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Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

Scenes from Shakespeare:
Using Excerpts from Romeo and Juliet to Introduce Young Students to the Bard

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Summer Program, 2003

Introduction

One of the challenges of the Theater Arts teacher is to develop in younger students an interest in, and an appreciation for, classic theater. We know that the earlier that someone is exposed to an art form, the greater the chance that he or she will be receptive to or interested in that art form. Unfortunately, very few children or adolescents have the opportunity to attend the theater, and even when they do, it is likely that it will be a contemporary musical or play rather than one of classic dramas. It is imperative, then, that students receive some exposure to classic theater in their classrooms.

Fortunately, this is not as daunting as it sounds. While performing entire plays by Euripides, Moliere, or Shaw is both impractical and probably undesirable, students can perform selected scenes from many of these plays which will give them a real sense of the larger works and of the style and contribution of the playwright. This is particularly true of Shakespeare because many of his tragedies and comedies have fairly simple plots and the interest lies most deeply in the dazzling dialogue. Plus, there is no playwright in the English language more important to students than Shakespeare.

This unit is designed to allow upper elementary school students or middle school students to successfully and authentically perform two short scenes from Shakespeare most accessible play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Students begin by listening to and reading the text. They identify unfamiliar words and learn what they mean. They study the scenes and learn the sequence of actions and the motivation of characters. They start to plan how scenes can be blocked. They learn elements of stage combat and Elizabethan dance. Finally, they add Shakespeare's own words, although edited so there is less to remember, and create an actual performance.

You can hear parents and administrators applauding!

LAUSD Learning Standards

The unit addresses both the major themes of the California Visual and Performing Arts Standards (see individual lessons for strands) and the Los Angeles Unified School District Benchmark Learning Standards.

In particular, it addresses Language Arts Standards 19, 20, and 22 dealing with critical reading and oral language skills and Performing Arts Benchmarks 36 and 42.

Lesson One: Into, Through, and Beyond Vocabulary

Concept

Probably the hardest single thing for students in reading or performing Shakespeare is understanding the many words in Elizabethan English which are no longer used in modern English. And probably the next hardest thing is the many similes and metaphors that Shakespeare uses in his dialogue. This lesson helps students not just understand these strange old words, but feel comfortable using them.

Selected Elements

- Students will be able to understand that language is constantly changing and that the words used in older plays are often different from those which are used today. *Historical/Cultural Context*
- Students will be able to define the meaning of words through mime and dance. *Creative Expression*

Progression

1. The teacher tells the students that they will be watching a brief excerpt from Romeo and Juliet. They should not worry understanding every word, but just try to be able to tell in a single sentence what is going on in the scene. After the class watches the party scene, they briefly discuss it. The teacher will ask what made it hard to understand at times.
2. The teacher then breaks the class into groups of four or five. Students are given abridged versions of both the party scene and the fight scene. Students will identify all words in the passages which are not used today and the party scene. They will be encouraged to first guess at the meaning of each word, and then use a glossary of Elizabethan English or a full-text version of the play to check the exact meaning of each word. The teacher will walk around and assist students as needed. Students should be able to explain the meaning of the word in ordinary English, not just recite a definition.

Task

Students will play Shakespeare Charades. Each group of students will develop a pantomime or a dance routine which illustrates the meaning of one of the archaic words in the text. When all the groups are ready, each will perform for the others. Each group will have one chance to guess what word is being defined through motion. The group which guesses the most words correctly wins.

Criteria

- Students choose words which are no longer in current usage
- The pantomime or dance routine illustrates the meaning of the word
- The pantomime or dance routine is done with grace and style

Assessment

Performance-based Assessment

4
- Words are not only archaic but essential to the meaning of the passage
- Actions clearly and imaginatively illustrate the meaning of the words
- Pantomimes or dance routines are done with style, grace

3
- Words chosen are no longer in current usage
- Actions illustrate the meaning of the words
- Pantomimes or dance routines are done well

2
- Most words chosen are no longer in current usage
- Actions often illustrate meaning of words, though not always clearly
- Some pantomimes or dance routines are done well

1
- Words chosen are not archaic, but still in common use
- Actions do not give a clue as to the word chosen
- Pantomimes or dance routines are done poorly

Verbal Assessment
- Why did you choose the words you did?
- What words were easy to demonstrate? Why? Which words were harder? Why?

