



Included in this workshop:
READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **6** Understand, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction.

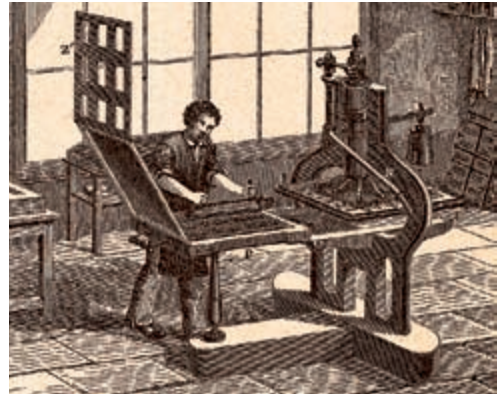
Nonfiction in the 18th Century

We often refer to the current era as the information age, in which we have come to expect a steady stream of instant information through television, the Internet, radio, and print. England in the 18th century experienced a similar demand for information but was limited to one form of media—print.

A New World of Ideas

At the dawn of the 18th century in England, the movement known as the Enlightenment was ushered in by the writings of two major philosophical thinkers, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. Their writings inspired the English people to rethink all aspects of society, question accepted beliefs, and explore new ideas. In this rich environment of ideas, **nonfiction** became a favored literary form.

Though the aristocracy was the primary audience of the Enlightenment writers, the spread of education in the 17th century had caused the literacy rate in England to soar among the middle and lower classes. The newly literate public's appetite for information grew, and London became home to a number of periodicals. The practices of modern publishing, such as the use of copyright and royalty fees, began to emerge in London at this time.



The stereotype press, invented in 1805

The Development of the Essay

The contents of most 18th-century periodicals consisted of essays. An **essay** is a short work of nonfiction that offers a writer's opinion on a particular subject. The essay form became popular after the 16th-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne published a collection of writings titled *Essais*, which means "attempts." In 1597, Francis Bacon became the first prominent English essayist when he published the first edition of his *Essays*. From then on, the essay became a popular means of expression—a way for English writers to air their views on public matters and to promote social reform. Works labeled "essays" were even written in verse, such as Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*.

Informal essays are essays in which writers express their opinions without adopting a completely serious or formal tone. Informal essays can include humor and may deal with unconventional topics, such as Joseph Addison's witty and entertaining commentaries on British morals and manners of the day, which appeared in the periodical *The Spectator* (page 602).

Formal essays explore topics in a more serious, thorough, and organized manner than informal essays. One example is Mary Wollstonecraft's argument against injustice in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (page 720).

Other Forms of Nonfiction

Letters and **diaries** often provide personal details of everyday life at the time they were written. Most are private and not intended to be shared, but some are published because they are well written or concern famous historical or literary figures. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (page 580) is an important historical record of the Restoration in which Pepys observed life in its smallest details and then meditated on the meaning of what he had witnessed. Eighteenth-century examples include Fanny Burney's journal and collected letters (page 708).

Biography is nonfiction in which a writer recounts the events of another person's life. **Autobiographies** and **memoirs** are works in which people recall significant events in their own lives. James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (page 682) is an example of a biography about a great literary figure.

When you are reading nonfiction, use the following strategies:

- Take note of the **type of document** you are reading. Is it a formal essay, or is it an informal work with a loose structure?
- Draw conclusions about the **author's purpose**. Is the writer addressing a social problem? If so, what solutions does he or she suggest?
- Consider the **historical context** and the value of the work at the time it was written or published. Ask yourself if the work is still of value today.
- Summarize the **main ideas** of the work in your own words.

Before marriage we cannot be too inquisitive and discerning in the faults of the person beloved, nor after it too dim-sighted and superficial.

—Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*

Close Read

Do you find the ideas in this passage to be of value to today's audience? Explain.

THE RISE OF JOURNALISM

1650	1690	1700	1710
1650s Coffeehouses emerge as cultural and political discussion centers.	1690s Oral communication of the news decreases as printed news sources rapidly increase. 1694 Lifting of licensing act allows English newspapers to grow.	1702 <i>The Daily Courant</i> , England's first daily newspaper, is established. 1709 <i>The Tatler</i> begins publication.	1711 <i>The Spectator</i> is founded by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.