

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



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Introduction

For this project, you will be divided into learning teams. First, each team will receive a copy of the same poem. Second, each team will work through the steps listed below. These group projects give you the opportunity not only to transcribe a manuscript poem but also to enter the world of early 19th century writing and publishing. At that time, as you can imagine, writers did not have access to the technology we have today. They could not simply write and revise a poem on their computers and then e-mail that version, along with any notes, to their publisher. Rather, a writer worked not just with pen and ink on paper, but had to re-work manuscripts from notes and other material in order to produce an error-free, "fair copy," of the finished work. The various notes on which the author draws are called "foul papers," and the work in progress is called a "draft." Once writers finished a "fair copy" of a poem or group of poems/stories/a book, they would send the manuscript to their publisher, who would transcribe it and have it printed. The printed version, called a "proof" would be sent back to the author for any corrections or revisions. Essentially, your group will prepare a proof copy of the poem. The groups will also prepare notes for the poem's more difficult words or obscure references. Your group will also write up a short 50-75 word biography of the author, summarizing the entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Other online databases, such as the Oxford English Dictionary and the Times [of London] Digital Archive will help you prepare your notes. Transcribing the poem will also help you to practice and to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and research skills. You should use your judgment, informed by your research, in order to develop a comprehensive and well-informed answer. You should be ready to learn from the process and from each other.

You will be working in groups in order to respond to the problem. As a group, your task is to respond to all parts of the problem and to utilize the scholarly sources listed below to help develop your answers. Although you may use internet sources to direct and focus your research, you should not rely on the information you find on the web, unless you can also verify it through a scholarly source. Because the problem asks that you develop your answers not only to arrive at a conclusion but also to learn from the process, your group should not attempt to contact scholars, faculty, or other students (outside of your group) for answers to the problem; such contact will have a deleterious effect on your grade. Also, although there is a published version of the poem, do not attempt to find it on the web. Try to decipher the author's handwriting as a group without outside assistance

Part 1 and part 2 offer specific guidelines for how to complete the assignment and what you should turn in after you've finished the assignment.



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Part 1

1. Transcribe the manuscript poem (insert finished transcription below):
2. Write notes for difficult words and for references/allusions in the text (insert finished notes below):
3. Write a brief summary of the author's life (insert finished biography below):
4. Combine the product of steps 1-3 into a single document that includes the transcription, notes, and biography.
5. Answer the following questions about the exercise (each of the five answers should be about 75-100 words):
 1. How did the transcription change the way you view the poems and other works in your text?
 2. What aspects of the assignment did you find frustrating?
 3. What were the most rewarding aspects of the assignment?
 4. 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.
 5. In what ways does transcribing a "fair copy" in manuscript form help you to engage with the writer and the age/culture that produced the writer?



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Part 2

Your group will submit a cover sheet, two worksheets, and a works cited page at the conclusion of the assignment (templates available below):

1. The cover sheet should provide a facsimile of the "fair copy" of the poem, the title of your presentation, and the names of the group members who should receive credit for the assignment.
2. The first worksheet will offer your group's transcription of the poem, including notes, and a biography of the author.
3. The second worksheet will offer a works cited page, listing the sources for your notes and biography.

NOTE: Citations must adhere to MLA guidelines. Please supply both a hardcopy and electronic version of your group response. The electronic version should be saved in Microsoft Word on either a disk or CD.

A note regarding group work: Each member of your group, listed on the cover sheet, will receive the same grade for the assignment. If a member of the group does not participate, please, notify me as soon as possible and do not include that group member's name on the project. Group members whose names do not appear on the assignment will not receive credit for the assignment and must make an appointment to speak with me to explain reasons for not participating. If I determine the lack of participation occurred for an unexcused reason, then that individual or those individuals will receive no points for the assignment. If I determine that the reason(s) for not participating are excused, then the student will be required to complete an additional and different assignment in order to receive credit. Excused absences are those for medical reasons (with verification) or for reasons covered in the Emergency Medical Leave Act.



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Worksheet 1

Section A: Transcription (Insert transcription below)

Section B: Notes (Offer notes and annotations that will help the reader understand the poem.)



Section C: Biography (Offer a fifty-word summary of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography of Mary Russell Mitford)



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Worksheet 2

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 form help you to engage with the writer and the age/culture that produced the writer?



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Worksheet 3

Works Cited

