



Posting Daggers: A Twitter-Centric Approach to Hamlet

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“At the circus your tax dollars pay for, we celebrate life by confronting immortality. We dance with death, though she be a fickle partner, so that when we tango with life it is all the more sweet. Poor Yorick, a fellow of infinite jest. But might we say poor us, if we don’t leave time or space in our hearts for such folly? #shakespeare #hamlet #infinitejest #artschoolproblems”

-from a post on Twitter, 2016

Introduction

Reading Shakespeare deliberately can be an excellent guide to living life deliberately. The Bard not only carries on these 400 plus years later, but remains a cornerstone of Western thought. Not many modern folks fully comprehend the language of Shakespeare’s plays, yet the works endure on American stages and in film and television. Nearly every work has a film adaptation and then another film adaptation, ranging from decades old BBC productions to those of modern Hollywood. Renowned theater troops perform the work still, as do high school theater classes. And the latter is where we will spotlight Shakespeare’s enduring resonance in this curricular unit. High schools are such an enigma in modern America, where all of life’s dramas are possible and apparent and relatable in some way to some scene of some play in Shakespeare. Teachers may struggle to find a way to relate 400 year old language to their students, but when theme and concept and ordinary human emotions are so strong, there is nothing Shakespeare cannot touch, even Twitter.

There was no way the Bard could have been able to tell as he sat with his quill committing verse to immortal page, that four centuries later teenagers would find more value in quick, easily available communiqués from friends, celebrities and strangers in the form of social media. The empire of Facebook is daring to rival Shakespeare’s canon in historical significance, but a part of that empire – and arguably an increasingly part – are smaller and even less complicated offshoots of the social media giant. Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat and Instagram have gained enough legs in modern teen culture that they each have a place in history alongside Shakespeare himself.

So where to start, when dealing with two entities on opposite ends of a spectrum – social media, which modern teens hold in near if not top priority in their lives, and Shakespeare – revered poet, “mortal God” to Bloom ¹, the same to many scholars and artists and patrons alike. Yet to those same modern teens, Shakespeare is mostly something they experience if they are required to at school, appreciate if their instructor is particularly effective, and ultimately forget as easily if they don’t harbor personal appreciation or go into the arts. It may be a mid-semester morning’s dream to hope that the lines from Shakespeare will be as important to an average teen as their devotion to posting tweets, status updates and pictures, or updating their timeline. However if one focuses on the quip or loaded line, an educator might be able to at least utilize the profound devotion to modern tech and media in order to encourage further understanding, appreciation, and real learning. With these short, well-articulated, charged lines so common in Shakespeare, a class could focus on the depth of a phrase or short speech, say, 140 characters or less. This reminds me of something the kids do. . . .

In tweeting Shakespeare, it may be possible to draw the interest of modern learners, perhaps just enough for them to look a little more deeply. If we can engage them with tweets and hashtags, perhaps they’d even delve more intently into the depths of one of the Bard’s most challenging works: *Hamlet* .

Rationale and Background Information

What might students think of “@Horatio” – might they be more interested in studying the role of the famous friend by his Twitter username? If Claudius’s “O, my offense is rank” speech were electronic, would he have shared it with anyone by Direct Message? What if the famous “To be or not to be” speech were separated into tweets – to whom would it be tweeted? What hashtags would be included – #ToBeOrNotToBe or #OutrageousFortune? If Ophelia wanted to blog about her zany lyrical meanderings, would anyone tweet a link to it? Why?

These are just a few problems with which to engage students in the learning of *Hamlet* through use of Twitter, which we will explore in depth in this curricular unit. Furthermore, the duality of public vs. private sentiment is rife within the play, and just as much on modern social media. This curricular unit will highlight an opportunity for educators to juxtapose what Hamlet may have wanted to keep private, or announce publicly, with a meditation on what would, and should, be kept private in modern day as opposed to shared over social media. Students invariably find themselves a part of many dramatic situations – whether it be poverty or loss, or even adverse relationships or woes with friends, and they tweet about it all. They blog or use Instagram to document experiences both light and dramatic, and they are constantly text-messaging and checking each other’s tweets and Instagram feeds and Facebook pages. This curricular unit has involved a test-audience of 12th graders in an urban, arts and humanities-focused magnet school, but is meant for anyone teaching *Hamlet* to teenagers. As many teens throughout history have done, they seethe with drama – seek it out, thrive on it. This proclivity toward “drama” has been regarded negatively by adults and peers, but they are simply exploring their identity with experience, interactions and relationships – the more dramatic the richer, the more meaningful to them. So when teens are looked down upon as being “dramatic” or “dark,” perhaps a better approach is to see this dramatic tendency as a portal – and seize it as an opportunity to allow them to learn a bit of literature on the way. To that end, bringing the Prince of Denmark to them at this emotionally rocky time in their lives can be informative as well as transformative. However, they may need some talking

into it.