Selected Vocabulary

pantomime

Materials, Equipment, & Facilities

Copies of party and fight scenes, markers or highlighters, Elizabethan English glossaries or word lists, a performance space, with a stage, if possible

Lesson Two: From Text to Theater

Concept

Once students can understand the vocabulary of the playwright, they can then begin to deal with the usual elements of reading comprehension – setting, character, story, and plot. The goal in this lesson is for the students to be able to dramatically translate the poet's characters and conflict into their own language so that they understand the situation.

Selected Elements

- Students read and watch scenes from Romeo and Juliet with full comprehension. *Artistic Perception*
- Students will act out the scenes in their own words. *Creative Expression*

Progression

1. The teacher and students will again watch the party scene and also the fight scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.
2. Selected members of the class will read through the play. The class will discuss each scene. For each scene, students will determine the 5 W's: who, what, when, where, and why. Of these questions, what happens and why it happens are the most critical. Students will need to determine the motivation of each major character to answer the why question.

Task

Students will work in groups of five to ten. Each group will improvise both the party scene and the fight scene. The groups will begin by creating beginning, middle, and ending tableaux for each scene. The groups will them move from tableau to tableau using pantomime. Once the scene can be performed silently, then the actors will improvise lines appropriate for Shakespeare's characters and plot.

Criteria

- Dialog appropriately paraphrases the intent of the scene
- Scene blocked appropriately so that actors face the audience
- Actors use entire stage area during the course of the scene
- Dialogue shows emotion and expression consistent with character
- Words are clearly articulated and can be heard
- Actors are serious and focused

Assessment

Performance-based Assessment

4
- Articulate dialogue accurately paraphrases scene
- Actors face audience at all times
- Actors effectively use entire stage area
- Effective dialogue displays emotion and expression consistent with text
- Words are clearly articulated and can always be heard
- Actors are serious and focus, always in character

3
- Dialogue accurately paraphrases actual scene
- Actors face audience
- Actors use entire stage area
- Dialogue shows emotion and expression
- Words are articulated; reasonably good projection
- Actors are serious and focused

2
- Dialogue generally paraphrases actual scene
- Actors usually face audience, though blocking may be awkward
- Actors fail to use the complete stage area
- Dialogue does not consistently emotions of character in text
- Some parts of dialogue may be hard to hear or understand
- Actors sometimes lose focus or go out of character

1
- Dialogue, actions do not generally paraphrase actual scene
- Blocking is often awkward; actors often do not cheat out
- Actors only use a small portion of the stage area
- Emotions are either not expressed or are inconsistent with scene
- Words are often difficult to understand
- Actors are silly or often out of character

Verbal Assessment
- What are the key actions in the scene?
- What are the motivation of each character?

Selected Vocabulary

cheating out, blocking, tableau(x), pantomime,

Materials, Equipment, & Facilities

large room for group activities with stage, if possible

Lesson Three: Stage Combat

Concept

Students love fake fighting! It's the reason that action movies and WWF wrestling are so popular. And it is one of the aspects of Shakespeare which can draw students in and make them engrossed in classical drama. In this lesson, students will learn how to engage in stage combat, and will then add this element to the

Selected Elements

- Students will watch scene from *Romeo and Juliet* to learn how stage combat enhances dialogue. *Artistic Perception*
- Students will act out a fight scene in their own words. *Creative Expression*

Progression

1. The students watch the fight scene from the film version of Romeo and Juliet. They may also watch brief fight scenes from another, modern film such as a kung fu movie. The class will discuss how the actors gave the appearance of fighting and how they avoided being hurt.
2. The teacher will demonstrate how stage combat is choreographed using a volunteer. They will pantomime a fight, including a fatal jab, to the count of six.
3. Students will work in pairs and create six count fight scenes. They will then share these fight scenes with the rest of the class.

