

## Learning to Read the Signs

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THE “FINGERPOST” is that ubiquitous hand with one extended finger we have long seen in public places, accompanied by directions such as “to the ladies’ toilets” or “exit this way.” More recently, that same finger has been widely adopted in electronic media, for the purpose of leading us simply and intuitively to a particular destination that the pointer wishes us to reach. Not all information is so willingly or simply provided, however, and neither is all communication so explicit. In many cases, the signs that can point us in the “right” direction take other more subtle forms, are not designed to be as helpful, or are buried in an avalanche of other indicators. Teaching the skills of reading such communication, examining all evidence in detail, and making an analysis and final decision of direction or fact, therefore, are the vital common goals of many history courses. Likewise, as part of the first-year seminar program at Dickinson College, the course “Tell Me Why: The Role of Information in Society” had the overarching goal to study the history of communication, from the oral tradition to the Internet, and further sought to provide new college students with a fresh opportunity to be trained to search for the pointing finger. Through the use of a mock trial based on their structured reading of Iain Pears’ 1998 bestselling period mystery entitled *An Instance of the Fingerpost*, supplemented with historical background, participants were set to the task of solving a case of murder.<sup>1</sup>

Pears’ masterful novel of murder and political intrigue in Restoration

England, set among the colleges of late seventeenth-century Oxford, is particularly suited to this type of exercise. Using both actual and fictional characters of the time and the murder of an Oxford don as a vehicle, Pears weaves a complex tale told, in turn, from the first-person perspective of four narrators, each with his own story and his own share of incomplete information about other people and other events. *An Instance of the Fingerpost* is narrated first by an entirely fictitious character, Marco da Cola, the son of a Venetian merchant who is on his way to London to recover property stolen by his father's business partner. While working temporarily in Oxford to supplement his finances, da Cola's strange demeanor, suspicious behavior, and whereabouts on the night of the murder make him a prime suspect. The second narrator, Jack Prestcott, is a partially fictitious character<sup>2</sup> who attempts to prove that his deceased father was loyal to the crown during the Civil War so that he can reclaim his inheritance. In his obsessive quest to clear his father's name, Prestcott becomes entangled in the events surrounding the murder and also becomes a suspect. The third narrator, John Wallis (1616-1703), a historical figure known to be a skilled cryptographer for Parliament and "the greatest English mathematician before Newton,"<sup>3</sup> is highly suspicious of Marco da Cola's presence in Oxford and blames him for Grove's murder. Weaving through the entire tale is Sarah Blundy, a former housekeeper for Dr. Grove. Sarah also is implicated in Grove's murder due to the suspicion that she is a witch, as well as her close associations with Grove, da Cola, and Prestcott. The novel's final narrator is Anthony Wood (1632-1695), a figure known to history as an early librarian and Oxford historian, who unwittingly is bestowed the secrets of all the other characters. During Wood's narration, the "truth" of the story is told and the murderer revealed.

The readers in a series of often surprising turns cannot themselves hope to gain a complete understanding of the story or identify the guilty party without information from all four storytellers. The instructors of this first-year seminar saw immediately the possibilities for valuable lessons about careful examination of evidence and the necessity of communication, and, to enhance the mock trial's effectiveness, teams of students were provided with only one narrator's version of the story. We set about to design a module that would be valuable, instructive, assessable, and compatible with the constraints of time and design of the seminar.

### Goals

The first-year seminar program at Dickinson College introduces students to the undergraduate experience by teaching them to "Critically analyze information," to "Examine issues from multiple perspectives," to

“Discuss . . . with clarity and reason,” and to “Create clear academic writing.”<sup>4</sup> Professors who teach first-year seminars may choose any subject for the focus of the class. The projects assigned in our course needed to accomplish the college’s goals for our first year students, in connection with the course’s themes of learning to communicate effectively, research efficiently, and use information judiciously. We developed the following outcomes for this project:

After close reading of assigned sections of Iain Pears’ novel *An Instance of the Fingerpost*, students will conduct a mock trial in order to:

- attempt to solve a historically based murder mystery;
- piece together a complete story from incomplete and biased sources of information;
- extract essential elements from sections of a story and distribute that information to others in a group;
- use outside sources to supplement given knowledge;
- manage and judge the accuracy of many pieces of information; and
- practice cooperation and teamwork.