That is a good place for social media to come in. *Hamlet* is full of loaded lines, barbs to catch and pins to prick and daggers to pierce into the very soul, using at times just a few simple words. Hamlet makes an entire speech about him, but all we need are two words to know that Yorick was a man of “infinite jest.” Currently, at the time of the writing of this unit, #InfiniteJest is used in 9,205 posts on Instagram (which tallies hashtag usage right in its own app). Many of these can be attributed to the modern novel by David Foster Wallace; however if we search #ToBeOrNotToBe, we find at the time of this unit’s writing 43,831 posts on Instagram. Many of these posts reference the line from *Hamlet* specifically in this hashtag but are applied to anything but – tattoo photos, workout routines, etc. These banal activities, and even trendy modern novels utilizing Shakespearean language, are part of the very crux of how relating Shakespeare to teens through these modern forms of communication can catch. It’s all already out there – all an educator need do is make the connection.

Objectives

If Hamlet had a Twitter account, might that have saved anyone?

This unit will explore how deeply we can be affected by a simple phrase or even word – if it comes from the wrong person under the wrong circumstances – and the prevalence of this phenomenon in *Hamlet*. In order to do that, we will explore the modern trend of brevity – headlines, Tweets, Instagram posts, status updates, blogs and lists – where once we relied on articles and text. We will explore lines in *Hamlet* that bear incredible impact in relation to their brevity, and we will transform those into modern tweets, texts, posts and headlines that have similar, wide-spread effect despite, perhaps even because of, their diminutive nature.

Students will be able to distinguish what aspects of Hamlet’s personality make him who he is by focusing on short quips and succinct lines that carry great impact. They will also look at his relationship with other characters, and the motivations of all by way of these short, “tweet-sized” lines. In order to do this, students will analyze the big impact of a small number of words. By utilizing the modern medium of Twitter (as well as, at times, other social and communication media), they will simultaneously discover the proclivity of people toward sharp, heavy verbal barbs that carry heavy affect or consequence, both emotionally and in the physical world. In essence, this will be a study in human communication; in detail, this will be a thorough look at brief moments in *Hamlet*, and indeed in life, which takes us to places of wide scope with only a few words.

For instance, to study the graveyard scene and Hamlet’s speech about Yorick (and, in effect, life and death; Hamlet’s relationship to his parents), students might create the hashtag #InfiniteJest. What would Hamlet tweet to @Horatio in order to explain his feelings? We would have to take a look at Hamlet’s meaning. Was Yorick more of a parent to him than Gertrude or King Hamlet ever were? And, by discovering how easily one of the only people who truly loved him or he truly loved can slip away into nothing, does this complete his conversion in Act V from vengeance to stoic fortitude? These are big themes of the play that can be opened up with such succinct phrasing. Choosing the right line to tweet or phrase to hashtag can engage students and be the basis for tremendous discussion. Have students analyze what the meaning is of “infinite jest.” Let them tell you why it would make a good hashtag. Continue by picking a line from this speech to tweet, perhaps “He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is!” [V.i.187-189]

Have students respond to and analyze the tweet, see what conclusions they come to and if they match the themes you want to analyze. Then, it's time for students to come up with what to tweet, what hashtags to use, who would send which tweet to whom, or whether to use a blog or Direct Message to explore the intricacies and big themes alike of *Hamlet* .

It will also be important for students to explore the nature of private sentiment vs. public. Students will be able to analyze which lines Hamlet meant to keep to himself, and which were meant for others' benefit. To do this, they will discern whether it would in effect be a "tweet" or kept as a personal blog. Would the tweets be public or private, or would he have used a Direct Message to another character?

More such examples will be explored, and in more detail, in this curricular unit.

A Brief Survey for Teachers of Social Media, Text Messaging, Blogging and Tweeting

If you are a teacher of English it is almost a certainty that you have *some* semblance of Shakespearean know-how; you at the very least have a framework, were it in your curriculum (and it is probably in your curriculum), for teaching a Shakespeare play. The nature of your job, however, does not guarantee any type of knowledge, much less a good grasp on, modern communication technology. And who could blame you? It moves as fast as any other electronic industry, introducing new "apps" (computer and smart phone/tablet applications) almost every day - new ways to communicate, sometimes at the detriment of old ways to communicate. Some may lament that many of our students communicate more over text message than by actually speaking to each other, and yet this is the reality of the modern era, and it doesn't seem to be slowing down or even changing course. And so it is, in my belief, of great importance to at least have a framework for understanding the world of modern comm-tech as an educator. It will certainly help in executing a curricular unit based upon it, and it may even impress your students. Like conversational Spanish when visiting Barcelona, an educator need only know the pertinent details of this modern language to relate it well to teens. I should note that even if you *do* have a solid grasp on these concepts, there may still be useful or interesting information here.

