



Struck to the Soul: Discovering Shakespeare by Directing

Curriculum Unit 16.01.07

by Barbara A. Sasso

Introduction

Within Shakespeare's plays are countless metaphors connecting our lives to actors on a stage. This unit proposes to further students' understanding of themes and character motive when reading Shakespeare by empowering them as dramaturges for scenes from Shakespeare's plays. As directors, they will be responsible for recreating a world and the people who inhabit it. They will need to justify all their creative decisions including setting, costumes, props and character actions. They will also need to determine what characters are feeling emotionally within a scene and how this emotion comes through in the words they speak. They will need to see the scene from above, and understand the characters' interactions from all perspectives.

Shakespeare is difficult. The language is four hundred years old, and although it is modern English, it is difficult for many teachers to use these plays to reach students whose reading comprehension is far below average or whose first language is not English. But isn't our goal as teachers to expand the perspective of our students? We should present characters whose conflicts are profound. Shakespeare's genius reveals the fearsome human heart and takes our students over socio-economic barriers to a place that is rich in vocabulary, poetry, music and thought.

Shakespeare's language reaches beyond the prosaic communicative function of language. The poetry of his expression is transcendent – even without seeing actors perform. Shakespeare's themes are timeless and the instruction of his scenes especially important for students in crises. His plays confront racism, sexuality, gender roles, incest, tribe and family violence, betrayal, the searing and ridiculous qualities of love, power, temptation, murder, war. Considering that homicide and suicide are still primary causes of death for teenagers, ¹ it seems particularly urgent to teach *Romeo and Juliet*. But how to open this door for students!

On the other hand, why should it be hard? Shakespeare's audience was mostly illiterate. Many were the "stinkards" who stood in the yard of the Globe Theater, likely rougher by far than the worst of my students. His plays were performed to people wealthy and poor, and to people who spoke different languages and from different cultures. Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed and seen on stage, not read, relying on stagecraft and actors to help convey what is not in the words, but underneath the skin.

Shakespeare makes us wonder about questions unanswered by characters' words. Why is Hamlet so

depressed, Romeo so desperately lonely, or Iago so evil? Why is Othello swayed by Iago? Why can't Macbeth stand up to Lady Macbeth? Why would Helena cling to Demetrius? Why can't Shylock find mercy? Why is Mercutio self-loathing? Why can't Prospero see his own tyranny? Why does Lear disown his most loyal and honest daughter? Why do Romeo and Juliet choose suicide? What does it take to forgive someone – or to forgive oneself? I would like students to pry deeper into Shakespeare's characters in order to give them insight into their own feelings and encourage them to be patient and thoughtful when making their own life choices. The questions that Shakespeare leaves unanswered are not simple ones. But the conflicts that plague my students – and most humans – are not simple. Literature has the power to give us all strength, wisdom and resiliency in facing our own trials. But how to unlock the wisdom that Shakespeare offers!

In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom writes that Shakespeare is a “mortal god” and our “psychiatrist.”² His argument is that not only are Shakespeare's characters so completely and wholly psychologically real, but that his creations have given us the map by which we learn to find our own humanity. If we give our students the task of being directors, they will gain the ability to work with the words, visualize a character's emotional intent, decide what the characters will wear, what props might be significant, where the scene is to be set, how the characters will move, what they are feeling, how the lines are delivered – and how these elements of stagecraft illuminate the difficult human questions Shakespeare gives us so we might vicariously answer them to improve our own lives.

Why not ask students to provide the stage directions that Shakespeare never wrote? As a director himself, Shakespeare understood that while the actor's speech might be the lines on the map, the voyage to these realms must surely be the internal dream of an individual. Indeed, “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report” what this dream might be. But the director, with his Argos view, must see and hear and communicate his dream. From this perspective, students will better understand not only meanings of individual words, but the human motive and heartbeat beneath the iambic pentameter rhythms of the lines.

My unit will include lessons on *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. These plays offer key scenes of instruction that students at all academic and linguistic levels discover not by simply viewing the scenes, nor necessarily by acting them, nor by simply reading them, but by formulating them as a stage or film director might. The play's the thing.

Objectives and Rationale

I teach English Language Arts at Wilbur Cross High School, a large comprehensive high school in New Haven, Connecticut. Demographically, 62 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged. The graduation rate is 65 percent and about 57 percent of our students are proficient in English. Around 50 percent of the students are Hispanic and 36 percent are African American. These statistics also show that about 30 percent of our students take Advanced Placement exams, with about 51 percent scoring a passing grade.³

Statistics often say little about my students. They don't reveal the large numbers of international students of various socio-economic status, who create the low “English proficiency” rate. Statistics do not show that in New Haven, many of the students in the Advanced Placement classes are children of Yale professors. The statistics don't show that many of the students who are taking Advanced Placement classes are *not* children

of academically enriched environments – just kids who are incredibly academically courageous. Statistics don't reveal the traumas that students bring to school or the difficulties they have that are not academic ones. As an educator in an urban setting, my *in loco parentis* role is as important as my efforts to raise Lexile scores. In teaching literature, I have a duty to teach about life. Storytelling itself arose as a means of instruction for lessons that go beyond the ability to score well on SAT exams, or sometimes, even beyond the ability to graduate high school.

Over the years, my school has instituted programs to address deficits in social and emotional skills that often accompany students growing up in poverty and in disadvantaged environments. These programs try to help students address negative behavior, understand their anger or loss of self. My students need ways to address hopelessness, lack of parental support or guidance, an inability to cope with grievous, senseless losses, and an inability to respond wisely to betrayal, deception and perceived disrespect. But such initiatives tend to come and go with funding and political support. Our society's motivation to support compassionate ways to respond to dysfunctional behavior of poverty-stricken people burdened by bias and racism does not have a stellar track record.

But the same lessons were always available through literature, and in an urban school, teaching life skills is a primary reason to teach literature in the first place. Shakespeare's genius makes his plays a very rich source for helping students see in his characters their own fears and traumas, and find insight, understanding, and compassion that might help them cope with life in a productive way. In my experience, often students who have more challenges in their own lives have very important insights to offer, if inspired to discover them.

