

NEWNHAM COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE CB3 9DF

The Woolf Essay Prize 2012

The Woolf Essay Prize is open to all **girls currently in Year 12** (Lower Sixth). 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 highflying students will be encouraged to consider applying to the University – and perhaps 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). Up to **five** entries may be submitted per school.

The competition has a first prize of £450 and a second prize of £300. The prize-giving will take place in Cambridge at the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

The main focus should not be on a topic that has been or is being studied as part of the AS/A2 Level or IB courses, though of course any relevant examples or references are welcomed. All sources must be appropriately acknowledged and cited, and a bibliography – including websites consulted – should be attached (though excluded from the word count).

It is **strongly advised** that students read *A Room of One's Own* before tackling any of these questions. The quotations used in the questions 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.

A printed copy of each essay, **accompanied by the enclosed cover sheet**, should be submitted by schools or colleges on behalf of their students to:

The Woolf Essay Prize
Schools Liaison Officer
Newnham College
Cambridge
CB3 9DF

The deadline is **Tuesday 24th April 2012**. Faxes and email attachments will **not** be accepted. Please note that the essays will not be returned, so students may wish to retain a copy for themselves. If students (or schools/colleges) would like receipt of the essay(s) to be acknowledged, please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.

For any queries not answered here, please contact Amy Aukland (Schools Liaison Officer at Newnham) on 01223 330471, or email slo@newn.cam.ac.uk. If any student would like to visit Newnham College, whether to find out more about the history of women's education in Cambridge; or to see where Iris Murdoch, Miriam Margolyes, Germaine Greer, Diane Abbott, Silvia Plath, A.S. Byatt, Margaret Drabble, Rosalind Franklin, Emma Thompson, and countless other influential and inspiring women have studied; or to find out more about the Cambridge Admissions process, they are very welcome to get in touch!

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1. “Indeed my aunt’s legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky.”
Is money the key to women’s liberation? Or to any, or all, liberation?

2. “I had been foolish to ask my professor to furnish me with ‘indisputable proofs’ of this or that in his argument about women. Even if one could state the value of any one gift at the moment, those values will change; in a century’s time very possibly they will have changed completely. Moreover, in a hundred years, I thought, reaching my own doorstep, women will have ceased to be the protected sex.”
Are our values as malleable as Woolf suggests?

3. “The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.”
How might you explore a recent political opposition movement in the same light?

4. “For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately.”
Can truly original literature exist?

5. “Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities [between women and men]?”
To what extent do you agree with Woolf?

6. “[I]t is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman.”
Is Woolf right? Discuss in relation to ONE of the following:
 - a) Parliamentary representation
 - b) Film direction
 - c) Pornography