The first email was sent on private servers in 1971, and the World Wide Web went public exactly 20 years later in 1991. AOL Instant Messenger and Google were launched in 1997 and 1998, respectively. The short half decade between 1999 and 2004 saw the advent of blogging websites Blogger and Word Press, as well as Friendster (a social media precursor to Facebook), LinkedIn, Myspace and Facebook itself. Youtube, a social video-streaming website, and Twitter followed quickly after. ² The latter, a website where posts of 140 characters or less altered the landscape of social media and indeed media itself, will be the basis for the modernization of many of the upcoming lines from *Hamlet* (If Hamlet had a Twitter account, might this modern twist on communication have saved anyone from madness or murder?).

SMS (short message service) messages are text communications sent over computers and smart phones or tablets. Text messages, according to mashable.com, are used by 81% of mobile phone users worldwide, and "texting" is the most utilized data application in the world. The first text message was sent in 1992 - when there were no keyboards on mobile phones - so the sender had to use a PC to create the message. The message was: "Merry Christmas." ³ Most teachers are familiar with text messaging as the most ultra-modern scourge of classroom management. However hopefully, with these strategies, students might be able to utilize

this obsession to engage in, instead of to distract from, the analysis of great literature.

“Blog” is a term which evolved from several phrases. The concept of “logging on the web” became a “weblog,” which finally became the vulgar “blog.”⁴ Awkward moniker aside, blogs have come to comprise a huge portion of what people, especially teens, read as web content. The websites Blogger and Word Press, mentioned earlier, are among the most popular places for any user to blog; however the phenomenon has caught such a wave that the most popular are seen as legitimate (for the most part) media news sources. Examples include The Huffington Post, TechCrunch, BuzzFeed, Gawker, and the above referenced Mashable. Hamlet always had quite a bit to say – we can, and will, prompt our students to imagine what it would have been like had he this type of resource.

Twitter is explained by Jessica Hische in a blog offshoot webpage entitled “Mom This is How Twitter Works.” Hische explains that it is a social networking tool found online and uses posts consisting of 140 characters or less. The posts usually consist of things users find interesting or useful or entertaining, some using it as a sort of news feed and others simply to update their friends and family on what is happening with them.⁵

The website (which is a great, far more detailed resource for teachers as a crash-course in the use of Twitter), goes on to explain the idiosyncrasies of exactly who sees what posts, which can be manipulated based on the users’ intention. To tag another user in a tweet, one must use her “username” which is what any given user chooses to be known as on twitter and is preceded by an “@” symbol. Therefore if Hamlet self-identified on twitter, his name would be @Hamlet (hence characters of the play, when referred to with regard to their twitter accounts, are all simply @ + their names).

So if a character wanted to tweet to another, but *only* to that person (it would not show up on the sender’s personal feed), he would simply refer to the person by his username. For example:

@Hamlet: “@Horatio, don’t tell anyone about my #AnticDisposition”

Hamlet does not want anyone to know that his antic disposition (might be) feigned, so he would only want to tell Horatio. In fact, this is *such* a secret that Hamlet would more likely choose to use Direct Messaging – the “chat” aspect of Twitter where users speak *only* to each other and nothing is “posted” to any other user.

However if there *were* something Hamlet wanted to share that he wanted all users (who follow his account, and/or the account of those he mentions) to know about, he could add a character (usually a period) in front of the username he is referring to:

@Hamlet: “We that have free souls, it touches us not. Come see #TheMouseTrap .@Claudius .@Gertrude”

This way, users who follow Hamlet, Claudius *and* Gertrude will understand Hamlet’s thrust at the King and Queen.

Hashtags, seen in the above examples, again described in detail on Hische’s website, serve to put a label on certain tweets with the specific purpose of other users being able to see who is tweeting about the same topic. They start with the “#” symbol, and can be used to popularize a phrase for a concert or gathering, make a topic more popular, or even to apostrophize a joke.⁶

If the cast of *Hamlet* had twitter accounts, most of their hashtags might be used to add Shakespearean dramatic accentuation, or as a “trending” (important) topic (as they are used in examples throughout this

curricular unit).

Now, with this knowledge, we bring the students to Shakespeare, instead of the other way around.

Twitter-Centric Teaching Strategies

Words as Daggers: An Introduction

@Gertrude: "These words like daggers enter into my ears! @Hamlet #LeaveMeAlone"

Words, as we grow to know, can hurt as much as sticks or stones. Even though we try as we may to shield our children (our own and our students) from being hurt by the words of others with perspective and old adages, we humans as social creatures predominantly feel enough of a need for belonging that the words of others can wound us as deeply as any physical harm. Therefore perhaps better than the sticks and stones lesson would be to instill in our children the perspective that words *do* have the power to harm, and the knowledge and history and skills in analysis are helpful defenses. However even then, even at our most enlightened, we are all human and sometimes those daggers will break our defenses, and the rest, as Hamlet says, is silence.

