



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
 2016 Volume I: Shakespeare and the Scenes of Instruction

Breaking the Rules in Shakespeare

Curriculum Unit 16.01.02
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This unit will focus on engaging students in the world of rule breakers and rule makers in Shakespeare. As young students, breaking the rules is something they commonly find tempting. By showing rule breaking examples in Shakespeare, students will be able to find closer personal connections with a genre of literature they least expected.

Shakespeare's plays can be categorized into three sub genres of Comedy, Tragedy, and History. In this unit, students will be able to discover relatable connections in each genre. Students will also be able to recognize words from the genre's word bank upon venturing into the text.

Reading List

Shakespeare, William	Romeo & Juliet	Act 2, Scene 2	1595-1596	Tragedy	Teacher/Students
Shakespeare, William	Much Ado About Nothing	Act 2, Scene 1	1598-1599	Comedy	Teacher/Students
Shakespeare, William	Henry IV Part 1	Act 2, Scene 4	1596-1597	Historical	Teacher/Students
Bloom, Harold	Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human	Entire Book, Highlights: Chronology(xv), Shakespeare Universalism (1), Romeo & Juliet (87), Much Ado About Nothing (192), and Henry IV pt. 1 (271)	1998	Reference, Introductory information	Teacher
Tanner, Tony	Prefaces to Shakespeare	Entire Book	2010	Reference, Introductory information	Teacher

Introduction to Shakespeare

Students will be introduced to Shakespeare by learning basic facts on Shakespeare's life so that they may have a better understanding of who he is as a man. Students will be able to view a portrait of William Shakespeare, a picture of where he resided and pictures of the globe theater.

Approaching Strategies

When I think of strategies of how to approach this unit I keep a few things in mind; the first is that my main goal is to make sure that the students grasp the real connection between Shakespeare's writing and their personal experiences. The second is that I have to supply students with the necessary tools to understand the context they are venturing upon.

I would suggest supplying students with a vocabulary list of the Shakespearean language in the text, a plot summary of the play you will cover, and a character map detailing the connection between the characters. If you feel your class will benefit from this, I would also suggest a short history on The Globe Theater along with images.

The main focus is on rule breaking in Shakespeare with transgressive behavior. Students might assume that characters in Shakespearean plays would speak deliberately since what they say, after all, was written by Shakespeare; instead we see how much trouble these Shakespeare characters can cause in moments of transgressive speech.

The Transgressive

The first task would be to define and amplify the meaning of transgressive. It is imperative that in this unit all students are able to identify the transgressive speech in the scene. As in Sesame Street, there is the word of the day; and it is, you guessed it, *transgressive*. This may actually be the easy part of this curriculum for your students. As they begin to understand the idea of transgressive behavior the light bulb should begin to click on and they will be able to comprehend so much more. I would suggest setting up a few scenarios as practice examples so that the class is all on the same page.

For example, *Michael told his teacher he had a huge surprise in his pocket, something he could definitely get in trouble for by showing a teacher. Even his mother told him that it was his personal business and that's for him and only him, not to be taken out and shown to anyone especially at school. He told his teacher it's something that makes him very happy, and that he likes to play a game with it. Michael's teacher was shocked and appalled. She was stunned at what she just heard but knew that what she heard warranted a trip to the principal's office. Once Michael arrived at the principal's office, Michael's teacher told him to tell the principal what he was describing in his pocket. A very nervous Michael blurted out, "I wasn't going to take my*

phone out, I swear. I was just telling my teacher how I like to play games on it. How is that wrong?" The confused teacher stared back at the principal who did not quite understand the visit. Michael's teacher quietly mumbled, "I thought he was talking about something else."

"Jumping to conclusions," right or wrong, does not seem to be the same thing as transgressive verbal or corporal action. What about Michael telling the teacher that he knows he should keep what's in his pocket to himself and would do so "unless someone started a fight and I need to take it out to get a better shot." Michael might mean "to take a picture in focus" while the teacher assumed Michael had a gun. Crucial to a discussion of transgressive speech is consideration of whether the transgressive meaning was intended or only belatedly understood.

