# Recovering Authors and Texts

[The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/) is fundamentally a [recovery project](https://recoveryhub.siue.edu/mission/) in which Jean Lee Cole works toward, as outlined by the Recovery Hub for American Women Writers, “recovering the work of women writers by providing digital access to forgotten or neglected texts and/or extending them with network mapping, spatial analysis, multimedia storytelling, innovative contextualization, and the distant reading of massive datasets.” Part of this work requires researching authors, organizations, and texts that are often difficult to locate because of historical biases that often erased the work of women and members of marginalized communities.

## Materials Needed

* This activity uses the information found on [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/) as well as the home page to the site. Pages include:
  + [Club History](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/club_history.html)
  + [Who were they?](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/bios.html)
  + [Membership Lists](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/membership.html)
  + [Meeting Minutes](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/meeting_minutes.html)
  + [Virtual Library](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/browse.html)
  + [WLCB Project Blog](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/blog.html)
  + [Projects](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/projects.html), specifically:
    - [Where they lived](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/mapping.html)
    - [Katharine Pearson Woods Exhibit](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods)
* Additional materials include databases and other methods of searching for information, selected at the instructor’s discretion:
  + [Google](https://www.google.com/)
  + [Chronicling America](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/)
  + [HathiTrust](https://www.hathitrust.org/)
  + [Internet Archive](https://archive.org/)
  + [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/)
  + Newspaper databases and genealogical databases (access to these may vary: contact your local librarian, whether at a public or academic library)
* Tablets and laptops for students, or guided exploration by the instructor via a computer and projector, will be necessary.

## Preparatory Work

* The instructor should familiarize themselves with [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/) and the databases, sites, and methods of searching they plan to use with students in this exercise.

## Instructions

* Based on your background preparatory work, provide students with a brief overview of [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/) site to understand what information is available on the site and how the Archive serves as a [recovery project](https://recoveryhub.siue.edu/mission/) for the works of the members of the Woman’s Literary Club of Baltimore.
* Break students into groups and assign them a page under the [Materials Needed](#_Materials_Needed) section and ask them to become the “five-minute expert” on their page—i.e., look at the page and share with the rest of the class what their page is all about. Ask them to consider at the outset what type of research was required to create these pages and the potential sources of information needed by the writer.
* Draw students’ attention to two pages: the [Membership Lists](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/membership.html) page and the [Who were they?](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/bios.html) page. Explain that while the [Membership Lists](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/membership.html) page has a comprehensive list of members, the [Who were they?](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/bios.html) page contains selective biographies of members. Collectively examine a biography, such as that of [Hester Crawford Dorsey Richardson](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/HesterRichardson.html), to get a sense of what a typical biography looks like for the site.
* Have students select a person from the [Membership Lists](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/membership.html) page that is *not* represented on the [Who were they?](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/bios.html) page. Then, have students try and locate information about that person using the search and database sources outlined the [Materials Needed](#_Materials_Needed) section and any other sources they typically use for approximately 10 minutes.
* Coming back together, ask students to answer the following questions:
  + What information were you able to find about your person? Where did you find that information? Was it on the sites provided as part of this lesson or outside sources?
  + Did you encounter any issues while searching?
  + Was it difficult to find information? If so, why do you think finding information was difficult?
* Additionally, you may want to include a short discussion of the following issues:
  + Accuracy of names or availability of information for a name. Many women in the Woman’s Literary Club of Baltimore used “Mrs. -husband’s name-” when they appeared in newspapers or the club’s meeting minutes. How might you need to incorporate or understand societal mores of the time period and culture of the person you’re researching as part of your search strategy?
  + Search techniques:
    - One issue students may have encountered was a large number of irrelevant search results. Each search platform or database supports different techniques for focusing in on specific search results, exemplified below:
      1. Google supports specific keyword searching using parentheses and quotation marks. For instance, the following search query searches Google for pages that feature the full name Katharine Pearson Woods and the word Wheeling:
         1. ("katharine pearson woods" and wheeling)
      2. Chronicling America has an [advanced search page](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/#tab=tab_advanced_search) that supports searching by geographic area, time period, and phrases.
      3. HathiTrust and Internet Archive each support searching by metadata and full text. Metadata is information about the text or item, such as the title of a book, the author of a book, or year published. Each approach will deliver different very results.
  + Usage of contextual information:
    - Encourage students to use what information they did find to customize their searches. For instance, if they discovered a person lived in a specific town at a particular time, focusing the search results to that geographic location and time period may be helpful.
  + Employing iterative search approaches:
    - If a search approach isn’t working, think about why that may be the case and how to move forward. Is the issue what you’re searching (i.e. full text scholarly monographs won’t be in a genealogical database) or how you’re searching?
* Using some of these considerations, have students go back and try and find additional information about their person for another 10 minutes. Coming back together, ask students similar questions compared to the first round of searching:
  + What new information, if any, were you able to find about your person? Where did you find that information? Was it on the sites provided as part of this lesson or outside sources?
  + Was it still difficult to find information? If so, why do you think finding information was difficult?
  + Do you think that difficulty in finding information impacts the scholarship you can create and the research you can do? If so, why? How does that impact your research going forward?
  + How does this search process impact your understanding of [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/) site?