

Basic outline for a Shakespeare Unit

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Main focus or objective: Foster in students an enjoyment of Shakespeare's works.

1. Introduce students to a major theme of the play through any of the following:
 - ✓ Script writing, role playing, tableaux based on short story
2. Introduce them to the play as a whole
 - ✓ Synopsis
 - ✓ Watch movie (Hamlet)
3. Take up scenes
 - ✓ Student directed
 - ✓ Student active
 - ✓ Post scene discussions (in case they missed anything)
 - ✓ Variety is the key here
4. Post act assignments
 - ✓ Explore mood
 - ✓ Explore theme
 - ✓ Explore character development
5. Post play analysis
 - ✓ Major assignment
 - ✓ Related to theme, character, and or mood
 - ✓ Summative discussion or essay

Technical discussions take place within the context of student work.

Representing with Shakespeare: A Visual Approach to Enjoying the Bard

A Workshop Presented By

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My Basic Shakespeare Unit Structure

1. Because students often struggle with the language of Shakespeare I often introduce them to the entire storyline of the play we will be studying from the outset of our unit. I do this in several ways. If the video of the play is particularly good, I will watch the play before hand with my students (Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet). In other situations I hand out a prose synopsis of the play. (Nesbit, 1997). Once students have read through the synopsis I have them develop a 10 frame cartoon that represents the student's thoughts on what the ten most important event in the play are.

The heart of my Shakespeare units is a series of group assignments. That students complete after each Act of the play has been examined by the class. These assignments include the following:

2. Spectrogram Analysis

For this assignment I require my students to develop a series of tableaux vivants—a series of scenes in which characters are frozen in predetermined poses. Spectrograms can be used to represent a number of aspects of a play. I have students use spectrograms to represent the changes in the relationships between characters as the play progresses. I have students begin this assignment by filling in a set of charts similar to the one below. In each box on the chart students write down their thoughts about the nature of the relationships between each set of characters.

Hamlet Act 1: Initial Relationships

	Hamlet	Ophelia	Gertrude	Polonius	King
Hamlet					
Ophelia					
Gertrude					
Polonius					
King					

Hamlet Act 1: Shifting Relationships

	Hamlet	Ophelia	Gertrude	Polonius	King
Hamlet					
Ophelia					
Gertrude					
Polonius					
King					

Hamlet Act 1: Final Relationships

	Hamlet	Ophelia	Gertrude	Polonius	King
Hamlet					
Ophelia					
Gertrude					
Polonius					
King					

Completing these charts enables students to look systematically at all the interrelationships between characters. During the next step of the assignment I expect students to find a way to use spatial orientation, proximity and elevation, facial expressions, and the individual's poses to express these relationships. If they feel that they need them, students may also use simple props to enhance their scenes.

Once their spectrogram has been planned, I expect my students to write a script which would enable others to put together the same spectrogram without seeing it first themselves. I also expect them to provide the class with an explanation of each scene in their spectrogram as well as a discussion of what choices they made in designing the spectrogram.

Students then rehearse their spectrograms and present them to the class. Presentations involve the following format. 1) Students present the whole spectrogram. 2) Students explain their spectrogram. 3) Students present their spectrogram a second time.

3. Mood Visual

For this assignment I expect my students to develop a visual representation that effectively captures the central mood or emotion of the act as well as any significant variations from that mood. Visuals can take any form the students choose.

Previously, my students have submitted some of the following: photo essays, sculpture, collage, quilt, painting, paper mache, and lego models. In addition to the visual I expect my students to complete a written explanation of their visual, and what choices went into creating it. Students are also expected to justify their choice of mood and its variants as represented in the visual.

4. Sub-text Retelling (though not a representing assignment I include it here as part of my explanation of my unit.)

This assignment works well for exploration of character motivation and development. This activity involves choosing an interesting or important scene, or a segment of a scene, from the act we had just studied. As the students review the lines of each of the characters they are expected to consider the characters' thoughts and feelings. They are then required to rewrite the scene using only the hidden, unexpressed thoughts of the characters, not the words that they have spoken. Once they have rewritten the scene they are expected to rehearse and perform it.