### **Review of Literature**

There is little scholarly literature directly relevant to this project. Many classroom mock trials described in educational literature intend to replicate actual legal proceedings using formal rules of court, which we did not oblige our students to follow. Many educators, however, have found success in using role-playing exercises as a way to study history, and in using historical fiction to help recreate, as Nancy Partner put it, “An acute sense of history, the feeling of being in the middle of a story fraught with meaning.”<sup>5</sup>

For this project, the students’ ability to reason through a problem was equal in importance to the historical lesson. Therefore, we sought good advice about effectively using active learning to enhance history lessons. Active learning exercises such as mock trials and role-playing are acknowledged by many innovative educators as good alternatives to class sessions normally dominated by lecture and discussion, so long as they are planned carefully. McDaniel, for example, described using such activities as a method by which “to draw students in to the lesson,” and noted reassuringly that the students’ lack of prior knowledge about a particular subject should not deter an instructor from embarking in role-play, as it “makes little difference to the success of the exercise.”<sup>6</sup>

What would make a difference to the success of our particular assignment was the students’ ability to take information available to them and interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate it. The mental exercises

involved in reasoning, according to Drake and McBride, require students to “discover relationships among facts and generalizations, and values and opinions, as a means to provide a solution to a problem, to make a judgment, or to reach a logical conclusion,”<sup>7</sup> exactly what we hoped our students would accomplish.

Despite the potential benefits of historical role-play, it remains somewhat risky for an educator to give up classroom control for extended periods of time.<sup>8</sup> Role-play activities are enormously time-consuming both for the instructors and for the students, and without careful preparation from both parties, the intended outcomes might not be achieved. One of Luff’s role-playing “rules” is to avoid under-involvement, or the failure to give most, if not all, of the students the chance to participate in the activity.<sup>9</sup> Because we wanted the entire class to be involved in the *Fingerpost* project, assigning roles for every student did, in fact, prove to be one of the most difficult details to arrange. Luff also advises that instructors require the students to complete benchmark assignments before the role-play is performed to ensure that they are prepared for their roles, while at the same time taking care to avoid over-scripting the exercise.<sup>10</sup> We attempted to strike the balance between requirement and creativity by allowing the students to choose their individual roles once assigned to a group, by not imposing formal rules of court, and by placing no restrictions on imaginative or theatrical methods of delivering their information.

### **Assignment and Strategy**

To begin the project, we divided seventeen students into four groups representative of each of the novel’s narrators. We made sure to include in each group at least one student who had in previous assignments demonstrated good analytical ability, one with solid writing skills, and at least one who was outgoing and likely to be comfortable doing much of the speaking for the group. Since the class had seventeen students enrolled, the first three groups had four members and the fourth group had five members. Each group was assigned one of the four narrators (da Cola, Prestcott, Wallis, or Wood) for their specific investigative focus. Only students in Anthony Wood’s group read his section, which reveals the truth behind Dr. Grove’s murder and the questionable behavior of the rest of the characters. None of the students had read the book prior to taking this class, but if any had, they would have been assigned to Anthony Wood’s group. Students were asked not to read any further than their assigned sections so as not to spoil the suspense and surprise of the trial, and they cheerfully complied.

Within Group One (da Cola’s), Group Two (Prestcott’s), and Group

Three (Wallis's), the two students filling the roles of witness-narrator and his defense attorney read only that narrator's section, while the other two students acting as either the prosecuting attorney or jury member each read one of the other two sections. For example, in Marco da Cola's group, the students playing Marco da Cola and his defense attorney read da Cola's section, the student playing the prosecuting attorney read Wallis's section, and the student serving on the jury read Prestcott's section. In Group 4 (Wood's), two students read Anthony Wood's story, and the other three students each read one of the other three narrators' stories. The complete assignment, including information about how each role was assigned, is reproduced in Appendix I.

Since each student read only one part of the story, they were compelled to share with the rest of the group any information that they uncovered during the course of the project, no matter how trivial that information seemed. We told the students that they would have no hope of figuring out the story without frequent and regular communication to address the following questions:

- Who killed Dr. Grove and why?
- What was Marco da Cola doing in Oxford, and did his description of himself make sense?
- What was Sarah Blundy's involvement in the murder?
- Why do we even care about Jack Prestcott?
- Why did Dr. Wallis involve himself in the story's events?
- How is the backdrop of the English Civil War relevant to the story?

