

"A Poem has a Life before it Gets into my Anthology?": Manuscript Editing and Problem-Based Learning: Instructor Guide

Title

"A Poem has a Life before it Gets into my Anthology?": Manuscript Editing and Problem-Based Learning

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Discipline

English

Target Audience

Intermediate, majors

Keywords

Critical thinking, English, literature, manuscript editing



Length of Time/Staging

Approximately 1 week (two to three class sessions) within a 14 week semester, near the beginning of the semester.

Abstract

Where does the poem you read in an anthology originate? Is the copy in your anthology a good copy of that original? You may not consider such questions. However, thinking about these things can help you make an intellectual and emotional connection with writers and with the poetry you read, particularly those writers and works in the age before computers or typewriters. The answers to such questions can help you better connect with the writer's world. Technology can actually help in this process. Specifically, when you work in groups to transcribe versions of a high-quality photographic image of a manuscript "fair copy" of a poem, you get a sense of the technology of the age in which 19th century poets worked and the tools they used. Rather than a computer or a text messenger system, writers worked with pen and ink and on paper; both of which are very different from their 21st century counterparts. Moreover, comparing the transcriptions from the various groups can give you a sense of some of the problems printers encountered when typesetting author's drafts, even a "fair copy." Transcribing a poem from a high-resolution image will allow you to enter the 19th century, at least for a few hours. Conducting research into the writer, the writer's life, and the essays written about the writer will enable you to practice research skills.

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Format of Delivery

A small to medium-size class of about 12-40 students works best for this problem. The students should be interested in literature: English majors or minors, although motivated non-majors/minors might also profit from the exercise. The problem works very well as an introduction to problem-based learning. The following is a procedure for implementation for one week of classes. I designed the below "Format of Delivery" for three 50-minute class sessions. However, it can easily be adjusted for class sessions of other durations.

Introduction:

The instructor should introduce the subject by asking the students to consider the following "real-life" situation: "Have you ever had someone forward an e-mail that you wrote to someone else or to a group of people? Has the forwarded message ever been changed, either by mistake or intentionally? Has someone decided that the original message might be more funny, more informative, or more provocative if words and phrases were added or taken away? How did you or would you react to such a situation?" After the students have had a chance to respond to the opening questions, the instructor should let the class know that essentially each work in the



students' anthology goes through a similar process. Contemporary editors make sure they go back to the source to check for errors or changes, either intentional or not, before publishing the final product in the anthology. The following PBL exercise allows students to go back to a literary source to produce a publishable version of a poem. In this case, the original source is not an e-mail, computer file, or even a typed copy of a work. In this case, the original is a manuscript copy of a poem written in the 19th century, so the exercise will allow students to enter, at least for a few hours, another world by using technology and group learning to better develop an appreciation for a world, a writer, and a work of literature produced long before the technologies we use today could even have been imagined.

1. The instructor should take 20 minutes to offer instructions and to distribute and read over with the students the "Problem Statement," "Guide to the Problem," "Student Learning Objectives," and the "Student Resources." The instructor should explain to students that they would benefit from meeting outside of class and would also benefit from assigning individuals within groups responsibility for completing components of the assignment. The instructor should show students how to manipulate the image, using contrast and image enlargement tools easily accessible on word processing programs. The instructor should also distribute the grading criteria for the assignment. Finally, the instructor should demonstrate how to access the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary in order to help students decipher more difficult words; the OED contains an advanced search option which enable users to search with only partial words. The OED requires a subscription. If your institution does not have a subscription to the OED, another online dictionary should prove satisfactory.
2. The instructor should then assign students into teams with three to five members for each team. There should be at least three teams. The instructor should allow students at least 10 minutes to establish an organizational structure, contact information, and a meeting time outside of class.
3. The teams should then begin transcribing the poem. Even though each team member may have access to a computer, each team should only work with one screen, in order to focus the group's attention on working together to decipher the manuscript. The instructor should emphasize that the groups should transcribe the easier parts of the manuscript first, leaving difficult passages/words for later. The groups should also be instructed to complete a working draft before the next class meeting. The working draft should include a complete transcription of the poem, including the difficult-to-decipher words/passages; a transcription of the author's name; and a list of words, references, and allusions that the group decides would help to understand the poem.
4. At the start of the next class meeting, the instructor should demonstrate how to access the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, the MLA Bibliography, and the Times [of London] Digital Archive. These databases require a subscription. If your institution does not have a subscription, substitute databases should be available. WARNING: Do not use Wikipedia or any other non-peer-reviewed reference source.