In a photography class "to get a better shot" might be immediately understood to refer to camera work, while in home room Michael's phrase might be transgressive talk (intended or not); pulling Michael's hands back and reaching into his pockets is decidedly transgressive *behavior*.

The transgressive speech in this situation involves Michael describing something inappropriate in school and others jumping to conclusions. You can use this example or something similar but it shows something that many of us do on a daily basis. We tend to get that foot of ours stuck in our mouths and then have to hop around on one foot trying to get it out.

Your students should come up with a few examples from their everyday lives to connect to transgressive speech. Allowing them the opportunity to share their own experiences makes the lesson more personal and will allow them to be open to hearing more about the behaviors Shakespeare has written for us. The more personal connections we find, the easier it is for us to take down the wall between Shakespeare and us.

Romeo and Juliet (Tragedy)

Though many assume that this play is one of Shakespeare's more familiar plays, many students may not be fully aware of the story of Romeo and Juliet. I normally call these "Drive-Thru Summaries". When people are hungry they need to eat, maybe something quick because they're on the go so they will grab some Drive-Thru food. Analogously, we are going to give a "Drive-Thru Summary" so students can quickly get caught up to the story and we can then focus on the scene of transgression. The scene I suggest we focus on in this play is the balcony scene between Romeo and Juliet. What we want to focus on is the language between the two, specifically the line by Romeo, "O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?"

I would first read this scene with students so that they can read it for themselves and have a better understanding when it is read in two voices. I would suggest asking any students if they're familiar with this scene and then follow with anyone could explain what might be happening in the scene. The goal out of this discussion is to identify transgressive actions and words. Jumping over others' walls is one form of "transgression"; what are others in this scene? What is different about the transgressive nature of Romeo's question?

The idea is to play off the scene that gets Romeo in trouble. Romeo is asking if Juliet will leave him unsatisfied emotionally—i.e., uncommitted—for the night. Juliet is thinking that Romeo is asking for sexual satisfaction there and then. Romeo clarifies the miscommunication after hearing Juliet ask what satisfaction he might be

asking for in the middle of the night as he recovers by asking for her hand in marriage.

Questions for Discussion

Balcony Scene (Act. II, Sc. II-Romeo and Juliet) Discussion and Scenework

Student will answer the following questions in an open discussion.

1. How many of you have curfews? What does your curfew entail? Are you allowed to have friends over? Are you allowed to go outside? Are you allowed to be on your phone?
2. How many of you have a boyfriend or girlfriend? At what age are you allowed to date? At what age are you allowed to marry?
3. What could two teenagers possibly talk about on a balcony in the middle of the night?
4. What rules did Romeo and Juliet break? Did anyone else break any rules? What were they?
5. Do you think Romeo, prior to Juliet's question, meant to ask for Juliet's hand in marriage? Do you think he was just trying to get out of getting caught by his words?
6. SPARK QUESTION: In the line by Juliet, "What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?"

How would you interpret that? What could Juliet possibly mean by that?

Is Juliet referring to Romeo making a sexual invite? How would you react to that? (**For grades 5-8** , how would you react to someone suggesting inappropriate behavior towards you, or an unwanted friendship?)

Students will use the balcony scene to recreate a modern version. Students are welcome to recreate the content beforehand that leads Juliet to the line, "What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" Have them imagine Romeo in a modern situation that turns on the same line. Try to imagine how this would play out in a modern situation where Romeo could exhibit such a potential transgressive behavior. Students will also act out their new scenes in groups.

Examples for Modern rewrites with accidental accusations of the following actions:

- Peer pressure for drug use
- Asking for help cheating on a test
- Bullying
- Joining gangs
- Skipping class
- Damaging property
- Asking someone on a date

Much Ado about Nothing (Comedy)

This play may not be common to many school age students so a “Drive-Thru Summary” is definitely needed. The scene of transgressive behavior that I would like to focus on is the masquerade party in the play. This scene leads to Beatrice ‘moping’ about everyone getting married except for her and as Don Pedro hears her complaint he asks, “Will you have me lady?” This now leaves our characters in a bit of a predicament.