The strategies surrounding this curricular unit, therefore, will predominantly deal with brief, succinct sentiments: words and phrases that - at times intentionally and at other times not - jar the recipient so much that their entire being is affected. In *Hamlet*, the foremost targets of these assaults are Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, even Claudius, which is where we find our most common thread of this concept, the donor of these blunt verbal maladies: Hamlet himself. Sentiments with such brevity yet such impact are heavily prevalent in the play:

Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,

Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love

Over the nasty sty--- [III.iv.91-94] ⁷

Hamlet says much in addition to this when confronting Gertrude in her bed chamber. But if we turn this into a tweet from Hamlet to Gertrude, we might be able to engage students in analysis:

@Hamlet: "@Gertrude You are #Stewed in corruption!"

Hamlet is implying that Gertrude has made herself impure in the bed of his uncle - the word "stewed" here, focused on as a hashtag, may not pop out to a high school student otherwise, yet once the meaning of "stew" as a brothel is explained, the ferocity of this son's assault on his mother becomes clear. One might ask students, once this has been analyzed, if they agree that this word is important enough to make the "trending topic" (hashtag) in this speech.

Gertrude's response is also apt to our theme of brevity. It is only finally with these heavy, nasty lines uttered by Hamlet that she gives up, expresses that she has had too much in few words of her own:

O, speak no more.

These words like daggers enter in my ears. [III.iv.95-96]

Or, if replied as a tweet:

@Gertrude: "These words like daggers enter into my ears! @Hamlet #LeaveMeAlone"

Deciding on the tweet is a way of introducing the question whether Gertrude is hurt by the suggestion that remarriage is a kind of adultery or by the implication that she has been insensitive to her son's pain, regardless of her own views on remarriage. ⁸

Words *can be* like daggers, as Gertrude points out. And we find that the same is true today, very true indeed. The advent of Twitter, Instagram, text-messaging and many other such vehicles for brief, impactful speech have shown us what creatures of terse communication we are. Or, much as Bloom asserts that Shakespeare invented the human (ie, we get much of who we are from Shakespeare's plays), this exercise raises the question – Do we Tweet because we know how deeply words can affect us, or do words affect us so deeply because they are Tweeted (brief, intentionally impactful)?

It is advisable, then, to begin a lesson on this with student-generated examples of times when brief words have had great impact – from a family member, friend, teacher, bully, the media – accompanied by what they believe are the reasons so few words can affect us so deeply. This can be in the form of a journal entry or warm-up question posed on the whiteboard, which is expanded into more detail in the below section on "Classroom Activities."

To Tweet or Not to Tweet: Public Vs. Private Conversations in Modern Media and *Hamlet*

The above is expressed via twitter as a bit of a public battle, at least to the followers of @Hamlet and @Gertrude, and it is appropriate here to point out to students (if a clever one or two has not already) that – isn't this a private conversation in Gertrude's bed chamber? How, then, might they express the conversation differently in modern communication media than by tweeting to each other? Would they text message this or Direct Message the conversation? I think that, although this conversation is private, to analyze it using Twitter one must consider that while there is a fourth wall in a production of the play, there may also be one in its study related to Twitter. Therefore, in an example like the above, it will be OK for students to suspend their disbelief and agree that tweeting this pivotal argument between Hamlet and the queen appropriately represents the sheer drama of it.

However, there is an opportunity here to additionally utilize modern communication media to identify the idiosyncrasies in character interaction within *Hamlet*. We have already contemplated how Hamlet would express his desire for Horatio to guard the feigning of his antic disposition via private message as opposed to public tweet. In the below section we will continue tweeting *Hamlet*, but in addition raise the question of which mode of modern communication – more public or more private – each scenario would most benefit.

Tweeting the Daggers of *Hamlet*

Teaching *Hamlet* can be as personal for an educator as playing the prince can be for an actor. The play is so deep, rich and vast that even with guides like this curricular unit, instruction will always come down to many personal choices. Here, I will give examples of themed lines from the play that carry a very big impact despite the fact that they are brief, and ruminate on their impact if converted to Tweets as examples of scaffolding for students to develop an understanding, then do the same. One might use these examples as they are given here, use some and some of one's own, or simply use this as inspiration or background knowledge to formulate one's own for teaching purposes. I begin and involve this section with three important, impactful lines from the play - one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. All are uttered by Hamlet, two of them to the audience (in his soliloquys), and one uttered to Horatio who, according to Howard Bloom, is the play's "inside outsider" - the character representation of the audience. ⁹ I believe these lines carry the very essence of the play, are strong forays into the study of short lines with very deep meaning, could feed into any teaching of *Hamlet*, and could make excellent Tweets! In this section, we will continue tweeting the heavily-themed lines of *Hamlet*, while adding the question *how* each would or should ultimately be communicated in modern format: that will be a point for the students to decide (reinforcing their pride that they are the experts after-all).