Teaching Strategies and Classroom Activities

1) Foundations: Welcome to Shakespeare

For students of all socio-economic backgrounds, introducing Shakespeare is critical. The language is hard. A first glance, his world is foreign. His metaphors are unrecognizable to most young people living in the 21st century. Why are we forcing him on fourteen-year-olds? Why not present an interactive video game that they can download on their iPhones that deal with the same issues?

We have to sell Shakespeare. This is just a matter of showing your students that you respect them. You are asking them to go on a very difficult linguistic voyage with you. To earn their trust, you have to explain why you, not the district or the principal, think this is important for their lives. Selling Shakespeare becomes an act of grace, a leap of faith, a statement that you think your students are capable of absorbing the same therapeutic, intellectually and ideological enrichment as everyone else.

We will never know what Shakespeare thought of homosexuality, but this year a transgender student in my lower-level academic class chose to read lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" soliloquy, with gusto. She later told me the moment gave her a sense of pride in who she was as well as a new respect for Shakespeare. Recently an all-female *Taming of the Shrew* was staged in New York. By giving students free reign as directors, we can help students discover how the genius of Shakespeare can resonate for them.

Shakespeare had keen insight into the traumas of family life, and of love and depression, and thoughts of suicide. These are always relevant issues to young people from all walks of life. It almost seems immoral *not*

to teach *Romeo and Juliet* with conviction, love and compassion to teens who need to know that waiting can make all the difference, or not – to teach *Hamlet* with an eye to unspeakable family sexual abuse.

To get students to buy in, we must explain why Shakespeare can change their lives. To do so, we need to be passionate about Shakespeare ourselves.

2) The Play's The Thing: Scenes of Instruction 4

When thinking of methodology to teach human truths in Shakespeare, we need look no further than Shakespeare himself, who many times in his plays reinforces the very power of stagecraft, of acting out parts, and conveying truths through scenes of plays-within-the-plays or references to life as a stage. Consider such passages in *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Henry IV Part I*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Macbeth*.

To encourage students to discover these truths let them become the stage directors for scenes in Shakespeare where characters are “struck to the soul” with a truth, and reveal them in ways that only come through via theatrical presentation. Students will need to think deeply about their own understanding of human nature, to discover truths about themselves, and to gain thoughtful ways of understanding their own actions. One might want to start by telling students that someone has just given them a pile of money to film the latest adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example. The only caveat is that they need to justify all choices to very demanding producers – which would be our role as teachers.

Students could work in groups, individually, or as a whole class. Depending on academic levels, scenes might be assigned or chosen by the students. Teachers can help struggling students by posing questions about a character's motives to consider for staging particular scenes.

There is much to gain by showing different film versions of a key scene from different directors. Many films of Shakespeare's plays are accessible online. Students should compare aspects of the production that model their tasks for the lesson. Why would a director choose this particular setting? In the scenes presented, compare the personas of the characters as played by different actors. How do different ways of delivering lines, physical actions, use of props and edits made to Shakespeare's text reveal subtleties that shed light on the characters' unspoken emotions? For example, compare Francesca Annis' very passive-aggressive portrayal of Lady Macbeth in Roman Polanski's 1971 film to the more domineering vision that Kate Fleetwood portrays in the 2010 film directed by Rupert Goold. The settings and costumes are extremely different as well. How are both types justifiable as representations of someone who would, and could, push her husband to murdering his king? A third comparison could be made to Victoria Hill's rendition of Lady Macbeth in Gregory Wright's brutal and sexual 2006 film of the play. Hill, who is also a writer for this film, portrays Lady Macbeth as an angry, broken, cocaine-addicted wife of a drug dealer. Choose a key scene to view, such as Act 2, scene 2, the aftermath of Duncan's murder, or Act 1, scenes 5 and 7 as she manipulates him into the murder. Students should have a project response handout on which to write their observations, and class discussion should follow to help all students understand what will be expected of them.

Next, students can choose or be assigned scenes and write a scene analysis. Why is this scene important? Why not drop it from your production? How does it develop conflicts or theme, advance our understanding of the characters and shape a character's development? This will allow students to consider thematic elements that have to do with character motivations: why do people behave the way they behave? Are characters discovering something in this scene about themselves that is very important? What is it?

Students should also write up fairly detailed character analyses for key characters in the scene. These should look back in the play and explain how characters' previous struggles are developing further in this scene. The analyses should also include a description of where the characters are heading emotionally, so that their actions or delivery of lines in this scene will connect. This will allow students to see characters' transitions over time, and see where wrong choices were made and why.

Students could then closely analyze the words they choose to use in the scene. It is important to clarify that directors often cut many lines from the printed text. Which ones are important? Which would they choose to keep and why? Which lines absolutely need to be heard, spoken slowly, or perhaps even directed at the audience? Close analysis of language is always a skill we wish to build in students. Here, students have editorial authority to edit out words, and asking themselves why they would keep other words forces them to analyze the meaning and weight of text. It is a sneakier way of getting them to annotate, and can improve both comprehension and skill in analysis of language.

Students should then describe and justify the setting, costumes, lighting and props. Where do you envision your version of the scene taking place? Why choose this time and place? How do these help you reveal the play's universal themes? Do the same for costumes and props. Students will see how Shakespeare's truths connect to ours, and perhaps create a personal universe for the scene that is more relevant for them.

Students then create a script with stage directions, either using a split page format or a playwriting format. They would include expressive gestures, physical actions and a description of line delivery. Students could then act the scene out so they might embody the characters themselves. Even if students know that directors often take liberties with Shakespeare to change things, they will have to justify whatever they change. Students thus have an opportunity here to get inside the psychology of a character and vicariously experience this moment of human growth, from within the character's shoes and from the perspective of the other characters.

