16th Century Shakespeare and 21st Century Students

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16TH CENTURY SHAKESPEARE AND 21ST CENTURY STUDENTS

by

Sheridan Lynn Steelman

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Sheridan Lynn Steelman
Western Michigan University, 2017

Drawing on examples from the author’s and colleagues classrooms, this dissertation shows how an historical approach to teaching Shakespeare, drawing on primary documents from the period, opens meaningful interpretations, issues and questions for secondary students. Chapter One reviews current pedagogical approaches to teaching Shakespeare, close reading, reader response, and performance to set forth the rationale for teaching Shakespeare using primary documents. Chapter Two highlights ninth grade students studying *Romeo and Juliet* and includes classroom stories about engagement with documents about gender, sexuality, violence, and potions. Chapter Three describes two general English 11 classes and their successes and challenges with *Hamlet* as they read the text and other primary documents about ghosts and religion, melancholy and madness, theater and acting, and espionage and treason. The fourth chapter illuminates findings while teaching *Macbeth* to Advanced Placement students, using a variety of document genres on themes of witches, government and freedom, manhood, equivocation, and insomnia. Chapter Five reveals the challenges and joys of teaching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in a middle school classroom, drawing on digital and visual documents about conflict and resolution, fairies and the supernatural, work and rank, and celebrations and entertainment. The final chapter proposes a small-group inquiry approach to Shakespeare’s sonnets, incorporating student-driven research of documents. The chapters quote from student work and discussions as well as teacher observation to illustrate and provide
evidence for the value of the approach. Several appendices include lists of documents by theme, strategies for teaching Shakespeare and the documents, assessment rubrics, contemporary literature based on Shakespeare’s plays, and teacher online resources for further exploration. One important appendix outlines how teachers and students can research their own documents.
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The Northview teachers with whom I worked spent hours learning about the document approach to teaching Shakespeare. I appreciated the efforts they made to accommodate my project and to share their students during the weeks we spent together. The High School English Department, specifically, has supported my work for many years. This group of men and women fight the good fight each and every day in their classrooms. They are often the unsung heroes who care about their students, going above and beyond contractual hours and expectations to ensure student success. I would especially like to thank my AP teaching partner, Audra Whetstone, who had constant faith in me.

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lend middle and high school credibility. I am deeply grateful for her time and talent.

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Sheridan Lynn Steelman
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After 45 years in the classroom, I understand the importance of professional development and extensive teacher training in classroom management, curriculum assessment, cognitive coaching, literacy consulting, and teacher leadership. The latter years, however, have been spent working toward improving capacity in literature and language, specifically the teaching of Shakespeare, and have been a wellspring of growth in teaching English.

This dissertation project, the teaching of Shakespeare using primary documents, includes the students at Northview Public Schools, a suburban, middle-class community, located northeast of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The High School has 1147 students in grades 9-12 with almost one quarter of our population comprised of students who live outside the district. Over the past five years, this community has seen significant increases in diversity and the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. As situational poverty has increased, so too has the at-risk population. Our test scores, however, have not dropped, largely due to the concerted efforts of the entire community to support educational programs and processes and to treat each other with respect and compassion. It is no wonder that my tenure at Northview has been long and fruitful.

Administrators, staff, and community members have supported my educational journey, encouraging my effort and welcoming my presence in classrooms throughout the district. Parents signed permission slips to allow their teenagers not only to participate, but also to be photographed, quoted, and described in my dissertation and book on teaching Shakespeare. Administrators welcomed me into their buildings, and teachers worked tenaciously with me for the benefit of our population. It has been the students, however, who have willingly and sometimes bravely risen to the challenges I set before them. They worked, played, and sometimes indulged me for six weeks at a time, participating in this project with open minds and undaunted enthusiasm.

This dissertation is more than a memoir or significant part of my teaching life that begs retelling. Rather, it is the culmination of a life of learning, the need to know and the desire to be the best educator possible for my students. When I applied to the Graduate Program, I recounted a story from my childhood. A milkman delivered glass-jarred milk to my home and placed it in the milk chute. Sometimes, though, he walked in the door and handed my mother a bottle, which she opened immediately. The cream, having risen to the top, could easily be poured into her coffee. I noted the desire to be that cream, bubbling up from the depths of a simple glass jar, ready and anxious to be the best part of my environment. That feeling has been at the core of my teaching and the impetus for improvement.
Preface—Continued

The following pages, often written in narrative form, are a testament to the beauty of teaching, a longstanding career in which the care, nurturing, and development of young minds is shared with eager, and sometimes tentative, teachers like me. The power of story, of imaginative literature, is only one tool to steer the course of young minds. It is, however, the best tool I know.

Sheridan Lynn Steelman, 2017
CHAPTER I

APPROACHES TO TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is the most taught author in American high schools and the only author specifically required by the Common Core State Standards, now adopted by 42 states. Best selling national textbooks universally include *Romeo and Juliet* in the 9th grade and frequently include *Hamlet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Julius Caesar*, and several sonnets at other grade levels. It would be fair to say that American high school students typically study an average of three plays, as well as some sonnets, either included in anthologies or as glossed editions, such as the Folger or Dover. Arthur Applebee found that out of the 122 authors included in the top seven anthologies, Shakespeare appeared in the top three, having the most selections included and the most space allotted. Other high school English courses, such as Advanced Placement, also rank Shakespeare as a priority author, as evidenced by how often his plays are suggested by the College Board as an appropriate text of higher literary merit, an impressive 89 times since 1971. *King Lear*, for example, appeared 17 times on this list, taking sixth place as “most frequently cited” on the National AP English Literature and Composition Exam.

And America is not the only country where Shakespeare has an important role in the English curriculum. Of course, in Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, Shakespeare is prominent in school curricula. Shakespeare is also taught throughout the former British Empire, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone - there are more than 400 million speakers of English in these countries. Ranita Hirji, Dean of Studies at the Commits Institute of Journalism and Communication in Bengaluru,
reports that most university syllabi include at least one Shakespeare play to transform students into “‘English-ingesting’ and, more importantly, ‘English-regurgitating’ professionals.” In Mexico, Russia, Serbia, and Azerbaijan, all students following the national curriculum will study Shakespeare. Many other countries, both English and non-English speaking, offer Shakespeare as an option (LoMonico). In our American world view, we may believe his plays and sonnets to be the pinnacle of literary achievement in the western world; indeed, Shakespeare’s genius is recognized all over the world.

Reading and understanding (and regurgitating) Shakespeare, however, is not easy, especially for young adults. They often struggle with language, encountering difficulties not only in the nuances and complexities of meaning, but also in understanding character and plot complexity, given the social and cultural contexts of 16th century England. In the 21st century, the culture and expectations for reading are evolving. Certainly, social media and increased screen time can be deterrents to reading, and teachers do complain that today’s students are reading less and with less tenacity than in former years. Nevertheless, many English teachers successfully engage their students in rich reading experiences using contemporary and young adult literature. This success may mean, however, that if students are accustomed to the relative ease of reading contemporary pieces in literature circles and discussion groups, teachers may find more difficulty in fostering interest in pre-twentieth century literature, especially Shakespeare. It’s harder work.

Secondary teachers often turn to “veterans” or other experts in their quest to keep Shakespeare alive. They seek help approaching the theatrical nature of the plays, the historical and cultural contexts of the language, and, most importantly, the relevant connections to contemporary social and political issues. Many helpful approaches and strategies, found in
traditional textbooks, include introductions to the plays, glossing of words and phrases, comprehension questions, biographical notes, and suggestions for discussion. For better or worse, illustrated texts with simplified and modernized language are readily available and increasingly utilized. *No Fear Shakespeare*, for example, provides side-by-side facing page translations into modern English and, in the most current version, a graphic novel fully illustrated format. Accessible recorded performances, approachable on-line versions featuring specific blogs and “apps,” such as *Shakespeare in Bits* and *Shakespeare Pro*, are resources for 21st-century teachers and students.

Differing schools of thought about the teaching of literature have emphasized varying approaches to making Shakespeare accessible, and each has value. The most important approaches to teaching Shakespeare have been close reading, reader response, and performance. Every teacher of Shakespeare benefits from knowing about these approaches, and I begin this introduction by overviewing them. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses, yet none of them builds upon rich historical, New Historical, and cultural studies scholarship increasingly important in academic Shakespeare study. After reviewing established approaches, this dissertation will set forward a document approach to teaching Shakespeare that specifically foregrounds historical and cultural materials, issues, and questions from the early modern period, helping students better understand Shakespeare in his own time and, by making significant thematic connections, better understand Shakespeare’s relevance to today’s world. My context will be the middle and high school levels where I work and teach, and my research will be compelling for teachers at these levels. At the same time, the document approach is potentially relevant at any level, and wherever Shakespeare is “ingested.” Indeed, when used in tandem
with other teacher-selected approaches, the inclusion of primary documents in the teaching of
Shakespeare will create rich and meaningful instructional moments.

Close Reading Approach

Formerly known as literary Formalism, New Criticism dominated American high school
and college classrooms for most of the twentieth century. This approach to teaching literature
focuses on close reading of texts, ignoring outside influences, such as author or culture. I.A.
Richards, considered to be the father of American New Criticism, sought a scientific analysis of
literature, by which he meant deciphering a single, true meaning through isolating and
objectifying form and language and categorizing works by their formal attributes, such as text
structure and rhetorical strategies. In *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards defines the process of
reading and comprehension as “navigation - the art of knowing where we are wherever, as
mental travellers, we may go” (10). In other words, readers gain true understanding by staying
within the known four corners of the text; the meaning becomes transparent when readers
employ a consistent, systematic study of the concrete elements of imaginative literature. In his
study, Richards focused on student responses to thirteen different, untitled poems of varying
lengths and forms, cataloguing and interpreting student responses to study “what may be called
the same opinion in different stages of development” (8). Interspersed among several, numbered
responses, Richards inserted personal commentary regarding the capacity of the responses and
often surmised what he deemed justifiable rationale for peculiarities, such as, “the absence of the
title of the poem deprived readers of a clue” (114), in response to a misconception about
perspective. He noted how some responses go awry of the one “true meaning” or interpretation,
which is inherent in and emerges from the text itself and commented, sometimes humorously,
about how readers fail to notice pertinent metaphors or poetic forms. As a result, miscues resulted from a specific gap in the reader’s instruction, which had the potential to be remedied. Richards’ idea of reading as navigation formulated throughout the second half of his text where he pinpointed the four basic parameters of comprehension within which student responses are framed: sense, the actual denotation of words; feeling, the connotative meaning; tone, the attitude of the author; and, finally, intention, a conscious or unconscious purpose. *Practical Criticism* sets forward a framework within which the study of literature is systematically analyzed and lays the groundwork for New Criticism.

Ignoring any authorial, cultural, or contextual influence, New Criticism primarily takes into consideration how meaning is derived from the words on the page; Richards’ study substantiates the basis for varying responses to the same poem by candidly outlining deficiencies in the readers, rather than any remoteness rooted in the poetry, lack of contextual knowledge, intertextual connection, or flaw in the text. Despite the quality of their Cambridge education, his college-aged subjects are described as “immature” and “inexperienced,” clearly impacting their interaction with and responses to the text. Moreover, in addition to the tendency for readers to give “stock responses” (295) while charting unfamiliar territory, Richards concedes that preconceived notions about poetry may be one reason for a lack of the ability to construe “correct” meaning. Stress, based on fatigue and insecurity, is another factor influencing how subjects responded. Despite voluminous examples of varying responses - the variability becoming the base upon which Louise Rosenblatt will later build the tenets of reader response theory - Richards’ study demonstrates how complex, figurative language, such as poetry, can and should be recognized and analyzed with the same respect and validity as science and math. In short, a consistent, concrete approach to literature can be taught.
A New Critical or close-reading approach to Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets includes the analysis of language through “text alone,” rather than an examination of student responses, dramatic performance, or analysis of ideas, values, or beliefs of Shakespeare’s time. Whereas New Critical close reading typically brackets out historical or cultural contexts, in the case of Shakespeare in secondary schools, New Critical close reading primarily emphasizes denotative meanings of Shakespeare’s language, especially archaic words, expressions, references, and imagery. The typical New Critical emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of poetry, such as rhyme, meter, figurative language, and irony, is typically simplified into close reading substitution, which often becomes a modern translation, providing easier access to basic meaning. The formal characteristics of Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets, which may include verse form, rhyme scheme and stanza divisions, may be explained in secondary textbook anthologies but are rarely connected to interpretations of meaning. Typically, this type of New Criticism provides historical information in the form of glossing for contemporary students about words, expressions, and language from a different time period. The emphasis, however, is not on understanding Shakespeare’s world but solely on translating language. Both Formalism and New Criticism remain within the four corners of the text because the analysis of Shakespeare’s language is wholly dependent on his stylistic and structural choices. Readers need not go beyond the words on the page to understand his message.

If taught at the high school level according to Richards’ ideas about navigating language through a consideration of denotative and connotative meanings, which give rise to an understanding of tone and purpose, students can gain a basic understanding of Shakespeare’s plays and poetry. To this end, editors of contemporary high school literature anthologies have adopted the systematic New Critical or traditional approaches to assist secondary students.
Moreover, professional books for teachers, such as Mary Ellen Dakin’s *Reading Shakespeare With Young Adults* (2009), provide resource material for building units of study on Shakespeare’s language. Although Dakin celebrates the “collaborative” nature of her text in that comprehension is often based on teachers, peers, scholars, and performers, she claims that a true reading of Shakespeare is “what we can do with increasing independence to construct meaning” (xiii). Thus, as an English teacher who knows first-hand the complexities of both teaching and learning early modern English, she provides teachers and student resources in the form of various, categorized lists and language definitions to help students as they struggle through the text. Defining archaic or early modern English, Dakin claims, will challenge the frequently held stereotype that Shakespeare’s wording is “too hard.” One list, functional vocabulary specific to stage directions, provides students with terms they may see in any genre: comedies, tragedies, or histories. Other lists include high frequency words, such as “hark” and “oft”; problematic pronouns, such as the first-person royal (we) and the second-person familiar (thou); and themed words, phrases, and definitions tied to specific plays. A “Character Vocabulary for Macbeth,” for example, provides lists of modifiers and their definitions for various student activities, including building word relationships, creating character webs, and completing sentence stems.

*Reading Shakespeare*’s organization delineates language concretely, similar to the parameters as described by Richards: functional vocabulary (denotative), problematic pronouns (connotative), emotional “heartspeak” (tone), and pre-reading (intent). Based on the premise that teaching Renaissance language through a close-reading approach will create opportunities in which students may construct meaning with increasing independence, Dakin instructs teachers to focus instruction primarily on language and form, i.e., within the four corners of the text. She does, however, include some extended reading opportunities at the end of her text in an
“Epilogue,” lists of contemporary young adult fiction, such as Ophelia: A Novel by Lisa Klein and Loving Will Shakespeare by Carolyn Meyer. The final chapter thus provides ideas for teachers to diversify instruction, building on close reading tools for reading Shakespeare and providing for independent opportunities to explore the same plays and themes in a contemporary young adult version. Dakin’s structure models the content of many other texts on the teaching of Shakespeare: teaching the language of early modern drama through close reading, followed by or interspersed with creative activities for students to establish relevance and to generate excitement about Shakespeare’s work.

Another New Critical approach to Shakespeare’s plays, the Folger Shakespeare Series, is found in “glossed” editions where words and phrases are defined in accessible, contemporary language. Students who read these editions in school are able to see the full text on one page and the glossary of difficult or early modern language on the facing page. In the Folger edition of Macbeth, for example, “screw your courage to the sticking place” (1.7.70) is defined as an archery term in the provided glossary, which provides students immediate access to the meaning without having to interrupt the flow of reading. In most cases, glossed editions, such as the Folger, provide substantial definitions or contemporary substitutions of words and phrases within the context of the scene. Both the Folger Shakespeare Library Series and Dakin’s Reading Shakespeare present to students, who are assumed to be concrete, sequential learners, a better understanding of the denotative and connotative meanings of antiquated words and expressions. In short, both themed vocabulary lists and glossaries provide students with information for basic understanding.

Although they do not offer analysis of Shakespeare’s work, there are advantages to this approach. First, most twenty-first century students are unfamiliar with early modern English, and
assistance with Shakespeare’s vocabulary, rich in puns, innuendos, and archaic expressions, is crucial. Second, close reading provides opportunities to appreciate language. Watching performances are helpful for students to understand expressive character dynamics and non-verbal cues, but close reading provides the reader a systematic approach to understanding early modern language. The emphasis of a close reading approach in textbooks, individual editions, and professional books for teachers on helping students understand and appreciate Shakespeare’s language establishes the pedagogical priorities found in many classrooms.

One of the primary weaknesses of the New Critical approach to teaching Shakespeare, however, is the inherent risk of students’ belief in one interpretation. By emphasizing close reading, the exclusive study of language and form, students often dismiss Shakespeare as “too hard” and “boring.” Early modern English becomes too much to decipher, and today’s students often believe that “true understanding” can only happen when a glossed edition, such as the Folger Shakespeare Series, or a simplified version, such as No Fear Shakespeare or the online Spark Notes or Schmoop, can provide meaning. Professional texts on the teaching of Shakespeare, such as Dakin’s Reading Shakespeare With Young Adults, often deal with this limitation by broadening approaches. To this end, for example, Dakin includes some activities and projects that appeal to multiple senses when reading lines from the plays. She suggests verbal expression, which includes large-group readings, to reinforce variable intonation and enunciation as well as experimentation with the cadence of lines in varying tones. Analyzing artistic representations of the plays is another suggested avenue for students to imagine characters. Despite the fact that most activities are seated, the point is that Dakin does experiment with additional activities to incorporate with close reading.
Another drawback of primarily using a New Critical approach is its intense focus on the plays as written texts and thus neglects Shakespeare’s first priority in writing: creating dramatic scripts to be performed on stage where blocking, body language, intonation, costuming, props, lighting (natural in his day), are important to meaning. Humor and anger, as well as other intense emotions, are inherent in hand gestures, facial expressions, and physical movement, those cues especially important to visual learners (and playgoers). Today’s students who depend on social networks for both communication and information have developed an ease with visual learning. As a result, when longer, complex text is too cumbersome, they are much more comfortable with viewing plays, either online or live, where action often carries meaning. Some academic texts, such as Rex Gibson’s Teaching Shakespeare (1998), primarily employing a close-reading pedagogical approach, adds a chapter on performance, thus providing dramatic supplements teachers can employ within the classroom. Gibson introduces theatrical experiences, suggesting that teachers and students take on the roles of characters. For teachers who have no experience with acting, Gibson’s lists of scenes and sequential, accessible instructions significantly increases engaging opportunities to experience Shakespeare’s language, adding another layer to his close reading approach.

Close reading is one important approach to teaching Shakespeare at the high school level, but it does ignore the historical and cultural background that students need to understand how sixteenth-century audiences sitting or standing in the Globe Theater may have understood the nuances of meaning in the language of his plays. And close reading does not provide potential thematic connections that might make Shakespeare relevant across time. Shakespeare’s wording can be difficult for today’s students, but it is often the historical and cultural information that can clarify and enhance themes. In Romeo and Juliet, for example, students often laugh when the
Capulet and Montague servants, Sampson and Abraham, exchange words about biting their thumbs at one another. The glossed section in the McGraw Hill anthology defines the term “bite my thumb” as “making an insulting gesture” (325). The drawback for using glossed editions in this way is that students depend on experts to define terminology, rather than to discover a much richer meaning based on the work of comparing historical texts. I would argue that simple glosses and translations of historical terms and expressions may limit rather than expand historical and cultural understanding. It is an approach more likely to distance students from the issues in the works, making it more difficult for them to understand the relevance of Shakespeare to contemporary complex questions and issues. Moreover, students become more deeply engaged in the reading if they are given opportunities to discover meanings themselves. Primary documents, such as manuals, treatises, journals, recipes, letters, and speeches can heighten curiosity and understanding and raise issues relevant to the present as well as to the past.

Reader Response Approach

The reader response approach, described by Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as Exploration* (1938), argues that the meaning of a text depends on a reciprocal, personal transaction with the reader. Rather than focusing on one correct interpretation inherent in a text through a study of language and form, Rosenblatt emphasizes that for each reader, text comprehension depends on interaction with the text in a given moment. The reading process is reciprocal in that both reader and text interact as separate entities, suggesting a reciprocity whereby the actual making of meaning happens during continuous interactions between reader and the printed word. Rosenblatt claims readers approach reading with both literary and non-literary processes, such that “both cognitive and affective elements are present in all reading”
What words evoke is what is carried away and what Rosenblatt terms “efferent” reading. In some instances, for example, the reader must focus on the verifiable meaning of text, subordinating the affective realm. In other instances, readers broaden their scope to include personal associations. The experience and resultant affective associations surrounding what is taken away is the “aesthetic” reading, where the reader lives through the experience during the transaction. In both cognitive and affective realms, “efferent” and “aesthetic,” the interactive process has the dimension of movement, forming a continuum of possible transactions that fall on different points.

In I.A. Richards’ New Critical approach to poetry, he hypothesizes readers, through an analysis of form and language, will posit one, correct meaning where text is the focus. The interaction is not reciprocal. Rosenblatt’s reader response approach to poetry, however, takes into consideration the meaning derived from analysis of form and function, as well as the experience when readers “live through what is being created during the reading” (33). Poetry provides opportunities for multiple reactions as readers interact with text again and again. Some readings may simply provide the gist, falling on predominantly efferent points. The eventual focus of the poem, however, may be directed to affective elements, such as sensations, feelings, and images, dependent on a reader’s capacity and readiness. Rosenblatt also concedes that the same text, depending on time and circumstance, “will have a very different value and meaning” (35). Thus, living through the poetry of Romeo and Juliet may not necessarily provide opportunities to acquire information; rather, the acquisition of experiences teach them the joy of new love, the pain of family discord, the heartache of death. And these understandings may vary not only between readers, but also within an individual reader at different stages of life. Although Rosenblatt does not discount the importance of close reading and the attention to
language and form, the psychological process - the aesthetic realm - taking place between reader and text is crucial. Thus the total experience includes both the efferent and aesthetic and elicits responses often leading to reflection, which, according to Rosenblatt is the most valuable part of the reading experience: the ability to register others’ responses with understanding and empathy.

The difference between Richards’ close reading and Rosenblatt’s reader response is in the process itself. Both account for misreadings, but Richards labels them as “mnemonic irrelevance” (Qtd. in Rosenblatt 77), whereas Rosenblatt contends that readers draw from memories and experiences, which can be both absorbing and conflicting. In short, readers respond personally. This is not to say that Rosenblatt believes that for every reader, there is a different “correct” interpretation but that a variety of personal responses exist, falling within the continuum of efferent and aesthetic. She questions Richards’ study, not because his subjects did not have a strong background in poetics, but because “their fund of critical dicta on good poetry were of very little use in helping them handle their unvarnished primary personal responses” (61). According to Rosenblatt, Richards’ students were at the mercy of their own biases, emotions, and experiences. She asserts that responses to reading cannot be wholly systematic, simply because all readers base their responses on individual personality, knowledge, and experience, influencing their ability to derive meaning. Each interaction with text demands flexibility, rather than the rigidity that accompanies stock responses, and the opportunity to gain experience and thus empathy by living through the experiences in their reading. Personal responses are made up of previous diverse readings, personalized and extrapolated from background knowledge. Thus, when students lack experiences to bring to the reading process, they often seem indifferent. But when readers are aware of the dynamic nature of the reading
process, they gain critical knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses they bring to bear on new literary endeavors.

The reader response theory has been the basis for many contemporary pedagogical texts. Rosenblatt’s transactional process develops over time, focusing on student-centered, flexible, and multiple approaches to the reading process while recognizing and respecting different interpretations. It is true Shakespeare’s wording and visual imagery can and do intimidate today’s students, especially those who are on their maiden voyage with Shakespeare. Few fourteen-year-olds grasp his humor or register innuendos. They do, however, connect with his themes of tragic love and familial conflict inherent in *Romeo and Juliet*. Rather than study the Elizabethan sonnet form utilized during the interchange between Romeo and Juliet when they first meet, students can and do react on a personal level: what it means to fall in love with the “wrong” person, what it means to defy a parent’s wishes, what it means to impulsively submit to passions seemingly out of control. The reader response approach can thus become the impetus for valuable, relevant, and diversified discussions and writing assignments for students as well as for pre-reading activities in preparation for reading the play. The approach allows students to account for diverse, cogent, and relevant responses to Shakespeare, which, according to Rosenblatt, are the basis for analysis.

According to Allen Carey-Webb, teachers do not often realize that by incorporating group discussion, literature circles, artistic activities, and creative writing where students are developing and sharing their personal responses to a literary work that they are approaching literature through reader response theory (6-7). Many current, pedagogical texts, such as *Readicide* (2009, Gallagher) and *Book Love* (2013, Kittle), focus on engaging, interactive activities where teachers respect diverse interpretations and insights to imaginative literature.
Their strategies apply to a variety of whole-class novels and poetry, classic or contemporary, because multiple and diverse personal responses are often the impetus for writing and further reading. In essence, as students read more, they are building a repertoire of strategies to help them understand more complex genres, themes and periods. Rather than recording “correct” responses to imaginative literature based on the analysis of language and form, Gallagher and Kittle, similar to Rosenblatt, suggest multiple and varying responses to literature relevant to today’s teenagers. Certainly a narrow focus on popular culture can create a bias toward more contemporary young adult fiction. Even so, building experiences through diverse reading opportunities, as Rosenblatt suggests, is vital in that once students begin to respond freely and creatively, growth begins. Teachers can provide opportunities for student-choice reading which, according to Gallagher and Kittle, builds the tenacity and stamina needed for more complex text.

How teachers approach the teaching of literature is key not only to increasing student engagement with text, but also to building self-efficacy in response to texts. Kelly Gallagher’s *Readicide* (2009), the title term defined as “the systematic killing of the love of reading” (2), includes strategies to mitigate the tedious study of form and language and thereby assist teachers in their quest to find the “sweet spot” of instruction. Gallagher concedes that under-teaching, asking students to fend for themselves, is not the answer to over-teaching, focusing on every fathomable rhetorical device without allowing students to react to text in personal ways. As a proponent of teaching the classics to students whereby they are gaining “imaginative rehearsals to the real world” (93), he suggests activities where high school students interact with meaningful books of higher literary merit such as *1984*, *Jeckyl and Hyde*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Gallagher does not, however, exclude contemporary young adult fiction; many of his ideas are transportable, easily adapted to student-choice reading, making his text
Readicide accessible to teachers using diverse language arts curricula. He speaks to the value of first- and second-draft reading responses, text annotations, and metacognitive reflections, all of which can be useful to students as they analyze prose and poetry. Gallagher’s ideas fit with reader response in that he is suggesting that teachers allow students to think about the big questions that meritorious literature answers: *What is the condition of human life? How do people respond to the complexities of internal struggle?* These questions rebut an absolutist approach, which Rosenblatt believes teachers, despite valuable systems they may have worked out for themselves, are “not justified in teaching to students, as one might teach a method of solving a problem in calculus” (123). Both Gallagher and Rosenblatt believe that a reader response approach to teaching literature provides significant moments where both teachers and students, as communities of learners, respond to literature efferently and aesthetically. In this way, individuals are able to engage with the big ideas that classic and contemporary authors present.

The reader response approach has several advantages. When the teacher understands each student’s interaction with text as legitimately unique, rather than something simply “mistaken” that needs to be corrected, it takes the fear out of sharing ideas about class reading. Although Rosenblatt concedes that not all responses are equal, her understanding of the reading process respects the personal interaction between reader and text. From a reader response perspective, the creation of meaning is dynamic and evolving as students acquire more information, learn from others, study from other texts, and return to the reading. Thus, students are free to change their thinking, knowing new insight is not only acceptable, but also honored. Moreover, reader response is based on a growth mindset, the belief that we are not held hostage to prior mistakes in thinking. What this means is that students who read Shakespeare or any other sixteenth-
century writer, the difficulties in learning are not fixed. Rosenblatt’s approach to reading
undergirds this belief in learning growth through practice and experience. Readers who face
difficult text with a growth mindset know that understanding will eventually become clear with
hard work. Thus, work ethic and positive encouragement, working in tandem with the precepts
of reader response, often provide a positive approach to reading literature.

Although the reader response approach is, for many students, non-threatening, some
limitations are noteworthy. First, students may not be encouraged to move beyond their own
personal comfort levels, especially when faced with difficult language. Students, especially
reluctant readers, are likely to have difficulty engaging with text that initially seems beyond
comprehension or interest. If the vocabulary is frustratingly difficult, what often ensues is “word
calling” or a focus on correct pronunciation without attention to meaning. If the content is
uninteresting, readers often “shut down” and suspend engagement completely. Deborah
Appleman addresses this limitation in her text *Critical Encounters in High School English*
(2009) on teaching literary theory to adolescents. Although she gives Rosenblatt credit for “the
soundness of the reader-centered approach” (29), she contends there is often a disconnect
between a reader’s world and the world of the text. If, indeed, personal responses to literature
are based on the reader’s selective background knowledge, which is both cognitive and affective,
Appleman claims reader response may be merely a method for clarifying our own existence. If
so, the reading experience becomes more static than dynamic, offering our students opportunities
for self-confirmation, rather than the growth that takes place as a result of transformational
thinking. Appleman contends that literature teachers have a responsibility to “move students
beyond their own personal responses” (25) and warns teachers that incorporating reader response
as an approach to literature as the sole lens through which students interact with imaginative literature will significantly narrow the range of understanding.

Despite her warnings, Appleman concedes that a reader response theoretical pedagogical approach has some merit. A proponent of teaching theoretical lenses to students, Appleman teaches her students the value of reader response by encouraging them to understand the process as a lens through which they can respond to literature. In this way, students are metacognitively aware of their responses as readers and are able to see this response as one, but not the only, lens through which literature can be understood. Rather than depend on what she terms a pre-selected theoretical paradigm, a limited range of thinking based on present knowledge, Appleman encourages a shift toward a broader base of knowledge where readers are invited to construct theoretical contexts, such as gender, social class, and postmodernism. Students who delve deep into literature through other theoretical lenses soon learn on their own how the confines of solely using the reader response approach eventually limits thinking. As we will see, Appleman’s concerns about reader response are well addressed by a document approach.

Another concern about reader response is that it does not specifically address the question of how to work with intrinsically unmotivated students, especially those who could read but have no desire. Although a proponent of reader response, Jeffrey Wilhelm’s research sheds a light on this limitation. His responses from avid readers explaining why they read led him to seek answers to how teachers motivate reluctant readers in an action research study. One especially surprising finding was a large number of students who seemed unable to offer any reflections on their experiences with reading. It is unclear whether their silence denoted a lack of knowledge or an inability to express, but Wilhelm concludes that passivity is often a result of text-bound attitudes in which the unmotivated “submit” themselves to the reading task, thus becoming
reductive. In other words, reluctant readers lack desire, but it is during this lackluster state when reader response can be most effective. Not all passive students struggle, but they do simultaneously lack engagement and according to Wilhelm, Rosenblatt does not address the limitation of intrinsic motivation; i.e., how reading as a transactional process is stymied by the reader; however, his research, based on classroom teaching and student responses, reveals that students who increase active engagement in the reading process - before, during, and after - through creative activities also demonstrate improved metacognitive expression. The unmotivated or reluctant reader, according to Wilhelm, is the one who does not fully engage with text personally, who simply go through the motions of classroom activities. These students read without positive intent and are therefore unlikely to construct meaning. Eventually, the disengaged become the unwilling. In Wilhelm’s classes, students reflect on all learning processes, rather than solely the transaction between reader and text, increasing the likelihood of engagement through creative expression and constructing personal meaning through what Rosenblatt terms the aesthetic realm.

When approaching Shakespeare’s plays and poetry through a reader response pedagogical approach, the transaction between reader and text, both efferent and aesthetic, emphasizes and promotes self-efficacy. Students have rich opportunities to “play” with text through interactive activities, such as literature circles and Socratic seminars, which provide opportunities for deep thinking through safe discussions where responses are accepted as possibilities, rather than stifling truths. Similar to Rosenblatt’s reader response approach, Wilhelm’s approach to reading builds positive experiences in the classroom. Wilhelm’s concerns about reader response point to the possible values of a performance approach, which he encourages not just for theatrical works, but all literary genres. Approaching Shakespeare
through activities that heighten the senses and encourage engagement increases the likelihood that students will also build awareness of how they apply what they know to the reading process. Activities that focus on student familiarity with contemporary culture, however, will not be enough when studying Shakespeare. Students also need to approach the reading process with the background knowledge of early modern society and their beliefs to increase the likelihood of successful and meaningful transactions with Shakespeare’s work.

Performance Approach

A third important approach to teaching Shakespeare emphasizes the plays as performance, which is both entertaining and engaging to teenage audiences and can be divided into three major areas: viewing, where students watch performances either live or on film; acting, where students are out of their seats, experimenting with language and movement or performing scene work; and analysis, where students study script through the eyes of directors, actors, and audience members. Although live theater may not always be readily available to students, it is certain they have access to film and theater through the Internet. The Folger Shakespeare Library provides numerous quality online resources for teachers who wish to show various clips of specific scenes to compare special effects or costuming as well as strategies for inviting students out of their seats and experimenting with novel performance ideas within the confines of the classroom. Video clips, lesson plans, and acting opportunities are available to both teachers and students on the Folger website for the sole purpose of bringing Shakespeare to life. A professional podcast, for example, introduces students to Shakespearean actors and scholars who have performed and studied Macbeth and can also be used as a model for creating exemplary audio productions. The Folger also offers lesson plans for incorporating reader’s theater and
classroom performance activities, providing guidance to teachers about how to approach Shakespeare’s work, depending on students’ prior experiences and comfort levels. (Throughout this dissertation and in the appendices, teachers will find specific references to these and many other resources.) Experimenting with Shakespeare’s language in dramatic form is a vital tool and thus a viable approach for not only understanding, but also “feeling” Shakespeare’s plays using all the senses. Local theaters, especially those that specialize in Shakespeare productions, promote both education and entertainment. The Shakespeare Theater in Chicago, the American Shakespeare Center in Virginia, the Utah Shakespeare Festival, the Lantern Theater Company in Philadelphia, the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, the Lansburgh Theater in Washington, D.C., and Shakespeare & Company in the heart of the Berkshires in Massachusetts all host teacher workshops several times each year, training teachers in how to incorporate and modify theatrical experiences in the classroom. Trained professionals lead teachers through activities, demonstrating how to work with students’ initial feelings of trepidation and insecurity when set free to explore language in large or small groups. Some teachers may feel completely comfortable in the role of moving Shakespeare from the page to the stage, but others may feel somewhat insecure, which, ironically, helps them experience first-hand how to work through and successfully deal with their students’ same feelings.

Many workshop ideas require students and teachers to be on their feet, exploring language through movement. One example that helps students understand the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet* is to give each student partner group a printed copy of one line. Each pair experiments with choral reading using varying intonation and cadence until they agree on how best to deliver the message. Next, they decide on body motions that best express the meaning.
After practicing, the groups arrange themselves to speak the lines sequentially, and the students then begin reciting and acting out the prologue from memory. Students then choose key words from each line and, using the same body motions, they again recite their parts, presenting the prologue in its most compact, poetic form. Another idea is a pre-reading activity for teaching *Macbeth*. Using a script provided by the Education Department of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater containing key lines from this great tragedy, students practice parts, incorporating sound effects and makeshift costumes to create a “one-take” filmed movie trailer. At this point, students do not necessarily know the plot line - how the witches are involved or why King Duncan is murdered - but they practice their lines so thoroughly and convincingly that the play comes alive when they later read it together in class. Workshop ideas generally require students and teachers to explore language through physical movement, thus creating the advantage of repetition. Practicing lines several times demonstrates the value of hearing the words, rather than reading silently from the text, simply because of the emphasis on enunciation and cadence. As a result of the training, many teachers return to their classrooms, transforming their previously quiet settings into cacophonous workshops where students “feel” the sensory input of Shakespeare’s language. Significant words on the page, such as *blood* in *Macbeth*, ceases to be solely a word on the page and, instead, becomes part of an alliterative, vocal experience. Is a performance approach possible for teachers without access to workshop trainings? Of course. Online sources, such as *The Teaching Channel*, provide opportunities to watch master teachers in action. One such lesson, hosted by drama teacher Ms. Broadbent at the Hornsey School for Girls in London, engages her grade nine class in activities where students learn how to prepare for a key scene in *Macbeth* (1.3). Watching her work with students is magical. The program,
“Classrooms Around the World,” provides lesson plans as well as suggestions to analyze teaching strategies. (http://tinyurl.com/yagmvdyz)

In addition to engagement through movement and interpretive readings, theaters that offer both Shakespeare productions and teacher training - Shakespeare and Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, American Shakespeare Center - provide opportunities to work with stage directors. Teachers are often invited to watch a performance rehearsal to observe how directors interact with actors and actresses and thereby model how to work with students on the nuances of a scene. A director may take 20 lines of text and explode the moment to determine how lines can be delivered and how space can be filled. Working through short segments with many “takes” helps students understand that Shakespeare’s language can be interpreted differently, depending on the director’s creative interpretation. Watching a director work is yet another inroad to working with students in a performance approach to teaching Shakespeare. How, for example, is Banquo to be received by King Duncan after he and Macbeth successfully end the war with Norway? How does King Duncan’s subtle yet obvious “slight” when he receives Banquo affect the audience’s understanding about his relationship with Macbeth? How long should Duncan look into Macbeth’s face? How hard should he clasp Banquo’s hand in congratulation? None of these answers are found within the text, yet the director’s comments and cues allow teachers to imagine how this process could unfold within the realm of their own classrooms.

Edward Rocklin’s Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare (2005) also provides ideas to help students experience the play in dramatic form. Through examples of activities intended for secondary and college classrooms, Rocklin suggests ideas for students who approach the play as a script, one in which they are challenged to divide into practical scenes and arcs. In this way, students take the role of director, player, and audience, all of which
Rocklin asserts will engage students in a deeper understanding of Shakespeare’s talent for engaging audiences with his tragedies, histories, and comedies. Using *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Richard III*, and *Hamlet* as primary texts, Rocklin asks, “What do the Words Do?” (xx) in an effort to begin with the text when incorporating a performance approach. He contends literary theory is secondary to introducing students to the drama genre and to the challenges of translating text into script and script into performance. His approach, however, is based on a strong, theoretical platform, which he describes and maps with three foci: conception, enactment, and reception. The visual representation of his theoretical paradigm clarifies that all three points are interrelated. The *conceptual play text* or script provides the roles from which the characters emerge; the *enactment* or performance is built but not limited to the script because of the discovery of space, transformation, and performance: the emerging energy of the actors and actresses change the dynamics of the play during each performance, such that the words on the page may be static, but the actor’s interpretation of those words may be dynamic, such that each performance has its own particular nuance. The final point of the three-prong theory is *reception* where students simulate the role of audience member and critic. Few, if any, theories consider the role of the audience, a crucial consideration in teaching any piece of literature.

Figure 1. *Mapping options for a performance model*, pp. 78, 2005.
Rocklin does not consider the early-modern audiences, historical/cultural contexts or supplemental documents, but he does consider how today’s viewers respond to live and media productions of Shakespeare’s work. One example of how audience reception intersects with both conception and enactment is in the Hamlet section “What if the Ghost Came Back?” (336-341). Rocklin’s purpose is to consider what the ending should do. In other words, were Hamlet’s efforts successful? Did his death mean anything? The return of the ghost of Hamlet’s father would indeed have been impactful, especially if we consider other early modern performances, such as Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, in which the ghost is ever present and has the last word in the play. Rocklin’s performance approach is textually layered with the depth that script, stage, and audience, when melded, can provide. Despite an absence of Shakespeare’s world, specific awareness of what an early modern audience would know, and an exploration of intertextuality, his approach creates an overlap of analysis providing rich texture to high school or college classroom instruction.

Performance approaches, whether incorporating viewing, acting, or analyzing, are appealing to high school teachers. Most students enjoy the experiences that performance offers, especially the energy that physical engagement affords. Viewing professional performances, either live or film, allows students to experience Shakespeare by listening to early-modern language supported by nonverbal cues. One actor at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater compared the experience of watching a play on stage to walking into a dark room: at first, nothing is clear. Eventually, however, the eyes adjust, shapes become more visible, and the path is easier to navigate. Shakespeare’s language, despite its initial strangeness, becomes much clearer when we adjust to its sound and cadence and when it is supported by expressive movement. Viewing a live performance is also a social experience, one that creates energy among students. When
audience members hear laughter or the sharp intake of breath of those seated around them during an intense scene, viewers and actors are affected. During the pre-performance talk, student audience members are often encouraged to laugh, clap, scream, and cry during performances because it creates energy for the actors on stage. Viewing film versions of plays does not provide the same intense sensory experience, but it does allow students to compare different interpretations of the same play. The witches in Macbeth, for example, can be portrayed as men, women, monsters, nurses, garbage collectors, or hags, depending on the period in which the production is set or the dramatic or thematic goals of the director.

The performance approach provides yet another dimension for student interpretation. By practicing lines, they can experiment with intonation, enunciation, and cadence. The more students become familiar with Shakespeare’s phrasing, the more adept and confident they become. Whether students perform lines, scenes, or acts, their movement requires physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement and draws on sight, sound, and motion. Through practice and experimentation, the most novice participants develop confidence and interpretative skill. In addition to physical engagement, viewing professional productions can be an effective inroad to dramatic, classroom performances. Well taught performance approaches potentially involve valuable, analytic discussions about theatrical options or “moves,” which greatly enrich student understanding. One idea is to view several film versions containing choreographed sword fights, such as the ending scenes in Hamlet and Macbeth. Students are usually excited to accept a challenge to choreograph sword fights using plastic swords or wooden dowels, incorporating professional moves they have studied in filmed or stage performances. Analyzing script through the different lenses of playwright, actor, or audience member, can be rewarding as it blends writing, moving, and viewing. Rich instruction that overlaps three types of performance-oriented
approaches, creates a depth and breadth that viewing or acting alone cannot provide. Rocklin’s three foci - conception, enactment, and reception - provide students with a collaborative framework where students work together, simulating the play from script to production while keeping the audience in mind.

Performance approaches also have limitations. Many teachers do not have experience in theatre or performance and do not have strong theater departments in their schools. Others, without access to local community resources, may not have the confidence or the skill to bring performance to the classroom. Teachers who have studied Shakespeare in college may have been trained using a New Critical approach and may be most comfortable with passive, rather than active, instruction. Moreover, not all students are willing or able to engage physically, preferring seated activities where they are not the center of attention. Thus, the anxiety created in certain students may be counterproductive to the goals of a performance approach. Although many students prefer an active learning approach to Shakespeare, classroom performances do require considerable close reading of the text. Even so, the type of close reading called for to prepare enactments may not prepare students for the multiple-choice exams increasingly required of students in an era of standards and testing. Similar to close reading and reader response, performance approaches typically focus on contemporary audiences but rarely consider Shakespeare’s world and his stage. Shakespeare’s audiences would have experienced the Globe’s open-air productions and would have been bombarded by screams, smells, jostling, and color. Remaining in the present, rather than bringing students back to the sixteenth century, limits some understanding of Shakespeare’s words and the meaning. Performance approaches that focus on today’s interpretations, however engaging, do not consider possible connections between the plays and relevant discourses and texts from and about early modern society, nor do
they foreground social, cultural, or political issues. Thus they may miss or gloss over historical
issues of vital importance to today’s secondary students.

Primary Document Approach

My review of the established approaches to teaching Shakespeare illuminates the need for
the historical approach I intend to develop in this dissertation. New Critical close reading
approaches to teaching Shakespeare in secondary schools are important to understanding
Shakespeare’s language at a basic level but do not investigate historical and cultural questions
and issues. Reader response approaches facilitate student personal responses and interest in
Shakespeare’s work but are culturally limited by the knowledge and background of the students.
Performance approaches engage students in the plays as living, interpreted scripts but neither
depth in their knowledge of the time period nor raise questions about Shakespeare’s relevance to
the present. All of these approaches are useful, but what this dissertation will show is that high
school students can also substantially benefit from an historical approach that draws on primary
documents from the period and recent scholarship to open meaningful interpretations, issues, and
questions. Students can better understand the past, the knowledge that Shakespeare’s audience
may have brought to the plays, and the issues in his day by combining the study of his works
with key historical documents. I will show how students are able to engage more deeply with the
plays, examine important questions about their relevance, and develop important knowledge and
questions typically overlooked in other approaches.

Students working with the document approach read and analyze intertextually, focusing
their attention on specific texts and thinking about big ideas, such as gender, class, and identity.
They read Shakespeare in ways that connect the present and the past, rather than isolate the past
in the past. For this reason it makes sense to follow the approach of contemporary scholars who use the term "early modern" rather than "Renaissance" to describe Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare lived at a time when institutions, social practices, and ideas were emerging in ways that continue to shape how we live. Stirrings of capitalism, science, new religious ideas, and global connections were taking place -- Shakespeare set his plays in Italy, in Northern Europe, even in the New World (*The Tempest*), as well as England. The "early modern" is also tied with emerging ideas of nation and nationalism, and Shakespeare's stage brings together all social classes to develop a national imaginary. His plays also set forth "brave new worlds," populated with new and diverse characters from Othello to Caliban to the merchant of Venice. Women in so many of his works take on men's clothing, and/or new and powerful roles. The younger generation escapes into nature to re-imagine relationships and social connections. His plays are tied to the Age of Exploration, the Protestant Reformation, and the Commercial Revolution. Yes Shakespeare was part of the Renaissance, but, if a term like "Renaissance" implies looking backward, "early modern" looks forward, toward us.

Today most American secondary English teachers teach William Shakespeare’s’s plays and poetry, not only because his works embody themes that continue to speak to students, but also because the new Common Core State Standards deem his work worthy of the relevancy and rigor that students need for twenty-first century literacy. In most imaginative literature units, teachers may substitute diverse novels, plays, and poetry to help guide students toward successful achievement, such as in the ninth and tenth grade reading standard,¹ where Shakespeare is the proffered example of an author whose work is drawn from a source play. In the eleventh and twelfth grade reading standard,² students are expected to determine figurative and connotative

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¹ See RL.9-10.9, corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/
² See RL.11-12.4, corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/
meanings of words as they are used in a Shakespeare text and “analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.” In other words, as the pinnacle standard for students who are on the cusp of post-secondary education, students must, in an analysis of craft through close reading, analyze the impact of Shakespeare’s language. More important, and how the historical/cultural approach allows students to meet these standards, is how incorporating primary documents provides opportunities for critical thinking about language and issues involving the past and the present, thus synthesizing these two standards.

Students’ analysis of authorial craft is based on close reading but is also deeply imbedded in cultural themes expressed in diverse discourse. Common Core State Standards recognize the importance of both craft and culture, but they are also deemed crucial for twenty-first century students as evidenced by nationally recognized assessments. College Board national assessments, the SAT, AP Language, and AP Literature national exams include essay topics that require students to analyze how writers express complex ideas. In the 2017 AP Language and Composition National Exam, for example, the synthesis essay asks students to “synthesize the material from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-written essay.”3 Students taking this exam will have scoured multiple primary documents, analyzing author’s craft from a variety of genres to form an opinion on a relevant issue. Skills involving reading complex texts are not relegated to advanced students. The SAT requires students to read a passage and analyze how the author uses stylistic devices, such as word choice, to add power to the writing.4 Reading and studying early modern primary documents as part of the study of Shakespeare affords students multiple opportunities to analyze how authors speak to specific

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cultural themes. Writing about how Shakespeare and others develop relevant themes, based on varied viewpoints and genres, directly aligns with the skills needed to successfully meet and exceed academic standards. The approach I propose, does not dismiss close reading or any other pedagogical approach to teaching Shakespeare. It does, in fact, honor previous scholars and practitioners who have paved inroads to literacy education by demonstrating how primary documents can be used in tandem with other approaches.

My dissertation will be a resource to support high school English teachers and will address Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets in separate chapters, which can be and often are studied as part of a standards-based curriculum. The organization of the dissertation will be based on projected teacher needs: most teachers, depending on how many grade levels they teach, focus on one play and perhaps a few sonnets throughout the school year and will therefore need easily accessible ideas in both chapters and appendices. Each chapter addresses historical/cultural themes and will draw on specific examples from my own classroom and from other English teachers at different grade levels whose classrooms I have visited. The chapters quote from student work and discussions as well as teacher observation to illustrate and provide evidence of the value of the approach. At the end of each chapter I provide scholarly references. Several appendices include both lists of and excerpts from primary and secondary documents, strategies for teaching Shakespeare and the documents, assessment rubrics, contemporary literature based on Shakespeare’s plays, and teacher online resources for further exploration. One important appendix will outline how teachers and students can research their own documents. In addition to the primary and secondary documents I have organized by theme and by play, other relevant issues may surface throughout the unit. With relative ease, additional research is possible, making the document approach exciting and fresh each year. Although not specifically part of
this dissertation, I intend to develop a complementary website where students and teachers can access resources and materials, such as lesson plans, slides, clips, documents, and writing samples - all in one place. I intend for the website to be an accessible, interactive network platform for middle and high school teachers to communicate with each other about teaching Shakespeare.
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CHAPTER II

ROMEO AND JULIET: THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

“We were told to read A Midsummer Night’s Dream last year. I tried reading it on my own, but it was impossible.”

“Yeah, we read that too at my old school,” said Stephanie, “and it was all homework. I just went to Spark Notes. I had no idea what the play was about.”

“I hate Shakespeare,” said Tyler. “Well, really, I just don’t get it. It’s just too old.”

All 28 students were nodding. Only one boy in the corner, who had been forced to do his entire year at home because of an illness, looked around in disbelief. He didn’t say anything, but I knew from his demeanor when he entered my classroom, that his experiences with Shakespeare had been positive. This was my first day teaching Romeo and Juliet, and I was unsure how freshmen would feel about the “lady down the hall” as their guest teacher. The fact that I was teaching them a Shakespeare play did not help either. But Colin had danced into the room on his toes with a smile on his face and gave me his best Romeo line: “‘What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.” This kid was beaming. “I love that part,” he said. How can it be that high school students have such diverse experiences studying the Bard? And why do many teachers loathe the thought of teaching Shakespeare for several weeks, knowing it will end with frustration, confusion, and defeat? In a study on the teaching of Shakespeare in secondary schools, “Shakespeare and the Common Core: An Opportunity to Reboot,” Turchi and Thompson believe that despite the challenges of teaching difficult texts, “Shakespeare is with us in the twenty-first century.” The only author expressly named in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, he is a significant inclusion, given promoting rigor and critical analysis takes precedence over naming specific
authors or texts in the Common Core. Moreover, in a national survey of English teachers, Turchi and Thompson found significant enthusiasm about teaching Shakespeare. His work “opens up universal themes” and “increases cultural appreciation,” gushed one respondent. Then why do many of us struggle with exactly how to approach the author we believe is “good for almost everything”? If our task is to help students build toolboxes for understanding complex text, which should ultimately lead students to find relevance in Shakespeare’s language, why do students often find his work “excruciatingly dull”? As one co-teacher said to me before we began our journey into Romeo and Juliet, “I dread this unit. I just don’t know what to do with it. And I know my students dread it too.”

