

# Vestpocket Shakespeare Project

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Part I. Archival Research Reports (150 pts)— Due Date  
Part II. Miniature Shakespeare Archival Project (150 pts)— Due Date  
This assignment is 30% of your final grade.

<https://vestpocketshakespeare.wordpress.com/>

## Assignment Description

Our class will set out to discover the secrets of a rare Shakespearean gem in ISU's Special Collections Library: the Vestpocket Shakespeare, the complete works in 40 miniature volumes. As a class, we will use the tools of "book history" to find out all that we can about this unique collection. Students will develop research questions and find answers through research tasks and sources (consult peer-reviewed books, scholarly articles, rare book dealers, auction catalogues, old newspapers, etc.). Our class will focus on the books' production, marketing, dissemination, readers, editing, design, and bibliographical makeup. The goal is to gather our research into a neatly designed and well-edited webpage that tells the world about our archival research and findings.



## Part I: Research Report

For [date], please compose a 5-page (approximately 2500 words) research report that 1) presents your original findings on a specific topic or question related to the Vestpocket Shakespeare set and

2) explains your processes of research. You should aim to find out as much as possible about your chosen topic and keep meticulous notes.

In addition to the 5-page report, you must also include a Works Cited and Works Consulted page. You may also need to include tables, figures, images, etc. (for instance, if you found an advertisement for the Vestpocket set, print it and include it in your report; take pictures of the features of the books that you are analyzing). You should also include copies of the pages from which you cite. For instance, if you read a chapter in a book and paraphrase from pages 2-3, please copy or take pictures of pages 2 and 3 and turn them in with your report.

Your reports will then form the content of our webpage (Part II). These reports should reflect your own original research and findings at this point in the process. It is fine if more than one student takes on the same research question. Usually, students will take different approaches even if they write about the same material evidence.

### **Why a Works Cited and a Works Consulted Page? Why pages from sources?**

It is a good habit as a researcher to start a file system in which you record every source that you consult. If you read an article or website on Shakespeare's books during WWI, record the citation and make a short note about the contents, even if you don't find information to use in your paper. You may need to consult this source later, or your peers might need to use it at a later stage.

When you turn in your paper, you should have a list of Works Cited (those that you quote or paraphrase in your paper) AND a Works Consulted (those that you looked over, read, browsed, considered). By recording your Works Consulted, you will also record your research process.

Because we are publishing our research on the web, we cannot have any citation errors (or worse, plagiarized material). One of the most common citation errors is taking an author's ideas out of context, and even the most careful students can make this mistake if they don't fully understand the larger argument in a book or article. Therefore, as your editor, I will be double checking not just that the citations are done correctly but that you accurately capture your source's ideas. I may need to access more pages from the source to determine the context, so you should scan/copy whole articles and chapters when doing your research—or have access to the books from which you cite.

### **Fact and Interpretation: Please Signal with Phrases**

We need to be careful in this project to distinguish facts from interpretations in our research. For example, when you write about the dimensions of the books, the number of pages in the Glossary, or the presence of illustrations before each edition, you should feel free to state these details as facts. However, when you write about issues that rely on your informed reasoning, you should signal to the readers that you are interpreting. Use phrases like "Based on evidence in (source A), we can conclude that...." Or "It seems that ....." Or "The evidence suggests that...."

When we begin editing our final drafts, we might remove some of these hedging phrases; however, for the first part of the assignment, I need you to communicate when you are reporting the evidence and when you are interpreting the evidence.

Also, be aware of when your sources are stating facts or offering interpretations. For instance, if John Doe writes, "This set was likely printed in 1933," do not paraphrase in your paper, "The set

was printed in 1933” (Doe). Be very careful with this kind of information. One word—“probably”—here changes the meaning in an important way.

As you already know, not all sources are trustworthy. Some websites are not edited or produced by experts in the field. Other printed books and articles only have the facts that were available at the time. For instance, many discoveries related to Shakespearean publishing have been made over the last two decades; thus, scholarship in the 1970s may have errors just because more evidence has been uncovered about a publisher or an edition. Just be aware of this issue if you find inconsistent evidence.

You may need to request resources from I-Share and Illiad to complete this assignment. Both services take a week or more to deliver materials. If you find an article or book that you absolutely NEED right away, check with me first. We might be able to find another avenue for accessing the work.

## TOPICS

What you uncover in your research may end up determining the topic of your paper, but you need to start with a research question. Below I have listed many questions that I have about the Vestpocket Shakespeare set. Some of these questions will have easy answers; others may be impossible to answer. Some will require interpretation based on evidence; others will report facts from lengthy archival research. However, before we can conclude that we have hit a dead end, we have to do the research. Therefore, I will be placing heavy emphasis on the Research Process (how much time, effort, care, and thought you put into answering your question). Don’t just settle for one source; find two. Don’t just read one book on the matter; find a few.