That it should come to this

When Hamlet is brooding over the state of Denmark and Elsinore in his first soliloquy, he laments, "That it should come to this" [I.ii.137] What would be the result of this if it were a Tweet? Certainly there would be comments from other users as to what he means - what should come to this, Hamlet? And what "this" are you so disgusted about? A deeper analysis of the soliloquy is, of course, necessary. But students may be hooked by this single, intriguing line - mysterious on its own yet so rich in context, it begs to be explored beneath the surface. One might compel students to take a second look at the soliloquy and produce what Hamlet might respond to his Twitter followers about what, in fact, is the sphere of reference. Would they focus more on how down he believes the state of Denmark is? Or would they dwell more on his lamentation of his murdered father, and a mere two months later, his mother marrying his uncle who took over the throne?

The tweet:

@Hamlet: "That it should come to this! #ButTwoMonthsDead #MoreThanKinLessThanKind @Gertrude @Claudius"

The format:

Would Hamlet actually tweet this (speaking this to all of Elsinore), be tweeting only Gertrude and Claudius (as in the tweet above) or be Direct Messaging them privately, or simply (as some directors have shown it) be talking to himself? This is occasion for good discussion and analysis of this soliloquy and soliloquys in general. What mode of communication would we generally expect of a soliloquy? *This* particular one? Others? We continue with another, next.

To be, or not to be: that is the question [III.i.56]

Hamlet's meditation on suicide is basically summed up in this "Tweet." Not only is this one of the more famous lines from the play, and indeed from literature, but it is one of the most succinctly representative of the themes and other lines surrounding it. Hamlet is brooding about whether he should just end it all

(frustrated at his inaction toward revenge in addition to everything else that's going wrong), or if even that would be an escape (considering no one knows what happens after death). It is one of the darker moments of a very dark play, and in the classroom this one line can incite much discussion and allow students to delve further into the soliloquy and the scene of which it is a part, in order to find deeper meaning and decide what type of stir – or to use modern parlance, buzz – this as a Tweet would generate.

The tweet:

@Hamlet: "To be, or not to be: that is the question. #ShufflingOff this #MortalCoil #WhatDoesItAllMean"

The format:

This one is a bit more complicated. Directors have sometimes shown Hamlet speaking these lines to the spying Polonius and Claudius – so one might point that out to students and ask them what they'd add to the above tweet in that case (an "@Polonius" and "@Claudius"), thus prompting them to wonder if he is actually contemplating suicide, or simply reinforcing his antic disposition to suspected enemies. Another take could be if this were Hamlet's blog – what would read in the comments? Would other users compel him to explain *why* "that" is the question? What alternate questions (e.g., to revenge or not to revenge) might he be evading by tweeting this one?

***Let it be* [V.ii.339]**

Extra points to the student who asks if this line is what inspired Paul McCartney to the title of his definitive masterpiece composition. He claims it was not – but if teenagers of this modern era make that connection, they deserve extra kudos anyway. One of Hamlet's final lines, when we readers know he has reconciled himself to his impending death, when he is seemingly finally at peace, is arguably representative of Hamlet at his most powerful – accepting death as he does. As Bloom puts it: "[T]here is something far from dead in his heart, something ready or willing, strong beyond the weakness of flesh." ¹⁰ What will the students make of it? If Hamlet Tweets this, what does it say about both the nature of the Prince, and about social media today? Is it so ingrained that a celebrity or public figure would actually Tweet *as* he lies dying? An additional point of inquiry for this quotation is that he says something very close to it to Horatio previously in the scene: "Let be." [V.ii.225] Perhaps this signifies that Hamlet will become so accepting of his own death not simply because he will have finally brought vengeance upon Claudius, but because whatever transition he has made in Act V indicates that he has come to terms with the events of the play, and has made whatever peace of them he can.

The tweet:

@Hamlet: "@Horatio, let it be. #WhatWillBeWillBe #AnticDispositionOver"

The format:

By now, Hamlet might be less concerned with who does or who does not know his feelings. In fact, considering his ponderings of apologies he owes to Laertes in this same scene, he may be quite ready to make his feelings public, and so a standard tweet may actually be best for this sentiment. On the other hand, the actual apology to Laertes may be a very public occasion, and apology can be just the issue to focus attention on what is public (to one or many) and what real feelings are kept private. One can further complicate student thinking by raising the question of why you'd not find "let it be" in the previously spotlighted "To be or not to be"

speech. How and why has the character of Hamlet changed (evolved?) from Act III to Act V? What might this progression look like on Hamlet's twitter feed? Ask students to design it.