Turchi and Thompson believe that intentional frames, rather than plot summaries and character reductions, may help teachers focus more closely on re-articulated goals. In other words, we need to ask ourselves how students will grow as a result of studying Shakespeare in the twenty-first century. Their article gives teachers “an opportunity to reboot,” a rethinking of traditional practices, to ask ourselves, as these authors suggest, if deliberate and focused explorations of important themes could lead students to think more deeply. The theme of violence, for example, could be explored in Romeo and Juliet, Act III, scene i, when Tybalt challenges Romeo: “Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries / That thou hast done me. Therefore turn and draw.” But the same theme might also be explored in the 1595 document, His Practice. In two Bookes, The first intreating of the use of the Rapiers and Dagger. The Second, of Honor and honorable Quarrels, a manual written by fencing expert Vincentio Saviolo who had moved to London the year before Shakespeare finished the play and whose document Shakespeare may have consulted when he wrote the fight scene that ended in the stabbing and subsequent avenging of Mercutio’s death (Holmer). Saviolo’s manual, which first admonishes fighting -
“Wherefore by way of advise, I wish all men to avoid evill companie” (68) - does give men permission not only to draw, if challenged, but also to strike the accuser if the challenged is unable to defend himself. And isn’t that just what happens when Mercutio takes it upon himself to answer Tybalt’s written challenge to Romeo? Both Shakespeare and Saviolo explore similar early modern issues through very different genres, providing students the opportunity to compare and discuss. Yes, national standards promote rigor and critical analysis, but teachers already understand and desire a richly diverse classroom where students learn to approach a variety of text types actively and without trepidation.

The fencing material in Romeo and Juliet typifies the eclectic nature of Shakespeare’s borrowings and was probably culled from his own London experience as well as from various literary sources. ~ Joan Ozark Holmer
Preparing Students to Read Shakespeare

Having taught English for over forty years, I can confirm that my classes always studied a Shakespeare play or sonnet. Only the very best students admitted *loving* the plays - perhaps ten percent of my students - and the rest simply endured. Some enjoyed performing bits and pieces or reading in groups, but the majority preferred movie versions where the meaning was often carried in the action. Still, despite the visual effects, some lines remained a mystery. The same questions or comments surfaced year after year about *why* characters were motivated to act or *how* events became problematic. Ultimately, it is difficult for most contemporary teens to understand why Romeo and Juliet decide so quickly to marry, given their young age. Why are the Montagues and Capulets so angry with each other? Why is Romeo chastised for losing control of his emotions when he is banished? Are his tears really “womanish”? Why does the Prince threaten anyone who disturbs the peace with death? Why are Romeo and Juliet so quick to commit suicide, and why are they buried side by side? None of these questions are fully answered by the text, and yet students believe the actions to be incredible and incredulous by today’s pop culture. Eventually, the play becomes just another old text that has no relevance.

What I ultimately wanted to accomplish was a bridging of gaps. Today’s students simply do not understand early modern society when Shakespeare’s plays were performed. And why would they? To help narrow the space between what my students find relevant today and what they *perceive* about 400-year-old texts, I decided to approach *Romeo and Juliet* through the study of issues illuminated by multiple early modern authors, including William Shakespeare, to help students reflect on how those issues continue to be relevant today. The first step was to find engaging resources to bolster background knowledge. Ninth graders, especially those who had never studied Shakespeare, would have a better overview of Shakespeare’s world through
engaging visual and digital texts on topics they might find interesting, such as clothing, food, living conditions, romance, weaponry, and medicine. USBORNE’s *The World of Shakespeare* is an Internet-linked book, filled with colorful photographs, maps, sketches, and timelines, many of which are taken from early modern documents. Students were able to browse pages, then find the accompanying website links to delve deeper. Virtual tours of the Globe Theater, readings on the Elizabethan cure for lice and drunkenness, video clips on medicine in London, and walks through photo galleries of play performances provided an engaging platform for their initial inquiries. I loved the noise in the room as students shared their findings.

The second step, a student-originated list of topics and questions, prompted discussions and writing on the historical and theatrical context of the Shakespeare’s work. Following an immersion into important issues of his time, student inquiry would hopefully provide the impetus for gateways into the play. In a Quick-Write, students wrote about their research experiences, including questions they still had. Ryan, for example, noted “Women weren’t allowed on stage and asked, “If people tried to shut down plays, but the queen liked them, wouldn’t they in a way be disobeying her by shutting them down?” Kiara wondered why Shakespeare’s wife didn’t go to London with him. Nick asked how Shakespeare was different from other authors of that time period. Brenna thought it might be hard to make murders and sex look real on stage, especially if that was in his plays. How were people stabbed? Kyla learned that “children left home young to prepare for adulthood,” so had Shakespeare written *Romeo and Juliet* because he had a similar story? Eden wondered why Shakespeare would leave his family, and Nick was confused about

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5 See Appendix B for Shakespeare teaching strategies.
Students often feel, "That's so old school-people don't get married like that anymore" after reading Romeo and Juliet. Elle asked what determined social rank and wondered if Shakespeare himself ever wore purple. Ainsley noticed that many of Shakespeare’s plays were about love and violence. “Why?” she asked. I wrote their questions on the board for us to revisit throughout the unit. How would we find the answers, I queried? Would Shakespeare’s play reveal all? Or would we have to look at other documents? That was the beginning. Students first learned that Shakespeare would not be our sole text; other early modern cultural/historical documents would also be our source of learning.

My goal was for students to understand Shakespeare as a pop-culture artist who might have been tapping into his own society for ideas to be explored, manipulated, and exploited in his own work, similar to Kendrick Lamar, Rupi Kaur, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jill Soloway, and Chimamanda Adichie who have been recently touted as “culture defining” in the twenty-first century. Rather than study Romeo and Juliet as a single, isolated literary work divorced from a specific time period, I hoped my students would raise issues about Shakespeare’s time period and our own by categorizing them into broad themes that were also addressed by many sixteenth-century texts and images. In this way, any author’s work, including Shakespeare’s, would be “fair game” and included in my quest to both challenge and empower students. They soon learned that not all authors shared the same ideas; some disagreed but by comparing several documents, they could get a sense of competing ideas or cultural understandings. For example, when Romeo and Juliet exchange vows during the balcony scene, students objected. “But they just met!” said Nick. Other documents from the same time period, however, broadened student understanding of marriage and sexuality, thereby contextualizing

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6 Act II, scene ii

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Students often feel, "That's so old school-people don't get married like that anymore" after reading Romeo and Juliet.
the play and mitigating reductive thinking. According to Chimamanda Adichi, if we “show
people over and over again as one thing, that is what they become.” A single story, she claims, is
dangerous and often leads to viewing people through one lens, leading to misunderstanding and
mistrust. Was sixteenth century England a place where children married young? Were children
impulsive and oblivious to their parents’ wishes? Did parents disown their children for such
infractions? Reading several documents, such as sermons, letters, treatises, charts, and journals,
espousing differing opinions about important issues can lead to rich discussion where students
debate what the documents reveal: their variability, their complexity, and their relevance.
During the first two weeks of reading Romeo and Juliet, as well as other primary documents,
students found that ideas about marriage and sexuality may not have changed much in the past
400 years. Nick’s question from our first few days together drove the entire unit: How was
Shakespeare different from other writers of his time period?

How to Begin the Play

The first question I had when I began preparing for Romeo and Juliet was which broad
themes would initiate student inquiry. Because the play opens with the fighting among servants
of the Capulet and Montague households, I chose the
themes of gender and clothing, knowing that students
would be interested in male attitudes about fighting and
women’s roles in society. Both documents and videos that
incorporate period clothing, such as Carlo Carlei’s 2013

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<th>Historical/Cultural Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Gender and clothing</td>
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<td>2. Marriage and sexuality</td>
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<td>3. Violence and death</td>
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<td>4. Medicine and poison</td>
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Can documents be incorporated at any point in the play?

production\textsuperscript{7} and the 2017 Chicago Shakespeare production where both Prince Escalus and Benvolio were played by females, alerted students to gender issues, certainly a relevant theme today. I decided to include eight documents in booklet form to read and discuss after each act.

Students each had at least one part in the play, providing practice in reading aloud as well as following one character’s motives for action. They also made foldables,\textsuperscript{8} a study aid with six tabs, one for each act and one for dramatic terminology, such as aside, soliloquy, and stichomythia.

The second question I had, and probably the most important, was how to begin the actual reading. I wanted these ninth grade students’ first experiences with language to be engaging, so I used an idea from a workshop hosted by the Chicago Shakespeare Theater Education Department, suggesting students leave their seats and physically experience the language. I gave each student pair a line from the prologue. Each group had to memorize this line and create motions to carry the message using their entire bodies. They had fun leaving the classroom and figuring out their assigned 10 syllables. I had to explain that “loins” were not “lions,” a common mistake. We formed a large circle with the groups in sequential order. Moving from group to group around the circle, we retold the prologue several times, laughing as we all “played” with our lines. Next, students chose the two most important words from their assigned lines and adapted their motions. Finally, each group chose the single most important word, and they narrated the play in 14 words and motions. We went around the circle quickly, filling the hall with laughter. Perfect.

\textsuperscript{7} Performances by Douglas Booth and Hailee Steinfeld
\textsuperscript{8} See Appendix B.
Students needed to understand which characters were Montagues and which were Capulets, so I made a class set of envelopes containing the names of all the characters that they could arrange as a family tree\(^9\) while I narrated the story. As I included each character, I added the name to the board while students created their own graphic organizers on their desks. Once students had all the characters’ names in a meaningful assembly, they put them back in the envelopes and met with another student, trying to replicate the family relationships. Before reading Act I, students created Montague and Capulet family trees at least four times.

The first scene of the play was slow-going. After explaining the feud between the two families, we began to read. I expected that students would mispronounce words, fumbling through the first 80 lines, and that did happen but with practice and patience, we moved through the first scene. Most importantly, though, we talked about what it meant to be “at war” with other students, families, or countries in our world. We laughed about gestures, such as “I do bite my thumb, sir” (Line 45) and today’s “flipping someone off.” Students then listened as our class Prince Escalus read his lines. He read slowly, warning the two families. Their job was first, to listen as Prince Escalus read aloud and second, to reread his words with a partner.\(^{10}\) In their writer’s notebooks, they explained what he meant by “If you ever disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of our peace” (96-97). This close-reading activity allowed students to reread and unfold early modern language early in the play. Before they began, they knew the

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\(^9\) See Family Tree in Appendix B.  
\(^{10}\) See Big Chunk-Little Chunk in Appendix B.
gist of the Prince’s words but after they wrote, they had a much better understanding of his directive. It was time to go deeper.

Adding Primary Documents

When they read Queen Elizabeth’s 1594 Proclamation, one year before *Romeo and Juliet* was written, in which the Queen bestowed “a provost martial with sufficient authority to apprehend all such as shall not be readily reformed and corrected by the ordinary officers of justice; and them without delay to execute upon the gallows by order of martial law,” students understood why Escalus was so harsh in his justice. Her proclamation made clear the precedent for Shakespeare’s scene. His audiences would have understood the Prince’s power - he could and would carry out her proclamation to “apprehend” and “execute” or defy his monarch. Another proclamation they read was from 1562, one that defined who could carry a rapier and the parameters for the size of the blade; any person who was found to carry a weapon “passing the length of twelve inches,” specifically with intent to harm, would be imprisoned. Where, I asked, does Shakespeare mention the law during the fight between Sampson, Gregory, and Abraham? Eden, who played Sampson’s part, spoke up: “When he says, ‘Is the law of our side if I say ay?’” They were getting the idea. Shakespeare was not writing in isolation. He was writing to an audience who knew about fighting in the streets, who knew about wielding a rapier, what size was allowed, and what could occur if an enemy said, “I am for you.”
At the end of the act, students received eight other documents to read as a jig-saw.\textsuperscript{11} First, groups of four read one document together while I circled the room and answered questions about wording. Most documents were excerpted to fit on one page, and all were grouped on the gender and clothing theme. In Samuel Rowlands’ poem “The Humors that haunt a Wife,” he condemns the woman who tries to be too modern, a selection that could be compared to Jane Anger’s 1589 pamphlet “Protection for Women,” the possible rebuttal to Pyrrye’s “Disprayse of Women.” The pamphlets, much like a contemporary, rousing debate we might read in editorials, listen to on podcasts, or watch on televised debates, were written responses to controversies over the nature of women. The rise of printing made pamphlets disseminate quickly but revealed more attacks on “the woman question” than defenses.

“\textit{This period is a landmark because for the first time in England women began to write in their own defense and for the first time anywhere significant numbers of women began to publish defenses.}” Katherine Henderson and Barbara F. McManus \textit{\textendash} \textit{Half Humankind: Contexts \& Texts of the Controversy about Women in England 1540-1640.}

Students were also intrigued by John Gerard’s plants from his 1597 \textit{Herball}, specifically black hellebore, which is “good for mad and furious men” or those plagued with love melancholia. After much discussion on the documents’ main points, students formed three

\textsuperscript{11} See Appendix B.
groups of eight where all documents were represented. Their charge was to teach their document to the rest of the group, explaining not only the author’s claim or purpose, but also the document’s tie to the theme of gender. Rowlands’ poem, for example, was humorous but poignant. Students who read this poem could not dispute the purpose: to keep women in their place - at home and in the service of their husbands. Jane Anger’s pamphlet was more sympathetic toward women and Gerard’s natural remedy for love sickness was recommended for men who were too weak. As a final activity, we convened as a large group to debrief on what students learned about Shakespeare’s world: What attitudes were unearthed from the documents? How might Shakespeare have exposed some of these issues in his play?

“They sure had attitudes about girls back then!” said one student.

“How do you know? I asked.

“Well, look at what it says about being a virgin!” said another. “It says she is ‘the beauty of nature’ and ‘her parents joy.’”

“And what is a ‘wanton’ woman?” asked a student from the back.

“I think it’s someone who hooks up,” said another. They all laughed.

“Well, this document calls her a witch and a devil!”

“Same as now, then,” said someone else. They all laughed again.

“Devin, do you have a question?” I asked the boy on the side of the room who normally seemed rather quiet but now had his hand up.
“Well, I was just wondering why Shakespeare makes Juliet seem so different. In the last scene, when she meets Romeo, she is not shy at all, like in the document on virgins. But she isn’t a devil either. Romeo treats her like she’s perfect, but she’s definitely interested.”

“If the audience knew about the pamphlet wars and had the impression that women were a problem, as you read in the documents, why do you think he portrays Juliet in this manner?” I asked.

“Maybe he was trying to make people mad.”

“Maybe he was making people wonder if they were wrong.”

“Maybe he was trying to get them to think.”

“Maybe he was trying to get them to come to his plays.”

I think all of you could be right,” I ventured.

Working Through the Tough Stuff

If I’m giving you the impression that students read the documents easily without struggle, confusion, or questions after the first “go,” I will admit that this was not the case. Some students, especially those who were trying to make sense of John Lily’s “Anatomy of Wit,” could not comprehend this author’s claim. I joined their group to help them break it down. William Whately’s sermon on women’s roles from 1619 was no easier because of the spelling and sentence structure. Students did extract certain lines that jumped off the page, such as “mine husband is my superiour, my better.” “Seriously,” said one girl? “They really thought that?”
“I know, right?” I answered.

“What ideas and thoughts will you share with your large group that explains this document?” I asked.

Brooke admitted she didn’t get half the language. “Why does it say that women must give men leave to ‘chew the cud?’ What does that mean? And what is ‘good carriage’? How can her ‘good carriage’ be withered?” We worked through as many language issues as possible the first time we tackled documents other than Shakespeare’s play, but working in small groups first helped build confidence for when they were to teach their document to the rest of the group. The first time through the documents, despite ample discussion in their small groups that was facilitated in part by me, their jig-saw discussions were brief. Most students focused on what was stated, commenting on spelling differences or obvious noticings. Alana noticed, for example, that the compliments in “Encomiums on the Beauty of his Mistress” mimicked Romeo’s compliments of Juliet’s beauty: “She doth teach those torches to burn bright” (86). Isn’t that plagiarism, she asked?

“Not really,” I answered. “Copyright laws in 1595 did not exist, and writers often borrowed from other writers. What does this similarity tell you?”

“Shakespeare probably read a lot,” she said.
My thought was - and I told her - that she was thinking through so much more than what was happening in *Romeo and Juliet*. Similar to Brooke’s comments, other student discussions were moving away from mere plot summary and focusing instead on bigger issues in the documents. This is not to say that Shakespeare’s work was moving from center stage, but I was noting how other authors were becoming supporting players in a larger context, broadening student thinking and forcing them to consider more than one voice on a topic. To deepen the synthesis of ideas gleaned from the documents, students wrote daily about their thoughts, about how Shakespeare presented issues, such as gender, in *Romeo and Juliet* and about how those same themes surfaced in other documents. Nathan wrote about how women had “barely any rights” and compared their plight to “the chain of command as a slave.” Nick noted that Juliet’s father “says he will allow Juliet to select any husband she wants, but when she wants Romeo, he forbids it.” Jake mentioned that in his document, William Whately’s sermon on “Women’s Roles,” “women needed to accept that they’re inferior to men, like they’re animals or something.” He wondered if that would happen later in the play.

Large-group discussions often followed writing - one of my favorite parts of class - and this is when we all shared our thinking. Bella complained that men “were very controlling over women,” but she also noticed that “women did get a lot of compliments.” Brooke said, “I get the general feeling that the men thought they were better than the women. They thought they were more worthy and knowledgeable.”

“Where did you find that idea?” I asked. Did you read it or was it implied in your document?”

“It was in the *Academy of Complements*,” Brooke answered. “In that question and answer part at the top. The question is, ‘Who is the most jealous?’ and the answer is ‘the
woman.’ But then the next thing this guy says is that the man has more cause but won’t say why. He actually says, ‘My reason for this time I will keep to myself.’”

Macy acknowledged this idea but added that “when Romeo is upset about Roseline being chaste, ... it sounds like he’s not used to girls saying no to him.”

“‘Love-Melancholy’ makes it sound like love is a disease,” said Eden. Her stream of consciousness style made it seem as though she was trying to work out her own thoughts about gender equality and finally came to the conclusion that “Romeo and Juliet really shows the scandle of their love. Not only was it young, forbidden love but also diseased love from the viewpoint of many others.” Eden’s ideas surprised me, not because of what she said, but how much she and the others had opinions about what they were discovering about early modern writers. For many, this was their first experience with primary documents, and yet I had never had so much discussion during a Shakespeare unit of study and particularly during the first few weeks. I was both stunned and excited.

Inquiry and Relevance

Many students have heard of Romeo and Juliet before and, if so, most of them think about the balcony scene in Act II. When Juliet asks, “Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?” they commonly believe she is asking him where he is, rather than why he is called Romeo. This act, however, can be considered somewhat “steamy,” depending on which film they watch and exactly where ninth graders center their interest. Are they planning to have sex? Is he getting her to agree? And, of course, there is the snickering when Romeo asks Juliet, “Oh wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?” (2.2.125). If there is any theme that elicits student engagement, it is marriage and sexuality. Contemporary novels John Green’s Fault in our Stars
(2012), Rainbow Rowell’s *Eleanor and Park* (2013), and most recently JoJo Moyes’ *Me Before You* (2016) and Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* (2017) all deal with how today’s teenagers cope, overcome obstacles, and sometimes tragically fail in circumstances involving complicated love. It is therefore unsurprising that cultural norms on sexuality would be particularly engaging for and relevant to twenty-first century students. Throughout all of our discussions, I had recorded themes students saw emerging in the play as well as in other documents, substantially more than the ones I had offered as a starting point. Initially, themes they had previously noticed in contemporary novels, such as disappointment, control, family relationships, deceit, and identity, were the focus of discussion. None of these had been suggested by me but had, instead, arisen from our initial group discussions and student writing. Eventually, I noticed a shift in how they were approaching and embracing the idea of historical or cultural themes. They began to use words, such as patriarchy and gender norms in relation to marriage and sexuality in ways that were more complex and sophisticated. Rather than simply naming themes, they were developing skill in noting differences in time periods and analyze discourse intertextually. It was a slow process but had the potential for seeking answers to more complex questions. I had not seen this level of discussion before and knew Act II would be pivotal in how students would interact with issues of young love and heartbreak, emotions they understood.

**Approaching Shakespeare’s Text**

Teaching Shakespeare using primary documents is an approach that has taught me more than simply how and when to introduce other voices to our classroom conversations. I have had to think strategically about how to work with Shakespeare’s language using engaging yet instructive strategies. Each time we approached the text, I had to decide how to keep their minds
focused and engaged. Lessons in ninth grade English classrooms must activate and inspire, but lessons must also make sense and be “do-able.” With this understanding, I intentionally varied how and when to incorporate oral and silent reading, audio and video, performance and writing, group and independent work. Transitions between activities needed to be seamless, but I also felt time to relax and debrief was justifiably important. To begin Act II, I decided to play the audio of scene one, so students could hear professionals play Mercutio and Benvolio, in their drunken stupors, call out for Romeo, and make fun of his Petrarchan love for Rosaline. Next, I put two stools in front of the room for Romeo and Juliet as they professed their love for each other.

Before they began, I asked students to think about what might worry Juliet, how she would react to Romeo’s proclamation of love, whether Romeo is merely asking for sex, and whether or not they believe this new love seems real. We listened. We wrote. Then I assigned specific lines to each partner group. I directed them to reread the lines and to explicate or to unfold the meaning. What were Romeo and Juliet saying to each other? After approximately 15 minutes, students reported their findings to the class. I asked them to share the most powerful line from their assigned section as well as a contemporary way to say this line. In sequential order, each group first recited their Shakespearean line, creating a 15-line love poem. Next, each group read their contemporary line, creating the modern version. I realized students were balking at Shakespeare’s language far less than other years. They were more confident in their ability to decipher what he was saying. They were less concerned if they did not know every single word. They were

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12 See Appendix B.
beginning to see how Juliet’s concern about her own chastity may not have been what they had assumed. The fear of parents finding out about what they were doing may have been confined to the sixteenth-century stage, but also known by twenty-first century fifteen-year-olds. Each day we actively engaged with the play, including the day my teaching partner dressed up as Romeo and I as Friar Laurence. We placed ourselves in the middle of the room and acted out Act II, scene iii, when Romeo confides his love for Juliet to Friar Laurence. We read our parts, trying to muster up as much emotion as possible, then discussed the scene together in a fishbowl conversation.13 We talked about what the friar was doing with the plants when Romeo arrived.

Was that a normal activity for a friar? How did the friar feel about the knowledge that Romeo was no longer in love with Rosaline and now loved Juliet? Was the friar his friend? Would he tell Romeo’s parents what he was doing? The goal, to model a discussion infused with more questions than answers, would provide a process for students to read the next scene - when Peter and the nurse speak to Romeo about his intent to marry Juliet - in small groups. Before moving on to watching a film clip of the rest of the act, I hoped to provide opportunities for questioning.

During Act II, we had read in small groups, discussed in large groups, listened to an audio,

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13 See Appendix B.
watched a fish-bowl discussion, created poetry, explicated lines, acted, and watched a movie clip. The key: variety. Students moved through activities like fish through water, gliding and turning through currents of language that sometimes confused and overwhelmed them. Often they struggled, but it was the type of struggle where they did not feel submerged. No one said, “I can’t” or “I won’t.”

Techniques for Working With Documents

I was excited to share the documents on marriage and sexuality, but I knew I had to try a new technique. In this activity, I had arranged the room, so that we had four large groups of six or eight. Roaming Team Leader\textsuperscript{14} is a group activity where four partner groups within the large circle each chooses a leader to move to a different partner group to share thinking: students from partner group #1, for example, would have a chance to read a document together before sending the “roaming team leader” off to group #2, which means that each “roaming leader” would first share their document before moving on to the other groups. The remaining partner from each group then shares his or her document with the visiting team member. In all, each member of the partner team shares one document with 3 other students. Documents included William

\textsuperscript{14} Seep Appendix C, Document Teaching Strategies.
Whately’s sermon “On Rushing into Marriage” where he warns, “He that leapes over a broad ditch with a short staffe, shall fall into the midst,” words akin to Friar Laurence’s “Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast” (2.4.94). In addition, students read about the plant, Sowbreade, considered by John Gerard as a “good amorous medicine.” In another document, the lawful age of marriage is touted as fourteen for men and earlier for women who are “soon riper than men,” but this is contrasted with a chart from 1550 that lists the average age of females who actually married in Devon, England, as twenty-six. Students read, annotated, and discussed document types and content before moving to the next partner group to share findings. Students had far less trouble than their first experience with documents.

They had now read two acts in Romeo and Juliet and were expecting spelling changes as well as syntax variation, such as in William Miller’s 1667 letter of advice about marriage when he states that a “Huswife dedicates her time and pains: her Children are her Garden, her Park, nay her Court.” After 45 minutes of discussing documents, I asked students to choose a document they considered the most shocking or interesting and write about their reactions. Elle thought it was “absurd that society thought they could control such personal and private habits.” Marissa agreed with Elle and added that these ideas were “over-stepping the boundaries a bit.” Eden discussed the sowbreade document and wondered if people really believed it worked. Another student conjectured that “this plant could make people fall in love. The plant could’ve probably increased testosterone in males, and
strengthened women’s sex drive.” Breana paired up two articles and noted, “It’s interesting to hear their rules, like your only supposed to have sex for kids, not for pleasure yet in Romeo and Juliet Romeo tries to have sex with Rosaline, and he wants to have sex with Juliet before they get married.” After asking students about what questions they still had, Kyla wanted to know about the father’s role, and Cody was curious about whether they used Sowbreade as a prank. After reading the John Donne’s letter of apology to Sir George More for eloping with his daughter Anne, Spencer was curious about whether Donne was punished. Their questions drew on their own interests to start engaging in thinking about early modern popular culture.

Working Toward the Assessment

We were now into our third week of reading and studying documents from the sixteenth century. Students did not ask about tests or about whether or not I was grading them on the classroom activities. Each day they walked into the room and wondered what the hour would bring: Would we act? Were we doing a reader’s theater? Would we watch a clip? Work in pairs? Would we sketch again like we did when we drew Queen Mab? They seemed excited about each day’s activities, but I knew we needed to revisit the assessment question I had given them on the first day of the unit. By this time we had a list of 20 themes on the board. We had seen how Shakespeare dealt with issues, such as sexuality, gender, and disobedience. We had written about how Shakespeare may have drawn from early modern popular culture. We had discussed societal norms and religious beliefs, posing questions about what the documents claimed or inferred. Writing about their experiences with Romeo and Juliet was essential, but students needed enough formative practice and feedback to confidently know that the final writing assessment would be no different than an activity we normally engaged in during class.
To help them gain confidence about their abilities to think and write, they needed practice: Step one was to write often about themes they saw emerging in the play. Step two was to choose evidence from documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, that allowed students to examine and make intertextual connections among documents. Step three was to reflect on how early modern cultural themes were relevant today. Thus far, students had practiced each step during quick-writes and reflections in their journals. Now it was time to help students build stamina while they combined the three steps in their writing.

Act III is where many students begin to slump in their seats if teachers do not sustain engagement with the play. I continued to vary strategies despite the crescendo of violence involving Tybalt, Mercutio, and Romeo. First, we watched Carlei’s 2013 film to view how the violence begins. Next, I asked our student players, Romeo, Tybalt, Mercutio, to the front of the class. Using plastic Star Wars sabers, and the three re-enacted\(^\text{15}\) the actual duel in silent slow motion, so students could see “up front and center” how Romeo blocks Mercutio, allowing Tybalt’s sword to hit its mark by going under Romeo’s arm. Next, we divided the class into acting groups, so students could devise ways of blocking the scene:

- Benvolio, Mercutio (Lines 1-9)
- Benvolio, Mercutio (10-33 up to where Tybalt enters)
- Benvolio, Mercutio, Tybalt (34-44)
- Mercutio, Benvolio, Tybalt (45-54 up to where Romeo enters)
- Tybalt, Mercutio, Romeo (55-71)
- Mercutio, Tybalt, Romeo (swords: 72-88 up to where Tybalt stabs Mercutio)
- Mercutio, Benvolio, Romeo (swords: 89-107 where Mercutio exits)
- Benvolio, Romeo (108-119 to where Tybalt enters)
- Benvolio, Romeo, Tybalt (swords: 120-135 to where Romeo exits)
- First citizen, Benvolio, Romeo, Tybalt, Capulet’s wife (136-149)
- Prince, Benvolio, Capulet’s wife, Montague, Prince (150-196)

Students enjoyed performing mini-scenes, but the highlight of the week was working with an

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\(^{15}\) See Re-Enactments in Appendix B.
expert in stage combat. Moving our class to the Fine Arts Center, Matt McKay first reviewed the parts of the rapier and demonstrated some of the moves that were used in Act III, scene i,

such as passado, alla staccata, punto reverso, and the hai. Students used foam swords to fight each other, incorporating a demi-lunge, thrusting - both straight and around the side - and circling. McKay included di Grassi, an Italian swordsman, whose 1570 document, which was translated into English in 1594, Shakespeare may have used as a source for the scene. Once back in the classroom, we analyzed another document, Vincentio Saviolo’s *His Practice in Two Books*, which, according to Joan Holmer in “‘Draw if You Be Men’: Salviolo’s Significance for *Romeo and Juliet,*” conveys how Saviolo stresses “much more the importance of the occasion for the gentleman’s quarrel.” Holmer emphasizes the sequence of events in a challenge, which is explained in the document: an oral confrontation must occur, followed by a concise, polite letter of challenge. In gentlemanly fashion, the appointed time and field for the duel are specifically named. When the two documents, Saviolo’s *Practice* and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*
(2.4.6-35, 3.1.26-106), are placed side by side, students are then able to do a text comparison. How do both documents deal with violence involving threats and weapons?” I asked.

Colin said, “Well, it doesn’t seem like Shakespeare followed this guy’s rules: Romeo did receive a letter, but there wasn’t any confrontation before that.”

“Yeah,” said Devin. “When Romeo was at the Capulet house, Tybalt wanted to fight, but the old guy Capulet held him back.”

Colin quipped, “Go to! Go to!” We all laughed, but Devin made his point. I realized then that excerpts from secondary documents, such as Holmer’s, might have added valuable background about Saviolo. Her research on early modern fencing had placed him in London in 1594 when he rented a room in the Rose Theatre from Philip Henslowe, entrepreneur and theatrical business manager, to teach fencing lessons the year before Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet and two years before it was first performed at the Globe. If Shakespeare had done any rehearsing at The Rose or had heard about London’s newcomer, he may have met Saviolo and perhaps watched some of the fencing lessons. Each day I made notes to myself about which documents elicited the most excitement and how to direct discussions. An interesting comparison we noted is how Saviolo compares the art of rapier to music: “I thinke it necessarie that euery one should learne this arte of rapier, for as a man hath voice and can sing by nature, he

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16 See Holmer, p. 164-165.
Asking students questions about our current rules about guns/violence/policing helps students find relevance in early modern weaponry and law enforcement.

“What music terminology do you notice in this section of the play?” I asked. Three of the band students shouted,

“Minstrels!”

“Fiddlesticks!”

“Discords!”

“What about yesterday when Mr. McKay mentioned di Grassi, the Italian fencing teacher who may have also written a book on fencing? Do we know which document Shakespeare may have relied upon for his fencing terminology?”

“He probably used both,” said Brenna. “How would anyone know?”

“You’re right. We don’t. But we do know that many documents from that time period used similar wording, including Shakespeare’s.

“How do we know Shakespeare didn’t know fencing? Maybe he already knew these words,” said Nate.

“Does anyone have an answer to that?” I asked. The silence was palpable. “Good. More questions than answers. That’s exactly what learning is all about.”

Writing, Writing, Writing

We followed up with a “short write” about how the theme of violence is developed in both Shakespeare’s and Saviolo’s documents. Brenna and Jake both wrote about the obvious fight scenes in the play but Brenna pointed out that “Mercutio thinks he [Romeo] is soft and
cannot fight.” She notes that Saviolo mentions if it is appropriate for a third party [Mercutio] to step in. “It’s talked about,” she writes, when he says, ‘when one doth call another for an offence done unto him by a third person,’ and the passage talks about how a third challenger needs a reason.” Jake discussed this same point by pointing out, “Mercutio duels Tybalt even though Romeo was the one who was initially challenged by Tybalt. Shakespeare must have been aware of Saviolo’s fencing manual.” Reading the students’ writing about violence and how sixteenth-century writers focus on similar issues invigorated me. In past years, student writing focused on scene summaries or character descriptions, exactly as required. Something new was awakening in me now: approaching complex texts through historical themes grounded in specific texts and images allows students to analyze culture and society from multiple perspectives. Transitioning to how these themes are developed in today’s literature and popular discourses becomes natural. Discussions about bullying in Butter (2013) or Shane Koyczan’s 2014 Ted Talk17 become seamless extensions of early modern thinking about challenges, fights, and death. If I had ever wondered how to make Shakespeare’s plays relevant to today’s teens, I know now that I would never return to isolated close reading as the sole pedagogical approach. It is the early modern culture and the playwrights who inspire me, the “base contagious clouds” now having departed from my eyes (1H4, 1.2.202). We all know students detest answering questions about their reading. If students are confused, they discuss those fine points with their elbow partners. Packets of questions end up being an activity to get through and generally they tap into their

17 See Teacher Online Resources, p. 50.
Critical literacy argues that students' sense of their own realities should never be treated as outside the meaning of a text. To do so is to infringe on their rights to literacy. ~ Daniel E. Ferguson

friends’ work. I would argue students prefer discussion and careful thinking about meaningful topics - sexuality, violence, identity - and relating competing ideas of the past to what they understand today. Sometimes they argue about one sentence or line of poetry. Other times, they simply talk about a theme, such as Capulet’s hypocrisy when he first tells Paris that his daughter Juliet may decide her future husband “within her scope of choice” and then, in an effort to assuage Tybalt’s anger at noticing the Montagues at their party, tells Tybalt that Romeo is a “virtuous and well governed youth” (1.5.69), followed by his tirade in Act III when he commands that she get “to church o Thursday / Or never after look me in the face” (161-162). Most students find Capulet’s logic ridiculous, and some simply nod in agreement. Yes, they have experienced family stress before. Most of our discussions center on our “wonderings.” Could this be what Shakespeare meant? Where did he get that idea? What different ideas did people in his time period have? What did the audience know? What may have been their reaction? How did the actors handle the violence? How can we think critically about how ideas in history still influence us? Did Capulet hit his daughter? Where did they get the blood? Did Saviolo go to the play? Was he in it? My colleagues noted that her own classes seemed so much more excited about the play this year. “I’ve never heard so much discussion,” Emily said. “It’s awesome.”

As we approached Acts IV and V, I was determined to increase writing practice for the final assessment on how Shakespeare develops early modern cultural issues, drawing evidence
from primary documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, that continue to be relevant today. Thus far we had written entrance and exit slips about themes, discussing big ideas in *Romeo and Juliet* and other documents. We now needed to reflect more on the relevance of Shakespeare’s world to today’s popular culture. I knew my students would teach me more about relevance in their world if I opened it up to discussion. I decided to try a Samoan Circle, a leaderless meeting in which all participants had equal voice on a controversial topic. We formed 3 concentric circles, the inner “discussion” circle of five, the middle “thinking” circle of 8, and the outer “waiting” circle of 17. “Your task today is to discuss how some of the cultural issues from Shakespeare’s world are still relevant today. So far, in *Romeo and Juliet* and in other documents, we have read, discussed, and written about big issues, such as the role of women and the pamphlet wars. We’ve seen how Juliet and her parents interact and how the feud has divided families. We’ve written about laws, about how weapons and violence were controlled. And we’ve talked a lot about Romeo’s love for Juliet within the context of this warring feud. How and where do you see any of these big issues today? Let’s see where this discussion leads us.”

This was our first attempt at this type of discussion, so the five students in the middle began slowly. “Well the thing that I think about the most is how Romeo and Juliet just met and now they’re married? That just doesn’t happen today. I mean, in a way, that just doesn’t compute,” said Sarah.

“Well, no,” said Eden, “but things can go pretty fast nowadays too, especially with all the social media. I know girls who meet guys or talk to guys on Snapchat and Instagram. By the next day, they’re dating.”

“That’s true,” said Sarah. “Sometimes it’s some guy they never met before, someone from another school, so I don’t really see the point in that.”

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18 See Appendix B.
“Yeah, but they’re not getting married,” said Collin, clearly annoyed.

“Maybe not, but they’re doing other things.” I could hear some laughing from the middle and outer circles. This was tough for me because I knew that unless I moved from the outer to the inner circle - just like my students - I would not be able to enter into the conversation. Students were well aware of how a Samoan Circle worked, but still I had no idea what direction the conversation would take.

“Yeah, so I guess it’s not all that different with finding ways to sneak out of the house to meet up with some girl or guy or trying to find someone to hook up with on Bumble.”

“What about Juliet’s dad trying to set up her marriage? That just doesn’t happen.”

“Maybe not here, but probably in other countries it still does. I’ve read lots of books about it, like Sold, and that’s what happened. Maybe not sold into marriage, but sold into slavery. That stuff happens now.”

“But that’s a book.”

“Well, it’s still happening today! Think about Malala and her trying to change things for girls! That’s real!”

“It’s not like that here, though, even though some dads are super strict. My dad won’t let me hang out with anyone unless he knows the parents.”

“Mine either. But if I did, he wouldn’t threaten to cut me off completely. That was harsh.”

“Well it was a man’s world then. It’s not now.”

“It should be,” said Tyler as he was moving from the middle to the inner circle. “Just kidding.” The girls in the inner circle rolled their eyes.

“We do have gangs, though, but maybe it’s not between two families.”
“Or maybe it is. But we do have police brutality. I don’t think it’s any different than when the queen says the prince has the right to kill anyone who starts something.”

“We don’t have that!”

“Kind of! You can’t just go around killing people because they aren’t in your family!”

“But that’s exactly what happens when there’s a drive-by and someone is shot!”

“But there’s a trial.”

“Not always!” Conversation escalated as students moved in and out of circles, sometimes staying in the inner circle for only a minute and sometimes for more than five. Voices were animated, and sometimes angry in disagreement, but they were listening - and engaged.

Drugs and Potions

I find that students are particularly interested in drugs and potions, particularly those that have unusual lore connected with them. An interesting, accessible article, “Would Shakespeare’s Poisons and Drugs Work in Reality?” became our starting point for the scenes where Juliet goes to Friar Laurence for help, and his only idea is for her to take a potion that
“like death when he shuts up the day of life; / Each part, deprived of supple government, / Shall stiff and stark and cold, appear like death” (4.1.101-103). We watched two versions of Juliet’s subsequent soliloquy when she fearfully considers the consequences of drinking the “distilling liquor.” Many students wonder what drug could he have mixed to make her sleep for a defined amount of time. How could Juliet’s parents think her dead, when her heart was still beating? How could they really pull off this ruse? We looked at other documents from Gerard’s *Herball* (1597). Sleeping nightshade, or Atropa belladonna, according to Claudia Hammond, may have been the answer because “a small quantity leads to madness, while a moderate amount cause a ‘dead sleepe’ and too much can kill.” Other possibilities are leopard’s bane, which was thought to kill animals but not humans. Students much preferred the idea of the mandrake because of its early modern lore. As a medicine, it had both soporific (a word they now knew and realized was also used in Beatrix Potter’s bunny books) and aphrodisiac powers. “Is that why she awoke with so much love for Romeo?” a student asked? The most humorous, however, was the idea the plant sprung from the seed of a hanged man, but that is not all. According to early modern lore, the plant actually screams when pulled out of the ground. In the 1579 document *Bulleins Bulwarke of Defence* the author claims the scream not only causes the plant’s death, but also “the feare thereof kylleth the dogge or beast, which pulled it out of the earth.” Early modern audiences would not have touched the mandrake because of the poison found in the leaves that permeates the skin. They might have imagined the Friar using a harnessed dog to do the job, followed by a careful grinding of the root that “beareth the image of a man” (41v). Phillip Barrough’s document warns users that sleep-inducing drugs are dangerous because of the dose, which if given in excess, can kill. Andre DuLaurens agrees and adds “wee must take heed to deale with very good aduise, for feare that in stead of desiring to procure rest vnto the sillie
melancholie wretch, wee cast him into an endlesse sleepe.” Plants, and their sleep-inducing, death-like constitutions, were a constant source of discussion and intrigue among students. Did students find plant lore relevant? Absolutely. They knew today’s drugs, whether synthetic or natural, were the source of stories passed from person to person and also had the power to help or to kill.

We listened to two actresses, Ellen Terry and Emily Trask, perform Juliet’s soliloquy in which she laments her plight and then discussed which actress expressed Juliet’s fears in the way students envisioned the scene. Next, they worked with a partner in a close-reading activity, re-reading her soliloquy and listing in their writer’s notebooks Juliet’s fears about taking the potion. At this stage in our unit of study, I was both amazed and gratified at how eagerly the students dove into the text. Despite the length of her speech, a full 44 lines, students had already listened twice and had read the lore “like mandrakes torn out of the earth, / That living mortals, hearing them, run mad” (47-48). They discussed the themes present in this section. Zac wrote about curiosity: “She is listing things that could happen if she takes this potion. She is curious if it will work.” Ainsley took a harder stance, choosing doubt: “Doubt that the potion would work. Or doubt that Romeo will come to save her from the vault and she’ll be left to die. She is doubting that it’ll work.” Olivia agrees with Ainsley’s choice and adds, “I think as the book continues you will see even more doubt from other characters as well. I do like a lot how Shakespeare didn’t start this theme until much later in the book. Your so content until doubt starts to creep in and that what really turns the book around. Its a big part that I don’t think some really realize.” Jake sees relationships changing in this scene. He believes Juliet’s decision will completely change her relationship with other characters. “As she says goodnight to Lady Capulet and the Nurse, she wonders ‘God knows when we shall meet again (4.3.15). Juliet is basically cutting
off her family & friends indefinitely, & why is she doing this? To avoid marrying Paris & reunite
with Romeo...She fears seeing Tybalt’s ghost in her family chamber, giving more insight as to
her relationship with him.” Brenna admitted she wanted “to dig a little deeper” by writing about
how characters are beginning to problem solve. The Friar and Juliet “make a plan for Juliet to
fake her death and wait for him and Romeo to pick her up in the vault. Then she has a fear of the
plan going wrong...and I do also see a fear of the plan not working so then she won’t be together
with Romeo. So maybe there could be a theme of Separation or fear of separation.” Brenna is
using her writing to consider options. She is thinking about how big ideas overlap, helping her
to sort out her ideas about Juliet and the Friar. Often I saw how writing, even five minutes of
reflection, led to more lively discussion. Now I was witnessing how both discussion and writing
are pathways to inquire, to learn.

Gradual Release

By the end of the play, students were reading the early modern documents without the
same confusion they had when they only had one act under their belts. Now they seemed more
confident in their ability to get the gist, knowing that they might not understand every word. At
this point, formatively assessing their independence in reading both the play and other
documents was critical. Instead of students reading with a partner, they formed groups of four,
each taking one document to analyze. I introduced two new ideas: how to analyze
historical/cultural themes with several quotes from other Renaissance authors who had
competing ideas about a topic. We talked about how Romeo and Juliet were buried side by side.
“What did writers believe about the afterlife?” I asked. “You will see that in John Calvin’s
Corpus Reformatorum, he claims “Husbands and wives will then be torn apart from one
When students voice personal opinions about the afterlife, they may be contextualizing early modern beliefs to help them find relevance in the twenty-first century.

another,” whereas Alexander Hume believes “we shall see them face to face.” John Donne, in an effort to console a grieving widow, shares a personal thought: “God hath another purpose to make them up again.” Their discussions centered on what Shakespeare was saying about what happens after death in the final scene. We also discussed how to analyze visual texts by a close reading of Hans Holbeins’s wood engravings of death intervening in everyday life. Matthew suggested that Holbein thought death could be anywhere - it didn’t matter if you were rich or poor. “He [death] could show up when you were doing something else.” Again, students considered how the authors and artists, including Shakespeare, were portraying death. “Is it the same way we think of death today?” I asked. “If Sad Teen Death Movies were a genre, which ones come to mind? One student suggested The Book Thief (2007) by Markus Zusak as an example of how death is the narrator of the story. One student mentioned 13 Reasons Why (2017), the recent book-to-movie that, according to Sophie, “messed with my mind.” Another student mentioned If I Stay (2014) where death is sudden and tragic, causing tears and questions about why someone so young has to die. They wondered if the audience cried when they saw Shakespeare’s play, a similar reaction they had when they watched movies today.
Wrapping It Up

It was time to finish the play and hone in on the summative writing assessment. As a final activity to think about the end of the play, we watched the Carlei 2013 version of Act V, scene iii, followed by group silent annotations. I enlarged and printed the text, divided it into eight sections, glued each to a poster-sized “sticky note,” and placed them sequentially on the wall out in the hall. Using different color markers, students in each group stood in front of their assigned excerpt. For ten minutes, students silently read the text and, based on close reading and the film clip, silently annotated with explications, sketches, definitions, and questions. After ten minutes, I allotted five minutes for groups to discuss the excerpt and decide how to present a one-minute analysis of their work. The hallway exploded with voices. After two minutes, all students were invited to group #1, and we began our “document walk.” Each group explained their section of text before sending us off to the next group. After the final couplet was read, students debriefed not only the play, but also the process of reading, including the primary

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19 See Appendix B.
20 See Appendices B and C.
documents from Shakespeare’s world. Most students agreed that learning how to read the “old language” was by far the hardest but they “came to class really wanting to read and see what was coming next.” Spencer said, “I like how we went through the book in class. I haven’t ever read a book like this in class, it it is hard to compare to other books.”

Elle added, “I liked that we were not required to do reading at home because I had a lot of trouble with the language. Micah did not enjoy when we listened, but “it was fun to watch and read. [The story] didn’t have a happy ending like all the cliche books or movies...When you think of Romeo and Juliet I would think of a love story but, thankfully it had more themes.” Many students mentioned how historical themes were never the focus of any books they read in English class, so this was new and interesting. Claire said she was now thinking about other cultures and compared the play to a Chinese story, except “in the end they turn to butterflies.” She was excited about how we read Shakespeare together. “I liked the variety and doing things differently,” she said.

Anna also commented on the primary documents. “I liked all of the background information that we learned. My favorite part was the sword fighting, and actually seeing some of the culture that wasn’t just a picture.”

“What about how the documents added to your understanding of Shakespeare’s work?” I asked.

Hope said, “They kept me very interested and helped me understand better.”

Having read a Shakespeare play last year in English, Eden said that reading a play like we always do can be “long, boring and typical.” Including information about what it was like to live during Shakespeare’s time, along with reading, listening, and acting, was a lot more fun. “We felt as though we were a part of that world,” she said.
The final assessment, an essay about how Shakespeare develops cultural and historical themes, with evidence from both the play and other documents, that are still relevant today, was no surprise, having given them the exact assessment question the first day of the unit. We revisited the question many times throughout the unit, and we did several formative practices by looking at documents, choosing themes, and writing, writing, writing. We wrote about the documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, and reflected on how his society’s issues were still relevant today. To put all the pieces together, we created a graphic organizer that would help them stay focused when they wrote. We reviewed their writing and discussion topics.

Students indicated the most helpful activity that prepared them for the assessment was the independent practice. They knew they would be given three new documents to read and use as possible evidence for themes they saw in *Romeo and Juliet*. They had already read, annotated, and discussed over 20 documents, both visual and digital, and felt confident in their ability to understand early modern texts. Two days before the assessment, I set up the room as it would be arranged - in rows - and they wrote for an hour on a document they had never seen, “The Ladder of Love,” from Book 4 of Castiglione’s *The Courtier*, written in 1528 and translated into English in 1561. In this one-page excerpt,
Castiglione claims outer beauty is holy and the gateway to inner beauty. After reading and annotating, students reflected on that theme’s relevance today. The following day, I broke down one student’s essay into chunks, pointing out its organization, supporting evidence, and conclusions. After projecting several student essays, pointing out strong vocabulary and organization, we made a list of “transportable writing moves.”

How were these student writers conveying their ideas? What transitions did they use?

What active verbs illuminated their sentences? In other words, which writing techniques could they use in their own essays, moves that good writers incorporate? Students made lists in their notebooks and reviewed their essays from the day before. They rewrote their weakest sections and shared the changes with their writing groups. Feeling ready, they looked forward to the next day’s assessment.

On the day of the assessment, most students reported they had not felt the need to study because they had consistently practiced reading and writing about themes, documents, and relevance during class. Seating, different from the normal groups of four, added a visual seriousness to our task just as resources, including the text, notes, documents, and practice writing, mitigated anxiety. Knowing they would receive new documents to write about on the assessment, they had already reviewed big ideas such as love, violence, or death, knowing that one of the documents would support these choices. One document, Sir Francis Drake’s “Of
Marriage and Single Life,” written in 1553, was an essay that developed gender, marriage, sexuality, liberty, identity, and relationship themes. Drake claimed single men “are more cruel and hardhearted because their tenderness is not so often called upon.” In a homily against disobedience and willful rebellion (1570), Thomas Cramer considers rebellion a sin against God and believes rebels are violating not only their country, but also their parents. This document could be used to discuss cultural issues on violence, death, religion, goodness and evil, family relationships, spirituality, or gender. The third document, based on a visual from Richard Day’s *The Book of Common Prayers* (1590), contains the service for burial and touches on death, burial, religion, love, compassion, and empathy. After the minister speaks, the collection of people surrounding the casket ask the Father to raise the living from the death of sin “unto the life of righteousness” in hopes that when “we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth.” Students chose one of these documents, including any visual text found within the documents, a viable option for those who preferred not to tackle a digital text. Organizing their desktops with books, foldables, documents, and writers’ notebooks, students fell into an easy silence as they opened their “blue book tests.” I noticed they often would stop and stare off into the distance or close their eyes but other than the sound of pages turning and pens moving, the entire hour was filled with thinking and writing.

Analyzing Assessment Data

I wondered about writing stamina, but these ninth grade students read, planned, and wrote for the entire class period. “That was hard,” said many as they left the room.

“But did you do ok?” I returned? I received affirmative answers from all. I was anxious to read their writing. Nick Arnold chose to write about rebellion, a theme he decided was
relevant because “Romeo and Juliet are rebels. They defy everything that their parents desire for them.” Despite the connotation of the word rebel, Nick insightfully thought about how neither considered the ramifications of their parents’ feud, choosing instead to be together. Other rebellious characters Nick cited were the nurse, who disobeys her master, the Lord Capulet. Although Nick acknowledged “people defy authority [to] fight for what they believe in, he discussed Cranmer’s document by delineating how breaking rules recklessly is not the same as fighting for a cause. He added that Friar Laurence is a holy man but one who also rebels against the senseless family feuding. He is a rebellious co-conspirator by marrying Romeo and Juliet against his own better judgment and gives Juliet a potion disregarding the danger of his actions. Nick finished his essay by ruminating on other rebellions, such as multiple protests in America to bring the troops home from Vietnam. Nick wrote about the theme of death, explaining it can take you anytime and anywhere, using Act III as his source for how Shakespeare develops the theme of death. Nick personified death as an uncaring monster who does not care that Tybalt’s intent may have been more to fight than to kill, not stopping until he deflowers Juliet and takes the stage at the end. Noting that the Book of Common Prayers portrays death religiously and therefore “a good thing,” Nick understood that people were expected to welcome death as a ticket into heaven, rather than an enemy, which “plays a huge role in the ending.”

Cody spent considerable time writing about how the early modern theme of violence is still relevant today. Both Cody and Eden discussed terrorists, such as ISIS, as having had a “huge impact on our world by bombing and shooting, stealing, and many more from countrys [sic] around the globe. It’s terrible,” wrote Cody. He added two more levels of violence inherent first, in gangs, noting that “for some gangs to be able to join you have to beat someone up just to be a part of it no matter it is women or male” and second, in online bullying, “so much they take
their own lives.”