The most important aspect of this lesson is the reflection: How did the characters' journey teach me something about myself, or the people I love? What might I change in my life, based on what I've discovered? What insights do I have now that I might not have had before about a character who is confronting heartache or grief? The main goal of this lesson is to have students expand their knowledge of the human heart and for them to become more self-aware and compassionate. By asking them to create and inhabit the world of a significant scene in Shakespeare's plays, and embody the characters who live in it, they have an opportunity to vicariously experience the transformative emotions of the characters themselves.

Suggested Scenes and Thematic Elements

***The Tempest* : Adolescence, Power, Self and Other, Redemption and Forgiveness**

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is an excellent play to use for students at any level. It is particularly a good play to consider if one is teaching collaboratively with history teachers, as the play provides an interesting snapshot of the world at the beginning of European domination.

Shakespeare takes this theme of power and tyranny from a historical and political realm to one that is very familiar. (Likely sources for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* include a 1609 shipwreck of on the island of Bermuda;

⁵ the diary of Antonio Pigafetta, ⁶ a sailor who accompanied Magellan; and the essay “On the Caniballes” ⁷ by Michel de Montaigne, translated by John Florio.) Prospero’s conflict in the play begins as a political one, but quickly becomes one of a father at some loss to keep control of his teenage daughter who, despite growing up completely sheltered, is still growing independent of him. Shakespeare’s plays move us because while they are often peopled by those in power, they concern human family relationships, human ambition, human identity, human suffering. We all find ourselves lost on this landscape. Act 1, scene 2 of this play would be an excellent scene for students to cover, to explore both issues of political power and family power.

At the beginning of the scene, Miranda is horrified at her father’s creation of the tempest that seemingly has sunk a ship and drowned all aboard. What does the setting look like? What is their “home” on this island? What does Prospero’s “study” look like, or Miranda’s bedroom? How might props in the setting speak to their personalities and to their relationship over the years? He has been her only teacher, and she has matured into a teenage-girl without any maternal guidance. How do they physically interact as she questions him? What are they looking at? Julie Taymor, who also directed the acclaimed stage production of *The Lion King*, directed a film of *The Tempest* (2010) with Helen Mirren as “Prospera”, Miranda’s mother. How might this change intensify their relationship, or change some of the ways they interact?

Prospero assures Miranda that the passengers are safe, then tells her it is time to reveal to her the full story of her past, and who he is. He enjoins her, “Ope thine ear./ Obey and be attentive.” Is Miranda really listening? Prospero asks her six times to pay attention as he tells her how his brother betrayed him. She finally tells him, “Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.” What tone does she use? Miranda listens when Prospero includes her in the story, but should she seem less attentive when he is describing a world she can’t remember or imagine? Staging this would deepen a student’s understanding of the moment a parent asks a teen to understand the parent’s world, to see the parent as a human who has suffered and who has weaknesses. Is the child ready to listen? If students choose a modern setting, might Miranda be focused on her cell phone?

Students should consider their own relationship with their parents. How much do you really hear when your parents talk about their past? Are teenagers really concerned with who their parents were? When is the previous life of a parent important? When is it necessary for a parent to loosen control over a child and allow more freedom in choosing a partner or exercising his or her own opinions and powers?

Miranda states in her first monologue that if she were “any god of power” she would have saved all the souls on the ship. How might she address this to Prospero? How might he react? When he asks her to take off his magic garment before he speaks to her, does Miranda handle it with reverence? When Miranda asks his “reason / For raising this sea storm,” he tells her not to ask any more questions and magically puts her to sleep! Is Miranda in mid-question when he makes her fall asleep? How might students represent Prospero as conflicted about how much she is ready to know? (Perhaps *parents* should stage this scene?)

The scene then explores Prospero’s position as a tyrant. How in stance or costume do we portray him? Ariel, who is begging for his overdue freedom, is in a position of an indentured servant. We learn that Ariel had been imprisoned for twelve years by another usurper of the island, Sycorax, described as a witch, who although hailing from Algiers, was a “blue-eyed hag” who had been left on the island by sailors. Pregnant, she gave birth there to Caliban, her son, who is described as “freckled.” What should they all look like? If the history is to be visually presented, students should discuss their decisions whether or not to do something in their staging and justify their choices. Prospero keeps Ariel in check by threatening him with the same imprisonment, and controls Caliban by whipping him. Having students stage the part of this scene among Ariel, Caliban, Miranda and Prospero would allow them to explore issues of power and perspective.

Miranda is awakened to unwillingly join her father to visit Caliban. Prospero acknowledges that they need him to “make our fire, / Fetch in our wood” and serve in “offices / That profit us.” Caliban relates that in the beginning, Prospero treated him as a child and taught him “how / To name the bigger light and how the less, / That burn by day and night.” Since Caliban’s speech echoes Genesis, should he recall this instruction reverently, as though reading scripture? Caliban showed him all the “qualities” of the island, only to be betrayed and have his “kingdom” stolen from him to be enslaved. Prospero accuses Caliban of trying to rape Miranda: Caliban replies that he would have peopled the island with little Calibans. Miranda claims he is not capable of goodness, that his race is “vile.” Let students know that in most stage or film presentations, directors not only eliminate lines, but sometimes give them to other characters to speak. Might Miranda’s lines be better understood as Prospero’s? How might Miranda react to them? Caliban eloquently uses the language Europeans taught him to curse them, but finds little other “profit” in it. In staging this scene, students should consider Caliban’s tone, his willingness despite threats, to speak up for himself. What of this accusation of “rape”? What tone might Caliban use in recalling this? To what extent do either of them hear *Caliban’s* story? Is Prospero’s anger at the end of this section in part, shame? He is fomenting his own usurpation on this island, perhaps as he did unwittingly back in Naples. It would be interesting for students to construct the story of Sycorax from her perspective. Might it somehow be included in this scene?

Students should know that at the end of the play, both Ariel and Caliban will be freed. Prospero will “bury his staff” and “drown his book” and forgive all those who have wronged him. Along the way, he will be forced to recognize that although he controls the bodies of individuals, Miranda will renounce his wisdom and be of independent mind as much as Ariel and Caliban are. Where should Miranda make her independence manifest?