Task

Students will perform the fight scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. They will take the performance from Lesson Two and add elements of stage combat.

Criteria

- Dialog appropriately paraphrases the intent of the scene
- Scene blocked appropriately so that actors face the audience
- Actors use entire stage area during the course of the scene
- Fighting is planned so that it is realistic yet safe
- Words are clearly articulated and can be heard
- Actors are serious and focused

Assessment

Performance-based Assessment

4
- Articulate dialogue accurately paraphrases scene
- Actors face audience at all times
- Actors effectively use entire stage area
- Fighting is exciting and realistic yet safe
- Words are clearly articulated and can always be heard
- Actors are serious and focus, always in character

3
- Dialogue accurately paraphrases actual scene
- Actors face audience
- Actors use entire stage area
- Fighting is realistic yet safe
- Words are articulated; reasonably good projection
- Actors are serious and focused

2
- Dialogue generally paraphrases actual scene
- Actors usually face audience, though blocking may be awkward
- Actors fail to use the complete stage area
- Fighting is not always realistic
- Some parts of dialogue may be hard to hear or understand
- Actors sometimes lose focus or go out of character

1
- Dialogue, actions do not generally paraphrase actual scene
- Blocking is often awkward; actors often do not cheat out
- Actors only use a small portion of the stage area
- Fighting is unrealistic or possibly dangerous
- Words are often difficult to understand
- Actors are silly or often out of character

Verbal Assessment
- What is the hardest thing about doing stage combat? What is the easiest?
- How can stage combat be made as realistic as possible while still safe?

Selected Vocabulary
stage combat, choreography

Materials, Equipment, & Facilities
large room for group activities with stage, if possible

Lesson Four: Elizabethan Dance

Concept

Just as dance was an integral part of social life in the Elizabethan area, it features prominently in theater of that period. This, in contrast to stage combat, is an aspect of Shakespeare which can be initially difficult for students. Fortunately, however, Elizabethan dances are not particularly difficult to learn, nor do they involve the kind of intimate physical contact which students dislike. Students with a little practice will find these dances fun and be able to incorporate them into a scene.

Selected Elements

- Students will learn to perform two popular dances of the Elizabethan period, the Branle and the Galliard. *Historical/Cultural Context, Creative Expression*
- Students will incorporate Elizabethan dancing into the party scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, paraphrasing Shakespeare's dialogue. *Creative Expression*

Progression

1. Students will watch the party scene from one of the film versions of *Romeo and Juliet* to observe the integration of dancing into drama.
2. The teacher will teach the Double Branle to the class as a whole group. This is an easy dance, done in a circle. Dancers move the left foot to the left, then join it with the right. This is done twice. Then the dancer move the right foot to the right, then join it with the left. This is also done twice. The movements to the right are slightly smaller than those to the left, so that the circle slowly moves to the left.
3. The teacher will then teacher the Galliard to the class. This is also an easy dance. The dancers make a little leap into the air, landing on the left foot on the first beat with the right foot slightly kicked out. One the second beat, this pattern is reversed. The third and fourth beat repeats the first and second. On the fifth beat, the dance leaps slightly landing on the left foot. The sixth beat repeats the second. The pattern repeats indefinitely. "My Country "Tis of Thee" is a Galliard.

Task

Students will perform the party scene with the Branle and the Galliard. All students will perform the Branle at the beginning of the scene, and those without dialogue will perform the Galliard while the speaking characters do their paraphrased dialogue.

