database and MLA International Bibliography. I knew from past research that these two databases were listed on the English and Literary Studies research guide as a subject related database. JSTOR is also a database I feel comfortable using as I have often used it for college research. After the results of the keyword search appeared, I limited the results to journal articles. I believe I also limited the results by subject selecting Language & Literature. My notes indicate that I used broad keywords for my searches like "Jane Austen AND Emma AND Mansfield Park" or "Jane Austen AND Emma AND slavery." These searches yielded a lot of results, in order to see which articles I wanted to pull, I would read the abstracts to see if the work was relevant. Once I had articles I liked, I searched the author(s)' name(s) to see what other publications they had. Other times I would look through the cited sources in the article to see if any of them could be helpful. I also did the reverse of this, by checking through Google Scholar what works cited the article I liked. I gathered a lot of articles covering Austen and slavery but hadn't yet looked into the depictions of slavery.

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I struggled to find sources that discussed what I had called depictions of slavery. I wanted sources that would tell me what I learned through experience in school that the image of slaves working used specific words like stooped which Mrs. Elton herself used. I was insistent that if I used "stooped" or synonyms alongside "depictions of slavery" I would find articles. However, it proved more difficult to find the types of sources I wanted. I started to search in different subject databases, history and African American studies, with the same terms. I just could not let go of what I thought were good keyword searches. I even started searching Google for vintage paintings or photographs of slaves working that I could use as primary sources. I was able to find some images from reputable sites, but I still was not satisfied.

In class we read "Jane Austen and Empire" by Edward Said. This discussion of how Austen's novels connected to the British Empire intrigued me and I felt it had a direct connection to the allusion to slavery, so I explored how Austen connected to imperialism. I looked in JSTOR using the "British Imperialism AND Austen" keywords. Again, I used keywords that were too broad. I was getting very burnt out and remembered that I am writing about Jane Austen. The Janeites have their own society, Jane Austen Society of North America, which has its own journal focused on Jane Austen related topics. The journal is searchable through the JASNA website. I simply used "Mrs. Elton" as the keyword. This would narrow my results to only those related to the character and from here I could see different angles that other scholars had toward her. Finally, I found some broad yet specific discussions on Mrs. Elton that helped me find other approaches to the topic. Knowing this I went back into JSTOR and searched "Mrs. Elton AND imperialism" and "Mrs. Elton AND slavery."

Ultimately, I ended up having more sources than I used. This was for the better as I didn't feel limited or pressed to get all my information from a small handful of sources. I could create

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my own quilt of information from source to source to create the basis for my argument. This research paper was a journey of source searching. I realized that even though I had a very specific topic, it may have been helpful to start searching within a tad larger of a topic to find sources that went in the direction of the paper. This way I would have some authors and more keywords to search in databases. I know I will use this technique as a guide moving forward, especially on my current research assignment.