Teacher Reactions

The two teachers who worked with me answered a teacher survey, which included questions about teaching, documents, changes, and learning. Both teachers had ideas for modifying their past practices. Mr. Weber said, “I would try to reserve more time for reading/discussing documents with my students” and Mrs. Alt said she would alter “the choice of primary documents used on the final assessment.” She indicated that her general classes found them to be difficult and that more visual text might be more appropriate, such as the Holbein woodcuts about death. Mr. Weber said he learned “that it's important for students to realize Shakespeare didn't write his plays in a vacuum. He was aware of the world around him and it is reflected in his work. I think knowledge of this helps students see the humanity of Shakespeare and his work. He's not just a writing icon.” Mrs. Alt concurred and pointed out the value documents play “in further teaching what life was like during the writing and performance of this piece.” Neither teacher had any questions about teaching the unit, but Mrs. Alt mentioned something that I felt as I was researching the documents: She said, “Feeling foolish I had not thought to do this sooner.” I knew what she meant. I couldn’t believe how many years I had taught Shakespeare and never really thought about teaching through an historical, cultural lens.

Conceptually, I knew that each year language barriers created an ever widening schism, but it had never occurred to me that the study of early modern society through primary
documents would close the gap. I am sure I dismissed glimmers of what it would take to make this idea a reality because of the frontloading it would take to make it happen. It was not merely the research; it was the time to revamp the entire unit and the fear of knowing whether it would be “just another idea that teachers try and then forget about” because it takes too much time and effort. The more teachers use the idea, however, incorporating documents where they fit and having fun with them, the more they will become a solid piece of their own units. As you are reading this chapter, I hope your love of Shakespeare’s language and culture is rekindled. If you are intrigued by how primary documents can open the door to deep thinking and memorable discussions about William Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets, keep reading. The classroom stories I tell are probably familiar in that all of us struggle with the same teaching challenges. But we also share the same love of literature and the same desire to share its beauty. To understand Shakespeare’s writing, explore his world. Allow the ideas found within the pages of other early modern writers to enter your classroom, and with patient eyes attend, “our toil shall strive to mend.”
References


CHAPTER III
UNFOLDING HAMLET IN ENGLISH 11

I know I’m not alone when I admit Hamlet is my favorite play and probably Shakespeare’s greatest work, so you can imagine my dismay when two students entered my English 11 classroom on the first day of the unit and asked to leave. “We would rather do an online course instead,” said one young man.

“I don’t understand,” I answered. “Why?”

“Well, we don’t really care about Shakespeare or his life.” This was the first day of introducing a documents-based approach to Hamlet, and during this interaction, I realized I was going to have an even tougher job because many were challenging students, self-proclaimed reluctant readers who found difficulty sustaining independent reading beyond fifteen minutes. As part of a school district immersed in a language arts workshop model, our English Department prides itself in a reading culture developed over time. Together we agreed upon

- We will write every day and incorporate writers’ notebooks in our classes.
- We will use 10-15 minutes of class for choice reading.
- We will confer with students about their reading/writing during choice reading time, taking notes on our discussions.
- We will use the readers/writers workshop model as the HOW for our teaching.
- We will build classroom libraries with engaging books for students to read.
- We will “book talk” books each day to create excitement about reading to share our reading lives.

common practices and vowed to honor and build the culture, holding ourselves and our teams accountable to best practices in the field. To this end, our English hallway is quiet during the beginning of each hour, the only sound the hushed tones of students conferring with teachers about their reading lives. Despite our commitment to literacy, some students do struggle, and I
Many teachers hold their breaths with the same hope, knowing and wanting the experience we have with Shakespeare and his language to carry itself straight to the students in the same way we experience it.

would now encounter the challenges and joys of sharing Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy with those students. After having taught one teacher’s class during the *Romeo and Juliet* unit and working with the rest of the ninth grade team after school to plan and answer questions, I was ready to teach two teachers’ junior-level students. Each teacher observed and took notes while I taught, but their other classes would follow a curriculum without primary documents as a point of comparison.

What I didn’t know when I began was what I would encounter, in addition to reluctant readers: students with learning disabilities and anxiety as well as other unforeseen circumstances, such as snowstorms that closed doors and a painful student death.

I have always taught with the resolve to to open hearts, using Hamlet as the key, similar to Azar Nafisi when she describes reading imaginative literature as a sensual experience: “If you don’t enter that world, hold your breath with the characters and become involved in their destiny, you won't be able to empathize, and empathy is at the heart of the novel. This is how you read a novel: you inhale the experience. So start breathing.” I know this to be true. So, despite the mumbling about an online course, I depended on Shakespeare’s writing to invite these young skeptics to empathize with a young Dane who just lost his father, who watches his mother carry on with his uncle, and who tries to hide his own fear, hatred, and love until he is able to right these torrid wrongs.

My students, all juniors, willingly shared their previous experiences with Shakespeare’s plays, specifically *Romeo and Juliet* two years earlier. Similar to the freshmen the previous spring, they had a range of reactions. Some merely relayed factual information, such as,
“They’re all full of drama, love, sex, and death” or “He wrote a long time ago.” Other students expressed dismay, describing the language as “boring” or “tiresome” while others didn’t understand “why we have to keep classic literature alive.” Some wrote about how they didn’t understand the language but enjoyed the story. One girl, AJ, described how she “grew up in a library” and loved Shakespeare’s plays but didn’t know much about him or the time period.

More than once, at the beginning of class, I book-talked Shakespeare’s other plays or young adult fiction based on his works, such as Saving Hamlet (2016) by Molly Booth and To Be or Not To Be: A Chooseable-Path Adventure (2016) by Ryan North. After students settled into choice reading, I held short conferences with individuals. To get a pulse on student interests and ability, I asked if they considered themselves readers. Cam said, “I’m not much of a reader. Destiny admitted, “I don’t read much.” Josh said, “I enjoy reading, but I don’t have much time.” Some students, however, were excited about their favorite books. Jennah loved Insomnia by Stephen King. Alex said his girlfriend got him into The One and Only Ivan. Lindsay loved the idea of “poem books” and was into Crank by Ellen Hopkins. My thought was that most of these young adults wanted to read even though many of them did not see themselves as “readers.” Most admitted they were not readers because they “were too busy” or they were “too slow” or “not into it,” but all were riveted when I talked about the books I loved and the stories they told. I wanted to show them how Hamlet’s story paralleled our stories today: sagas of greed, of longing, of family, of betrayal. Linking the early modern period with today’s world seemed to be my best hook.
When beginning any whole-class novel or play, I often struggle. Two short clips, a short biography\(^{21}\) on Shakespeare’s life and another from the National Endowment of the Arts,\(^{22}\) provided a glimpse of early modern culture. Students “turned and talked”\(^{23}\) with the person sitting next to them about the issues that interested them, such as education, marriage, theater, monarchy, language, or the plague. I had used a similar strategy with the freshmen, but I wondered if juniors who had read at least one other play would ask the same types of questions or if their inquiries might probe deeper. If their “wonderings” were more thoughtful - more provocative - would they glean more from this tragedy? As we listed themes and questions on the board, I noted similarities to what students two years younger asked: Why did Shakespeare leave to go to London? Why couldn’t purple be worn? Why are his plays so popular now? But then I began to notice a change after their lists took shape. Students’ thinking began to turn more philosophical. I realized that ninth grade students queried facts about Shakespeare and his world whereas eleventh grade students were digging deeper. It is possible that some may have remembered background information from two years ago, but most, regardless of their reading ability, structured their questions with more complexity. The following chart compares questions from both grade levels:

\(^{21}\) http://tinyurl.com/z73lk79
\(^{22}\) http://tinyurl.com/ycqdojyx
\(^{23}\) See Appendix B for Shakespeare teaching strategies.
Table 1. Ninth and Eleventh Grade Students Inquire About Shakespeare’s World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ninth Grade Questions</th>
<th>Eleventh Grade Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why are the Montagues and Capulets so angry with each other?</td>
<td>Where are the scripts for each actor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why were girls not allowed to act?</td>
<td>Why did boys leave their homes to prepare for adult life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which play is the most famous?</td>
<td>How did his plays get recognized and become so famous?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the queen liked the plays, how did they get shut down?</td>
<td>How did a woman get so powerful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Shakespeare have a similar story to Romeo and Juliet?</td>
<td>Were there English people in America in this period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there plays still missing?</td>
<td>Why exactly are his plays considered better than everyone else’s when he took ideas from other people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why didn’t Shakespeare’s wife go to London with him?</td>
<td>How did he survive in London all by himself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was Shakespeare’s favorite play?</td>
<td>What made Shakespeare want to start writing plays?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did theaters close so much?</td>
<td>Why didn’t they keep better records?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did people let others steal their stories?</td>
<td>How was Shakespeare so informed about history and so literate if he never finished school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both groups were interested in factual information about Shakespeare, but I did note differences in their “wonderings” and began to think about how the desire for historical and cultural information would prompt complex thinking or help them comprehend his writing at deeper levels. The question about whether there were English in America at this time, for example, might denote an insufficient grasp of history, but it also reflects an interest in the world beyond Shakespeare,
similar to the questions about the present location of his scripts and the ramifications of leaving home to train for vocations. The older students’ interests already reached beyond specific plays to find a context for the greater world or to understand Shakespeare’s culture and how it shaped his writing and his life.

Based on the questions students asked, you might think my classes were filled with philosophical discussions about Shakespeare’s life, followed by easy pathways into the play. Far from it. I struggled daily with alleviating anxiety about reading *Hamlet*. Often, students simply did not want to talk. Filling out a form or writing briefly about pre-ordained questions was not the same as a sustained conversation about some of the larger issues we would confront. What always seemed to work best was when students first shared their thinking or writing with a partner or small group. If I sat in a student desk with them, rather than stand in the front or sit on a tall stool, students seemed to relax more and talk. Allowing students time to talk to each other, followed by a class discussion became a workable system. I was experimenting with time issues. How many minutes is optimum for them to talk in small groups before transitioning to class discussion or to writing? How often should they participate in class discussions and what types of discussions would increase their interest in primary documents? Were the two connected?

The approach to Shakespeare, using primary documents, stems from two goals: to understand the historical/cultural/social context of Shakespeare’s writing, making connections to our own time, and to facilitate opportunities to become self-reliant readers, writers, and thinkers. It would take time, I knew. During our first wobbly weeks, students needed time with teacher-
directed activities to function independently with early modern diction and ideas. So, in addition to introducing the play with background information about Shakespeare and his world, I discovered the play’s sources can serve as useful documents for students to get started. When we learned a little about Shakespeare’s life, students were interested that he had a son named Hamnet who died in 1596, five years before the play was written. I thought we could explore that idea and think about possible sources of the play as a way to open some thematic issues and questions.

Shakespeare scholar Emma Smith from Oxford University describes the play’s sources in her podcast Why is Hamlet Called Hamlet? Knowing about Hamnet and wondering if the play was named for him, my students perked up. Smith addresses the question directly by introducing one source, a story about Amleth, a prince who feigns madness after believing his uncle killed his father, found in The History of the Danes (1570) by Saxo Grammaticus. An earlier version of the play or phantom version that we know was staged in London, the so called “ur Hamlet,” of which there is no extant copy, raises questions. Smith offers the possibility that Shakespeare himself may have written an earlier version. Another is that Thomas Nash, a young satirist who wrote the introduction in Robert Green’s Menaphon (1589), refers to the tragic hero Prince Hamlet. Nash credits Seneca with reading by candlelight such sentences as “Bloud is a begger, and so forth; and, if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole Hamlets” (1.35), decidedly placing the name Hamlet in print before Shakespeare wrote the version we do have from 1601.

Smith offers yet another possible source, The Spanish Tragedy (1587), a blood tragedy written by Thomas Kyd. The idea that Shakespeare could have taken at least some of his ideas

24 Check out Emma Smith’s podcasts at https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/approaching-shakespeare and Hamlet specifically at https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/hamlet (beginning at 3:08).
from Kyd’s work was intriguing because students understood “remakes” or “spin-offs. They easily related to a writer’s appeal to fear, the ingredient that pumps the blood and races the heart. “How would you define a blood tragedy?” I asked.

“Lots of blood,” said Erik.

“And knives,” added Lucas.

“And villains,” said Leah. “But why would Shakespeare take someone’s ideas who was writing at the same time? Wouldn’t everyone know?”

“Thomas Kyd wrote The Spanish Tragedy just before Hamlet came out. The two plays had some similarities: a ghost, a character named Horatio, a crazy female, and the main character who waits for the right moment to take revenge,” I said. “Think about Kyd’s play as a blockbuster. Everybody knew about it.”

“So basically, Shakespeare didn’t make up this play,” said Jaden.

“Probably not, but when Shakespeare wrote, no copyright laws existed as they do today. Playwrights and poets borrowed and even took lines from each other without fear of recrimination.” I knew my students would find Smith’s information interesting, and I also knew they would not be able to listen to her podcast intently for more than ten minutes. To alleviate the problem, I created a graphic organizer of Smith’s podcast with information provided in some shapes but not in others. Students first

Figure 19. Graphic organizer of Emma Smith’s podcast
copied the “diminishing map”\textsuperscript{25} in their notebooks while I briefed them about Emma Smith’s ideas. Next, I played the podcast (beginning at 3 minutes), modeling my own thinking as I filled in blank sections while they followed suit in their own maps; during the second half, students listened and made their own meaning while I roamed the room, taking notes on their thinking.\textsuperscript{26} The second step included “partner talk” where they alternately read sections of their graphic organizers. Through reading, listening, and writing, students learned how primary documents informed us about Shakespeare’s world.

Digging into Shakespeare’s Text

After a week of discussion and writing about Shakespeare’s world and a taste of document work through source texts, I wanted to set the stage for what was happening in the castle at Elsinore, the preface to Marcellus’ appraisal about the state of Denmark (1.4.90). Forming partner groups, students read the first twelve lines from strips of paper, playing the parts of Bernardo and Francisco. To stage these lines, each group determined who was on guard and who was coming to change guard. Why would Francisco say, “Nay, answer me? Stand and unfold yourself” (1.1.2). Using plastic swords, several groups acted out these lines in front of the class, putting their own spin on whether Francisco was indignant, sarcastic, or scared. Allowing students to get up out of their seats and read parts aloud does not guarantee an

\begin{quote}
Is watching a film version at first helpful in aiding students in forming ideas about the characters before they then begin to take on the lines and character choices themselves?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} See Appendix C.
\textsuperscript{26} See Bubble Track in Appendix C.
understanding of Shakespeare’s language, but the physical movements helped students visualize meaning.27 Something was definitely rotten in Denmark.

To visualize relationships, I sometimes blocked the action or directed their attention to specific language. To remind students who was aligned with whom during the beginning scenes, I strategically placed stools in the front of the room for Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet, flanked on Claudius’ side by Polonius and Laertes. Cornelius and Voltemand sat on the Hamlet side with Horatio, Bernardo, and Marcellus behind them. The purpose of this was two-fold: first, many students depended on proximity to understand character alignments. They viewed Hamlet next to his mother and Laertes next to Polonius on the King’s side as his chief counsellor. Horatio was associated with Hamlet by sitting next to him with the guards nearby. The visualization of this grouping would be important when they encountered the ghost of Hamlet’s father. Second, I hoped to pique their fascination with the cultural and historical information that would surface in early modern primary documents. I used Shakespeare’s language choices, specifically pronouns, to demonstrate yet another way to understand character relationships. When Claudius uses the royal “we,” for example, he is using a familiar tone of inclusion to address his court, quite savvy for a new king who would like nothing better than to build rapport. He also uses the respectful “you” when giving Laertes leave to go to France, yet uses an almost mocking “thou” when addressing Hamlet’s similar request for leave. Words matter. Language issues would be a perfect entrance into Shakespeare and his society’s norms.

After reading several scenes, I asked students to write what they now understood about Elizabethan culture. Alex noted, “People believe the king is the highest power. They believe he is the next thing to a god. Everyone looks to impress the king.” Austin learned “the language is very important. You don’t want to say one thing and mean another.” Scout wrote,

27 See Blocking Scenes in Appendix B.
“the “parents” or guardians seem to be very strict towards [their] children,” referring to Polonius’ advice to both Ophelia and Laertes. Josh wrote, “The old Elizabethan culture seems very boring to me. That old culture had a bunch of traditions that everyone had to follow...it just felt like everyone was the same and there was no fun. Everyone had to be the same religion and wear the same clothes.” Savannah noted the differences between “you” and “thou,” stating “thou” could be an indication of closeness or even an insult. When I read some of these quick-writes aloud, I asked Savannah what she meant about her comment. “Well, look at how Polonius uses “thou” with Laertes and “you” with Ophelia. “It’s as if he is putting her down for her behavior with Hamlet, even though she hasn’t done anything wrong!” Savannah was commenting on new information and using it to help them understand Shakespeare’s language choices. I would hope to take advantage of this kind of cultural interest during the students’ initial experiences with reading other early modern documents.

Ghosts and the Afterlife

The first theme we explored together was ghosts and the afterlife, specifically because of initial questions of the ghost of Hamlet’s father and what the apparition tells his son about why he is “doomed for a certain term to walk the night” and why he is “forbid to tell the secrets of [his] prison house” (1.5.15, 18-19). Some students understood the concept of purgatory as “where you go before you can get into heaven.” From our initial research, students learned about the deep divide between catholics and protestants and knew Queen Elizabeth had firmly established
the protestant faith as the country’s religion. They did not know the specific conditions under which Shakespeare was writing. After finishing scene v and watching the Kenneth Branaugh’s ghost scene28, students had more questions: Were ghosts a big thing back then, or was it just Shakespeare who used the ghost idea? Were people scared of ghosts? Was Shakespeare in trouble with Queen Elizabeth for having a ghost on stage? The anxiety about and the appearance of the ghost in Act I engages readers and viewers, and my students indicated an interest in further exploring the theme.

Before small-group work began, I shared two documents I hoped would pique their interest as well as differentiate between primary and secondary documents. The first, “The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet,” is a secondary source in which Stephen Greenblatt likens the number of times Shakespeare wrote the word “Hamlet” in his play to the re-opening of a wound. Greenblatt confirms “passionate grief, provoked by the death of a loved one, lies at the heart of Shakespeare’s tragedy” but also illuminates how Shakespeare, having no doubt traveled through Lancashire or other places closer to home as a young man, would have been privy to remnants of Catholic tradition, such as candles, crosses, and bells. Visiting the grave site or reciting a Pater Noster - Our Father - as well as other traditions and rituals of the faith, had been “under attack for decades; everything had been scaled back, forced underground, or eliminated outright.” Greenblatt’s point that despite the monarch’s and thus Parliament’s claims that the dead were beyond earthly reach, people still wondered “whether the dead could continue to speak to the living, at least for a short time, whether the living could help the dead, whether a reciprocal bond remained.”

“This article, I said, is valuable not just for its content, but also because it mentions primary sources that are interesting. The burial register, signed and dated August 11, 1596, as

28 http://tinyurl.com/y7hlowh9
‘Hamnet filius William Shakespere,’ indicates that Shakespeare may not have made it back in time to see his son before he died.”

“That sucks,” said a voice from the back.”

“I know,” I answered to no one in particular. “But it does show us how secondary sources can point us to primary documents that can and do complete stories for us. They fill in gaps and answer questions we may have about Shakespeare’s world and even his personal life.” I had their attention now. And hopefully they were beginning to understand how and why multiple voices would help us more accurately envision early modern culture.

The second document, an excerpt from Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, was one of the several primary documents I used to address the supernatural and the afterlife to help students think thematically and historically about Act I.29 “You may remember we talked about this play as being Kyd’s blockbuster, having just been performed before Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet,*” I said. I looked around. Their eyes told me they were still with me. “Kyd’s ghost, Andreas, is both visitor and commentator on the play. In fact, he may have been sitting atop a beam or seat above the action, observing events with his companion Revenge, both serving a chorus role throughout the play.

> When I was slain, my soul descended straight
> To pass the flowing stream of Acheron;
> But churlish Charon, only boatman there,
> Said that, my rites of burial not performed,
> I might not sit amongst his passengers. (1.1.18-22)

“Does this sound like the ghost of Hamlet’s father?” I asked?

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29 See Appendix A for list of primary documents under *Ghosts and Afterlife* theme.
“Well, yeah,” said Austin, “because Shakespeare’s ghost says he has to walk during the night and burn during the day until his sins are gone. And this ghost can’t go to the underworld because of his burial. So something is keeping the ghost on earth.” Reading passages as text comparisons, Austin now understood that Hamlet’s ghost felt misunderstood and guilty. His ideas, however, would deepen as he read and discussed multiple ideas about ghosts and the afterlife from a variety of documents.

To begin working with documents, students broke up into small groups where one student read the document excerpt aloud while other group members read silently. Each group’s task was to summarize the big idea - or what was the author saying about the theme - in one sentence, followed by 3 bullet points supporting the big idea. I roamed from group to group, listening to readings, answering questions, and directing attention to specific sections of the text.

In Jane Owen’s *Antidote Against Purgatory*, I directed students to the second paragraph where Owen states her cause: “I could wish you (wor/thy Catholickes) that you would have a feeling apprehension of the paynes of Purgatory.” Students noted that purgatory was scary and that Catholics were not popular at the time. “Right. So what points does Anger make that would help her case against purgatory and catholics?” I asked. Students went back to the text.

“It says God is cruel and will turn to punishments,” said Jaden.

“It says here that every person is flying toward death,” said Scout. “So that must be why people are supposed to do Good Workes. Those two words are capitalized, so they must be
My students are very interested in what people actually sounded like in Shakespeare's world. "Did they actually talk like that?" is probably the most frequent question I hear from students.

Words, Words, Words

What amazed me was the noise volume in the room as discussions rose to a new level. All three groups were focused on the task, and I was eagerly listening in, sometimes sitting outside the circles to avoid any interruptions. The next day, we began with a reflection on what they had learned. Students first wrote and then shared their writing with small groups before opening it up to a class discussion. Many preferred to read their written comments, but how they related the documents to Shakespeare’s work took their understanding to a deeper level. Austin, who had initially compared Shakespeare’s and Kyd’s ghosts, now thought about how the “ghosts were interacting with humans.” Isaih added that Shakespeare’s ghost was “manorly” and how “heaven and hell are the final stages … but there is always a middle man.”

Jake disagreed. “The afterlife is presented very coldly in Hamlet and the primary documents,” he read from his own writing. “Both tells a lot about earning your spot in heaven or hell, as well as being put in purgatory. People wish to believe that purgatory is pleasant and

30 See Each Teach in Appendix C.
relieving but others shatter that vision. They speak about how your sins must stain your soul or be burned off in purgatory."

Ireland raised her hand. “My document had to do with purgatory and if you didn’t do good then you would stay there forever. And I think Hamlet definitely portrays some of that in his play. He obviously thinks that in the afterlife you stay a ghost or become one.”

Layla added, “But this ghost is stuck, not going to heaven or hell. Back when Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, it was against the law to disagree with the church. Believing and doing what these ghosts say was highly frowned upon back in this time period.”

Students were now getting a sense of what was happening in Shakespeare’s world at the time: religious liturgy, common beliefs, and writers’ slants were all brought to life through the documents they read. I realized that poetry genres were the most difficult for students to decipher, so I learned to gravitate toward these groups to help individuals walk through the lines before sharing with a larger group. When Adam shared his writing about a poem with the large group, he included both the meaning and the possible implications. “There was this poem called ‘Burning Babe’ ...there may be a very good chance that he [Shakespeare] read this. Lots of violence is used in his plays and I feel like he may have incorporated violence into his day from this poem. In the poem they mention the catholic church and how you’d get burnt if you were catholic. Shakespeare probably got some ideas from this.”

“When was this poem written, Adam?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But at the bottom of the page it says this guy was tortured in 1592. So when did Shakespeare write Hamlet?”

“About eight years later.”
“So he definitely could have read it and thought about it while he was writing.” Students nodded, but Jacob’s and Erik’s comments, while not in agreement, summed up the day’s experience. Jacob felt Shakespeare used all the ideas we read about in the documents because his ghost was demanding and “you can’t always trust them. And Hamlet didn’t kill his uncle right away. He wanted to be sure the ghost wasn’t telling a lie and that what he said was true.” Erick did not agree. “I think he made everything up. That’s because of the eight documents. None of them really was the obvious choice to choose from mainly. Not one [of the documents] was the biggest contributor. He just glanced over at them and thought they were all bad, so he felt he had to make them all better. He realised that that would take a long time so he just took the main idea from all of them and wrote a pretty long story he thought was better.”

What I loved about the discussion was that students began to expand their thinking; rather than confining their thinking to plot, they began to read and write with more information at hand. Students understood that we could never be sure of Shakespeare’s intent or exactly which documents he might have known, but their discussions began to center on his society and how the ideas of other writers may have been influential. The ghost of Hamlet’s father became more than merely one man’s idea; it was now an early modern ghost and was borne of sixteenth century thinking.
Melancholy and Madness

We started by looking at the character traits for each of the four humours, metabolic agents in the body, believed to control temperament and affect the mind. First, I asked students to note the area that best describes their own personalities. I placed myself in the blue, phlegmatic area, careful and even-tempered, yet I could see some traits from the sanguine side, especially when feeling sociable and easygoing. Next, students worked in small groups to place at least two characters from the play on the humours chart. Mary, one of the teachers who was observing, wondered about placing the focus on Ophelia, rather than Hamlet, allowing students to assess the damage to their relationship based on her reaction not only to their forced break up, but also to Hamlet’s antic disposition. Her input provided a perfect segue into early modern visual documents. First, I showed them the Henry Peacham interpretation of the four corner posts of the humour spectrum, so they could see how these

Figure 22. The four humours, in perfect balance, were believed to be necessary for good health.

personality traits were envisioned. Next, I showed them Thomason’s English antick, and together we read the traits. “Which humours would an English antick possess, according to the chart?” I asked?

“He’s pretty strange looking,” said Jadan.

“Yeah, look at that hat!”

“And those socks! He’s definitely in the unstable section,” added Caroline.

“Can you pinpoint a predominant humour?” I asked.

“He’s got to be choleric but only because he’s not sad or melancholic and definitely not reserved,” she added, staring at the picture.

“But he could be on the stable side,” argued Alex.

“Look where it says ‘sociable’ and ‘easygoing.’”

“So do you think Shakespeare’s society believed people to be a mixture?” I asked. Students were nodding. The picture of the English “antick” was a popular document and one the teachers had neither seen nor considered when teaching this play. What they found most interesting was the description of the antick’s “apish gestures.” Students next compared the descriptions from Ophelia’s accounting and noted the similarities to Thomason’s 1646 description; according to both, madness appears in physical dress as well as behavior. Shakespeare’s “antic disposition” includes
stockings fouled,

Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,

Pale as his shirt, knees knocking each other,

And with a look so piteous in purport

As if he had been loosed out of hell.

(2.1.89-93)

Thomason’s antick includes a long list of transgressions, such as unbuttoned sleeves, unhooked britches, open codpiece, large boots, low-slung belt, and general slovenly appearance coupled with ridiculous behavior. Students noted two very different interpretations of madness: Ophelia’s description is more diabolical. Hamlet’s behavior, according to her, is beyond ludicrous. She notes he “held me hard” and studied her face. After some length of time, he “raised a sigh so piteous and profound,” it seemed to fill his entire body (Lines 99, 106). Is this the same behavior Hamlet portrays to Polonius in scene ii, actions that cause Ophelia’s father to describe them as “madness” in an aside to the audience? One student noticed the difference between how early moderns reacted to madness, depending on the gender of the English antick. In the play, Hamlet believes his behavior will be excused if he acts crazily. In Act I, scene v, Hamlet tells Horatio he will “put an antic disposition on” (192), such that Horatio will “know aught” of him. Hamlet’s display of madness in fact changes, depending on his company and his own degree of temper.
In many documents, females are noted as most likely to succumb to madness. In fact, after reading *A Juniper Lecture, With the description of all sorts of women, good, and bad: From the modest to the maddest, from the most Civil, to the scold Rampant, their praise and dispraise compendiously related* (1639), Erick laughed. “Look at the picture of the man raising a stick toward his wife! He’s going to frickin’ beat her!”

Kayla read the actual text aloud: “IF you perceive her to increase her language, bee sure you give her not a word, good nor bad, but rather seeme to slight her, by doing some action or other, as singing, dancing, whistling, or clapping thy hands on thy sides; for this will make her vexe extremely.”

“What does ‘vexe’ mean?” she asked?

“I think it means that she’ll get upset,” said Erick. “This is crazy stuff. It also says in the last part that the man should buy a drum and lock it up, so he can beat it if she acts crazy! And that’s supposed to help?”

I was intrigued by Erick’s interest in this article because it was not the article he was assigned to read. Just the day before I had received a suggestion from the classroom teacher who was observing and she wondered “if some students' readings of the documents [was] cursory/superficial, and [if] students could explore more in-depth on articles they were most interested in based on the student teachings.” The next day I implemented her idea. I asked students to review all the documents they had learned about in their groups the day before and to choose two they believed had some commonalities. Students returned to their groups to review
and discuss how the documents were connected. Their writing and debriefing with the class was one of the most interesting discussions we had to date. These students articulated text-to-text connections with the same level of interest and intellect as the Advanced Placement Literature students in other classes. Despite the suggested theme of “melancholy and madness,” students noted other themes, and our discussion took a slight turn. Tyler mentioned how he saw other issues in the play that he also saw in some of the documents, such as “analyzing then solving.”

“Can you tell me more about that?” I asked.

“Well, the document on the Black Hellebore shows how they analyzed the plant that caused melancholy, then they found certain fruits that cured it. And in the play Hamlet analyzed the situation that the ghost of his father told him. After he analyzes, Hamlet tries to figure out
how to get revenge and deal with the problem.” Tyler had looked at the play through a completely different lens and one I had not considered. I pushed for more examples.

Jacob’s hand went up. “I was thinking about plants and medicine. In the article I read, it talked a lot about plants and how some may be used to make medicine. In the play, a mixture of plants and medicine is made into a poison. Claudius uses this poison to kill Hamlet Sr. Really, the purpose of plants and medicine in the play was meant for harm. In the primary document, it talks about how plants and medicine were used to help. So it doesn’t make sense.”

“Yeah,” said Madisyn, “I read that too, and the guy who wrote it, Robert Burton, said that eating fruit causes sadness, but it says only certain fruit, like when it’s ‘putrid.’

“That means rotten,” said Jacob.

“But there are certain fruit that are ok,” she added. “Like sweet stuff, like cherries and plums. Does that mean you can go crazy if you eat rotten food?”

“Well, did they have refrigerators?” asked Jacob?

“Maybe people died from rotten food back then,” she answered. “Or maybe they went crazy.”

“So, how does the theme you talked about, the one about plants and medicine, relate to Shakespeare’s play?” I asked, hoping to get them back on track.

Jacob answered quickly: “Plants can be used to hurt and to help. Either for poison or for medicine. They just have to know what they’re doing. And Shakespeare used the plants he knew would kill Hamlet’s father.”
To Be Or Not To Be

Before beginning Act III, I wanted to check in with students about how they were faring with reading Shakespeare and learning about his world through primary documents.

- The documents are kind of hard to understand sometimes
- They are helpful to understand what’s going on in the play
- They are easier to read in groups
- Good to see something to compare to what’s in the book
- Women were treated a lot differently
- Plants and fruit cause and cure depression
- Some depression going on in the book - like today
- Themes are relevant today, like violence, revenge, madness

Using a wireless keyboard, one student listed ideas, and I could hear the excitement in their voices. Despite difficulty with some language, their knowledge base was growing and deepening. We were ready to move on to an important soliloquy, the one most students recognized, “To be or not to be.”

First we reviewed the beginning of Act III and students read the part where the King tells Ophelia of his plan to have her meet with Hamlet alone. The queen hopes Ophelia’s “good beauties be the happy cause / Of Hamlet’s wildness” and hopes her “virtues / Will bring him to his wonted way again” (3.1.43-45). I set up Hamlet’s soliloquy by surmising Hamlet’s melancholic state and his preoccupation with death. During our reading, Nate, a normally silent student, suddenly blurted, “What do you mean you don’t wake up?” The entire class turned toward him. I don’t think we had ever heard his voice before this moment.
“Well, let’s look at the text. Hamlet wonders if death is like sleeping or dreaming, but you don’t wake up,” I answered tentatively.

“Well, let’s look at the text. Hamlet wonders if death is like sleeping or dreaming, but you don’t wake up,” I answered tentatively.

“I think you do,” he answered quickly and firmly.

“I think you do,” he answered quickly and firmly.

“Really? Tell me more about that idea.” Nate began to talk about how babies, before they are born, are not conscious, but do eventually wake up to a conscious state. The students all stopped talking and listened. Then Nate actually stood up. This was very strange. Normally, Nate comes to class late, slumps in his chair lazily, and says little to nothing at all. He said, “Can I go up front?” I was shocked, but the class was now all sitting up straight and I heard several voices.

“Go for it, dude!”

“Go for it, dude!”

“All right!”

“All right!”

“Tell it like it is!”

“Tell it like it is!”

This was an emerging Nate whose interest I had never seen before. At the front of the class, he stood straight. “Death is temporary,” he said. “We do have a temporary unconscious state, like we do when we are born. It’s a matter of waiting. We eventually will wake up again.” Indeed, Nate had just awakened. Perhaps it was the content of our discussion. Perhaps it was the documents. More than likely, though, Shakespeare’s magic had been rumbling around in his head, and he simply had to speak. Here’s a kid who comes in reeking of smoke, who never says a word. He was totally into Hamlet’s soliloquy. Crazy. Everyone clapped and hollered, myself included. I couldn’t believe it.
Then our player Hamlet, Alex, read the soliloquy, followed by a short reading of the First Folio version. Next, each group took a big sticky note sheet with the soliloquy printed in the middle and a pack of markers. During the next 15 minutes, they sketched what they thought Hamlet was saying.\footnote{See Digital to Visual in Appendix B.} They loved moving to the big tables in the hall. After approximately 20 minutes, they came back in and explained their sketches. What I found interesting is that Nate’s request to stand began a new tradition in the class. Everyone wanted to stand to “report out.” It became a “thing” in the class that made each person’s contribution seem more profound. They spoke louder and raised their hands to participate. None of us knows how a soliloquy will change a person, a class, an experience. Nate became a viable part of the class from that day forward.
Gender and the Relevance of Shakespeare

Our study of the documents on madness and melancholy permeated our future discussions about both Ophelia and Gertrude. During Act III, scene iv, the closet scene with Hamlet and Gertrude, students read aloud until line 30 when Hamlet stabs Polonius who is hiding behind the arras. I showed the Mel Gibson clip\(^{32}\) where Hamlet and Gertrude argue, and she kisses him. Students were appalled, but we talked about directors’ choices and explored other possibilities to depict Hamlet’s relationship with his mother as well as Gertrude’s relationship with Claudius. After viewing a clip from scholar Claire Kinney’s lecture “Difficult Women,”\(^{33}\) students responded to Gertrude’s and Ophelia’s roles in the play as subjugated women who rarely express their inner thoughts. I had not yet attempted a Socratic seminar\(^{34}\) with English 11 students and was amazed at the results of how passionate these students were about the question: How are gender issues relevant today? We used the Hamlet text and the primary documents on madness as our sources. First, they shared ideas in small groups before forming a large circle. Some of the initial comments they made were expected, such as

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\(^{32}\) http://tinyurl.com/yd4qtbdv  
\(^{33}\) See pages 58-66 for references and teacher online resources or purchase this resource from this site: http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/shakespeare-s-tragedies.html.  
\(^{34}\) See Appendix B.
“Gender is not a problem today, at least not at this school. It might be an issue with individual cases, though.”

“We don’t see as much disrespect as during Shakespeare’s time, but little things might come up.”

“Yeah, girls can play varsity football now, volleyball too.”

It wasn’t long before the conversation changed direction. “But in the Armed Forces, standards are higher for men. They say it has to do with science,” said Jake who was wearing an Armed Forces sweatshirt. “Something about the science of men’s build’s, that women just don’t have the strength.” At this point in the conversation, a few boys became agitated. One said he was going into the navy and even though some females were in the armed forces, they simply were not as strong. I asked him if he would trust a female soldier next to him, and he shook his head.

Rick said that girls seem to get the upper hand.

“They think they are better than boys.” I could see Jadan nodding, which gave Rick more confidence. “Girls can play football and basketball too, but here boys can’t even try out for volleyball. Only girls can.”

“That’s not fair,” another male said.

Figure 31. Students discuss gender issues in Socratic seminar.
“Yes, it is,” said a female student. “You guys have had it your way forever. It’s like that picture on the document of that lady who got hung because she was accused of burning her husband. It didn’t matter if she did it or not. They hung her because she did something to her husband, and he may have deserved it!” The conversation was escalating.

“Or that article about the lady who was defending Eve from the Garden of Eden. It wasn’t her fault that Adam didn’t take care of his own business. God said he was in charge, and yet she got into all the trouble. I agree with her [Amelia Lanyer].”

Despite a little anger and sometimes shouting, I was pleased to see students joining into the conversation and was ready for the next class. Truthfully, I was hoping for more, and they did not disappoint. One group of girls had some attitude. I was relieved and excited to see it come out during our seminar, mostly because it created the energy, albeit tinged with some negativity, that was needed for some lively discussion during a Shakespeare unit. A male student initiated the discussion about radical feminists, and I asked him to define his term. He said, “You know. Women who think they’re better than men. Feminists are people who think men and women should be equal, but radical becomes women thinking they are better than men.”

“Women were not equal back then,” another female blurted. “Women had fewer perks, and it seemed like they just accepted their role at the time. It did not seem to be as much of an issue back then - women couldn’t fight back.”

Another male spoke up. “Not all men are stronger than all women.”
Now Miara looked at him. “Don’t get me started, dude. We get the shaft around here, and you know it. Females can’t wear short shorts or tank tops that show a lot of shoulder. Guys can wear just about anything. They allegedly can’t sag, but no one says anything if they do.”

“So guys are aroused by shoulders? That’s offensive to guys and makes it sound like we are only focused on only one thing,” said Christopher.

Scout chimed in. “Oh, come on! What about ‘wife beaters’? Now that’s offensive! Sports bras cover more than swimsuit tops!”

I tried to redirect. “What about gender issues in the play?” I asked.

“It’s all about sexual expectations,” said one female. “Girls who flirt are called names. Like Ophelia when Hamlet is yelling at her. He says to get to a nunnery and that she’s a ‘breeder of sinners,’ like every kid she has will be bad.”

“What about other writers during the early modern period?” I asked. Did they indicate that women had less power than men? Or was Shakespeare alone in his development of Ophelia as a character?” I could see Miara was still fuming. She is one student who misses a lot of school, but I was glad to see she came on this day.

“Girls can’t do anything,” she said.

“What?” interrupted a male classmate?

“Without blame,” she added. “Think about how much of this stuff points the finger at women.”

Despite the concern about students becoming upset, I enjoyed the passion in the room and the connections between the generations. Students who invested themselves in discussions where the themes continue to haunt their own culture were the ones who would see Shakespeare as relevant today. Yes, the language is difficult. Yes, the norms seem archaic. But students
were beginning to relate to Hamlet’s inability to act swiftly and to Ophelia’s feelings of unabridged devastation. Both feel powerless, and the sense of lost autonomy in the face of crisis can be all too often familiar. Students may not have cited evidence from the text or primary documents, but I did see unabridged engagement that day. They made text-to-self connections based on their personal experiences at school, home, and the world around them.

**Theater and Acting**

Often during classes, I fill in as a student when groups are short a member. In addition to filling in the conversation, my presence gives me an opportunity to note dynamics and comprehension in small group settings. After we finished Act III and had discussed the “play within the play,” students formed groups of six for a brief overview of the documents, all themed as theater and acting. Students read a combination of primary and secondary documents, including sketches of bear baiting and the Globe Theater, articles on the “wickedness” of stage plays, other playhouses, and an excerpt from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* (1595), describing the difference between delight and laughter. Using a writer’s notebook, each student first outlined how to share article ideas with a group and then met with other students who had read the same documents. In my first class, I reviewed document #4 entitled “Shakespeare Stage.” We discussed how the Puritans were upset that tragedy, which included murder, was used for entertainment. Also the purpose of the jig, enjoyed at the ends of plays, drew displeasure from the magistrates and was described as lewd and inappropriate.

“Why do you think the jigs were considered inappropriate?” I asked.

“Maybe because it was like twerking back in the day!” said Melanie. We all laughed.
“Nobody’s gonna like that!”

“But why after a tragedy,” asked Jadan, “because everyone’s lying on the stage dead, right?”

“Yeah,” said Christina. “Well, maybe they all just stand up and start goin’!”

“Well, that would be awkward,” added Melanie.

“Maybe,” said Jadan, they someone makes an announcement. Because there’s no curtain. So how can they make it seem natural?”

“But, why a jig?” I asked, wondering where this was headed.

“Maybe Shakespeare wanted them to leave happy.”

“Or maybe it’s a way to celebrate the ending of a good play.”

“These are all good ideas,” I said, “and I can see why you’d want to know more about that.”

““The jig reached the height of its fame with Tarlton and then Kemp…In the eyes of satirists it epitomized all that was disgusting in popular entertainment…Mostly it was the obscenity that drew attacks from the satirists but jigs did get associated with uproar generally.” ~ Andrew Gurr

During the next class, I shared document #5, *In Defense of Poesy*, by Sir Philip Sidney in which he discusses *Hecuba* as a form of entertainment. He does not believe in the mingling of kings and clowns and mentioned the difference between delight and laughter: “Our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong.” Sidney claims that a woman can be pretty, which is delightful, but not funny. When I read, “we laugh at deformed creatures, wherein certainly we cannot delight,” students thought this was awful.

“Who would do that?” asked a student. But I noted a few thoughtful expressions and wondered if some of them could relate. In small groups, students categorized the articles; one
group said documents 2, 3, and 4 went together because they all discussed the Puritans and why they did not like the theater. Other comparisons were obvious, such as the articles on the Globe. With practice, making connections among the documents was becoming much easier, and students were beginning to do this on their own, especially in small groups when individuals were sharing information. Certainly, listening to their peers improved with the understanding that follow-up activities usually included writing about each document’s claim, but I was noticing a growing interest in historical and cultural issues. Attitudes toward the documents were transcending toleration and reaching a point of genuine pleasure.

Focused discussions on how themes are relevant today illuminated their own time through understanding the past. My overarching goal in teaching Shakespeare is for students to consider how this sixteenth-century playwright continues to delight and inspire twenty-first century people of all ages. Students know I love Shakespeare, but my enthusiasm, one gateway into the play, is not enough. When students pose and learn from their own questions and then, again, question what they think they are learning is a more direct route to discernment. Young adults own their learning when they can help shape what and how they learn and what they prefer. Sometimes it comes easily to them. Other times, however, students grow to love a subject or topic as gradual discernment transitions into passion.

Occasionally, there will be epiphanies, and it happened on the day we talked about the relevance of the theme of theater and acting. I asked about today’s entertainment in reference to the Puritans who were against entertainment because it was morally wrong. “Is there anything like that today?” I asked. Jacob mentioned that parents don’t want their kids watching rated-R movies or doing video games because it might make them want to do “those things.” Another
student mentioned it was “like that article by Stubbes on *Anatomy of Abuses* where he said you could learn to be a hypocrite if you play the part of one on stage.”

“Can you find that in the article? I asked.

Eric flipped through the document booklet and said, “Actually, I marked it. Here it is:

‘If you will learne fallshood, if you will learn cosenage: if you will learn to deceiue: if you will learn to play the Hipocrit’...what’s cosenage, anyway?”

“It’s a legal term,” I said. “Like deceit or fraud.”

“Oh, well, then that makes sense. The whole thing this guy was getting at means this is what people learn from going to the theater. And that’s what freaks out parents today.” Eric was making a connection. Stubbes treatise on the morality of stage plays, his warnings that actors or “players” who dress up to pretend they are someone other than God intended them to be, may not essentially differ from those who now tout the corruption of the Internet or x-rated movies.

Today’s forms of entertainment, students agreed, continue to be suspect in the tainting of

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Abuse God no more, corrupt his people no longer with your dregges, and intermingle not his blessed word with such profane vanities. ~ Phillip Stubbes
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God-fearing people, similar to Stubbes’ claims that those who attend playhouses will learn to do the very things they see on stage: laugh swear, mock, deceive, lie, deflower, steal, and flatter - all the sins of the wicked and doomed to “eternall damnation.”

**Learning Through Observation**

When I have taught in other classrooms, I note a variety of teacher responses. Some observe and take notes, some grade papers, some chime in, some note student body language, some participate as a student. From a new vantage point, teachers can focus more on student
nonverbal cues, engagement “triggers,” and coping mechanisms. In short, a pure observation frees up the observer to note the process of learning. (Oh, that there were more such opportunities in our classroom!) During this project, the teachers were most interested in content, information about Shakespeare and the play I shared with students. A secondary interest was how the information was delivered, which teaching strategies elicited positive student engagement. After Act III, I gathered specific feedback from the two English 11 teachers. Mary said, “I have thoroughly enjoyed watching you teach! I love having the ‘different perspective’ -- both on how you see the play and the lessons and on how I can see my students when I am not in charge of the day’s agenda. I can listen more, both from the back of the room and from within a group, to gauge how they are doing with the play and how they interact as people together.” She did note, however, that several activities in one hour “get confusing for this ‘lost’ group, which includes some ADD/ADHD students as well as some slower thinkers, and doesn’t let them take the necessary time to process. Without assigning homework points during the unit, her fear was that students would not read and practice on their own. “Some of them need the incentive of points to motivate them,” she said. I wondered, Are grades the motivating factor for participation and engagement? Nate’s engagement with Hamlet’s soliloquy on “To be or not to be” told me otherwise. Would added points affect Nate’s unseen yet germinating passion for Shakespeare’s writing? I agree that homework, if ungraded, carries little weight and, by nature, we tend to those things that affect us most powerfully. I believe in
Students often gain knowledge from cultural information they can apply to the play as they read specific scenes.

Assignments, but I prefer ungraded formative activities and checks. Checking in with students through entrance and exit slips, quick-writes, or journal writing alerts me to the need for reteaching, directed practice, or independent work.

Sometimes, when teaching Shakespeare, learning the characters and understanding the plot structure is the main objective. Sometimes, close reading a soliloquy to study poetic imagery is the focus of an entire class period. But what I have learned from students themselves, is that although Shakespeare may be the only named playwright in the national standards and close reading is the tool for understanding his language, few believe close reading alone to be an effective method for understanding Shakespeare’s work. I advocate for a more complex reading across texts through a cultural lens, one that widens perspective on broad spectrums of thought and helps students grow intellectually and may, in fact, improve critical thinking. The variability of summarizing, viewing, and performing precluded whole class reading of every single scene, thus shifting the focus to historical/cultural themes and their relevance today. Using primary documents in conjunction with reading *Hamlet*, provided the early modern background within which he was writing and allowed students to deepen their conversations and thus their understanding of concurrent thinking.

**Plants and Lore**

The documents on Renaissance plant lore, for example, led us into some of the most interesting conversations we had about Ophelia’s death. Was it suicide or an accident? We began with a summary of Act IV, so students would know the general idea of the act, including the death of Ophelia, which is not shown on stage but, instead, reported by Queen Gertrude.
Providing the gist of the act allowed us to focus on two scenes, v and vi, when Ophelia displays her madness: first, in song and again, 150 lines later, in gifts when she bestows flowers and herbs on Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius. The documents provided a wealth of information about how plants were used during the sixteenth century and included writers, such as John Gerard, a botanist and an herbalist, who wrote *Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597), an illustrated catalogue of plants and herbs that includes their history and use; Dodoens 1578 *Table of Vertues*, a listing of the “nature, vertues, and dangers” of herbes, trees, and plants; a recorded 1581 dispute between the Royal College of Physicians and a poor woman apothecary; and a hymn and frontispiece that depicts Queen Elizabeth as a gatherer and goddess of flowers. During scene v, Ophelia enters the castle after her father is mistakenly yet fatally stabbed by Hamlet. She is the classic early-modern “mad woman,” whom Laertes describes as a “rose of May” yet compares her “young wits” with an “old man’s life” (4.5.181, 183-4).

In Pre-Raphaelite John Millais’ visual representation of Gertrude’s report in scene vii, Ophelia floats floral coronet in her right hand, her eyes and mouth open. According to Gertrude, mermaid-like, “she chanted snatches of old lauds / As one incapable of her own distress / Or like a creature native and endued / Unto that element” (202-205). Based on text specificity, Gertrude indicates she

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**Students may note the sexual significance of fennel and columbine noted as emmenagogues or stimulants of menstrual flow.**
saw and heard the entire tragedy. In the painting, the position of Ophelia’s open eyes, mouth, and arms may invite the psychoanalytic interpretation of a repressed, young woman on the threshold of sexual awakening or self-expression, experiences she would now never enjoy.

Ophelia’s role in this play is one of “recipient and victim of external authority, embodied in the voices of her father, her brother, and her beloved Prince Hamlet” (Barbudo 153). After reading scenes v and vii where Ophelia’s madness is in question, students perused documents about plant lore and their significance to the early moderns. One document juxtaposes Gerard’s description of the plants Ophelia gives to Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude with a contemporary accounting of what happens in scene v. Gerard notes that Rosemary “comforteth the braine, the memorie, the inward senses, and restoreth speeth unto them that are possessed with the dumbe palsie, especially the conserve made of the floures and sugar, or any other way confected with sugar, being taken every day fasting” (1292). Thomas and Faircliff explain that Laertes is the most likely recipient who responds that her words are a “document in madness (4.5.201). Authors note that rosemary is not only found in wedding bouquets, but also placed on the deceased. Ophelia seems to be floating between two states as represented by her floral gatherings. While awake and communicative, she chooses Rosemary; while floating and nonsensical, she chooses spring flowers that wilt quickly and stink, a pathetic replica of the woman Gertrude described as “the happy cause / Of Hamlet’s wildness” (3.1.42-43).
I have taught *Hamlet* many times before without using the documents that shed light on Renaissance plant lore and green imagery. Student reaction is often “Ophelia-negative.” Many do not understand why she can’t argue with her father and brother, why she can’t reason with Hamlet, why she can’t simply leave. A twenty-first century reading can create this confusion and frustration. After reading the documents, including the excerpts above, and searching Shakespeare’s text for related quotes, however, students had more to say. Alex mentioned that in his document Queen Elizabeth had a fascination with herbals and went to different gardens. He said, “One mistress didn’t have a license to practice and got in trouble but the queen wasn’t too upset about it. It was kind of hard to find something to relate that to in the play, though.”

“What about when Ophelia gives Laertes the Rosemary,” I asked. “That was for remembrance or memory. That’s a kind of medicine, isn’t it?”

Adam chimed in. “My article talks about Rosemary - that’s good for memory, like you said. And pansies. That one was for thoughts. I had trouble with the early stuff but took it slow. ‘Therewith fantastic garlands did she make’ was my quote cuz it talks about making the wreath” (4.7.169).

Liann said, “Rue and daisies were talked about in mine. Rue was famous for its scent but gave skin irritations. It says it’s associated with repentance and regret. And violets are associated with virginity and gentleness. Daisies are a symbol of purity and innocence. They give it as an antidote for anger.”

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35 See Text to Text in Appendix C.
“How do they make it?” I asked.

“I don’t know. It doesn’t say. I wonder.” And that is exactly what I had hoped she would do.