Each of these lines can, of course, lead into activities that can be included or be the precursor to what is outlined in the section "Classroom Activities" below.

Generalizations Vs. Pointed Attacks with Examples from Hamlet's Relationships

Gertrude

Oh, mothers. They can be our dearest friends and worst enemies, our strongest advocates and our biggest emotional obstacles. Gertrude qualifies as all these for Hamlet, and he knows it. He is never easy on her. Students will for the most part be able really to identify with him. Who doesn't have a mom who's been tough on him from time to time? Hamlet may be a considerably hyperbolic example of this, because his mother marries his uncle two months after he (unbeknownst to her?) murders her husband. This brings us two highly impactful sentiments from Hamlet that could be used as tweets: "Frailty, thy name is woman" [I.ii.146] in Act I when Hamlet is brooding about his mother's weakness and disrespect in finding another husband so soon after hers has died; and, as a cruel, dark send-off to her corpse as he is dying, "Wretched Queen, adieu!" [V.ii.334]. How cruel his final words to, and thoughts about, his mother.

The tweet:

@Hamlet: "@Gertrude Wretched Queen, Adieu! #TerribleMother #NoLongerWondering #DyingBreath"

The format: direct tweet. It is important to further explore here the difference between a generalization as a tweet, and a pointed barb. We have explored Hamlet's sentiments, curses and explanations, and whether he would be screaming them to the world (open tweet), whispering them to himself (private blog), or pointing them directly at one of the other characters in an ad hominem attack. ¹¹ The last of these options would result in a direct tweet - ie, one that was tweeted to Gertrude but can also be seen on Hamlet's feed (which we would presume in this case includes all of Elsinore). A stage director would decide whether Hamlet addresses a dying Gertrude or apostrophizes an already dead one. The tweet equivalent of this option is a great opportunity to discuss privacy and public rhetoric generally.

Ophelia

Hamlet is cruel to her and, indeed, she to him. Yet she is led by others while he, as is usually the case, is led only by himself. It should be interesting to students to analyze what is essentially a relationship between a girlfriend and boyfriend and wonder if any of what transpires between them is emotional abuse. There are a lot of popular Tweets lauding the importance of awareness and action in response to domestic abuse: can Tweeting words between these two doomed lovers illuminate a connection between the play and modern day? When Hamlet demands "Get thee to a nunnery" [III.i.121], on the surface it can seem like she is simply being advised to find solace in a convent. But further scrutiny of their conversation indicates he may be telling her she belongs in a brothel. In some productions, such as Kenneth Branagh's film, Hamlet speaks this line after perceiving that Polonius has set her up and she is being "used." This difference can lead to a discussion - does Hamlet perceive that Ophelia is setting him up for being spied upon (brothel)? Is he no longer a romantic partner but a prop? Or does he despair of *all* romance and so mean "convent" seriously?

The tweets:

@Hamlet: "@Ophelia Get thee to a nunnery #IKnowYou'reSettingMeUp #Brothel"

@Ophelia: "@Hamlet, I still love you though. What was I to do? #DadMadeMe #PleaseForgiveMe or I might #GoCrazy"

The format: Direct Message. We have turned many of these scenes into tweets to accentuate the drama of the scene in modern terms, in effect breaking the fourth wall in some cases and problematizing the privacy or public rhetoric of a given speech. In this case, a private conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia would be very different indeed. *If* we are to read that Hamlet is aware that he is being watched by Polonius and Claudius, it may be appropriate to have the conversation remain over tweets that include their respective usernames: @Polonius and @Claudius.

Horatio

With the exception of the long-dead Yorick, Horatio seems to be the only major character in the play towards whom Hamlet is openly affectionate. But what Tweets can we find in definitive support of such a relationship? Certainly nothing from the end of the play where Hamlet demands that Horatio not take his own life not out of love, but so that he might ensure Hamlet's name is not sullied after his own death.¹² We might consider, then:

Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee. [III.ii.73 - 76]

When considering form, we might consider two opposing, or perhaps coinciding, meanings in this speech. One is a generalization and would be an open tweet to Hamlet's followers:

@Hamlet: "Give me that man that is not passion's slave and I will wear him in my heart's core.
#TiredOfFakePeople"

The other meaning in this speech is directed toward his friend, Horatio and may be Tweeted as such. However if students believe that Hamlet would want to say this to his friend in private, it would be a direct message. What dramatic irony it would be, were Horatio to check his Twitter account *after* the final, tragic events at Elsinore, to find this Direct Message from Hamlet:

DIRECT MESSAGE: "My Dear friend Horatio, after all this, I don't know whom I can trust around here. But if there were a man that was not passion's slave, it would be you. And I'd wear him in my heart of heart, as I do thee."