As noted in the assignment, each group also was required to explore specific questions about its assigned character. The answers to some of these questions were not evident only by a reading of the novel; therefore, the students had to consult the college library's basic resources, such as biographical dictionaries; historical timelines; and specialty encyclopedias on history, religion, and science. Training on the use of library resources had been provided earlier in the semester.

After the assignment was explained and the students started reading the book, the college's specialist on English history (this article's lead author) delivered a fifty-minute lecture to the class. The tone and the scope of this presentation were important, since it had become apparent during the planning stages that the students would likely be more successful if provided with as much background knowledge of Civil War and Restoration-era England as possible. An attempt at a comprehensive background in the events of the period would have confused rather than aided students reading the novel, even if it were possible. The talk, therefore, concentrated on the atmosphere of the time, with specific references that could be applied as the students' reading progressed. England had just emerged

from a momentous and unprecedented two decades, in which one king had been executed and the Commonwealth set up to replace him subsumed in a military dictatorship, after which another king returned to be crowned. Moreover, Europe was in the grips of a massive ideological and religious divide comparable only to the Cold War of the middle and late twentieth century. In such a period of disorientation and intrigue, information was important because it was often dangerous both to oneself and to others. Beneath the veneer of a happy “Restoration” ran deep and hazardous undercurrents. Plots, old and new; fears and hatred of Catholics, agents, and double agents of foreign enemies; and the struggle to hide old loyalties and build new reputations all lay just beneath the surface. Pears exploited this brilliantly in his novel, using actual historical figures involved in such maneuverings, and the task of the background lecture was to reinforce this by setting the broader scene and providing students with some small suggestions for further thinking about where specific characters might fit in this environment fraught with secrecy, danger, and stratagem.

Because the students had four weeks to prepare for the mock trial after the lecture, we had to devise ways of making sure they were keeping on task and reading enough to participate fully in their group meetings. Keller strongly recommends that teachers “prepare students for assuming specific roles by asking them to complete appropriate assignments.”<sup>11</sup> Leading up to the trial, we required the students to write journal entries reflecting on the lecture and their readings, and we set up discussion boards within the college’s online classroom management program to facilitate conversations. The instructors also required periodic in-class updates about each group’s progress; and we held several class discussions during which the students would share the results of their outside research, and instructors would answer questions about the novel as thoroughly as possible without spoiling important plot points.

The trial was set to last for five fifty-minute class periods, with two additional class periods set aside prior to the trial for preparation. During the first three days of the mock trial, Groups One, Two, and Three presented the prosecution and defense for each character. On the fourth day of the trial, the jury described the results of their deliberations, which took place outside of class; revealed their opinion about who was the murderer; and explained why they thought that character was guilty. On the last day, Group 4 exposed each character’s lies, deceptions, and half-truths, and revealed the accuracies in the story of each narrator, before finally revealing the “truth” behind the story.

At the end of the trial, the students were required to grade each other’s involvement and performance so that the instructors could determine how effectively each student participated in the groups’ meetings. Finally, we

required students to complete an appraisal of the project, reproduced in Appendix II, which also served as this project's assessment.

### **Results of the Mock Trial**

Although the trial days were informative, entertaining, and sometimes shocking for the students, the class did not solve the murder. They accepted the conclusions of Pears' characters without pushing the limits of possibility, and they did not consider how the improbable could have been possible. In addition, the students assigned to the jury said at the end of the trial that, although they had indeed suspected the "real" murderer, they felt compelled to discount the character because neither the first three sections of the book nor the trial provided them with sufficient evidence for conviction. With this decision to impose court rules upon themselves, they also unintentionally discounted the supplemental knowledge they had gained. The students allowed the characters' abject mistrust of one another to distract them from certain evidence that would have vindicated the one they fingered, even though they quite thoroughly explored during the mock trial the idea that the murder of Dr. Grove did not necessarily follow suspicious, and possibly illegal, activity. Additionally, they were too willing to discount the testimony of a character revealed to be mentally unstable, and it did not occur to them that perhaps the murder was simply a diversion from the true threats to an unstable English society. When Anthony Wood's group revealed the identity of the murderer in class, the students began to understand more clearly the complications that can be caused by the ineffective communication of all available evidence, as noted in the comments they made for the assessment portion of this project, discussed below.