## Bibliographical Research

- What size are the books? How many pages are in each book? What books are the longest and shortest? Thickest/thinnest? Why do sizes matter?
- Are there other books printed in the 1930s in this same size? Who published them? Do they also have a bookcase for storage? How does comparison help us understand the Vestpocket set?
- Are all of the forty volumes formatted or designed in the same way? Are there any variances (other than the obvious change in contents) on the spines, title pages, illustration designs, page numbers? Any pages missing? Any printed in larger or smaller type? Different font? Any differences in coloring of editions? What might these variances mean?
- Is there an order to the forty volumes? Are they organized in a specific way in the glossary? How are they organized? Where might this organizational strategy come from? Why is the organization important?
- What is the binding made of? What material? Are all pages in the book printed on the same kind and style of paper? Do all of the books in the set look like they are printed on the same

type of paper? Are other books in the period printed on similar kinds of paper? Do other books have similar bindings?

### **Publishing Research**

- Who is the publisher of these editions? When was the set published? When was the publisher in business? Where were the books sold? Disseminated? Where were these books printed?
- What else did the company publish/sell? Did they release any other miniature editions?
- Why did the publisher produce this set? What was the goal?
- How was the set marketed? Who was it marketed to? How much did it cost? Are there any records of sale of this set from the 1930s?

### **Readers and Reception Research**

- Are there any signs of readerly usage or ownership? Do the books look like they have been “read”? Which books have the most wear on their covers? Over-thumbed pages? Handwriting? Dashes? Quotation marks? Why does this matter?
- Who was the target audience for this set? Do we find it marketed in magazines? Newspapers?
- Who was the “real” audience for this set? Do we have any evidence of who actually owned these sets? Where do we find most sets being sold?
- Where were sets likely stored? Used? Read? Purchased? Shared? Collected? Private owners? Libraries? Schools?
- What other Shakespeare editions were available to readers in the 1930s? Why might a reader choose this one instead? What can comparing other Shakespeare editions with this set tell us?

### **Texts**

For every book in this set, we could ask:

- Was the Shakespeare text edited specifically for this Vestpocket set? If not, then what text is this based upon? Who edited this text (or all the texts)? When were they edited? How were they edited?

- Were shorter version of texts (like Q1 *Hamlet*) chosen? Or, were the sometime-longer Folio texts chosen? Why does this matter? Or Why do you think the text that was used was chosen?
- If you find the editions upon which the Vestpocket set was based, what can we learn about those edited versions? Does teach Vestpocket play follow the other edited text exactly? Are there variances? Are the variances just printing errors? Or are they substantive changes?
- Where did the illustrations come from? Were they created specifically for the Vestpocket set? Who created the illustration? When were they created? Why include them in the set?
- What features of the illustrations deserve more analysis? How do the illustrations focus the readers on specific characters or themes? Are there patterns in the ways the illustrations do so? Why include illustrations in such a small Shakespeare set?

### Historical and Cultural Context (Interwar Years)

- The period in which this set was likely printed is often called the “Interwar Years” (1919-1938), marked out by WWI and WWII. When searching for books and articles, consider adding “Interwar Britain” to your search. Why does the historical period in which these books were produced matter? What can it help us understand about the set?
- Were there other Shakespeare sets in miniature before the 1930s? (Knickerbocker is one example). What can we learn about the Vestpocket Shakespeare by comparing it to other miniature Shakespeare books? What influence did the Knickerbocker or other sets have on the Vestpocket Shakespeare?
- Were other miniature book sets popular? Was this set the first? Was it actually called “Vestpocket Shakespeare” by its creators or is that just a term that has become attached to the set by later readers?
- Why create a book that is not easy to read? What is the purpose of this book collection? What kind of culture consumes books that are not easy to read?
- Why print the whole complete works of Shakespeare in miniature? What point is being communicated in the production of this set?
- What was happening in the English and/or Scottish book trade in the 1930s? What effect may have this had on the production of the Vestpocket set?
- What kind of culture finds value in a miniature Shakespeare set? Why is miniature + Shakespeare an interesting innovation? Or is it an innovation?
- What did Shakespeare mean to English culture in the 1930s? How popular were his plays in other media? How popular in print?

Note: The questions above are not prescriptive. You should feel free to pick one and see where it leads. Or, you might decide to develop your own question. Some questions will require more archival research; others will require secondary research. Both are necessary to complete this project. If you have not completed any primary or secondary research (or just a small amount of research), you have not “completed” the assignment. Doing research is the assignment; the report is simply to offer a record of what you found. Please check with me on your topic if you decide to pursue another area of research on the Vestpocket set.

