

Call for Papers
Writing and Social Justices: *Praxis*, Aesthetics, Pedagogies
Special Issue, *University of Toronto Quarterly*

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Reflecting on her late friend and colleague Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison once surmised that “[t]here was no division in her mind between optimism and ruthless vigilance; between aesthetic obligation and the aesthetics of obligation. . . . Any hint that art was over there and politics was over here would break her up into tears of laughter, or elicit a look so withering it made silence the only intelligent response” (Preface, *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions*, ix). In this vision, political engagement, teaching, and aesthetic innovation work symbiotically, mutually enhancing as they weave the labour of writing with the labour of building just communities and societies. Morrison’s insight captures the spirit of burgeoning critical and pedagogical interest in literature and social justice, broadly conceived as encompassing environmental, racial, gender, class, and multispecies justice. From courses on social and environmental activist literatures, to monographs and articles, to social justice pedagogies in the literature and writing studies classroom, we are witnessing a flowering of literary-cultural scholarship invested in narrative’s power to inspire practical, concrete action for progressive social change. For many teachers, students, and scholars, literature’s capacity to spark *praxis*—to attune us to the links between social and environmental justice, speak truth to power, rehumanize in the face of dehumanization, make space for difficult conversations, and inspire critical hope in the face of catastrophe—offers a driving purpose for humanities scholarship in an era of climate crisis, global warfare, and neoliberal cutbacks. As Caroline Levine suggests in *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis*, far from apolitical, analyzing aesthetic forms and structures gives humanists an existential responsibility to take up “the practical work of designing, building, and maintaining collective life” (1). Yet claiming literature as a space for social justice work has also been lambasted as misguided soapboxing that risks distracting the university from core missions like knowledge production and teaching.

The sheer variety of justice-focused literature and writing scholarship in recent years suggests that the time is ripe to gather for a robust conversation about the methodologies, commitments, and teaching practices animating such work. This special issue of *University of Toronto Quarterly* invites social justice-focused research across the literary humanities and its (inter)disciplines, including literature; rhetoric and composition studies; creative writing and artistic practice; film, game, performance, and cultural studies; gender, sexuality, disability, and critical race studies; education; environmental humanities; and Indigenous studies. We aim to spark rigorous interdisciplinary dialogue about the overlaps, intersections, confluences, and generative dialectics linking literature, writing, pedagogy, social movements, and socio-environmental justice. We welcome wide-ranging inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives, including those that centre BIPOC, decolonial, queer, and community-engaged methodologies, and those that blend scholarly and creative practice.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Literature and writer-activism within and about social movements, including studies of specific authors and texts and texts connecting distinct movements and socio-environmental justice issues
- Literature as a point of connection and tension between different forms of justice, including social, environmental, decolonial, racial, gender, class, transnational, transitional, and other intersectional justices
- Relationships between literary/aesthetic form and social justice/political activism
- Literary and cultural texts that reimagine the “social” in social justice (e.g. multispecies justice, the rights of nature, and other frameworks that draw together justice for human and more-than-human species)
- “Justice” for whom? Contested definitions of justice across geographic, political, and colonial boundaries
- Limits and failures of literary justice; texts that create spaces for alternative justice(s)
- Representations and misrepresentations of writer-activists and activist icons in politics, media, and literature
- Socio-environmental justice through public-facing and community-engaged literature and writing studies scholarship
- Community writing *praxes*
- Manifestos and other diverse forms of knowledge production
- Social justice literatures and world-building futurisms (e.g. Black, Indigenous, feminist, queer, trans, and Palestinian futurisms)
- Debates and controversies around social justice in literature classrooms (e.g. attacks on DEI and gender inclusivity, book-banning, debates surrounding classroom politicization)
- The relationship (and tensions) between justice, resurgence, and survivance
- Social Justice Education in Literature, English Language Arts, and Rhetoric & Composition Studies

Scholars and community-engaged practitioners from all fields are invited to submit a 350–400-word abstract with a 100–150-word bio and CV by 5 December 2025 to Julia Boyd (ja.boyd@mail.utoronto.ca) and Megan Janssen-McBride (megan.janssen@utoronto.ca). When submitting your abstract, please indicate whether you plan your submission to be a conventional article or a more experimental form. If you are working in a more experimental form, please indicate your proposed length and format so that we can take your project vision into account when making decisions.

The co-editors will review abstracts and notify authors of decisions by January 2026. Articles will be due 31 May 2026 and should follow MLA format and range in length from 6,000–8,000 words, unless otherwise decided in consultation with the editorial team. The special issue will be published in late 2028 by *University of Toronto Quarterly*.

For an online copy of the CFP and more details about *UTQ*, [please see the journal website](#).