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# Teaching Shakespeare in the 21St Century: a Guide for Secondary Educators

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TEACHING SHAKESPEARE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:  
A GUIDE FOR SECONDARY EDUCATORS

by

Deborah Heilmer

A Research Project Presented in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Teaching Shakespeare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Guide for Secondary Educators

This project explains how the integration of innovative methods for teaching Shakespeare's works, and the works of other canonical authors, can increase motivation and achievement among 21<sup>st</sup> century students in the secondary classroom. It provides a rationale for the continued use of Shakespeare's works as part of the secondary curriculum, as well as an overview of common problems associated with teaching Shakespeare today. Issues addressed include cross generational, sociocultural translation and modern-day relevance, as well as assessment authenticity. The project consists of a research paper and unit guide constructed for the purpose of bridging the gap that often exists between modern secondary students and the traditional, secondary English curriculum; both pieces contain explicit examples of research based activities and assessments that address these issues.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Currently, many secondary educators must address the problem of lack of student engagement, motivation, and achievement in the regular classroom (Kleypas, 2004). Frequently, for the English teacher, the most problematic issue is student resistance to reading. Today, many students dislike reading and an even greater number dislike prescribed reading; many perceive traditionally required texts as dull, archaic and irrelevant to their lives (Tabers-Kwak & Kauffman, 2002). Often, for students unmotivated by grades, lack of interest in subject matter is detrimental to their learning and achievement (Arias & Rusillo, 2004). Thus, in an era of high stakes accountability, the great divide between the traditional English curriculum and the modern, secondary student is an area of concern for many English teachers.

Some educators believe that removal of traditional, canonized texts from the English curriculum in favor of student selected reading will increase student interest and, thereby, achievement (Milburn, 2002). However, many teachers contend that the implementation of student selected curriculum will not necessarily increase interest in reading or promote academic success (Arpajian-Jolley, 2009; Paquette, 2007). Most teachers agree that students can benefit from exposure to the ideas and language available in canonical literature.

## Statement of the Problem

Although educators debate the use of traditional literature in secondary English classrooms, most are required to teach texts from the traditional canon. Of these texts, William Shakespeare's works are among the most frequently required and consistently taught in the secondary classroom. However, Shakespeare's works are also among the most frequently resisted and disliked by secondary students (Evans, 2006; Kleypas, 2004). Often, students find Shakespeare's plays incomprehensible and his ideas inaccessible. Consequently, many educators find his works exceptionally difficult to teach; some avoid doing so in favor of easier texts (Hett, 2002; Milburn, 2002). Rather than abandon the use of difficult, traditional texts, such as Shakespeare's works, it has been suggested that educators alter their instructional strategies and teaching methods to bring new relevance and accessibility to the traditional canon.

## Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project will be to develop a unit guide that can be used to effectively engage high school students in the timely, culturally relevant, and integrated study of the works of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Instructional strategies for increased student engagement, motivation, and achievement, as well as comprehension of Elizabethan English and inclusion of diverse student perspectives, will be provided in the guide. Also, the guide will include best practices for the application of: (a) contemporary literary criticism; (b) media integration; (c) sociocultural and historical context; (d) performance and role-playing activities; and (e) writing and assessment. The Colorado State Secondary Standards for Reading and Writing (Colorado

Department of Education, 2009) will be addressed in all suggested activities and assessments, as will Bloom's taxonomy (as cited and revised in Anderson, 2001) and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993).

### Chapter Summary

This author's position is that the traditional literary canon, including the works of William Shakespeare, should remain integral to secondary English education in the United States. However, this author contends that to increase engagement, learning, and achievement in secondary English classes, educators must strive to make the canonical texts current, accessible, and personally relevant for 21st Century high school students. In Chapter 2, Review of Literature, this author will present background information and current perspectives to support revision and innovation of traditional methods for teaching canonical literature, as well as the continued use of Shakespeare's works in secondary English curriculum. Additionally, this author will provide an overview of recently implemented methods and practices used by educators to create accessible, relevant literary studies for students today.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For nearly two centuries, William Shakespeare's works have been central to English education and curriculum in the United States (Davis & Salmone, 1993). While revision of the traditional literary canon and its use in public schools altered curricular requirements in the mid 20th Century, Shakespeare's works remain an integral part of English curriculum in many secondary schools. Today, Shakespeare's plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*, are among the most frequently taught literary texts in the secondary classroom. However, many teachers report that they are also among the most problematic (Kleypas, 2004; Tabers-Kwak & Kauffman, 2002). Recent changes in the cultural landscape and, thereby, student subjectivity, challenge and confound the way in which many teachers present and facilitate secondary study of Shakespeare's works (Hadley, 2002). Similarly, recent developments in learning theory suggest that students possess a variety of 'intelligences' or aptitudes, to include: (a) verbal-linguistic; (b) visual-spatial; (c) musical-rhythmic; (d) naturalistic; (e) logical-mathematical; (f) interpersonal; and (g) intrapersonal, that, often, traditional methods for English instruction fail to address (Gardner, 1993).

#### Student Subjectivity: Recent Changes and Challenges

According to Baines (1997), Hadley (2002), and Morrison (2002), frequently, decreased student receptivity to traditional texts and teaching methods can be attributed

to: (a) a general, cultural shift away from print media toward oral, visual message mediums and entertainment; (b) the increased use of technology; (c) a shift in the practical use of written language; (d) increased cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity in public secondary schools; and (e) increased variation of individual learning styles and aptitudes. Each of these developments has had a unique impact on student subjectivity and created new challenges for secondary educators.

For example, according to Paquette (2007), students from culturally and/or ethnically diverse backgrounds may approach traditional Anglo American texts with resistance, not only because their native language or dialect differ from that of the text, but because they do not view the texts as representative of or relevant to their experiences. Similarly, traditional, highly individualistic reading and writing activities may fail to address the needs of students from collectivist cultures which, often, value the use and development of interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1993). Also, Anglo American, English speaking students who have had little exposure to traditional English literature, may struggle to perceive its current, contextual applicability. Consequently, many students deem both the material and the method presented in a traditional literature course personally irrelevant.

Additionally, the recent emergence of new technologies that allow rapid exchange of information, and the emphasis on oral/visual media may render traditional teaching methods both limiting and academically incomplete in the eyes of students today (Baines, 1997). Similarly, the impact that technologically mediated, global discourse has had on written language and its uses may cause traditional forms of academic writing to appear

limited and without sufficient purpose. Therefore, students today may require not only a more visually stimulating and fast paced learning environment, but also one that encourages them to use and develop a variety of skills and intelligences that are applicable in the modern world.

Also, Kleypas (2004) contends that traditional methods for teaching literature often fail to provide students with opportunities for creative thinking and expression that are vital to their growth and development. Some teachers contend that traditional methods are simply too sedentary for active secondary students (Robbins, 2005). In regard to the incompatibility between many modern students' needs and the traditional, secondary learning environment, Paquette (2007) wrote:

Our school culture encourages children in their formative years to develop active imaginations through recess and role playing, but the structured world of high school does not leave much room for the imaginative activity needed to help teens transition from childhood to adulthood. (p. 41)

Paquette's observation speaks to the notion that, frequently, the structure and delivery of secondary English education contradicts not only current sociocultural norms, but also the style of instruction students grow accustomed to in the primary and early middle grades. Indeed, such a shift in classroom expectations and emphasis may confuse and alienate some students, especially those who respond primarily to intrinsic motivational factors, or exhibit primarily visual/spatial and/or kinesthetic learning styles (Arias-Rusillo, 2004; Gardner, 1993).

In order to address these issues, revision and innovation of traditional methods for teaching literature at the secondary level may be necessary. However, Stibbs (1998) suggested that, frequently, the current emphasis on standards and testing takes

precedence over the need for revision of traditional teaching practices. Many teachers opt against the use of innovative or experimental methods in favor of those driven by the quest for predictable results. Nevertheless, Arpajian-Jolley (2009) contended that the use of innovative and even experimental standards-based methods, designed to address a variety of intelligences and learning styles, can lead to increased student achievement in the classroom, as well as performance on standardized tests (Gardner, 1993). Also, Morrison (2002) found that the use of innovative methods increased involvement and achievement among remedial and at risk student populations.

#### Why Teach Shakespeare? Relevance and Rationale

Although, seemingly, some secondary English teachers choose not to teach Shakespeare's works in favor of more easily accessible material, many believe his plays have the potential to hold great relevance and importance for students today (Arpajian-Jolley, 2009; Carey-Webb, 2001; Mellor & Patterson, 2000; Paquette, 2007; Wortham, 2006). According to Milburn (2002), traditional English works, such as those of Shakespeare, expose students to language that they are unlikely to encounter in modern literature or media, and this exposure is vital to their development as readers and writers of Standard English. Similarly, Milburn argued that exposure to sophisticated language increases student comprehension of formal and academic forms of English, which may be vital to their future success in college or the workplace.

However, Mellor and Patterson (2000) and Paquette (2007) suggested that the importance of teaching Shakespeare lies not in the complexity of his language, but in the notion that his works provide a platform for classroom exploration of timeless, universal

and essential human concerns, such as: (a) love, (b) power, (c) hatred, (d) friendship, (e) anger, (f) sex, and (g) violence. Similarly, Carey-Webb (2001) reported that Shakespeare's plays can be effective in cross-curricular social and cultural studies units that cover timely topics such as: (a) war, (b) politics, (c) leadership, (d) racism, (e) colonialism, (f) gender roles, and (g) social status. Many teachers contend that to avoid such topics in the classroom, because they may be controversial represents both a disservice and a detriment not only to the implementation of a successful Shakespeare study, but also to the education of young adults today.

Frequently, Shakespeare's plays provide students with opportunities to explore important moral and ethical questions (Wortham, 2006). For example, in addition to a traditional focus on literary interpretation, language use, and writing practice, Arpajian-Jolley (2009) used Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, to explore questions of morality, personal responsibility, and conscience, which are relevant topics for adolescents today. According to Paquette (2007), Shakespeare's works are important to the secondary English curriculum, because they allow students to grapple with difficult, human questions, in a safe environment, before they are confronted with them in life. On the subject of classroom catharsis, Paquette (2007) wrote:

Today's media encourage overt sexual and violent behavior in young people who need help making appropriate adult decisions. Shakespeare not only helps them imagine positive and negative effects of such rash behavior, but also gives them a language with which to talk about their scary new emotions around issues of sex and violence. (p. 41)

According to Paquette, often, oversimplification of complex, adult topics is not only rampant in the media today but, also, it can be potentially dangerous to impressionable

teenage students. Consequently, it has been suggested that Shakespeare's unflinching, insightful handling of timeless adult themes and difficult, hot-button topics in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet* may be vital to the education and personal development of 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents, particularly those considered at risk.