Criteria

- Dialog appropriately paraphrases the intent of the scene
- Scene blocked appropriately so that actors face the audience
- Actors use entire stage area during the course of the scene
- Dancing is authentic and done to the beat
- Words are clearly articulated and can be heard
- Actors are serious and focused

Assessment

Performance-based Assessment

4
- Articulate dialogue accurately paraphrases scene
- Actors face audience at all times
- Actors effectively use entire stage area
- Dance movements are graceful, rhythmic, and accurate
- Words are clearly articulated and can always be heard
- Actors are serious and focus, always in character

3
- Dialogue accurately paraphrases actual scene
- Actors face audience
- Actors use entire stage area
- Dance movements are rhythmic and accurate
- Words are articulated; reasonably good projection
- Actors are serious and focused

2
- Dialogue generally paraphrases actual scene
- Actors usually face audience, though blocking may be awkward
- Actors fail to use the complete stage area
- Dance movements are sometimes rhythmic and accurate
- Some parts of dialogue may be hard to hear or understand
- Actors sometimes lose focus or go out of character

1
- Dialogue, actions do not generally paraphrase actual scene
- Blocking is often awkward; actors often do not cheat out
- Actors only use a small portion of the stage area
- Dance movements are generally not rhythmic nor accurate
- Words are often difficult to understand
- Actors are silly or often out of character

Verbal Assessment

- How do the dances of the Elizabethan age help people meet each other and talk? How are that similar or different from dancing today?

Selected Vocabulary

Branle, Galliard

Materials, Equipment, & Facilities

"Popular Dances of the Renaissance" by Judith Kennedy, CD of early music which accompanies the Kennedy booklet, CD player, large space for practice and performance, with stage, if possible

Lesson Five: Adding Shakespeare's Language

Concept

In this lesson, students move into the actual performance of Shakespeare. As valuable as just knowing the plots of Shakespeare's plays is, the real splendor of his work is found in the stunning sounds and images of those words. Students need to do more than just hear those words. They need the opportunity to speak them, savoring the beautiful flow of iambs and images.

Selected Elements

- Students will perform actual scenes from Romeo and Juliet with dancing and stage combat. *Creative Expression, Historical/Cultural Context*

Progression

1. At the end of lesson two, the teacher should tell students who are interested in one of the parts to start memorizing the lines at home. The teacher will discuss methods for learning the lines and stress how working with a partner is essential for this.
2. Students will audition for parts. Students not auditioning will be practicing dancing.
3. Once actors have been chosen for leading roles, then the class will begin to practice staging and performing both scenes. This can take several class periods. Some rehearsal may be done with individual actors. A student should be chosen to introduce the scenes.

Task

Students will perform the party scenes and the fight scenes from Romeo and Juliet, using an edited version of the actual text, adding both dancing and stage combat. This should be performed before an actual audience of peers, parents, or both.

Criteria

- Actors accurately remember and repeat Shakespeare's words
- Words are clearly articulated and can be heard
- Words are spoken with appropriate emotion and emphasis
- Scene blocked appropriately so that actors face the audience
- Actors use entire stage area during the course of the scene
- Dancing is graceful, rhythmic, and historically accurate
- Fighting is planned so that it is realistic yet safe
- Actors are serious and focused

Assessment

Performance-based Assessment

4
- Actors accurately remember and repeat Shakespeare's words
- Actors face audience at all times
- Actors effectively use entire stage area
- Dance movements are graceful, rhythmic, and accurate
- Fighting is exciting and realistic yet safe
- Words are clearly articulated and can always be heard
- Actors are serious and focus, always in character

3
- Actors remember and repeat Shakespeare's words
- Actors face audience
- Actors use entire stage area
- Dance movements are rhythmic and accurate
- Fighting is and realistic yet safe
- Words are articulated; reasonably good projection
- Actors are serious and focused

2
- Actors remember most of Shakespeare's words
- Actors usually face audience, though blocking may be awkward
- Actors fail to use the complete stage area
- Dance movements are sometimes rhythmic and accurate
- Fighting is not always realistic
- Some parts of dialogue may be hard to hear or understand
- Actors sometimes lose focus or go out of character

1
- Dialogue is mostly improvised because actors do not remember lines
- Blocking is often awkward; actors often do not cheat out
- Actors only use a small portion of the stage area
- Dance movements are generally not rhythmic nor accurate
- Fighting is not realistic and/or may be unsafe
- Words are often difficult to understand
- Actors are silly or often out of character

Verbal Assessment
- What was the best thing about performing? What was the hardest?