During this class, I joined a group, filling in for Jake. I had Shakespeare’s sonnet XV. I followed my notes and read aloud to my group that the poem relates plants to dying. “We are like plants because we grow from seed, we blossom, we die. So beauty and youth are destroyed by time. But,” I said, “there’s one way to be immortal. To live forever. Write poetry.”

“Wow.” said Ethan. I didn’t think about that.”

“Right. That way you can live through your poetry...it’s beautiful...so beauty can go on. And I figured I would use the quote where Ophelia says, ‘they withered all when my / Father died’ (4.5.188-9) because both the violets and her father are compared here and in both cases their beauty was used up. Dead. Her words, though, have stayed, right?” They just looked at me. Dead silence. I understood that to be a yes.

Shakespeare’s Relevance Today

During this project, I relied heavily on teacher feedback about the documents - how they were received by both teachers and students. I hoped the connections among texts were clear, especially those documents that were not directly tied to the play. Documents, such as John Gerard’s *Herball* have a direct tie to scenes v and vii whereas the document about Queen Elizabeth as flower gatherer is more indirect. The fact that she often made potions is not directly tied to *Hamlet*, but her experience with flora would have been known to those around her, including Shakespeare. One teacher reported that his students were “solid on their understanding of the document[s].” He felt his students understood how the “Queen stepped in for a lady herb
doctor and connected that to Ophelia’s use of flowers in her madness.” Another teacher said, “I think the task was GREAT! The idea of focusing on 1 document, finding 1 key line was a perfect way to prepare their thinking [for the assessment]. While they did not have to write, they did have to talk and explain the connection, so they were comfortable not having to make their attempt at this so “formal,” which can be intimidating to some, so this was a great way to have them all try it AND have to report on it.” It was interesting to me how each teacher had different expectations and reactions to the same lesson. Both enjoyed the lesson but perceived the purpose differently: one was most interested in document comprehension whereas the other focused on assessment preparation. Both provided valuable insight.

And then disaster struck. A student in the same grade level but in a different English class died in a car crash during a snowstorm just before Christmas Break. We were all in shock. The next few days were spent mourning this young man whose life had been cut short. Students spent several days writing, crying, sharing, and grieving in personal ways. I projected a Shakespeare quote and wondered if any students had internalized his words during their moments of intense grief. Is empathy at the heart of imaginative literature, as Azar Nafisi

“Every one can master a grief but he that has it.”
*Much Ado About Nothing*
William Shakespeare

love, hug, smile, cherish, hold, love
It’s all we have…and all we know.

Figure 35. *Shakespeare and grief*
suggests, allowing us to breathe with the characters and somehow make sense of their lives? Does that same empathy help us deal with the lives we live and the tragedies we endure? None of us were ready to bear the loss of one so young. None of us had adequate words of comfort. None of the students mentioned the quote but felt comfortable enough to stay and write, console, and reflect. When we imagine tragedies, there may be times when we connect what we read to what we experience. Some authors invite us to share insurmountable grief within the book’s pages, allowing us to swim with the current as it forges ahead without restraint. Others hold us at bay, recounting grief like a wave crashing to shore, swallowing us whole, and then retreating, leaving us bare and vulnerable. We somehow survive, and yet tragedy rarely leaves us unscathed. We can count on the scars we inherit, those we wear and those we hide. Similar to Hamlet, who bears his father’s loss alone and is now suddenly privy to the fair Ophelia’s death, we are often taken unawares. Regretfully, we sometimes have not said our goodbyes. Hamlet’s grief, no doubt tinged with guilt, is a distant reminder of the fragility of life and leaves him “wonder wounded” and forced to bear his complex feelings alone. Some students may have related to this, including those who wrote about grief on their assessments. I suppose we need not fear the power of literature. Shakespeare’s words have prepared readers for the suddenness and eventuality of hardship, the tragedies that teach us the value and beauty of our world.

Wrapping Up

It was time to prepare for the summative assessment. Students reflected on themes and
Writers who read their own essays/writing aloud are providing self-feedback by hearing how language sounds in their own ears. Does it make sense? Do pauses indicate punctuation? Would another word sound better? Reading to a partner in a “one-foot voice” keeps the volume down and the content more private.

their relevance to today. We had been practicing in “pieces,” adding steps and complexity to each section of the essay question throughout the unit. First, we wrote about themes, then added how we saw the emerge in *Hamlet*. Second we analyzed documents to discover how they influenced societal norms and, third, we noted how the themes defied time.

Students wrote daily, in the form of quick-writes or longer formative pieces to practice sections of the final essay. Feedback on student writing often took place during independent reading conferences; Sometimes I read aloud student quick-write responses from the previous day and gave verbal feedback to the entire group. Students also shared their writing with peers in “one-foot voices” to hear their own writing spoken aloud. I often wandered the room and sat in on conversations to provide informal feedback. From the students’ perspectives, the most effective strategy was when I projected their writing to point out “transportable moves,” strategies and devices other writers used to express ideas that could be applied to any writing. One day I shared examples of introductions with attention to how some writers use “warm-up” sentences just before the thesis that contains one or two words from the thesis statement. “How does this ‘move’ help the reader?” I asked.

“It’s not a surprise when we see the thesis,” said one student.

“It sounds like he knows what he’s doing,” quipped another. Some students smiled.

“I like this ‘move,’” I said, “because it makes the transition to the thesis smoother, like this writer is slowly getting us to the point, rather than jumping in suddenly at the end of the

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See Quick-Writes in Appendix B.
paragraph.” Students loved seeing both their peers’ and their own writing highlighted in positive ways.

Students also reflected on their own writing (metacognition) without sharing those ideas with the class, but their written reflections gave me ideas for what mini-lessons I needed for the next day. “What I’m learning for Thursday is a lot of things. I’m learning that when writing pieces on articles it’s not all about writing. It’s about looking deeper into subjects and find more to think about than write. Also it’s more about processing things and understanding it,” Lindsey wrote.

Sometimes students wrote about how they felt about writing, their stress levels and approaches. “What im learning to do about on this essay is mainly not to let myself stress out or overthink this essay. All I need to do is pick a theme that I know well and tell how that theme fits into Hamlet and a primary document,” wrote Lauren.

“When I write on Thursday, I’m going to try to explain my theme better. Some people may not understand or know what the theme means. I’m also going to try and give more thorough examples from the play and documents,” said Ireland.

Another student thought about the recent sample essays I shared under the document camera. “I’m learning about transportable moves, which I used today by looking at other people’s writing for better ideas
when I write my essay on Thursday. I was also shown a miniature diagram or template that shows how to write my essay step by step which I think will really help me write the essay because if I didn’t have a template, I’d be jumping around with my thoughts and not get anything done.” I read some of these short-writes aloud to the class without divulging names. Students realized they had similar feelings.

I believed we were ready. Just before leaving class, Austin asked me if he could write about grief. A close friend of the young man who passed away, he was still suffering greatly. I asked him to tell me more about his thinking. He said, “When Hamlet is feeling so bad about his dad...he has to act crazy so people won’t know. I think I have a lot to say about that and relate it to how I’m feeling right now. I can’t seem to get any of this out of my head.” I’m hoping his writing will be a source of therapy and catharsis during such a difficult time. We all internalize Shakespeare’s work in different ways. Austin found a way into the play through his grief in ways that allow Nafisi’s words to come full circle: we need to enter the characters’ world and breathe with them. If we don’t, we will not be able to inhale the experience with empathy. It may be that our interactions with Shakespeare’s poetry varies according to the number and type of experiences we bring to to reading. How we gain empathy is often derived from an understanding of how others negotiate their cultural mores, both past and present.

The Final Assessment

For a final formative practice before the unit exam, I gave the students one document, an excerpt from Castiglione’s *The Covrtyer*
(1561), containing dialogues about the qualities of an ideal courtier. The following excerpt, The Ladder of Love, describes the beauty of body and soul:

*Think now of the shape of man, which may be called a little world, in whom every parcel of his body is seen to be necessarily framed by art and not by hap, and then the form altogether most beautiful, so that it were a hard matter to judge whether the members (as the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the ears, the arms, the breast, and in like manner the other parts) give either more profit to the countenance and the rest of the body, or comeliness...*

*And it may be said that good and beautiful be after a sort one self thing, especially in the bodies of men: of the beauty whereof the nighest cause, I suppose, is the beauty of the soul; the which, as a partner of the right and heavenly beauty, maketh slightly and beautiful whatever she toucheth, and most of all if the body where she dwelleth be not of so vile a matter that she cannot imprint in it her property. Therefore beauty is the true monument and spoil of the victory of the soul, when she with heavenly influence beareth rule over material and gross nature, and with her light overcometh the darkness of the body...* (Castiglione, Book 4).

I thought this one might be difficult, but they read it silently and independently, realizing it had something to do with beauty. “What is grace?” asked Alex.

“I said, “It depends on how you use it. You can ask for grace, for example.”

“You mean like mercy?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. Or, if you have grace, it’s like an inner beauty like Castiglione mentions in his writing: I pointed to the line that said “the beauty of the soul” and “beauty is the true monument.” Many students had written about beauty as a theme Shakespeare develops and used the scenes with Ophelia as examples. But some had questions about whether anyone in the play,
besides Gertrude, thought Ophelia had beauty. “Remember when Hamlet asked Ophelia if she was honest? If she was fair?” I asked? “Fair means beautiful.”

“So he is asking her if she has inner beauty?” asked Alex

“I think he is,” said Jennah. Because she tricked him, right? Even though she didn’t want to, but he knows it. He knows her father and the king are watching, and she’s going along with it. Remember, in the movie, how mad he got at her?

Maybe Shakespeare is showing you how women were supposed to act. And Ophelia is not showing her inward beauty.

“At least not to Hamlet,” said Alex.

I was impressed with what the students were doing on their own. They were writing for at least 30 minutes without interruption, which seemed insurmountable only weeks before. And I had not seen them focus so intently as they were doing now. I noticed that reading the documents independently was at the heart of their complex thinking about Hamlet. In past years, they may have considered an essay topic where they demonstrated their understanding of the play through apt examples and quotes, but this approach required the complexity that is part of high achievement: synthesizing, interpreting, and concluding. As they finished up, I could feel the tension in the room deflate. On their way out, I asked almost everyone - How are you doing? How is it going? The answers I heard made me realize they were confident about writing about Shakespeare on tomorrow’s assessment:

“Piece of cake.”

“I’ve got this.”
“No problem.”

“This is easy.”

“I know what to say.”

The next day for the final they received three new documents to read and analyze. They were asked to consider emerging themes in early modern documents, including *Hamlet*, and write about how these same themes continued to be relevant today.

Student reflections echoed my own conclusions. Before our class none of these students had approached Shakespeare through a cultural/historical lens and most had never before read primary documents. It was new to ask them to think and write about how ideas from 400 years ago might continue to be relevant today.

Answering the question *Should we read Shakespeare?* Should in fact be connected to the question  *How should we read Shakespeare?*  The answer to how for me can be found in student anxieties and successes with this project, and it can be summed up as: *not in isolation*. If we read only Shakespeare’s words, we miss the rich, complicated, and conflictive melting pot of early modern society --a world like and unlike our own -- and how that diverse society is the crucible from which Shakespeare shared his world creatively and beautifully. As one student said, “The ghost of Hamlet’s father became more than merely one man’s idea; it was now an early modern ghost and was borne of sixteenth century thinking.”

Some students complained that they could have achieved higher scores on their unit final with more practice. Those comments were balanced by those who felt we spent too much time reading and writing. A few students thought they would do better on the assessment, and a few were surprised at their high marks. Their diverse reactions gave me ideas for refinements for
future teaching. But I see clearly how their reading improved, their thinking deepened, and their writing sharpened.

Addendum

Teacher Feedback

Valuable feedback is often from other teachers in the trenches, those folks, like me, who push themselves to improve craft, who try new strategies to help students grow. Honest feedback from my colleagues pushed my thinking and forced me to analyze and thus clarify my own thinking, goals, and strategies. I had several “hallway” meetings with high school teachers with whom I was collaborating, those moments in the hallway when we, like quarterbacks, hand off new ideas to a downfield receiver, usually “quick and dirty” within a few minutes and then suddenly, the classroom doors shut and another teaching hour begins. It is often during these brief exchanges that brilliant, insightful remarks are made about the success or failure of a lesson or a warning is given that can help fend off an inadvertent tackle. Other feedback sessions took the form of email. One teacher gave me valuable feedback in the form of questions and answers that turned into a discussion about teaching Shakespeare. We both asked and answered questions.

Question: What are the advantages of using the actual documents? In other words, could teachers use the documents to prepare lecture/discussion about audience knowledge and beliefs at the time without having students read the original sources?

Answer: My guess is that some teachers will prefer to do it that way. They may read the documents and either rewrite or blend into their lessons the information they believe will help students understand the play better. But I can think of two reasons why I see the value in putting the documents in students’ hands. The first is based on the “Aha” moment I had when I used documents for the first time. Yes, initially students struggled with early modern language. After a few exposures, however, that included reading, annotating, collaboration, and discussion, students became much more adept and
confident. They were able to reread the texts and point to pertinent information, which is impossible when a teacher shares her own copy or presents an idea on a powerpoint. Another unintended result when using primary documents is how reading multiple early modern genres affects student understanding of Shakespeare’s plays. I haven’t yet measured the growth, but I have noted improved understanding of his word choice - the structure and the imagery - after having read multiple early modern documents. It stands to reason, but I hadn’t counted on that.

Question: Why do the documents always come at the end of each act? Some could have been very helpful before or during the reading of a particular scene so that students would have “background knowledge” prior to reading and trying to comprehend the play text itself.

Answer: This is another process change I will make, simply because of teacher input. Initially, I envisioned students perusing many documents on the same theme with diverse opinions on what they were unearthing from historical readings. The next step would have been the opportunity for students, as part of an inquiry approach, to begin researching documents on their own. I incorporate this step with Advanced Placement students (Chapter Four: Macbeth) but would like to incorporate with all types of students. Building interest in the documents through the use of short excerpts that are in sync with the text as well as a plethora of visual text, such as the Rainbow Portrait, will help scaffold the process. Students who are studying Shakespeare as juniors and seniors, and especially as Advanced Placement students, are, I believe, ready for researching their own documents.

Question: Which documents would you use in future units of study about Hamlet and how would you use them?

Answer: I was very interested in the elements of a Revenge Tragedy, as this would be useful for students to “chart” each element as it appears in the play. I would definitely show the [English] Antick picture in order to make this reference clear to students as they read. However, I would use it with the actual scene (1.5), not separately. “William Shakespeare and the Representation of Female Madness” might be a document I use in and of itself. It would lead to great discussion as well as be a good set-up for Act IV.

Question: I can see you feel more comfortable inserting documents where you believe they fit within the play. Would any other documents fit with your teaching?

Answer: As a teacher observer, the Act III documents on theater and acting felt like they were a stretch as far as students understanding the play itself. I would definitely include the information about the Globe, but many teachers do this in connection to any/all of Shakespeare’s plays. I would definitely use the document “Ophelia’s Flowers” as a student handout, as this was very useful for students’ understanding of what she is doing and why. I would also consider going over Sonnet 15, even as a “mini-lesson” of sorts.

Question: I believe if more teachers like you were interested, we could unearth many documents that could fit with your interests. Which documents would bring in new information to add to your teaching?

Answer: I would definitely use (a color version of) the Rainbow Portrait! However, spying is a key element throughout the play, so I would show this as soon as we get Figure 39. Gheeraerts, Marcus. The Rainbow Portrait. Hatfield House (1600-02)
Polonius sending Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in Act II, and then use it as a reference for the many other incidents of spying.

Student Feedback

In the end, student responses are usually honest, forthright, and helpful. One of my first mentors in teaching shared the best advice I have received to date: “Perception is everything.” What that means is that we need to listen to each other, regardless of how much we love our own private paths. Student surveys reflected the story of my teaching throughout the unit. Their honesty redirected my path many times, and their writing, discussion, and body language were my guide posts.

Student Survey Results

The following graph reports the percentage of students who responded to each statement before and after reading *Hamlet*.

Table 2. Eleventh Grade Student Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY STATEMENTS</th>
<th>BEFORE</th>
<th>AFTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The play will be/was difficult to read.</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story will be/was boring.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will have/had to read some or all on my own.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher will explain/explained the play to me.</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will have/had to take a test on this play.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The play will be/was fun to read.</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will learn/learned to love Shakespeare</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will succeed/succeeded on this unit.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will want/want to read another Shakespeare play in the future.</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One telling survey result was how the students viewed their own success, specifically how many changed their opinions after having read the play. Student commentary provided additional insight about how the documents affected their learning, especially in light of how relevant the historical issues were to their own lives. One student admitted, “At first I didn’t think I was going to enjoy reading Shakespeare at all. But as we got more into the book and started acting it out I began to really like it. The method we used with reading the primary documents was extremely helpful because reading Shakespearean is NOT for everyone. The comments that piqued my interest were, of course, the ones about the primary documents and how they enriched the Shakespeare experience. I read over and over how learning about a culture was the best part of the unit. The differences between our worlds seemed to melt after a while. As one student noted, “It’s just not that different and helps us think about how things are similar to back in his time.”
References


*Shakespeare In Our Time: Shakespeare in American Communities*. Hillman Carr Production, National Endowment for the Arts. 2005. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZYtY0KOc0


CHAPTER IV
TEACHING MACBETH IN THE AP WORLD

In *Daemonologie*, King James uses dramatic form to admonish his readers about the dangers of necromancy, a dissertation that precedes Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and clearly articulates religious reasons for persecuting witches. Why then, students ask, would Shakespeare write a play with witches appearing in the very first scene? And why are *Macbeth*’s witches so much more compelling compared to the source play? Despite my own interest in Renaissance culture, I had not explored many societal touchstones from which William Shakespeare must have been drawing when he included the supernatural, resistance, and gender, intriguing topics for most contemporary students. Historical information about Shakespeare’s world, however, drew them like a magnet. When I added a few document excerpts, such as Shakespeare’s noted source play, Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1577), in addition to King James’ *Daemonologie* (1597), to shed light on witchcraft motifs, students were interested. During Act I, scene iii, in response to Banquo’s request for his own prophecy, the Third Witch briefly states, “Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none” (1.3.70), a mere eight single-syllable words, compared to Holinshed’s 69-word full accounting of Banquo’s future. Through only a few primary documents, I had provided a quick snapshot of early modern culture, illuminating Shakespeare’s tragedy as more than a single story. By moving primary documents to center stage, rather than placing a scant few peripherally, I now hoped to give other writers equal footing and to witness student interaction with a host of writers who spoke to similar issues - religion, government, family life, medicine, topics relevant to 21st century
Then Banquho; “What manner of women (saith he) are you, the séeeme so little fauourable vnto me, whereas to my fellow heere, besides high offices, ye assigne also the kingdome, appointing forth nothing for me at all?”

“Yes (saith the first of them) we promise greater benefits vnto thée, than vnto him, for he shall reigne in deed, but with an vnluckie end: neither shall he leaue anie issue behind him to succeed in his place, where contrarilie thou in dëed shalt not reigne at all, but of thée those shall be forne which shall gowner the Scotish kingdome by long order of continuall descent.”

students - but through different genres and temperaments. The richness of their arguments and the eloquence of their writing would no doubt surface in The Tragedy of Macbeth, allowing us entrance into Shakespeare’s play with potent discussion points.

My excitement about primary documents was balanced by my students’ practical natures and their interest in details on how they would be graded. Of course, they could feel my output of positive Shakespeare energy, but I could tell they were anxious about this new document approach. Would it be too difficult to handle? Students knew we would tackle the primary documents, including Macbeth, together, but they also understood they would do considerable reading and writing outside of class. So how manageable were primary documents, they wondered, given that they would have to research the documents for an essay at the end of the unit?

My hope was that these 11th and 12th grade AP students would find their passion and delve into some area of the play, combining a variety of documents to understand Shakespeare’s cultural backdrop. Were women as strong as Lady Macbeth? Were kings as vulnerable as Duncan? Did early-modern society generally follow prophetic advice? Did witches simply appear? And could they connect to the present day?
They had read my overview of the project, but they had realistic questions that begged concrete answers. When would we hold our usual conferring sessions? How long was the researched essay supposed to be? How many points was it worth? Would they have feedback along the way? Could they begin writing before we finished the play? I was surprised to learn that 13 out of 109 students had never read or studied a Shakespeare play. Most of these students came from other schools or states and somehow fell through a Shakespeare crack or two. Over the years, many AP students have reported that, despite having read Romeo and Juliet as freshmen, most had relied on SparkNotes to clarify language if they were reading independently. Reading pre-twentieth century literature was daunting, they complained, admitting they often simply gave up. And, yes, they were extremely anxious about the work and how they would measure up against their aspiring, confident peers.

On the first day of the unit, one student, often self-reliant, took control of the document camera, scribing notes on previous knowledge about Shakespeare and his world. The class discussion began slowly but grew as students remembered information from their freshman year.
The first question had to do with Shakespeare’s birth and death. “He died on his birthday, right?” asked Jake?

“Yes,” said Camille, “and his 400th birthday is coming up soon.”

“Isn’t that too much of a coincidence?” asked Molly.

“Well, not much is known about his personal life, I heard,” answered Jake.

“Well, is that true then?” asked Molly, looking at me.

“No birth or death certificates exist, but church records give an interment date of April 25, which is the date he was actually buried but not necessarily when he died,” I said. Most class discussions were student-centered, so I participated only when asked.

“So did he really die on his birthdate?” asked Eric.

“The fact is, as Jake says, we just don’t know.” The conversation pivoted first on one topic, then another, as students voiced past memories. They were aware that Shakespeare wrote sonnets and that he was married and had a son who died. They knew about the Globe Theater and that females did not act at all. They knew about the plague and its effect on theater closings. Their knowledge bank was slim with few details to fill in the gaps. What they did not know, beyond some basic facts, was the thinking about big issues. They might have known, for example, that Hamnet died when he was 11 years old, but they knew nothing about the burial or the customs surrounding death during the early modern period. Religious liturgy, the afterlife, and grief - historical/cultural beliefs that created parameters for behavior - were unknown to these twenty-first century students. Once the discussion began, however, students couldn’t stop talking or asking. Initially, they wanted to know if the knowledge they had was accurate but, eventually, their questions focused on Shakespeare’s world: “What was it like back then?”
After the discussion, students now had some shared background information, which they could use as springboards for research. They spent one class period researching their own queries, situating Shakespeare within a culture where other writers and artists also commented on early modern issues. Was Shakespeare using current scandals as his topics for writing? Was he a feminist? A racist? Did people like his poetry? Didn’t he get into trouble for his writing? After perusing various websites for background on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, such as [http://www.localhistories.org/tudor.html](http://www.localhistories.org/tudor.html) and [https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/16century/review/summary.htm](https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/16century/review/summary.htm), we examined a list of themes they saw emerging either in his plays or his immediate world, big ideas we could track throughout our exploration of primary documents, including *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, and would become engaging topics for later research. Initial thinking included love, jealousy, death, betrayal, conflict, murder, kinship, and gender: universal themes that students knew would emerge in literature across time and place, but not necessarily the same issues and themes that would bubble up from 11th-century Scotland, such as tanistry and primogeniture or honor and war. This was new territory for my high school students. Past experiences with finding themes usually included examining big ideas that transcend time. Understanding Shakespeare’s writing as a discourse situated in an historical period hopefully would allow students to reflect on how history establishes pathways into contemporary thinking in ways that seemed natural and inevitable, but also complex and influential. My goal was twofold: I wanted to show students how *Macbeth* was not simply a text in isolation but one man’s thinking permeated by other cultural perspectives. Second, I hoped they would reflect on their own

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37 See Appendix K for more historical/cultural websites.
culture to determine how contemporary cultural themes are rooted in historiographies. Perhaps the tentacles from Macbeth’s Scotland would reach toward early 17th century England, where different issues, such as religious strife and the divine right of kings took precedence. By uncovering the hidden complexities of the past through works that reflected the human condition, perhaps they would better understand and thus revalue the complexities of their own lives.

Taking First Steps Together

Twenty-first century students are generally willing to attempt the rigor if they see the relevance. Even so, most of us believe that our first steps into a Shakespeare play are crucial. I have used various techniques to segue into the play, especially those activities that engage students in language. Regardless of the pedagogical approach, the idea is to get them up on their feet to experience the cadence and beauty of the words, incorporating movement and gestures to help carry the meaning. Since the first set of documents included both digital and visual texts on witches and religion, I decided to begin with small-group performances of Act I, scene i, with the three witches on the heath. After sharing some directors’ envisioning of the Weird Sisters - nurses, hags, drag-queens, garbage collectors - students planned and practiced. Some performances included costumes and hats, but most wore sweatshirts with hoods up. To be more creative, Ashley, Kerra, and Josh wore matching blue hospital aid uniforms. Some brought blankets to be used as capes; some wore masks. One group had a Spice Girls twist with wild hair and fishnet stockings. One group brought a pot - one stirred while the others threw in stuffed animals and plastic worms and fingers, but the most ingenious idea was performed as cats and meowed the entire script, imitating the cadence and intonation of the witches’ language.
having some fun with the opening scene, students engaged immediately with Shakespeare’s language, a necessary ingredient for our starting point.

After some discussion on the dynamics between the Macbeths and a close reading of Lady Macbeth’s solicitation of the spirits to “unsex” her and to fill her with “direst cruelty” (1.5.48-50), students were ready, albeit hesitant, to dive into their first set of documents on witchcraft and religion. Prior experiences with primary documents, specifically early-modern writing, may be variable. In fact, many had never read primary documents before and didn’t know what they were. Regardless of ability level, I spent time frontloading the experience, sharing my own “self-talk” on the strategies I use to overcome barriers as I walked through a few documents. It is true AP students are strong readers and writers, but my classes are usually varied and therefore warrant a gradual release of responsibility. Regardless of age and ability, students need “fix-up” strategies, ideas for maintaining momentum and engagement. Most of my students needed to hear me say, “I don’t always know what every word means, but I can determine the gist when I am at the beginning stages of reading documents.” They seemed to feel assured that eventually their skills would improve.

My skills were improving too. I was finding better ways to present the documents and feeling more comfortable in my “think-alouds.” My introductory mini-lessons on reading
Students often benefit from reading an entire act before each set of primary documents, but some teachers prefer to place them strategically throughout the text. The best strategy is to try it different ways to see which method fits your teaching style.

documents usually included modeling my thinking interspersed with Q & A formative checks\(^\text{38}\) for understanding before students worked collaboratively. Rereading was a must. Because most of the documents are one- or two-page excerpts, students are willing to read multiple times: once independently to annotate and gather big ideas, another time in a small group where one person reads while the others follow along, and a third time during the larger group “debrief” where students share their findings and often read sections they find interesting. During their small-group collaborations, I generally spend time in specific groups to provide support before moving toward the independence of sharing documents or the “each teach” section. I have tried variations of jigsaws or “each teach” activities,\(^\text{39}\) allowing the process of gradual release and rereading to combine. In one variation, after students formed three groups of ten and were assigned a document to share, students moved to small groups of two or three with those who had read the same document. This step was pivotal, especially to students who needed extra support on their initial reading. Together, these small groups re-read their documents, stopping to review annotations and to discuss their reactions. As I roamed the room, answering questions and encouraging students, I noted the methods they used to make sense of text: brief outlines, bulleted points, arrows, headings, and highlighted sentences created meaning that could be shared and modeled for peers. Some students enjoyed sketching and made use of their own artistic abilities to help them express the basic tenets of their document. These crucial small-groups took precedence and were instrumental in the success of the large-group presentations.

\(^{38}\) See Appendix C for Document Teaching Strategies.

\(^{39}\) See Appendix C.
Listening to students discuss primary documents is magical. I’ve found that if students have multiple opportunities for small-group discussions each week, my presence within the group to “listen in” rarely affected the content or the direction. During our first debriefing of the documents when students each shared a different document to a group of eight peers, I was unsure about how students would engage in conversation. This was not exactly the same as sharing their own writing with a friend to seek feedback, not the same as sharing the content of a novel to gain understanding, and not the same as sharing the structure and style of an author to add information. Rather, student discussion on primary documents was the opening of a treasure box: as unique gems were uncovered, students discovered the gleams of other nuggets as they became more visible.

In essence, the more they read and discussed, the more they understood. Initially, students waited while each shared the major points of individual documents. It didn’t take long for the summarizing to end and the real crossfire to begin. Soon I heard very little discussion focused solely on content. Once a student reviewed a document that elicited more than perfunctory listening, the conversation animated. Students seemed genuinely interested in the variety of ideas, interjecting their thoughts and comparing findings like a ball being tossed from person to person. Carson jumped in, for example, when Jake shared King James’ *Daemonologie*. The form of the excerpted document, Jake explained, was a play with two characters, Philomathes, a skeptic on magic, who asked Epistemon, a teacher, whether there was any such thing as witches. “The teacher in this play says there are two kinds - necromancy, which is witchcraft, I guess, and sorcerie. I just don’t know the difference because the teacher Epistemon says they’re both bad.”
“After I read mine, I read that one too,” said Carson, eliciting some surprised expressions, “and on the second page it says something about astrology. It’s the skeptic who says that not everything comes from the devil. And the teacher agrees that astrology is different but only if you’re learning about the *course* of the seasons and weather. It’s different if you’re influenced *too much* by them.”

“But how much is too much?” asked Jake.

“I’m not sure, but I think it has to do with conjuring the devil. The skeptic goes right from talking about the naturalness of weather into asking about the unnaturalness of circles and conjurations.”

I was fascinated not only with how they were teaching each other, but also with how they were moving beyond their own reading.

Eliot shared the document on Snapdragons, focusing on the fact that people would wear them to ward off witches but mentioned Gerard’s instructions for soaking the plant to use as a compress for “dim eyes.” “That seems weird, doesn’t it? I mean, warding off witches and bad eyes just aren’t even close!”

Jake brought up the fact that he had a secondary document, an excerpt from the 2015 *The Year of Lear* by James Shapiro. He said, “This one was a lot easier to read and was about the trial of Anne Gunter. I guess back then neighbors and relatives would come to your house to watch your symptoms to see if you were possessed. That happened to her, and she went to trial, and that went on for eight hours!”

“What year was that?” Camille asked.

“It says here about 1605.”

“When was Macbeth was written?”
“1605?” asked Ashley. She looked at me.

“Close,” I said. “It was thought to have been first performed for King James in 1606.”

“Looks like witches were on everyone’s minds,” Jake said.

“Could be.” But now they were wondering about what witches looked like, if people thought witches could be someone living next door.

Jake showed the group Pierre Boaistuau’s “Demonic Possession,” a
1598 woodcut included in Shapiro’s text, which prompted the discussion on whether or not Shapiro’s description and Boaistuau’s woodcut depicted the same “wyrd” sisters in Shakespeare’s play. Students were nonplussed. “Let’s go back to the text,” I ventured.

“Banquo says in scene iii,” said Cassie, “that they are withered and wild and “not like th’inhabitants o’th’earth” (41)

“And don’t they have beards?” a male student asked. The group laughed.

“So, no, they don’t really seem the same as in the witch trials. Shakespeare’s witches are women, the same as in the Berwick Trials. But the picture from The Scotland News showed regular women, like it could have been anyone in the community,” Jake concluded.

Cassie looked up from her document. “But look at the guy in the Demonic Possession picture. He’s got something coming out of his mouth. It looks like fire.”

“Or a forked tongue,” said another student. Students were starting to see that Shakespeare may have been capitalizing on news from Scotland but made changes for his own purposes. In Macbeth, they noted, the witches were rarely seen alone and mostly in threes. Their looks, their words, and their actions seemed mysterious yet believable.

“I wonder why Shakespeare changed them?” Ashley asked. I realized that other scholars could add information to their immediate questions, such as James Sharpe’s research on early-
modern conceptions of witches’ meetings. We discussed the word *sabbat* (observed by modern pagans as a seasonal festival as well as a gathering of witches), which students thought could be how Shakespeare first presents the three witches on the heath. “The idea of the sabbat was at its peak just after *Macbeth* was written, so it was probably something his audiences may have heard about,” I said (Sharpe 164). “Other researchers,” I added, “believe that covens, orgies, and sabbats were not part of English trials at all, and these ‘witch hunts’ were rather low-key in comparison to other countries like Scotland.”

“So that’s why the document on the North Berwick Witch Trials was from *The Scotland News*,” said Jake. “But wouldn’t the word spread to England?” he asked.

“It doesn’t say that in the document,” said Camille, “but since James VI was in Scotland and probably knew about it, he brought the news to England with him. And that’s when *Macbeth* was performed, right?”

“Wait a minute! *Macbeth* takes place in Scotland! Now it’s making sense!” said Jake.

“But what about the SnapDragon plant?” asked Eliot.

“You and your SnapDragon plant,” laughed Cassie.

“But wasn’t the guy who found that plant thinking about how to keep witches away too? And he was English.”

I decided to add a little more to the pot. “Also, remember that England was a Protestant state, so another reason that witch hunts were not as prevalent could have been who was writing at the time and about what. Many sermons focused on evangelizing or correcting anti-Christian behavior.”

“But there were witch hunts, right?” asked Ashley.
“Yes, the Essex witch hunts, which took place before they happened here in America but a good 40 years or so after Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth.*” I could see Tray flipping through the documents to look at some of the visuals but then looked up before adding to the discussion.

“I was just looking at some of these contraptions they used to get people to confess they were witches. This Dr. Flan and Agnes Sampson were average people, good citizens. They refused to confess, and so Dr. Flan was tortured by the boot. They put this vice on him and turned the screw until he went unconscious. And they were chained to a wall and couldn’t sleep. Then they were strangled after going through all that torture. I can’t believe it,” he said.

“So, based on all that you’ve read, what are you thinking about Shakespeare’s witches?” I asked.

“Pretty tame.”

“The witches in the play aren’t really the same witches we’re reading about in the documents,” Jake concluded.

“That’s interesting, Jake,” I said. “I’d like you to do some thinking around that idea. If, indeed, you are seeing differences between the play and the documents, how do you negotiate that information? Let’s do some writing about how the documents might help in your understanding of how Shakespeare includes ideas about witchcraft and the supernatural.” Students wrote for fifteen minutes and were eager to share their thinking in both small groups and then with the entire class. I had to coax Brodie a little. I could see he had written almost a page, and I saw that he didn’t say much in his small group. I decided to push him out of his comfort zone a little.

“So, Brodie, what did you write about?”
“I don’t personally feel the documents gave me a better understanding of the story itself [Macbeth], but they have given me the contextual information to compare it.”

“I agree,” said Ashley. “The documents to me make Macbeth more confusing. If witches were basically the darkest beings on earth besides Satan, why did the characters believe them and listen to their prophecies? Wouldn’t someone with as much influence as Macbeth be able to easily put them in jail where everyone thought they belonged? Wouldn’t it be dangerous for Lady Macbeth to call upon the spirits to help her since she could be accused?”

“Are you saying Lady Macbeth is a witch?” I asked.

Cassie spoke up quickly. “Lady Macbeth is conjuring like a witch, and witchcraft is regarded as the devil’s magic, which makes sense due to Lady Macbeth’s conjuring being more powerful. Remember, she asked the spirits to ‘unsex her.’”

“If Lady Macbeth had prayed to the devil outside of her home, she would have been accused of being a witch, although she couldn’t be one because she is of the ‘earthly realm,’” added Hailey.

“But people of everyday life also seemed to get into the hysteria and accusations whether they were true or not,” said Kaylee.

Zach’s hand went up. “The documents really help to set the time period and what was actually going on with witchcraft. And, anyway, Shakespeare wrote about controversial topics, right?”

“I feel like the documents help me understand the time period better,” said Payton. “I was confused earlier about how they treated witches, but some of the documents helped me understand better. I think talking to the other people helped.”
“Yeah, it’s like we’re learning about a new culture. Now I have a clearer understanding of how they dealt with witchcraft and how society rejected it,” said Jenae.

“What confuses me,” said Caitlyn, “is why Macbeth would be seen with these three witches because of the harm they could cause. This is serious and so were the criminal accusations that went along with the practice of black magic.” And so it went. I had never heard so many students speak up before. Students, generally quiet, were not only engaged, but also forthright. Yes, students did at times express confusion as they were working through multiple voices, often with competing ideas. They often wondered how to connect ideas as they explored individual writers and varying genres, such as treatises, catalogues, essays, sermons, and letters. Shakespeare was no longer a single voice of genius; instead, he was one instrument in an orchestrated dialogue that students learned to understand and appreciate.

Government and Freedom

After a few weeks, students were much more comfortable with reading documents, synthesizing ideas, and discussing issues. We were nearing the halfway point, ready for documents related to government and freedom. To increase facility and eventual independence with documents, I decided to try a shared-reading strategy, adding annotating to the think-aloud and questioning from the Act I documents. I chose one of the more difficult documents, an excerpt of John Milton’s *Areopagitica*, his 1644 speech to Parliament, opining the need for free speech. Brief background information, included as an introduction, explained what led up to Milton’s document. At the time, all written documents, including scripts, were licensed and registered with the stationers and censors before flooding the market with dangerous “opinions.” In 1606, when *Macbeth* was first performed in court, the Master of Revels had authorization over

40 See Shared Reading in Appendix C.
all scripts “to ensure that the Court received the best possible entertainment, and that no one would be upset too greatly by anything they saw” (Gurr 293, Crystal 194). Using the document camera, I annotated my copy and modeled a “think-aloud” on seven basic premises he made to drive home his points. “First,” I remarked, “note in the first paragraph how Milton uses the analogy of confused seeds that bear an apple where both good and evil are mixed. He calls them ‘two together.’” Milton makes the analogy of the Garden of Eden when ‘Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill.’ In other words, we cannot know goodness without its twin. I’m going to number what I think his major points are while I’m reading and annotating and maybe draw boxes around each section to help me keep his ideas straight in my mind.” I went on to my second point, indicating where, in the text, Milton asserts “wisdom can there be to choose.”

“Is he talking about free will?” asked Ross.

“Yes, and that takes me to what I believe is Milton’s third point. He claims God gives us free will to choose goodness and posits evil can be learned without books.”

“So,” continued Ross, “he’s saying that censoring books won’t do it. I mean, people will still do evil stuff.”
“Right,” I said. “He seems to lay out his argument logically in a way that is almost step by step. As many of you learned last year in AP Language, he’s appealing to logos here.”

Students were nodding. I marked the fourth point in my document about learned men needing books as tools for teaching. “See what he is doing?” I went on. He is placing good, but specifically evil, outside the realm of books. If he can convince Parliament that learned men - and we have to assume those ‘learned men’ are sitting in front of him - need books for learning, which is his fourth point, he can include them in his argument by convincing them of their need not to indulge censorship.”

“Nice job,” said Alyssa. I loved the idea that students felt they could either ask questions or make commentary as I was talking because it showed they were engaged and thinking through Milton’s ideas.

“I know, right? His fifth point, though, his refutatio, borders on ludicrous. Look at this section where he says, ‘If we think to regulat Printing, thereby to rectifie manners, we must
regulat all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightfull to man.’ Then he makes a list. Music.
Dance. Gestures. Motion. Lutes. Violins. Of course, that seems ridiculous, right? So why would he do that?”

“Maybe he wanted them to see how dumb this was,” said Sophie.

“But he had a smart audience,” said Emily. “I think he just wanted them to see how far this could go. The government getting into your business. Like Big Brother.”

Students watched me work my way through the text, breaking it into manageable bits, looking for avenues to comprehension through categorizing and synthesizing. But now I could see they were ready to read. They flipped through the rest of the documents, scanning the titles, authors, and graphics of the remaining documents. Classes had varying numbers of students, but exposure to at least five would provide ample variety. First, students numbered off by five. I had arranged the room with three groups of ten desks. Each group had five in a row, each row facing the other. Students noted who was reading the same article and sat opposite them.

After reading and annotating the assigned documents, students shared their findings, big picture ideas supported with details that would be necessary to understand nuances of meaning. How, for example, could Rebecca Lemon’s article, “Sovereignty and Treason in Macbeth,” which included words of advice from Machiavelli’s _Prince_, a primary document, be taught? Lemon asserts neither Duncan nor Macbeth were effective in their kingship if Machiavelli’s advice held sway. Student pairs walked slowly and carefully through documents, and I observed how, together, they patiently fought through difficult language while searching
for meaning. Finally, they were ready to share their article four more times, each time with a different student. The two parallel lines afforded the opportunity for one line easily to shift to the right, such that students had the opportunity to debrief their articles with four different students.

During each class, I participated, which proved to be a worthwhile experience and valuable for them to see me do so. As we listened to interpretations, it not only helped me glean their understanding, but also demonstrated my participation as a learner.

I was especially impressed with Haley who read the secondary document, Paul Kottman’s “Spectral Communities and Ghosts of Sovereignty” on the theatricality of the king. She mentioned the fact that Macbeth had a social failure because he did not recognize the importance of the “show” of hosting. That was his downfall. She said she had no trouble reading the document and “got a lot out of it.” I commended her for that.

Simply reading the documents would be tedious unless I had a variety of methods for engaging students. In the previous “roaming team leader” exercise, students moved every four minutes, allowing each student two minutes to report. Having been invested in the recent presidential election, many of these students were extremely interested in political issues - surfacing at the end of the unit in their researched essays - but during this activity, they

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41 See Shift and Share in Appendix C
primarily focused on kingship when I asked them to write briefly about new themes they saw emerging from the documents and connected to Shakespeare’s play.

While this type of learning may be enjoyable to us and match our interests, not all themes and topics covered by these documents will interest students without another component of engagement.

Writing About Primary Documents

In their writing, students traced contrasting ideas of faith, fear, paranoia, and trust in their understanding of regicide, ambicide, and hosticide, all of which described Macbeth’s relationship with King Duncan. Carissa mentioned the idea of faith and how the people had to have faith in each other and in their God, which meant their king as well. She cited The Divine right and irresistibility of kings and supreme magistrates (1645), when she wrote about how the people must account to the King if they believe in God. “If that trust is broken, so is their country,” she wrote. Tori wrote about the same document, but she chose the “divine right of kings” as her new theme. She said, it is “shown a lot in Act II … about how much power goes into the idea of how God chooses the king and how when one is chosen, how much power really gets into their head. The [document] talks about how God is first and then comes the kings and princes right after God, which gives them a lot of power right after God. In Act II, Macbeth knows that the only way he would be chosen is to kill the next in line and that sense of all that power...goes into his head.”

This type of writing serves many purposes. By writing short pieces, either in their critical reading journals or as quick-writes to be turned in, students have opportunities to stop and reflect on learning. While they are writing, I may be roaming the room, observing the process through body language or providing feedback through clarification. Later, when I read what they have written, I gain considerable information about group and individual progress, alerting me to my
next steps in either reteaching or moving forward. The students also gain information about
themselves as learners. Writing helps clarify their own
thinking and provides practice for sharpening their writing
skills. It could be said that every word they write moves them
closer to success on the AP exam, but more importantly, it
helps them decompress. I have found that after intensive
reading and discussion, taking five minutes to relax and reflect allows all of us time to “be.”

Documents and the Performance Approach

I never considered combining the study of documents with a performance approach.
Actually, I wasn’t the one who made the suggestion. It was the students themselves. During Act
V, students formed triads to experiment with blocking the sleepwalking scene with Lady
Macbeth, the doctor, and the gentlewoman. Students playing Lady Macbeth had battery-
operated candles to light their paths but needed to figure out how they would deal with that prop
when she says, “Out, damned spot, out I say!” (Line 37). Discussions within the room included
comments about how Lady M. would walk in the darkened room. Would she seems crazy or

“How do students receive feedback on this and other types of writing? How does this type of thinking connect to AP test preparation?”

“Her pain is absolutely paramount. And I think that is what she dies of - she has nothing left. There’s nothing left for her to life for, and that’s the tragedy of it.” ~ July Dench on playing Lady Macbeth

lucid? Would she stumble around with her eyes open? Would the doctor seem amazed or
knowing? Was the gentlewoman worried or simply annoyed? In the meantime, Jason mentioned
two scenes later, Macbeth is with the doctor discussing what has ailed his wife and seems to
think that rhubarb will purge her of her agues. Students went directly to John Gerard’s *Herball* excerpt to find out the “vertues” of rhubarb. “It says here to slice and boil the roots,” said Jason, “and then to add honey to the mix.”

“That actually sounds good,” said Emily.

“Are you joking?” said Carissa.

“I like rhubarb!”

“Well, it says you drink 8-10 spoonfuls before a fit, but that’s not really what’s happening here,” said Jason, who was now back in the *Macbeth* book. “She’s walking around in her sleep but not shaking.”

“But, it’s actually Macbeth who asks about the Rhubarb. It’s like he has heard about it because he says to the doctor, ‘Hear’st thou of them?’”

“So, could this be a new discovery in medicine?” I asked. Their discussion was getting my full attention. I had never before seen students research background when they were performing a scene.

“Well, maybe,” said Carissa, “because the doctor says something about it being a royal preparation. Maybe that means it’s being used at court.”

“But then this other guy in the other document says that peonies are used for dreams. So then which one do you use?” asked Jason.

“It’s probably just like today when you go to the doctor, and they don’t know exactly what to give you.” It was fascinating listening to conversations emerge from unlikely places. I did not expect that students would check the documents while problem solving how to block a scene. This was important “talk,” especially now when students were thinking about the upcoming assessment and wondered, *What shall I write about?*
The Document Workshop

We had finished *Macbeth* and had written numerous responses to early modern cultural issues based on our reading and discussions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The final assessment was a researched essay in which students explored historical/cultural issues and analyzed how primary documents, including *Macbeth*, speak to these issues in their writing. One of the most important features of the essay was the “relevance factor.” I wanted my students to reflect on why Shakespeare’s play is still meaningful today. How does a 400-year-old play traverse time, landing in our laps with such ferocity? Students had already made connections with some of today’s political unrest, specifically the 2016 presidential election, and they realized how complicated socio-political issues often escalated in frenzied debates. They had discussed and written about how greed, misunderstanding, and dishonestly can have devastating results - not so different from what happened to the Macbeths. Students had been discussing and writing with purpose. I agree with Carol Jago who understands how “knowing that they [students] will be writing an analytical essay about what they are reading often lends urgency and intensity to our classroom conversations” (100).

We had experienced many lively discussions. I believed the key was to tie the content and form of the essay to the learning students had been doing and to allow them the freedom to explore issues in dynamic ways.

In English teaching, we often talk about “workshop” approaches. Nancie Atwell (*In the Middle*, 3rd edition, 2014) describes the writing workshop. Sheridan Blau uses the word workshop to talk about literature discussion. It makes sense to
call the approach I am using a kind of “Document Workshop.” This type of workshop is not delegated solely to reading the play and writing responses to specific scenes or other authors. It spans the entire unit of study as well as the assessment process. In truth, I believed in an assessment that would capitalize on the skills they had developed while we read Macbeth, as an assessment that would allow students the freedom to explore independently and collaboratively. I thought long and hard about how to extend the process of reading Macbeth using primary documents to create an assessment experience. Thus, the document workshop was how I approached the entire project, incorporating three key elements:

**Inquiry**

Students need time to explore interest areas, brainstorm historical/cultural themes, and question social norms.

**Collaboration**

Working in dynamic groups provides opportunities for seeking, finding, and providing support. Building teamwork is a skill that not all students find completely natural. Once students understand and find comfort in the organized chaos of classroom “think-tanks,” the more they rely on and take advantage of a noisy yet productive environment.

**Debriefing**

Reflection can provide the markers for how far we have come and how much we have learned. I found that I needed to set aside time for students to discuss what had been learned, so they could move forward with more direction and confidence.

Using a document workshop approach created multiple dimensions in understanding Macbeth. Rather than focus their writing solely on the events in the play, students were now abuzz with documents they had researched. They listened to tutorials, reread the play, researched
documents - each student was at a different place in the process. The “urgency” of knowing they had to produce a piece of writing about emerging themes based on early modern issues was palpable.

I don’t think I have ever taught *Macbeth* when students were so seriously and yet so passionately working.

I first noticed that students had various approaches to settling on topics. Some began with the play itself, jotted down quotes from scenes they found interesting, such as the sleepwalking scene in Act V. From there, one student reviewed the documents he already knew about and then spent some time talking to his writer’s group about the Macbeths’ insomnia. Rick discovered the element of sleep deprivation, deciding that it probably had some effect on the Macbeths. He said, “I could look at when they stopped sleeping and then how their behavior started changing. There must be something about sleeping. I guess I never thought about people having trouble sleeping back then.” As a class, we had already read one document about natural medicines for dreaming or for fits. One of his group members suggested he research contemporary thinking about high levels of stress and sleep disorders.

Other students knew exactly which subject they wanted to research. Claire was interested in children and wanted to look further into the scene where Lady Macduff and her young family are murdered in Act IV, scene ii. She wondered what types of documents would provide more

Figure 50. Documents on insomnia and angst

*An Alarne to Wake Church Sleepers* (1646)
*Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1615)
*The sicke womans private looking glasse* (1636)
Woodcut of the Body Politic, a Puritan nightmare(1644)
insight. She went to her group for help. One member suggested she begin with the secondary
document on civility, which gave some background on private and public life. “It might give
you a starting point, something to do with families.”

“Think about what happened in the play when Macduff finds out his family is murdered,”
I added, having just joined their group. “Remember, Malcolm told Macduff, “Let grief / Convert
to anger” (4.3.268-269).

“Revenge!” she said, smiling. This was not the original direction she had anticipated, but
her curiosity was now piqued.

Any type of workshop where students are working both independently and
collaboratively can result in reteaching and delays in progress. The one challenge I had was to
plan for the variability in learning styles and pacing balanced with a project deadline. For this
reason, I decided to record mini-lessons, which could be accessed on the class website, allowing
students to view them from home or on a bus on their way to a game, taking advantage of the
emerging “flipped classroom” approach (steelmancafe.weebly.com). The recorded lessons were
a tool for those students who chose to move ahead quickly or to hear a lesson more than once.
Other resources included a sample writing schedule to help students who needed a plan to finish
on time as well as suggested and linked websites for further research.

The beauty of the document workshop approach was that students were all at different
stages of writing - researching, drafting, rewriting, proofreading - creating opportunities for them
to discuss their processes with each other. The classroom, filled with the aromas of coffee and
tea, was where students came together to discuss the play, sources, writing, and struggles. As
facilitator, I conferred with students individually and in small groups, encouraging them to give
themselves permission to experiment. I call this type of writing “dynamic” and repeatedly
expressed my mantra: “Let your essay grow out of your thinking. Let go of the predictable, ‘five-paragraph essay.’ You know how to write, and you know what you want to say. Write, and see where it takes you.” Initially, hesitantly, they did. Eventually, confidence grew.

One historical topic that proved to be highly interesting to students was the Guy Fawkes gunpowder plot, creating quite a stir within the classroom, especially when they read the excerpt from “Remember, Remember” in Robert Shapiro’s *The Year of Lear* (2015). The story of Guy Fawkes and the 1607 engraving of his tortured and ravaged body pulled on a wattled hurdle to his death allowed students to contemplate the full scope of regicide. My students believed Shakespeare’s world, filled with horror at the attempt on the life of King James I, provided a reason to write *Macbeth*. “I know he [Shakespeare] probably got his ideas from other sources, but, come on, he must have known his play was gonna be a hit,” said Jeremiah.