#### Teaching Shakespeare: Current Methods and Perspectives

Often, secondary educators share the belief that in order to successfully engage modern students, traditional literature must be made accessible, current and relevant to their lives (Carey-Webb, 2001; Evans, 2006; Hadley, 2002; Hett, 2002; Stibbs, 1998; Wortham, 2006). Additionally, most agree that traditional secondary methods for teaching such material require revision to accommodate students today. In order to: (a) address recent shifts in student subjectivity, (b) build interest, and (c) meet the challenges associated with teaching Shakespeare, many educators support innovation and revision of teaching methods in the following areas: (a) language support; (b) learning activity style and structure; (c) literary analysis; (d) contextualization; (e) media and technology integration; (f) writing practice; and (g) assessment. Frequently, educators report that the introduction of nontraditional methods and activities to address each of these areas increase student engagement and achievement, and make subsequent units of study more enjoyable for modern students.

#### *Translation and Interpretation*

Often, the language which is used in Shakespeare's works presents the greatest obstacle for modern students (Milburn, 2002). Typically, traditional methods for scaffolding difficult texts include: (a) glossaries for language and vocabulary support, (b)

advance organizers to increase understanding of figurative language, and (c) teacher directed analysis of meaning. While these provisions may be necessary to achieve basic student comprehension of Shakespeare's works, it has been suggested that these methods, in isolation, often fail to provide students with the nuanced understanding necessary for self-directed interpretation or analysis (Kleypas, 2004). Without such understanding, students may be unable to make personal, meaningful connections to the literature and, consequently, remain unengaged in study of the material.

According to Kleypas (2004), when paired with traditional forms of language and vocabulary support, student directed translation and interpretation of Shakespeare's works greatly improves student understanding of the texts and helps them connect the reading to their own lives. In discussion of how an author's use of language and dialect impact the student reader, Wortham (2001) wrote: "Students identify with certain voices while distancing themselves from others" (p. 9). In other words, in order to bridge the perceived gap that exists between his world and their own, students must be encouraged not only to understand, but to identify with Shakespeare's voice. Wortham suggests that, to help students connect with the language of traditional texts, teachers must engage them in activities that encourage them to: (a) translate the language into a familiar linguistic code, (b) form complex and arguable interpretations of meaning, and (c) appropriate the text's original language for their own use.

To accomplish this, Wortham (2001) suggested that teachers treat Shakespeare's language as an alternative form of dialect, similar to recent, familiar forms of regional English. Subsequently, Wortham recommended the use of activities that ask students to

translate Shakespeare's language into an alternative parlance. According to Wortham, apprehension and distance often decrease when students are introduced to Elizabethan English in this manner; frequently, students become interested in the communicative complexities of Shakespeare's language when compared with their own, familiar linguistic codes. This approach can effectively bridge the sociocultural gap that may exist between modern students and traditional British literature. As an accompaniment to this form of translation activity, Wortham recommended an exploration of the sociocultural implications associated with the use of different dialects.

In an effort to increase student comprehension and engagement during a Shakespeare unit, Kleypas (2004) conducted a translation activity similar to those Wortham (2001) recommended; Kleypas asked her students choose a scene or speech to translate into their own linguistic code and perform it before the class. Students were encouraged to make personal connections and interpretive claims in their translations. Some students chose to interpret the text through poetry or rap; some chose to recreate the setting or context of the piece, wear costumes, or add props. For example, one student chose to translate a speech from a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and performed her piece as the jilted Helena, in a bathrobe, as she ate a pint of ice cream. As they performed their pieces, students read both the original, Elizabethan language and their translation to the class. This allowed peers to learn from one another and gain exposure to the language. Kleypas reported that this activity solicited extraordinary analytical insights and enthusiasm from her students.

Tabers-Kwak and Kauffman (2002) conducted a similar form of activity in which

students were asked to translate one of Shakespeare's works into language that could be understood by elementary school students. In this case, students were actually able to present their pieces to a fourth grade class; thus the activity proved beneficial to both the elementary and secondary students involved. Picture books based upon Shakespeare's plays were used to help guide students in the creation of their projects and proved a helpful remediation tool for struggling readers.

While some educators choose to implement translation activities, some contend that Shakespeare's language should not be altered by translation, but carefully preserved (Evans, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Milburn, 2002). In this case, often, it is believed students may miss subtle nuances of meaning and affect in translation, and that understanding should come through close, interpretive study of the original language. According to Evans, students should encounter Shakespeare's plays as they were originally intended: not through translation, and not as mere words on a page, but as live, affective, sensory experiences.

In regard to language as sensory experience, Park (2002) cited Grove (1998) and stated: "Considering literature as an art form suggests that it can be experienced at a physical level, just like painting, a piece of music, a film or dance" (p.15). Park suggested that exposure to the intricate physicality of Shakespeare's works is essential to both meaning and appreciation of the text. Recitation, listening, visualization, physical performance, and creative activities are recommended in order to immerse and engage students in the language.

In an effort bring Shakespeare's original language to life through sensory

experience; Jackson (2005) supplemented reading with tangible materials, such as: (a) paintings, (b) costumes, (c) music, (d) food, (e) film, and (f) additional props. In doing so, Jackson addressed visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, and kinesthetic learning styles to increase student appreciation, comprehension, and, interpretation of the text (Gardner, 1993). Jackson kept all materials present in the classroom throughout the unit and allowed students time to explore, inquire, and make predictions about each object before reading the text. Jackson reported that the use of this method boosted curiosity, as students would anticipate what classroom materials represented and how they would be used at various points in the reading.

In addition to this kind of supplementation, Evans (2006) recommended that classes attend live performances of Shakespeare's plays whenever possible. Also, class field trips to theaters which offer backstage tours and, occasionally, interviews with cast members were highly recommended, e.g. as offered at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Such activities address the needs of a variety of learners, to include the naturalistic learner, who often prefers field experience to that of the classroom.

According to Milburn (2002) and Robbins (2005), often, students respond best to Shakespeare's language when they are exposed to it in appropriately paced doses or chunks. Frequently, students find the traditional, act-by-act reading of Shakespeare's plays overwhelming and soon become lost in the complexity of the language, regardless of provided support. Milburn (2002) reported that his students' most successful encounter with Shakespeare's works involved a lesson devoted entirely to the reading and

interpretation of one speech. Similarly, Milburn found that the use of film to supplement the text proved more effective when viewed in chunks along with the reading. While this method may limit student exposure to Shakespeare's works by quantity, it has been suggested that learning may increase in quality.

### *Performance and Play*

According to Paquette (2007) and Robbins (2005), the alteration of learning activities to include an increased emphasis on performance and play in the secondary classroom is necessary to: (a) increase enjoyment and comprehension of required texts; (b) include students' various learning styles; and (c) address the disparity that exists between methods used in primary and secondary grades. In discussion of the importance of play in traditional, literary studies, Zipes (1992, as cited in Hadley, 2002) wrote, "Through playful disruptions, it is possible to begin transforming canonical texts into tales that empower and entertain children at the same time" (p. 77). Similarly, performance and play methods interrupt the necessarily verbal-linguistic emphasis of the secondary English classroom to address the visual-spatial, interpersonal, and kinesthetic needs of the intellectually diverse, modern student (Gardner, 1993).

Frequently, educators recommend the use of performance activities to accompany study of Shakespeare's works; some contend that student performance is imperative to any authentic study of Shakespeare's plays, which were written to be performed and to entertain Elizabethan audiences (Hadley, 2002). According to Hadley (2002), Shakespeare wrote for a performance culture in transition between oral and literary traditions. Thus, it has been suggested that the current emphasis on performance and

audio/visual entertainment in popular culture has produced circumstances similar to those of Shakespeare's time, and ideal for performance based study of his work.

In an effort to increase student interest in Shakespeare, Robbins (2005) used performance based activities designed to help students understand the nuances of: (a) language, (b) characterization, (c) conflict, and (d) mood. Students were asked to give impromptu, interpretive performances of assigned scenes. To support recital and interpretation, Robbins conducted mini lessons in which students learned to read the textual cues available in poetic verse. Students read and prepared only their own lines, but performed in groups of two; they learned that Elizabethan actors frequently gave impromptu performances and read only their own lines, so as to react spontaneously to the action of the play.

Robbins (2005) observed that this activity allowed students to interpret and react to Shakespeare's language, as if engaged in spontaneous dialogue. Class discussion and revised performances followed each initial performance, so that students could apply and present what they had learned. According to Robbins, this activity was effective because it encouraged self-directed inference and interpretation; students began to grasp important aspects of the play in situations where the precise meaning of the language may have been unclear. Also, this activity encouraged visualization, which is an important tool for reading comprehension.

In similar activities, both Bucolo (2007) and Morrison (2002) asked students to form small acting companies and choose one scene to perform, video record, and present to the class. In each of these activities, students were encouraged to provide interpretive

adaptations of their piece. Some students recreated the context of their scene through costume and setting changes; some explored nuances of theme through surprising casting choices or role reversal. For example, Morrison reported that in a recreation of *Othello*, one group opted to switch the sex and race of the main couple midway through the performance; this was done in an effort to complicate and explore racial and gender constructions presented in the piece.

Bucolo reported that a group of young men filmed their dramatic recreation, adapted from the eavesdropping scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the men's bathroom; this was done in an effort to modernize the context of the piece, so as to make it more relevant and accessible to their peers. Both Bucolo and Morrison observed that students explored fascinating themes and made surprising personal connections when they engaged in this activity. Also, most students were excited by the prospect of in class, peer performances.

In an activity designed to increase student understanding of the characters and internal relationships depicted in *The Tempest*, Hadley (2002) used an unconventional form of role play in which individual students took on a specific character's persona, without reading from the text. Rather than recreate scenes from the play, Hadley asked his students to conduct character interviews, and whole class panel discussions with those assigned specific roles. Students who did not portray one of Shakespeare's characters during the course of the activity asked questions and made comments as either interviewers or audience members. On occasion, roles shifted so that each student would have an opportunity to take on a character persona, as well as ask questions of the panel,

or conduct an interview. Hadley reported that these activities fueled extraordinarily profound discussion of not only characters and relationships internal to the text, but also its major thematic questions.

Alternatively, in an effort to increase comprehension of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Paquette (2007) used role play and performance activities designed to engage students in an active study of the play's figurative language. Students were assigned roles and physically acted out the language; they became the "thick night" or Macbeth's "mind full of scorpions" (p. 40). Paquette reported that this activity effectively engaged students in a close study of the language; through role play, students began to accurately interpret difficult metaphors, as well as make predictions about the play's characters, mood and action. Paquette suggested that performance activities may reduce students' resistance to figurative language and increase their interpretive abilities.

#### *Contemporary Literary Criticism*

When students are able to translate and comprehend the fundamental meaning of assigned literature, many teachers choose to include literary criticism as part of their instruction (Mellor & Patterson, 2000). Often, the goal of this practice is to encourage students to grapple with major questions of literary interpretation and significance. Frequently, traditional literary criticism in the secondary classroom exposes students to teacher centered and academic opinion on the subject of textual meaning and author's purpose; texts are treated as though meaning is inherent and fixed, the sole property of the author and the literary expert.