When Prospero enslaves Ferdinand, he seems to believe that his magical powers cause his daughter and Ferdinand to fall in love. The word “power” comes up in this scene a number of times, as the lovers fall into each other’s sphere. Miranda now challenges her father strongly. “My foot my tutor?” he asks her. Is there a power shift here? How might students direct this scene to indicate whether or not it is Prospero’s magic, or simply the magic of love itself that moves Miranda and Ferdinand? Has Miranda run off during Ariel’s lovely song and spied Ferdinand long before her father catches up to her?

How might students reveal Prospero’s inner world in these scenes? With the wedding masque in Act 4, should Prospero’s political world seem healed through the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand? Should Prospero seem ready to release his control over his daughter? At the end of this scene, Shakespeare reveals the power of theater in our own lives as Prospero’s beautiful speech acknowledges the illusory nature of power and of life itself: “We are but stuff / As dreams are made on.” Should these words reflect a moment of wistfulness or of clarity just before he surrenders his magic, frees the inhabitants of the island, and forgives those he shipwrecked? How should he deliver these lines? Does he mourn the transience of things, especially here the loss in marriage of his daughter? Does he rejoice in this calming awareness of peace at the end of life? Are Miranda and Ferdinand both listening?

In Act 5 Prospero forgives Alonso, Sebastian, his brother Antonio and Caliban for all their misdeeds. It is clear from the text that Alonso and Caliban have learned something and through Prospero’s generosity, have mended their outlook on violence to achieve power. But what of Antonio and Sebastian? Antonio does not respond in words to Prospero’s offer of forgiveness. How would students choose to stage this? Could a director choose to indicate somehow that these two retain their treacherous ways? Should they exchange smug, deceitful smiles as Prospero moves on? How would that theatrical lesson speak to some aspects of human nature, and perhaps, a failure of love?

A Midsummer Night's Dream : The Imperfection of Love

In *Midsummer* the flaws of human love are front and center. As with all literature involving the supernatural, students should be asked to consider what exactly *is* the love potion? How would they portray it? Students should consider, as the Mechanicals must, how they are going to stage a scene that is in a dark forest. What role *will* moonlight have? How will the setting reflect the confusion of love? Should the setting reinforce the sense of the magical? What about costumes? What about symbolic props?

In Act 3, scene 2 things have really gotten out of hand when Puck's mistaken intervention – or perhaps just a warm moonlit midsummer night – causes Lysander to abandon Hermia for Helena, and Demetrius to fall back in love with her. But Helena finds her own strength. She is done with being a fool, is finished with this ridiculous bunch and is ready to head back to Athens. That is, if Hermia doesn't scratch her eyes out first. Consider having students stage Act 3, scene 2 from Helena's plea to Hermia at around line 195. She asks her to remember their close childhood relationship. Perhaps they each possess a token of their friendship? How does Hermia react? How is small Hermia able to hold onto Lysander? What action on stage reinforces her choice to release him to go after Helena? Helena again reminds her of their friendship, and understands in this moment that she was foolish to chase after Demetrius. To whom does Helena deliver these lines? Do the boys physically hold Hermia back as she revs up to attack Helena? As soon as Hermia releases Lysander, they leave Helena defenseless to go fight one another. What expression should she show?

This scene is a lot of fun for students because of its mayhem and endless opportunities for physical humor. But the process of staging the scene might go a long way to guiding them to examine their *own* irrational and foolish actions when love is concerned. Is Lysander staring at Helena to make Hermia blame her? What tone does Lysander use in criticizing Hermia's looks? What can be done on stage to indicate whether the boys are truly themselves or acting like bewitched puppets? Is Helena looking mostly at Demetrius? Does Lysander physically challenge him? Why does Helena not believe Demetrius' claims that he loves her?

The scenes of awakening in Act 4 are also good choices for staging: How would Oberon deliver his lines as he observes Titania in love with an ass? Is he still amused or disturbed? Does he manage to soothe her? How would the actors convey what happens that softens her stance with him about the boy? When the lovers awaken, how might students direct the actors to clarify why they are no longer fighting as they marvel at the dream they have had? When Bottom awakens, is he is mystified or visionary? What tone does this speech take? Is he still the same arrogant character who wants to take all the parts? Is he humbled? What might be done on stage to suggest that we are beyond the silliness of the night and that the lovers are ready to stay with each other despite troubles? Perhaps the mystery could only be conveyed through the wordless expression of the eyes and actions of the lovers on stage.

The lovers are back together, but consider the pairs: Theseus captured Hippolyta in war and says in Act 1 that he "won her love" doing her injuries, but promises to wed her in "another key." How might a director show if he is successful or not in winning her heart? Her words during the hunt in Act 4 indicate that she is impressed by his *dogs* – when he allows the lovers to marry whom they choose, does this seal her affection for *him* ? Consider how to stage the couples as they watch the play. What physical actions indicate their emotional state?

In Act 5, the Mechanicals bungle the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. How should one stage this story about desperation in love in a play about the endurance of love? Michael Hoffman's 1999 film has Flute play his last lines as Thisbe with a tragic tone and the audience is hushed, magically transformed from scoffers to mature, sympathetic human beings. Should such a transformation be suggested, or should the comedy be sustained?

If the latter, then perhaps without Moon, Thisbe can't locate Pyramus immediately on stage, or Flute's voice continues to shift back to the falsetto, or somehow the sword is "mis-stuck" in Pyramus' body to mirror the many "mis-takings"?

Romeo and Juliet: Desperation and Suicide

Getting to the heart of the Romeo and Juliet's personal conflicts as they are introduced in Act 1 is necessary for students to understand their relationship. When we meet Romeo in scene 1, should he seem deeply depressed, or foolishly playing the role of a thwarted lover? He says, "I have lost myself; I am not here." Should he appear to be no more than out of sorts, or reflect a deeper loss of self? In scene 3, Juliet's mother is emotionally distant from her as she tells Juliet her father's plan to marry her profitably to a prince. How does Juliet react? Does she care about her parents? Lady Capulet's sad story in this scene is important, as is the attitude of Nurse. Should Nurse seem conscious of irritating Lady Capulet by reminding her of her absence in Juliet's life? When staging this scene, how do Nurse and Juliet interact, compared to Juliet and her mother?