However, we consider this project in no way to have been a failure. Because the students recognized that they learned important lessons about information, communication, and the careful use of evidence, we believe rather that it was a great success. Even though the students did not correctly identify the murderer, they did accomplish our goals of managing and judging the accuracy of available evidence, working as a team, piecing together an incomplete story, and practicing research skills to supplement gaps in knowledge. Often without realizing it, the students were following the correct leads, and during class discussions before the trial, they asked a number of insightful questions that may have helped them figure out the story had they pursued the answers more methodically as we suggested. Minor problems aside, the assessment revealed with certainty that the exercise accomplished our goals, was meaningful to the students, and is well worth repeating.

### Assessment of the Project

College and university accreditors recently have been placing heavy emphasis on outcomes-based assessment, and articles on appropriate assessment practices pervade modern higher education literature.<sup>12</sup> Even though Keller admits “[r]ole playing activities are hard to evaluate,”<sup>13</sup> we were determined to devise an assessment activity for this assignment that would prove either that our students learned what we intended to teach them and we achieved our desired goals, or that our pedagogical methodology was flawed and needed revision.

Fortunately, the assessment we performed at the conclusion of the *Fingerpost* mock trial demonstrated that our students made a significant advance in their awareness of the importance of reading the “signs.” We required the students to respond in writing to twelve questions about the project, making an attempt to cover all its aspects, from the preparation period through the mock trial. Following the advice of Drake and McBride, we asked the students to reflect upon their efforts to reason through all possible scenarios in the novel, and to present us with the results of their investigations<sup>14</sup> as well as their learning experiences during the project. The responses to the questionnaire, which all seventeen students completed, indicate that they not only achieved the major goals of the project, but that they clearly recognized that they had done so, in spite of failing to determine the identity of the murderer. One student, for example, commented, “With just one piece of the puzzle, each student’s knowledge was useless, but with the help of other people in our groups we had everything we needed in order to draw our conclusions.” Most of the students similarly observed that information, whether well or poorly communicated, affects not only their own endeavors in life but also, potentially, the course of history.

Students also reported learning important lessons about the difficulties associated with using limited sources of evidence, and they noted that sources are indeed varied and motivated in ways that make analysis and a final decision on exactly what happened in history a difficult and complicated enterprise. With the need to tease out evidence from disparate and often deceitful sources, there should be little surprise that the class as a whole learned some important lessons about historical method. “The biggest thing I learned is that we could be so wrong about so many things,” one participant remarked. This same student went on to say that “so much of history is taken from primary documents exactly like accounts such as Marco da Cola’s. When primary documents are used, their bias is impossible to ignore; however, they often give us information on previously unheard of topics and events. So they have to be used, but their information must be taken with a grain of salt.” The awareness



that history is either an inexact science or a creative art and that it is often dependent on scant and scattered evidence is an important early lesson for an undergraduate.

The assessment revealed only one persistent complaint about the project, which was that it would have been helpful had we provided some guidelines on the mechanics of conducting a mock trial, or “rules of court.” We did not specify, for example, if there had to be opening and closing statements, what type of questions would be allowed, when and how the opposing party could “object,” or when and how to call “witnesses.” Interestingly, when this issue was discussed in class, one student countered that too much specific direction might stifle creativity and that no more rules should be added to the project.

### **Suggestions for Enhancing this Project**

A few minor adjustments would contribute to further success with this exercise. As we determined that the project would probably have worked a little better with fewer students, optimally, no more than four on each team, we would either create different roles for additional students, repeat the exercise only if the class size is smaller, or perhaps devise a competition among teams in the class. Additionally, since some of the students reported that they delayed reading their assigned chapters, we would need to monitor this more carefully by assigning specific page ranges to read each week, requiring periodic summaries of their reading progress, and setting a minimum number of meetings for each group, to include recorded “minutes.”

Many of the students in this case study thought that the context Pears provided in the novel was sufficient for completing the assignment, thereby underestimating the value that a more sophisticated awareness of the period would have afforded. Most of the students did, however, acknowledge that some understanding of religious and political tension helped to better place their characters in the broader setting. To this end, several enhancements of preparatory study could be made. One tactic would be to require participants to provide written responses to short research questions before the main project commences, such as ones our students actually asked in class:

- What are some reasons that Marco da Cola, a young man from a seventeenth-century merchant family, would not be married to the daughter of a similarly wealthy family?
- What was the significance of Marco da Cola’s unusual odor?
- Why would the son of a merchant also be trained as a soldier and a doctor?
- How was Quakerism viewed by English society in seventeenth-century

England?