In the secondary classroom, traditional, teacher led literary interpretation can be

problematic for a number of reasons (Hadley, 2002). Park (2002) suggested that the use of traditional literary criticism may discourage students from making their own connections to literature by placing strict limitations on interpretative possibility. Often, traditional literary perspectives exclude students' initial affective associations and emotional responses to literature. In effect, students are asked to dismiss their own subjectivity in favor of academic opinion. Similarly, Park suggested that the use of traditional criticism may oversimplify texts and fail to engage students in complex literary study. Frequently, when students are offered prescribed, academic interpretations of texts, rather than invited to participate in the production of meaning, they simply repeat their teacher's preferred answers (Wortham, 2001). Often, this fails to engage and develop not only students' critical thinking and analytical skills, but also their interest in literature.

It has been suggested that many students find texts more relevant and experience greater success when they are allowed to make their own, authentic connections and interpretive claims (Mellor & Patterson, 2000). According to Tabers-Kwak (2002), students are best served when English teachers "orchestrate dialogue and learning, rather than directing interpretations" (p.70). The adaptation of contemporary literary criticism for the English classroom allows teachers to move away from dictatorial practices to establish an environment that fosters complex, relevant, and student centered literary study (Hadley, 2001; Mellor & Patterson; Wortham, 2001). Additionally, such practices often address the needs of the intrapersonal or reflective learner, who seeks to explore his or her own values and beliefs as part of academic study (Gardner, 1993).

Proponents of contemporary literary criticism, such as Mellor and Patterson (2000), contend that meaning in literature is not fixed, but ever changing, that the reader brings meaning to the text by way of his or her subjectivity, which is influenced by immediate social and historical factors. Although proponents of this perspective affirm the partiality and subjectivity of authorship that is inherent in any text, they contend that plural and perhaps contradictory meanings can and often do exist. Thus, in the contemporary critical approach, there is greater depth and breadth of interpretation, and new production of meaning in the part of the reader is encouraged.

According to Mellor and Patterson (2000), often, the adaptation of a contemporary approach to literary criticism is effective, because it includes diverse student perspectives in the production of meaning. Student subjectivity is not perceived as something that impedes the accuracy of a given interpretation, but is imperative to its relevance (Mellor & Patterson, 2000). Students are encouraged to provide textual evidence to support their interpretations, however, there are no right or wrong answers; there are only varied and arguable readings of the text (Hadley, 2002). Through the application of a contemporary, critical perspective, students are invited to consider Shakespeare's works in terms of fresh analytical perspectives; they engage in active dialogue with the text and one another as they develop and defend their own academic opinions.

For example, in an activity designed to involve students in analysis of ethical positioning in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Wortham (2001) held formal debates in which students developed, presented, and defended original, interpretive readings of the

play. Wortham reported that student participation in this activity: (a) produced a wide variety of complex and debatable interpretations, (b) engaged students in evidence-based analysis, and (c) raised important questions about social stratification, government, and politics.

In a similar study, Mellor and Patterson (2000) chose to engage students in an activity that encouraged them to reflect upon the role that subjectivity plays in the production of meaning. Students were given two contradictory critical interpretations of *Hamlet's* character, Ophelia and were asked to consider how and why each critic came to their respective conclusion. While students were encouraged to interrogate each position and respond with points of argument or agreement, neither interpretation was viewed as necessarily correct. Rather, students were encouraged to consider the rationale and/or agenda that accompanied each reading.

In their synopsis of the study, Mellor and Patterson wrote, “in wanting students to examine what makes particular readings of Ophelia possible, it seemed we were asking them to question not only about the character, but also about representations of femininity and masculinity, and about how we read” (p. 512). Mellor and Patterson reported that this exercise resulted in increased understanding of both the text and the role that reader subjectivity plays in literary interpretation; many students asked questions of immediate, cultural significance and grew more aware of themselves as readers.

#### *Sociocultural and Historical Context*

Frequently, Shakespeare's works are taught in conjunction with study of the era in which they were written (Elsden & Grove, 2009). Typically, information about the life

of the author, the inclusion of readings from Holinshed's chronicles (1587, as cited in Elsden & Grove) and other pieces of pertinent historical information is considered central to student comprehension and appreciation of the texts. While most educators agree that such learning remains an important part of literary study and analysis, it has been suggested that to teach traditional literature solely in the context of the time in which it was written might limit student perceptions of its current relevance. Similarly, it has been suggested that, often, such study presumes omniscience on the part of the teacher or literary scholar and discourages student-centered interpretation of the text (Hadley, 2002).

Rather than restrict the opportunities for contextually based literary study, many teachers recommend: (a) an expanded integration of historical and cultural studies to include past, recent, and current events; (b) increased integration of culturally relevant, textually pertinent ethical and ideological questions; (c) an exploration of the ways in which ideas and representations available in traditional literature are reproduced in modern media and culture; and (d) the treatment of historical source material as narrative; that is, as subjectively produced information open to interpretation by the reader (Carey-Webb, 2001; Ciliolotta-Rubery, 2008; Elsden & Grove, 2009; Derrick, 2003; Hadley, 2002).

For example, in an effort to integrate an exploration of Elizabethan and modern American cultures into a unit on Shakespeare's comedies, Carey-Webb (2001) engaged students in a comparative study of morality and gender roles as presented in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This study included

analysis of both current and historical perspectives on Elizabethan and modern American gender constructions and associated moralities; students were encouraged to compare pervasive cultural norms with situations and characters presented in the two comedies. Also, in a similar unit of study, Carey-Webb asked students to interrogate recent and historical perspectives that surround world colonization and racism with the situation and characters presented in *The Tempest*. In this study, students were encouraged to consider various instances of foreign occupation and racial subordination throughout history.

In another unit of study, designed to integrate literary study with that of politics, Ciliolotta-Rubery (2008) asked students to consider executive leadership and legitimacy issues in a comparative study of two American presidents and Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Students explored the contextual history of *Richard II*, the divine right of kings and usurpation, through modern, political nomination and election, as well as various perceptions of what constitutes a good ruler. In discussion of the results of this unit, Ciliolotta-Rubery wrote:

Students learn quickly how complex the nature of legitimacy can be through the rich characters of Richard and Bolingbroke and how difficult it is to come to a consensus about the qualities or nature of legitimate rule. Moreover, as students proceed to analyze the legitimacy of the central characters, they come to surprising conclusions about themselves as citizens and the way in which they categorize and judge the deeds of political actors. (p.131)

According to Ciliolotta-Rubery, as students compared Shakespeare's characters with familiar political leaders, not only did they begin to connect Shakespeare's play to their own time, they became more aware of their own personal, political expectations and ideologies. In a similar study, Wortham (2001) asked students to compare political and ethical principles as presented in the play, *Julius Caesar*, with those of Elizabethan

England and the modern world. Students were encouraged to consider and discuss their own political and ethical beliefs throughout the study; they grappled with questions that pertain to: (a) politics, (b) society, and (c) government.

Often, teachers who involve students in this type of comparative and contextual study recommend activities in which students find and share recent articles and reports that reflect modern treatment of topics covered in Shakespeare's works (Carey-Webb, 2001; Elsdon & Grove, 2009; Hadley, 2002; Wortham, 2001). For example, after the events of September 11, Derrick (2003) asked students to explore Shakespeare's representations of military conflict with recent military action that had occurred around the world. Additionally, Derrick asked students to consider media representations of good vs. evil and terrorists vs. heroes, in terms of characters presented in Shakespeare's plays. Derrick reported that such activities increased student interest and engagement in the plays, and created an atmosphere of dialogue regarding recent and highly relevant world events.

According to Hadley (2002), when students are asked to consider Shakespeare's works outside the context of the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare becomes a contemporary voice that encourages them to think critically about their world (Hadley). According to Wortham (2001), comparative study of Shakespeare's texts, world history, and modern American culture not only builds relevance, but also encourages students to think critically about their world, as well as raise profound, moral and ethical questions. Additionally, when students are allowed to view history as a varied, subjectively produced narrative, studies of Elizabethan history promote the development of complex

literary interpretation and broadened world perspectives (Elsden & Grove, 2009).

### *Film Studies*

Frequently, teachers use film versions of Shakespeare's plays to accompany literary study and build comprehension (Arpajian-Jolley, 2009). It has been suggested that, often, traditionally conceived films, such as Franco Zeffirelli's (1968, as cited in Christel, 2000) *Romeo and Juliet*, are useful for language support and effectively expose students to the original, Elizabethan, performance based context of the plays. However, many teachers contend that the inclusion of a variety of films conceptualized as non-traditional versions of Shakespeare's plays, as well as films that present similar situations or characters to those presented by Shakespeare, prove to be effective instructional tools. Also, many teachers suggest that the inclusion of film analysis as part of secondary English curriculum is as important as the inclusion of literary analysis; because, film serves as a natural accompaniment to literature, especially performance literature, and it creates fresh, familiar critical thinking opportunities that encourage students to become thoughtful consumers of modern media (Arpajian-Jolley; Christel).

According to Arpajian-Jolley (2009) "When students see themes from classic literature receive fresh new treatments from contemporary authors, they discover the timelessness of great literature and the universality of its themes" (p. 73). Frequently, modern film versions of Shakespeare's plays recontextualize the material in such a way that allows for greater understanding and appreciation of the texts for students today (Christel, 2000). Some films, such as Baz Luhrmann's, *Romeo and Juliet* (1996, as cited in Christel) maintain the original language, but modernize the setting and situation of the

piece, as well as cast film stars who are recognizable to and popular with many secondary students. Often, the inclusion of such films is effective, because exposure to Shakespeare's language remains, while a more familiar and relatable context encourages increased interest and comprehension (Milburn, 2002).

For example, when students are able to contextualize the feud between the Montagues and Capulets in terms of gang warfare, or cultural tension, they may be able to connect the central conflict of the play to the problems of the modern world; thus, Shakespeare's works become more palatable and the dramatic situation of the play holds more relevance (Morrison, 2002). Recently, filmmakers have produced recontextualized adaptations of plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *the Twelfth Night*, and *Othello* that include modernized language and take place in a high school setting (Christel, 2000). While films such as these do not expose students to the original language of Shakespeare's texts, they can provide effective language support, as well as encourage student engagement (Morrison).

Often, teachers use recent teen film adaptations as a base line for contextual study, interpretative activities, and/or creative reenactment of Shakespeare's plays. Arpajian-Jolley (2009) asked students to analyze Shakespeare's plays against modern film adaptations such as Gil Junger's *Ten Things I Hate about You* (1999, as cited in Arpajian-Jolley, 2009) to look for similarities and differences, as well as consider the interpretive and contextual choices of the filmmakers. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the most important instructional benefit to the inclusion of teen film adaptations in Shakespeare studies is that, often, they provide the most timely, relevant,

and comprehensive vision of the work available to the secondary student. The utilization of such films in the secondary classroom can inspire students to connect traditional literature not only to the greater cultural landscape, but also to their own, immediate experiences.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that, often, students engaged in study of Shakespeare's works benefit from comparative analysis of contemporary films that are not necessarily adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, but explore similar themes and/or include characters that encounter similar dilemmas (Arpajian-Jolley, 2009). In a unit that combined Shakespeare and film studies, Arpajian-Jolley (2009) led students in a comparative study of the play *Macbeth*, Woody Allen's films *Match Point* (2005) and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989, all cited in Arpajian-Jolley, 2009). Arpajian-Jolley asked students to compare and consider the moral dilemmas presented to the characters in each piece; students considered human representations of crime, conscience, responsibility, ambition, and retribution in their analysis. Also, students analyzed the artistic choices of the filmmakers; they considered the ways in which music, setting, photography, and direction nuance themes available in the films as well as in Shakespeare's play. Arpajian-Jolley reports that the inclusion of contemporary films in the study of Shakespeare increased student interest and comprehension; additionally, the unit evoked profound, interesting student analysis and insight.