Selected Vocabulary

Materials, Equipment, & Facilities

CD of early music which accompanies the Kennedy booklet, CD player, large space for practice and performance, with stage, if possible

Appendix

Shortened Party Scene

Enter CAPULET, all the GUESTS and GENTLEWOMEN to the Maskers

CAPULET
Welcome, gentlemen! ladies that have their toes
Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you
Ah ha, my mistresses! which of you all
Will now deny to dance? she that makes dainty,
She, I'll swear, hath corns; am I come near ye now?
Welcome, gentlemen! I have seen the day
That I have worn a visor and could tell
A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,
Such as would please: 'tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone.
You are welcome, gentlemen! come, musicians, play.
A hall, a hall! give room! and foot it, girls.

Music plays, and they dance

ROMEO [To a Serving man]
What lady is that, which doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight? (1.5.42)

SERVANT
I know not, sir.

ROMEO
O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

TYBALT
This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?

CAPULET
Why, how now, kinsman! wherefore storm you so?

TYBALT
Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe.

CAPULET
Young Romeo is it?

TYBALT
'Tis he, that villain Romeo.

CAPULET
Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone;
He bears him like a portly gentleman;

TYBALT
It fits, when such a villain is a guest:
I'll not endure him.

CAPULET
He shall be endured.

TYBALT
Why, uncle, 'tis a shame.

CAPULET
Go to, go to;
You are a saucy boy: is't so, indeed?

TYBALT
I will withdraw, but this intrusion shall
Now seeming sweet convert to bitter gall.

Exit

ROMEO *[To JULIET]*
If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET
Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

ROMEO
Have not saints lips?

JULIET
Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO
O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray -- grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET
You kiss by the book.

NURSE
Madam, your mother craves a word with you.

ROMEO
What is her mother?

NURSE
Marry, bachelor,
Her mother is the lady of the house.

ROMEO
Is she a Capulet?
O dear account! my life is my foe's debt. (1.5.118)
Exeunt all but JULIET and Nurse

JULIET
Come hither, nurse. What is yond gentleman?

NURSE
His name is Romeo, and a Montague;
The only son of your great enemy.

JULIET
My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!

Exeunt

Shortened Fight Scene

TYBALT
Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo.

MERCUTIO
Consort? What, dost thou make us minstrels?

Here's my fiddlestick; here's that shall
make you dance. Zounds, consort!

TYBALT
Well, peace be with you, sir. Here comes my man.
Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

ROMEO
Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting. Villain am I none.
Therefore farewell. I see thou knowest me not.

TYBALT
Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries
That thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO
I do protest I never injured thee,
But love thee better than thou canst devise
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love;
And so, good Capulet, which name I tender
As dearly as mine own, be satisfied.

TYBALT
What wouldst thou have with me?

MERCUTIO
Good King of Cats, nothing but one of your nine
lives.

TYBALT
I am for you.

MERCUTIO
Come, sir, your passado!

They fight.

MERCUTIO
I am hurt.
A plague o' both your houses! I am sped.
Is he gone and hath nothing?

ROMEO

What, art thou hurt?

MERCUTIO
Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch. Marry, 'tis enough.

ROMEO
Courage, man. The hurt cannot be much.

MERCUTIO
No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a
church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve. Ask for me tomorrow
and you shall find me a grave man.   A plague o' both your houses!
Why the devil came you between us?
I was hurt under your arm.

ROMEO
I thought all for the best.

MERCUTIO
Help me into some house, Romeo,
Or I shall faint. A plague on both your houses!
They have made worms' meat of me. I have,
And soundly too. Your houses.

ROMEO
Alive in triumph, and Mercutio slain?
Away to heaven respective lenity,
And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!

They fight.

ROMEO
O, I am fortune's fool!