I would suggest giving the students a few minutes to mull over this one because the character interact may be a little more complex than that of Romeo and Juliet.

Beatrice is complaining that left and right woman are getting married and she seems to be wondering aloud if it will ever be her turn. Don Pedro offers to find her a husband, to which she responds, presumably in joking manner, by changing the meaning of *get* from “find you a husband” to “beget a man who could be a husband.” She thus appears to be asking if she could have Don Pedro’s brother or Don Pedro’s himself. Don Pedro (to her surprise?) interprets her remark as a serious invitation to offer a marriage proposal. This now leads to the need for Beatrice to figure out how to take that foot of hers out of her mouth.

It now seems that an art form must be made to get people out of awkward situations. I would propose students should brainstorm ways to get Beatrice out of this situation. It seems that this would be a tender modern life moment for someone to turn down a marriage proposal. This could lead to a “What would you do?” discussion. Again, the main focus is to connect students to the text for them to be able to identify transgressive behavior and give examples. The goal, or one goal, will be to go back and appreciate Beatrice’s wit and Shakespeare’s psychology.

Questions for Discussion

Here I would like students to apply the situation of both characters to themselves. What would they do if they were Beatrice? What would they do as Don Pedro? How would they feel on either side? Do they side with a particular character and why? Two things to specifically focus on during the brainstorms are (1) to discuss why Beatrice risks saying what she does, and (2) to discuss how she might get out of this when her “joke” (if it was a joke) is taken straight.

Masquerade Party Scene (Act. II, Sc. I- Much Ado about Nothing) Discussion and Scenework

Student will answer the following questions in an open discussion.

1. Have you ever had a crush on someone? Did you know if the feeling was mutual?
2. How did it make you feel knowing or not knowing their reaction? What did you do?
3. How do you tell a person that you may not like him/ her or the things they do?
4. What rules did Don Pedro break? Did anyone else break any rules? What were they?
5. SPARK QUESTION: In the line by Don Pedro, “Will you have me lady?” what do you think he meant? Did he mean to ask her to marry him? Was he responding nonchalantly to her previous statements? Do you think he cares for Beatrice? Was she really asking for a husband or was she venting or just teasing? How

would you react to that? (**For grades 5-8** , how would you react to someone suggesting inappropriate behavior towards you, or an unwanted friendship?)

Students will use the masquerade party scene to recreate a modern version. Students are welcome to recreate the content beforehand that leads Don Pedro to the line, “Will you have me, lady?” Think of a time when you said something you really didn’t meant to say or said something jokingly which was taken seriously: how did your peer react? What were the consequences? What was the outcome? Students will also act out their new scenes in groups.

Examples for Modern rewrites:

- Pressure of a Relationship
- Difference in Orientation/ Gender
- Difference in Race/Ethnicity
- Difference in Religion
- Difference in Age
- Difference in Class
- Difference in Political Views
- Difference in Education

Henry IV Part I (Historical)

One may often find that, unless you have become a literature junkie or avid theater-goer, Shakespeare’s historical plays aren’t as appreciated as they should be. An especially precious gem in the play Henry IV Part I is the tavern scene, something of a play within a play.

The focus I’d like students to understand in this play is the emotional connection to a single fast moment that may slip right by us. We tend to talk a mile a minute these days and many things, unbeknown to us, may come off offensive and hurtful; or an auditor may have a deeper emotional connection that we had no inkling of. We may have even said the most treacherous thing, possibly in a joke and what we actually did was remind them of a past that was horrible and life changing.

Some of those elements pertain to Henry IV Part I Boar’s tavern scene. The main line I would propose you focus on is “Depose Me?” It may be worth it to bring students up to speed with the history of Henry IV and Richard as to why the phrase “Depose Me” has more historical and emotional meaning to Falstaff than it does as a reference to just a change in play roles.