Act 1, scene 5 further defines the characters and reveals their dangerous attraction. How much attraction should the scene show? Should the staging linger over their interaction on the dance floor or move suddenly to their verbal interaction? Who in this scene seems more in control? How to indicate this? In Act 2, scene 2, how to depict the relationship rush? Romeo is risking his life in pursuing her! Why does he suggest an engagement in response to Juliet's question about "what satisfaction"? Should he seem to change course at that junction or smoothly to continue along his planned betrothal? Nurse calls Juliet away, but when she returns to Romeo, instead of understanding that their love is "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden" she now wants to make marriage arrangements. How might something Nurse said register on her face? Note that Shakespeare never directs Romeo to climb up to her. Perhaps a modern take would have Juliet climbing down. Or perhaps, sharing FaceTime?

Students should consider the number of times Juliet declares that she will kill herself and decide whether threats of suicide should always be taken seriously. Often someone who needs to be in control is someone who is also desperate. How would Juliet's expressions or actions reveal her despair in this scene? How would Romeo's expressions, delivery of lines or actions reveal his dangerous loss of self?

In Bas Lurhmann's interesting and uneven 1996 film of this play, the tomb scene had everyone talking. Leonardo DiCaprio's Romeo has not finished his soliloquy when Juliet awakens, smiling. She doesn't understand that he is drinking poison until it is too late, and he is stunned to see her alive before he dies. They exchange a moment's understanding of the error of passion before Romeo dies. Lurhmann also chooses to eliminate Friar Lawrence and Paris from this scene. Questions for students to consider in the staging: What difference does it make to the interpretation of the play if Romeo sees that Juliet is alive before he kills himself? If we see him kill Paris or not? If Friar Lawrence is in the scene or not? How externally motivated should Friar Lawrence's leaving Juliet alone in the tomb seem to be when he knows she is suicidal? Lurhmann has Juliet shoot herself in the head. How would students stage it? What lessons would they take away from getting inside the characters at this moment?

Macbeth : What is True Power?

Macbeth is a perennial favorite for high schools and is valuable for students because it deals directly with issues of power and self-esteem; it isn't surprising that Geoffrey Wright (2006) sets the stage in the world of drug lords and gangs.

The play begins with witches plotting to wreak havoc with Macbeth, yet perhaps all they do is offer temptations. How might students think of staging the witches as representations for Macbeth's *hamartia* if they first examine Macbeth's character through the end of Act 2? How does he react to the witches' prophecy compared to Banquo? Does Lady Macbeth tell us truth or appear to invent her picture of her husband? After he decides he should not kill Duncan, how suddenly or how slowly should he appear to succumb to his wife's wishes? Going back to the opening scene, how could the witches be portrayed to represent aspects of Macbeth's problems?

I don't think I've seen same portrayal of the witches in any two productions of *Macbeth*. In the 2015 film directed by Justin Kurzel, the witches are three women with a young girl and an infant. (This film, as does the Wright film, begins not with the witches, but with references to the Macbeths' dead child.) Inviting students to add such a dumb show and asking them to justify their vision for the opening scene for *Macbeth* would be an excellent way for them to understand that Macbeth began as someone who is "not without ambition but, without / The illness should attend it" and is also "full o'th'milk of human kindness." How might the witches represent Macbeth's grief, his guilt, his insecurities, or his trauma as a soldier? How might they represent some of his backstory? How to they represent the source of evil for someone who would commit a murder he really doesn't want to commit?

In Act 1, scene 7 Macbeth grapples with the temptation to murder Duncan and decides against it. He firmly tells Lady Macbeth, "We will proceed no further in this business." But he yields to her when she demeans him as a coward and then alludes to the dead child that she would most willingly – and graphically – slay if she had promised. How does she deliver this horrifying assertion? What expression registers on Macbeth's face? Is it fear? Pride? Remorse? Stage directions in the text suggest a party is going on. Does he interact with Duncan at the party? Is Lady Macbeth being irritatingly good at deception? Does he walk away to begin his soliloquy, "If it were done when 'tis done"? In filming, this might be a voice over. Perhaps he doesn't leave, but is looking at Duncan. He has not concluded his speech when Lady Macbeth addresses him. Does he see her approach him? In the text, she enters afterward, but perhaps he is talking to himself. Should she be represented overhearing him? Where are they standing in respect to everyone else? How would you have them interact, physically in this scene? At the end, what does Macbeth believe he will gain from murdering Duncan? How would that goal be represented or ignored in actions? In these moments, director choices in Macbeth's expression could reveal depth to his conflict and exactly how much he is struggling with himself in this scene.

Part of the problem in not *seeing* this play staged it that students lose compassion for the tragic hero. But our compassion for him is key to allowing us to have compassion for fallen people in our own lives, perhaps even ourselves. After killing Duncan, Macbeth says, "To know my deed 'twere best not know myself." Should this appear sincere or staged? How difficult should it appear to be to go back to the person he was before he committed the crime? Does a crime define who you are? At the end of Act 3, after murdering his friend Banquo and being haunted by his ghost, Macbeth is contemplating murdering Macduff, and chooses again to turn to the witches. He says, "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er." Does he pause over a possibility of redemption, or hasten beyond care?

In Act 5, scene 3 Macbeth shouts for a servant with a suggestive name, "Seyton". In some editions of the text, stage directions state that all others exit, but should they? As he shouts, Macbeth begins a speech with "I am sick at heart" and continues with "My way of life / Is fall'n into the sere" where he observe that he has nothing of honor, love or friendship – only curses. How might students stage this? Could Seyton, with the doctor who is attending Lady Macbeth, be listening? Macbeth asks the doctor if he can "Pluck from the memory a rooted

sorrow” or find and remove the disease of his land. He says this as he frantically tries to put on his armor, but seems to direct servants to take it off again. Consider who might be helping him in this scene. Seyton? The doctor? What difference would this make? How might his armor, on or off, and Seyton’s emotional stance (Compassionate? Ironic?) in this scene help illuminate our understanding of Macbeth’s emotional state?

