A Serious Proposal to the Ladies
Mary Astell

Possible Applications:
Philosophy of Mind (cognition, will, rationality, prejudice)
Social philosophy (women’s equality, custom, prejudice, vice)

Complimentary Texts/Resources:
Alice Sowaal, “Mary Astell’s Serious Proposal: Mind, Method and Custom”
Sowaal explicate’s Astell’s view of cognition in order to better explicate and understand her position on the causes and remedies for women’s inequality.
SEP article on Astell:
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/astell/
Women-philosophers.com on Astell:
http://www.women-philosophers.com/Mary-Astell.html

Editions:
Most easily available version is in Atherton’s Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period:
http://www.amazon.com/Women-Philosophers-Early-Modern-Period/dp/0872202593/
But there are complete versions available. Patricia Springborg is the editor of the commonly-used editions:
http://catalog.library.georgetown.edu/record=b2130592~S4
http://catalog.library.georgetown.edu/record=b2072189~S4

Thesis:
Astell argues that women are not defective by nature, that is, that they are just as capable as men of understanding the world and (thereby) comporting themselves correctly in it. Only by removing themselves from society (in part I) or by developing basic knowledge of the world and God (in part II) can women free themselves of the pernicious prejudices of custom that take them to be incapable of learning (or virtue).

Key Definitions:
understanding: the faculty of the mind which seeks/ascertains truth, via its acquisition and inspection of its ideas
will: the faculty of the mind which seeks the good (i.e., God’s will), and precipitates (voluntary) action
**prejudice**: an opinion or belief that is held without rational consideration, fomented by education, authority or (usually) custom

**ignorance/vice**: vice is the failure of the will to will regularly. ignorance is the failure of the will to grasp the truth (and thereby fail to properly regulate the will)

*Summary:*

*Class Activities:*