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Drama as Education II

Friday April 29, 2011

Curriculum Plan

Six Week Unit Plan

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for Tenth Grade High School Drama Students

By Melissa Bergstrom

Timeframe: 12 classes of one hour each (Class meets twice a week for one hour each time)

Essential Questions/Understandings:

Can violence and conflict ever give way to anything but violence and conflict?

In conflict, is there a clear perpetrator and a clear victim?

What defines poetry? Can we as modern theatre artists use hip-hop to better engage with the language of the play?

What role do rumors and insults play in current conflicts between race, religion, politics, and culture?

How do we as artists honor the original text and theme of Shakespeare *and* make it relevant to the world in which we live?

How are the themes in *Romeo and Juliet* universal and applicable to our world today?

The task of a theatre artist is to make a play, whether older or contemporary, relevant to the current audience.

There is no right or wrong way to approach or engage with Shakespeare, but rather a variety of methods one can explore to work with the text, character and themes.

An actor develops a character both physically and psychologically, and there are a variety of ways to do this.

Skills/Knowledge:

Students will understand that Shakespeare utilizes iambic pentameter, and will be able to break down lines into iambic pentameter.

Students will learn how insults and rumors are the seeds of some of the most heated conflicts in the play and in real life.

Students will be able to identify the various elements of language that Shakespeare employs in the play (simile, alliteration, metaphor, imagery, rhythm, rhyme, point of view, personification, repetition, hyperbole). Students will be able to identify these elements in the text.

Students will examine contemporary hip-hop lyrics as a means of exploring the poetry in *Romeo and Juliet* and will build their own poetry out of these lyrics and lines from Shakespeare.

Students will engage in a variety of methods for developing characterization, including but not limited to character walks, socio-poetry, language, and costume design.

Students will be able to identify and engage with design elements, including set, lights, costume, and sound. They will examine how these contribute to a play's concept.

Students will stage their own scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, incorporating the work on our class work on iambic pentameter and character analysis.

Class One:

Students would have read Act I for homework. This day serves as the introduction to the world of the play, and the tension that exists between the Capulets and Montagues. Recap Act I with the "What Happened?" game.

What Happened?" (5-7 minutes)

Use this activity as a way of reviewing what happened in Act II and as a way of checking in to see that students are able to summarize what happened thus far in the play.

Give students as one large group about two minutes to summarize what happened in Act II. When time is up, have all students come to one side of the room to be the "audience", and ask for a few volunteers to start the scene. When the teacher says go, students will take to the playing area, and in their own words, act out Act I. If a student becomes stuck along the way and cannot remember what happened next, they can shout "What happened?", and a member of the audience can come in their place and continue the scene. If an audience member is watching and realizes

the players are leaving something out, they may yell “ What happened was....”, and then come on stage and join the scene.

The idea is that this would be a two minute maximum improve warm-up to get the students on their feet and review what everyone read for homework.

Divide students into two groups, either Capulets or Montagues. Create a common culture within each group, using givens of the play, but leaving room for the students to create the culture. Goal is to get students to engage with and invest in the idea of family rivalry. Play the “Insult Game” with class, divided as Capulets and Montagues to get them in the frame of mind for the rivalry of the play. Also play “Rumors”. See expanded lesson plan for Class One. Read Act II for homework.

Class Two:

Recap Act II with “What Happened?” game, as described previously. Watch the Zeffirelli *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene to show students yet another way in which the play can be styled <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsGhZiDRYSg> .

Students will make a Socio-Poem out of the characters of Romeo and Juliet with butcher paper and markers, and what they have learned about them through the text up to this point. The idea is to engage students in the internal and external forces that exist within and around Romeo and Juliet as human beings to gain a fuller, more three dimensional sense of the characters.

As a class, brainstorm ways in which these feelings, pressures, and contradictions manifest themselves in the world today. Students will explore parallels to conflicts in the local or global community. Record these on a large sheet of paper that can be displayed in the classroom. Over the course of the next few class periods, students are encouraged to write phrases or words or add images related to current crisis and conflicts in the world that go along with the parallels. Read Act III for homework. See expanded lesson plan for Class Two.

Class Three:

Warm up game: Defender. Students will mill and seethe in the space, choosing someone that is to be their protector and someone that is to be their enemy. No one tells anyone else who they have chosen for either role. Spend a few minutes afterwards allowing students to reflect on how the activity played out for them. How does this translate to the relationship dynamics of the play?

Recap Act III with the “What Happened?” game. Show students the opening Act III scene from Baz Luhrman’s *Romeo + Juliet* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2q1HFJHZ1Q>.