In scene 7, Seyton tells Macbeth that Lady Macbeth is dead. There is a cry of women. What might this cry sound like? How does Macbeth react, as he says he doesn’t know what the sound is? Should a scene of mourning be staged? How does he physically express his assessment of himself in the time between that cry and the news of his wife’s death? The text does not indicate that Macbeth goes to see Lady Macbeth’s corpse. But should her body be on stage during Macbeth’s most famous soliloquy from this play? His first line might be delivered in quite a number of ways: “She should have died hereafter.” Students would need to justify the delivery and physical actions to express how the rest of it goes. Is it addressed to Seyton? To Lady Macbeth? To himself? Macbeth will build up emotion to the end of the scene where he says, “I ‘gin to be aweary of the sun / And wish th’estate o’th’world were now undone.” Has Macbeth learned the effects of resorting to violence to attain power? Has he succumbed entirely to it? Should his suffering in this scene be made apparent?

Hamlet : Family Trauma

What is true of *Hamlet* is also true in many family therapy sessions: everyone talks, no one listens, and no one answers any questions. Students who stage a scene from this play should consider who really has questions and if there are answers.

Hamlet might be the most difficult of all of Shakespeare’s characters to portray. As directors, students will need to describe how the actor speaking Hamlet’s lines will also reveal unspoken emotions, if not truths beneath them. Someone who is reactionary, paranoid, angry, brooding, abusive and suicidal – and is responsible for more murders in this play than anyone else, may not be someone to be staged as a very nice person. Hamlet brings out the worst in everyone. How might students consider portraying this character in a way that makes us care about him? What mannerisms does he have? How physically close does he allow himself to get to other characters? The play raises many questions, but how many should a given staging appear to answer? In his first soliloquy, the question of who killed his father does not come up. What *is* bothering him?

In Act 2, scene 2, Hamlet listens as Claudius holds court. Claudius uses oxymora to describe the death of his brother and his “o’erhasty” marriage to his sister-in-law: “With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage.” How is Hamlet affected by this speech? When he mocks Claudius with, “A little more than kin and less than kind” is he speaking only to himself? If not, is anyone embarrassed?

When Gertrude tells him he should get over his grief for his father, Hamlet rails at her. Should he be represented as implicitly asking her why *she* “seems” *not* to be grieving? Is the inability to pose this question something to consider? Might Hamlet actually be hiding something else beneath his black clothes – is he actually wearing black clothes?—and cloudy expression? How would an actor convey this? Should a director call for Gertrude’s coldness towards her son here and later express her warm desire for him to remain in Denmark? When in Claudius’ monologue does she shift? Does she react to Hamlet’s expressions during this monologue? And what about everyone else?

Claudius lights into Hamlet and calls him obstinate, impious, stubborn, unmanly, unfortified, impatient, simple, vulgar, and peevish – and says that Hamlet’s continuing grief is an insult to his dead father. He then quickly

imparts that Hamlet is next in line to the throne and begs him to stay in Denmark, rather than go back to his life as a student in Wittenberg, calling him, again, his “son.” Gertrude also begs him to stay. Hamlet here relents. Should Claudius convey a shift in emotion towards Hamlet? Should he appear to think he’s won Hamlet over as he and Gertrude go off to drink and shoot off cannons? What are Hamlet’s and Gertrude’s interactions during this speech? How does the court of Denmark, if they are still there, react? Do they seem to favor Claudius or sympathize with Hamlet? Does the crowd exit believing that everything is resolved when nothing is resolved?

Not everyone leaves. The audience is still there. Is Hamlet’s powerful first soliloquy addressed to the audience, or camera? Have we become the unfortunate therapists analyzing this dysfunctional family?

As his friends enter at the end of the speech, Hamlet says, “But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.” When do they enter the scene? How does he react to their entrance? The contested word in the opening line of this speech is “sullied” as it appears in the Second Quarto, but is changed to “solid” in the Folio version. Students might start at the end and go backwards to decide which word works and why. Backing up from the end, Hamlet is not able to understand just why his mother married so quickly, but why she would “post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” Should that disturbing word “incestuous” as relating to an uncle who is not a blood relative of his mother be delivered dispassionately or as though it embodied all that cannot be spoken?

Continuing backwards, we find that the marriage happened within a month of his father’s death, the timing of which seems to shock Hamlet, since he will clarify this observation three times in the speech. Should Hamlet seem melancholy or frenzied when he describes Claudius, who he says is “No more like my father / Than I am to Hercules.” In the same breath that he praises his father, he is denigrating himself. Does his face express unquestioned reverence for his father or is it fully focused on anger towards Claudius? Does Hamlet’s expression convey a belief that *all* women are frail? In Hamlet’s words, his parents were a perfect couple, perfectly in love. Does his face and expression convey this belief? He believes that his father was an excellent king, a “Hyperion” to the “satyr” that is his uncle, a similar contrast to his own distance beneath Hercules. How can an actor physically convey these comparative distances, putting himself at a lowliness comparable to Claudius? How could an actor express the dark emotions that cause Hamlet to believe that the entire world has become “weary, stale, flat and unprofitable”? And how does he express his dark desire that he would kill *himself* (not his uncle, not his mother) if God had not forbidden it? Should he convey a focused anger or general depression as he begins this soliloquy with declaring that he wishes that his own “dirty” flesh, or his own “solid” flesh would melt into purified dew? Students should explain how either word takes on significance when exploring Hamlet’s view of his mother, women in general, his complex view of his father, his parents’ relationship, and his own hateful self-assessment.

How might Hamlet’s mannerisms or expression convey what he must heart-breakingly keep silent about? How will the actor deliver the lines so that we might have an emotional, if not actual, clue to Hamlet’s secret?