In a similar lesson that covered the St. Crispin's day speech from *Henry V*, Milburn (2002) showed students two different film versions of the scene, one starring Laurence Olivier (1944) and one with Kenneth Branagh (1989), as well as pre-battle

speeches from popular films such as *Gladiator* (2000) and *Braveheart* (1995, all cited in Milburn). Milburn reported that most students were active in their discussion of the two different adaptations and adamantly preferred Branagh's grittier, more realistic version. However, also, they were interested in the connections that the comparison between Branagh's interpretation and modern war films brought to light. Milburn reported that this activity led to an important discussion of cultural and media representations of war, leadership, and bravery throughout history and in the present day. Also, the lesson led to greater understanding and appreciation of the play for many students.

#### *Modern Media and Technology Integration*

In addition to the use of modern film adaptations to engage students in study of traditional literature, many teachers report that, often, the inclusion of modern communication and informational technologies increases student learning and engagement (Bucolo, 2007; Farabaugh, 2007; Hett, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Sesmet, 2009). It has been suggested that the inclusion of modern technology and media in the English classroom more appropriately reflects the way students today produce, receive, and seek new information. Therefore, many modern students perceive studies which include the use of technology, modern media, and computer literacy skills as more personally useful and academically relevant than those which do not. Also, frequently, the use of modern media and technological innovation in the classroom creates opportunities for the integration of a variety of disciplines in literary study; teachers are able to create learning environments that are more inclusive of students with preferences or aptitudes for science, mathematics, music, or social studies.

Often, Internet based research and the use of applicable websites, as part of literary study, is central to classroom technology and media integration (Hett, 2002). For example, through the use of the online Folger Shakespeare Library, teachers can provide students with a plethora of information and possible research topics relevant to Shakespeare studies; students can access a variety of: (a) articles, (b) glossaries, and (c) audio visual information in the form of podcasts and YouTube videos. It has been suggested that both guided and independent online research activities pique student interest in the subject matter and promote inquiry; the use of guided research projects allow teachers to introduce students to specified online resources and information, while independent research projects allow students to explore related topics of interest and provide opportunities for reciprocal learning.

As well as the inclusion of appropriate, preexisting websites in traditional literary study, Farabaugh (2007) recommended the use of wiki software to build class created websites for literary based learning, comprehension, and language support. Farabaugh used wiki software to create an online classroom environment that included: (a) interactive discussion boards, (b) topics of inquiry, (c) articles that covered relevant current events, as well as historical and cultural context, and (d) translation exercises and language support. Through the use of wiki software, Students shared their own critical perspectives and researched information related to Shakespeare's plays with their peers. Also, students participated in the creation of online response journals, or class *blogs* where they became part of and wrote for an interactive audience. This kind of writing activity addresses the needs of the interpersonal learner, who prefers interactive learning

to the isolation that often accompanies traditional composition (Gardner, 1993).

Farabaugh reported that students' response to this activity was extremely positive; comprehension of Shakespeare's texts and overall achievement increased.

In addition to Internet based studies and assessments, many teachers implement the use of media and computer technology to encourage students to develop creative projects that explore cultural context, themes, dramatic situations, and characters in Shakespeare's plays (Baines, 1997; Bucolo; 2007; Morrison, 2002; Sesmet; 2009). For example, Baines and Morrison used student generated film projects to engage students in close reading and interpretation of Shakespeare's plays; students wrote, designed, directed, performed, filmed and edited culturally relevant adaptations of scenes, and presented them to their peers. Morrison reports that this project proved to be most effective with students from racially or culturally diverse backgrounds. According to Morrison, often, even the most current film adaptation of Shakespeare's works fails to properly represent and connect with non-Anglo students. Conversely, the presentation of student generated film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays provided the class with more inclusive, relatable and authentic interpretations and perspectives.

Alternatively, Bucolo (2007) asked students to view Al Pacino's documentary, *Looking for Richard* (1996, as cited in Bucolo) and produce their own versions of the film. In small groups, students selected one of Shakespeare's plays as the focus of their production and developed their own investigation of performance and/or literary aspects of the piece. Bucolo reported that student presentations produced an environment of provocative inquiry, reciprocal teaching, and engagement. Also, Bucolo suggested that,

often, when students are asked to create and present creative projects for their peers, they become more invested in the learning process. However, Sesmet (2009) recommended that in addition to classroom presentations, teachers encourage students to post and view projects on Youtube. Sesmet reported that, often, for students today, the opportunity to present their film before a broad, public audience proved to be more relevant and motivational than in class only presentation.

In a similar lesson, Baines (1997) asked students to design and film theatrical previews for one of Shakespeare's plays. These previews were intended to capture an important thematic or dramatic element of the play, as well as sell the play to classmates and/or an Elizabethan audience. Baines reported that this activity encouraged students to consider Shakespeare's plays in terms of modern entertainment and that doing so proved to be an effective engagement tool. Likewise, projects, such as this, create opportunities for students to collaborate as diverse learners and contribute their unique gifts to the completion of a final product.

### *Writing and Assessment*

Currently, the development of written language skills remains central to learning and assessment in the secondary English classroom. However, frequently, traditional, literature based writing exercises and interpretive essays fail to engage modern secondary students and are perceived as irrelevant to their personal and educational goals (Stibbs, 1998). It has been suggested that in order to effectively engage modern students in writing exercises as part of learning and assessment, teachers may need to expand the academic scope of assignments and activities. Many teachers recommend the

development of writing exercises that are designed to address larger, potentially global audiences, as well as a wider variety of purposes (Hadley, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Naylor, 2001).

Naylor (2001) and Morrison (2002) advocated the inclusion of creative, technical, and journalistic activities in units dedicated to the study of Shakespeare's works. Rather than write essays that address characterization, dramatic situation, or theme, Naylor recommended that teachers ask students to explore each of these things through the creative adaptation of an alternative purpose or persona. Suggested activities included the creation of diary entries or letters written from the perspective of one of Shakespeare's characters; also suggested are journalistic and/or technical writing activities where students create detailed legal documents, advice columns, or newspaper articles that interpret and depict important aspects of the play. Additionally, some students may prefer to write creative adaptations or extended versions of Shakespeare's plays. Naylor reported that classroom application of such activities effectively developed students' written and interpretive skills, and allowed them to demonstrate their understanding of the plays from a variety of fresh, evocative perspectives.

Some teachers recommend the continued use of traditional academic essays for learning and assessment (Hadley, 2002). However, many advocate a broadening of traditional subject matter to include applicable topics of interest and relevance for the individual student. For example, suggested topics included: (a) analysis of various film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, (b) Shakespeare's treatment of culturally relevant topics such as war or feminism, or (c) the exploration of Elizabethan cultural perspectives

in comparison to those of the modern, westernized world.

Also, Hadley suggested that, often, student selected, project and performance based assessments prove to be effective, because students are encouraged to draw upon their own aptitudes or interests. For example, at the conclusion on their Shakespeare unit, some of Hadley's students chose to adapt or create musical scores for one of Shakespeare's plays; some chose to adapt or create locations and set designs. To accompany each project, students wrote essays which explained their own, unique, interpretive vision. Hadley contended that students are more likely to become engaged in reading and writing, and put forth greater effort when they are encouraged to engage their own learning styles, develop their own questions, and follow their own intellectual and creative pursuits.

#### Chapter Summary

As demonstrated in this review of literature, the inclusion of traditional literature, such as Shakespeare's works, remains important to the provision of a sound and sufficiently complex English education for secondary students. However, often, the revision of traditional secondary methods for teaching Shakespeare's works, as well as other canonized pieces, is necessary to engage and inspire 21st Century students. Through the application of innovative teaching practices that: (a) promote student comprehension; (b) encourage student centered thinking and expression; (c) bridge historical and/or cultural gaps; (d) build personal relevance; and (e) address a variety of intelligences and learning styles, English teachers can improve student motivation, increase achievement, and encourage literary appreciation in their classrooms. In

Chapter 3, this author describes the method, target audience, organization, and peer assessment plan for the development of this project.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The purpose of this project will be to develop a unit guide that can be used to engage high school students in timely, culturally relevant, integrated study of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The problems associated with the use of traditional texts in modern, secondary classrooms, to include problems of student motivation and achievement came to this author's attention through extensive observation of a regular, sophomore English class, as well as through interviews with department faculty. Throughout these observations and interviews, it became clear that many English teachers struggle to engage students in reading of any kind; often, this decrease in student interest is detrimental to learning and achievement.

While many teachers within this department continue to teach traditional texts despite the issues they encounter, some had completely abandoned canonical texts, or any universally prescribed reading, in favor of student selected materials. Despite attempts to alter curriculum to suit student preferences, often, these teachers continued to encounter the same problems of student engagement as those who teach from the traditional canon. It seems apparent that teachers who adapt instructional strategies to increase relevance and accessibility of assigned reading frequently enjoy greater student participation, engagement, and success in their classrooms. Through this experience, this author saw the need for increased awareness and development of new and innovative methods for

teaching traditional literature. She chose to focus on Shakespeare's works due to the relative difficulty of the texts, frequency of use, and widespread student resistance.

#### Target Audience

This project will be designed for application with secondary students, Grades 9-12. However, many of the ideas presented will be adaptable for use in late primary to early middle grades. English teachers who seek new and innovative ways to teach linguistically difficult, traditional texts, teachers interested in the application of: (a) performance methods; (b) contemporary literary criticism; (c) media integration; (d) performance-based and authentic assessment, and (e) teachers who seek to increase student interest, motivation, and achievement will be interested in this project.

#### Organization of the Project

The goal of this project will be to provide teachers with a guide to build timely, relevant unit plans on the subject of Shakespeare's works and to facilitate successful instruction. The guide will include a review of literature to support the continued use of traditional literature, such as Shakespeare's works, in the secondary classroom, as well as the use of innovative practices to encourage student engagement and achievement. Also, the review of literature will provide an overview of current perspectives and best practices in secondary English education, specifically pertaining to the study of Shakespeare's works. Subsequent chapters will provide explicit suggestions for the application of culturally relevant, integrated, and innovative practice, as well as a discussion of project results. Detailed examples of methods, activities and supplemental resources for instruction will be provided.

## Peer Assessment Plan

Assessment of this unit guide will be obtained from three colleagues. Each colleague will be furnished with a copy of the project; they will be asked to provide feedback on the information presented, as well as offer suggestions and recommendations for further development. Additionally, colleagues will review the guide for clarity, timely relevance, and applicability.

