

Nifty Assignments: Encryption & the Enigma Machine



David Reed
Department of Computer Science
Creighton University
davered@creighton.edu

Overview

3 CS1/CS2 assignments based on encryption & the Enigma machine

- could be assigned independently, or as connected assignments in a course

why nifty?

- historical significance & modern relevance of encryption
- each assignment can have a hands-on component, building physical models out of paper

1. Cipher Disks & Cryptograms

historical motivation:

- substitution ciphers have been used for millenia
 - Atbash cipher (6th century B.C.)
 - Caesar cipher (1st century B.C.)
 - Vigenère cipher (16th century)
 - Civil War cipher disks



more recent:

- cryptogram puzzles
- motivation for discussing modern uses of encryption
 - e.g., process underlying secure Web-based transactions

AXYDLBAXR
is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

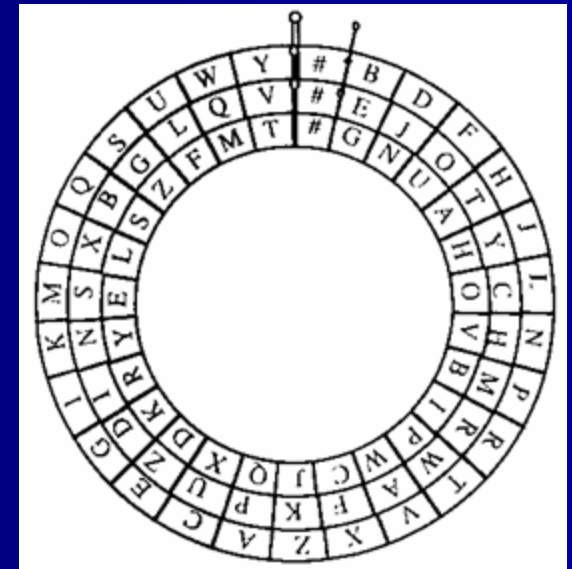
2-26 CRYPTOQUOTE

HBRGMLBMRRQ DU CRG IKUG
E HDHNL FRBQ. RKG RY
TRJBEQLUMDV TEC TRJL ECQ
FDNN TRJL GML MEVVX NDYL
YRB ENN. — MLXFRRQ HBRKC
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT IS VERY EASY TO
MANAGE YOUR NEIGHBOR'S BUSINESS, BUT
OUR OWN SOMETIMES BOTHERS US. — JOSH
BILLINGS

2. Multiple, Rotating Disks

rotating substitution keys are the underlying mechanism of the Enigma

- can obtain Enigma-like behavior from a generalized 3-ring cipher disk
- 2-stage mapping to encode a letter:
'A' inner → 'H' outer; 'H' middle → 'N' outer
- odometer-style disk rotation
rotate inner disk after each encoding;
also rotate middle when inner completes cycle



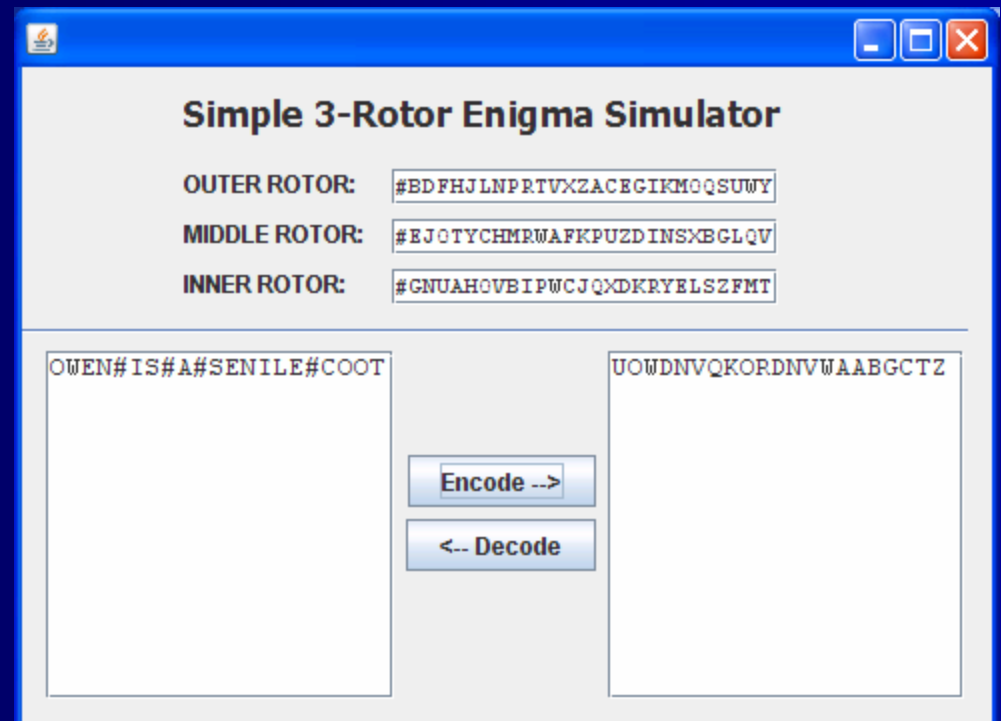
hands-on activity:

- similarly, can build a paper model
- e.g., <http://www.jambe.co.nz/makeenigma.html>

2. Simple Enigma Model (CS1)

CS1 assignment:

- based on the paper model of 3-ring cipher disk, design and implement a simple Enigma simulator
- must support both encoding & decoding
- allow for different rotors & settings
- focus: class design, string manipulation, GUI design



3. Enigma Machine

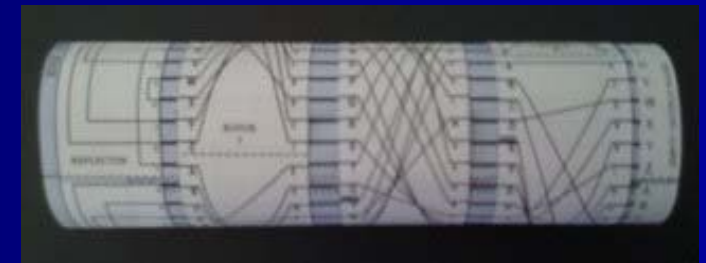
historical motivation:

- Enigma used by Germany in WWII
- original design utilized 3 rotors
 - interchangeable, could vary order & setting
 - rotors contained circuitry, connecting to adjacent rotors
 - effectively defined a 6-stage mapping
- rotors are interlocked to produce a complex, automatic rotation pattern



hands-on activity:

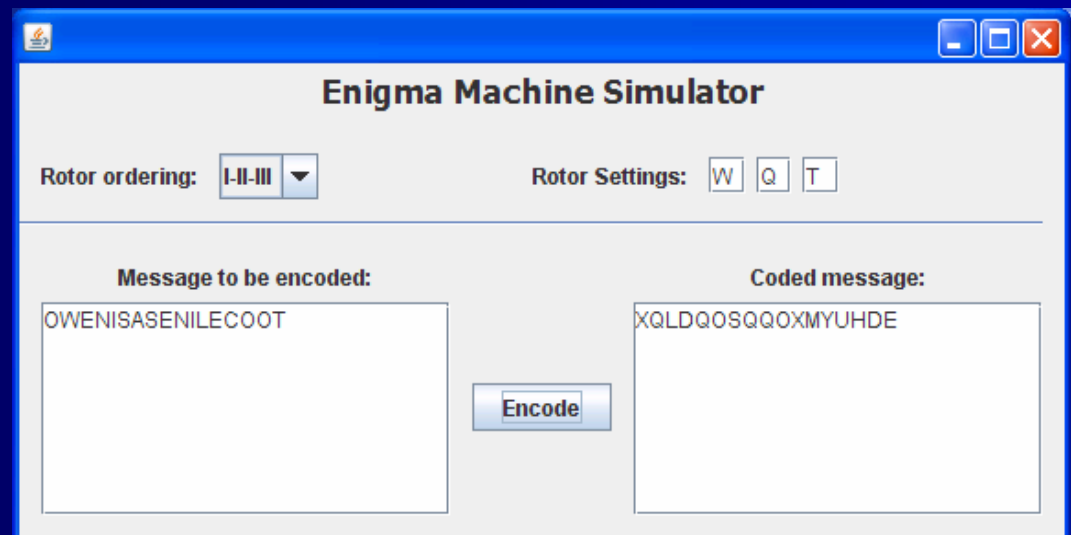
- I have designed a 3-D paper model (inspired by Koss' Paper Enigma)
- <http://dave-reed.com/DIYenigma>



3. Enigma Simulator (CS1/CS2)

CS1/CS2 assignment:

- based on the paper model, design and implement a complete Enigma simulator
- must allow for different initial rotor settings
- focus: complex design, interacting classes, string manipulation, GUI design



Summary

assignments with a story & context are more interesting to students than artificial applications

assignments that have a hands-on component are engaging to students

- can help to build a mental model of what they are designing/implementing

the topic of encryption can lead to exploration

- just turn on the History Channel
- online resources on encryption, Enigma, Bletchley Park, ...