Students analyzed the frontispiece of the accounting of Guy Fawkes, *Mischeefes Mysterie: OR, Trefons Mafter-peece, The Powder-plot* (1617), depicting a huge eagle delivering the letter to Cecil who would hand it to James, warning him of the impending explosion that would take his life. The subsequent proclamation of Guy Fawkes Day to commemorate the incident created its own wake when an anonymous 1678 pamphlet warned citizens that the celebration was wreaking havoc with the religious community. The Pope’s likeness had been doused in flames during a Fawkes celebration. “This makes total sense to me now,” said Hope. “I’ve never heard of this before, and why not?
Reading *Macbeth* is one thing. But finding out about the Guy Fawkes incident is something totally different. It’s no wonder Shakespeare wrote this play. Now it almost seems like a warning.”

“I know,” said Rachael. “People then watched all this happening. When you see all the people standing around when Fawkes was dragged in, you can see all the people who seemed like they were cheering or shaking their fists at him.”

“I wonder what happened when *Macbeth* was actually performed for the first time. They must have thought, ‘Yeah, this is what happens, and it really did,’” said Hope. She shook her head.

Students recognized the images they found during their research on Guy Fawkes, particularly the ones associated with the movie *V for Vendetta*. As I was working with writing groups, occasionally I heard students laughing about some of the graphics they had uncovered,
such as the recognizable masks worn by anonymous activists or “anons,” Internet-based groups that, in public, don Guy Fawkes’ masks. Some of their discussions, however, turned more serious when they talked about the state of our nation. Students were beginning to see how historical events could be discussed in English classes while reading imaginative literature. “This isn’t just about the setting of a story,” said Jenna. I agreed. Perhaps this was not a multi-disciplinary course, but it was a multi-disciplinary approach.

Dealing With Deadlines

To accommodate variable schedules, I provided two weeks of extended availability, beginning at 6:00 a.m. before zero hour begins and staying extra hours for students in play practice or at work. We all knew that a deadline was a deadline. The project came at the end of the semester, and final exams were fast approaching. Grades were due. Period. Nonetheless, students reflected on their experiences with the process, allowing me entrance into their thinking about their learning processes. Anissa, for example, struggled to find time in her schedule to work outside of class: “While daunting at first, [the process was] less intimidating once a steady workflow and pattern was found. For me personally, my only issue was finding the chunks of time in which I was most productive. The writing was not difficult, but rather, my own schedule was...As far as the writing process itself, linking the theme of retribution into today’s world did not come easy initially. Once I simplified my thinking to a broader idea, however, it became easier to do so. Finding primary documents was not an easy process either...the fact that the framework of Shakespeare’s piece was based heavily off of Holinshed’s Chronicles, however, expedited this process.” Although most of the writing was accomplished during class, other students, similar to Annisa,
struggled until settling into an idea and productive work flow. Once found, excitement grew, and it was easier to find periodic snatches of time outside of class, if needed, to write.

Aaron, from my earliest class of the day, was eager to take AP Literature because he was told, and rightly so, that he could “handle” the difficulty level. His struggle was not in thinking and writing, nor was it in engagement and interest; instead, he could neither justify nor rationalize using time outside of class for homework. “I’d simply rather play video games,” he freely admitted. “On some days I feel bad, because I know it affects my grade, but most of the time, I just don’t care.” I didn’t want to lose Aaron to self-defeat or low grades, so his class time needed to be used to advantage. He loved Shakespeare, and he loved discussing literature, but I also knew that I had to encourage him to think about time management.

Aaron had an interest in philosophy and decided to explore the theme of ethics and power. He wrote, “It [regicide] seems like a wrong thing to do by today’s standards. Back then it wasn’t seen as good, but almost not as bad as today because it happened all the time. Kings died all the time in 11th century Scotland. You can’t do that today. It’s interesting to see how times have changed. It’s like the search for power - his quest for it is so strong, that Macbeth didn’t really have morals to begin with, so he didn’t have to worry about killing the king. At the beginning he is convinced pretty easily,” he told me while others in the class listened. “And I also see a parallel with Star Wars, Episode 3, from 2006. In the scene where Palpitem is in the chair and Annikan is going to cut off his head. Palpitem says, ‘Do it’ to Annikan. Palpitem is like Lady Macbeth.”
getting excited, and the others joined into his discussion. They assigned names from Macbeth to all the characters in Star Wars. Before the excitement wore off, Aaron and I searched EEBO (Early English Books Online)\(^42\) for ethics, one of his favorite topics. Nothing. Then he searched for morals and saw 1000 hits. He was on his way.

Students like Aaron needed to find their passion, but it was unrealistic to think he would change his entire lifestyle to write an essay on Macbeth. Eventually, I realized that if I could give him extra time, he would focus on what he could do, rather than give reasons to give up. Our email exchanges became a positive source of information:

I didn't have a chance to ask this, but would it be okay for me to compare Macbeth to Star Wars throughout my paper or am I only able to do it as one instance? What seems more interesting to me is having my thesis but including it's effects today and how media portrays similar ideas today. Almost the idea of "Some things never change." Would that be an okay thing to do? (Aaron)

Yes, your focus can be on today's relevance by including the Star Wars idea. You will still need to support your ideas with primary documents, including quotes from the play. I think your idea is wonderful and compelling. Go for it! (my response)

Awesome, thank you! I'll be working on it as much as I can (Aaron)

Also, do I need to do an outline? They have honestly never helped me (Aaron)

That's part of the process, so yes. (my response)

Okay. I'm working on it as much as I can (Aaron)

Go for it, dude! (my response)

My mom got a call saying I wasn't in class this morning, but I was. I was in the hall. I thought you saw me (Aaron)

I didn't. I asked others where you were. You never came in, did you? (my response)

I did at the very beginning. I'm sorry, but I assumed we weren't doing anything today so I went to the hall to work on my project. Also I'm sorry for all of this. I just got out of work. I know I'm really late with this but I still want to get it done. (Aaron)

Can't wait to read it! (my response)

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\(^{42}\) See Appendix D.
Aaron’s essay was well worth the wait. Often I saw him in hallways at tables with his laptop open and his *Macbeth* book next to him. He was excited about writing, but he found the time to write on his own terms, often during other classes or lunch. Yes, he missed the deadline but accepting his project when he was able to finish allowed me to see what he could do, given the time he needed. His metacognitive reflection added to my understanding. “Since I have never personally done any paper of this caliber, the options for improvement were at every corner,” he surmised. Students like Aaron amaze me with their diligence and interest in going deep with the play and time period. Finding issues that matter to them, helping them do authentic research and make meaningful connections to the world they know often inspires commitment and learning.

**Culture and Context**

It wasn’t all Shakespeare heaven. Some students complained because they didn’t understand the play. Some students complained because they didn’t know how to write “long papers.” Some students complained that we lost time because of snow days.

Through the challenges, what I deemed most important was reading and discussing early-modern documents, the historical and cultural backdrop of the play. According to leading scholar Stephen Greenblatt, a
culture’s ideology can often seem vague unless we see it as both constraint and mobility. These dissonant terms work together in the relationship between Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and early modern culture. Analysis of the text can and should move beyond the boundaries of characterization and action, establishing links with cultural practices. Deep meaning, therefore, cannot be found solely through narrowly defined close reading. Readers need to “reconstruct the situation in which they were produced” (13). Greenblatt’s vision of how meaning is created is reflexive in that the meaning of the text is best understood within the context of the culture, and the culture is best understood within the context of the text.

To illustrate, consider Mary who chose to write her essay on how Shakespeare develops the theme of gender in *Macbeth*. As we discussed ideas from the text, her initial thinking included how Lady Macbeth is depicted - strong, arrogant, and fearless. She is as Macbeth calls her “my dearest partner of greatness” (1.5.11). Searching to find evidence for a thesis that Shakespeare’s female characters are inconsistent with early modern normative gender roles, Mary initially analyzed the relationships among the males and females in the play, specifically Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, deducing that Shakespeare must have “desired female dominance in a world where there was none” and that he was dissatisfied with women’s “power of influence.” Mary was clearly interested in the play and especially in gender inequities but seemed to be painting herself in a corner without anything else to write. After consulting a secondary document, Mary Ellen Lamb’s 1998 article, “Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England: 1500-1800,” on the subordination of women, Mary was able to add information about men’s perception of women as household managers and caretakers. She also learned about how Shakespeare included cross-dressing in his plays to represent comedically how women compensated for their powerlessness.
At this point in Mary’s process, she was accumulating facts from both the play and an outside, secondary source. But Mary’s thinking deepened and impassioned when she discovered William Whately’s marriage sermon. Whately’s description of the inferior female brought her thinking about gender inequality to a new level. She had not considered the early modern female perspective. Mary first quoted Whately’s sermon that “the duty of a wife is to ‘acknowledge her inferiority’ and then to ‘carry her selfe as inferiour.’” Certainly, Mary had learned from secondary documents about the sixteenth century British life that women were considered inferior, but it was not until she read Whately’s sermon that she realized the necessity of women’s acknowledgement and acceptance of a subservient role for marital happiness. She writes, “if she [a married woman] does not recognize this, then she will live woefully.” Her understanding of early-modern marriage through the words of a 1619 Puritan cleric allowed her to interact with Shakespeare’s play on a different plane. She now saw Lady Macbeth as someone who was willing to risk everything, even her marriage, as Macbeth’s “dearest partner of greatness” (1.5.11), by throwing off her cloak of femininity when she pleads with spirits to unsex her (48). Mary now saw her words in a different light: “Lady Macbeth is insinuating that she is not content with her duties and stereotypical abilities as a female. She wants to be ‘unsexed’ so that she is not labeled as a woman externally and does not feel any remorse for her deeds internally.”

Of course, I could have announced all of these facts to the class. I could have created a Powerpoint, recorded a mini-lesson, written a fact sheet filled with cultural points. But would that have had the same learning impact as Mary’s work with documents, those pieces she chose for her own purposes, that deepened her thinking and her writing? And the choices she was making, the areas of interest that mattered to her were guiding her - as well as her classmates - in
this document workshop format. Mary’s words changed from “gender differences” to “gender disassociation,” a sophisticated, apt, and empowering description of Lady Macbeth’s choice to act despite her role in society. In a reflection of her experiences with research, Mary wrote, “The documents that I was able to find and incorporate into my paper not only strengthened my essay but also strengthened my understanding of the play as a whole...Overall, I thought the writing process was difficult to begin with but as I progressed, everything began to come together and I am happy with the final result.” Mary stirred my thinking about the power of culture and the importance of including sixteenth-century artifacts in the study of Shakespeare.

What we were exploring in uniquely meaningful ways in my high school classroom was Greenblatt’s idea of reflexivity between texts and culture. It was unique because the culture and identity of the learner intersected with the literary text and its cultural context. Greenblatt’s ideas of mobility and constraint are especially important to understand how new ideas affect culture. Within a culture, both acceptable and renegade ideas are mobile, moving within and bumping against walls of acceptability, “a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained” (11). The movement of ideas within a culture is the impulse or stimulant of creative energy, which can neither be contained nor controlled without the elasticity or permeability of boundaries. Walls of acceptability - manners, if you get right down to it - do offer restraint but often provide room for movement, such that cultural boundaries often stretch to include diverse thinking, and often become the impetus for thinking “outside of the box.” Thus, culture is both limiting and limitless.

Language arts instructors who teach Shakespeare should be cognizant of the intersection of contemporary and early modern cultures. If it is important for today’s students to understand the
confines and complexities of a 400-year-old body of established cultural boundaries, it is also
important to implement a pedagogical approach that examines the intersection between past and
present. Primary documents are a rich resource in this endeavor. Secondary English students
can study writings, drawings, letters, speeches, and recipes and consider how artistic pieces fit
within and extent culture contexts. As literary scholars, our students can analyze writers’
“moves” against the social parameters constructed by a people during a literary period to note
their effects. As social psychologists, they can evaluate change within a culture when forces
expand the perimeter of a culture’s norms by changing its shape.

Most teachers work hard to make curriculum rigorous and relevant. Many choose texts
that engage students or supplement classics with other sources that breathe new life into
classroom discussions. Sometimes students have “little understanding of what is going on in the
world outside of their high school,” as Kelly Gallagher puts it in *Readicide: How Schools are
Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* (47). One remedy is to add texts about current
thought and events, a new Gallagher staple in the curriculum called Article of the Week43
(AOW), including news stories, essays, editorials, blogs, and speeches. Students read and
annotate current articles, reflecting on content, connections, and confusions. What Gallagher
suggests is an augmentation of the existing curriculum to include current writers, hoping to
produce “bi-textual” readers or “students who garner reading from a number of different
sources” (Wolf qtd. in Gallagher 47). In this way, students engage in texts to expand their
understanding of the world around them, thus increasing the background information they
possess necessary for reading comprehension of any text.

It is important for students to find relevance in what they are reading, to search for
themes that matter to them. They realize and internalize how themes from the sixteenth century

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continue to be not only relevant, but also pulsating. And they come to understand their own
world and the choices they make more richly. Often, according to Gallagher, students are not
consistently given opportunities for thinking beyond explaining or comparing. “Bi-textual,” or
multi-textual readers, also need to dissect varying opinions on themes within a culture to be able
to see the complexity that continues to complicate current, similar themes. In other words, it may
not be enough to rely on Shakespeare’s Macbeth to make the leap to twenty-first century
thinking. Students will generally understand the intense danger and daring of the Macbeths to
consider, not to mention commit, regicide. The heinous murder of Duncan and the panicky tone
embedded in Shakespeare’s rhetorical stichomythia after Macbeth confesses to his wife, “I have
done the deed” (2.2.19) illuminates the tension between the two as well as the seriousness of
their act. Lady Macbeth believes she heard crickets cry and is paranoid about the noise:

LADY MACBETH  Did now you speak?
MACBETH    When?
LADY MACBETH  Now.
MACBETH        As I descended?
LADY MACBETH  Ay.

Students normally can find the relevance in this scene, especially if they think about the gravity
of killing of a president or other world leader. To help students broaden their idea of regicide
during the early modern period, however, they need to read other early-modern documents that
provide discursive perspective, a process that allows “gray area” to dominate previously held
“black and white” issues. Suddenly, the task of determining relevance today is neither simple nor
one-dimensional. We can, for example, match incidents from century to century, connecting
lines through history. When students understand, from a variety of seventeenth-century
documents, such as news reports, paintings, poems, sermons, and yes, theater, how regicide was viewed, indicted, punished, or sanctioned, their understanding becomes multi-dimensional. True intertextuality can occur.

Documents and Perspective

Carson believed the primary documents “were one of the most helpful resources given to us” reflected on the Guy Fawkes incident and its history. By reading excerpts from James Shapiro’s *The Year of Lear* (2015), she learned about the conspirators, how they rented a building where they intended to first, tunnel to the House of Lords and second, plant the gunpowder, which would ultimately kill King James I who was purportedly attending a session of Parliament. She knew the purpose stemmed from a common hatred of how English Catholics had been treated without hope for change. She also knew that despite grumblings about limited toleration, no one had attempted treason as horrific as blowing up King James (120-121). She read excerpts from Henry Garnet’s *Treatise of Equivocation* (1598) and Robert Parson’s *A Treatise to Mitigation towards Catholic Subjects in England* (1607), both outlining methods for Catholics to bend the truth or mentally equivocate to escape religious persecution. She read the pamphlet warning against going too far with burning effigies of the Pope after the incident occurred. What she had not considered was “the other side of the story.” She may not have considered the effects of the plot on James I as revealed in a letter written by the Venetian ambassador in England, which sheds a disparate light on the post-plot state of the monarchy. The letter’s tone, sympathetic and
vulnerable, certainly contrasts with James’ confident need to re-establish his power: first, in his
address to Parliament four days after the incident and second, in published form the *True and
Perfect Relation* (1605).

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The king is in terror; he does not appear nor does he take his meals in public as usual. He lives in the innermost rooms, with only Scotchmen about him. The lords of the Council are also alarmed and confused by the plot itself and the king’s suspicions; the city is in great uncertainty; Catholics fear heretics and vice-versa; both are armed; foreigners live in terror of their houses being sacked by the mob that is convinced that some, if not all, foreign Princes are at the bottom of the plot. The King and Council have very prudently thought it advisable to quiet the popular feelings by issuing a proclamation, in which they declare that no foreign Sovereign had any part in the conspiracy. God grant that this be sufficient but as it is everyone had his own share of alarm.

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In this document, he cleverly transcends personal gain to enter national salvation by thanking God for his life and then proclaiming November 5 as a religious holiday.

Reading documents offering a variety of perspectives often presents narratives that may, on the surface, seem unequivocal. The Gunpowder Plot is not so simple and neither is our ability to situate Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in the middle of such turmoil. In the end, Carson did not write her essay about regicide or James I, but having read a variety of documents, understood the wide-ranging effects of a multi-textual approach. “Without the primary documents,” she wrote, “I personally wouldn’t have learned about the Guy Fawkes celebration or its history. These sources as well remain relevant because of their ability to provoke thought.

What impressed me was the fact that Cate went beyond the scope of her essay on witchcraft in her thinking about the early modern world in comparison to her own twenty-first
century place in society. This kind of expansive thinking and synthesis simply does not happen when students read Shakespeare’s work as the only primary document in the curriculum. Although it is true that including the relevance question as a discussion point may be important, it can be horizontal thinking. Students may take a leap to the twenty-first century but without the depth of thinking cultivated by first analyzing diverse perspectives. Teachers who tell their students about the Renaissance Period are sharing the narrative fabric of Shakespeare’s world through a personal, twenty-first century lens, but students who are not invited into his world through the art of those who lived it have not held hands with original thought. It is various accountings through a surfeit of expressions that provide the threads of existence. When students weave those threads together, creating their own patterns, they are then able to speak to Shakespeare’s work - from the vantage point of their own lives.

Cate was interested in how diverse perspectives may have had ramifications on Shakespeare’s Macbeth. She noted Shakespeare often included topics in his plays that were considered taboo and “challenged some of the cultural norms of his time,” which meant that including seditious politics and historical events would not have been unprecedented. In her understanding of the play, she considers that justice may have been served at the end, even though Shakespeare does not follow early modern political protocol in his dramatic script. Macbeth is not hanged, drawn, and quartered, similar to the the
band of brothers who were caught and brought back to justice. “Macbeth starts to lose his mind and he is slain by Macduff. If politics and English history were included in the making of *Macbeth*, it can surely be seen as message to those who would try and carry on the legacy of Guy Fawkes: You can not avoid justice and the ramifications of treason,” Cate concluded her essay by reflecting on the relevance of Shakespeare’s themes today “in spite of the 401 years that separate Shakespeare’s life and modern society.” Citing the recent 2016 presidential election as one of the “ugliest ever seen,” this young woman whose final year in high school was filled with difficult classes and challenging decisions thought about how American citizens should be concerned with the state of the nation. Her reading of *Macbeth* was only one of many cultural stories that may have been shaped 400 years ago. Other narratives, the engraving of the eight conspirators as well as a print showing the execution of Guy Fawkes and the depiction of King James I in the frontispiece of *Mischeefes Mysterie* receiving the news of the plot delivered by an eagle, also became the “frontispiece” of her own narrative within a twenty-first century America. Cate counters the idea that prison or death are the worst punishments. From *Macbeth*, she learned “the chains of the mind are just as unbearable as the real ones.” From the stories of other early modern writers, however, she learned that those who commit treason/murder cannot escape justice or the “righteousness of one’s conscience.”

Similar to Cate’s concern about the political unrest during the recent election, others reflected on their own situations as both students and citizens after...
having read many Renaissance primary documents. Sometimes their ideas centered on popular culture, and sometimes it took a turn into the philosophical either as part of their essay or their self-reflection. Trenton was equally intrigued with the gunpowder plot and compared Henry Garnet’s intent to Macbeth’s witches by explaining how language can be manipulated. “These two events can be connected,” he wrote, “because both include the use of ambiguous language to conceal the truth, the main difference being the reason it was used. Henry Garnet used it for the protection of catholics, while the witches used it to deter Macbeth, leaving him to contemplate what is the truth and what is false.” Trenton then moved from his diverse readings about Shakespeare’s world to his own. Trenton’s understanding of the play was deepened when he considered how people, both in imaginative literature and in real life, find truth in the wake of being misled. Confusion, in other words, is not a permanent condition, especially if the people involved seek to know. As an example, he noted how Macbeth’s knowledge is clarified when he sees how the “wood / Comes toward Dunsinane” and that his misunderstanding has “tied me to a stake” (5.5.51-2, 5.7.1). Trenton concluded that those who remain in ignorance can never move forward. His search to find relevance, however, turned philosophical. Trenton’s initial assumption, that equivocating as described by Garnet and Shakespeare may have had devastating consequences, was countered by his own suspicions that ambiguous statements can also protect people who are not yet ready to hear the truth. “The only problem that arises with this,” he admitted, “is that it only creates problems in the future.” Trenton’s writing was filled with examples of how truth often hides behind tricky yet beautiful language and understood how early-modern catholics’ lives would have been lost had they not known how to deliberately
couch the truth in ambiguity. The delay, Trenton felt, also kept Macbeth in a temporary state of bliss before having to face reality. In truth, the delay is only that. The truth will always be revealed, Trenton acknowledged.

Next Steps for AP

I hope I have conveyed to you, through all of my high school classroom stories about teaching Shakespeare with primary documents, that most of my students loved learning about what it was like to live in a tumultuous early modern society. If you imagine that all AP students, notably the most talented readers and writers in our schools, are all invested in “archaic” text before they enter AP Literature classrooms, you may not be completely correct. In fact, there were many who needed coaxing, encouraging, and downright pushing. But I will say that most, within very short order, became excited about learning more than what Shakespeare said on the page. After the project was over, I did note that many wanted to spend more time on relevance to today’s world. Writing and subsequent discussions we had about why Shakespeare still matters were some of the most lively and interesting.

I could and would spend much more time than I did on this unit, but “moving along” was important - and you AP teachers know this - to provide a wide variety of cultural and period literature for these students. But I will say that teaching Shakespeare with primary documents was one of the most invigorating experiences not only for my students, but also for me. It was work. No doubt. But I could see student thinking expand and deepen in ways I have never seen before in all the years of my teaching. I will make changes as I do each year, taking into account the suggestions my students have made, but providing the rich resources of diverse early modern thinkers to understand the influences surrounding Shakespeare’s writing, will continue to be a staple in my teaching.
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CHAPTER V

MIDDLE SCHOOL MAGIC AND *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM*

Each year when I take students to the Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier, I see rows and rows of middle school students who absolutely adore Shakespeare “live.” Yet, a survey of English teachers in my area, West Michigan, revealed that fewer than 10% actually include any Shakespeare play in middle school.

In the district where I work, the eighth grade honors English classes study *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but teachers of the general classes do not include Shakespeare. I asked those teachers of general classes if they might be willing to bring the same play to their students. I offered to help any way I could. Two were excited, and two expressed trepidation, but all were willing to give it a try. Teaching Shakespeare to all middle school students called for an approach that would work with students of different reading levels and making accommodations for autistic, emotionally impaired, learning disabled, or 504 students who needed extra time for assignments. Aside from the diverse population, we would also stumble over scheduling issues. As a zero-hour teacher who begins teaching at 6:30 a.m., I had two hours at the end of each day when I could visit their building, but class schedules allowed me access in only one teacher’s classroom. Unfortunately, the other teachers would not have free periods to observe. We discussed the possibility of combining groups, but 60 middle school students needing considerable assistance, all in one space, seemed unmanageable. A third problem was how to obtain books. Teachers agreed that printing the entire play would allow students to annotate individual copies. Moreover, making consumable copies allowed the teachers to try this idea without the expenditure of purchasing 250 books that might not be used again. In the end, the eighth grade course team agreed that I would teach in one teacher’s eighth grade general English

44 See p. 51 for link to MND full text under Teacher Online Resources.
class with the classroom teacher participating in all of the activities in a “student role” while a special education teacher conferred about accommodations and a student teacher observed for teaching strategies. The host teacher who welcomed me into his classroom videotaped my classes, which were made available to teachers who were unable to observe. In addition to the printed copies of the play, we all used common lesson plans, slides, and handouts, all of which we adapted as we traveled this journey together. Truthfully, our students drove the instruction. Through Shakespeare’s and others’ writings, we worked as a community of learners, exploring early modern society and culture together.

From Story to Story

My first day of teaching eighth grade in the middle school was a bit of a culture shock. Let’s face it - I am an experienced high school teacher who was learning to teach middle school students about Shakespeare’s world, and I had plenty to learn. These students were chock-full of energy. I loved their enthusiasm, but I immediately realized I would need to be flexible and sensitive to many student needs. Lesson plans would have to be dynamic and fluid, open to change as I learned about pacing, assessing, and reteaching.

I began with a book talk on Laurie Halse Anderson’s novel *Speak*. The plotline, revolving around the main character, Melinda, who is on the cusp of her first year of high school in New York. During a summer party, a persuasive senior entices her outside. It is clear he has been drinking and suddenly his advances turn violent, and he rapes her. She needs help and somehow finds a phone to call 911. The police arrive, crashing the party and Melinda’s reputation. Unfortunately, her first walk down the halls at Merryweather High School became a walk of silence. No one speaks to her, believing she had called the police to get them all into
trouble when, in fact, she had been assaulted. I had five copies of *Speak* with me. “Who wants to read this book?” I asked. At least ten hands went up. All five were gone in seconds. After our first ten minutes of independent reading time, I asked all the students to turn to their “elbow partner” and share the books they were reading. The noise was deafening. They loved to talk about books!

I took the opportunity to link this experience to Shakespeare. Rather than begin with an inquiry approach to the early modern period as I had done with the high school students, I decided - on the spot - to enter the sixteenth century with an exploration of their own pop culture, including novels, movies, videogames, and TV shows, to learn about their interests and see if I could find some simple themes that might allow connections. Were any of their books about relationships? About betrayal? About parents blocking their children from love or friendship? I put a few up on the board that I knew would be in the play: love, marriage, magic, confusion, escape. I asked them to write about one theme they saw in their books during a five-minute quick-write.

After only one minute, several students started looking out the window or talking to each other. “Is something wrong?” I asked one boy.

“No,” he said.

“Why aren’t you writing?” I asked.

“I did it already. I’m done.” He put his head down. I realized I had more to contend with than teaching themes. Aside from learning about Shakespeare’s comedy, I could not ignore that students would need writing stamina for more than a few minutes if they were to write steadily, important for assignments ahead of them in the unit. I moved on and wandered through the rows of students. When the timed writing was almost over, I asked students to end their writing with
any questions they might have about themes they were noticing in their books. Again, blank stares.

“Let’s think about how the themes you are writing about travel through time and space in your books,” I said. “In Speak, Melinda’s friendship with her former eighth grade friends is now jeopardized by what happened at the summer party. Will anyone want to be her friend if they think everyone else resents her? If I were writing about this book, I might wonder about how Melinda is going to get through all of her classes without any friends. One question I have is Who will Melinda rely on to get through each day?” Students went back to their journals.

After writing questions about their own books and forming small groups, they were ready to list basic themes they believed to be important in their independent reading books: friendship, love, dating, jealousy, stealing a boyfriend, showing off, sharing secrets, keeping secrets, payback or retaliation after a betrayal, trying to be popular, lying to save face, having a best friend, losing a best friend, fighting with a best friend. As students discussed themes, I realized how much impact these contemporary young adult novels were having on the energy of the classroom. I needed to find a way into Midsummer that would continue the momentum.

Culture Clash

I decided to approach our journey as I would a trip to an exciting destination, one that I was sharing with novice travelers. If we were to enjoy the play together, I needed to keep my
fellow travellers’ comfort levels in mind, considering their sense of adventure, their level of anxiety, and their thirst for knowledge. Without the same confidence and ability levels of my high school students, these thirteen-year-olds would need to experience the play using multiple senses and comprehend the plot structure through multiple readings. I envisioned anxiety-laden questions, such as, “Which one does Hermia love?” or “Do we really have to know all those rude mechanicals’ names?” As any tour guide, I would know our destination but make choices along the way as to which roads to take. These eighth graders wanted to have fun, and I hoped they would love Shakespeare as well as other early modern writers. They needed to feel free to sightsee a little, to stop when they needed more time or even skip sections we could afford to miss during the first reading.

To enter the world of London during the sixteenth century, I showed a brief biography of Shakespeare. Next, students made a T-chart where they compared what they learned about the sixteenth century from the video clip with what they already knew about their own world. As we listed their 16th-century topics of interest, such as the theater, I used a narrative format to fill

45 See Teacher Online Resources, Appendix L.
a few gaps in their knowledge. “Let’s talk about what it must have been like to go to one of Shakespeare’s plays in the Globe Theater, the one you saw in the clip,” I said. “What did you notice about the Globe from the picture you saw?”

“It’s round,” said Richard.

“It has no roof!” said Zach.

“So it must be hot in the summer,” said Jaiden.

“And maybe hard to hear the actors,” said Adam, “with all those people.”

“That’s a long time to stand,” said Rebecca, “What did they do if they had to go to the bathroom?”

“Just pee!” yelled Messiah. I noticed that he had his hand up constantly. His body language told me he was interested in theater and especially interested in what it must have been like to go to a play during the sixteenth century.

“Actually,” I said, “Messiah is correct. Most of the plays lasted at least two hours, and many of the groundlings, or the people who didn’t have much money, had to stand in front of the stage for that long. And, yes, the men did pee where they could, I suppose. But the women couldn’t do that easily. Sometimes they had buckets they tied under their dresses for that purpose.”

“Oooooh! That’s grosse!” said Ivy to her table partner but certainly loud enough for all of us to hear.

“There’s no way!” said Brishene, laughing. Clearly, the students were “hooked” and wanted to know more.
I had two jobs ahead of me: the first was to help students understand the characters and their dilemmas, and the second was to introduce the primary documents and their purposes. Students created foldables that would help them categorize the three worlds in *Midsummer*. On the reverse side, students made three columns, one for the royal world, one for the rustic world, and one for the green world. As we approached each scene, we made lists of those characters who would “live” that dimension; students practiced pronunciations of names and learned each character by his or her role. The royal world, for example, was made up of those characters introduced in Act I, scene i: Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius, and Helena. Most students understood the differences among the three worlds and simplified the descriptions to the rich, the poor, and the magical. Hannah, from the corner of the room, thought the green world was “more nature where plants and things were all green.”

“Right,” I said, “and at night when things were very dark, there might be a little magic there.” The problem lay in remembering which characters played which roles. To capitalize on their interest in storytelling and to sensitize their ears to early modern language, I began telling the story of a royal couple, Hippolyta and Theseus, who are waiting to be wed. “How they met was not exactly the norm,” I said, “because Theseus actually took Hippolyta as a prize when he won a war against the Amazons. I decided that this might be a good time to introduce the first
primary document, an engraving by Levinius Hulsius (1589) from the German edition of Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The Discovery of Guiana*. To understand the relationship of Theseus and Hippolyta, we read Theseus’ words to his bride-to-be: “I woo’d thee with my sword, / and won thy love, doing thee injuries; / But I will wed thee in another key” (Lines 17-19).

“Let’s take a look at this engraving and think about what Theseus means when he tells Hippolyta that he won her love doing her injury,” I said. “What do you think he means?”

“He hurt her?” one boy asked.

“How could he win her love if he hurt her?” another boy demanded from the back.

“Well, let’s take a look at this engraving to see if we can find some answers. What do you notice in this picture?” The students were quiet, scrutinizing the detail in the darkened room. Finally, Messiah spoke up. “It looks like the ladies have the arrows, and they strung up two men and hung them upside down from a tree!”

“But they must be dead because they have arrows in their stomachs,” said Austin.

“Or lower,” said Messiah.

“And there’s a fire to burn them to death just in case,” said another. “So who are these people?”
“According to Sir Walter Raleigh’s writing, the Amazonians, female tribes from South America, were women warriors,” I answered. “This text was written approximately five years before Shakespeare’s play, so it’s possible he would have heard about the reports from Raleigh to Queen Elizabeth. In the play, Theseus attacks the Amazons and takes Hippolyta for his own. When he says, ‘I will wed thee with another key,’ what do you think he means?’”

“Well, he probably doesn’t mean a real key.”

“Maybe like he’s not going to hurt her now, just marry her. Now he loves her,” said Harper. Students were connecting the primary document with the text, trying to make sense of both. Clearly, visual text would provide “another key” into narrative for these middle school students as they strove to imagine stories from pictures.

After the initial run-through of the plot and several lines from scene i, students did a Quick-Write46 on one character “pair”: Theseus and Hippolyta, Hermia and Lysander, or Demetrius and Helena. They wrote about these characters’ situations, and many students, both male and female, included personal anecdotes about parents or past experiences. Jordan said, “Love is something that I understand,” a comment that conveyed connections she made within only a few days of reading and thinking. Morgan wrote, “I know the Hermia, lysander & demetrius situation” but also wondered “What will happen in the end with Hermia?” Ava pondered Demetrius’ sudden change of affection and asked, “Why

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46 See Appendix B, Shakespeare Teaching Strategies.
dosent Demetrius love Helena?” Hannah picked up on a conflict between Hippolita and Theseus and noted problems with all the relationships, especially with the females in the play. Madalynn wrote about the unfairness of how girls were treated and made the connection between Hermia’s father rejecting her and Demetrius rejecting Helena. Madelyn’s final comment was about Queen Elizabeth: “How come a girl can be queen but have little meaning?” Madelyn’s comment surprised me because I hadn’t considered that middle-school students would note gender inequities in a text-to-world connection. Their growing interest in early modern culture was changing how they perceived the action within the play. I wondered if primary documents might help them gain insight about the love relationships in the play. By adding other early modern voices who wrote about gender issues, Shakespeare’s play might be understood as not merely a story about young love. I hoped they would see how literature, regardless of when and where it is written, is shaped by cultural norms. I was certain primary documents would situate Midsummer within an historical context imbued with gender inequalities and that students would discover how writers today also drew from a similarly complicated world.

Gender Trouble

The first primary digital document, the treatise Of Domesticall Dvties, clearly outlines female domestic duties. The excerpt begins by quoting Ephesians
5:22-24: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject to their husbands in everything.” I let that sink for a few minutes after I read it aloud. The next section began with a heading that I asked Brigitte to read aloud: “Of an husband’s superiority over a wife, to be acknowledged by a wife...” What is that saying,” I asked?

Brigitte thought a minute. “Well,” she answered slowly, “I guess it’s saying that if you’re married, then the husband gets to says what’s what because he is superior.”

“Anything else?” I asked.

John raised his hand. “I don’t know what that other word is. Acknowl…”

“The word is acknowledge, and in this case, it’s a verb. Does anyone know what it means?”

Messiah spoke up. “It means the woman or the wife, knows it. Like she thinks it’s ok because she doesn’t do anything to stop it.”

“Ok, good,” I answered. Let’s look at some of these duties that are outlined here. The date is 1622, so that’s almost 27 years after Shakespeare wrote Midsummer. But let’s see if it makes sense. Do you think women would have had fewer or more rights when Shakespeare was writing before the Domesticall Dvties was written?”

“Less,” said Brishene. This girl sat right up front, and I could tell from her expressions during class she wanted to talk but held back. Often her hand would go up and then right back down.

How did you direct this type of whole class discussion? Could students just "get by" without actively participating? Were they more for assigned work, or also part of the consideration for instruction time too?
“Brishene, why don’t you read a few of these duties. Will you read number three?”

“‘The titles and names whereby an husband is set forth do imply a superiority and authority in him, as Lord.’ Does that mean she calls him Lord?” she asked, wide-eyed. “Is he like a God?”

“Why don’t you also read number one to see what else you can find out?”

“‘God hath said of the man to the woman, He shall rule over thee.’ Is that right?” she asked? “Did God really say that? Because it lists the Bible verse.”

“Remember, this is William Gould’s interpretation of The Bible at that time. He is the author of this treatise. And a treatise is like an argumentative essay, the type of writing you have been learning in English class. It focuses on a specific subject and argues a point. This treatise tells us not only about Gould’s ideas, but also about others’ views. Mostly men were writing during the early modern period and often wrote about proper behavior for men and women. Do you think Shakespeare’s characters behave in the same way as Gould describes?”

Brishene nodded her head. “Egeus would like his daughter to do what he says, but she doesn’t want to. The guys, even Theseus, seem to think they can boss all the girls around, but I don’t think they like it.”

Students had a copy of the excerpted primary document, but I also had a copy on the screen in the front of the room where I would be able to annotate and point out specific language or direct their reading. “Look at the top of the page in the box where it says ‘43. Of a wives active Obedience. The spelling here is different, right? Sometimes a ‘u’ takes the place of a ‘v,’ and an ‘s’ looks like an elongated ‘f.’ You might also see an ‘i’ for a ‘j.’ So follow along while I read. ‘If she refuse to doe what he would haue her to doe, her defire is not subiect to him, but to her felfe...to his commandments, readily to doe what he lawfully commands.’ So, does a wife
have to do what her husband commands?” I asked.

Hannah, in the back corner nodded. I made eye contact with her. “What do you think?”

“It sounds like she has to,” Hannah answered.

“I mean, it says the word *law*.”

“Do you think the law extends to fathers and daughters too?” I asked.

“Probably,” she said.

The second page of the document explains how women should behave if a husband asks her to do something unreasonable in terms that could be understood by most middle school students and conveyed first that a female submits to a male in all instances. She should never disobey God’s word, but she should resist temptation to follow

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**Question:** Why then is this extend laid down in such general terms?

**Answer:** To teach wives that it is not sufficient for them to obey their husbands in *some* (my emphasis) things, as they themselves think meet, but in all things, whatsoever they be, wherein the husband, by virtue of his superiority and authority hath power to command his wife... She may do nothing against God’s will, but many things must she do against her own will, if her husband require her.

**Question:** May she not reason with her husband about such matters as she thinketh unmeet, and labor to persuade her husband not to persist in the pressing thereof, yea, endeavor to bring her husband to see the unmeetness (as she thinketh) of that which she seeth?

**Answer:** ...If her husband command her to do that which God hath expressly forbidden, then ought she by no means to yield unto it...her yielding in indifferent things tendeth much to the peace of the family, as subjects yield to their magistrates in such cases maketh much for the peace of the commonwealth...now of the two, who should yield but the inferior?

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Figure 62. Teacher annotations of *Domesticall Dvties*

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Figure 63. Gouge, William. “Of a wives active obedience,” *Of Domesticall Dvties*. Treatise 3, 1622,
her own needs. By yielding, she “tendeth much to the peace of the family,” thereby contributing to the peace of the entire British Empire or what they call the commonwealth. These 13-year-olds knew relationships were complicated. We would need to read more to get a full picture of what it meant to be a female during the sixteenth century but, for now, they understood why Hermia and Lysander felt the need to run away when faced with a disagreeable father whose dogged will to have his daughter marry Demetrius would not be quelled.

Writing Stamina

To begin the next class period, I wanted students to reflect on their learning about family relationships from what they had learned about the characters in Act I through primary documents. This would be the first time students had written about themes in documents, and I was hoping they would be able to go beyond the five minutes I gave them on the first day of class. I explained that primary documents could be anything that was written during a specific time period. Their job was to write about how Shakespeare develops the theme of family relationships by analyzing at least two documents. One document would be the play itself. Other documents would be visual texts, such as Gould’s engraving of the Amazon women and the Scold’s Bridle or the digital text, Domesticall Dvties.

This was no easy task. These were complex sixteenth-century texts, and students rose to the challenge. I gave them ten minutes, and every single student made it to five minutes this time. Approximately half of the group worked the entire time, and half stopped writing between six and seven minutes. This was moderate progress! One student wrote, “Family is a theme in
mid-summer dream by showing how women should act for example egeus want Hermia to marry demetrius but she has other Plans...She has been in love with lysander and wants to marry him. So She wants to defi her father Which Back then is illegal in one of the line Theseus says ‘To you your father should be as a god.’ In Domesticall Duties Women are not as important as men back then so they made rules…” Another student wrote about women obeying their husbands and fathers and had to act respectfully, politely, quietly without being “above” the male members of their families. Both students zeroed in on what they were learning about family dynamics during the sixteenth century through the writings of two writers, Shakespeare and Gould.

Instinctively, they were connecting Hermia’s reaction to her father’s demands to their own by focusing on this portion of the play, but they were reporting the information factually, rather than emotionally. What struck me most, as their teacher, was how focused they were on the language of both documents, citing both Egeus’ words to his daughter and Gould’s language in his treatise. Only a few days into our work together, and already they were moving beyond the mere plot of the play into the realm of Shakespeare’s cultural backdrop. Their writing provided some formative assessment of what they were learning as well as an opportunity to develop writing stamina. Students were learning that they had an opinion and were confident enough to write for
more than five minutes to share their thinking. I saw neither questioning eyes, nor furrowed foreheads, nor frantic whispers. Only writing. It was a beautiful sight.

I was realizing something about middle school students and their reactions to Shakespeare or any other early modern text: a visual component to anchor thinking was valuable. These students live and breathe visual texts daily, both images and visual representations of font, lettering, and spelling. Instead of using the digital text of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the story from scene ii as enacted by the rude mechanicals, I incorporated a visual of Thisbe finding her love, Pyramus, after he kills himself. With this on the screen as a backdrop, I told them the story. What I was learning was how to negotiate between visual and digital, auditory and visual, kinetic and auditory. Transitions needed to be seamless to maintain interest; time on task needed to be lengthened slowly as a narrative unfolded and interest intensified.

### Act II Primary Documents on Conflict and Resolution

1. *Well met Gossip: OR, Tis merrie when Gossips meete.* Frontispiece. Visual Text. (1619)
3. “A Letter of the Lady Jane, Sent unto her Father.” Digital Text. (1554)

The most important piece in teaching Shakespeare’s plays to middle school students, and what I learned in short order, was the need for variability of teaching technique and focus on text relevance. This age group forced me to think about every move I made in the classroom and the
strategies I have tried over the years; I needed to incorporate them strategically. I used my lesson plans as a base but had to be flexible enough to change, edit, omit, and add, much like the techniques I teach students in the revision process. The same holds true for lesson plans; they need to be dynamic, fluid, and open ended. My learning during this experience not only improved my craft, but also enriched my teaching of older students. And now, having used primary documents with older students, I was becoming more aware of vertical alignment. Would it make more sense to use sixteenth-century visual texts with middle school students as an entrance into Shakespeare’s world? Would younger students be most engaged with visuals, such as Hulsius’ 1598 engraving of the Amazons, rather than a John Donne poem or Thomas Adams’ sermon *The Divine Herball*? It was a balancing act I would need to experience more fully.

Act II is permeated with conflict, including Titania’s and Oberon’s stormy spat, Oberon’s retaliatory plan, Puck’s innocent misadventure, Helena’s futile attempt, and Lysander’s delusional blunder. For this reason, I grouped eight primary documents under the theme of conflict and resolution. The letter Lady Jane Gray wrote to her father before her execution, for example, was an example of a conflict without resolution. In the letter she tells her father that she is at peace and can accept her fate. The language, I knew would be challenging. Another document, “The Schoolhouse of Women,” is a poem warning husbands about marrying gossips because “they make as fools.” These texts would bring to light the complex attitudes toward women. The original plan, a jig-saw or “each teach,” included students in groups of four where each read a different document, as I often did with high school students. Students would first read silently, followed by a discussion with other students reading the same document before meeting with the original four-person group to debrief. To be effective with middle school students, I would need to have a teacher or strong reader for each of

47 See Appendix B for Shakespeare Teaching Strategies and Appendix C for Document Teaching Strategies.
the four groups to support others through the documents. This did not seem feasible. If I began with a visual and moved into pertinent highlighted portions of the text, which I projected on the large screen, students would have both experiences. My questions about which documents would engage my students yet provide a rich historical context were eventually answered by the students themselves. Beginning with contemporary examples added tremendous “buy in” and discussions about *Midsummer* and Shakespeare’s world.

Creating Contemporary Contexts

I began by showing the class contemporary interpretations of a trickster archetype. First, I asked them to name tricksters from movies, such as Johnny Depp playing Captain Jack Sparrow or *The Mask* played by Jim Carrey. Their lists were extensive, adding characters and movies I had not considered, such as Kevin from *Home Alone*, Stewie from *Family Guy*, Swiper from *Dora the Explorer*, Billy Madison, Tom and Jerry, and Spongebob. Andy, the classroom teacher, added *The Three Stooges*. “Based on your list, how would you describe the trickster’s personality?” I asked.

“A trickster plays tricks,” said Zach. Everyone laughed.

“Good one,” said Messiah. “He’s funny, but he lies.”

“He’s crafty,” said Harper.

“But in a good way,” said Richard.

“Is he mean?” I asked.

“No!” came shouts from the room.

How did you go about finding these resources/connections? Were the other teachers part of this lesson development? Or had you pre-planned many of these resources before beginning the unit?
We listened to the *Flocabulary* hip-hop version of one Fairy’s description of Robin Goodfellow and the pranks he plays on common folk, such as “mislead[ing] night-wanderers” or “fright[ening] the maidens of the villagery” (2.1.36, 40). Robin Goodfellow or Puck, as he is called in the play, did not seem mean in anyway, but his picture, sketched in 1639, elicited mixed responses. “Let’s look for a full 60 seconds at this picture in silence, noting the details. We will share after the full minute is up.” I dimmed the lights and started the timer. They stared. The minute, I’m sure, seemed interminable, but they remained quiet. “What do you notice?” I asked.

“He’s huge!” said one boy from the back.

“He has boobs!” said another, and we all laughed.

“He has ears like a rabbit,” said a girl.

“But he’s carrying a broom. But what’s that thing in his right hand? A candle? Or a knife?”

“It’s definitely a knife. Look at the end of it.”

“Someone is blowing a horn.”

“Maybe that’s why the people are dancing around him.”

“They’re pretty small.”

“Ok, let’s focus on the bottom half of the picture. What do you notice there?” I asked.

“He has feet like an animal. Like hoofs.”

“Is he supposed to be a devil?” The room was silent.

“Let’s take a look at how differently Robin Goodfellow - or Puck - can be interpreted,” I suggested. “The Folger Library in Washington, D.C. recently presented a very contemporary
version of *Midsummer*. We watched the trailer with Puck played by female actress Erin Weaver who said, “It [the play] really allows us to go on a journey that’s not just fun and playful and silly and magical - but meaningful...I hope this production doesn’t feel like it’s Shakespeare, and it’s too lofty. I hope it feels accessible.” (http://www.folger.edu/events/midsummer-nights-dream) Students noticed her persona was indeed the “trickster type” but definitely not the same as the visual printed by Thomas Cotes in 1639. Shakespeare’s Puck seemed more of a friendly Peter-Pan type, but more spritely.

Students seemed engaged, but I sometimes felt as if I were pulling these students through the information, because I was not sure from day to day which documents or parts of the play would elicit true excitement. Was Shakespeare too difficult for middle school students? Sometimes they put their heads down as if to say, “I don’t want to do this.”

Vassar was literally stretched out over two chairs without much interest in writing. Yet he is the one who had the most to say, who remembered everything I said, who seemed to “get it.” Jordan was quiet but willing to risk answering a question. Hannah remembered details. Messiah had a mind like a sieve and had his hand up for every question but would not write more than a word or two.

I tried something new. I had them turn to the next page in their notebooks to “get ready to write.” I said, “I’m going to show you a clip, and then I want you to write anything that comes to mind for five minutes.” Using Michael Hoffman’s 1999 version of *Midsummer*, I showed the fight between Titania and Oberon, explaining the the importance of the changeling boy (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tfc4BKxl5Rs), then summarized the part when Oberon
instructs Puck to find the flower that Cupid shot with an arrow. “The plan is for Oberon to place a drop of magic flower juice in Titania’s eyes to make her fall in love with the next person she sees.” I looked around and could see they were still focused. Before you begin writing, I’d like to give you just a little more information about early modern fairies. The green world, or the place where fairies lived, provided a ‘free zone’ for girls, especially girls who were a little rebellious. Do you see any rebellious females so far in Midsummer?”

Several hands went up.

“Hannah?”

“Well, Hermia. She doesn’t want to marry Demetrius, so she runs away.”

“Right. Anyone else?”

“How about Helena?” asked Jordan. “She isn’t just sitting around waiting for Demetrius. She goes to the woods to find him and get him back.”

“What about Titania?” asked Chloe. “She’s a fairy, though, but she is saying no to Oberon.”

“Good point. She is a fairy, and in fact may be just a product of the imagination. What that means is that she is not really in human form - she doesn’t think like a human - so she is free to think in new ways about all the rules of society. Does that make sense?” I looked around and could see a few nods of assent. Their eyes were still focused on me, so I continued. “In the next act, Titania will say, ‘I am a spirit of no common rate,’ so that must mean she is a special fairy. And we know that because of what you just said, Chloe. She defies Oberon’s demand for the changeling boy.”

“So is she going to help Hermia?” asked Chloe.

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48 3.1.154
"Well, let’s see what happens next. Remember, they are in the woods, or the green world, which is a bit of a safe zone for females who are trying to assert their own independence. Also, the fairies were thought to be ruled by a female. So, yes, Chloe, you could be correct.”

“I knew it!” she said. I could see her eyes sparkle, and I smiled.

“So as you are writing, think about how Shakespeare might be telling a story that incorporates some of the ideas people had about magic or the supernatural.”

They wrote. Most wrote the full five minutes. Vassar, Jaiden, and Quinden stared out the window. Ryan said she had a headache. Then, I pulled something out of thin air: “Trade with the next person next to you, and we’ll try a silent discussion. If you wrote more than two sentences, raise your hand.” Those who raised their hands traded notebooks with someone near, but I noticed something interesting. Those who had not written much looked around. Their faces told me they wanted to participate. “Read your new partner’s writing and add two sentences of your own to share your thinking with them.” Then, when they returned notebooks and read their neighbor’s writing, they chose three words to describe the movie clip in a “whip-around” where each student reads a quick response. Most participated, but I was still surprised at how this task was impossible for Vassar, Richard and even Messiah. I knew they had written something - even three words - yet they refused to contribute. I’m not sure why. We have no grades. And it’s not that they aren’t paying attention. They are. It must have something to do with their confidence. I needed to find out why.

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49 See Buccola, pp. 61-65.
50 See Appendix B.
Writing Floats on a Sea of Talk

At the end of Act II, we looked at a few primary documents that spoke to the conflict students noted in the play. They were aware of the emerging problem between Helena and Hermia because of Puck’s mistaken identity as he tries to make use of his love potion or “love-in-idleness.” We looked at the visual of the gossip’s bridle again as well as the frontispiece from *The Gossips Braule*, a mock comedy play where female characters do not “know their places.” According to Paster and Howard, a gossip had many meanings, including a godparent, a same-sex friendship, or “female intimates who attended childbirth” who then passed a gossips’ cup to celebrate (218). The most familiar meaning, however, is that of idle chatter or the person, usually female, who participates. Students had a copy of the excerpt from *A Maid Hating Marriage*, a play written in 1523, but I knew this document was too long. I decided I needed to recap the story first. “In this play, two young people, Catherine and her male friend Eubulus, are discussing Catherine’s dilemma with her parents.” I pulled up the play on the projector and drew boxes around specific passages they could refer to later, specifically the ones where Catherine shares her desire to become a nun and her parents’ wishes for her to marry. The students used highlighters or drew boxes on their own copies. In one section, the students read the parent’s response as described by Catherine: “They gave me a promise that when I had attained to seventeen years of age, they would submit to my desire.” So Catherine waited. And waited. She turned seventeen, but her parents changed their minds and broke their promise. They told her she had to marry.

“That’s not fair,” said Brishene. “She should just run away, so they can’t find her.”

“Girls that age could not always do that,” I said. “They had no money of their own and probably nowhere to go. What do you think Eubulus advised?”
“He wants to marry her himself,” said Messiah.