The groups should then continue work on the poem, with the goal of presenting fully transcribed and annotated versions of the poem for the next class session. The other worksheets associated with the assignment will also be due at the start of the next class meeting. The annotations should include a brief 50-75 word summary of the author's

biography presented in the DNB. The instructor should inform the students that they should meet outside of class in order to finish the project.

5. At the start of the next class each group will present to the class their team's version of the poem, complete with notes. During the presentation, the other teams should note the variations between their group's transcription and the other teams' transcriptions. The instructor should then distribute to each team and present to the class the published version of the poem. The instructor should then lead a class discussion of the issues addressed below:
 - a. How did the transcription change the way you view the poems and other works in your text?
 - b. What aspects of the assignment did you find frustrating?
 - c. What were the most rewarding aspects of the assignment?
 - d. Having annotated the poem, what would you say to students opening your anthology for the first time and reading notes? Focus on students who may not understand why notes and annotations are important.
 - e. In what ways does transcribing a "fair copy" in manuscript help you to engage with the writer and the age/culture that produced the writer?

Student Learning Objectives

1. Help students explore how a text of a work of literature comes to their anthologies.
2. Help students to explore some of the potential problems that might change the text from its original version.
3. Help students explore the role of editors in the (re)creation of the original text for an anthology.
4. Help students explore how to create notes/annotations to help explain parts of the work for readers.
5. Help students explore valid sources for notes/annotations and what constitutes a valid source.
6. Help students explore how notes/annotations change a reader's relationship with a text.
7. Help students explore the role of printers/publishers in the creation of copies of a literary work.
8. Help students explore the process of bringing a text to the page before the computer age.
9. Help students achieve a sense of intimacy with a literary work.
10. Help students achieve a personal connection with the writer.

Student Resources

The poem image is in the problem folder.

Altick, R. "The spirit of scholarship." *The Art of Literary Research*. New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 22-60.

Bowers, F. "Practical texts and definitive editions." *Essays in Bibliography and Textual Editing*. Charlottesville, Virginia: The Bibliographical Society of The University of Virginia. 412-439.

Greg, W. (1966). "What is bibliography?" *The Collected Papers of Sir Walter Greg*. Ed. by J.C. Maxwell. Oxford, United Kingdom: Clarendon Press. 75-89.



- Greetham, D.C. (1994). "Editing the text: Scholarly editing." *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*. New York, New York: Garland Publishing. 347-372.
- McGann, J. (1991). "Texts and textualities." *The Textual Condition*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 3-16.
- Reiman, D. (1987). "The four ages of editing and the English romantics." *Romantic Texts and Contexts*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press. 85-108.
- Small, I. (1991). "The editor as annotator as ideal reader." *The Theory and Practice of Text-Editing*. Ed. by Ian Small and Marcus Walsh. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 186-209.
- Tanselle, T. "Texts of documents and texts of works." *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing*. Charlottesville, Virginia: The Bibliographical Society of The University of Virginia. 3-23.

Instructor Resources

The answers to the above problem contain both objective and subjective answers. The transcription requires an objective response. There is a correct text and a correct transcription. Although students may offer creative responses to the manuscript, responses that might make an interesting poem, it is important to stress that the students must transcribe the poem as written and not change the poem. However, what the students choose to annotate, whether words or references, is very subjective; they must justify their choices. They need to explain why the information they choose to annotate will help readers better understand the poem. At the same time, the students must offer accurate notes and annotations. Therefore, the instructor should encourage students to explain and to justify their ideas, using the scholarly sources listed above as a basis for their choice.