While this example focuses on trust, there could be many student interpretations of Hamlet's regard for Horatio. Might Hamlet be telling his friend he can trust him? Could he simply be saying "I admire your cool"? Students could be asked if this is the same message.

There is really no end to how deeply one can explore *Hamlet* in this way, as is illustrated in this last example's multi-format usage. Feel free to experiment, explore, have fun while planning or while working through it with

students. Like *Hamlet* and Twitter alike, this device has endless applications.

Classroom Activities

Warm-ups and Journal Entries

This will be a necessity at the beginning of the unit, and presents an opportunity for students to get into the proper mindset while activating some prior knowledge. Through warm-ups and/or journal entries, students can be led seamlessly into the simultaneous modern world of comm-tech and the classical world of Shakespeare. A good introductory warm-up question is: What are some examples of times that brief words have affected you? A hurtful phrase or comment from a friend, perhaps?

This can be parlayed into any number of journal entries. Further examples of damaging or uplifting words can be written about in a more expanded way – were these words uttered by a family member? A friend? Teacher? Bully? The media? And ultimately, a very important question to ask of students is – why do you think such small words can affect us so deeply?

The Significance of Twitter and other Social Media

It is important to explore the phenomenon of modern technology and social media. Students can continue with a popular Tweet and talk about the significance of it – then imagine Hamlet was a Tweeter. A second (or next) lesson warm-up might be: What would Hamlet’s first Tweet be were he new to Twitter? Students can be compelled to search the text for the answer. This can lead to a discussion and analysis of the deeper meaning of this Tweet, and the assignment can be expanded into the students diving into the play and finding their own favorite lines or lines they simply find significant (if personal connection like a “favorite” is too much to ask).

The Public Vs. Private Sentiment

So much of Hamlet’s dialogue seems to be to himself. Using Twitter – what he would “Tweet” publicly or privately, what he would choose to Direct Message, or what he might simply keep strictly to himself (is there *anything* so private, these days?) – is a wonderful device for exploring with modern modes of communication which dialogue would serve what mode. Analyzing lines with students in this way can be powerful – an educator could experiment with which lines in this curricular unit work well for this practice, or continue to explore for him or herself which lines and/or scenes are most apt.

Formative Assessments

To consistently check for understanding, expand upon lessons and examples, and for practice or homework, consider the following formative activities:

1. Researching impactful Tweets. Here, it is a bad idea to use their own examples, which may be too personal or involve someone else in the class or school.
2. Student-generated Tweets from characters in *Hamlet* – they can even create mock Twitter accounts to do this.

3. Instagram posts using a picture they've created or found online. This can be done in pairs. I am a big advocate of allowing students to choose whether they'd like to work alone, in pairs, or groups when possible and relevant. I find they often go much deeper when the onus is not solely on them to perform, and when they can share both talents and responsibilities. Of course there are times when there is "collateral damage" as it were from this method, and some students will inevitably waste time or allow others to carry the load, but for the most part it does more good than harm. Hamlet, I think, if he were a student, would opt predominantly to work alone.

Text Transcripts

There is, of course, the very general (and perhaps at this point overly-used) activity of developing a Facebook page for each character in *Hamlet*. Or any book. For any lesson. This is certainly a strong route to take for relating character to modern students. However, it has become boring. Many teenagers – at the time of this curricular unit's writing – no longer consider Facebook the preeminent social media vehicle. Now, in 2016, the more popular are the aforementioned Twitter, as well as Tumblr, Snapchat and Instagram.

Utilizing these avenues of instruction can be problematic in at least two ways: for one, it requires the educator to be savvy himself with such media. Also, in an ever-evolving media landscape it is easy for anything written here to become outdated. However the hope is that, in 10 years when Twitter and Instagram are virtual reality applications and the as-of-yet uninvented Videoblastogram (or whatever it may be named) takes over as most popular social media app, that these strategies and activities will be applicable to any such application. One thing I don't foresee changing anytime soon, however, are text messages.