## Chapter Summary

Current problems associated with the use of sophisticated, traditional English texts, such as Shakespeare's works, in the secondary classroom are the subject of much debate and study. Throughout this project, this author will draw upon information obtained from the review of literature, as well as her own classroom experiences and observations, to create a guide that will offer teachers the tools necessary to resolve these problems. In Chapter 4, this author will provide explicit examples for classroom application of information provided in Chapter 2. While ideas and examples presented in Chapter 4 will pertain specifically to the study of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, they will be adaptable for use in a variety of literary studies. The goal of this project will be to address the needs of teachers who wish to create more exciting, engaging units of study, as well as increase student motivation and achievement.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most frequently taught pieces of traditional English literature in the secondary classroom (Milburn, 2002; Davis & Salmone, 1993). Often, the play is presented to students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and becomes their first academic encounter with Shakespearean drama; similarly, it may be their first encounter with the sophisticated and complex literature of the traditional English canon. Therefore, the manner in which secondary educators teach introductory works, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, is of vital importance; it is imperative that educators develop and facilitate units of study that excite interest and peak curiosity if they hope to inspire an appreciation for traditional English texts and encourage academic success.

The purpose of this guide is to assist secondary English teachers in the creation of effective, innovative, and engaging unit plans for William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This author is hopeful that teachers who read this guide will consider information provided in Chapter 2 on: (a) the needs of the modern secondary student; (b) the role of traditional literature in secondary English curriculum; and (c) suggested methods for secondary English instruction, as they develop units for literary study. Additionally, this author hopes that educators will apply or adapt the methodology described within this guide for use in their classrooms, as they create unit plans for *Romeo and Juliet*, alternative works by Shakespeare, or other traditional authors.



*Romeo and Juliet* (1968) Franco Zeffirelli

## *Romeo and Juliet Unit Guide*

*"Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight.  
For I never saw true beauty till this night" (1.5)*

This is a guide for the creation and development of curricular units on William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The primary function of this guide is to provide secondary teachers with suggestions for building an engaging, up-to-date, academic study of the play. Information is arranged in five Acts: (I) Preparing the Unit; (II) Introducing the Play; (III) Reading the Play; (IV) Assessment; and (V) Closure. Individual lessons are not mapped out chronologically; rather, ideas are categorically grouped and presented for adaptation to the needs of the individual classroom and to allow for deeper exploration of certain topics.

- ❖ **Act I** includes suggested unit standards, objectives with verbs from Bloom's taxonomy, essential questions, materials, and additional preparatory considerations.
- ❖ **Act II** includes recommended preview and anticipatory activities, presentation of background knowledge, front-loading exercises.
- ❖ **Act III** includes instructional recommendations for reading the play, film supplementation, translation, critical analysis, performance activities, discussion methods, and technology integration.
- ❖ **Act IV** includes suggested formative and summative assessments, writing activities, as well as recommendations for project-based assessments.
- ❖ **Act V** includes suggestions for closure excursions and activities.

All recommended assessments and activities include references to Bloom's taxonomy, Colorado state standards, and suggested academic objectives. Activities and assessments are designed to address a multitude of intelligences and learning styles.

## Act I: Developing the Unit

*"O brawling love, O loving hate. O anything of nothing first create" (1.1)*

*Romeo and Juliet* is a play that raises both arguable and fundamental questions about the human experience. Thematic points of intrigue include the truth and nature of love, passion, revenge, hatred, despair, difference, and destiny. While many students might perceive Shakespearean tragedy as distant and irrelevant, *Romeo and Juliet* provides students with an opportunity to explore themes and dramatic situations that they have likely witnessed or experienced in their daily lives. The following Act offers suggestions for building an effective, engaging, and standards based unit of study around one or more of the play's complex human themes.

### *Scene I: Essential Questions & Enduring Understandings*

Rather than build essential questions and/or enduring understandings solely around Shakespeare's importance as an historical playwright, or the impact of his literary contributions, begin by developing your unit around one of the play's central and relatable themes. You may also choose to integrate essential learnings that address different aspects of literary study. The following is a list of sample essential questions and enduring understandings that combine important socio-cultural aspects of the play with an academic focus.

- ❖ **Love:** How does Shakespeare represent love in this play? Are Romeo and Juliet's feelings for each other realistic? Why or why not?
- ❖ **Hatred & Violence:** Violence and hatred often produce devastating effects on both responsible and innocent parties.
- ❖ **Power Relationships:** How are power relationships depicted in, *Romeo and Juliet*? Who has power and who does not? Is power used in a positive way?
- ❖ **Dramatic Irony:** According to Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, what is the role of destiny or fate in life? How does Shakespeare use tragic irony to express his ideas on the subject of fate? How does tragic irony appeal to or reflect the reality of human experience?
- ❖ **Plot Structure & Relevance:** How are the events and perspectives present in this

play similar to or different from modern-day reality?

- ❖ **Figurative Language:** How does figurative language work in poetry and/or fiction? Why don't writers just say what they mean?
- ❖ **Figurative Language:** Often, an event, experience, or emotion defies ordinary explanation. Authors of drama, poetry and fiction use figurative language to create richly nuanced impressions of the human condition for their readers, as well as to present their ideas with precision and complexity.
- ❖ **Author's purpose & Theme:** Though written and set during the Renaissance, Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, raises important questions about current human and universal themes such as love, hatred, violence, power, and friendship.

*Scene II: Colorado Standards & Benchmarks for Reading and Writing*

Before beginning any unit, it is imperative that you draw upon existing academic standards to guide your instruction. The following is a list of suggested standards and benchmarks that are applicable to secondary literary study, as well as to activities and assessments recommended within this unit guide.

- ❖ **Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standard #1:** Students read and understand a variety of materials; students use comprehension skills such as previewing, predicting, inferring, comparing and contrasting, re-reading and self-monitoring, summarizing, identifying the author's purpose, main idea, and applying knowledge of foreshadowing, metaphor, simile, symbolism, and other figures of speech.
- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #1.1:** Students use a full range of strategies to comprehend literature.
- ❖ **Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standard #2:** Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.



*Romeo and Juliet* (1936) George Cukor

- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #2.3:** Students support an opinion using various forms of persuasion (factual or emotional) in speaking and writing.
- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #2.5:** Students select a focused topic, draft, revise, edit, and proofread a legible final copy.
- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #2.7:** Students experiment with stylistic elements such as tone and style.
- ❖ **Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standard # 4:** Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.
- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #4.1:** Students recognize an author's point of view, purpose, and historical and cultural context.
- ❖ **Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standard # 6:** Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.
- ❖ **Grades 9-12 #6.2:** Students use literary terminology accurately, such as theme mood, diction, idiom, perspective, style, and point of view.

*Scene III: Suggested Learning Objectives*

In order to arrive at any destination, we need a solid set of directions. Explicit objectives based on state standards will provide us with exactly that, as well as justification for all the fun we're having. The following list of unit objectives corresponds to state standards and benchmarks; it also serves as the framework for all proposed activities and assessments suggested within this guide. Each objective includes performance verbs from Bloom's taxonomy.

- 1.) The student will be able to: **read, analyze, and evaluate** William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Benchmark 1.1
- 2.) The student will be able to: conduct research and **synthesize** new information to **create** original, **analytical** assertions. Benchmark 1.1; 2.3; 2.5; 4.1
- 3.) The student will be able to: **identify, analyze, and evaluate** literary elements such as dramatic irony, theme, character, symbolism, and tone to determine significance and meaning. Benchmark 1.1; 4.1; 6.2.
- 4.) The student will be able to: **create** *written and oral* responses to the play, as well as to supplemental learning materials. Benchmark 2.3

- 5.) The student will be able to: **identify, analyze,** and **evaluate** the historical and current cultural significance of the play both *orally and in writing*. Benchmark 4.1.
- 6.) The student will be able to: **identify, analyze,** and **evaluate** the tone and style of non-linguistic art forms and compare them with those of literature. Benchmark 2.7
- 7.) The student will be able to: **identify** mistakes in their own writing and the writing of their peers and **apply** knowledge to correct them. Benchmark 2.5
- 8.) The student will be able: to develop a thesis statement, write and revise an original piece of writing to **create** a grammatically and conventionally correct final draft. Benchmark 2.3; 2.5
- 9.) The student will be able to: **apply** reading comprehension strategies to understand linguistically difficult texts, as well **apply** knowledge of Elizabethan English to their *reading, writing, and speaking*. Benchmark 4.1; 2.7; 1.1

#### *Scene IV: Suggested Resources & Materials*

The following is a general list of resources and materials that you will need in order to engage your students in the many of the activities recommended within this guide.

- 1.) Classroom laptop computers and/or access to a computer lab with internet access
- 2.) Art supplies, such as markers, crayons, colored pencils, large sheets of construction paper or tag board, glue, yarn, glitter, old magazines, scissors, paper plates. (Some of these things correspond directly to proposed activities. Others are just good to have on hand for situations where you or your students need to get creative.)
- 3.) Audio visual equipment, at the very least a television and DVD player.
- 4.) DVD copies of the films, *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Baz Luhrman (1996), *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1968), and Miramax documentary, *Shakespeare in the Classroom* (1999).
- 5.) Wiki software/Wiki website for classroom use, as well as class blog/wiki code of conduct and participation grading rubrics.
- 6.) Examples of *Romeo and Juliet* references in popular culture, current events, art, music, and media.
- 7.) Elizabethan costumes, props, and artifacts from live productions of the play.
- 8.) Trade books featuring pertinent information.

- 9.) Children's picture book versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.
- 10.) Any and all assignment sheets, permission slips, and grading rubrics.
- 11.) Penguin classics copies of the play with helps and glossaries.
- 12.) Advance organizers containing important terms and difficult vocabulary.
- 13.) Reader response journals.
- 14.) Beach Ball.
- 15.) Performance scrolls and casting board.
- 16.) Folger Shakespeare library (online resource).
- 17.) A list of RAFTS writing prompts.
- 18.) Literature circle, Socratic seminar, situational role play, and debate discussion prompts.

*Scene V: Additional Considerations: Logistics, Policy, & Access*

Many of the activities recommended within this guide assume the best possible circumstances for teachers and students with respect to freedom and access in the classroom. However, material and logistic limitations need not impact which activities you choose for your unit nor should they limit your effectiveness. Scene V suggests adaptations you may wish to consider, if your circumstances are somewhat less than ideal.

If you cannot acquire Elizabethan costumes or props from your school theater or a local theater company for your classroom, get creative; make mock ups of props and artifacts, post pictures from live productions around your room. If you do not have access to live theater or field trip access within your district, consider holding student produced performances at your school; you may choose to invite other teachers, parents, and classmates (also discussed in Act V). This kind of culminating experience can be just as powerful as attending a professional performance and it will give students a sense of what goes into live theater.

If computer and internet access is limited in your school, plan to have students explore their school library for pertinent books and articles in lieu of online research. Some suggested activities ask students to consider applicable references and possible allusions to Shakespeare's works in modern media and culture. In this case, student observations and experiences from within their communities are more essential to the success of the activity

than access to technology. Similarly, if you cannot access wiki software to create a class website or blog, post student research and analysis contributions in the classroom, create a time for students to share reader responses, and address important discussion topics in class. Methods for organizing class discussions, such as Socratic seminars, literature circles, and debates are outlined in Act III.