Glossary of terms:

Scholarly Edition

A definitive text produced by examining versions of the text at various stages of the composition/publication process.

Fair Copy

A copy of a text, written in a clear and easy-to-read hand.

Foul Papers

Material previous to the fair copy, including but not limited to the author's notes and various less-easy-to-read copies.

Proof

Stages in the printed form of a text submitted to the author (and others) in order to make corrections and to prepare an error-free copy for publication. The below are simply stages in this process: Author's Proof, Galley Proof, Press Proof, Revise, Press Revise, Author's Revise.



Author's Teaching Notes

1. On the first day of the problem assignment, I assigned students to four groups. As a class, we had discussed PBL and group dynamics.
2. Students spent the first 10-15 minutes establishing the organizational structure of their teams and establishing ground rules for the completion and submission of portions of the assignment. Because the problem involves meeting outside of class time as well as during class, students coordinated their schedules and exchanged contact information.
3. Students spent a portion of three class periods working on the problem. I was available during these meetings to help offer advice or the guide students if problems arose. I also asked for student feedback on meetings outside of class, paying particular attention to group dynamics as they functioned outside of the supervised environment as compared to within the supervised environment. We made a list of problems/issues, and as a class, we developed solutions for each of the problems/issues.
4. At the conclusion of the assignment, students presented their transcriptions and notes/annotations. The sessions were student-driven and student-centered, although I was available to facilitate the sessions and to help solve problems if they should arise.
5. After the groups submitted their completed problems and worksheets, we discussed the process in the class. The students found PBL groups helpful to the learning process and expressed interest in learning more about PBL.
6. Students also found a discussion of the differences in the transcriptions particularly helpful. Prior to the discussions, I shared with the class the transcription offered in the "Solution Notes." We talked about how editorial choices change the way students interact with texts and change the meaning of texts.
7. We also discussed the dynamics of working with a manuscript as opposed to a copy of a poem in an anthology and how the manuscript creates an intimacy between the reader and the writer.

Assessment Strategies

1. The assignment will receive a single grade. All team members should receive the same grade on the assignment.
2. All students should participate in the discussions and presentations. Instructors should actively solicit views from students who do not initially participate. However, participation, for my classes, is a separate assessment. Therefore, it should not constitute a component in the current assignment.
3. Worksheet one has three parts and should comprise 50% of the grade for the assignment. Each of the three parts should receive a separate grade. The grade for part 1 (25% of the final grade) should be based on the accuracy of the transcription. Because it is unlikely that any group will transcribe the manuscript with complete accuracy, the instructor should exercise a certain leniency in assessing the transcription. The grade for part 2 (15% of the final grade) should be based on the accuracy of the notes. Instructors should consider the choices students made regarding what to note/annotate only inasmuch as they are well reasoned choices. The grade for part 3 (10% of the final assessment) should be based on the accuracy and readability of the summary of Mitford's life.

4. The second worksheet should comprise 40% of the grade for the assignment. Instructors should base their assessment on the the quality of the teams' responses to the questions: Do the answers respond to the questions in a thorough way? Do the answers reflect critical thinking?
5. The third worksheet should comprise 10% of the final grade. Instructors should consider the adherence to MLA standards on the bibliography.

Solution Notes

I offer below a transcription with sample notes. As indicated above, students should feel free to choose what and how to note/annotate the poem. However, the notes, annotations, and transcriptions must be accurate.

Sonnet

Written at Donnington Castle, near Newbury, said to have been the latest residence of Chaucer, & celebrated for its resistance to the Parliamentary Army during the Civil Wars.

Oh for some gentle spirit to surround
 With clinging ivy, thy high-seated towers
 Fair Donnington, & wipe from Chaucer's bowers
 The last rude touch of war! All sight all sound
 Of the old strife boon Nature from the ground
 Hath banished. Here the trench no longer lours,
 But like a bosky dell, begirt with flowers
 And garlanded with May, sinks dimpling sound,
 A very spot for youthful lover's dreams
 In the prime hour. Grisildis' mournful lay,
 The half-told tale* would sound still sweeter here ____
 Oh for some hand to hide with ivy-spray
 War's savages, & chase the jarring themes
 Of King & State, Roundhead & Cavalier.
 M.M. Mitford

*"Or call up him who left half told

The story of Cambuscan bold."