- Why might the presence of a foreigner near the King of England present such a threat to the government?
- How important was the implication of homosexuality?

The answers to questions such as these would prepare the participants a little more in the period and enhance their chances of making informed judgments as the project unfolded.

In classes built more completely around such a project, this type of study could be taken further. The project could be linked to a short or extended research paper on broader topics related to seventeenth-century Europe, focusing, for example, on political wrangling in post-Civil War England, church and state relations, tensions between Catholics and Protestants, or burgeoning scientific knowledge and the ethical issues surrounding animal and human research. In future versions of this project, we will stress the idea that the layers of information being communicated are often dependent in part on recognition drawn from such prior knowledge.

### Conclusion

Designing a mock trial in a college class based on Iain Pears' *An Instance of the Fingerpost* was an experimental and ambitious project that posed great challenges both to the instructors and to the students. The project was difficult to design and extremely time-consuming, and since we had never attempted anything quite like it, there was no guarantee that the students would come away from the lesson having learned anything that we had intended to teach them. When the project was assigned to them, the students felt somewhat daunted and worried that it seemed too complicated. They recognized early that it required sustained periods of concentration, cooperation, and trust in relative strangers. Even so, the project was unique enough that the students expressed for it a great deal of enthusiasm, which we were careful to maintain. Momentum could easily have waned without continuous positive anticipation and expectations of excellence from the instructors. In short, we were well aware that this project had the potential to be a colossal disaster, yet we considered that even an unfavorable outcome to the project could afford valuable lessons.

We gladly report that most of the anticipated goals we set for this endeavor were indeed met. This success came on several levels. The overall goals of the first-year seminar, to teach the analysis of information from varying perspectives and discuss these ideas with clarity and reason, were certainly achieved through the requirements of the project. At the course level, this project emphasized our themes of communicating effectively and using information judiciously. At the level of the assignment, our

students themselves reported learning important lessons about the complications and the misinterpretations associated with the ways that humans pass and hide information, as well as the challenges historians face when telling stories based upon such intelligence. Given a difficult assignment, each group made important, if somewhat erroneous, decisions about what pieces of information to use and what to ignore; however, we expected that first-year students with only a smattering of contextual knowledge would make such mistakes. We considered that, for this assignment, the process itself rather than its product was the main point of the exercise. Finally, we instructors learned that the value of thoughtful assessment goes beyond the evaluation of individual students' performance to the successes and failures of the course. The risks we took in creating this lesson turned out to be well worth the effort, as goals of the project were met in a way that the students found challenging and ultimately valuable.

## Notes

*The authors would like to thank the students of Dickinson College who were enrolled during the fall of 2007 in the first-year seminar, "Tell Me Why: The Role of Information in Society." Their unwavering enthusiasm for this project and their thoughtful and insightful commentary helped to make it such an enjoyable success.*

1. *An Instance of the Fingerpost* is a suspenseful mystery and the authors have made every attempt to avoid spoiling the plot for those who have not yet read the story. In discussing our project for this article, we have made mention of some of the novel's character descriptions, which some readers may not wish to know in advance.
2. Iain Pears, "Dramatis Personae," *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998): 691.
3. Ibid.
4. Dickinson College, "First Year Seminars," *Bulletin: Academic Years 2008-2009, 2009-2010*, <<http://www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/bulletin/First-Year-Seminars/>>.
5. Nancy Partner, "Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History," *Speculum* 61, no. 1 (January 1986): 90.
6. Kathryn N. McDaniel, "Four Elements of Successful Historical Role-Playing in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 33, no. 3 (May 2000): 357-358.
7. Frederick D. Drake and Lawrence W. McBride, "Reinvigorating the Teaching of History Through Alternative Assessment," *The History Teacher* 30, no. 2 (February 1997): 147.
8. Ian Dawson, "'Not the White Tights Again!' Role-play in History Teaching at Degree Level," *Teaching History* 14 (October 1989): 7.
9. Ian Luff, "'I've Been in the Reichstag:' Rethinking Roleplay," *Historical As-*

sociation 100 (August 2000): 8.