Explore status and the dynamics of power among the characters of the play, specifically the power shifts that have happened in the course of Act III. Play with the different statuses by experimenting with walks around the room. Have the students mill and seethe in the space and

play with speeds of walking and movement on a scale from 1-10 to get a sense of how each level feels for the different characters in the play at the opening of Act III. Afterwards, ask students which speed for them felt most powerful? Most subservient? Repeat the activity for how the characters dynamics have shifted by the end of Act III. Again, let students share their discoveries about the shift. Read Act IV for homework. Lessons inspired by an idea on the Folger Shakespeare website <http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanDtl.cfm?lpid=725>

Class Four:

Recap Act IV with the “What Happened?” game. Show students the Act IV scene from Stratford Shakespeare Festival’s 1993 production of *Romeo and Juliet* (I will need to order the DVD here <http://store.stratfordfestival.ca/product.php?productid=685&cat=14&page=2>). Examine the language of the play. Teach the students about iambic pentameter, and possibly use a movement and rhythm game to give students to put some text on its feet and get a sense of the sound. This site is a great resource for teaching the language: <http://www.bardweb.net/content/readings/romeo/lines.html> Have students choose a piece of text from the play and break it down using the system of marking iambic pentameter, then read it aloud to the class. Read Act V for homework.

Class Five: Recap Act V with the “What Happened?” game. As a variation on the Video Shorts presentation, we will read an excerpt aloud as a class from Sharon Draper’s young adult novel *Romiette and Julio*, an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that focuses on the relationship between an African American girl and a Mexican-American boy in modern day Ohio (<http://sharondraper.com/bookdetail.asp?id=7>).

Examine the figurative language of the text. Identify different types of figurative language employed by Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* (simile, alliteration, metaphor, imagery, rhythm, rhyme, point of view, personification, repetition, hyperbole). Have students come up with examples of these from their own lives and experiences.

Then, using either Romeo or Juliet’s speeches below, each student will examine the contradictions that exist in the language and explore these ideas in the context of the play. Students will speak the text one at a time, bringing both the figurative language and iambic pentameter to life. If time permits, students will get into groups to create their own oxymorons and present them to the class in tableaux. Great resource:

http://americanshakespearecenter.indigofiles.com/Romeo_and_Juliet.pdf

Juliet's Speech:

JULIET: O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,
A damned saint, an honourable villain!

Romeo's Speech:

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
O anything, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this. . . .

Class Six:

Video Shorts: Show students trailer for Hip Hop Shakespeare Company's work <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/video/2009/apr/15/hip-hop-shakespeare-akala> as an introduction to using hip hop pedagogy with Shakespeare.

Hip Hop/Shakespeare Lesson (borrowed almost entirely from <http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanDtl.cfm?lpid=751>) Divide students into small groups. Each group will receive a paper bag in which I have placed strips of paper that contain lines from both Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and popular hip hop songs. Each group also gets a large piece of

butcher paper and a glue stick. Each group will pull out ten strips from the bag, one at a time, gluing down each strip on the butcher paper in the order that it was pulled from the bag so that in the end it forms a poem. Come together as a class and allow each group to read each poem. Repeat the activity, with each group pulling ten more strips from the bag, except this time allowing students to craft the poem by arranging the lines in any order they choose. Glue down to paper and again share to the entire class, giving students a choice of music to accompany their poem.

Reflection: What is similar about the Shakespeare and hip hop lyrics? Different? What are some figurative speech used in each? Is one more effective than the other? Why or why not? See expanded lesson plan for Class Six.

Class Seven:

Divide students into groups and assign each group with a scene of the play to present to the class. Students will act out the scene, and additionally write a two to three page paper describing their choice of setting and genre, justifying their choices of design, including set, sound, lights, costumes, and props. Refer back to Class day two brainstorm paper in order to get students thinking of all the possibilities for genre and setting of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Give each group a “Shakespeare” drawing board somewhere in the space. This can be a blank wall where each production team/cast can collect words, images, and materials that inspire and drive their concept. It is essentially their drawing board for the scene presentations. I will provide some words, images, and materials, but students are encouraged to bring items from home that speaks to them.

We will discuss the elements of set, sound, lights, costumes, and props. Students must design a production concept that includes all these areas of design, either to include physically in their production, or to at least describe to the class when not possible to actually do in the classroom (for example, if a group sets the play in the Middle East and wants to include a real tank as part of their set design). A written rationale for why they chose the particular setting and genre that they did must also be included (written rationale and any newspaper articles and/or research that show parallels between the conflict and violence in *Romeo and Juliet* and the concept of the students’ scene.

Give students remaining in class time to have a production meeting for their scenes.

Class Eight:

Rehearsal for presentations of scenes.

Class Nine:

Production meeting for student scenes.

Class Ten:

Rehearsal for presentation of scenes.

Class Eleven:

Round one of presentations of scenes and production concepts. Scenes will be assessed using a rubric.

Class Twelve:

Round two of presentations of scenes and production concepts. Scenes will be assessed using a rubric.