“Well, let’s see what he says. ‘I would advise thee to adventure upon no new thing against thy parents’ minds...To neglect father and mother upon some occasion for Christ’s sake is a pious thing...thou mayest put thyself in the power of a counterfeit father instead of a true one.’ So, does Eubulus agree with Catherine?”

“No!” said a few voices from the side of the room.

“What is his worry?” I asked.

“She might get tricked. But how could that happen if it’s the church?” These students were asking provocative questions, but I still felt as though I was leading the discussion. How would they be able to write a coherent essay on how Shakespeare develops a theme using evidence from the play and primary documents if they were unable to read the documents?

Penny Kittle’s words, “Writing floats on a sea of talk” were in my brain. I needed to loosen or to let go of my own reins on their learning and allow these curious students time to share their ideas with each other before they wrote, but I also needed to remain directed toward the final written assessment. Students needed to practice each part of the essay, adding each piece: examining relevant historical themes and providing evidence from primary documents. First, I drew a graphic organizer to help the students organize their thinking and stay focused on the question.

Next, using the theme of female power, I decided to write an unfinished sample essay,
The theme of female power is one that is in many books and movies today. Females have not always had equal power with males, and during the early modern period, this was no exception. Males were able to decide who would marry their daughters and what their wives would do. William Shakespeare, poet and actor, develops the theme of female power in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, drawing upon what was happening in his culture.
In his play, not all the characters have power and those who try to gain power are punished. For example, Egeus does not allow his daughter Hermia to marry the man she would like to marry, Lysander. She must run away to gain power and even then, she has trouble trying to figure out how to make it work. Titania also tries to obtain power in her relationship with Oberon, but when she asserts herself, he finds a way to punish her: he asks Puck to find a flower, love-in-idleness, so he can squeeze the juice from this flower in Titania’s eyes when she is sleeping. Once she wakes up, she will fall in love with the first person or animal she sees, a joke that will teach her a lesson. Shakespeare shows what happens to females if they try to take matters into their own hands.

As I talked about the play, I began to write the essay at the computer, which was projected on the screen. Yes, it was nerve-wracking, writing in front of these students, making mistakes, correcting them, taking risks. I thought these students would start talking to each
Another example is from the primary document *A Maid Hating Marriage* written by Erasmus in 1523, approximately 70 years before Shakespeare wrote *Midsummer*. In this play, two characters are trying to figure out a problem. Catherine wants to go into the nunnery and she is asking Eubulus for advice. She complains that her parents want her to marry instead. Her friend tells her she must obey her parents. Shakespeare no doubt read this play or heard about it and may have had some ideas about writing at that time.

I asked my students what I should do after I mentioned the title and author. “You need to talk about it,” said Messiah.

...
“Right,” I said. “What I need to do is add a few sentences about that play and then say why I believe it’s important.” These students did not see an entire essay, but they did see me work through the first draft of an essay, similar to one they would write for their assessment. Next, we talked about the question they would answer today, *How does Shakespeare develop the theme of conflict and resolution, using two primary documents, including A Midsummer Night’s Dream, as evidence?* I asked them about conflict: What is it? They were able to tell me it it’s a problem, and the resolution is how it is solved - thanks, Messiah. I swear, he is the only one who answers. They listed other conflicts: Egeus wants his daughter to marry Demetrius, Hermia wants to marry Lysander, Oberon is mad at Titania about the changeling boy, Puck puts the flower drops in the wrong person’s eyes. They realized they had evidence from the play.

We reviewed the visual documents they had seen so far: the Amazons, Pyramus and Thisbe, Robin Goodfellow, and the scold’s bridle. We talked about how to analyze a visual text and reviewed Domesticall Dvties. We scanned the documents from Act II, *The Gossip’s Braule* and *A Maid Hating Marriage*. I also projected the frontispiece of Samuel Rowland’s *Well met Gossip: OR, Tis merrie when Gossips meete* (1602), a dialogue between a maid, a wife, and a widow, considered to be the three female stations of life beyond childhood. During a time when “good” women were chastised unless they were silent, virginal, and obedient, Rowlands’ dialogue of three women enjoying time together without men, may have seemed outlandish. A gossip was more than simply a person spreading rumors; indeed, early moderns may have been referring to a godparent, a same-sex friendship, someone who attended childbirth, or a chatterer (Howard and Paster 218). “Shakespeare may have considered Helena and Hermia to be gossips because of
their close friendship,” I offered. As we walked through the highlighted portions of the play *A Maid Hating Marriage*, we talked about the two main characters, Eubulus and Catherine. They are best friends, and she is sad because she wants to go into the nunneries. Her parents want her to wed. Her parents tell her to wait until she is 17 - she does but then they change their minds. Eubulus tells her to obey her parents. This shows a big conflict.

Leaving the sample introduction on the projector, I gave the students the last 15 minutes of the class to write. They wrote. Just before the bell rang, I asked the students to raise their hands if they were not finished. Most of the class raised their hands. I cheered - and right out loud! “That means you had more to say. Congratulations!” Some days are like that. Just plain good.

Before moving on, I thought it was time to check their understanding of the play (formative assessment). We did a 3-2-1 activity\(^{51}\) where they name three things they understood about the play, two things that were still confusing, and one question they would like to ask. The responses informed my thinking and changed the next day’s teaching strategy. Students were confident about what they knew. They seemed to have the plot line in place sequentially and understood the three worlds and the conflicts that illuminated as the character groups intersected, such as when the royals went to the green world or when the fairies interacted with the rustics. What they were most confused about were characters’ names, early modern language, and misunderstandings when the fairies complicated human dilemmas. Most of these confusions could be cleared up with additional review and a large-group discussion.

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\(^{51}\) See Appendix B.
I was impressed with their questions. I noted a desire to understand characters’ behaviors as well as to predict future events. During the next class, I took the time to answer students’ questions, including:

Bridget: What does the set look like?
Harper: How the rudmacanics are apart of the story
Caden: What is puck?
Rebecca: When was this play created?
Ryan: Why can’t they choose who they marry?
Madalynn: How come a girl can be queen but have little meaning?
Jordan: Why is there so many people in the play?

Students often find that clarity on one point can illuminate the rest of the play, such as Caden’s question, *What is Puck?* Caden plays the role of Puck when we read aloud, so he is admitting that he doesn’t know how to play the role.

Our past discussions about and the visual text of Robin Goodfellow confused him. Caden was really asking, “Am I a good guy or a bad guy?” My answer, “What has Puck done so far in the play that might help you define his character?” actually spurred significant discussion -- discussion which turned out to be helpful as we approached the next set of documents on magic and the supernatural.

When working with difficult texts, it is valuable to frequently assess what the students understand and don’t understand. They were working with a play that required a combination of reading, viewing, listening, and moving (performance) to create meaning. Generating questions, listening to questions of others, and exploring possible answers fostered the mindset of an
inquiry-based classroom. None of us had all the answers. Students became more open to their own confusions. Even if they were not embracing confusion, they were at least in a state of toleration. Their confusions and questions were not roadblocks but an important part of the learning process.
My goal was to move into two short documents, one primary and one secondary that focused on fairies, a topic most middle school students enjoyed, based on their love of fantasy and contemporary fantasy genres. The primary document contained excerpts from *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1665), both discourses on fairies, specifically their behavior and interaction with humans. The secondary document, an excerpted chapter from *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and The Fairies of Shakespeare* (1972), compares Shakespeare’s vision with his pop-culture lore. Each student pair received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fairies of Shakespeare</th>
<th>Digression and Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not demonic</td>
<td>Fairies steal stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sneaky</td>
<td>Capture humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovable</td>
<td>Disturb humans/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very nice</td>
<td>Not kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not harmful</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel for peace</td>
<td>Tricksters (mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuter</td>
<td>Wear green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuse to discomfort</td>
<td>Live in mountains and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>taverns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t demand money</td>
<td>Dangerous to refuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for service</td>
<td>fairy gifts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 68. *Text comparison on fairies*

both documents, each student reading one or the other. While reading, they annotated, jotting margin notes that commented on the text, such as Burton’s description of Robin Goodfellow as “a bigger kinde” of hobgoblin that would “grinde corne for a messe of milk.” One student wrote, “seems like human size” and “does jobs for food.” Students then convened in two large groups. Standing with those who read the same document, they shared their annotations, questions, and speculations. Back at their partner tables, they each made t-square notes where they reviewed
the content of their documents, then boiled down big ideas into bulleted points. I roamed the room, looking and listening for ideas from each group I could put on the whiteboard. When students noticed I was taking notes on their thinking to transfer to the board, they began to work more earnestly to see their own ideas transcribed. Eventually, I had transferred many of their ideas about the two articles to the board. This was the first time these eighth grade students had read and discussed documents independently, creating their own meaning and comparing authors’ ideas. It was loud in the room - and focused - a sure sign of engagement.

Teacher Reactions to the Document Approach

I was excited, but I knew it was time to check in with the other teachers. Did they feel the same roller coaster effect of intermittent success and failure, independence and dependence, passivity and engagement? A meeting after school brought the rest of the team together to report success and vent frustration. “It’s going fine in here,” said Kathy, looking across the table at her student teacher. “Megan is doing a great job.
At first she watched the video lessons, but now she is working on her own. She did a character chart on the wall where she puts up character names as they appear in the play. We have to revisit that every day. These students simply cannot remember who is who.” I looked at the wall and saw the names of the main characters with arrows pointing to their love interest. It was a great way to manipulate the names to show how relationships changed throughout the play.
“Most of the time, I feel like I don’t know what I’m doing,” admitted Megan with a sad smile. Each day I have to review the plot. I’m getting more and more behind!”

“What happens when time is literally running out at the end of the school year? What considerations should a teacher take into account?”

“Do we have a time limit set in stone?” I asked.

“I’m also behind the original schedule, but if it doesn’t matter, then we’re ok.”

Andy nodded. “We don’t have to rush,” he said. “Let’s just do this and not worry about it. This has been fun!”

“But, of course, I’m lucky,” I said. “When I am teaching, I often have two other adults in the room.” Andy participates right along with his students, asking questions, reading aloud, and diligently writing, modeling student behavior. Normally, he sits next to Ty, who needs extra support, so he can jump in and help at any time. I can actually draw a circle around him and note the students who are watching him participate and learn. How beneficial it was for the students to see their own teacher going through the same experience! He partners up with anyone nearby, modeling amiable attitude and perseverance. In addition, Linda, the special education teacher, is there to work with Ivy, Brooke, Quinden, and Zachary. Each day she touches base with each, helping them to be caught up, focused, and on task. Support systems are in place.

My situation made me wonder. What about those teachers who do not have extra support staff in the classroom solely to assist students?

“How is Benson doing in his English class?” I asked Linda who works in two of the English classrooms, providing support and making accommodations.

“He’s not in the same place. His strategies are somewhat different, but he’s getting there. I don’t think he has the same type of student you do,” she said, looking at me.
“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, his students are more advanced. They can discuss more things, and they seem to catch on quicker. He makes use of film more to help students visualize what is happening. He did have one problem, though. A parent called and said his daughter may not read *Midsummer* during this unit. The play is about fairies, and that is against their religion. So we will have to find another play for her. He wanted to use *A Comedy of Errors*. What do you think?”

I looked around, noting that the other teachers were looking straight at me. “I guess times have not changed since my first year of teaching,” I said. “That happened to me when I taught *Romeo and Juliet*. It wasn’t fairies, though. It was the double suicide.”

“What did you do?” asked Linda.

“What I think we all do when these things happen. We give choices. And Benson chose a great play for an alternative.”

“It’s what we do,” said Kathy.

Another topic of discussion was the assessment. We reviewed the content, which included three new primary documents. Students would choose one to read and to analyze how Shakespeare develops similar themes in the play. As in the other grade levels, students would also need to show how the theme continues to be relevant today. “Now that we are in the middle of the play and have used some primary document with the students, what are your thoughts about your students’ ability to read independently?”

“I don’t see how they can do it,” said Linda. “My special needs students will need support.”

“I agree,” said Megan. “My students are struggling with the documents big time.”
“You’re doing great,” assured Kathy. “These are tough, even for the honors class I have.”

“But, wait,” argued Andy. “I think we should give this a try. I am watching my students work through them, and they are doing so much more than than even a few weeks ago. We might be making assumptions that they can’t when they can.”

“We could add more pictures,” I offered.

“That would help a lot,” said Linda. “Or maybe only use the primary documents they’ve already seen.”

“That could work,” said Megan.

I tried to come up with a compromise. “What if we work with all of your ideas?” I asked. “I could add some visuals and a few of the documents we have shown them and then add one or two new ones.” They all nodded. I knew just the document that would work.

Writing About Themes

To move toward the unit test incrementally, students practiced writing the first part of the final essay by developing their ideas about the theme of magic. They were beginning to write for at least twenty minutes by the end of the third week, and I wanted them to think about a theme and play with thesis ideas. Once I told them I was going to put up some of their writing to show good models of introductions, I realized I had just stumbled upon the one strategy that proved to be a “game changer” in the classroom. Suddenly students’ writing stamina improved as well as their vocabulary. They had more interest in spelling correctly.

Vassar always had his head in a book, mostly fantasies or Stephen King. But, when it came to writing, he simply put his head down and refused to participate. I knew if I could just
get him to put his pen to paper, I could find out more about what he knew. Finally, he wrote one paragraph, but it was worth sharing. With Vassar’s permission I pointed out some of his vocabulary, such as “remotely dabble” and “magical entity” on the data projector.

“I can’t write like that!” said one student from across the room.

“Dang, that’s boss!” said another. I could see Vassar was somewhat embarrassed, but his eyes told me he was proud of his work. From that day forward, when the class wrote, Vassar wrote.

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Magic is everywhere today with horror movies, however some of the oldest work that even remotely dabble with magic or the supernatural in their work was William Shakespeare and in this case his character, Puck. Now firstly Puck isn’t the only magical entity however he is the only one who was overtly magical as he was the one who turned Bottom into a donkey, also he goes by the name Robin Goodfellow which is the singular of Robin Goodfellow’s, another name for tricksters.

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Figure 70. Student introductory paragraph

Given the power of sharing student work with the class, I made sure that all of them had their writing up at least once.
Work and Rank

The final practice writing we did focused on the theme of work and the rude mechanicals in *Midsummer*. Several documents illuminated the life of early modern craftsmen and the nature of work. Documents on work and rank were as varied as the levels of station: some were visual, such as the title page from Turberville’s *The Noble Art of Venery, or Hunting* in which the queen is shown with her courtiers in the woods, seemingly taking a rest after a long morning of hunting. Courtiers are seen resting on the ground or standing with each other next to their horses, talking. What may not be as obvious are the mounds of food and drink being served—provided by workers back at the castle—as well as those who are serving the repast. Another document, *The Schoolmaster*, written by Roger Ascham in 1570, outlines the importance of education, especially how children should be taught. In an excerpt from another Shakespeare play, *Richard II*, a gardener related to one of his hired help how to trim back the dead weight of an apricot tree, a metaphorical description of how Richard should have “plucked up, root and all” the dangerous weeds (men) from his own garden (England). Another writer, John Milton, also wrote about work in an excerpt from *Paradise Lost*. In Book 4, Eve suggests to Adam that they divide their time-consuming and challenging work in the Garden of Eden until “more hands / Aid us,” a reference to their future progeny. Adam is not so anxious to work “when we need /

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3.4.30-58
Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,” gently rebuffing his partner with the reasoning that they were created to be happy, not to work. Rather than provide a variety of digital text, I chose one excerpt from *The Statute of Artificers* (1563) because of its timeliness, 30 years before *Midsummer* was written, and an accompanying visual that I knew would be of interest to middle-school students. The statute was passed to banish idleness. In other words, laborers *had to go to work*. The interesting part of this statute was that only those adolescents whose parents earned three pounds per year could work. When I use documents with students, I can sometimes predict their reactions. The theme of work, however, was different. Many of these middle school students felt an immediate connection to work issues, specifically ideas about poverty, work, and
class. Using a shared reading strategy, I gave each student a copy of the excerpted statute, and we read through the five short sections, followed by an analysis of the 16th century woodcut of a beggar whipped and dragged to the gallows to be hung. Students were aghast at the visual representation of a poor person who would be hung for begging on the streets. Compared to the freedom in our own country and the countless people on the streets they have witnessed sitting or standing on corners with signs or openly approaching shoppers in parking lots, this treatment of the poor and downtrodden may have seemed foreign and yet there were familiarities. In a discussion that vacillated between the past and the present, students voiced dismay about hostility toward the poor and recent attitudes toward immigrants. They were equally surprised

“Reading literature without a view to historical trends and the shape of the world as we know it in the present can lead us to underestimate the capability of literary artists and to trivialize the act of literary interpretation.” ~ Allen Carey-Webb

about early-modern workers who knew, by law, they had to work. Truthfully, I had trouble with this document. I know I could have done a better job of breaking it down, wondering if only incorporating the visual text would have been a better choice. My students surprised me with their insights. Several focused on the text. One said, “I want to write about work on the final assessment.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because there’s so much to say about the play and about my own life. I’m trying to imagine what it would be like to live in a place where you could only get a job when your parents owned land and had money.” Other students added to the discussion.
“It says in Section VI there’s a ‘penalty for [unduly] dismissing servants.’”

“Yeah, that means servants can’t be fired.”

“But the servants can’t leave either.”

“So, what do you make of that?” I asked.

“They seems like prisoners, in a way.”

“Well, let’s read the next line. Ryan, will you read?”

“‘In all, the statute consisted of forty sections seeking to limit the mobility of workers, to prevent unemployment and vagabondage, to control the hours and conditions of work, to adjust wages...’” Ryan looked up, clearly puzzled.

“Let’s take this slowly,” I offered. “If Parliament would like to ‘limit mobility,’ they may not want workers moving around a lot. It says they don’t want unemployment or vagabonds, which are people who don’t live anywhere in particular. They roam about, looking for food and shelter. So what do you think?

“I guess,” said Ryan, “they just don’t want people out of work, probably so they won’t beg and try to get something for nothing.

“Any other ideas about the purpose of this statute?”

“Well, it says in the introduction that it’s supposed to ‘create stability in the labor force,’” said Jordan.

“What do you think that means?” I asked.

“So that more people are working?”

“What kind of work do you think the statute is addressing?”
“Maybe the kind those mechanicals are doing, like carpentry, and using your hands,”
offered Ryan. He seemed quite excited about this piece. “I get that they all need jobs to have
food and something to do. Can I write about this one on the test?”

“Of course.” We were venturing into important discussion topics, and I was noting a
shift in their ideas and possible stereotypes of the rude mechanicals and their class status. When
we first met the rustics weeks earlier in Act I, I had asked them to describe these six characters.
Messiah had shouted out, “Poor people!” Now their idea of poverty and the idea of how the poor
were treated was changing. The rude mechanicals in Shakespeare’s play were not the vagrants
discussed in the Statute of Artificers. Their jobs as carpenter, joiner, weaver, bellows-mender,
tinker, and tailor were respectable trades, similar to those in the graphic The Noble Art of Venery
or Hunting depicting many, important “behind the scenes” work. Initially, the mechanicals may
have filled a comedic role, but now issues about work during the early modern period was less
based on one Shakespeare play and more on the synthesis of many documents. Similar to the
high school students who concluded the ghost of Hamlet’s father was “an early modern ghost,”
these eighth grade students were beginning to understand class structure and its relevance today
through different lenses. I realized this was an area that needed more time. I made a note that the
next time I taught this section I would spend more time on contemporary issues about the
relationships among poverty and crime and the unemployment rate in our country. Companies
here in our own state, for example, have relocated, leaving hundreds of workers out of jobs. Our
own school district, a middle class suburban school - and recently described as “sub-urban” -
worked with students who were homeless, living out of cars or with friends and neighbors.
These were relevant issues I knew begged discussion.
The Final Assessment

The actual process of taking an hour-long written exam still seemed daunting. I decided to give my students a practice run, right down to how to organize their materials on their table tops. I made a diagram, and they practiced setting up their materials, including how to stack their writer’s notebooks, foldables, and plays for easy access. We reviewed what a document could be, either visual or digital, and discussed possible models for organizing ideas. We practiced writing for 30 minutes to see if their stamina had increased. I watched them talking with each other about their foldables, the documents, and some were reading earlier quick-writes or drafts. Practice writing now was focused. The “heads down” disinterest had been replaced with furious writing and confident eye contact.

On the day of the final, it was my impression that students were both nervous and confident. They had learned about the play, the documents, and the assessment. They knew they could choose any theme on which to write but had to focus on the documents provided. When they opened the booklet, they smiled. They had seen most of the documents: *Of Domesticall Dvties, The Scold’s Bridle*, the engraving of the Amazon warriors, the painting of Pyramus and Thisbe, the picture of Robin Goodfellow, and, of course, the Statute of Artificers. What they had not seen before was an excerpt from Act III of *Romeo and Juliet*, where Juliet is beseeching her

Figure 73. Students simulate final assessment day.
father to listen to her. An accompanying contemporary picture from the 2007 movie shows a belligerent Capulet screaming at his daughter: “Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch!” (3.5.158). They would recognize the play as well as the discord between father and daughter, similar to Hermia and Egeus in *Midsummer*. They wrote. I walked around the room, conferring and calming. These students knew what to do, and they gave it their best. The next day I shared many essays as proof we had *all* succeeded. What was most important, however, was how the students felt about the experience with Shakespeare using primary documents.

**Shakespeare and Documents in Middle School**

The teachers I worked with had different and evolving judgments about teaching Shakespeare in middle school and incorporating primary documents into the curriculum. I surveyed their opinion intermittently to see how their ideas changed immediately after teaching, six weeks after teaching, and then, finally, three months after teaching. Immediately after the unit’s completion, all five teachers reported that the documents “helped students understand Shakespeare’s world.” Two teachers added further that students better understood themes in the play and, surprisingly, felt they were better teachers as a result. All but one said they would
continue using documents the next time they taught. One wrote, “I’m not sure” and then followed up with “I would not use them as the primary focus. To me, the main objective is an understanding of the play. When the documents can aid this without taking away time from learning the play itself, I will use them as supplements to increase student understanding.” Although opting to use them again, the other teachers qualified their responses. One said, “I would use fewer documents, only choosing a few important ones to help them understand the time period, and not use them to teach on a theme. The students had a difficult time connecting the two and I struggled with explaining it.” Another added, “Allow more time in class to read and interpret the documents and connect the documents to scenes in the play.” One teacher suggested we compile all primary documents into one packet that could be given to students and addressed one at a time to help kids see them as all connected, giving a picture of the time period.

When asked what they learned from the primary documents, teachers conveyed an interest in learning about the time period through this unique approach. One teacher stated she gained “a more accurate picture of how Shakespeare's plays would have been understood in his time.” All teachers who used primary documents described their own learning as valuable, interesting, and accurate, admitting that despite some confusion at first, students made connections to themes on a deeper level through close reading of primary documents other than Midsummer. The entire unit was described as a process where students gained confidence as they learned to discern the relevance of the themes to their own lives. All but one teacher believed the extra time spent on the cultural and historical backdrop of the play was worthwhile. Benson, a middle school teacher who has a strong background in Shakespeare and who enjoys including both film and performance, did not believe the documents were worth including,
simply because the unit was becoming too long. “Three weeks is about all they have,” he said.

“After that, they’re done.”

Megan, the student teacher who was working with one of the veteran middle school teachers, changed her thinking about student learning after six weeks of reflection. She was ready to think about how to adapt both the material and the process:

When I was in it, it wasn’t going as well as I thought it did. Now I feel differently. They did better than I thought when I was teaching it. They looked at more complex text and language and, overall, it helped strengthen their regular reading and writing. It doesn’t seem as hard to them now. I thought they did well on the assessment. The kids who are already strong did well. The others, those who have IEPs - well, there wasn’t much growth for them. It was harder for them. Really, though, they all can do it, and it should be continued. The primary documents were hard, and some didn’t see the connection. They got exposure to both the visual and the digital documents and to the play too. Some really loved it. They were excited to get up in front of the class and do some acting. Most all the student got the plot because we talked about it so much. (Skinner)

“What were some of their favorite activities? I asked.

“They loved doing the hand motions with the lines,” she said, eyes sparkling. “And breaking down the lines. The movie too.”

“What would you suggest for the next time around,” I asked. “How would you approach teaching Midsummer with other primary documents to eighth graders?”

“I would start with the plot and language first. I would definitely talk about the themes and find documents to relate them to today. Maybe they could find present-day references to Shakespeare and spend more time setting up his importance. I’d like to see them make connections before getting into the plot. A lot of what we did I would do again: a little reading, a little acting, a little watching.”
Three months later, the middle school team met to consider whether or not to teach *Midsummer* again the following year. The consensus was that next year they would teach Shakespeare’s comedy using primary documents to all students. Kathy, the veteran teacher who also teaches one eighth grade honors class reported that 12 out of her 60 students enrolled in her two general English classes chose Shakespeare as their favorite unit. She said, “I thought it was a pretty high number out of nine units, especially for students who are not necessarily strong readers and writers. What I liked the best was that it was a good way to integrate primary sources. None of our other units require that kind of reading and synthesis, so this was their first time. The struggle didn’t surprise me.” Kathy felt students seemed to take this unit of study more seriously. “They wrote and wrote and wrote,” she said. “It was pretty awesome. A lot of kids went right to the magic part, that and the love triangle.”

The students who read *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and contemporary documents learned about family, work, customs, and beliefs—providing a rich context for the time period in which William Shakespeare lived and raising important questions about the relationship between the 16th century and the present. Ninety-two percent of the students I worked with reported on the final survey that the documents they read were either somewhat or very important to the study of Shakespeare, but their written comments were as diverse as the classroom population. For every positive comment, such as, “I thought it was cool learning about some of the history behind it all,” blatantly honest students admitted, “i did not like learning about shakespere it isconfusing” or “it was boring and i will never us the knowledge ever again.”

Most students, however, were in the middle, qualifying their comments by thinking a little more deeply about why we would study a 16th-century playwright and by trying to make sense of his world through a 21st-century lens. Why, indeed? One student reminded me about
the power varied strategies to increase engagement: “Reading Shakespear was fun but challenging, it deffinitly made it better to act and watch the movie to help understand the language. I never thought that we use Shakeare themes in todays world but they are all around us.”
References


CHAPTER VI
SONNET MOMENTS

At the end of the school year, many high school English teachers reflect on what they taught, how students progressed, and where holes appeared. Did we teach enough grammar? Is the curriculum aligned? Is my teammate progressing? Very rarely do we wonder if we taught enough of Shakespeare’s sonnets. In fact, if we teach one sonnet, we may feel we are ahead of our language arts colleagues. Yet, most teachers will admit that the sonnet structure, tightly bound in meter, rhyme, and length, is interesting and worthwhile. Then why not? Why do teachers shy away from teaching the poetry that Shakespeare turned to after the theaters closed, poetry often noted as titillating, provocative, and lustrous? In many cases, high school teachers simply do not have time. Some feel tied to the poets and poetry anthologized in textbooks provided by our school districts - where a few sonnets do appear. Some are drawn to contemporary forms, such as free verse or spoken word, that initially seem more accessible and relevant to our students. Some may feel most comfortable teaching other types of imaginative literature, shying away from the genre that requires close, close reading.

So, why the sonnets? And, specifically, why more than one Shakespeare sonnet?

According to Helen Vendler, Shakespeare structures the sonnet predictably, incorporating three quatrains, followed by a couplet and using a systematic ababcdcdefefgg rhyme scheme. Teachers could find more than a few predictable 14-line poems “enough.” Even so, Shakespeare does not unfold the speaker’s emotional perceptions through a prescribed, sequential strategy. It may be that for each sonnet, Shakespeare hands us his magic reins to steer our course through his
thought nuggets. And that is what the sonnets do: provide us with one man’s poetic genius - his
doubts, his fears, his dreams, and his joys - all in 14-line imaginings.

This book has explored early modern historical and cultural themes, big ideas that weave
their way into and thus fashion identity and behavior. This chapter, however, is not solely about
how to teach the sonnet form or the genius of a single individual. Instead, it puts forward an
approach to primary document teaching you might like to try. It describes an experiment in
giving freedom, emphasizing process, and fostering student inquiry. Student-led inquiry. And
that is why this chapter is so important: it points to how students, through their own questions
about Shakespeare’s sonnets, find their way toward intertextuality as they investigate historical
and social ideas.

I wandered off my path of teaching Shakespeare’s plays, all poetic, dramatic, iambic
narratives, and wondered what would happen if students read his sonnets with no prescribed end
goal. What if students simply read and wrote about the ones that had speaking power, that made
their hands clammy, their tongues dry, or their hearts hurt? What would happen? It occurred to
me that with the freedom to turn - either back at the past, to the present or future - that students
might reach for more information. Would they want to know if the speaker was Shakespeare
himself or if the love interest was a man or woman, or if the rival poet’s effect was downright
debilitating? Would they find themes and issues in the sonnets that made them curious about the
time period or connected to present day concerns? My hope was that William Shakespeare’s
sonnets would seem “real” to today’s teenagers. Their believability would be based on reading
his words within a twenty-first century cultural mindset. If Vendler is correct in that a poet’s
duty is to “create aesthetically convincing representations of feelings felt and thoughts thought”
It's interesting that only 1 AP Lit student chose this project and more AP Lang students did (given they had less experience or context for Shakespeare). Do you think this is significant? What may have been their motivations for choosing this project over others?

(16), I believe that, if given time, high school students could and would lose and find themselves in sonnet moments of their own.

When I suggested an open-ended sonnet project to the juniors remaining in AP Literature and AP Language after the seniors had graduated, four were interested. The juniors’ end of the year project is a self-driven, chance to explore a subject. With the sonnets, I wanted to see how students would steer their own course if given ample freedom and a book of Shakespeare sonnets, a journal, and loose parameters. To begin, I provided a handout to each student describing two general goals, exploring Shakespeare’s sonnets along with early modern documents and looking into connections between the sonnets and pop culture today. Daily journaling about sonnets, research, and process encouraged students to think about the how as much as the what during this three-week study. Next, I purchased six different sonnet books, three with the sonnets only, and three Folger editions that provided more assistance in word definitions and explanations. Students chose the type they preferred as well as a journal for their writing. They knew this was an “experiment” of sorts, a project that would be student-driven and process-based, including sharing their learning at the end of three weeks. The struggles with understanding the sonnets and researching the time period would in themselves be important and would be shared.

I had faith in these students, but I wasn’t sure if I had faith in this experimental, student-directed process. Normally, high school students, even advanced ones, are teacher-monitored, teacher-facilitated, teacher-bound. Normally, teachers are success-oriented, assessment-sensitive, curriculum bound. Would students adapt to a self-driven learning experience? Would

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53 See Sonnet Project, pp. .
they understand the structure of the project and the sonnets? Would they enjoy the experience? Would their curiosity drive them? Would primary documents support them?

One student had some experience with sonnets during his year in AP Literature, having studied Macbeth and the sonnet form. The other three students remembered reading one Shakespeare sonnet in honors ninth grade English. Other than having read at least one of his plays, that was the extent of their background.

So, who are these students? After a week into the unit, I met with each to learn about their initial sonnet investigations.

Sam Preston, a junior, describes himself as a diligent student who does what he can ‘to make a good future for myself.’ He believes a study of the sonnets could be something fun and admitted, “I wouldn’t usually do something with poetry. I have always loved history and looking past the original plays and seeing what was going on. Also seeing how it affected other branches of art.” Sam’s background in Shakespeare includes reading A Midsummer Night’s Dream in eighth grade, Romeo and Juliet in ninth, Macbeth in AP Literature, and Othello on his own. “Before this year,” he said, “we never really read Shakespeare for understanding, just for the plot. I knew the themes – like Romeo and Juliet – the theme of love. I was always told what it was about, what the teachers wanted me to know. Now [in this project] it’s more open ended. I want to see what other themes are prevalent.” After spending some time reading the sonnets and choosing a few that he connected with, Sam believes Shakespeare wrote a lot about time and love. “If you put them side by side, you can see how they weave together. He [Shakespeare] saw time as the
inevitable passage of life. It also dealt with love too. Like the one where he writes about devouring time.”

When asked which sonnets “spoke” to him, Sam knew right away. “I really like number nineteen. It was so deep. Nothing can stop time’s passage. But with love, it makes it easier. With literature, one can stay forever young.”

Not ever having studied the sonnets before, Sam loved the freedom of the project and the opportunity to decide for himself how to use primary documents to explore Renaissance art that might also connect with the themes of Shakespeare’s sonnets. “For one of my documents, I used a portrait by Jan Van Eyck’s painting of Arnolfini in 1460 of two lovers. In it you can see they are expressionless. Through their touching and where they are placed, you can see their love. At that time it was more quiet between a husband and wife because it was sacred. It was really hard to find a painting of two lovers. Mostly then it was religious. It was tough to find.” Sam’s process was searching the Internet for famous paintings from the early modern period that fit the theme of love. “I don’t confine myself to one research method,” he said. “I wouldn’t have found Everyman if I hadn’t done it this way. I let the research take me where I wanted to go.”

Jill Muraski describes herself as focused, especially during a big project. “Sometimes I think I push myself too hard,” she admits, “but I’m trying to find better balance. Sometimes I let school run my life.”

Jill signed up for the sonnet project because she loves Shakespeare and had never done anything like this before. “I thought this would be a neat way to find out more about him in a different way.” Jill has read several of Shakespeare’s plays and saw one stage production in Chicago. Despite not understanding all of what was happening
as a younger student, Jill saw Shakespeare as a challenge once she entered high school and tried to figure out the early modern language. “We did a packet or on the screen, and we’d have half the original and half rewritten, but personally, I like trying to figure it out by myself. The two experiences were somewhat the same – sometimes we had parts. Or we had to reenact a scene in a group.” Jill admits she has never read any sonnets other than “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day” [#18] as part of a Shakespeare unit in ninth grade English, after which they had to write a sonnet.

When asked what she had learned so far in her early research on the sonnets, Jill saw a contrast between the themes she saw in the poetry and what she had found out about in her research on his personal life. “One thing that sticks out to me is that he talks about what love should be and yet in his own life he was writing to a mistress.” Jill is drawn to the dark-lady sonnets and is working to find out who he was writing to and why. Although she had not researched any documents yet, Jill mentioned prior experience with primary sources in other classes. “It’s not new,” she said.

When asked to describe herself as a student, Hannah reflected on her philosophy of life. “I always try to do my best,” she mused. “I push myself a little too hard sometimes, but I’d rather do that and get things done quicker.” Hannah has been interested in the sonnets and since her ninth-grade experience with reading one. “Now that I’ve read more of his sonnets, I wonder why teachers only select the love sonnets to go over in class. No one talks about the weird ones, and now I realize they are all so different.” Like other freshmen at our school, Hannah read Romeo and Juliet but it was confusing to her. “I couldn’t understand
why these teenagers did what they did. I thought it would be interesting to study Shakespeare. I knew he was a playboy - a little bit of a player - but I didn’t even know he was married. Apparently, he has kids. One of my teachers said he liked to be different, and I think it’s good to go against the grain.” Hannah’s research revealed that Shakespeare “was an interesting dude,” but people don’t really know much about him. “I haven’t gotten through all of the sonnets yet. The ones that are popular are really pretty, especially the first ones where he says to have children. These sonnets are like the back door into his life.”

David Jenkins is a self-proclaimed “boundary crosser” but only if he can learn something from that experience. “Time is precious,” he said, “so I like to have a reason for learning.” This young man is on a straight path to a career in plastic surgery, so I found it unusual that a science-driven young adult would be interested in Shakespeare’s sonnets. He explained his fascination with pre-nineteenth century texts as “related to the time period,” knowing Shakespeare is the best during the sixteenth century. David admitted he is not necessarily into poetry, but the sonnets seem like a story on one page. “I know nothing about the sonnets, really. But I am interested in his style and what he has contributed, like the screen writers of today.”

David dove right into the research to find out what he could about Shakespeare’s work and thus the man. He was excited about what he was exploring and noted, eyes sparkling, Thomas Thorpe published the sonnets in 1609. “Maybe Shakespeare didn’t want this published,” he said. “The sonnets all seem like reasons to be in a relationship. Everything he has written is about love, devotion, integrity. I wonder if he was in a relationship and that was
why he wrote these. Is this 154 reasons to put himself out there?” When asked which sonnet
had “spoken to him,” he mentioned the first three as they are numbered in his sonnet book. “I
related the first one to the narcissistic person. This sonnet seems to be Shakespeare’s reservation
- why he hasn’t done anything so far. Love always seems to end in tragedy for him. In holding
back.”

“How are you reading the sonnets?” I asked. “What is your process?”

“I use the left side of the page to help me figure it out. First, I read the sonnet three times
and then read the left side. It gives a summary and the definitions – this is the Folger part. That
way I can see if I have gotten it on my own, but I can double check my thinking. I like learning
how people learn from their mistakes.”

“How have you previously studied Shakespeare?” I asked.

“Normally we would listen to the teacher read parts of a play alone, and parts of it we
read along. We were silent, though. We didn’t really analyze it. Sometimes we would act it out,
but I don’t ‘think’ when I read that way. People were memorizing their parts and not even
thinking about what it meant. I didn’t like that.”

“What do you like?”

Well, in eighth grade, we read Midsummer and analyzed it as a piece of literature. We
did a lot of writing and looked at Shakespeare’s life. I liked that. I would like to read a few plays
- maybe read just the beginnings - and say to myself, ‘Where are these plays going? What are the
common grounds?’ I’m just not sure about the sonnets yet. The plays seem more tied together.”
Exploring

After interviewing the students, I had a bit of a “what now” moment. These students were all “self-starters” and interested in investigating how Shakespeare’s sonnets reflected not only his world, but also theirs. My approach did not mean a thorough hand-washing of their needs for the next three weeks as they muddled through their own process. I established, organized, and maintained a framework for myself. These four students had full range of motion throughout the project, but I had resources in place for all of us. I checked in with them daily, and they felt free to come to me throughout the three weeks with thoughts, questions, and concerns.

How each approached the sonnets and the cultural/historical backdrop of early 17th-century Europe was based on how the sonnet language and the themes stirred their thinking. Throughout the first week, they read and wrote about what the sonnets were doing. Sam began his journey by writing questions he wanted answered as he read. His questions first seemed centered on whether Shakespeare’s experiences were driving his writing. His final question, however, focused his direction: How does Shakespeare’s work translate into modern pop culture? Sam was not only finding connections among the themes, but also noting similarities between the 16th and the 21st centuries. He immediately noticed the human obsession with time and its “omnipotent nature.” In his earlier writing, he could see how love, Shakespeare’s antidote, “has the power to combat the haunting progress of time.” Sam’s writing was something I looked forward to reading at the end of each day. His prose, descriptive and thoughtful, provoked my own thinking. He described the symbiotic relationship of time and love in Sonnet #12: “But wherefore do not you a mightier way / Make war upon this bloody tyrant time?” According to Sam, it is indeed Time as a powerful being whose “clutches has everyone.” Finally, he asks What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object? From this
moment, the idea of how art represents love and time became the connecting bridge between these two foes.

Both Jill and Hannah, students who were in the same class, decided on a process together. They read the sonnets silently without supplementary help and wrote a short summary and reaction. Next, they searched the Folger edition to check understanding. Jill’s notebook, with marginal headings of “My Thoughts” and “Folger’s” for each sonnet she read also included her comfort level with the poem. She evaluated Sonnet #3 as “harder to understand” and, after reading the Folger explanation, realized that the speaker was not addressing himself, but rather the reader. Her writing, organized and methodical, revealed some frustration, especially with Sonnet #7, which caused “the most confusion so far.” Deciding this sonnet to be “a little sexist, if you ask me,” she wrote about how fading beauty can be forgotten through procreation if only a son, mirroring his father’s image, is born. After exploring the sonnets for four days, Jill decided
to research fashion to see where it led. She wrote, “I don’t know much about fashion, so this could be interesting.” In her writing, she explored some ideas about fashion during Shakespeare’s time as well as costumes from his plays.

Hannah chose to read the introductory material in the sonnet books to learn about Anne Hathaway and their children and how the sonnets were categorized by the editor. Her notes included themes, such as “jealousy, obsession, self-loathing, delight, and lust, as found in the introduction.” At the end of day one, Hannah posed some exploratory questions: Who is W.H.? Was Shakespeare in a homosexual relationship or was he writing about a friend’s experience? Was he having affairs? Did he marry Anne because she was pregnant? Working together gave both girls autonomy and collaboration. Each read the sonnets silently and took personalized notes. Unlike Jill, whose writing was divided into two categories, her initial thoughts and Folger notes, Hannah’s notes were divided visually by sonnet. By day five, her thinking and writing had changed; she was now more reflective. She wrote, “I definitely see a lot of stuff about beauty & Living on & leaving heirs. But I also see happiness in them too.” Later, her ideas changed again and she remarked, “I’m kind of looking at maybe delving into how events going on around him impacted his writing… another thing that seemed interesting was looking into who exactly commissioned the sonnets & what they paid for them and could you making a living off of writing them...also looking into what made him start to write about rival poets could be super fascinating.” Hannah had many paths she could take but decided to begin researching as many as possible to find one less traveled. She was on her way.
Checking in with the students who were working on the sonnets was a daily yet unpredictable occurrence. Sometimes we talked for a few minutes at the beginning of class, and sometimes we spent half the hour researching documents together. During the first week, most seemed busy reading and writing, with the exception of David, whose busy schedule and involvement with an AP biology project precluded consistent work within the classroom. His writings, sandwiched into his free time, illuminated some interesting questions. Focused on the publication of the sonnets in 1609, David’s concern was centered on the purpose, more than the themes, for Shakespeare’s writing. He wondered if Shakespeare’s sonnets were simply musings, exercises in sonnet writing, and nothing more complicated than “a laundry-list of reasons for himself to be w/ someone...154 reasons for himself to find a mate.” It occurred to David that Shakespeare’s plays contain love, heartbreak, and loyalty. Could it be possible that the sonnets were a break from the dramatic genre and not, in fact, for publication at all?

Finding a Niche

By week two, I met with students individually to see where they were headed and to answer questions and to listen to each student articulate what they were thinking about the sonnets and what types of primary documents would support and guide their research. Our individual conferences reminded me of how diverse these four students were in their project process. Jill had copious notes on each sonnet but seemed somewhat unsure of how she would go about researching fashion. She seemed slightly resigned to, rather than excited about, her topic. We discussed how some scholars divided the sonnets into two groups, the first 126 written from the speaker’s point of view to another man and 127-154 written to a “dark lady.” Jill’s eyes lit up as she said, “I want to look into the mystery of the Dark Lady. He references her but
nevers gives an explanation about who she is. I want to research this mystery.” After our meeting, she posed questions in her journal:

- Who was the Dark Lady?
- How is she connected to Shakespeare’s life?
- Did she represent anyone/anything?
- Was she a living person?

Jill’s list, Things to Look For, reminded her to focus on visual descriptions as she reread and to research repeated words and changes in tone throughout the sonnets. “I’m just absolutely fascinated by whoever this person was and why there’s a ton of sonnets about her.” Invigorated, Jill excitedly went to work and jotted words in her notes about themes. She found repeated words, such as black, beauty, and mourning, and thought about unconventional beauty as an emerging theme. By day nine, she noted that she was neither focusing on one sonnet, nor one theory. Rather, “I’m focusing on the mythology/conspiracy of the Dark Lady and the prime suspects: Lady Penelope Rich, Mary Fitton, Jane Devenant, Lucy (an African prostitute), and Queen Elizabeth.” Both Hannah and Jill collaborated on the research, settling on Mary Fitton. Jill’s notes were filled with possibilities, including the real W.H. She believed it would have to be to William Herbert as if to say, “I know your secret” or “Look who I’m with, too.” Hannah seemed as interested in the object of the speaker’s love interests, having found two websites she was scouring, The Monument: Shakespeare’s Sonnets, written by Hank Whittemore and Shakespeare’s Sonnets, written by Dr. Michael Delahoyde of Washington State University. Both
websites provided information for both girls as they debated the age-old question *Who were the objects of the speaker’s love, fear, and jealousy?*

Each day, Sam focused on artistic representations of love to compare how love was expressed in paintings during the Renaissance Period. Were early modern ideas of love different or the same as today? After great difficulty in finding a piece of artwork, he chose Jan Van Eyck’s *Arnolfini* (1434), analyzing how the couple’s relationship is depicted. What Sam found most interesting about the painting is the lack of obvious emotion conveyed by both the husband and wife. “At first I thought it would be futile to try and use the two for a theme of timeless love, but as I inspected the work more, the love became more apparent.” Subtle clues in the painting began to take shape, such as the placement of the figures, the woman close to the bed in a traditional motherhood role and the husband toward the window with the light of the patriarchal world shining through the window and on his face. The green dress, Sam notes, “is seen as symbolism for new growth” in addition to the dog between the two but closer to the woman as a signifier of loyalty. To tie the two themes of love and time together, Sam chose a modern, Saatchi art, *Town of Time* (2005) by Sergey Tyukanov. Despite the dead disrupting The living in the painting, Sam noted that time is something that cannot be erased as shown by the hourglass-shaped buildings. “The artist provides an insightful view on time, showing it both as civilized and destructive,” he wrote. Sam’s attention to detail focused on the couple
sitting atop the tallest clock tower, seemingly oblivious to the rampant destruction below. “The lovers are left in a world of their own,” he mused, “demonstrating the nullifying power love has over time.” Sam chose sonnets 18 and 19 as ones that personify time as an unstoppable force as well as a foe. In number 19, the speaker understands the power of words. Unlike time, where the present is quickly swept into the past, writing can be savored, kept, cherished. In this sense, the speaker’s love poetry can be timeless and more than simply a measurement of age. Sam cited the final line, *My love shall in my verse ever live young*, as the part of the poem that “says it all.”
Sam’s exploration of Shakespeare sonnets that speak to the symbiotic relationship of time and love eventually brought him to some new thinking. He described his reaction to the first line of sonnet 12, “When I do count the clock that tells the time” as one rather transcendent. Now he was thinking about the speaker’s feelings about death. “It seemed as if Shakespeare reviled death,” he wrote. “By using words such as ‘hideous,’” a tone is established. It seems like Shakespeare was more mad at time, rather than frightened by it. However, he knew its power and saw there was little one could do to stop it.” Time is also the enemy in Marvin Bell’s 1937 poem “To Dorothy,” a love poem Sam researched for statement on eternal love. The goal, finding relevance in Shakespeare’s work, prompted a search for more contemporary poetry that mirrored the sonnets’ sentiments. “In Marvin Bell’s poem time is the enemy,” Sam said. He quoted a few lines - “If I lost you, / the air wouldn’t move, nor the trees grow” (Lines 10-11) - “Love is extremely powerful,” he said, “so powerful, in fact, some would rather cease to exist than live a life without it.” And it looks like time just stands still without it. Nothing grows. Nothing moves. “Both Bell and Shakespeare are saying the same thing,” he said.

The Power of Collaboration

In addition to working independently, the students, specifically Sam and David who would not normally see the other students, needed time together to discuss their findings. I was excited about the opportunity to listen to their discussion, following the twists and turns I hoped it would take. I had no idea if they would simply summarize their research or if their discussion would lead them off the beaten path into uncharted territory. Initially, students began by sharing their work. Sam gave some background on his process, walking the girls through his powerpoint
presentation while Jill and Hannah listened respectfully. Jill shared her ideas about the Dark Lady as well as her list of possible “suspects.” Ruling out Marry Fitten because her life didn’t seem to coincide with Shakespeare’s, Jill said, “Jane Devenant is popping out to me. When I was researching, I found she was the wife of an innkeeper in Oxford. In 1606, Jane had a son who later revealed, ‘I am the son of Shakespeare.’” Jill summarized her feelings about sonnet #127: “He uses the word ‘dark,’ referencing eyes, skin, and hair. His language relates to one of his earlier plays from *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, and I found a theory that his sonnets and the play were written for a certain person, the ‘dark’ lady.”

“Was the dark lady African?” asked Sam. “I feel like Shakespeare wrote about women in a progressive way. Othello was a Moor, and Shakespeare didn’t stereotype him in any way. Segregation in Britain may not have been as bad as it was in America. Shakespeare seemed to be ahead of his time.”

“I wonder if he’s defending his mistress at the same time he was writing his sonnets,” Jill said.

“Maybe he fell in love with someone else but couldn’t show it. I wonder if he couldn’t marry a black woman. I don’t have the feeling he ever loved Anne Hathaway. He abandoned her when he went to London. This idea of forbidden love in *Romeo and Juliet* is kind of like this idea of not being able to marry who you want.”
“But there’s 20 years difference between *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and the sonnets. That’s a long time to love someone,” said Jill.

“In Othello, he marries Desdemona who is white,” answered Sam. You never really hear about what was happening in that part of the world. Were blacks discriminated against? I know nothing about that. I feel like they didn’t depend on slavery like Americans did. There may not have been. I’d like to read the laws about slaves at that time. Slave masters too. Or first hand accounts of blacks at the time.”

“Look on *LUNA* and put in slavery to see if blacks were discriminated against,” said Hannah who was typing furiously on her laptop. “I found ten items on slavery and an image during when Cromwell was in power.” Hannah spent time looking up documents while the others looked on. “It talks about the Turks taking slaves,” she said. “*The History of the Royal Slave* was written in 1688, not that long after Shakespeare’s writing. “I wonder if Shakespeare had the personal experience of the things he talked about.”

“Did he do this for the money, or was he truly in love with someone else?” asked Jill.
“I have no idea,” answered Sam. But Hannah, the group’s research expert, was already into *The National Archives*, the official archive of the UK government.

“It says here slave trade routes were not open until 1698, well after Shakespeare passed away, but that in 1640, slave trade was booming.”

“Are you familiar with Joseph Turner’s painting *Slave Ship*?” I asked. It was becoming increasingly difficult for me to absent myself from the group’s conversation, and I noticed we were getting close to the end of our hour together. “See if you can pull up the painting, Hannah.” The painting was done in 1840 but depicts what was happening in the late 1700s. Slave trade was very real at that time. Men, women and children were thrown overboard because they were sick and wouldn’t bring in any money if delivered in that condition.”

“What’s that sticking up out of the water there?” asked Hannah.

“A foot,” said Sam. Everyone was silent. And then the bell rang.

“Oh, no!”

“Hannah hasn’t even talked about her research!” said Jill.

“We definitely need more time,” said Sam.

I loved the fact that these students were so excited about sharing their findings yet did not simply stop at that point in their process. They were raising and developing important questions that called for further exploration. I wanted to position myself as interested in their inquiry and eager to learn more along with them. At this point, the best way I could facilitate our group’s community was to read their writing. The next day, the students journaled about their collaborative discussion and how it informed their thinking. Sam wrote about how the conversation suddenly shifted when he asked Jill if she believed the dark lady to be African. He
said, “Suddenly we were all enthralled. Never before had I thought about who the dark lady really was. Yet with Jill’s presentation I was curious to know about this curious figure. Questions started flooding my brain as I am presented with this new conclusion. So I ask the question, ‘What was life like for blacks in England during Shakespeare’s time? All three of us begin to formulate ideas, however none of us have a clue. Never before had we been presented on black lives in England in Shakespearean times. We knew a lot of the African American fight in America.”