5. Found Poem

For this assignment I expect my students to identify both the underlying emotion of the Act and the main ideas or themes expressed in the act. Once they have grasped this they are required to write and present a poem which captures both the central idea of the Act, and the main emotion of the act. The words from the poem must be found within the text of the Act. Students are also expected to complete a write up that defends their views on both the themes and emotions of the act. As well, they are expected to justify the choices that went into creating and representing the poem.

During the study of a Shakespearian play I also work in a number of other assignments.

6. Period Costumes

At suitable point in the play I asks students to research one of two options: 1) the clothing worn during the Elizabethan era, 2) clothing worn during the era in which the play being studied is set. I assign students to research the clothing worn by different classes in those societies. Once students have gathered the needed information they are required to sketch out a character on poster paper and then using strips of cloth or other means, dress the character in the clothing of his era and cast. Students are then expected to present both their poster and research to the class.

7. Character Evaluation

For this assignment I ask students to consider the actions of a specific character in the play. I ask them to look for patterns of behavior. I also ask them to consider what motivates the character so far in the play. Once students have thought through this I ask them to visually represent their conclusions about what motivates the character and what patterns of behavior that character has demonstrated.

8. Character Connections

For this assignment I ask students to choose a character from the play and compare themselves to that character. Their analysis should consider motivation, world view, mutual interests, life situations, among other factors. Once the student has found a point of connection (or points of connection) to the character they are expected to develop a visual that expresses that connection. Once the visual has been completed they are expected to develop a written explanation of the visual which expresses the deliberations that went into creating the visual.

In addition to these assignments I use a number of assignments to complete our Shakespeare Unit.

9. Complex Visual

As a wrap up assignment I like to have students develop a complex visual that represents their understanding of the play.

The following is the assignment I use at the end of my Hamlet Unit.

Hamlet at the End

Either individually or in groups of up to _____ prepare a visual (a single image) that sums up your understanding of the play. You are free to choose any type of visual you wish—spectrogram, collage, painting, drawing, sculpture, ect—but it must be a single image.

Your image must address Hamlet's tragic flaw, depicting its central role in his downfall. Your image should also address one of the play's motifs. As well, your image should explore the relationships between major characters in the play.

You must submit a written explanation of your visual.

10. Sculpture Assignment

Before starting this assignment I have students pick two characters who had intrigued them when we were studying the play.

Next, I have students read the essay "He and I" written by Natalia Ginzburg. After reading the essay I have students consider a scenario in which the husband (the He) reads a draft of the essay for the first time the morning that that the manuscript had been sent away for publication. In pairs, I then have students role play the 'discussion' that takes place between Natalia and her husband.

This activity is followed by a discussion on the depth of comparison and contrast that Natalia draws between herself and her husband.

I then have students think in depth about the points of comparison and contrast between the two characters they have chosen. (They are required to think beyond the superficial.)

Next, I require students to think about what types of images and symbols can be used to depict these points of contrast and comparison.

Finally, I give students some rudimentary instruction into sculpting and set them up with the tools they need to sculpt an image that represents the points of similarity and contrast between their chosen characters.

Once the sculpture has been completed I require my students to write an explanation of how their sculpture is designed to represent their understanding of the similarities and differences between their characters.

11. Character Cards

For this assignment I have students think about the hockey, baseball, or Barbie cards that they like to collect.

Cards have two sides to them. On the face of the card students need to put an image of the character, along with the name of their card company (or collector's series)

On the back I have students develop a method of providing vital statistics about their characters. Creativity points are awarded for method of data presentation.

Scoring Guide for Sub-text Retelling

- 10 - 9 Script and justification reveal an excellent understanding of what emotions underlie the text; in performance these emotions were effectively represented both verbally and physically.
- 8 - 7 Script and justification reveal a satisfactory understanding of what emotions underlie the text; in performance these emotions were effectively represented both verbally and physically.
- 6 - 5 Script and justification reveal a satisfactory understanding of what emotions underlie the text; in performance these emotions were poorly represented both verbally and physically.
- 4 - 3 Script and justification reveal a poor understanding of what emotions underlie the text; in performance these emotions were not represented.