The most difficult place to look to for Hamlet’s problem is in the closet scene. Conceiving how Hamlet and Gertrude physically interact in this scene would be a challenge for high school students, but allowing them to stage it could help them see what is unspeakable in the play.

Hamlet has a chance to revenge his father while Claudius is praying. Hamlet’s argument is that if Claudius is cut off on the road to redemption, he will go to Heaven. How close to Claudius should he stand? How would a director attempt to express Hamlet’s emotional state as he chooses not to kill Claudius? Is he too weak, is he too unwilling to do this? Is this a convenient excuse? Should this Hamlet appear Christian, with Christian

beliefs that teach him specifically *not* to revenge, but to forgive? Hamlet's sword might be considered an important prop in this scene. *Does* he take it from its scabbard and then sheath it? His words tell us he is thinking of Gertrude: "My mother stays." How he says these words might reveal if he cares more to talk to her than to revenge his father.

The closet scene begins shockingly with Hamlet's rash murder of Polonius – but what precipitates this? Hamlet reminds Gertrude she is her "husband's brother's wife." She is ready to end the conversation there, but Hamlet insists she stay, saying he will hold a mirror to her soul. What is Hamlet doing that causes Gertrude to cry, "Thou wilt not murder me?" Is she speaking literally? Could Hamlet be physically holding her down? What does she fear seeing? Is the mirror literal? Should the scene be staged so that the audience sees the portraits? Are we the mirror, acting as witness to the family drama? After Hamlet kills Polonius, how does she respond? How does it affect Hamlet and his plan to talk to her? Where is the body in the scene?

Hamlet does not ask directly if Gertrude knows that Claudius killed her husband, but says that his murder of Polonius is "almost as bad, good mother, / as kill a king and marry with his brother." Her response echoes his line, but Hamlet never asks her if she knows the truth about his father's murder. How might a director portray whether he wants to know or not? Instead, he tells her to look at two pictures: One of his father, and one of Claudius. Is it necessary for these pictures to be literal? Should the scene be staged so that the audience sees the portraits? Would having the pictures highlight or take away from what Hamlet wants his mother to see about them? Could the pictures act as a kind of emotional shield for him? Would the audience have seen the face of the Ghost and know what each man looks like?

How much should his next lines echo his first soliloquy? How might a student stage this scene to reveal Hamlet's unspoken trauma and illustrate what his mother did that sickens him, sickens Heaven, and corrupts his world? What tone does he use as he speaks to her? Physically, how do they interact? Is he emotionally strong as he delivers these lines? Is she afraid of him? Is he close to her? How should he ask her to look at the man that was his father? Hamlet describes him as a composite of Olympian gods, and Claudius as "a mildewed ear." What is Gertrude's physical response? As Hamlet rails at her madness for choosing Claudius over his father, should her body language suggest cowardice, lust, or cluelessness as the motive? What are they? Gertrude begs him to stop: "Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grainèd spots." What is Hamlet's physical response to this confession? Should he appear happy to have accomplished his purpose?

How might staging reveal the emotional effect on *Gertrude* of seeing these "spots"? How might students reveal why Hamlet doesn't ask what they are? Hamlet continues with his obsessed and traumatic image of his mother "In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed." How would students stage interactions between Hamlet and Gertrude that might reveal Hamlet's unspoken thoughts? Is he able to touch her or look at her as he says these words? She begs him to stop but his words "like daggers enter" in her ears. Can she look at him? He calls Claudius "a murderer and a villain" but does not tell his mother that Claudius murdered his father. Would Hamlet say this suggestively? Does he believe his mother knows that Claudius murdered his father? Is he avoiding a direct statement of the fact?

When Hamlet calls Claudius "A king of shreds and patches," the Ghost of Hamlet's father enters. In the First Quarto, the directions tell us that the Ghost is in a nightgown – far different from the frightening military armor he wears in Hamlet's first encounter with him. How to dress him and why might reveal what the Ghost represents that speaks to Hamlet's own trauma. Students will need to accept or reject the Quarto directions and justify their choices.

The appearance of the Ghost in this scene and how both Gertrude and Hamlet respond to it might be the place where taking the role of director can reveal for students traumas in this play that are not revealed. Could the scene be blocked as a tableau representing a disturbing family scene from Hamlet's youth? His father suddenly enters, telling Hamlet to leave his mother alone – threatening him. Gertrude insists that nothing is happening, that Hamlet is imagining things as Hamlet cowers, begging angels to protect him. Where does Hamlet look for these angels, these witnesses? Could they be the audience? As Hamlet completes his description of Claudius as “a king of shreds and patches,” should he be looking in the direction in which the ghost appears – or does he turn about suddenly?

Is the Ghost in this scene even there? Does he appear as something spectral or in a very corporeal way that would make it very difficult for Gertrude – or the audience – to deny his presence? Both the Ghost and Gertrude seem to want Hamlet to believe that Gertrude is innocent. How might students depict Hamlet's struggle as he tries to prove otherwise? Gertrude tells Hamlet his “ecstasy” is causing him to imagine things. How does he react to this?

Rather than heed his father, Hamlet continues to assault Gertrude with his injunction that she stop going to bed with his uncle. But then he does something else: He turns to her (Suddenly? After a long pause?) and lays out a picture of a gentler relationship to come: “And, when you are desirous to be blest, / I'll blessing beg of you.” Should this be staged as a sudden, irrational shift or as a proper emotional resolution of all doubts and an ultimate forgiveness? As students take on the task of directing this scene, they might consider questions that Hamlet doesn't ask and ways to use stagecraft to represent them.

Conclusion

The exercise of creating fully-formed, psychologically real humans who express the depth of their emotional journey not only in words, but in actions is a way to give students the means to explore their own humanity and question their own actions as they stage Shakespeare's scenes of instruction.

Resources for Students and Teachers

Bergreen, Laurence. *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe*. New York: Morrow, 2003. The book also captures the spirit of exploration in the Renaissance and includes references to Pigafetta's diary, a source for Sycorax.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. Fascinating essays by a lion of literature. Bloom has brilliant and uniquely personal insights into Shakespeare's characters.