In addition to these concerns, your school's policy regarding PG-13 and R rated movies may impact which film version you select as a supplement to reading. While many recorded performances of the play can be viewed without controversy, most film versions of *Romeo and Juliet* contain violence, nudity, and/or mild sexuality. If this presents a problem, I recommend viewing films in chunks throughout the course of your unit, rather than watching them in long bursts. This will allow you to omit scenes which may be objectionable, while still exposing your students to the fresh adaptation of your choice. As an additional safe guard, I recommend parent permission slips for viewing potentially objectionable media either in the form of film, or on the internet. Also, if your school does not already own a copy of the film you wish to show, be sure that you are aware of and adhere to copy right laws concerning in-class film presentation.

#### *Scene VI: Differentiation & Individualization*

While activities and assessments suggested within this guide have been designed with the needs and learning styles of individually diverse students in mind, they are often rigorous. Each one is designed to challenge and engage even the most advanced students, and full comprehension of Shakespeare's work can be a challenge for anyone. Therefore, rather than adjust the intended rigor of your objectives or activities in the interests of differentiation, I recommend adjusting the scope, sequence, and pace of your unit to accommodate your students, as needed. Students of all ability levels should be exposed to complex literature, and they should be asked to synthesize, evaluate, and create new information. Expanding or narrowing the scope of your unit, and adjusting your pace to suit students' scaffolding needs, will accommodate learners of varying ability levels while maintaining high expectations for all.

Act II: Introducing the Play

*"In fair Verona, where we lay our scene" (1.1)*

Modern secondary students live in a world bombarded by fast-paced media messages, all of which constantly compete for their attention. Publishing houses, television studios, film makers, video game manufacturers, and gadget designers all seek to capture the collective imagination of the millennial generation. Thus, if we truly want to engage the mind of the modern student, we must first **a)** preview learning to create anticipation and peak curiosity; **b)** connect learning with students' background knowledge and experience;



*Romeo and Juliet* (1884) Frank Dicksee

and **c)** demonstrate why what we have to offer is both relevant and necessary to their lives.

The following Act offers suggestions for previewing the play, activating background knowledge, front-loading information, and building relevance without compromising academic standards and objectives.

*Scene I: Setting the Stage*

Consider decorating your room with artwork, images, artifacts, music, and costumes that relate to the period or the play, itself. When students enter, allow them to quietly explore the room. I recommend using a *gallery walk* to introduce students the items in your room. As

students move about the room, have them post one or two word reaction to each piece; ask them what comes to mind as they examine each item. (You will need to create stations and post large sheets of paper near each item in your room.) Once students are seated, review their responses and ask them to guess what it is you will be studying. Keep the décor intact throughout your unit and pull various pieces into class discussion when appropriate. You may also consider asking students to select an image, artifact, or piece of music from within the room and have them determine the object's use and connection to the play. You may choose to have them conduct light research on the significance of an item and present their

findings to the class. By including significant sensory experiences in your preview activities and throughout your unit, you will address the needs of students with visual-spatial and kinesthetic learning styles, and increase their appreciation and comprehension of the text. (Learning aligns with objectives #4 & #5 and corresponding benchmarks.)

### *Scene II: Anticipatory Sets*

Consider an *idea wave* as an initial ice breaker for your unit. It is a simple, yet provocative way to peak student curiosity, get them talking, and gauge their background knowledge about a subject. Ask students to share one or two word answers to the question “What do you know about Shakespeare?” Or, ask them to share words that come to mind when they hear the title, *Romeo and Juliet*. Once each student has spoken, you may add to or elaborate on students’ ideas as you see fit.

Next, introduce students to Elizabethan English with a *Shakespearean insults activity*. Provide students with a list of Elizabethan nouns, verbs, and adjectives typically used to create insults in Shakespeare’s plays. Ask students to create insults using the list you have given them and have them share their insults with the class. You may choose to have them build brief dialogues to present with a partner, or you may choose to have them work individually and engage the entire class in a sharing exercise. Should you choose to engage the entire class at once, I recommend an “insults in the round” approach. Ask students to form a circle and lightly toss a beach ball to the student they intend to insult. Continue with this activity until everyone has had a chance to play both victim and antagonist. You may choose to ask students to verify the meaning of either the insult he/she creates or the insult he/she receives. This activity is designed to provide a fun and humorous introduction to Elizabethan language. As such, you will want to establish clear behavioral guidelines and expectations to ensure that the mood of the class remains light and respectful. Know your kids; if this activity is something that does not fit the culture of your classroom, alter the context to include *Shakespearean words of love*, rather than insults. (Learning aligns with objective #9 and corresponding benchmarks)

### *Scene III: Sneak Preview*

Before you begin reading the play, I recommend viewing Miramax’s (1999) documentary on the film *Shakespeare in Love*, as a class. This star-studded documentary

provides an age-appropriate overview of the Oscar winning film that is loosely based upon *Romeo and Juliet*. It also provides a great deal of insight into the play, itself, as well as Shakespeare's life and the Elizabethan era. The film addresses modern treatment and adaptation of the play's themes and discusses the ways in which Shakespeare's works remain relevant, today. You will want to assign your students a viewing task to keep them focused. Rather than saddling students with a fact-finder worksheet, pose one or two questions for reflection on topics covered in the film. You may choose to move students into Literature Circles (discussed in Act II) to share responses and facilitate discussion after viewing the film. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #5, & #6, as well as corresponding benchmarks.)

*Scene IV: Modern Day Relevance & Background Knowledge*

Introduce students to Shakespearean allusion in modern media and culture. After having previewed the play, show students examples of both direct and indirect references to *Romeo and Juliet* in modern media and culture. Pose the question: Where else have we seen this play? Then, ask students to embark upon a *Popular Media and Modern Culture Scavenger Hunt*, wherein they will connect the play with current events, music, art, film and literature. Once students have completed their scavenger hunt, ask them to present their information to the class. This activity not only builds relevance, it also front loads information, activates students' background knowledge, and engages students in reciprocal teaching. (Learning aligns with objective #3, #4, & #7 and corresponding benchmarks.)

Additionally, you may choose to front load background knowledge by beginning with an elective research project pertaining to historical context, modern adaptation, and/or authorship of the play. I recommend the use of the *Folger Shakespeare library* for online research pertaining to Elizabethan history, culture, and theater; this site includes extensive information on Shakespeare's life and influence, as well as other, applicable research links. Though often assigned at the end of a literature unit, research projects completed prior to reading provide students with an important contextual foundation. Students are more likely to recall and apply what they have learned as they read the play if they conduct important research before they read. Likewise, students often retain more information through synthesis and reciprocal teaching than they do through teacher-centered lecture. (Learning aligns with objectives #7 & #4 and corresponding benchmarks.)

Also before reading the play, you may need to *pre-assess* students' comprehension and analysis skills, as well as their knowledge of academic vocabulary with respect to figurative language, difficult words in the text, and/or the elements of drama and tragedy. Once you have given your pre-assessment, you will probably find that you need to front-load missing information. I recommend weaving this type of learning through the introductory activities listed above (i.e. include information in room décor, scavenger hunts, pre-reading research, creative pair and share activities, and whole class engagement exercises that mirror the style of the recommended Shakespearean insults activity. )

Pre-assessing and front loading this kind of information is often vital to successful literary study. However, take care not to lose momentum in doing so. Hold students' attention by sneaking literary terminology and definitions into engaging preview activities that are associated with the play; do not attempt to front load academic vocabulary out of context. Finally, I recommend providing students with advance organizers that list important terms and definitions complete with examples from the text prior to reading; they should keep them and refer to them throughout the unit. (Learning aligns with objectives #1-#9 and all corresponding benchmarks.)

Remember, as you select introductory and preview activities, you want to do more than prepare students for your unit; you want to sell them on it. Students should be somewhere between curious and chomping at the bit by the time you actually allow them to read this play. Think movie trailer; think excitement, and have fun.

### Act III: Reading the Play

*"Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast" (2.3)*

Attempting to read through one of Shakespeare's plays without support can be tedious at best, especially for students who are new to Elizabethan English. Therefore, it is imperative that secondary teachers carefully consider their approach when engaging students in Shakespeare studies. The following Act recommends both methods and activities for effectively reading and teaching *Romeo and Juliet* in the secondary classroom.

#### *Scene I Progression & Pace:*

Slow progression is often best when reading linguistically difficult texts. Therefore, rather than trying to read through an entire Act in one class period, chunk the play into a series of short, workable scenes, speeches, or dialogues to be explored in isolation, and thereafter considered as part of the whole. You may choose to read aloud to the class on occasion and alternate with student led, performance reading (described Scene III). In doing so, you will find greater opportunity to promote comprehension, supplement reading, encourage critical analysis, and include fresh learning activities throughout the course of your unit. But, this method of reading takes time. Assume that you will spend at least one week studying each of the play's five Acts. While you may choose to assign homework in the form of supplemental reading, research, or response writing, it is recommended that students read *Romeo and Juliet* entirely in class. This will increase your ability to ensure comprehension



*Romeo and Juliet* (1996) Baz Luhrman

of the text and involve students who may otherwise neglect to read on their own. (Learning aligns with objective #1 and corresponding benchmarks)

#### *Scene II: Film*

It has been suggested that Shakespeare's works were meant to be performed and

experienced, rather than simply read. Therefore, exposure to modern film and theatrical versions of the play remain a vital component of any Shakespeare study. Choose a film adaptation or live video taped performance of *Romeo and Juliet* to present in sequence with the reading. You may decide to choose more than one version of the play to solicit class comparison between adaptations. I recommend the use of Baz Luhrman's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) for its provocative, modern treatment of the piece and Franco Zeffirelli's more traditional, 1968 version for comparative purposes.

Occasionally, you may choose to present scenes before in-class reading to support comprehension. However, some suggested performance activities call for students to read the material cold. Therefore, I recommend switching things up. Show a scene from the film to support reading, initially. Then, as the unit progresses, show film clips after all reading activities are finished. This will allow you more flexibility within your unit; it will also scaffold student translation and comprehension of the play. You may also consider showing clips from films that mirror or borrow themes, characters, and dramatic situations from *Romeo & Juliet* (e.g. *West Side Story*, and other stories of forbidden love.) You may choose to view clips from films presented by students during their modern media scavenger hunts. Doing so will not only enhance student comprehension of the play's dramatic elements; it will also reinforce the current prevalence and relevance of the piece. (Learning aligns with objectives # 1, #9, & # 6, as well as corresponding benchmarks.)

#### *Scene III: Translation & Interpretation:*

In order for students to appreciate the beauty of Shakespearean verse, they must first possess a fundamental understanding of what it is that Shakespeare has to say. While vocabulary support of the original language is vital, I recommend engaging students in activities that ask them to (a) translate the language into a familiar linguistic code, (b) form complex and arguable interpretations of meaning, and (c) appropriate the text's original language for their own use. As you read, organize activities in which students translate the play into a familiar dialect and present their translation to the class. You may choose to allow students to work on translation exercises in small groups or independently. For variation, you may ask students to translate Shakespeare into alternative non-standard forms of English and/or toy with the context of the play. This type of exercise can evolve nicely

into a conversation about the cross-contextual relevance of the plays major themes, as well as the socio-cultural implications of dialect and language.

