

SEA Common Reading Initiative 2023 – Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*

Compile a small selection of colonial American letters (or other seventeenth-century texts, such as a poem by Anne Bradstreet). Give each student or group of students a letter, and ask them to:

1. “Translate” the letters into modern English
2. Compare and contrast the content of the letter to a specific passage or scene in *A Mercy*. What about the language, form, and/or content of the text reminds you of *A Mercy*, and why? What are some ways that this text and *A Mercy* differ?

Sample documents freely available online:

[Thomas Mathew, 1705, \*The Beginning, Progress and Conclusion of Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia\*](#)

[Virginia, ND, \*Opinions of Learned Councils, 1681–1722\*](#)

[John Pervis, \*A Complete Collection of all the Laws of Virginia now in Force, Carefully Copied from the Assembly Records, March 23 1661/62–November 10, 1682.\*](#)

[Anne Bradstreet, “The Author to Her Book”](#)

[Anne Bradstreet, “To My Dear Loving Husband”](#)

This assignment was adapted from Chiara Cillarai, “‘One Question Is Who is Responsible? Another Is Can You Read?’ Reading and Responding to Seventeenth-Century Texts Using Toni Morrison’s Historical Reconstructions in ‘A Mercy,’” *Early American Literature* 48, no. 1 (2013): 178–83.