## RUBRIC

An A-report will

- Answer an important, appropriately narrowed research question about the Vestpocket set or its context
- Provide evidence for your findings (conclusive or inconclusive evidence is important); just be honest about what you found.
- Demonstrate significant time and effort in the research process (secondary and/or primary research)
- Be based on relevant, reliable, and trustworthy sources
- Detail the research process and evaluate the results (feel free to critique your own research if you realized a problem too late in the process)
- Be in clear, concise prose in well-organized paragraphs (the style should be formal and professional, but you are welcome to use first-person and contractions)
- Cite sources meticulously in the paper; contextualize those sources
- Include a Works Cited and Works Consulted page in MLA format
- Include copies of the pages (from sources) that you cite (paraphrase or quote)
- Be turned in on-time and in the appropriate formats (hardcopy and electronic copy); 5 pages (approximately 2500 words)
- Include relevant documents to demonstrate evidence (images, etc.)

**Part II: Making the Archival Webpage** (150points)—more details on this part of the assignment will be released after Thanksgiving break.

For this part of the assignment, I am taking on the role of project editor. After I read your papers, you will be assigned a group and be tasked with creating a page on our Word Press site that presents your group’s combined research. These pages will include approximately 1500 words of text or less.

The assignments for individuals and groups at this stage will depend largely on what you produce in Part I. Some individuals will need to do more research; others may be asked to fact check; some will be asked to gather the writing of their peers into one report; others will need to proofread and correct the grammar/style of their peers; some will be asked to collaborate with other groups to maintain consistency of design and style across the pages. I may assign specific tasks to specific people, or simply, list the tasks that need to take place and allow the group to decide. Some tasks will be negotiable, but communication with me is key.

Your job is “done” when your group has created a well-designed, clear, meticulously proofread, extremely well-cited, appropriately illustrated web page that answers questions about the Vestpocket Shakespeare. [Note that we must have permission to use images on our site; don’t just copy and paste from the web for this part of the assignment. I will ask to see evidence of permissions at the editing stage so that we aren’t accused of copyright violation].

Students who do well on this part of the assignment will

- Accept constructive criticism on their research and writing from Dr. Lyons (the project editor)
- fix errors, rewrite paragraphs for clarity, fact-check, do more research
- fix more errors, rewrite paragraphs for clarity again and again, re-check facts, do even more research (if needed)
- Be an active member of the group; take on responsibilities and fulfill them on time
- Not submit sloppy writing or designs due to lack of time or forethought
- Submit a self and group evaluation at the end of the semester

## Resources

**(This is a small sample of resources that may be helpful in your research process). Please feel free to consult with me and reference librarians throughout this process.**

## Databases and Bibliographies

Middlebrow Network [includes a bibliography of relevant sources on Early and Mid-Twentieth Century Book History]

<http://www.middlebrow-network.com/Bibliography.aspx>

Miniature Book Society’s Essential References

<http://www.mbs.org/reference.html>

Miniature Book Society Newsletter Index (1983-2013)

[http://www.mbs.org/sg\\_links\\_media/MBS\\_Newsletter\\_INDEX.pdf](http://www.mbs.org/sg_links_media/MBS_Newsletter_INDEX.pdf)

Miniature Books Resources

<http://bluroofdesigns.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Miniature-Books-references-full-sheets.pdf>

Miniature Book Bibliographies

[http://www.lorsonbooksandprints.com/miniature\\_bibliography.html](http://www.lorsonbooksandprints.com/miniature_bibliography.html)

Annotated List of Collected Editions of Shakespeare

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~adm6/en3025/listcoll.html>

## Books

Anderson, Patricia and Jonathan Rose. *British literary publishing houses, 1881-1965*. Detroit : Gale Research, 1991. [Floor 6, Shelves: Building Use Only PS128 .D5 v.112]

*A Companion to the History of the Book*. Ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose. Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.  
[Full-text Electronic Resource in Milner]

Crane, Edward. *A century of book publishing, 1848-1948*. New York, D. Van Nostrand Co., [1948.]  
[Full-text Hathi Trust; see Milner Library Catalogue for link]

Koopman, Harry Lyman. *Miniature Books*. Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1968. [Floor 6  
Special Collections: Building Use Only Call Number: Z1033.M6 K61968]

McDonald, Peter D. *British literary culture and publishing practice, 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP,  
2002. [Arriving in Lyons' Office soon]

Rose, Jonathan. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. New Haven, CT, Yale University  
Press, 2001. [Arriving in Lyons' office soon]

Welsh, Doris V. *A bibliography of miniature books (1470-1965)*. K. I. Rickard: Cobelskill, N.Y., 1989.  
[Floor 6 Special Collections: Building Use Only. Call Number: Z1033.M6 W451989]

Here's a digital copy of this volume:

<http://hdl.huntington.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16003coll1/id/244>