Some students may chose to interpret the text through original poetry or rap; some may choose to recreate the setting or context of the through performance piece, wear costumes, or add props (discussed further in Scene IV). Some students may choose to develop picture books which translate the text into language that elementary school students could understand. (There are picture book translations of *Romeo and Juliet* available that you may use as exemplars for this activity; you may also find them useful for scaffolding and language support.) Students should be encouraged not only to translate the words, but the sentiments of the play. Likewise, they should read both the original, Elizabethan language and their translation to the class. This kind of activity allows peers to learn from one another as they gain further exposure to the language. Such exercises are useful for building student vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. However, they also encourage students to manipulate and play with language; this removes the inaccessibility from Elizabethan English and, in so doing, removes a major motivational road block to your instruction. Learning aligns with objectives #1, #3, #5, #9, as well as corresponding benchmarks.)

*Scene IV: Performance and Play*

Performance activities are highly recommended for engaging secondary students in drama studies; this is especially true for those involving Shakespeare. Likewise, performance and play methods

linguistic emphasis of the classroom to address the interpersonal, and intellectually diverse

In Shakespeare's given their parts and their they went on stage. going through the style reading, I

**“Through playful disruptions, it is possible to begin transforming canonical texts into tales that empower and entertain children at the same time” - Zippes**

interrupt the verbal-secondary English visual-spatial, kinesthetic needs of the student. time, players were often lines just moments before Therefore, rather than motions of dry, popcorn recommend asking your

students to present regular, impromptu performances of the play. (You will find that this takes only a little more time than popcorn reading and that it is a much more effective comprehension and engagement tool.) Mimic this authentic, Renaissance practice by assigning students new roles each day; allow them to prepare briefly, and ask them to perform their scene for the class. This should be done before viewing the scene on film, so that students are only aware of what their lines and actions will be; as such, those of their fellow actors should come as a surprise.

This approach should lend a sense of suspense and authenticity to otherwise dull, in-class reading exercises. Be sure that traditional language and reading supports (e.g. glossaries, graphic organizers) are available to your students. You will want to review comprehension strategies and difficult vocabulary with the class before launching them into this activity. Also, keep expectations for this activity reasonable; it should be more fun than a dry read through, but it may be just as messy. Once students have performed their scene, review it as a class and allow each group to re-play their scene while applying any necessary corrections in interpretation or pronunciation. At this time, you may choose to engage in translation activities and/or view the scene on film to deepen understanding.

In addition to impromptu performance, you may choose to allow your students to present prepared performances, or slightly more elaborate translations and adaptations of scenes. I recommend implementing this kind of activity as part of both formative and summative assessment throughout the course of your unit. For shorter, mid-unit, prepared performance opportunities, I suggest combining translation and performance activities. As described in Scene III, you may ask students to “dress up” one of their re-contextualized translation pieces to create a fresh adaptation of the play for an in-class performance. Performance activities can also be used to help students understand and interpret figurative language within the text. I suggest asking students to physically act out the language of a difficult passage in order to increase comprehension. For example, students may become Queen Mab in order to deconstruct Mercutio’s complex and famous speech.

Additionally, you may choose to implement role play exercises to help students better understand and interpret character development and motivation. I recommend conducting mock interviews, panel discussions, or talk shows featuring students as

characters within the play. In each of these activities, students prepare both questions and answers that are relevant to interpretation of select characters.

Performance based activities should be fun, even silly on occasion. However, they must be structured with specific objectives in mind, if they are to be successful. Ultimately, performance activities should be designed to help students understand the nuances of: (a) language, (b) characterization, (c) theme, (d) plot, and (e) mood. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #3, #5, #9, as well as corresponding benchmarks)

*Scene V: Wiki Wonderland*

For technology integration and to encourage classroom discourse, I recommend the use of *Wiki software* to create an interactive blog & website. Ask students to post responses to writing prompts, as well as any additional, pertinent information and research on the website. You may also choose to ask them to post questions, formal writing assignments, and responses to their fellow students' work. The objective of this activity is to create a collaborative, online representation of your class' work, as well as to encourage interactive writing and dialogue about the play. As such, I recommend ongoing use of the site throughout the course of your unit. By the end, you should have an extensive record of student contributions, feedback, and growth. You will want to draw up a set of expectations for courtesy and conduct while using the interactive sight, as well as rubrics for participation. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, as well as corresponding benchmarks.)

*Scene VI: Class Discussion & Contemporary Critical Analysis*

Once you have finished reading, translation, and viewing activities for each scene, you may choose to orchestrate class discussion of dramatic elements, such as theme, mood, character development, tragic irony, or figurative language. Or you may choose to explore an essential question presented in your unit. When facilitating discussion, it is important that you give class discussions a sense of structure and direction. Consider using one of the following formats: *literature circles, Socratic seminars, and/or formal debates.*

**Literature circles** are useful for facilitating small group activity or discussion; they are structured discussion groups where each student is assigned a task and must contribute accordingly. For example, one student's task may be to locate interesting or relevant passages in the text, another may be in charge of forming questions to guide analysis. You

may assign tasks to suit your specific unit goals; however, each group member must have a specific task for contribution. If structured properly, literature circles can be an effective management tool for facilitating rich small group research, analysis, or dialogue.

**Socratic Seminars and/or formal debates** are useful for facilitating whole class discussion and inquiry around a certain literary piece or topic. In a Socratic seminar, students are given questions to answer, rather than answers to questions; each student must ponder his or her own position or response and share it with the class. Likewise, students are expected to respond to one-another in order to facilitate further dialogue. In a debate setting, you may choose to split the class into two parts to address opposing perspectives on one topic. Or, you may choose to break the class into small groups to address several topics. In either case, presentation of opposing viewpoints should involve the whole class, and facilitate whole class discussion. Students must follow clearly laid out procedures for any type discussion to be successful. As with your wiki website, you will want to create behavioral expectations and guidelines for literature circles, seminars, and debates, as well as participation rubrics. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5 and corresponding benchmarks.)

Often, the goal of classroom literary study is to engage students in analysis, evaluation, and informed, creative thought regarding the selected piece. Ultimately, the discussion and writing prompts, as well as the essential questions you present should guide student analysis of the play. However, it has been suggested that a contemporary approach to literary criticism (i.e. one that assumes varied, rather than fixed textual meaning) is an effective means of engaging students in close reading and analysis. Therefore, I recommend well informed, student-centered analysis over teacher-directed meaning making.

In order to facilitate more in-depth analysis and evaluation, I recommend introducing students to contradicting, professional, and analytical perspectives. You may need to engage in additional scaffolding for this exercise, depending on the difficulty of the language used in the examples you present. Begin by guiding students in reading two differing arguments. Ask students to evaluate each argument to determine whether they agree or disagree with the writer. Ultimately, this exercise encourages students to create their own arguments, and it teaches them to do so by using evidence from the text. Finally, you

may choose to ask students to develop their own analytical, academic piece of writing, using the professional example as an exemplar.

*Scene VII: Analysis & Cultural Relevance*

For students to appreciate traditional literature, it is important that they are able to make relevant connections between the text and their world. Once you have engaged in analysis activities, build relevance by asking students to connect the themes of the play with current social issues and events. You may ask students to consider Shakespeare's treatment of culturally relevant topics such as gang violence, prejudice, power relationships, or gender roles. You may also choose to engage students in the exploration of Elizabethan cultural perspectives in comparison to those of the modern, westernized world. In order to facilitate student inquiry, you may choose to repeat the cultural scavenger hunt activity outlined in Act II. In this case, you would ask them to look for current events that mirror topics addressed in the play. Additionally, you may also choose to ask students to develop formal arguments regarding Shakespeare's treatment of these issues and hold class seminars and/or debates. In that event, you may wish to determine what style or structure of discussion best suits the needs of your class. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5 and corresponding benchmarks.)

Whatever your instructional approach, be sure to check frequently for understanding and engage students in comprehension activities to address a variety of learning styles. I believe that once your students are given the opportunity to understand this play, and make relevant connections to their lives, they will find it difficult to resist.

## Act IV: Assessment

*"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (2.2)*

Assessments should not only gauge student progress, they should involve students in authentic, relevant application of their skills. The following Act suggests a variety of formative and summative assessments for the English classroom. Some are a bit unconventional and probably not for the faint of heart, while others speak more to what one might typically find in the secondary English classroom. However, even the more traditional assessments have been given a fresh, creative spin.

### *Scene I: Writing with Creativity, Authenticity, and Purpose*

Traditional forms of academic writing (e.g. persuasive, expository, etc) are important and should be included as part of your curriculum. However, I recommend bending traditional writing assessments to address larger, potentially global audiences, as well as a wider variety of purposes. For example, rather than simply assigning a literary analysis paper, consider entering the land of make-believe with your students; engage them in journalistic or technical writing activities that ask them to think like a lawyer, private detective, judge, or journalist. Have them create detailed legal documents, newspaper articles, formal blogs, or editorials that interpret and depict important aspects of the play. I recommend the use of RAFTS writing prompts to help you get started; RAFTS resources include a wide variety of fun, authentic ideas for literature-based writing assignments.



*Tales from Shakespeare* (1901)  
Charles & Mary Lamb.

You may also wish to allow students to engage in creative, interpretive writing activities by asking them to write from the perspective of one of the play's characters. They may choose to write diary entries, formal statements, or letters that present an analysis of events or characters within the play (This type of writing activity would work nicely as an extension of the character role play activity suggested in Act II). Alternatively, some

students may prefer to write a creative adaptation or an extended version of the play. Students who are interested in film may wish to write an analysis or compare/contrast paper covering one or more of the play's film adaptations. Those who are interested in current events and/or history may wish to write about the play through a sociocultural or historical lens. Allowing for this kind of creativity and flexibility will enable you to teach traditional, formal writing style and technique from a fresh, purposeful, and creative perspective; it will also allow you to appeal to individual students' aptitudes and interests. Use your wiki site to post student writing and to create a class-wide discourse; this will bring a fresh sense of authenticity to your writing assignments, as many students will write, either formally or informally, for online audiences in their lifetime.

In addition to formal writing, I recommend that students engage in response writing, either on your wiki site or in a journal (to be handed in), on a regular basis. Student must write to express their ideas, and write often, if they are to grow in their abilities. You may also adapt response writing to suit more imaginative, creative purposes. However, I recommend offering straight forward, but provocative prompts for formative assessments, and a broad range of complex choices and creative possibilities for larger, final papers. As always, cater writing activities such as these to suit the goals set forth by your objectives and your school's curriculum. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9 and corresponding benchmarks)

#### *Scene II: Projects, Performance, and Student Generated Film*

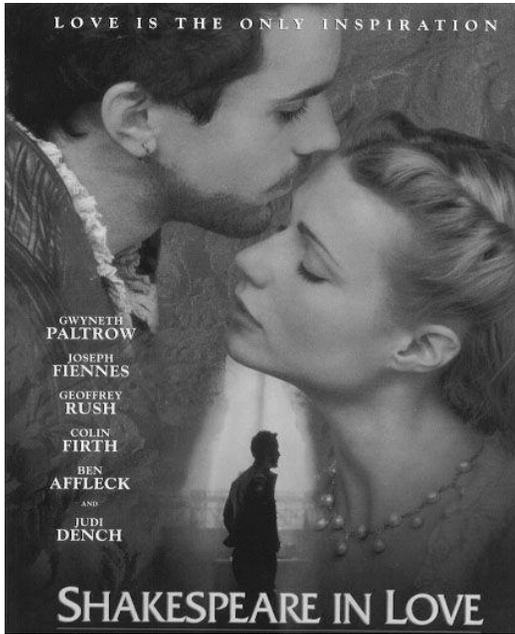
Though writing is necessarily an essential part of most English assessments, there are many ways in which students can demonstrate their learning in the English classroom. Ultimately, students should be encouraged to draw upon their own intelligences, aptitudes, and interests as often as possible. Consider the inclusion of performance-based assessments in conjunction with or as an alternative to the traditional, summative essay.