"Florio's Translation of Montaigne's Essays. Chapter XXX: Of the Caniballes." Renaissance Editions. November 21, 2009. Accessed July 02, 2016. <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/montaigne/1xxx.htm>. Source for Gonzalo's description of the island in *The Tempest*. Read Montaigne's essay "On Education" too!

Hamlet. Directed by Franco Zeffirelli. Performed by Mel Gibson, Glen Close, Alan Bates, Paul Scofield, Ian Holm, Helena Bonham

Carter. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1990. DVD. Excellent film of the play. Note Bonham Carter's performance in Act 4.

Hamlet . Directed by Gregory Doran. Performed by David Tennant and Patrick Stewart. BBC. December 26, 2009. Accessed July 2, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/video/1473795626/>. Acclaimed performance by David Tennant.

Hamlet . Directed by Kevin Kline. Performed by Kevin Kline, Dana Ivey, Brian Murray, Diane Venora. New York: New York Shakespeare Festival, 1990. DVD. Kevin Kline might be the best Hamlet ever.

Hamlet . Directed by Laurence Olivier. Performed by Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons. Great Britain: Rank Organisation, 1948. DVD. Lawrence Olivier removes all the dark humor from this play. Why? Good as a discussion piece.

Heron, Melonie, Ph.D. "Adolescent Health." Deaths: Leading Causes for 2013. National Vital Statistics Reports; Vol 65 No 2. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. April 27, 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/adolescent-health.htm>. Sad statistics for adolescent suicide rates.

Macbeth . Directed by Geoffrey Wright. Performed by Sam Worthington, Victoria Hill, Lachy Hulme. Richmond: Arclight Films, 2006. DVD. Violence and sex. A very modern and brutal film set among warring drug lords.

Macbeth . Directed by Orson Welles. Performed by Orson Welles, Jeanette Nolan, Dan O'Herlihy, Roddy McDowall. Los Angeles: Republic Pictures, 1948. DVD. Absolutely stunning cinematography adds much depth to this film.

Macbeth . Directed by Roman Polanski. Produced by Hugh M. Hefner. Performed by Jon Finch, Francesca Annis, Martin Shaw, and Nicholas Selby. United States: Columbia Pictures Presents, 1971. DVD. Disturbing rape scene, but Ross interestingly becomes one of the murderers in this film.

Macbeth . Directed by Rupert Goold. Performed by Patrick Stewart and Kate Fleetwood. BBC. October 6, 2010. Accessed July 02, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/video/1604122998/>. Worth watching for discussion of political stereotypes.

The Merchant of Venice . Directed by Michael Radford. Performed by Al Pacino, Jeremy Irons, Joseph Fiennes, Lynn Collins. Sony Pictures, 2004. DVD. Wonderful film that shows clearly why Shylock is vengeful.

A Midsummer Night's Dream . Directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle. Performed by James Cagney, Olivia De Havilland and Mickey Rooney. Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 1935. DVD. Stunning cinematography and over-the-top performances. Mendelssohn's breathtaking score.

A Midsummer Night's Dream . Directed by Michael Hoffman. Performed by Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Stanley Tucci, Calista Flockhart. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1999. DVD. Lovely modern adaptation. Kline and Tucci are brilliant -- but why the bicycles?

A Midsummer Night's Dream . Directed by Peter Hall. Performed by Helen Mirren, Diana Rigg, Judi Dench And, Ian Holm. United Kingdom: Royal Shakespeare Company, 1968. Accessed May 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RD-7aRcxmA>. Director? Cast? You have to see this one.

Sasso, Barbara. "The Play's the Thing." Google Docs. July 02, 2016. Accessed July 02, 2016. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1V4hKYn3rmW1P1uszdJ-iNM-93vQfAMi-Tmj62Ndie0/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs>. Lesson handout.

Shakespeare, William, and G. Blakemore Evans. *The Riverside Shakespeare* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. Standard college source for all the plays. Signet editions, however, of individual plays have excellent background source information.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* . Edited by Henry Norman Hudson. New York: Ginn and Company, 1901. Accessed August 20, 2010. <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/keydates/tempestbermuda.html>. Research for the shipwreck of the "Sea Adventure" in 1609, a possible source for *The Tempest* .

The Tempest . Directed by Julie Taymor. Performed by Helen Mirren, Alan Cumming, Djimon Hounsou, David Strathairn. United States: Walt Disney Studios, 2010. DVD. Helen Mirren as "Prospera". Excellent performances by Hounsou and Cumming.

"Wilbur Cross High School." US News and World Report High Schools. 2016. Accessed June 4, 2016. <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/connecticut/districts/new-haven-school-district/wilbur-cross-high-school-4498/student-body>. High school demographics.

William Shakespeare's Hamlet . Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Performed by Kenneth Branagh, Julie Christie, and Derek Jacobi. United States: Columbia Pictures, 1996. DVD. The four-hour Hamlet only Kenneth Branagh could conceive. Fabulous performances by many excellent actors.

Appendix: Implementing District and Common Core Standards

The unit complements New Haven School District's curriculum unit for grade 9, identification of self. It complements curriculum a unit for grade 10, which ask students to evaluate the individual and society. Lessons include assignments that meet Common Core Standards for reading literature in gathering evidence and analyzing text, and in determining purpose or theme, in analyzing character through use of dialect and in understanding shifts in cultural expression. Analysis will include a variety of media, including literary narratives, poetry, visual images, film and music.

Notes

1. Heron, Melonie, Ph.D. "Adolescent Health."
2. Bloom, Harold. "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human," 1-17.
3. "Wilbur Cross High School Student Body," US News 2016.
4. Sasso, Barbara. "The Play's the Thing."
5. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* . Edited by Henry Norman Hudson.
6. Bergreen, Laurence. "Castaways" in *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe* .
7. "Florio's Translation of Montaigne's Essays. Chapter XXX: Of the Caniballes."

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>