

# Circulating Literacy

WRITING INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN PERIODICALS, 1880–1910

Alicia Brazeau

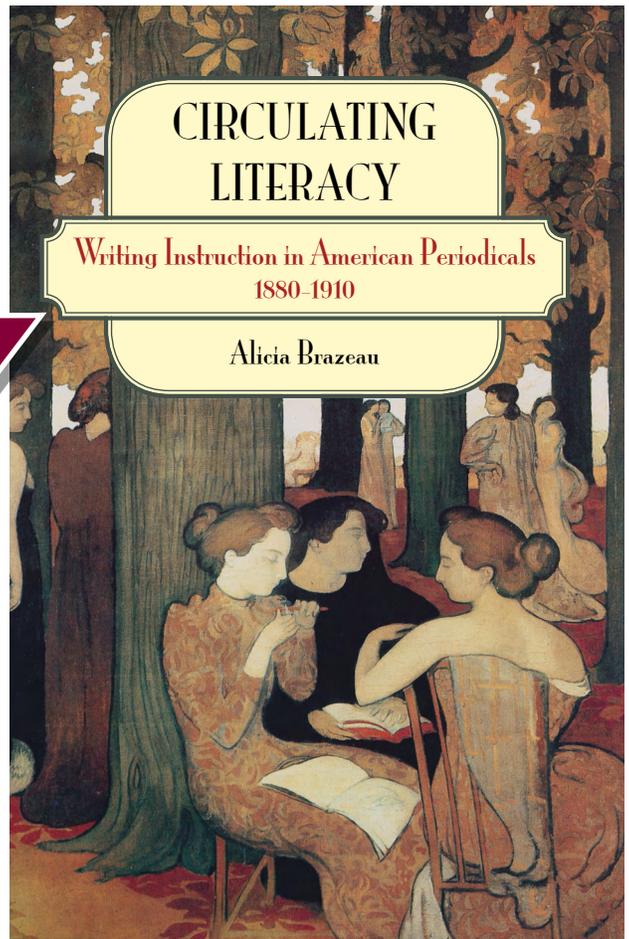
“*Circulating Literacy* examines how readers of periodicals near the beginning of the twentieth century engaged in literacy learning. Close readings and analysis of five popular women’s and farm journals provide a great deal of primary research. The field of composition will benefit from continuing to examine how literacy education occurs in ‘extracurricular’ spaces, and this book successfully makes the case that we should be paying more attention to the ways voices such as editors (and readers) impacted literacy learning.”—**Charlotte Hogg**, author, *From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community*

“Brazeau presents fresh material, filling in gaps about the literacy practices of turn-of-the-century women. As a historian, I find it interesting and relevant and believe others will as well.”

—**Lisa S. Mastrangelo**, author, *Writing a Progressive Past: Women Teaching and Writing in the Progressive Era*

## Exploring the role of popular magazines in promoting literacy in America

Near the dawn of the twentieth century, more than a million Americans had subscriptions to popular magazines, and many who did not subscribe read the periodicals. Far more men and women were learning advanced literacy through reading these magazines than by attending college. Yet this form of popular literacy has been relatively ignored by scholars, who have focused mainly on academic institutions and formal educational experiences. In *Circulating Literacy: Writing Instruction in American Periodicals, 1880–1910*, author Alicia Brazeau concentrates on the format, circulation, and function of popular and influential periodicals published between 1880 and 1910, including the farming magazines *Michigan Farmer*, *Ohio Farmer*, and *Maine Farmer*, which catered to rural residents, and two women’s magazines, *Harper’s Bazar* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, that catered to very different populations of women. Brazeau speaks to, and connects, the important topics of rural studies, gender, professionalization, and literacy sponsorship and identity, arguing for the value of the study of periodicals as literacy education tools.



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**Alicia Brazeau** is the director of the writing center at the College of Wooster. Her writing has appeared in *College English* and *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*.

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**List of Illustrations****Introduction: Literacy by Subscription**

Presents the history of periodicals in connection with established histories of literacy and composition, arguing for the value of periodicals as educational tools, and lays the theoretical foundation for the following chapters.

**1. Literacy Identities: Defining Magazine Writers**

Demonstrates how this collection of magazines shares a common strategy of constructing literacy identities, and considers how editors connect their illustration of the social and professional identity of the audience with a set of life-style-specific reading and writing practices.

**2. Buying and Selling Literacy: The *Ladies' Home Journal***

Outlines how the *Journal* and its editor, Edward Bok, cast women as consumers and sellers of literacy, offering readers a departmentalized vision of literacy identity.

**3. Joining the Club: Clubwomen, Magazine Readers, and Scholars**

Explores how the editors of *Harper's Bazar* urged readers to adopt habits of reading and writing that emphasize communal relationships among women, and prompt readers to assume the role of a mentor or contributor to a women's club community.

**4. Special Invitation to Write: Magazine Readers as Contributors**

Farm journals were likewise preoccupied with the value of literacy as a tool for shaping a community; Brazeau examines the imperative articulated by editors for farmers to contribute articles to the press so that they could participate in the formation of agriculture as a scientific profession.

**Conclusion: Subscribing to a Professional Writing Community**

Traces readers' responses to the publications, demonstrating how these magazines became sites for self-sponsoring professional writing practices.

**Notes****Works Cited****Index**