As previously stated, any teacher could have students create or steward an actual Facebook page, another option being a "Fakebook page" or an offline designed mockup of an actual profile. This activity could match any other format – Twitter, Instagram, etc. After students explore Hamlet's personality and interactions with other characters it may be useful to have them design an Instagram or Twitter post about something significant from his early experiences – perhaps his first encounter with the ghost of the king. One might import his last words into these early moments: Has Hamlet always been thinking "the rest is silence"? The students can decide, would Hamlet tweet about his experience? The easy answer is no, as he would not want to reveal things like keeping his "antic disposition." The same would be the case for other social media. However, if he were to *text-message* his experience to his confidantes, that might be another story. So – what would his text message to Horatio look like after he first encounters the ghost in conversation? If we are to go by Bloom's assertion that "we are certain from the start that [the Ghost] indeed is King Hamlet's spirit,¹³ we need only concern ourselves with Hamlet's reaction to it. A good example to model for students might be the text adaptation to an actual passage from the play, such as (see "Teacher Resources" for text-speak translation):

Hamlet: "Saw dad's Ghost. Dnt tell anyone – gotta put on antic disposition"

Horatio: "K. TBH this is wondrous strange tho"

Ghost has been added to this conversation

Ghost: Swear!

Horatio: Kk, geez. I swear

Hamlet: K. I trust myself to you

Important scenes like this can be explored and applied in such a way. When students need to focus on certain scenes to develop understanding deeper than the general plot, in order to really begin gleaning thematic concepts, ones that have born through the centuries, it is important, with limited time, to focus on integral scenes like this one. "Everything in the play depends upon Hamlet's response to the Ghost." ¹⁴ It is argued that if he chooses to ignore the Ghost, no one comes to the grizzly end that they do. It is worth asking if students agree. This is a good place to let Tweeting raise the question why Hamlet jokes with the ghost when it is audible to his friends.

Blogging

Bloom argues that the bigger roles (like Hamlet) are not just roles for actors, but are "real people." They are "rammed with life." ¹⁵ Students should pick one of the four focus characters (Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude or Horatio) they think has traits closest to what a "real person" would be like and write a blog from their perspective.

Mid-Unit Formative Assessment: The Bloom Blog

Bloom argued that Shakespeare, through his work, defined how we would become humanized – life imitating art instead of the other way around. ¹⁶ Students might wonder if this is true. Are there any examples in the tweets of this unit about how we act being *based* on what's happened in Hamlet? Have students blog a response and perhaps tweet a link to said blog.

Final Project

For an appropriate summative assessment that ties all the learning together, it may be advisable to continue along the path of utilizing modern comm-tech to your advantage as an educator. If Hamlet were alive today, would he protect his privacy at all costs, or would he be a blogger? He could be. He is obsessive, loquacious and articulate, and with access to a wide audience. But would he? Bloom asserts that "Elsinore's disease is anywhere's, anytime's. Something is rotten in every state, and if your sensibility is like Hamlet's, then finally you will not tolerate it." ¹⁷ Comparing what is going on in Elsinore to another world problem of today, have students write a blog from Hamlet's perspective. What parts would be Tweeted, which sent by Direct Message, and which kept completely private?

Blogging does not necessarily mean writing informally! And it certainly should not be in this case. This should be written in the format of a formal essay, and examples can be shown of blogs that are successful *because* their creators take the writing format seriously. A good example is The Huffington Post, which can be shown to students on an overhead or using handouts.

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Teacher Resources

Text Speak Translations

TBH – to be honest

K – okay

Kk – okay, okay (with emphasis)

More Examples of Usable Epigrammatic Quotations as Tweets

"This above all: to thine own self be true" [I.iii.78]

"If thou didst ever thy dear father love, Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." [I.v.23-25]

"A little more than kin, a little less than kind" [I.ii.64-65]

"My lady worm's" [V.i.89]

Useful Websites

Jessica Hische's explanatory exploration of Twitter: <http://www.momthisishowtwitterworks.com/>

Appendix: Implementing Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Author's choice will be a huge aspect of this unit. Words are the author's own, and it is up to us to interpret them, therefore this standard will be implemented when discussing the strategic use of short words and phrases in this decidedly tragic resolution to a story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

Clearly the Shakespeare standard is implemented. But also, in this curricular unit, we are exploring impactful, brief lines. This standard can be achieved through this practice, leading to why comedy or tragedy is involved even in small lines throughout the play.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

In this Shakespeare play, we are further interpreting both the written and viewed versions through creating our own tweets, text-messages, blogs and other forms of modern media.

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4. Thompson, Clive. "The Early Years." *New York Magazine*, July, 2016, <http://nymag.com/news/media/15971/>
5. Hische, Jessica. "Mom This is How Twitter Works." July, 2016. <http://www.momthisishowtwitterworks.com/>.
6. Ibid
7. Line quotations are from *Hamlet*'s Signet Edition: Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. New York: Signet Classics, 1998.

8. Brisman, Leslie. Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute Seminar, *Shakespeare and the Scenes of Instruction* , 2016.
9. Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* . New York: Riverhead Books, 1998, 5.
10. Ibid, 422.
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12. Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* , 421.
13. Bloom, Harold. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* , 4.
14. Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* , 387.
15. Ibid, 15
16. Ibid
17. Ibid, 431

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