Scoring Guide for Found Poem

- 10 - 9 Poem effectively captures the emotion of the text. The poem is polished to the third level of writing. Justification of poem reflects a thorough understanding of the importance elements of the text.
- 8 - 7 Poem satisfactorily captures the emotion of the text. The poem is polished to the third level of writing. Justification of poem reflects a complete understanding of the important elements of the text.
- 6 - 5 Poem satisfactorily captures the emotion of the text. The poem is polished to the second level of writing. Represents a satisfactory understanding of the important elements of the text.
- 4 - 3 Poem poorly captures the emotion of the text. The poem is polished to the second level of writing. Justification of the poem reflects a limited understanding of the important elements of the text.

Final Projects

Traditionally my final project for a Shakespearian unit would be an assignment that requires students to develop a complex visual representation. The following assignment, was developed for my English 30 class.

Hamlet at the End

Either individually or in groups of up to [total number of students in the class] prepare a visual (a single image) that sums up your understanding of the play. You are free to choose any type of visual you wish—spectrogram, collage, painting, drawing, sculpture—but it must be a single image.

Your image must address Hamlet's tragic flaw, depicting its central role in his downfall. Your image should also address the play's motif: the world of seems. Also, your image should explore the relationship between major characters in the play.

You must also submit a one page explanation of your visual.

You have class time until Friday to complete this assignment, at which time it will be due.

One final assignment our English department developed was a Shakespeare performance competition. My colleague who teaches English 11 was having trouble motivating his students to read Macbeth dramatically as they were taking the play up in class. We discussed the problem and decided to propose a dramatic challenge to the English 20 and 30 classes. Each group was to stage and perform a scene from the play that they were studying. We would select a panel of judges to preside over the contest. Both classes were to agree on what the reward for winning the challenge would be. They decided that the class that lost the challenge would be required to sing a song, chosen or written by the winning class, at that year's graduation ceremony. Once this was decided their enthusiasm for performing Shakespeare began to build. The senior class was determined that it would not sing at its own graduation, the grade 11 class was equally determined not to be singing "You are So Beautiful to Me" to the grade 12 class, and so the challenge was on.

Judging Guide

Overall impression:

	Poor				Excellent
How well were props designed?	1	2	3	4	5
How well were costumes designed?	1	2	3	4	5

Quality of characters

	Poor				Excellent
How real does the character seem?	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
Effectiveness of body movement	1	2	3	4	5
Vocal Expression-monotone? Emphasis?	1	2	3	4	5

Quality of Performance

	Poor				Excellent
How well are lines memorized (overall)	1	2	3	4	5
How well did they project their voice?	1	2	3	4	5
How clearly were their words enunciated	1	2	3	4	5

Total

/45

This assignment has the beginnings of becoming a school tradition.

Scoring Guide for Spectrograms

- 10 - 9 Unique and engaging tableaux which reflect a thorough analysis of the characters' relationships. Representation reveals an excellent understanding of sub-text and dramatic irony.
- 8 - 7 Unique and engaging tableaux which reflect a considered analysis of the characters' relationships. Representation reveals a good understanding of sub-text and dramatic irony.
- 6 - 5 Unique and engaging tableaux which reflect an adequate analysis of the characters' relationships. Representation reveals a satisfactory understanding of sub-text and dramatic irony.
- 4 - 3 Tableaux which reflect an incomplete analysis of the characters' relationships. Representation reveals a limited understanding of sub-text and dramatic irony.

Scoring Guide for Visual

- 10 - 9 Representation effectively captures the central emotion or mood of the act. Justification of choices reveals an excellent connection to, and understanding of the text.
- 8 - 7 Representation effectively captures the central emotion or mood of the act. Justification of choices reveals a satisfactory connection to, and understanding of, the text.
- 6 - 5 Representation satisfactorily captures the central emotion or mood of the act. Justification of choices reveals a satisfactory connection to, and understanding of, the text.
- 4 - 3 Representation does not capture the central emotion or mood of the act. Justification of choices reveals a poor connection to, and understanding of the text.