Hannah’s writing was equally passionate about her learning that day. She referred to the topic of slavery in Britain as a “super cool rabbit hole that we decided to explore.” Hannah’s love of research led her to pictures of African children during that time period. “In those pictures their clothes look to be very well made. They aren’t what many would - at least in the U.S. - expect a slave to wear. One of the children even had lace on her bonnet and frock. From there we looked up some of the laws pertaining to slavery and found that there was more trade of non-living goods than anything else. Also they were more indentured servants than they were slaves. So we were thinking that it could have been possible for the dark lady to have been of African descent.” Despite the focus on Jill’s project on the dark lady, all three found connections to their own projects, realizing in short order how primary documents, both visual and digital, could fill in the gaps, answering questions that they were posing during their time together. None of these students seemed concerned about the final product as much as they were interested in deepening their knowledge about Shakespeare’s world when he was writing. Jill wasn’t able to find documents on slavery on *LUNA* through the Folger Library though there was information about trading goods. She turned her attention to Amelia Lanyer as another possible “suspect” in her search for the dark lady.
Simon Forman, an astrologer, wrote about those who came to see him regarding their future. Jill found his journal and noted that Lanyer had visited him several times during 1597, which was just before Shakespeare turned to sonnet writing. Forman’s notes indicated Lanyer was concerned about her husband pursuing knighthood, her miscarriages, and how she missed her days in the queen’s court. According to Jill’s notes, “Forman was interested in having sexual relations with her.” By the time of the presentation, Jill identified both Devenant and Lanyer as possible subjects for many of Shakespeare’s sonnets. “The true identity of the Dark Lady will probably continue to elude us for years to come.” What I found most interesting about Jill’s process is that she began the project with an interest in fashion. It took her approximately two weeks of daily reading, writing, researching, and discussing to arrive at an impassioned project topic. The road she traveled was as important, if not more important than her end goal, to share what she had learned. Finding Forman’s journal was the gem she uncovered in the process and her most treasured find. I could have provided Jill with articles or with information I have collected, but Jill’s excitement about her research grew with her discoveries. Her personal sonnet moments became an impetus for growth.

How long were these presentations? How were students presented with the expectations of the project/presentations?

Sharing the Wealth of Shakespeare’s Jewels

On presentation day, students in the sonnet project shared their findings in a variety of ways. Sam projected a powerpoint of the art and poetry he researched from both the 16th and the 20th centuries. It was important to him to remember in detail the sequence of what he learned as he examined how Shakespeare’s themes of time and love intersect and co-habitate
Sam ended his presentation with a final thought about the project. “Never before have I looked at Shakespeare’s work as I do now. I had never really had any background in reading Shakespeare’s sonnets, even though they were easier to read than most of his plays.” In his journal, Sam admitted that after the project’s completion, he felt more confident in himself. The work was difficult, he explained, but taking the time to dig was worth the effort. “The reason his sonnets are so important is because they allow for the exchange of ideas through time itself,” he wrote. He felt the process boosted creativity and challenged him to read between the lines. “So why don’t schools focus more on his sonnets?” he asked. “Plays are equally important, but with his sonnets, there is a free range of themes and ideas one can take from just one piece.”

Jill and Hannah presented their research at the same time. Jill acknowledged that they took different approaches to their work, even though both of them were trying to solve a dilemma. “I wanted to figure out who the dark lady was and came up with the top four suspects,” she said. After explaining her reasoning for ruling out two, she named Queen Elizabeth as a possibility. “I don’t think it’s her, though, because you don’t really expect the queen to have an affair with Shakespeare. Also, there weren’t many times in history when they met.” Jill believed Amelia Lanyer is the most likely candidate because Simon Forman wrote about her in his journal. “His notes reveal it could be Shakespeare.” Hannah identified the second mystery: *Who was the fair youth who was the subject of Shakespeare’s first 126 sonnets?* “All of his sonnets seems to be written for WH who could be one of his patrons.” A lot of sonnets were commissioned. The first 26 were to a “fair youth” who might be William Herbert,
the Earl of Pembroke, or Henry Wriothesley, the 2nd Earl of Southampton. “I’ve done a lot of research on the matter, and I don’t really know who the fair youth could be,” she admitted. “Another interesting tid-bit is that some people think Shakespeare didn’t write the sonnets. Shakespeare is so big – why don’t we know this stuff about his life? We really don’t know much about him.”

“You both read most of the sonnets,” I said. “Teachers tend to teach the most famous, such as ‘Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day’ (18), ‘Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds’ (116), or ‘My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun’ (130). What do you think about the sonnets you read compared to the ones most often taught?”

“Don’t just do the famous ones,” said Hannah immediately. “Those aren’t the ones that are interesting. It’s the others that really tell stories we want to know.”

Fostering Independent Study in Your Class

Teachers may wonder if an independent sonnet project could ever work with general English classes. I can hear you say, “Ok, this may work for AP, but it would never work with my students. My students are struggling readers. It just won’t work.” Perhaps not in this way. But I do believe that Shakespeare’s sonnets can create opportunities for learning and growth for all students. Having taught Shakespeare using primary documents to both middle and high school students who are not AP students, I know students are interested in gender, stories, love triangles, jealousy, and equality. And, according to all of the students who were involved in this project, they all love a good mystery and the chance to solve it. The most important teacher tools
for teaching the sonnets to all students are part of the Gradual Release Model: collaboration and independent practice.

- **Background information** - Some students may not have any experience with Shakespeare’s plays or sonnets, so having some background will allow students to begin a similar project. Without any prior knowledge, students may not know where to begin, even with the greatest of interest. For this reason, I developed a handout that outlines the sonnet structure, and some basic, background information on Shakespeare’s body of work as a whole, such as how many he wrote, scholars’ ideas about subject matter, possible chronology, patterns, the dark lady, and the rival poet. The goals, process, and parameters of the project can be adjusted to suit any time frame and age group.

- **More time for collaboration** - Students of all abilities need more time to share ideas and work together on a common project. Often their conversations take unexpected twists and turns that lead them on exciting adventures. Not all students are ready for long periods in group work where they feel free to be “off task.” I start with small increments of time where students have only five minutes to discuss a topic and are held responsible for sharing their findings. Eventually, add time as students demonstrate focused conversations.

- **Socratic Seminars** - Students benefit greatly from large-group discussions, especially those based on shared reading. Allowing students to read a sonnet and discuss what it means in a large group helps clarify thinking and add ideas. To scaffold this experience, allow students time to read and annotate the sonnet, followed by “partner-talk” with the person sitting next to them. Project a global question on a screen or write it on the board, such as *How does the speaker define beauty?* after reading sonnet 130. Students should
be encourage to take notes during the discussion to help them craft their writing on the same question the next day.

- **Student-generated rubrics** - Allow students to create the rubric for a sonnet project. After reading many of Shakespeare’s sonnets and discussing some of the narrative possibilities, provide a rubric template\(^{54}\) that is broad enough to include diverse exploratory projects. Allow students to work on rubrics in groups, which will also provide opportunities to discuss interest areas. Rubrics can assess work ethic, progress, and findings as well as presentation modes (panel, power point, speech, reader’s theater, podcast, or film).

- **Focus on primary documents** - Students need help with how to access primary documents,\(^{55}\) including not only which online sources to research, but also how to access early modern language. Some students may wish to concentrate on visual text while others may wish to research journals, letters, recipes, sermons, or catalogues. Primary documents provide inroads to Shakespeare’s culture, which depicts his own popular culture. Most students who study either his plays or poetry are immediately drawn to how his life differs from their own 21st-century lens. Comparing the early-modern vision of beauty to what social media presents today is both motivating and relevant.

- **Journaling** - The value of writing every day in middle and high school language arts cannot be overlooked and creates a platform for discussion in small and large groups. Daily topics that include student learning - whether they hit a dead end or a jackpot - provide students with clarification of what they are seeking as well as what they are finding. For teachers who regularly confer with students during independent reading

\(^{54}\) See pp. 37-38.

\(^{55}\) See Appendix D.
time, journal entries can be the focus of discussion and a time for individualized help. “Silent reading discussions” when students read others’ journal entries and provide written, rather than verbal, feedback, is a time when students find out more about their peers’ inquiries in a non-judgmental environment. Journaling can also provide the seed for further research, such as when a student writes about Shakespeare’s sonnets on nature and later delve into John Girard’s *Herball* (1587).

- **Focus on process, rather than product** - Part of the beauty of the Sonnet Project was the freedom to decide how to share findings. Sometimes students are so worried about the product that valuable research time is cut short, just when the process is becoming most exciting. It wasn’t until the last week of the project that the students realized their individualized topics all had a similar thread: racism in Britain. Without time to research, write, and *collaborate*, their individual research topics would have been the pinnacle of their learning. Research and writing each day can become tedious without an end goal and based on the class make-up and dynamics, sharing can become part of the process without becoming overwhelming. Some novel ideas for novice researchers may include:

- Roaming team leaders,
- Poster walk,
- Panel discussions,
- White spaces,
- Class book,
- Triad presentations,
- Name that poem,

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56 See Appendix G.
○ Group websites,
○ Blogs,
○ Voicethread
○ Shakespeare Kahoot, and
○ Interviews.

Looking Ahead and Making Meaning

The final step in the project allows inquiry to continue long after the project’s end. Like a toboggan run where initially we slide quickly down a chute - or a rabbit hole, as Hannah described - doggedly and single-mindedly searching for answers to personal questions, we finally shoot out of the chute, destination unknown. As learners, we know that our process never simply stops. We continue to travel at breakneck speed, veering left or right, tumbling over, or simply slowing to a stop. It is indeed during this end run that we consider and reflect: Where would my research go next? I do know from student discussions during the Sonnet Project, they became extremely interested in Britain’s history of slave trade in comparison to the United States. They also considered “othered” groups during the seventeenth century based on how Shakespeare portrayed Africans, Jews, and women in his plays and sonnets. Often Sam mentioned how progressive Shakespeare’s writing must have been and wondered if he faced personal tribulation as a result. Finally, Shakespeare’s personal life - his wife, his children, his mistresses - all seemed both intriguing and conflicting. Students wanted to know more, but we simply ran out of time. Essentially, the project ended, but thinking continued. We do know students should have ongoing, diverse opportunities for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and research, all during their sacred time in language arts. A study of Shakespeare’s sonnets can
address each strand. What students learn from reading different kinds of documents, exploring controversial ideas and materials, and making comparisons and connections across documents, period, and ideas is invaluable. Specifically, in this unit I noticed students’ growing skill with inquiry. I had not realized how much skill in questioning relies on practice. Initially, students read the sonnets independently and collaboratively, looking for meaning based on their ability to scrutinize language. Close reading is a skill they knew; none of these four students had experienced any other way of diving into early modern poetry. It wasn’t until they began to search beyond the perimeters of the poetry, beyond the four corners of the text through historical visual and digital documents that their reading began to have real meaning.
Sonnet Project

Materials/Resources
Shakespeare’s sonnets book
Journal
Online digital and visual resources

Goals
● To explore Shakespeare’s sonnets through early modern primary documents
● To find relevance in Shakespeare’s sonnets by exploring pop culture today

Requirements
● Write daily in your journal about your reading and research, specifically about the themes you see emerging in his work.
● Research the early modern period to understand Shakespeare’s cultural/historical influences. Explore both digital and visual text, including art, music, and fashion.
● Research pop culture today and think about how Shakespeare has influenced your world and you.

Resources
Please ask for anything you need, including articles, websites, and books. Think about watching lectures and documentaries and listening to podcasts and audio readings by famous performers. One of the most helpful resources will be the Folger Shakespeare Library (folger.edu), specifically Luna, which allows access to students for exploration of artifacts from the early modern period. Some of the following sources may help you begin:

Podcast on Didriksen transformation of popular music into sonnet form

Green, John. Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Crash Course Literature 304. 27 July 2016. Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDpW1sHrBaU
Background on the sonnets, including #18, #116, and #130

Ted Talk on how communities shape poetry

Sonnets set to contemporary music

Reading the sonnets in American sign language

Starbuck’s attempt to rewrite sonnets in brief form

Voicethread
https://voicethread.com/products/k12/
Creating voicethread projects

Website devoted to the sonnets with focus on dark lady and the fair youth

Project Ideas
You may present your reading and research in any form you wish - be creative! The following is a springboard list:

1. Create a notebook of primary documents you found that support the themes in sonnet 130. This is a spoof on the sonnets that came before Shakespeare, those that used the blazon where poets complimented their love interests by comparing their physical appearances to nature. Read some of Petrarch’s sonnets to compare to Shakespeare’s. Present artistic representations of what was considered beautiful during the sixteenth century.

2. Find three sonnets about love, including sonnet 116. Research sermons from the 16th or 17th centuries that describe or prosthelytize the love between a man and a woman or about marriage. Look for other love sonnets, such as those of Sir Philip Sidney, to compare style and themes. Look for plants listed in John Gerard’s Herball (1597) to see if any plants were used for medicinal purposes to combat love sickness or melancholia. Make a powerpoint or book of readings and drawings showcasing your findings.

3. Find sonnets about writing or about Shakespeare’s rival poet. Share other poetry where early modern writers wrote about their writing, such as Anne Bradstreet’s “The Author to Her Book.” Research how poets were published or about copyright laws during the early modern period. Share the insights of a scholar who wrote about how sonnets were shared with others as well as prints of Shakespeare’s work in manuscript form.

4. Explore three sonnets about nature or life. Research natural remedies for sickness as well as plant lore of the early modern period. Compare how we use natural remedies today with what Shakespeare experienced in his own world. Sketch the plants you research and make your own catalogue of plants and their attributes.

5. Research Renaissance painters, focusing on themes you also see in Shakespeare’s sonnets (female beauty, Greek mythology, upper class). Choose both Renaissance and contemporary artistic works to compare in a voicethread project.
Background Information on Shakespearean (English) Sonnets

- Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. He turned to sonnet writing after the theaters closed because of the plague. Other poems included “A Lover’s Complaint” and “Venus and Adonis.”

- The structure of Shakespeare’s sonnets:
  - A sonnet contains three quatrains and one couplet.
  - Quatrains consist of four lines, every other line rhyming.
  - A couplet is a two-line rhyme.
  - The three quatrains usually explore a problem as if the poet is saying, *what if* or *when this* happens. The couplet does not solve the problem explored in the three quatrains. Rather, it addresses or makes a comment on it.

- Italian sonnets have two sections, rather than four, but have the same premise: problem and solution or problem and comment.

- “Venus and Adonis” was extremely popular with the upper classes. The literacy rate was only 10% in Britain, so Shakespeare’s plays were seen by all classes; sonnets were read by few.

- The first 126 sonnets are believed to be about a relationship between the speaker and a man. Numbers 127-154 are written to a “dark lady” thought to be Amelia Lanyer (among others).

- Sonnet sequences were a popular art form: a string of sonnets that make a story. Scholars differ as to whether or not Shakespeare’s sonnets were a sonnet sequence.

- Themes and subthemes in Shakespeare’s sonnets:
  - 1-60 (procreation)
  - 40-42 (love triangle)
  - 78-86 (rival poet)
  - 104-26 (best writing)

- Renaissance ideas of friendship between men based largely on classical models (Aristotle), no sense of homosexual identity; sodomy was a capital offense; many of Shakespeare’s sonnets had strong homo-erotic themes and explored both homoerotic and heterosexual themes.

Your research will uncover much more about Shakespeare's sonnets, and his world. Enjoy!
References


CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation project, an historical/cultural approach to teaching Shakespeare using primary documents, provided multiple opportunities for growth. Working directly with students allowed me first-hand knowledge about their comprehension and engagement; working with teachers gave me insight based on their observations of my teaching as well as their own experiences teaching with documents. The conclusions I have drawn from this experience result from a year of preparation, 18 months of direct classroom instruction, and honest feedback.

As a “zero hour” teacher, beginning at 6:30 a.m., I had two available hours at the end of the school day, affording me access to my colleagues’ classrooms as well as the middle school in another building. During two months, I taught the 110 students assigned to me as a full-time instructor of five Advanced Placement English Literature classes. I spent the remaining time with other teachers’ students. In all, I taught four plays and worked with three high school teachers, four middle school teachers, two special education teachers and one student teacher. I worked with five grade levels in nine different classroom settings, directly teaching 210 students and monitoring and mentoring teachers who taught an additional 460 students. In total, 670 middle and high school students studied Shakespeare using primary documents. The numbers of students and the variety of experiences provided ample data to draw conclusions about the project and to determine next steps in research and teaching.

Student Feedback

During each Shakespeare unit, I spent from four to six weeks with each teacher’s class. At the end of each play, I asked students with whom I worked directly to fill out an anonymous.
survey, answering questions about the experience. Approximately 172 students out of the 210 or 82% of the total population responded. The responses, both quantitative and qualitative, provided valuable information to help me move forward. Well over half of the students had already studied at least one Shakespeare play, but out of 172 responses, 124 anticipated difficulty in reading and understanding early modern language. This number dropped significantly to 72 after having read a play and primary documents. Students checked a range of responses describing the purpose for using sixteenth and seventeenth century documents, such as they “helped me understand [Shakespeare’s] audiences” or “helped me understand the historical period.” Despite varying responses to how the documents were valuable, over 156 or 91% of the participants responded “yes” to the statement, “Primary documents were important to the study of Shakespeare.” In short, most students believed the documents to be instrumental in their learning. Although more than half of the student population - 72 or 65% - had never read primary documents before this Shakespeare unit, the results below show that working with documents helps not only to increase understanding, but also to decrease anxiety. The summary of their responses (below) is one important piece of evidence for further research, development, and implementation of this document approach.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY STATEMENTS</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is my first experience with studying a Shakespeare play.</td>
<td>59 /171</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought the play would be difficult to read and understand.</td>
<td>124 /172</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now I believe the play was difficult to read and understand.</td>
<td>67 /172</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary documents helped me understand his audience.</td>
<td>74 /171</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary documents helped me understand the historical period,</td>
<td>109 /171</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>such as how people thought or acted 400 years ago.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary documents helped me better understand how the themes Shakespeare</td>
<td>75 /171</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed are still relevant today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary documents were important to the study of Shakespeare.</td>
<td>156 /172</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A combination of approaches is most important to the study of Shakespeare’s</td>
<td>82 /171</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have never read a primary document before this unit of study.</td>
<td>72 /171</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student comments in the narrative section provided additional information, underscoring the importance of understanding historical/cultural issues. One eighth grade student wrote, “It is very important to learn about old documents expecially shakespeare because he developed many themes we still use today.” Another typical response described the anticipated difficulty level but qualified, “Shakespeare’s work is important to read because the themes he developed are still in the world today.” Of the 24 qualitative responses from the middle school, only four were emphatically negative, complaining that it was boring, useless, or irrelevant. One student commiserated that learning about the space program would have been more useful. Older students tended to write lengthier responses about their experiences with primary documents, primarily assessing them as valuable and necessary. One student who read *Macbeth* stated,
“Overall, Shakespeare can help us understand why things are the way they are today.” In general, the qualitative responses provided the explanations for the quantitative data.

Student responses, during direct teaching and from the surveys, provided crucial information. First, positive reactions to the documents were not dependent on age or ability; rather, variability in interest stemmed from the type of document. Some students, for example, were more interested in documents about social issues, such as sexuality and gender. Others preferred visual representations, such as sketches of fairies or woodcuts of skeletons. Still others preferred political treatises or religious denouncements of witches. What this tells me is that the variability of document genres and topics are at the heart of student engagement. Second, discussions about the issues emerging from the documents provided the depth and breadth of thinking that I have not previously experienced in previous years of teaching Shakespeare. Students comments revealed an interest in “what things were like back then,” which provided many more discussion topics than a simple plot line for each play. Through intertextual discussions, students questioned and explored varying attitudes - about gender differences, for example - providing rich topics for debate. In many cases, the issues we discussed were those that they cared about and had meaning. Third, both the survey and commentary revealed an increase in metacognition. Students reflected more on their own learning and often wrote about how, rather than what, they were learning. Providing students with time to reflect on their learning allowed me access to their thinking but also helped students discover their own interests and strengths. This will be an area that I will increase as I strive to improve my own craft in teaching Shakespeare. I learned as students increase their own self-awareness about their learning processes, the more proactive they became when facing obstacles.
Teacher Feedback

Teachers also provided valuable information throughout the project. Classroom observations included teachers watching their students’ reactions while I taught, watching their other colleagues teach, or watching filmed lessons. They communicated their feedback through email, texting, “hallway meetings” between classes, and after school debriefings. I asked questions often and took suggestions seriously, often changing a classroom strategy (sometimes the next day) and reporting the results to all the teachers. In this way, our communication was ongoing and fruitful. Many of the conversations we had involved student reactions, but others included suggestions for improvement.

One strategy I learned and intend to develop is where in the lesson I introduce the documents. My initial thinking was to have students read an act before reading early modern documents with similar themes. It seemed logical to read Act I, scene v, in *Hamlet* before reading other perspectives on ghosts and the afterlife. My colleagues had different ideas. Why not show the picture of Thomason’s English antick at the very moment Hamlet decides to put on an antic disposition in Act I, scene v? Why not show the *Rainbow Portrait* of Queen Elizabeth’s gown covered in eyes and ears when King Claudius convinces Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet? In future Shakespeare units, I intend to experiment with placing documents strategically to see how they are received and if student writing and discussions deepen.

Another idea that came from teachers was the need for vertical articulation. Shakespeare had never been a staple in the middle school English/language arts curriculum, so they observed the process with new eyes. They knew their students well, having developed strong relationships long before I entered their classrooms, and anticipated how their students would react. Sometimes, however, their students surprised all of us. Twelve- and thirteen-year-olds generally
prefer visuals to help them understand Shakespeare’s stories, especially with so many characters to keep straight. My middle school group were excited about the Amazon engravings but, given time and practice, they also became comfortable with digital texts, resulting in new knowledge. I began to see how strategic planning, from grades eight through twelve, would give rise to intentional work with primary documents, specifically the balance between visual and digital text. The middle school teachers taught me how shorter excerpts with more visuals would help students during initial readings. They appreciated the narrative approach, in which we told stories about early modern culture, interspersing documents throughout, but cautioned me about using too many over too long a time span. I noted what is needed is consistent, honest communication among teachers who are working with Shakespeare’s plays. It is important for course teams to share teaching strategies and resources and even more important to build a consistent approach to teaching Shakespeare, beginning at the middle school level. Taking time to share our thinking about which documents we are using as well as how we present them will be a crucial next step.

I also learned the value of connecting to contemporary texts. Several teachers suggested including documents that students could compare to early modern documents. This is an additional step, but one that might help students think more deeply about the relevance of sixteenth century historical/cultural issues. Early modern primary documents have been at the core of this project, but it was one of my colleagues who, after the Romeo and Juliet project was over and we had a chance to revisit this new approach to Shakespeare, brought up text comparisons. “The first time Romeo and Juliet meet and create that beautiful sonnet together, wouldn’t it be cool to find a contemporary love poem to compare?” Other documents, such as current gun control laws to contrast with Queen Elizabeth’s proclamations, would indeed provide
context for their own society. I see a few ways that this addition might happen. First, teachers could research of a few starter documents to place alongside similarly themed early modern pieces to compare similar cultural issues. Another strategy might be for students to research their own documents, depending on their own interests. Given some instruction and accessible websites - available in Appendix D - students might take this on as an activity while they are reading the play or as a final project. Increased student choice relative to researching and learning about primary documents has been an important piece I learned during this project.

Student Choice

It was the final piece of this dissertation - and one I faced with the most trepidation - that pushed my thinking and caused my own views about teaching Shakespeare to change. When four students had the opportunity to read Shakespeare’s sonnets in an experimental student-driven approach to using primary documents, they showed me just how differently students process as well as how valuable time to explore increases student engagement and thus learning. As I move forward, I will provide more time for students to independently explore at their own rate and in their own way. This might mean time to reread; it might mean time to write about their learning; it might mean time to collaborate with others. In the future, I would like to explore avenues for increased student choice in other ways of expressing what they have learned about Shakespeare’s plays and primary documents. One high school art teacher has expressed an interest in students painting plants and herbs from the Renaissance Period, which can be compared to any of the sixteenth century botanical catalogues that include the “vertues” of each plant. She is willing for my students to use Art Department resources as well as her own mentorship for such a project. A history teacher also mentioned a new focus in his classroom: how literature speaks to
historical/cultural issues. I plan to have more conversations with him regarding how we can collaborate in the future. The Internet also opens the door to opportunities for exploration, such as fencing demonstrations, documentaries on Queen Elizabeth, and contemporary film versions of Shakespeare’s plays. Some schools have theater classes but, if not, productions are available online for students viewing, which could spark an interest in how casting and costuming has changed over the years. To increase student choice, I envision future multi-disciplinary projects that include writing, productions, or Internet products that could allow them to further explore their historical/cultural insights and connections to the present day.

**Collaboration**

I have also been reminded that good teaching is collaborative; the more tightly-fisted we hang on to our own ideas about *how* and *what*, the less impact we will have on the educational community. One of the most gratifying parts of this project has been in working with enthusiastic, talented teachers who, through collaborative efforts, were open to new ideas - to change. It’s true that the impetus must come from within. But I have learned through experience and many mistakes, I admit, that changing a long-held approach - from comfortable and reasonable to different and unfamiliar - can be scary and sometimes intimidating. I had the best of all worlds: teachers who were willing, administrators who were supportive, students who were agreeable, and the positivity that was contagious. Hopefully, through careful consideration of feedback and reflection, I will have gained the wisdom necessary to refine this new approach to teaching Shakespeare. It must be a collaborative effort, including many teacher voices, to move forward dynamically. Positive forces of change must be ever present.
The problem we teachers often face is how to fit in the time for collaboration, planning, and debriefing. Our days are filled with classes and often have less than an hour to keep up with a basic daily agenda. Following up with struggling students, answering emails, and grading papers leaves us with little time to meet with grade level course teams. Strategic planning is the only way, and often one teacher spearheads the effort. Assigning one or two substitute teachers to teachers’ rooms for a few hours can allow time to collaborate or to observe other teachers’ classrooms who are teaching the same unit. For teachers to incorporate a document approach to teaching Shakespeare or even to add a few to their existing plans, I have realized the importance of time for ongoing collaboration, which involves time to research and discussions about resources.

Resources

From the beginning of this dissertation project, my goal has been to write a book for teachers introducing an historical/cultural approach to teaching Shakespeare. After studying texts for secondary teachers, I have not found any that include middle or high school classroom stories about students who are studying his plays - their conversations, their thinking, or their struggles. I hope teachers “hear” their own students’ stories within these pages and, from their voices, learn how documents can be a part of their own classrooms. I also know how much teachers now rely on online and interactive sources to help them create relevant lessons for today’s students. Sometimes I have had to research many different sites to find the resources I needed to create one lesson. Time is always of the essence. Teachers have mentioned countless times the value of having resources grouped together on one site and organized by play. A book will incorporate a narrative approach to teaching Shakespeare, but the website -
TeachShakespeare.net - could be the “one-stop” place where teachers can access documents, lesson plans, slides, and other links to activities, handouts, project ideas, and rubrics.

I have worked with many student teachers, new teachers, and veterans who seek resources for teaching. This project has shown me the need for easily accessible resources. This year the Chicago Shakespeare Theater is offering an all-day workshop for teaching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. I would love to see all of the middle school teachers who taught that play to attend. The reality is most of them will not have the time or the desire to take an entire Saturday for this purpose. They would, however, check out their teacher website for new materials. I understand now more than ever that online resources - see Appendix L - may be extremely useful for teaching Shakespeare in the future. In addition, this website will provide links to a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers who want to continue learning new strategies for teaching Shakespeare.

**Professional Development**

Teacher feedback through our work together and final survey results revealed that watching someone teach is the best way to learn. Those who did observe focused on student reactions as well as how activities and transitions work over the course of an hour. Their feedback from the observations taught me the power of professional development that takes the form of observation followed by debriefing. As we worked together over the course of many months and learned how to improve strategies for incorporating documents, I better understand the need for ongoing training while we are teaching, especially when we have the opportunity to learn from colleagues and/or mentors we trust. We do have some options, such as classroom learning labs where groups of teachers visit classrooms to see other teachers in action. This is a
form of professional development some teachers have experienced and value. It allows for observation, questioning, and reflecting within a safe and nonjudgmental setting. Despite the time and money needed for facilitator training, it could be a viable option for teachers to learn how to work with primary documents within a Shakespeare unit of study. Another option may be a less structured format where a few teachers observe a colleague in their own building or travel to another district to visit a classroom where the teacher is teaching the same content. Although this option involves no training or extra time to learn protocols, its effectiveness is based solely on the goals of individual teachers. At the very least, the process develops relationships with other teachers who are thirsty for improvement.

Regardless of how observations are organized, I have learned that ongoing professional development is a must to help teachers improve and to provide support. It may be helpful to provide resources, such as the primary documents and websites, but what is more valuable is teacher conversations about how to work with the documents. That might mean discussions about how and when to use them with students. It might include sharing researched documents with other colleagues or how students reacted to specific historical issues. The best way I see this happening is through course team involvement where the ninth English team teachers, for example, are given time to develop their own lessons together. In this way they become each other’s support system and can share experiences while they are teaching the same unit.

Horizontal teaming or collaboration with those who teach at the same levels, deserves consideration and prioritizing.

Vertical articulation is also important and contextualizes our work in ways that can help us understand the path our students travel. In other words, we begin to see our own teaching through a different, less reductive, lens. As I worked with the middle school teachers in a
different building, I learned just how important it was that the middle and high school teachers have ongoing communication about what they teach. What this means is high school collegial partnerships with middle school and college English teachers for the purpose of improving the teaching of Shakespeare. It takes concerted effort and confidence to invite college professors to high school English department meetings or to workshops. In fact, in all my years of teaching, I have never extended what may seem to be a simple yet well regarded request. English and English Education professors would contribute the depth and breadth often needed as high school teachers plan for “life’s next steps” - higher education. I have been taking graduate courses for the past 20 years, and one of the best parts about those experiences is observing how college professors structure their courses. Often I have used the same strategies in my own classes and can demonstrate what my students can expect at the college level. Similar to high school English teaching, college teaching of Shakespeare is diverse. I hope to bridge that gap by inviting professors to join critical department meetings, networking discussions, and methods workshops on teaching Shakespeare. We will all benefit.

I have learned that teaching Shakespeare with primary documents should and must be flexible in how and when they are incorporated. My classes worked extensively with primary documents of all types, but that is only one method; teachers can use them in tandem with any approach, such as close reading, and during any part of the play. Teachers who are interested in using primary documents are more likely to take full advantage of their merits if they have opportunities to try a few activities using documents, peruse many different types, and choose how they wish to use them. Opportunities for their own research of other documents will add considerable value to their present expertise in teaching Shakespeare. The fact is most of us are cognizant of our own teaching ability and generally can pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Few
of us are willing to relinquish our hold on beliefs and practices that have worked satisfactorily. As course teams who value collaboration about improving craft, however, many of us appreciate ideas that strengthen the fabric of our own curricula. I believe this can happen through appropriate and ongoing professional development that includes observation and a collaborative spirit.

Final Thoughts

I can conclude without reservation that student engagement and interest superseded my expectations and past experiences teaching Shakespeare. Discussions were deeper and much more animated in all classes. Stamina, skill, and confidence improved at every grade level. Student surveys revealed important information, but the more complete data I gathered through daily discussions, interviews, and observations and that I describe and report on through the chapters of this dissertation are unequivocal evidence of the value of the document approach.

When students are so engaged with each other in discussions about Shakespeare or other early modern writers that they forget about the teacher’s presence completely, I can point to the inclusion of primary documents as an essential ingredient. And how do we measure the value of those moments? For the public, test scores are often the prime indicator of success. Test scores do have their importance, but they do not outweigh or replace those efferent moments when learning about something that matters becomes all encompassing. I listen and watch for classroom magic as it unfolds. As one student said, “Finally, instead of scrutinizing every small detail of one play, we get to look at the big picture.”

Her partner nodded. “I agree,” he said. “I get it now. We still have the same problems to solve now, so we can learn.”
Appendix A

Primary Documents by Theme

ANGST AND INSOMNIA
Catalogue, John Gerard and Dodoens Rembert
“Rhubarb” and “The Vertues” (1597, 1578)
Play, William Shakespeare
*Henry IV, Part 2* (3.1.4-31)
Essay and frontispiece, John Sadler
*The Sicke VVomans Private Looking-Glasse* (1636)
Essay, Helkiah Crooke
*Mikrokosmographia: a description of the body of man* (1615)
Treatise, Anon.
*An alarne to awake church-sleepers* (1644)
Treatise, Thomas Hill
*The moste pleasuante arte of the interpretacion of dreames* (1576)
Visuals
Sleepwalking scene
Scholarly article, Benjamin Parris
“‘the Body is with the King, but the King is Not with the Body’: Sovereign Sleep in Hamlet and Macbeth” (2012)

CELEBRATIONS AND ENTERTAINMENT
Scholarly article, Stephen Greenblatt
Introduction to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1997)
Poem, Anon
“A Midsummer Wish” (1670)
Letter, Robert Laneham
To friend Humfrey Martin regarding the Queen at Kenilworth (1575)
Title page, George Gascoigne
*The VVhole Works of George Gascoigne Esquire* (1587)
Engraving, George Turberville
*Queen Elizabeth on a hunt ...from The Booke of Falconrie* (1611)
Engraving, George Vertue
*Procession Portrait* (1601)
Excerpt, Trea Martyn
*Queen Elizabeth in the Garden* (2008)
Masque, Ben Jonson
The Irish Masque at Court (1611)

Songs, Anon

“Young Man Put to his Dumps” (1686-1689)
“May Day Country Mirth” (1684-1695)

CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Painting, Hans Holbein

The Ambassadors (1533)

Poem, Ovid

Pyramus and Thisbe (8 AD)

Letter, Lady Jane Grey

To her father before her execution (1563)

Poem, Sir Walter Raleigh

“The Lie” (1608)

Poem, Edward Gosynhyl
g

Here begynmeth a lytle boke named the Schole house of women (1541)

Frontispiece, title page, song, Anon

Gossips (1619, 1654, 1690)

Play, Desiderius Erasmus

A Maid Hating Marriage (1523)

Essay, Eds. Gail Kern Paster and Skiles Howard

“Nuns” (1999)

FAMILY AND OBLIGATIONS

Engravings, Levinius Hulsius

The Amazons (1589)

Sermon, Thomas Adams

A divine herball, Or the prayse of fertillitie (1616)

Text comparisons, William Shakespeare, Thomas Adams, John Gerard, and Robert Greene

Love-in-Idleness (1600, 1616, 1597, 1592)

Treatise, William Gouge

Of Domestic Duties (1626)

Eulogy, Philip Stubbes

A Crystal Glass for Christian Women (1591)

Painting, Sandra Botticelli

The Three Graces (1482)

Poem, John Donne

“A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” (1633)

Drama, William Shakespeare
Romeo and Juliet (1595)

EQUIVOCATION AND AMBIGUITY
Frontispiece, Francis Herring
Mischeefs Mysterie (1617)
Sonnet, William Shakespeare
“Sonnet 138” (1609)
Scholarly text, including two prints, James Shapiro
“Remember, Remember” (2015)
Execution of Guy Fawkes (1606)
Eight Conspirators (2005)
Treatises, Henry Garnet and Robert Parsons
Treatise of Equivocation (1598)
A Treatise Tending to Mitigation towards Catholic Subjects in England (1607)
Treatise (chapter headings), Robert Parsons
\textit{A treatise tending to mitigation tovvwards catholike-suijects in England}
\textit{VWherein is declared, that it is not impossible for subjects of different religion, (especially Catholikes and Protestantes) to liue togeteather in dutfull obedience and subiection, vnder the gouernment of his Maiesty of Great Britany.} (1607)
Pamphlet, Anon
\textit{The manner of burning the Pope in effigies in London, on the 5th of November, 1678.} (1678)
Poem, Edward Hawes
\textit{““Trayerous Percyes & Catesbyes prosopopeia”} (1606)
Text Comparisons, Andrew Sanders and Stephen Greenblatt (Ed)

ESPIONAGE AND TREASON
Narrative, Robert Wingfield
\textit{From Narrative of the Execution of the Queen of Scots. In a letter to the Right Honorable Sir William Cecil} (1587)
Visual, letter, and essay; Nicholas Wolton and Sir Francis Bacon
“Coded Letters” (1548) and “Of Negotiating” (1597)
Speech, Elizabeth I
\textit{“Speech to the Troop at Tilbury} (1588)
Scholarly article, Alexandra Brisco
\textit{“Elizabeth’s Spy Network”} \textit{BBC} (2011)
Essay, Qualities of an ambassador

288
Francis Thynne (1652), Landi Ortenso (1596), Alberico Gentili (1585)
Robert Hitchcock (1590), including excerpt from “Traitorous Ambassadors” (1652)

Scholarly article, Alexandra Briscoe
“Walsingham Traps Mary Queen of Scots” BBC (2011)

Letters
“Walsingham’s Network,” including letters from William Herle (1587) and Nicholas Berden (1586) to Walsingham

Painting of Elizabeth I, attributed to either Marcus Gheeraerts or Isaac Oliver
The Rainbow Portrait (1600), including description by James Shapiro

FAIRIES AND SUPERNATURAL

Text comparisons, Robert Burton and Reginald Scot
Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) and The Discovery of Witchcraft (1584)

Pamphlet, Anon
Robin Good-Fellow, his mad pranks, and merry iests full of honest mirth, and is a fit medicine for melancholy (1639)

Poem, Richard Corbett
“A Proper new Ballad Entitled The Fairies’ Farewell: or God-A-Mercy Will” (1620)

Lore, John Aubrey
“Fairies and Robin Goodfellow,” The Remains of Gentilism and Judaism (1688)

Frontispiece, John Parkinson
Paradisi in Sole (1629)

Poem, Robert Herrick
“Oberon’s Feast” (1648)

Scholarly article, Marjorie Swann

Paintings, Joseph Noel Paton, Amelia Jane Murray, Edward Robert Hughes
Oberon and Titania, Fairies Floating Downstream, Midsummer Eve

Scholarly Chapter, Minor White Latham
“Shakespeare’s Fairies,” The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare

GARDENS AND LORE

Catalogue, John Gerard
“Of Crowfloures, or Wilde Williams” (1597)

Scholarly text, Roy Strong
“Gardens for Queen Elizabeth I,” including sketch of Kenilworth (1656)

Visual
“Elizabeth I as Rosa Electa, flanked by the Tudor Rose and the Virgin Eglantine” (1590)

Pamphlet
List of fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh from the Year 1581 to 31st December 1873 with explanation from Trea Martyn’s Queen Elizabeth in the Garden (2008)

Catalogues, John Gerard and Thomas and Faircloth
“Rosemary,” “Pansies,” “Fennell,” “Columbine,” “Rue or Herbe Grace,” “Daisy,” “Violets” (1597 and 2016)

Sonnet, William Shakespeare
“Sonnet XV” and explanation (1609 Quarto Verson)

Manual, William Lawson
The Country Housewifes Garden (1623)

Poetry, Robert Herrick
“To Pansies,” “To Daisies Not to Shut so Soon,” “To Violets” (1591-1674)

Table, Dodoens, Rembert
A Table vwherein is conteyened the Nature, Vertue, and Dangers, of al The Herbes, Trees, and Plantes, of vvhich are spoken in the present Booke, or herball [H, M, N, W] (1578)

GENDER AND CLOTHING
Proclamations, Queen Elizabeth
Proclamation Enforcing Statues of Apparel (May 6, 1562)
Proclamation prohibiting Unlawful Assembly under Martial Law (June 20, 1594)

Poem, Samuel Rowlands
“The Humors that haunt a Wife” (1608)

Essay, John Lyly
Excerpt, The Anatomy of Wyt (1578)

Essay “A Virgin” and “A Wanton Woman” from Descriptions of Worthies, And Vnworthies of this Age. Copy from Folger Library

Poem, C Pyrrye
“Here Beginneth the Disprayse of Women” (1569)
“Here Beginneth the Prayse of Women” (1569)

Essay, Jacques Ferrand
Chapter XIV: “Signs Diagnostic of Love-Melancholy” from Erotomania (1640)

Catalogue, John Gerard
“Feverfew” and “Black hellebore”  
Gerard’s Herbell, or Generall Historie of Plantes (1597)  
Excerpts, Katherine Usher and Barbara F. McManus  
Pamphlets, Jane Anger and Joseph Swetman  
Jane Anger, her Protection for Women To defend them against the Scandalous Reports of a late Surfeiting Lover and all other like Venerians that complain so to be overcloyed with women’s kindness. (1589)  
The Arrainment of Lewd, idle, forward, and unconstant women or the Vanity of them, choose you whether, With a Commendation of wise, Virtuous, and honest Women, Pleasant for married Men, profitable For young Men, and hurtful to none. (1615)  
Frontispiece and sermon excerpt, William Whately  
“Women’s Roles” (1619)  
Poem, John Gough  
“Encomiums on the Beauty of his Miftrefs.” Academy of Complements (1640)  
Graphics, Harry Peacham  
Four Humours (1612)  

GHOSTS AND AFTERLIFE  
Essay, Francis Bacon  
“Of Revenge” (1625)  
Pamphlet, Jane Owens  
Antidote Against Purgatory (1634)  
Text comparisons on afterlife: St. Augustine’s City of God (early 5th c), St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica (1265), Ludwig Lavater’s Of Ghosts And spirits walking by nyght (1572), Thomas Nash’ The Terrors of the Night (1594), King James I Daemonologie (1597), Reginald Scot’s Appendix in The Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584)  
Poem, Robert Southwell  
“The Burning Babe” (1595)  
Drama, Thomas Kyd  
The Spanish Tragedy 1.5.98 (1587)  
Drama, William Shakespeare  
Hamlet (1.5.14-26) and Harald Jenkins Notes from Arden Shakespeare (1982)
Treatise, Simon Fish

*A Supplication of the poore commons Whereunto is added the supplication of beggars* [a plea for catholic reform] (1529)

Scholarly article excerpt, Stephen Greenblatt


**GOVERNMENT AND FREEDOM**

Dissertation excerpt, Paul Augustin Kottman


Frontispiece, article summary with quotes from *Machiavelli’s Prince*, Rebecca Lemon and Nicholas Machiavelli

*The Prince* (1640)

Speech and frontispiece, John Milton

*Areopagitica* (1644)

Woodcuts, Raphael Holinshend

*Chronicles of England, Scotlände and Irelande* (1577)

Treatise, King James I of England

The true lawe of free monarchies: or The reciprock and mutuall dutie betwixt a free king, and his naturall subiectes. (1598)

Treatise, John Milton

*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649)

Confessions and Homily, Reformed Churches and the Church of England

*The Divine Right and the Irresistibility of Kings and Supreme Magistrates*, including *The Confessions of Scotland* (1683, 1586)

**MADNESS AND MELANCHOLY**

Catalogue, John Gerard

“Blacke Hellebore,” including “Sweet Fruit” from Burton’s *Anatomy*

Text, Robert Burton (aka Democritus Junior) (1597, 1589)

“Melancholy and Madness” *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621)

Visual, Thomason

“The Picture of an English Antick, with a Lift of his ridiculous Habits, and Apifh Geftures. Maids, where are hearts comes? Look you what here is! (1646)

Text, Phillip Stubbes

*Anatomy of Abuses* Book I

“IS. in commendation of the Author, and his booke,” “On Dancing,” “On Bear Baiting,” “On Singing” (1583)
Catalogue, Richard Amyas
“A most Excellent Receipt against Melancholy” An Antidote Against Melancholy (1659)

Lecture, J O[jes]
“The Author’s Advice on how to tame a shrew” A Juniper Lecture, With the description of all sorts of women, good, and bad: From the modest to the maddest (1639)

Sonnets, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson
“Sonnet 45” (1609) and “On My First Son” (1616)

Essay and poem, Amelia Lanyer
“To the Virtuous Reader” and “Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women” (1611)

Pamphlet frontispiece, H. Gosson
The Araignement & burning of Margaret Ferne-feede, for the Murther of Her late Husband Anthony Ferne-feede, found deade in Peckham Field Neere Lambeth (1608)

Scholarly article, Maria Isabel Barbudo
“William Shakespeare and the Representation of Female Madness” (2015)

MANHOOD AND CUSTOMS
Poem, Ben Jonson
“To Penhurst” (1616)

Article excerpt, Charles Ross
“Macbeth’s Future: A Thing of Custom” (1997)

Article, Judith Newmark
“Gender Lines Blur in This ‘Macbeth’” (2009)

Essay, Castiglione
The Courtier (1561)

Nonfiction excerpt, Roger Chartier, Ed.

Diary, Simon Forman
Book of Plays (1611)

Manual, Desiderius Erasmus
“Of Manners at Table” from Manners for Children (1532)

Poem and visual, Sir John Davis
“The Courtier” from Yet Other Twelve Wonders of the World (1602)

Poetry, Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell
“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” (1648)
“To His Coy Mistress” (1650)
MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

Epic poem excerpt, Edmund Spenser

*Faerie Queene* 1.1.11-20 (1590-96)

Sermon, William Whately

“Sermon on Marital Sex” and “On Rushing into Marriage” (1619)

Catalogue, John Gerard

“Of Sowbreade. Chap. 296.” (1597)

Letter, William Miller

“A Letter of Advice Concerning Marriage” (1697)

Liturgy, Ed. William Keatinge Clay

“Solemnization of Matrimony” *Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer* (1559)

Treatise, Henry Swinburne

“Of Ripe or Lawful Age for Marriage” and “Of Public and Private Spousals” (1686)

Chart, Copy from Laslett

“Table 1.2: Mean age at first marriage in England by fifty year periods, 1550-1849” *Family Life*

Letter, John Donne

“Letter to Sir George More” (1602)

Scholarly Article, Stephen Greenblatt

“Romeo and Juliet” *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997)

Includes visual “The talk between Master Bradford, and two Spanish Friars.”

Text comparison: Arthur Brooke and William Shakespeare

*The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet* (1562)

*Romeo and Juliet* (1595)

MEDICINES AND POISON

Article, Claudia Hammond

“Would Shakespeare’s Poisons and Drugs Work in Reality?” *BBC* (2016)


Catalogue, John Gerard

“Sleeping Nightshade” (1597)
Catalogue, William Bullein
   “Mandrakes” and “Poppy” (1579)
Woodcuts (9), Hans Holbein
   “The Dance of Death” (1538)
Article excerpt, Tanya Pollard
   “‘A Thing Like Death’: Sleeping Potions and Poisons in Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra” (2003)
Article excerpt, Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy
   “Suicides in the Early Modern Period” Sleepless Souls: Suicide in the Early Modern Period (1996), including 1665 Mortality Record: “The Diseafes and Casualties this Week”
Catalogue, John Gerard
   “Mandrace or Atropa mandragora,” “Garden Poppies,” “Black Henbane” (1597)

THEATRE AND ACTING
Scholarly text James Shapiro
Scholarly text, Andrew Gurr
   “Bearbaiting,” including foreigner’s 1584 witness, The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642 (2009)
Pamphlet, Phillip Stubbes
   “Of Stage-playes and Enterluds, with their wickedness. The Anatomy of Abuses (1583)
Sonnet, William Shakespeare
   “Sonnet XXIII” and explanation, The 1609 quarto version
Scholarly text, Andrew Gurr
   On Kemp and the Jig. The Shakespearean Stage (2009)
Scholarly text, Andrew Gurr
   “The Playhouses” The Shakespearean Stage (2009)
Essay, Sir Philip Sidney
   “Poetry in England” The Defense of Poetry (1595)
Poem, Ben Jonson
   “To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare” (1623)

VIOLENCE AND DEATH
Frontispiece and explanation, Vencentio Saviolo and Joan Ozark Holmer
   His Practife. In two Bookes. (1595)
Text comparison: William Shakespeare and Vencentio Saviolo with comments by Holmer

*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.6-35, and 3.1.26-106 (1595)

*His Practice* (1595)

Excerpt, Vencentio Saviolo

“When one doth call another for an offence done viinto him by a third Person” (1595)

Woodcut, Copy from *The Mirror of Mans Lyfe in His Practice*


Handout, Matt McKay


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**WITCHCRAFT AND RELIGION**

Indictment

*A briefe description of the notorious life of John Lambe otherwise called Doctor Lambe. Together with his ignominious death.* (1628)

Discourse, William Perkins

*A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience.* (1610)

Dialogue, King James VI of Scotland

*Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into three Bookes* (1597)

Catalogue, John Gerard

“Calves Snout, or SnapDragon” (1597)

Scholarly text, James Shapiro


Proclamation, King James I of England

*An Act against Conjuration, Witchcraft, and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits* (1604)

News report, James Carmichael

“The North Berwick Witch Trials” from *News from Scotland, declaring the Damnable life and death of Dr. Flan* (1592)


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**WORK AND RANK**

Director’s notes, Ben Crystal

“The Mechanicals and Their Crafts” (2013)
Blog post, S.A. Markham

Statute, The House of Commons
The Statute of Artificers (1563)

Essay, William Harrison
*The Description of England* (1587)

Treatise, Roger Ascham
*The Schoolmaster*, (1570)

Title page, attributed to George Turberville (probable author, Jacques du Fouilloux)
*The Noble Art of Venery, or Hunting* (1575)

Portrait, Isaac Oliver
*Portrait of a Melancholy Young Man* (1590-95)

Epic poem, John Milton
Book 9, *Paradise Lost* (1660)

Drama, William Shakespeare
*Richard II* (1597)
Appendix B

Shakespeare Teaching Strategies

3-2-1

This short but effective activity can be used anytime during the lesson to provide formative information about student needs. When teaching Shakespeare, it affords students opportunities to ask questions they may be reluctant to ask in front of their peers. One general type I use frequently is

Name 3 things you understand about the play so far.

Name 2 things that do not make sense to you.

Ask 1 question that you still have.

I always take the time to read the questions - anonymously - to the class the next day. First, I want them to know the purpose for what I ask them to do. Second, I can clear up misconceptions about the play. And third, my students understand that they are not alone in their confusions. We embrace them and move on.

Big Chunk-Little Chunk

This close-reading activity allows for multiple readings of an excerpt. Students may read a scene, followed by one or two re-readings, first with a partner where one or both read aloud and next independently. Students next follow up with summaries or analyses of specific word choices. Sharing with a partner or the entire class is the final step and one that should not be omitted.
Blocking scenes

This activity is a shared-reading experience where all partner or small groups receive the same scene to block, interpret, and act. First, students need a space large enough to imagine a stage, deciding where “players” stand, how they move, and when they speak. Plan for enough time to allow students to practice moves and speech enough to be able to perform in class. The purpose of the activity is to break down language, especially in scenes where character placement is crucial, such as when Bernardo and Francisco are changing guard on the top of Elsinore Castle (1.1.1-12).

Cognitive Mind Maps

Mind mapping can take many forms, such as the character map on the left.

But often maps that lay out themes in gradual complexity also work well, especially when working with intertextual thinking. Moving from basic understanding historical themes, such as describing primogeniture in *Hamlet*, followed by deeper understandings of how the theme compares to tanistry in *Macbeth*, allows students to gradually synthesize ideas and draw conclusions about the tenuous relationships among characters and their deep-seated greed.

Generally, I model my own thinking before students begin work on their own examples in groups. This is one activity that moves students away from literal comprehension and moves them to deeper thinking about the plays.
Digital to Visual

Students take one scene, such as a soliloquy, and explicate its meaning through sketches only. This work can be expanded into symbols, which could be used for

Divide and Conquer

Divide up a scene into approximately 50-line increments, assigning the number of students needed to act out the scene, which can go from 1 student who may be speaking a soliloquy, to 5 students who are speaking to one another. Give students their section and time to practice. Having some props available makes this more fun. Groups perform their short scene clip sequentially in front of the class by reading their parts, blocking the movement and acting the part. Before each groups begin, a student in the group should provide a brief summary of what is happening. This is an interactive way to read, act, and view a scene!