Milton of Chaucer II P {<illegible>}

Vocabulary Notes

Strife: Contention; dispute; can also be read as "the act of striving or strong effort" (1601-1827; rarer).



Boon: A prayer or the act of praying; a request made to another human being.

Lours: To frown or scowl; to be depressed or mournful.

Bosky: Covered with brushes/driftwood; also has a double meaning of "tipsy" (1730-1843);.

Begirt: To surround or enclose.

May: (As used in Chaucer's time) 1. a virgin girl, 2. vitality, exuberance, and optimism associated with the start of summer. In a letter dated July 16, 1815, Mitford says of Donnington, "its romantic hill literally garlanded with the May-bushes" (239).

Sound: A deep sleep; to be fast asleep.

Griselda: A character in Chaucer's "The Clerk's Tale." In the tale, Griselda is tested repeatedly by her husband, the marquis, for unknown reasons. After believing her children to be murdered and her marriage annulled, Griselda learns from the marquis that all is a test, and is restored happily to her husband.

Lay: A short lyric or poem meant to be sung; alternately, a lair or lodging.

Jarring: Conflicting or clashing.

Roundhead: A member or adherent of the Parliamentary party during the Civil Wars so called from their custom of wearing the hair close cut.

Cavalier: name given to those who fought on the side of Charles I in the war between him and the Parliament; a 17th c. Royalist.

Cambuscan: refers to the character in Chaucer's unfinished "The Squire's Tale," a story of a Tartar King, Cambuscan, and his three children.

Historical Notes

Geoffrey Chaucer. The poet Geoffrey Chaucer (~1340-1400), best known for his unfinished lengthy work, "The Canterbury Tales." Of Chaucer, Mitford says, in a letter of July 6, 1815, "My admiration for him is very ardent. His poetry seems to me so healthy, so vigorous, so much in the thought and so little in the expression" (239.) It may be important to note that in this poem, Mitford is referencing a literary figure who lived in the 14th century, a war of the 17th century, and her contemporary experience of the 19th century.

Donnington Castle. The castle, located in the south of England, was purchased by Chaucer's son Thomas in 1415 as a dowry for his daughter; however, whether or not Chaucer actually lived in the castle is conjecture. Plenty of evidence exists to suggest that he may have spent some time in that area, but no actual solid proof (such as a recorded purchase or endowment) have survived. By the 19th century, the castle had become romanticized as Chaucer's final home, despite the fact that he died several years before records show his son purchased the castle. Mitford herself acknowledged believing it to be Chaucer's residence in a letter to Sir William Elford on July 6, 1815: "Since I wrote to you, I have been to see Donnington castle, the classic ground where Chaucer certainly resided and perhaps wrote some of those exquisite tales" (239). In *Recollections on a Literary Life*, Mitford confirms this, saying, "It is said upon evidence which appears incontestable that the father of English poetry, almost of the English language, Geoffrey Chaucer, once gazed from this fair hill and inhabited these massive towers" (497).

The Civil Wars (1642-1651). A series of wars fought in the 17th century between the English Parliament and their King, Charles I. Donnington Castle was seized by the King's armies and successfully held off siege for most of the war, guarding major roadways on the way to London. In *Reflections of a Literary Life*, Mitford describes the ruins she encountered at Donnington: "Situate[d] on an abrupt and loft eminence, this fortress of which nothing now remains but two towers on either side of an arched gateway, and a beautiful hall immediately behind the entrance was of considerable importance as commanding the main roads between London and the west frequently traversed by the Parliamentarians, and the road between Oxford and Wallingford, the Royal strongholds" (496).

Mitford's Footnote. Like Mitford, Milton refers to Chaucer in this line from *Il Penseroso*, written in 1645, and largely viewed as the companion piece to *L'Allegro* (1645).