I would recommend students to delve and think of a time they may have offended an elder or someone they look up to like a parent figure. What is a contemporary challenge to authority like deposition? Have you ever hurt your parents to the point of tears/ verge of tears? Have you ever disappointed them in your choice of words or actions? How is this breaking the rules? Would you consider loyalty, love and/ or obedience a sign of an unspoken rule between someone you care about? Students will be asked play with giving directive actions to others to justify a personal view of their own.

In example, Susan is now in her senior year of high school and she feels as though she is past the mother and

daughter bonding stage. She wants independence to show her maturity to her friends. Susan asks her mother to let her out of the car a block before her school so she can walk with her friends into the school building. Her mother agrees and drops her off a block before. What her mother may not know is that Susan's real intention in the request for the premature stop was that Susan is embarrassed to be seen in public with her mother. Was Susan right or wrong and why? Could her actions be justifiable? Would it have been better to lie or tell the truth to her mother? What verbal action could best express Susan's maturity?

Questions for Discussion

Students should be able to allow this to be personal and really delve into the way words matter. Understanding that mockery can turn into a sign or form of bullying should be key as well.

Boars- Head Tavern (Act. II, Sc. IV- Henry IV Part I) Discussion and Scenework

Student will answer the following questions in an open discussion.

1. Do you ever want to talk to a person about something serious but he/she doesn't listen to you? They don't take you seriously? Or maybe they take something too seriously?
2. Do you ever feel unheard when you have good advice? How do you feel when people aren't listening? Do you feel mocked or do you feel as though you mock others during times you are given the best advice?
3. Do you feel like you have a lot to teach but because of your age or your gender or ethnicity, people won't listen to what you have to say? How does that make you feel?
4. Do you ever feel like you have to be the parent sometimes? Why? Does your parent value your opinion or do they overlook what you have to say because you're the child? Is that right? Why do we do that?
5. SPARK QUESTION: What do you think Falstaff is teaching Hal? Can he be joking but also teaching him something important? Can we learn something from someone less educated? Can we learn something serious from a moment played as funny?

Students will use the Boars-head Tavern scene to recreate a modern version. Students are welcome to recreate the content beforehand that leads Falstaff to the line, "Depose Me?" What does depose me? How could this line prove offense? If you could comfort Falstaff what would you tell him? If you could give Hal some advice during this scene, what might be best to tell him? Can you identify the transgressive behavior? If you are playing the king or prince how would you verbalize the transgressive behavior? Students will also act out their new scenes in groups.

Examples for Modern rewrites:

- Asking an older/wiser friend/family member for advice
- Talking to a sibling
- Talking to a teacher
- Debating at an election
- Talking to your doctor
- Giving an eye witness statement to the police

Appendix

National Core Arts Anchor Standards

Anchor Standard 2: Creating

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 4: Performing, Presenting, Producing

Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 5: Performing, Presenting, Producing

Develop and refine artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Performing, Presenting, Producing

Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7: Responding

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Responding

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 9: Responding

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Anchor 10: Connecting

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor 11: Connecting

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

Appendix: Implementing National Core Arts Anchor Standards

The teaching implemented in this unit reflects the National Core Arts Anchor Standards for theatre. Precisely, this unit teaches students to analyze fictional literature (Shakespeare's plays), interpret intent and meaning (such as transgressive speech) and evaluate character intentions and misunderstandings. This unit also teaches students to bear meaning to the scene studied, reflect on the work using connections through society

or culture and incorporate personal experiences into the class discussions. It also allows students the ability to connect to the piece of work by developing their own performance and using their personal ideas with the central theme of the unit. The writing of the scene will be the result of students understanding the theme of the scene as they will be able to make modern connections through a similar issue of misunderstandings. In this unit students will work collectively as a group to discuss the implications of one character upon another, assess where the situation went awry and then divide into smaller groups to recreate a misunderstanding using modern day approaches and issues that they may easily connect to or experience.

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