10. Ibid.

11. Clair Keller, "Role Playing and Simulation in History Classes," *The History Teacher* 8, no. 4 (August 1975): 575.

12. See, for example, various articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* such as "Crossing the Rubricon" by Carolyn Foster Segal (25 April 2008); "Making an Art Form of Assessment" by Burton Bollag (27 October 2006); and "The Legitimacy of Assessment" by Margaret A Miller (22 September 2006). Helpful books about assessment include: *Outcomes Assessment in Higher Education*, edited by Peter Hernon and Robert E. Dugan (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004); and *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution*, by Peggy Maki (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2004).

13. Keller, 580.

14. Drake and McBride, 147.

## Appendix I: Copy of the *Fingerpost* Assignment

### *An Instance of the Fingerpost* Mock Trial and Retelling of an Unfortunate Incident

This project is all about communicating with one another. You will each be assigned to read part of a murder mystery, and, as a group, attempt to find out the truth from various characters' points of view. Most of the characters are telling the story in half-truths. It will be your duty to discern:

- Who killed Dr. Grove and why?
- What was Marco da Cola doing in Oxford?
- What was Sarah Blundy's involvement in the murder?
- Why do we even care about Jack Prestcott?
- Why did Dr. Wallis involve himself in the story's events?
- How is the backdrop of the English Civil War relevant to the story?

For maximum impact, you must not read any further than you have been assigned! You should arrange to meet frequently to talk to each other about the story. To maximize your group's success on this project, each of you must pay careful attention to your assigned section and take notes while you read.

<p><b>Group 1 – Representative of Marco da Cola</b> <b>Participants:</b> JF, KK, AM, AR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Marco da Cola (reads da Cola's story)</li> <li>2) Da Cola's defense (reads da Cola's story)</li> <li>3) Da Cola's prosecutor (reads Wallis's story)</li> <li>4) Wallis's scribe (reads Prestcott's story)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Group 2 – Representative of Jack Prestcott</b> <b>Participants:</b> PC, AH, TR, DY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Jack Prestcott (reads Prestcott's story)</li> <li>2) Prestcott's defense (reads Prestcott's story)</li> <li>3) Prestcott's prosecutor (reads da Cola's story)</li> <li>4) Da Cola's scribe (reads Wallis's story)</li> </ol>
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<p><b>Group 3 – Representative of John Wallis</b>  <b>Participants:</b> SB, TJ, JM, NP</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) John Wallis (reads Wallis’s story)</li> <li>2) Wallis’s defense (reads Wallis’s story)</li> <li>3) Wallis’s prosecutor (reads Prestcott’s story)</li> <li>4) Prestcott’s scribe (reads da Cola’s story)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Group 4 – Representative of Anthony Wood</b>  <b>Participants:</b> BB, MB, AH2, SK, SR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Reads Wood’s story and reveals how much the jury got correct—and no more</li> <li>2) Reads and retells da Cola’s story</li> <li>3) Reads and retells Prestcott’s story</li> <li>4) Reads and retells Wallis’s story</li> <li>5) Reads Wood’s story and reveals the truth</li> </ol>
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**General instructions:**

As a group, you must decide which specific role in the trial each member will assume. Those of you in groups 1, 2, and 3 must work closely amongst yourselves to develop the questions to be asked of each witness. You may not ask questions of other group members before trial day.

The student who takes on the role of “scribe” in groups 1, 2, and 3 will take notes on the day that the case of the character whose chapter you are reading is presented, and you will serve on the jury.

Group 4 will slowly reveal Anthony Wood’s version of the events in this story, character by character. It will be most effective if you allow each person to tell one critical part of the story. One person in this group will serve as a note-taker when the jury presents its deliberations and will reveal how much information the jury discerned correctly.

Since each character reveals the story from his own point of view, each of you will know things that your groupmates will not. Each of you is responsible for a very close and careful reading of your part of the story. Take good notes!

If you mention another person in the story during your presentation, and that person has not been mentioned in class before, you must explain who that person is. Not all of the characters are mentioned by every other character.

Those of you who serve on the jury must meet while the trial is going on so that you will be prepared to present your conclusions on your scheduled day.

Each group will have 50 minutes to present its case. Be sure to prepare enough material to fill the time. The trial will run according to the following schedule:

- Day 1 (Monday, October 22) – Marco da Cola’s group will present its case.
- Day 2 (Wednesday, October 24) – Jack Prestcott’s group will present its case.
- Day 3 (Monday, October 29) – John Wallis’s group will present its case.
- Day 4 (Wednesday, October 31) – The jury will explain its conclusions.
- Day 5 (Friday, November 2) – Anthony Wood’s group will reveal how much the jury got correct and will explain the correct version of events.