Performance-based, creative, and technical projects that are designed to reflect a nuanced understanding of mood, theme, characterization, or irony present students with the opportunity demonstrate their learning and show off their special talents. For example, students with great musical aptitude may choose to adapt or create a musical score for one of the play's scenes, while those with technical gifts may choose to adapt or create set

designs. Artistically gifted students may wish to create artwork that depicts a particular aspect of the story, while others may choose to do so through graphic design. Other suggestions include the creation of an interactive video game, a historically accurate, researched timeline that contextualizes events in the play, a faux “reality” show, a modern or an Elizabethan advertisement for the play, a playlist that depicts specific characters, or a performance/role play/debate/discussion presented to the class. The possibilities are nearly endless; the point is to allow students to draw upon their own interests and aptitudes to demonstrate a fully nuanced understanding of the play.

As an alternative to individual, creative projects, you may ask students to pool their gifts to create a filmed adaptation of one scene from the play. In development of this project, students should consider their script, casting, sets or locations, costumes, props, as well as sound and film editing. As in Act III, I suggest encouraging students to adjust the context of the piece to create a fresh adaptation. Or, students may choose to produce and film their own documentary, using the Miramax documentary as an exemplar. In either scenario, your summative assessment should be something that asks students to merge the skills and knowledge that they have acquired over the course of the unit to create a final product. I recommend asking students to write an essay which explains their own, unique, interpretive vision to accompany each project; doing so will address fundamental writing standards and objectives, which are an essential part of any English curriculum.

When facilitating projects such as these, it is always a good idea to ask students to present you with a project proposal, before you begin. While the object is to allow students a certain amount of creative and intellectual freedom, you also want to make sure that their projects demonstrate a nuanced understanding and analysis of the text, as well as an ability to meet specified learning objectives. (Learning aligns with objectives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9 and corresponding benchmarks.)



*Shakespeare in Love* (1998) Miramax

## Act V: Closure

### *"Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow" (2.2)*

Closure is an important part of any unit; it should provide students with the opportunity to reflect on what they have learned, answer essential questions, and celebrate achievements.

#### *Scene I: Shakespeare in Love.*

While many educators argue against the use of film to 'treat' students at the end of a unit, I am going to give you permission to dismiss their claims, just this once. The film, *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) pulls together much of what I

encourage you to share with your students

throughout the course of your unit, as it manages to both modernize and humanize Shakespeare's work without removing it from its original time and place. Also, for those who have been recently forced into an acquaintance with Shakespeare's work, the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) is a veritable treasure trove of humorous allusions and references to *Romeo and Juliet*, and other great Shakespearean works. Entertainment value aside, in watching this film your students will be able to draw upon their new knowledge not just as audience members, but as cultural participants.

You may choose to have students hunt for the aforementioned references and allusions as they view the film or you may have them write up a short compare/contrast piece about what the film pulls from the play, both literally and abstractly. I do recommend that you ask your kids to actively engage by assigning them a viewing task. (Learning aligns with objectives #3, &#6, and corresponding benchmarks.)

**WARNING:** This film is rated R. It does contain mild nudity, language and some sexuality. While none of these are excessive or explicit, I will refer you back to my comments in Act I regarding school policy: be careful. And, if needs be, simply skip objectionable scenes. The use of parent permission slips is always a good idea, as well.

*Scene II: Field Trip.*

Get thee to a live production! If at all possible, take your students on a field trip to see a live performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, or any Shakespeare play that you can get your hands on. If you can arrange a guided back stage tour, that's even better. Again, I recommend that you piggy back this experience with a viewing task; this could be as simple as asking students to write a short piece reflecting upon the experience, or you may choose to ask them to analyze the live play against one of the film adaptations you viewed in class. If you do not have access to live theater or field trip access within your district, consider holding student produced performances at your school; this kind of culminating experience can be just as powerful as attending a professional performance and it will give students a sense of what goes into live theater

*Scene III: Parties, Presentations, & Festivals.*

Celebrate the culminating efforts and achievements of your students by hosting a festival that features student work. You'll find that you can use items included in your unit preview to dress your class festival; you may also want to add some Elizabethan/Renaissance inspired treats to the mix. I suggest structuring your celebration around the presentation of student projects; this is especially fun if you have a great deal of student generated film to work with. You may decide to include a requirement for class feedback on each project in order to ensure audience engagement and participation.

As a final moment of closure for your activity, I recommend ending just as you began, with a gallery walk (described in Act I). You may use similar items or introduce some new things; you may include quotes from the play, the names of characters, or provocative questions at each station. This activity provides an opportunity for students to offer some closing thoughts, as well as to measure their growth against the original comments that they made on day one. You may also choose to include an idea wave to allow students to share their final thoughts, now that they have read the play.

However you choose to end your unit, closure activities should leave students with a sense of accomplishment, purpose, and an increased curiosity about their world. Reward them for their efforts and encourage them toward further, independent learning.

FINIS

## Chapter Summary

This literature guide was developed to meet the needs of secondary English teachers through the adaptation of research based, instructional methods for increasing student engagement and achievement. Specifically, this guide was intended for those who plan to teach William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; however, ideas regarding introduction, translation, discussion and analysis of traditional literature, as well as ideas for building relevance, designing assessments, and differentiation, may be adapted to suit the needs of those who hope to make canonical or otherwise difficult texts more accessible to their students.

The primary purpose of all methods, activities, and assessments suggested in the guide is to increase student interest in learning. However, contents were also selected and recommended for the purpose of promoting academic growth. The format of the guide, to include organization, graphics, and style, was developed to inspire creativity and enthusiasm on the part of the educator, as well as to make it accessible and easily adaptable to a variety of class settings. In Chapter 5, this author will discuss the limitations, peer assessment results, and recommendations for further development of the project.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to develop a research based unit guide that can be used to engage high school students in timely, culturally relevant, and academically sound study of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This author's research indicated a need for innovation of methods for teaching traditional literature to modern secondary students, as well as the existence of many recommended instructional strategies for increasing engagement and achievement. The resulting unit guide was developed to demonstrate classroom applicability of said strategies and to encourage educators to test experimental methods for teaching literature in their own classrooms. Although the guide offers explicit examples for classroom application, it was designed to provide educators with an overview of instructional strategies that may be adapted to suit a variety of classroom settings.

#### Limitations of the Project

While activities and assessments recommended within this guide are based upon research conducted by secondary English educators, this author was unable to conduct a test of the guide for effectiveness and applicability. Also, it is this author's position that student feedback would be most helpful in determining the guide's motivational effectiveness; ideas presented within this guide should be discussed with students from various academic and cultural demographics, to include those who dislike reading and

those who are amenable to traditional literary study. Potentially, this type of evaluation could provide an indication as to whether or not the use of this guide can increase success, engagement, and motivation with a variety of student populations.

Additionally, this project was limited in scope to address the needs of the general education classroom and factors associated with the general education setting. Research pertaining to the motivation and achievement of student populations with unique or otherwise special needs remains outside the realm of this project's general focus.

#### Peer Assessment Results

Often, educators who reviewed this guide found the suggested performance activities especially intriguing; they felt that the implementation of such activities may, indeed, prove an effective method for promoting comprehension and engagement in the English classroom. Also, according to reviewers, especially poignant and useful aspects of the guide include sections that address translation activities, essential questions, and comparative media activities. It has been suggested that recommendations within these sections are highly adaptable and may make literary studies more relevant and accessible for modern students. Similarly, educators who reviewed the guide suggested that festivals featuring student work, 'full circle' closure activities, and field trips may be excellent strategies not only for engaging students in literary study, but across content areas.

Although reviewers found most sections of the guide clear and explicit, many recommended increased development and discussion of differentiation strategies for the application of this unit. In particular, it has been suggested that this section could be

expanded to include greater specificity, breadth, and depth with respect to methods for teaching difficult English texts to English language learners. However, reviewers found the philosophical approach to differentiation explained within the guide both specific and applicable.

In addition to questions surrounding differentiation, one reviewing educator expressed concern over the recommended ‘Shakespearean insults’ activity; it was suggested that this activity could present a problem for students and parents if parameters for the exercise are not closely defined and monitored for appropriateness. Similarly, some reviewers found the parameters described for project based assessments a bit vague; it was suggested that further discussion and description of recommended assessments and the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills reinforced by their implementation would make this portion of the guide more applicable.

#### Recommendations for Further Development

Recommendations for further development of this project include research to determine the guide’s classroom applicability and effectiveness with varied student populations, to include English language learners. Additionally, the development of assignment sheets, rubrics, and exemplars for recommended assessments and activities has been recommended to increase the guide’s classroom applicability. Specifically, it has been suggested that appendices which describe the parameters for project based assessments and the ‘Shakespearean insults’ activity may be necessary. Also, reviewers have recommended the development of a comprehensive list of film, music, and visual art titles that can be used to as a reference for the guide’s ‘popular media scavenger hunt’

activity.

Additionally, reviewers recommended the development and inclusion of reading comprehension strategies for English language learners. Scaffolding, translation, and comprehension support activities recommended within this guide are highly generalized; although, they could be applied to assist ELL students in Shakespeare studies, further discussion of strategies to address their needs may be necessary. Likewise, explicit identification and integration of Marzano's instructional strategies could be helpful in grounding some of the guide's more abstract activity suggestions. Finally, it has been suggested that further development and discussion of what constitutes an applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century skill, and how assessments recommended within this guide address those skills, may be useful to educators who hope to increase the modern day relevance of their instruction.

### Project Summary

Methods for teaching traditional literature to 21<sup>st</sup> century, secondary students are the subject of much research and debate. Often, educational researchers suggest that secondary English educators should integrate fresh, innovative instructional strategies to bring new relevance and accessibility to canonical works, such as those of Shakespeare. This project was developed to encourage educators to adapt new strategies for teaching literature, rather than new curriculum. The unit guide was constructed with the intention of assisting secondary English teachers in the discovery and application of new instructional methods and to bridge the gap that can exist between modern secondary students and the traditional, secondary English curriculum.

Ultimately, it is this author's position that through the application of innovative teaching practices designed to: (a) promote student comprehension; (b) encourage student centered thinking and expression; (c) bridge historical and/or cultural gaps; (d) build personal relevance; and (e) address a variety of intelligences and learning styles, English teachers can improve student motivation, increase achievement, and encourage a sense of appreciation for traditional literature in their classrooms.

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