***At the end of all the presentations, each of you will grade your groupmates on their participation in this project. Peer grading will influence your individual grades. Don’t let your team down!***

**Group 1 – Representative of Marco da Cola:**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Reading Assignment</b>	<b>Role</b>
	<b>Marco da Cola’s Story: Section 1 – A Question of Precedence</b>	<b>You are Marco da Cola.</b> The prosecution and defense will ask you questions about your role in the story, and you will be prepared to answer the questions as if you are da Cola.
	<b>Marco da Cola’s Story: Section 1 – A Question of Precedence</b>	<b>You are Marco da Cola’s defense.</b> You will ask da Cola questions that will help him present his story in the best possible way.
	<b>John Wallis’s Story Section 3 – The Character of Compliance</b>	<b>You are da Cola’s prosecutor.</b> You will ask da Cola questions that incriminate him.
	<b>Jack Prestcott’s Story Section 2 – The Great Trust</b>	<b>You are the group’s scribe.</b> You will take notes during when da Cola is on the witness stand. You will then serve on the jury.

**Marco da Cola’s presence in Oxford is suspect. Did he kill Dr. Grove?**

**In addition to the main plot questions, your group should address the following:**

- Da Cola’s presence in England
- Da Cola’s opinion of the English monarchy
- Da Cola’s behavior and other people’s reactions to him in light of the fact that he presents himself as an educated, rich, gentleman soldier who has dabbled in medicine
- Da Cola’s interest in the Blundys and his knowledge of the family, in particular his relationship with Sarah
- Da Cola’s medical knowledge
- Da Cola’s professional work with Richard Lower, including the development of their relationship, the reasons for its eventual demise, and Lower’s skill as an autopsy surgeon
- Da Cola’s interaction with Jack Prestcott
- Da Cola’s interaction with government operatives such as John Wallis and John Thurloe
- Da Cola’s interaction with Anthony Wood, including Wood’s behavior at Sarah’s trial
- Da Cola’s relationship and interaction with Dr. Grove

**Group 2 – Representative of Jack Prestcott**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Reading Assignment</b>	<b>Role</b>
	<b>Jack Prestcott’s Story: Section 2 – The Great Trust</b>	<b>You are Jack Prestcott.</b> The prosecution and defense will ask you questions about your role in the story, and you will be prepared to answer the questions as if you are Prestcott.
	<b>Jack Prestcott’s Story: Section 2 – The Great Trust</b>	<b>You are Jack Prestcott’s defense.</b> You will ask Prestcott questions that will help him present his story in the best possible way.
	<b>Marco da Cola’s Story: Section 1 – A Question of Precedence</b>	<b>You are Prestcott’s prosecutor.</b> You will ask Prestcott questions that incriminate him.
	<b>John Wallis’s Story Section 3 – The Character of Compliance</b>	<b>You are the group’s scribe.</b> You will take notes during when Prestcott is on the witness stand. You will then serve on the jury.

**Jack Prestcott is obsessed with restoring his dead father’s honor and thus recovering his inheritance. Will he go to any length, including murder, to regain respectability?**

**In addition to the main plot questions, your group should address the following:**

- The reasons Prestcott senior lost his money and estate
- Prestcott’s relationship with, impressions of, and interaction with Marco da Cola
- Prestcott’s relationship and deal-making with government dignitaries such as John Russell, John Wallis, and John Thurloe
- Prestcott’s relationship with the Blundys, in particular his knowledge of the Blundy family, his treatment of Sarah, and the various places where he met up with her
- Prestcott’s relationship and interaction with Dr. Grove and the suspicion that Prestcott might have killed him
- Prescott’s disregard for the law, his abhorrent behavior, and the ways in which he managed to escape punishment
- Prestcott’s visit to Sir William Compton
- Prestcott’s obsessive nature

### Group 3 – Representative of John Wallis

Student Name	Reading Assignment	Role
	<b>John Wallis’s Story Section 3 – The Character of Compliance</b>	<b>You are John Wallis.</b> The prosecution and defense will ask you questions about your role in the story, and you will be prepared to answer the questions as if you are Wallis.
	<b>John Wallis’s Story Section 3 – The Character of Compliance</b>	<b>You are John Wallis’s defense.</b> You will ask Wallis questions that will help him present his story in the best possible way.
	<b>Jack Prestcott’s Story: Section 2 – The Great Trust</b>	<b>You are Wallis’s prosecutor.</b> You will ask Wallis questions that incriminate him.
	<b>Marco da Cola’s Story: Section 1 – A Question of Precedence</b>	<b>You are the group’s scribe.</b> You will take notes during when Wallis is on the witness stand. You will then serve on the jury.

**John Wallis is obsessed with order and maintaining balance in the government. He will do anything to stop a traitor. How does he determine who the traitors are?**

**In addition to the main plot questions, your group should address the following:**

- Wallis’s involvement in the British government throughout the revolution and restoration, including his knowledge of traitorous acts against Cromwell and the king
- What Wallis thought Marco da Cola was doing in England
- Specific reasons for Wallis’s suspicions of da Cola, and what he discovered while he started spying on da Cola (including Matthew’s discoveries and impressions of da Cola)
- Wallis’s paranoia in regard to personal harm
- The letter Thurloe wanted Wallis to decipher and his involvement with secret government documents in general
- Wallis’s knowledge of the Blundys’ history, in particular, Ned Blundy
- Wallis’s relationship with Jack Prescott and Wallis’s knowledge of the Prestcott family history
- The nature of the relationship between Lower and da Cola
- Wallis’ knowledge of the murder case against Sarah Blundy
- Wallis’ interactions with Cola



**Group 4 – Representative of Anthony Wood**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Reading Assignment</b>	<b>Role</b>
	<b>Anthony Wood’s Story Section 4 – An Instance of the Fingerpost</b>	You will take notes during the jury proceedings and, when they have finished, reveal how much information they got correct, but nothing further.
	<b>Marco da Cola’s Story: Section 1 – A Question of Precedence</b>	<b>You represent Marco da Cola.</b> You will reveal his “real” story. Your groupmates must help you show the discrepancies in your story.
	<b>Jack Prestcott’s Story: Section 2 – The Great Trust</b>	<b>You represent Jack Prestcott.</b> You will reveal his “real” story. Your groupmates must help you show the discrepancies in your story.
	<b>John Wallis’s Story Section 3 – The Character of Compliance</b>	<b>You represent John Wallis.</b> You will reveal his “real” story. Your groupmates must help you show the discrepancies in your story.
	<b>Anthony Wood’s Story Section 4 – An Instance of the Fingerpost</b>	<b>You represent Anthony Wood.</b> You will fill in any gaps left by the other groups, and explain who you are and your own involvement in the story.

**Anthony Wood is a quiet bibliophile who wants only to study history and accurately record events as they happen. What does Wood really know about the murder of Dr. Grove?**

**In addition to the main plot questions, your group should address the following:**

- The significance of the title of this book
- Richard Lower’s account of his professional relationship with da Cola
- Wood’s relationship with Sarah Blundy and her family
- Wood’s impressions of and interactions with John Wallis
- The package that Ned Blundy left his daughter and the fate of those documents
- The real reasons that Sarah was executed
- Prestcott’s knowledge of the Blundys
- Prestcott’s current position in life
- The story of Sir James Prestcott
- Wood’s impressions of and interaction with Marco da Cola
- Da Cola’s care of Sarah’s mother and da Cola’s behavior in that role
- Wood’s interaction with Dr. Grove
- What Prestcott gave Wood and what Wood found among da Cola’s belongings
- The autopsy of Sarah Blundy
- Marco da Cola’s identity and his actions in Whitehall
- The letter that Dr. Wallis intercepted from da Cola

## Appendix II: Copy of the *Fingerpost* Assessment

### **Mock Trial Assessment** ***An Instance of the Fingerpost***

1. Explain what you think was the purpose of this project.
2. Do you think that your professors prepared you well enough for this project? Why or why not?
3. What was the most difficult part of this project? What was the easiest part?
4. What methods did you use to communicate with your group? How often did you communicate and what did you discuss?
5. What did your group do to plan your strategy for your presentation? How did you decide what points to bring out in the trial?
6. What did each member of your team do to make your presentation successful?
7. In what ways was the history lecture prior to the trial helpful or not helpful?
8. What, if anything, was necessary to know about English history in order to complete this project successfully?
9. What did you learn about seventeenth-century European history from this project?
10. What did you learn about history in general from this project?
11. What did you learn about communication from this project?
12. What else did you learn from this project?