Document Walk

After student groups have annotated a soliloquy or other short scene on poster-sized sticky note paper, place papers on classroom or hallway walls spaced far enough apart that a group could stand in front to listen. It works best if students are working on different parts of the play that can be explained sequentially. Give students time to prepare a one-minute presentation of their annotated scene. Move from group to group as students unfold Shakespeare’s work.
Explicate or Unfold

Students close read a passage and, using more modern language, unfold its meaning. Each line or section can be written as a contemporary poem - spoken word works well for this - and then do a “read around,” first reading the original and then the more modern version.

Family Tree

This activity provides a visual experience with figuring out “who’s who” in a play. The idea works well when two families can be sort out, such as the Capulets and Montagues in Romeo and Juliet. The same method also works with plays similar to A Midsummer Night’s Dream to help students sort out which characters are in the three worlds: royal, rustic, and fairy. Simply type all the characters’ names on a sheet of paper (16 font) and make a copy for each student. The easiest way is to have them cut the names into strips, so they can be moved around on a student’s desk top. Try this method:

1. Before beginning the play, narrate the plot to the class while writing the names of the characters on the white/black board. Students should each have an envelope with the names of the characters on strips and follow along with your placement of names on their desks.
2. After erasing the board, students put slips back in envelope and work with a partner. Collaboratively, they should make a tree of relationships from memory.
3. The next day, students work with a new partner to reassemble the names according to their relationships in the play.
4. The next day, each student should independently make a family/relationship tree.
Fishbowl Discussion

To demonstrate the dynamics of a conversation, try a fishbowl in a few different ways. Using one or two students and the teacher, read a short excerpt from a play, each taking a part. Depending on the age group, you may want to keep the reading to under two minutes. The most important part is the follow-up discussion of what you have just read. The teacher can guide the discussion by demonstrating how to return to the text as the source of discussion or questioning. The discussion should not exceed four minutes. After this activity, students groups should then read a different excerpt to try the same technique. Another type of fishbowl is when student groups are given an extemporaneous question or excerpt to read. Four students sit in the middle and discuss the topic for up to two minutes. Each person in the class must take a turn. The second type of fishbowl works best when students are familiar with their small groups and have discussed with them several times before.

Foldables

This is an interactive note-taking system in which students may keep notes about a play. You will need 3 sheets of differently colored paper. Place them the “long-way” vertically such that each color sheet is approximately one inch below the one under it. When you fold it, it will look like the picture (right) with tabs that can be flipped open. Use one tab per act and one for language/vocabulary notes and sketches. Students love making these and can decorate them accordingly. If your students have writer’s notebooks, those pages can be limited to essays and quick-writes.
Inquiry Dive

Using a brief biographical video clip to highlight some general ideas about the early modern period, students create T-charts to compare popular culture from two time periods: sixteenth and 21th centuries. Students can then choose the specific areas they want to explore. (MND, 5)

John Collins 5 Types of Writing

Experimenting with different types of writing helps students gain ideas and stamina for writing longer pieces. Brainstorming and writing thoughts within a specific amount of time helps students focus on topics in short spurts, providing impetus for later, longer pieces. The following are examples writing assignments about different Shakespeare’s plays.

Type 1  In three minutes, brainstorm 15 historical or cultural ideas about Shakespeare you can share with your group.

Type 2  Describe briefly one incident when the ghost has appeared in Hamlet and the effects that it had through the viewpoint of one character.

Type 3  Write a two-page essay on why Macbeth decides to kill King Duncan. Be ready to read your draft aloud to your group. Make sure you attend to 3 focus correction areas: proper punctuation, detailed examples, and a conclusion.

Type 4  Write a first draft of an essay about the effect of the “play within a play” Shakespeare uses in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Your first draft will be critiqued by a peer before writing your second draft.

Type 5  Write a multi-draft persuasive essay on whether Shakespeare should be taught in American public high schools. After several opportunities for proofreading and
Jump-In Reading

Choose one section or soliloquy to review, one that you believe students would have fun reading aloud many times. First, ask a student to read through the selection entirely. Second, ask students to read it together chorally to have the sense of many voices. Third, ask students to choose one or two lines they each like best and to practice reading only those lines with their partners. Finally, put it all together:

- The student who first read the entire selection in step one, reads the entire selection again.
- The entire class reads the first line together.
- Students “jump in” on their chosen two lines to read aloud.
- The entire class reads the last line together.

This is both crazy and fun. You will notice that sometimes only student #1 is reading while at other times, 5 or even 20 will join in on one or more lines. It’s a great way to try some choral reading. Make a tape and play it back just for fun! (This idea is modified from the one provided by the Chicago Shakespeare Theater.)

Page to Stage

This idea can be used as a follow-up to reading or as a replacement for reading independently. Divide up a scene or act into sections, assigning the number of students to each according to how many characters are in the selection. Student groups should leave the classroom and practice reading with as much expression as possible. When they return, student
groups should perform sequentially. Make sure each groups begins by summarizing what is happening in this section.

What is important about page to stage is that students learn a little about blocking and movement. Where should each character stand? How should they play the part? What is happening now? Appropriate props could make this come to life so if you have some in the classroom, make it work!

Another way to do this is to take the same scene, and how different groups would play it. Act I, scene i, in *Macbeth* works well because students can put their own spin on how to interpret the witches.

**Play it Again, Sam!**

Take only a few lines from the text to practice tone. In Act II, scene iii, of *Macbeth*, McDuff has just arrived at Macbeth’s castle to ride with King Duncan to his next appointment. We know, however, that Macbeth has just slain the king. Ask two students to position themselves as it would happen on stage. McDuff will say, “Is the King stirring, worthy Thane?” six different times to Macbeth, but Macbeth will answer, “Not yet” using six different tones: calmly, annoyed, jittery, nervously, confidently, guiltily. Students can decide which tone conveys the message in Macbeth’s present state of mind. Students love this because it’s fast, and the lines are easy to memorize.

**Quick Writes**

During a five-minute time restraint, students can reflect and express their thoughts for different purposes.
At the beginning of class to explain what was learned the day before

During the middle of class to assess learning formatively

At the end of the class to reflect on content

To ask questions, to clarify, to predict

Read-Around

Students choose some section of their own writing that they believe to be good writing. It could be as brief as a vivid verb or as long as a sentence that contains a beautiful image. The activity is to prompt contribution from all students, especially those students who generally are too shy to say anything in class. Offering up one word usually sets the stage for more a more confident voice later. Students can also do this with Shakespeare’s language where they choose specific lines to read aloud. See Jump-In for another version of this activity.

Re-Enactments

Using body motions only, students act out a scene segment while another student or the teacher reads the part aloud. This works particularly well if the language is confusing, such as in the stage directions, [Tybalt under Romeo’s arm stabs Mercutio.], and when Mercutio claims, “Why the devil / came you between us? I was hurt under your arm” (3.1.101-102). The actions are most effective if they are done in slow motion.

Samoan Circle

Samoan circles are different from Socratic seminars in that the actual discussion involves a temporary small group that changes when individual finish having their “say.” A circle of five
in the middle of the room is where the discussion happens. A second circle of 8 surrounds the inner circle, and a third circle of 10 or more is the outer circle. The inner circle begins the discussion on a topic of interest. As individuals finish discussing, they move to the outer circle, and someone from the middle circle moves in. As the inner circle changes, so too does the discussion dynamics. New people bring new ideas, and often the focus changes direction. As students move from the middle circle to the inner circle, individual must move from the outer circle to the middle. Teachers may need to keep track, encouraging those in the back to move forward. A few parameters to help discussions from becoming stagnant:

- Students in the inner circle may not stay long. Add to the conversation, then move to the outer circle, allowing other voices to be heard.
- Students in the inner circle should leave individually - not more than one at a time - so the discussion does not change dramatically. The idea is that a new person adds to the conversation without changing course completely.
- Students may not “jump” from the outer circle to the inner circle, without first “waiting” in the middle circle for a turn. Teachers may have to monitor this until students become familiar with the process.
- The process is not complete until each person has had an opportunity to speak.

Silent Annotations

Choose one section of a Shakespeare play or a sonnet. You may wish to enlarge the print to at least 18 font. Glue to large poster, chart paper, or giant sticky note. Provide various colors of markers, one per student in group. Students must read and respond to the text with annotations, such as one-line summaries, definitions of words, meaningful sketches, questions,
synonyms, or bubble comments. To hold students accountable for participation, ask them to print their names at the bottom in the same color they used for responses. Students can work on annotations in the classroom, out in the hall, at tables, or standing as long as they know it is silent. They are, in essence, reading their group’s annotations while they work, which is useful to initiate more comments. Timing this activity must take into account the time it will take for close reading. Sharing or reporting findings is as important as the activity itself. If the text is broken up in sequential part, such as excerpts from an act or longer scene, a “document walk” works well. Allow students five minutes to plan their “talk” and 1 minute to present before moving to the next group.

**Socratic Seminar**

Sometimes we forget the power of a circle. Most people think of Socratic seminars as an opportunity to discuss a piece of writing, and this works extremely well. Students love sharing ideas and finding out what others think. Consider also how this might work as a “read through.” Students may think of this as similar to what it must have been like to receive Shakespeare’s script for the first time, and the players are reading the parts that Shakespeare has assigned. This works extremely well if you are doing an entire act with many different characters, thus involving as many students as possible.

**Think-Aloud**

Teachers can do think-alouds while they are reading a selection, stopping to comment on what comes to mind as they work through the text. The strategies we use when facing difficult language demonstrates to students how we build efficacy while reading. Another use for a
“think-aloud” is to talk about your process as you write a piece in front of students. This is actually one you may wish to practice, simply because it is difficult to hold their attention if you pause for more than a few seconds. This process can be unnerving, but surprisingly advantageous. Students will generally pay attention, especially knowing that they will be writing immediately after you. Watching you struggle is a good reminder that all writing is 99% perspiration! For another example of how this might work, Chapter 5 on *Midsummer* for the description on writing about female power.

**Three Ways to Have Fun With Shakespeare**

The following post comes from the June 7, 2017 Teacher’s blog provided by the Folger Shakespeare Library Education Department:

- Listening to students speaking Shakespeare is certainly my favorite part of teaching Shakespeare, but I also love watching them play games. We’ve often ended a semester with Shakespeare-based games. (Perfect for this sunny time of year!) Student favorites have been “Who am I?” and “Group Charades,” though “Who said that when?” can be good learning fun, too.

- A quick warm-up is “Who am I?”— I type up a sheet or two of labels with the names of characters from the plays we have read during the last semester. So, after reading *Romeo and Juliet*, the labels might include characters like the Nurse, Capulet, Lady Capulet, Montague, Lady Montague, the Prince, Benvolio, Mercutio, Paris, and of course, Romeo and Juliet.

- The students wear the labels on their backs and have to ask each other yes and no questions, trying to determine who they are. It’s especially engaging when these
questions involve direct quotations from the play (for deeper close reading, you can build this element into your instructions). I’ve had classes where the students would race to figure out their characters so that they could get another name.

● Needless to say, “Who am I?” can be engaging for students, but I think “Group Charades” is even more so. Plus it’s focused on the language itself. I generally give each group of four to six students a slip of paper with part of a scene from a play they’ve just read. Each group goes off to a different corner of the room to figure out how best to represent their assignment. (It might be the sword fighting scene from *Hamlet*, the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, or even the balcony scene from *Much Ado about Nothing.*

● My number one rule for the charades is that everyone in the group has to participate, even if it’s just as a chair or a tree! Once the groups are ready, they take turns performing so that their classmates can guess what they are doing. If a scene is guessed too quickly, I do let the performing group finish their performance, as long as it doesn’t take too long. (In a class full of especially imaginative, dramatic kids, performances take on a life of their own! During those situations, a time limit can help.)

● Depending on the size of the class and what else we’re doing that day, I generally have enough scenes selected for the groups to perform at least two or three times. But oftentimes, with a really enthusiastic group, they ask to make their own choices after they’ve done their first one. I love it when kids select, edit, and perform their own scenes!

● The third bit of fun is great for review at the end of the play—or even as part of a final assessment itself. The challenge is called, “Who said that and when?” Students can work solo or in groups to (a) deliver the lines and (b) guess the lines. I generally have a list
already made up from the previous play(s). In this case, it’s a list of lines or short scenes from the plays we’ve read—short excerpts that students have already read and studied closely. Points can be given for knowing who said the words, knowing who heard the words, summarizing or paraphrasing the words, explaining the dramatic context for the words, or doing something creative with the words, like imagining tone or props or even drawing an illustration. The points for one excerpt don’t have to all be awarded to the same student or group—in fact, since the point of this is fun, not competition, it’s best when everyone gets to win in some way. The whole point system might sound silly, but it’s a great way to engage young people—ALL of the young people in your room—in speaking and listening to Shakespeare’s words.

**Turn and Talk**

When students have an opportunity to talk about their learning, they are more likely to share their thinking with the entire class. This is a useful strategy when students are close reading or viewing a Shakespeare scene. “Partner-talk” throughout a lesson gives students time to voice their opinions as well as listen to others’ ideas - it becomes the platform for later writing or discussion.

**Verbal Fluency**

This is a fun way to review the plot after the first three acts of a Shakespeare play. Students should number off by 4 in their groups, remembering their number. Ask, “Raise your hand if you are a 1” and so on. Students will then go back to the beginning of the play to summarize what was happening. Each person has a certain number of seconds to summarize.
Beginning with #1, give 20 seconds to summarize the beginning. When 20 seconds is over, the teacher yells “Stop,” and then yells the next number - “2!” The next person summarizes the story from the point that #1 left off. Number two gets 40 seconds. The teacher yells “stop” again and #3 takes over and summarizes the next section in 60 seconds. Finally the last person must continue with a 90-second summary. This is a fun way to review! The challenge is to see how much of the play can be summarized in this amount of time.

Whip-Around

Quickly moving from student to student, each reads or reports a few words in response to a writing prompt. Begin with students standing. As each responds, they sit.

Who Said What?

This is a great way to get students up and moving after the first act in any Shakespeare play. Choose three characters from the act and write their names on a large poster or paper, placing them on three different walls of your classroom. Type up various lines from the act and hand one to each student. Make sure you have evenly divided how many are spoken by each character. Ask students to read their line aloud and go to that part of the room near the sign with their character’s name. Once in the three groups, students can then confirm they are in the correct group by reading each line aloud in their groups. The discussion is the most important part of this activity. See the link below to see how a drama teacher tried this activity with middle school students reading Macbeth.

https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/intro-to-teaching-macbeth?fd=1
Bubble Track (See Listen and Bubble below)

While students listen to audios, discuss in groups, or annotate documents, roam the room with a clipboard, tracking responses in “character bubbles.” Fill the page with bubbled student responses to share under a document camera or, if you have a wireless keyboard or tablet, post the responses to the projected computer screen while you roam. Students will sometimes work hard to see their words in print!

Diminishing Maps/Notes

This strategy is extremely useful for struggling readers who need assistance in note taking or comprehension. It provides a beginning template that students use as a model, which is filled out by the teacher, during the first half of the note-taking or comprehension activity. An audio version of a lecture or section of a play is an idea activity because students are not reading and can thus participate while listening.

1. Create a map or outline based on a reading or audio lecture.
2. Fill in sections of the map/outline - more at the beginning and diminishing toward the end, leaving more and more geometric shapes empty.
3. Review the map/outline with students, carefully recounting some of the information.
4. Allow students to copy the filled-in portions before listening.
5. Play the audio, modeling when to fill in blank portions.
6. Stop filling in sections at end - allow students to create their own meaning.

Document Walk
Using large sheets of rolled paper or poster-sized sticky notes, glue a primary document in the middle for students to annotate in small groups. Tape them to the wall or staple them to cork strips spaced far enough apart to allow larger groups of students to stand in front to listen. Students can then walk from document to document and listen to the creators explain and analyze content. Document walks can also be interactive: place the documents on chart paper and allow students to annotate all of the documents as they wander from station to station. This activity can be loosely structured in this way or organized, so students have specified time limits for each document.

Four Reads http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/25690

This activity is one where students read the document four times. Each student has a copy of the document for an initial shared reading. To prepare, make sure you have read the document ahead of time, noting difficult vocabulary, structure, or content sections.

1. First Read: Origins and Content - significance of place and time
2. Second Read: Meaning - genre type and big issues presented
3. Third Read: Argument - how argument is structured
4. Fourth Read: Historian - treat like a mystery and dig deep

Gradual Release of Responsibility

The components of GRR include:

1. Short (10 minute) mini-lesson where the teacher teaches a skill, modeling how to complete the task. During this time the teacher can do a formative check by interspersing questions throughout.
2. Work through task together as a large group. This may be an opportunity for the teacher to direct the activity with student help and feedback or with all students participating under direction of teacher.

3. This step, collaboration, is when students work through the task together while the teacher works with small group on the side, providing direct instruction for students who seem to be struggling.

4. Finally, students try the task independently.

This process is extremely useful for working with documents. Students have told me that the collaboration step is most helpful because students are sometimes more comfortable asking questions of peers. They can work out difficulty with language and purpose in smaller groups.

**GRAPES**

G  Genre

R  Rhetorical schemes

A  Audience

P  Purpose

E  Effect (on audience or tone)

S  Speaker, subject, situation (kairos)

*Audra Whetstone, AP Language and Composition instructor at Northview High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, devised this method for reading nonfiction pieces.*
Jig-Saw or Each Teach

It would be impossible for students to read as many primary documents as any teacher would like to a jig-saw activity works well because it provides an opportunity to hear about many documents. If you have 8 documents, for example, you can have students number off by 8 and read the corresponding numbered document. First, ask students to read and annotate independently, thus providing a baseline of understanding. Next, have students meet with other students, probably 2-3, to reread the document together and to share annotations. This is where students will discuss the most important claims the author is making and how it relates to the historical/cultural theme. Each student should make bulleted points during this step, so they know exactly what they will share with their larger group. Third, students reconvene in their groups of eight. Students should share the major points while the others take notes on the documents. Make sure each student has a copy of all documents, especially if you believe they will use them later for writing.

What to look for: Initially students will move from one person to the next to discuss the documents they read. Eventually, students will move toward a more interactive discussion where questions will be raised and comparisons made about various documents. The goal is to see evidence of intertextual analysis. One way to demonstrate what this type of discussion looks like is to actually stage one in which the teacher is involved. It can be a fish-bowl experience where one group is in the middle of the room while others sit outside the circle taking notes. You may have to prep the fish-bowl participants ahead of time, but watching a discussion in peak form may help others understand the process.
**Listen and Bubble**  (See Bubble Track above)

While students are discussing the content of one or more documents, the teacher roams the room with a clipboard and writes down random comments she hears students say. After four or five, write them on the board as dialogue bubbles, then continue roaming. Eventually students notice what you are doing and will be more intentional in their comments. Fill the entire space with ideas. An alternative strategy is to create an entire page of bubble comments without stopping. Using the document camera, project this document after the discussion. A follow-up Quick-Write or Exit Slip might include choosing one bubble comments to reflect on in a well developed paragraph.

**Overview-Parts-Title-Interrelationships-Conclusion (OPTIC)**

The following steps are used to help students approach visual texts:

- Overview - write down a few notes on what the visual appears to be about
- Parts - focus on parts of the visual, writing down any elements or details that seem important
- Title - highlight the words of the title of the visual if one is available
- Interrelationships - use the title as the theory and the parts of the visual as clues to detect and specify the interrelationships in the graphic
- Conclusion - think about the visual as a whole, speculating the meaning and summarizing the visual in one or two sentences

**PAPER:**  (http://tinyurl.com/y9nw87tj)
You can find numerous online ideas for reading primary documents and, depending on your student group, these will be helpful. One acronym for reading historical documents is PAPER:

- Purpose and motives of author
- Argument and values in text and our own
- Presuppositions and values in text and our own
- Epistemology or evaluating truth
- Relate to other texts

Students can also create acronyms of their own to share their strategies for reading documents. Try this one for READ: Read, evaluate, annotate, decide.

Q & A Formative Checks for Understanding

The most effective Q & A experiences are when they are combined with a mini-lesson. During the first few experiences with documents, especially those students who have never worked with them before, it is helpful for teachers to show students how they approach primary documents through a think-aloud. Once this is underway, teachers can stop during their own self-questioning and ask students directly if any of them know where or how to find the answer. One example is in the document “An Indictment Preferred against John Lambe” in which he made a woman lift up her coate above her middle “to the wonder of the company the woman began to take vp her cloathes, and by degrees lifted them vp above her middle.” After reading the document aloud and sharing my thinking, I asked why Lambe was stoned to death for witchcraft. Why was his behavior suspicious? As students interact while teachers model thinking, they become more than passive listeners as they engage with their own shared copy of the document.
The activity makes a great lead-in to reading and annotating, followed by sharing with a small collaborative group.

Questioning  (https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/history/resources/study/primary/)

When students go through the first “run through” with a document, certain questions could guide their independent reading:

1. Look at the physical nature of your source. This is particularly important and powerful if you are dealing with an original source (i.e., an actual old letter, rather than a transcribed and published version of the same letter). What can you learn from the form of the source? (Was it written on fancy paper in elegant handwriting, or on scrap-paper, scribbled in pencil?) What does this tell you?
2. Think about the purpose of the source. What was the author's message or argument? What was he/she trying to get across? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
3. How does the author try to get the message across? What methods does he/she use?
4. What do you know about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?
5. Who constituted the intended audience? Was this source meant for one person's eyes, or for the public? How does that affect the source?
6. What can a careful reading of the text (even if it is an object) tell you? How does the language work? What are the important metaphors or symbols? What can the author's choice of words tell you? What about the silences--what does the author choose NOT to talk about?
Say Something

Students form trios and alternately read a difficult portion from text. After each reading, the listeners synthesize and summarize what they heard in the reading. The second person may not repeat what has already been stated.

Shared Reading

Students have a copy of primary document, and the document is enlarged and on the screen in front of the classroom. The teacher is able to annotate and walk students through portions of the reading in a “think aloud.” Students interact with text and with teacher, allowing the experience to be a formative assessment of student comprehension. This is one of the first steps of the gradual release model during the mini-lesson.

Shift and Share

Begin with approximately 5-6 readings students can read independently to share with others. Make 3 large groups, each group containing 10 students with two lines of five desks facing each other. Partners sit across from each other. First, each partner group reads one article/poem/story/essay, annotating the key points, followed by an opportunity to share the details and conclusions of their reading. The next section of this activity is to “shift” to the right - students may need to physically get up and move to a different seat. (Options may include “rolling” if desks have casters or sitting on the floor and scootching to the right.) New partner groups take approximately 4 minutes to each share their article and take notes.
Student Writing

After students have written about documents, put them under the document camera or scan several to put up from the computer. Students love to see their work highlighted as good models. Explain why the writing is particularly good by pointing out strong verbs, insightful thinking, and clear writing. The secondary effects of this strategy are that students will often write more and better if they believe their work will be projected.

Subject-Occasion-Audience-Purpose-Speaker-Tone (SOAPSTone) – Tommy Boley

This is a text-analysis strategy, a method for initially teaching students how to analyze nonfiction.

- Speaker - the individual or collective voice
- Occasion - the event or catalyst causing the writing
- Audience - the group of readers to whom the piece is directed
- Purpose - the reason behind the text
- Subject - the general topic or main idea
- Tone - the attitude of the author

T-Square Notes

Comparing primary documents using the template on the right helps students scaffold thinking about multiple, competing voices on the same issue.

Students could compare an article from the Scotland Newes and Daemonologie, a play written by
James I, to compare ideas about early modern fears about witchcraft. Working in pairs or small groups helps students work through documents first before sharing thoughts about multiple ideas. The analysis of how both documents explore an issue is how you would like students to approach documents, but this may take considerable practice before seeing ease and confidence. Students do best when they make their own T-square notes in their writer’s notebooks. Passing out a template for students to fill in is actually restrictive in that students are not making meaning in the way that makes sense to them.

Text Comparison

On one page, place two document excerpts side by side. When students read, they should look for what the author is saying about the subject as well as how the writing is structured. After some practice with this skill, analyze HOW the author is conveying the information. Is it in narrative form? Does visual text, such as graphs, charts, or diagrams, illuminate the main points? Students should be given time to work through this on their own before discussing in small groups. This is best done using the Gradual Release Model: mini-lesson (teacher to student), formative (checking for understanding), collaborative (students together), and independent (students alone).

Text-to-Text Connections

Students read documents with one of Shakespeare’s plays in mind, searching for quotes from both primary sources to compare ideas about larger issues, such as plant lore, gender, or violence.
Text-to-World Connections:

Students analyze digital or visual text to make a connection with the world at large, what is happening outside of the text. An example is when students note the connection between the Amazon engraving while studying Midsummer and the gender inequalities during the early modern period. (MND, 10)

Visual Text Analysis

Students analyze visuals, such as charts, graphs, illustrations, paintings, and sketches, using a systematic approach.

Step One: Introducing Visual Text Analysis

1. If using a projector, dim the lights. It is easier not only to see the visual, but also to quiet the group.
2. Give students 1-2 minutes to simply look at the visual in silence. This may seem like a long time, but it is the most important step. Students may first look but, given more time, will begin to focus on the details.
3. Ask students, “What do you notice?” Students will begin slowly but will build more confidence when they realize no “correct” answer is necessary. Voicing diverse ideas will spur more. This is the step where many students will participate, more than in other class discussions.
4. Provide writing time for students to reflect on the visual and what they learned from others’ viewpoints that they had not noticed during the first two minutes of quiet observation.

Step Two: Releasing Responsibility Through Partnership
1. Project a second visual. If you are working with primary documents, the visuals may all fall under the same category, such as family relationships or normative gender roles.

2. Observe visual in silence for 1-2 minutes.

3. Each student talks with “elbow partner” about what they noticed in relation to theme. This step is important in that it builds confidence and content. Students find that some observations coincide with others’ but also learn about diverse lenses. Their partners can provide insight that becomes springboards for new ideas.

4. The teacher asks each partner group to report. Each person in the group must say something they noticed or learned.

5. Writing time - students need at least five minutes to reflect on their learning.

**Step Three: Moving Toward Independence**

1. Project a third visual.

2. Students observe for 1-2 minutes, then move immediately into partner groups for discussion.

3. Partner groups combine into groups of 4-6 where they share ideas about what they observed. This can be divided into two sections where students have approximately 10 minutes to share and then 10 minutes to direct their conversations toward a specific open-ended question, such as *How does this document provide context for the Macbeth’s relationship?* or *How does this document provide evidence for the religious significance of ghosts?* Students should jot down their findings in their critical reading journals.

   During this step, the teacher visits each group to listen and to write down a few comments in a bubble sheet. Using one sheet of printer paper, draw at least 10 circles. Fill in at least two bubbles for each group with a student comment.
4. Using the projector, teacher shares ideas that bubbled up from observing groups. This can be the “ice breaker” when some of the more unique ideas are shared.

5. Large group reports. Each group should select a spokesperson to share one conclusion that bubbled up from the discussions in both partner and small groups.

6. Writing time. Each student needs to reflect on how their confidence with visual text is increasing. What are they noticing about their own efficacy?

**Step Four**: Independent Work

1. Project visual text.
2. Quiet observation for 1-2 minutes.
3. Partner share for 1-2 minutes.
4. Writing time for 15 minutes.

**Step Five**: Transferring Knowledge (optional)

1. Students research visual text on specific topic. This step can be more successfully done in partner or small groups to encourage immediate feedback on research results. It should be a noisy activity with vocal engagement.
2. Students take notes on observations, specifically focused on connections among visuals.
3. Students create contextual questions for each visual.
4. Students share their findings.
Appendix D

Researching Primary and Secondary Documents

The best part about teaching Shakespeare using primary documents is finding the documents! The adventure lies within the search, and there is no better feeling when you find something unexpected. Two sources I have found to be extremely useful and open to students is first, the Folger Shakespeare Library and second, the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre.

Folger Shakespeare Library
The Folger Library may be the most underused goldmine by secondary teachers, primarily because teachers do not know about the wealth it houses. Moreover, most do not know that the Folger’s Education Department’s primary goal is to help teachers teach Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets. If you are working with documents, you will want to take advantage of the databases for scholarship and documents, but a plethora of other sources, such as weekly blog posts and podcasts are a rich source of daily classroom ideas.

You may wish to include research in your Shakespeare unit, so students have the opportunity to find their own early modern documents based on specific historical/cultural issues. You can access the site using the URL below, then click on either HAMNET for secondary documents or LUNA for primary. Take time to peruse the site to see all the treasures. It’s best to first find a few nuggets yourself, so you will be able to best advise your students.

1. www.folger.edu/research-scholars
2. HAMNET
   a. Click on e-resources, and you will find journals and databases normally found on college websites, including The Shakespeare Quarterly found on Project MUSE and JSTOR, where you can find scholarly articles on current issues about Shakespeare plays and sonnets. Other links, such as https://www.worldshakesbib.org/, will share over 120,000 records of genealogies, lineages, biographies, and histories.
   b. This site is open for students and teachers.
3. LUNA
   a. This is a platform for primary visual and digital documents like no other. Tens of thousands of digitized original documents will be of vital importance to teachers and students who have specific interests.
   b. The Education Department will help any teacher who is planning research projects.
4. FOLGERPEDIA
   a. The Folgerpedia is an encyclopedia of anything Folger. They describe not only the library offerings, but also the theatrical performances and teacher trainings.
   b. You may find it difficult to leave this site because of the many opportunities for anything Shakespeare or early modern. At this time, for example, the newest exhibits and information are all about Elizabeth I and her court.

What I have found works best is to decide on a few themes or ideas from the play you are teaching. If you have a projector, you can demonstrate your detective skills as you think through an idea.

   Romeo and Juliet
Let’s say a student in your ninth grade English class is interested in apothecaries. She wants to know something about their role in early modern society. You decide to log on to the Luna site at the Folger Library to see if you can find any pictures or descriptions of their work. You type in apothecary in the search bar at the top. The first thing you see are two rows of drawings from scenes during the 18th and 19th centuries. As you place your curser over each picture, the citation pops up, providing the image number and description. Other pictures show handwritten documents, and you find a 1619 letter written by Sir George More requesting payment for medicine. Another visual is an apothecary’s bill from 1591. The writing is difficult to read, so you click on the picture to enlarge it and click on the bar in the lower right corner to slide the picture up and down. Now you can see the writing, but this isn’t quite what you wanted. You go back to the search bar and type in medicine. Bingo! Look at all the pictures of skeletons and plants that look like people, and books about medicine. One of these books from the 1600s is about “the new, safe and powerful way of physick...to cure themselves.” This could be fun!

   A Midsummer Night’s Dream
You teach general eighth grade English and have students who want to know more about the play when it first came out in 1600, especially how the characters were portrayed. You go to shakespearedocumented.org and type in the title of the play in the search bar. You find a handwritten copy of when it was approved by the stationer (plays had to be approved before they could be staged). It was entered as "A mydsommer nightes Dreame." From there you decide to look at some pictures of Bottom - what did he look like? What costume did he wear? You return to luna.folger.edu and find numerous sketches of Bottom from a variety of productions. One catches your eye. It’s a pen and ink drawing of Bottom and Titania, drawn by George Cruikshank from the early 19th century. What’s interesting is that Bottom is huge - Titania is a tiny little fairy, similar to Tinkerbell. Your students decide to make their own sketches of how they envision the sizes of the fairies compared to Bottom.
The first thing you will notice about early modern documents is the writing. It can sometimes be difficult to read. Sometimes the writing is transcribed for you, or you can search for more information at the top of the page. The most important thing to remember is to give yourself and your students time to explore. And have fun!

**Teaching Modules**
You can also find primary documents within teaching modules (folger.edu/teachingmodules). Under each play’s title, you will find resources, such as PRIMARY SOURCE SPOTLIGHT, featuring specific documents that go with each play. Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, for example, are listed in sections under *Macbeth*, making it easy for teachers to align the original source with different parts of the play. The Folger staff provides resources in conjunction with lesson plans, which is extremely helpful.

**Chicago Shakespeare Theater**
The Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier in Chicago offers much more than plays on their thrust stage. Teachers who organize student field trips can purchase more economical tickets for “Short Shakes,” 90-minute productions, followed by “talk-backs” where students can ask questions about the performance. (Combining a Short-Shakes production with a shopping trip on the Miracle Mile is a good way to spend your day!)

Teachers are also invited to an all-day workshop where they can learn how to teach the play, a “hands-on” experience that focuses on how to get students out of their seats and have fun with the language. In addition, you will be treated to a rehearsal of the actual play your students will see, which I find to be one of the most valuable experiences of the day. They will generally choose one scene to rehearse where the director works with them on specific movements, expressions, and language. Blocking the scene is helpful, but observing how the scene can be performed several different ways, depending on the director’s choice, lends credence to multiple practice runs.

1. [https://www.chicagoshakes.com/education](https://www.chicagoshakes.com/education)
2. EDUCATION
   a. You will find extremely useful teacher handbooks for each play containing student activities, critical commentaries, performance descriptions, and plot summaries.
   b. Essays on Elizabethan England and early modern theater experiences are available for background information as you begin your work with primary documents.
Researching Secondary Documents

Sometimes teachers want to share ideas for researching information about early modern culture using more contemporary sources. From past experiences with students on the Internet, I often have to search myriad sites, wishing I had everything in one place. The following are user friendly links you might want to explore.

96 Incredibly Useful Links for Teaching and Studying Shakespeare
1. http://tinyurl.com/c6f5955
   1. If you want everything all in one spot, this is it. It categorizes links by topics: articles, quizzes, teacher’s guides, and audio/video resources.
2. Students may wish to use this site for more modern references to Shakespeare’s plays.
3. Some links do take you to early modern sources.

Historical, Cultural Websites

Teaching Shakespeare With the New York Times (“top shelf” resource and at the top of my list)

Clothing and Elizabethan England
https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/clothing-in-elizabethan-england

Daily Life in the Elizabethan Era

Elizabethan Era
http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/

https://schoolworkhelper.net/elizabethan-era-daily-life-food-education-marriage-family-fashion/

History of the Present
http://historyofthepresent.org/1.1/introduction.html

Life in 16th Century England
http://www.localhistories.org/tudor.html
Life in Shakespeare’s England
http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/londonlife.html

The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth Century
https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/16century/review/summary.htm

Renaissance Sites and Elizabethan Resources
http://www.elizabethan.org/sites.html

Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Age in England

Shakespeare Resource Center
http://www.bardweb.net/england.html

Shakespeare’s World
http://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-world

The Social Structure in Elizabethan England
https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/the-social-structure-in-elizabethan-england
Appendix E

Writing Assessment Rubrics

NINTH GRADE ENGLISH STANDARDS ASSESSMENT: WRITING

These essays offer an exceptionally focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt and specific textual support from primary documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, these essays explore the theme’s complexity to reflect on how early modern cultural issues are relevant today. Although not without flaws, these essays make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the theme with significant insight and understanding. Generally, essays scored in the top range reveal sophisticated analysis of ideas and exceptional control of language, including highly proficient use of vocabulary and stylistic maturity in sentence structure. (TOP SCORES: 90%-100%)

These essays offer a reasonably focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt, yet general, textual support from primary documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, these essays explore the theme appropriately, but less thoroughly or precisely than those with top scores. Reflections on how early modern culture issues are relevant today may be articulated too generally and without adequate complexity or support. Essays of this caliber contain noticeable language errors, affecting clarity and control in writing but do not completely undermine the ability to express concrete ideas. These essays consistently demonstrate proficient use of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure. (UPPER SCORES: 80%-89%)

Essays in this range offer minimal focus and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using superficial or obvious textual support from primary documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, these essays explore the theme by summarizing Shakespeare’s ideas or other cultural issues without sufficient reflection on how the early modern period has relevance today. Even though essays of this caliber address the prompt, they contain language errors that weaken the overall analysis, resulting in a thinly developed or weakly organized structure. Vocabulary and writing control is at a minimally effective level. (MIDDLE SCORES: 70%-79%)

Essays in the below average range offer little to no apparent focus or analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Textual support from primary documents, including *Romeo and Juliet*, is sparse or nonexistent, or essays reveal major misconceptions about how the readings provide evidence for a developing theme. Using emerging vocabulary or simple sentence structure, essays of this caliber reveal unclear, unsubstantial reflections about how early modern issues are relevant today. The overall writing is emerging toward proficiency. (LOWER SCORES: 60%-69%)
ELEVENTH GRADE ENGLISH STANDARDS ASSESSMENT: WRITING

These essays offer an exceptionally focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt and specific textual support from primary documents, including Hamlet, these essays explore the theme’s complexity to reflect on how early modern cultural issues are relevant today. Although not without flaws, these essays make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the theme with significant insight and understanding. Generally, essays scored in the top range reveal sophisticated analysis of ideas and exceptional control of language, including highly proficient use of vocabulary and stylistic maturity in sentence structure.
(TOP SCORES: 90%-100%)

These essays offer a reasonably focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt, yet general, textual support from primary documents, including Hamlet, these essays explore the theme appropriately, but less thoroughly or precisely than those with top scores. Reflections on how early modern culture issues are relevant today may be articulated too generally and without adequate complexity or support. Essays of this caliber contain noticeable language errors, affecting clarity and control in writing but do not completely undermine the ability to express concrete ideas. These essays consistently demonstrate proficient use of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure.
(UPPER SCORES: 80%-89%)

Essays in this range offer minimal focus and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using superficial or obvious textual support from primary documents, including Hamlet, these essays explore the theme by summarizing Shakespeare’s ideas or other cultural issues without sufficient reflection on how the early modern period has relevance today. Even though essays of this caliber address the prompt, they contain language errors that weaken the overall analysis, resulting in a thinly developed or weakly organized structure. Vocabulary and writing control is at a minimally effective level.
(MIDDLE SCORES: 70%-79%)

Essays in the below average range offer little to no apparent focus or analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Textual support from primary documents, including Hamlet, is sparse or nonexistent, or essays reveal major misconceptions about how the readings provide evidence for a developing theme. Using emerging vocabulary or simple sentence structure, essays of this caliber reveal unclear, unsubstantial reflections about how early modern issues are relevant today. The overall writing is emerging toward proficiency.
(LOWER SCORES: 60%-69%)

Failing essays demonstrate little competency or effort in analyzing how Shakespeare develops a theme. Although some attempts to analyze or to reflect may be indicated, the writer’s view has little clarity and only slight, if any, textual evidence in its support. Generally these essays are unacceptably brief or ineffectively written.
(LOWEST SCORES: 59% or less)
Essays receiving top scores focus on how Shakespeare develops a theme, drawing on evidence from primary and secondary documents, including *Macbeth*, to reflect on how early modern cultural issues are relevant today. A researched essay of this caliber is formatted according to MLA standards, including heading, in-text citations, and works cited. The thesis is concise, debatable, and cogent and is supported with apt evidence from authentic sources and relevant examples from *Macbeth*. Evidence of balance between scholarly sources and analytical discussion validates the student’s ability to navigate research and evidence for how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using an organic, persuasive format, the student demonstrates proficiency in the synthesis and analysis of sources, which demonstrates critical understanding. The academic tone and elevated vocabulary serve to establish sophisticated style and thought-provoking detail. The essay has evidence of thorough proofreading and revision and attends to mechanics, requirements, and content, employing consistent control over elements of effective writing.

7-8-9 90-100%

Essays in the B range focus on how Shakespeare develops a theme but partially draw on evidence from primary and secondary documents, including Macbeth, to reflect on how early modern cultural issues are relevant today. Researched essays of this description are formatted according to MLA standards but have errors in the heading, citations, or works cited. Thesis statements are somewhat debatable but are supported with evidence from either primary or secondary sources and obvious examples from *Macbeth*. The balance between scholarly sources and relevant observations is compromised because the writing focuses too much on one or the other. Essays in this range may employ obvious organization and style without insight or sophistication, incorporating vague support and obvious conclusions. Tone may be inconsistent, based on general word choice. Some areas of concern include lack of proofreading and revision, or attention to requirements, which have an effect on the overall quality of the composition.

6 80-89%

Essays in the C range are considered to be average quality and do not qualify as academic writing evidenced by consistent control over elements of mechanics and content. The thesis may be superficial or obvious, rendering it difficult to effectively support with authentic sources and relevant observations. MLA guidelines are minimally followed, and the student-selected format focuses heavily on summary. A student’s essay in this range relies predominantly on either primary or secondary sources or limited observations without thorough analysis or commentary. The tone in this essay is erratic based on questionable word choice and inconsistent writing control. The overall quality of the essay is marred by surface errors that distract the reader from the intended message.

5 70-79%

Essays in the D range are considered to be ineffective examples of research and composition and do not adhere to MLA standards or effective writing. Little attention is given to reliable and viable sources; the essay is further marred by errors in mechanics and flaws in logic. Neither appropriate planning nor academic tone is evident.

3-4 60-69%
EIGHTH GRADE ENGLISH STANDARDS ASSESSMENT: WRITING

These essays offer an exceptionally focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt and specific textual support from primary documents, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, these essays explore the theme’s complexity to reflect on how early modern cultural issues are relevant today. Although not without flaws, these essays make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the theme with significant insight and understanding. Generally, essays scored in the top range reveal sophisticated analysis of ideas and exceptional control of language, including highly proficient use of vocabulary and stylistic maturity in sentence structure. (TOP SCORES: 90%-100%)

These essays offer a reasonably focused and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using apt, yet general, textual support from primary documents, including *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, these essays explore the theme appropriately, but less thoroughly or precisely than those with top scores. Reflections on how early modern culture issues are relevant today may be articulated too generally and without adequate complexity or support. Essays of this caliber contain noticeable language errors, affecting clarity and control in writing but do not completely undermine the ability to express concrete ideas. These essays consistently demonstrate proficient use of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure. (UPPER SCORES: 80%-89%)

Essays in this range offer minimal focus and persuasive analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Using superficial or obvious textual support from primary documents, including *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, these essays explore the theme by summarizing Shakespeare’s ideas or other cultural issues without sufficient reflection on how the early modern period has relevance today. Even though essays of this caliber address the prompt, they contain language errors that weaken the overall analysis, resulting in a thinly developed or weakly organized structure. Vocabulary and writing control is at a minimally effective level. (MIDDLE SCORES: 70%-79%)

Essays in the below average range offer little to no apparent focus or analysis of how Shakespeare develops a theme. Textual support from primary documents, including *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is sparse or nonexistent, or essays reveal major misconceptions about how the readings provide evidence for a developing theme. Using emerging vocabulary or simple sentence structure, essays of this caliber reveal unclear, unsubstantial reflections about how early modern issues are relevant today. The overall writing is emerging toward proficiency. (LOWER SCORES: 60%-69%)

Failing essays demonstrate little competency or effort in analyzing how Shakespeare develops a theme. Although some attempts to analyze or to reflect may be indicated, the writer’s view has little clarity and only slight, if any, textual evidence in its support. Generally these essays are unacceptably brief or ineffectively written. (LOWEST SCORES: 59% or less)
Appendix F

Performance Assessment Rubrics

**ELEVENTH GRADE ENGLISH STANDARDS ASSESSMENT: PERFORMANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>90-100%</th>
<th>80-89%</th>
<th>70-79%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly expresses how performance is influenced without discussing themes developed in specific act</td>
<td>Adequately expresses how performance is influenced by themes developed in specific act its relevance to the performance</td>
<td>Minimally expresses how performance is influenced by themes developed in specific act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatizes appropriate lines from a specific act, demonstrating knowledge of content and intent</td>
<td>Dramatizes appropriate lines with some knowledge of content and culture; needs stronger idea of intent of act</td>
<td>Dramatizes some lines from act with minimal understanding of content or cultural inferences; questionable integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly and articulately pronounces and expresses language with natural intonation, cadence, and practice</td>
<td>Clearly and articulately pronounces and expresses language with some memory lapses or speaking too quickly/slowly to maintain natural</td>
<td>Pronounces and expresses with several memory lapses or indecipherable pronunciation resulting in unnatural speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adeptly and exceptionally delivers lines from notes, play, or memory without pauses errors or retakes</td>
<td>Adequately delivers lines from memory, notes, or play with some pauses or retakes either in a group or individually</td>
<td>Delivers lines but often stops or requests a retake; may pause often or add inappropriate gestures or pauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporates creative and appropriate sound effects, props, OR costumes that OR costumes</td>
<td>Incorporates some creativity in sound effects, props, OR costumes without significant bearing on the performance</td>
<td>Incorporates little creativity in sound effects, props, OR has minimal bearing on delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performs within and according to designated change; speaks few schedule and time lines</td>
<td>Performs according to the schedule but does not adhere to time constraints</td>
<td>Asks for schedule change or not adhere to time constraints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Sonnet Project Presentation Ideas

Roaming Team Leaders
This presentation works well for group projects. Instead of students standing up in front of the class, students present to small groups. An example might include a group of four students who decide to divide up the poems into types, such as those written to another man, those written to a mistress, those written to a rival poet, and those written about self-recrimination. After students have researched and discussed their roles and findings, they divide the class into four groups. Each member of the group, or team leader, rotates through each small group, presenting for approximately 10 minutes each. Vertical white boards can be used as separators between groups or students can convene around large round tables. If classes are smaller, a laptop can be used to show a clip or powerpoint to a group of 6-8.

Poster Walk
This presentation will get all of your students up and walking. Presenters can use either tables to set up project or large poster-sized sticky notes to put on the wall as their station. Divide the class into as many groups as you have presenters. Groups walk through the hall or classroom stopping for at least five minutes at each station to hear the presenter speak about their findings.

Panel Discussions
A panel discussion can be a different experience if the panel incorporates a fishbowl discussion format for at least a portion of the discussion. We often expect panels to be similar to a speech, except that more than one person speaks at a time. Consider a panel where the members have a natural discussion in front of the class, rather than in a group where, fish-bowl-like, members are surrounded by the audience to listen and learn.
Real Time Board
A real time board is a whiteboard that can be remotely and collaboratively shared with a team working on a project. Think of real time as a white board you would use either at school or in an office but one that is online and can be revised and enhanced by a group of learners. Begin with a few ideas and let the fun begin. You can choose a template or create your own. Ideas can be developed by everyone in the group anytime and anyplace. Add clips, pictures, audios, sticky notes - research you have gathered to develop this idea. For example, if you are working on a hunch about the identity of the “dark lady” of Shakespeare’s sonnets, add a few possibilities, and then send it out to your team. Each person can research a possible name and add to the board. The presentation is where you project your board to share your findings. (realtimeboard.com)
Check out the quick tutorial from Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f_6l6YDOso

Class Book
Create a virtual or digital class book of sonnets and responses. Responses could include music, contemporary poetry, visuals, sketches, or research. Divide the class into pairs, triads, or larger groups of 4-6. As they self-select their favorite sonnets, ask them to add pages to the book. A Google Document works well for this because of its “share” feature where many students can work at one time.

Triad Presentations
A three-person group is perfect. It’s not too small, yet it’s not too big where members can get lost in the shuffle. Moreover, it works especially well for students who are less likely to feel comfortable sharing in front of a large group. You can try a few different types of triads to see which you like the best:

1. In this project, each group has the same three different topics. For example, you could ask students in each group to research the background of the sonnet, Shakespeare’s sonnet structure, and contemporary sonnets. Once each triad has decided who will take which part, groups can then break apart, such that those students who are working on the same projects can work together to research their part. In addition to collaborating on ideas, they should also decide how to create a 15-minute presentation on their topic. This may take 4 days. On the 5th day, students reconvene in their original triads to present. End with a reflection on what they learned. The results are generally amazing!

2. Another approach to the triad presentation is to have each group of three research collaboratively one self-selected idea. They will work together to create something that can be shared with other groups in a 15-minute presentation. To present, split up the triad to work with 3 other triads, so that each member of the triad is teaching their product to 2 other students from other groups. A final reflection could include a panel discussion where each triad shares their process with the rest of the class.

Name that Sonnet
Creating titles for poetry is difficult because students need to know the poems well enough to create a title that is both unique and telling. A challenge to this activity is to take the titles of 14 sonnets to create another sonnet, using Shakespeare’s structure and rhyme scheme. The beauty of this project is that you can divide the class in a variety of ways to work and present.
Group Websites
Create a sonnet website where Shakespeare’s sonnets are shared and discussed. Specific sonnets
can be posted and discussed with scholarly articles, lectures, primary documents, and graphics.
Website do not have to be serious. You could do a Valentine’s website that showcases his love
sonnets.

Blogs
Blogging can be a way for students to have ongoing discussions throughout their project,
especially if students enjoy reading and writing while they are exploring Shakespeare’s work.
Blogging is good for students who enjoy writing in sentence format, rather than concentrating on
graphics. Students can post questions to create interactive blogs. One blogger who likes to
dabble in fiction and fact is Grace Tiffany, a Shakespeare scholar from Western Michigan
University. She has written numerous young adult fiction books about real early modern issues,
such as Gun Powder Percey, a novel about the Gunpowder Plot. According to her blog, she uses
fiction as “another medium for exploring the early modern world.” Listen to an interview with

Facebook Page
Create a Facebook page for Shakespeare where you can ask him questions about his sonnets.
Create a profile and add pictures of his family. Get creative: he can post where he’s been and
what he’s doing while he goes on vacation. Include work on his sonnets, such as where he got
his ideas and what they are about. See the BBC Shakespeare Facebook page for an example.
(https://www.facebook.com/BBCShakespeare/)
Find her blog at http://shakespearefiction.blogspot.com/

Voicethread
This is an amazing way to add voice to your powerpoints, visual, or any other document that
needs explaining. Voicethreads can be added to your work by phone, webcam, microphone, text,
or file upload. Students who do not like to speak in front of class and are comfortable hearing
themselves on
love this

(https://voicethread.com/)
**Shakespeare Kahoot**
Creating a Kahoot game is intuitive, and students love playing. It works well for learning just about anything and takes on a multiple choice format. Students first set up an account and then make a list of what should be learned. They must make up the questions, foils, and correct answers. What students love are the music, sound effects, and stopwatch. Students access the site on their phones by signing in and respond to each question within a set number of seconds.

Points are earned for each correct answer, declaring a winner at the end. Very competitive and fun! (kahoot.com)

**Interviews**
Students can set up an interview with Shakespeare and/or different sonneteers. This can be done live or recorded. Students make a list of questions regarding Shakespeare and his sonnets. The best part of this is when students decide to dress the part of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.
### Appendix H

Contemporary Fiction Based on Shakespeare Plays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hamlet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Black Prince</em></td>
<td>Iris Murdoch</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A depiction of obsessive love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Dead Father’s Club</em></td>
<td>Matt Haig</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt joins a club where members’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dead fathers are ghosts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Falling for Hamlet</em></td>
<td>Michelle Ray</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ophelia, high school senior, is ruled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Hamlet’s fame and father’s death</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gertrude and Claudius</em></td>
<td>John Updike</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative prequel to the play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly’s mom dies, and her ghost provides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the truth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamlet, A Novel</em></td>
<td>John Marsden</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Australian author re-imagines Hamlet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet</em></td>
<td>Merlyn A. Hermes</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story of Horatio who believes in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>philosophy until he meets the Prince of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ophelia</em></td>
<td>Lisa M. Klein</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamlet</em> told through Ophelia’s point of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ophelia: Queen of Denmark</em></td>
<td>Jackie French</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A novel about a strong, determined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ophelia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</em></td>
<td>Tom Stoppard</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A quirky, comedic play about R &amp; G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Saving Hamlet</em></td>
<td>Molly Booth</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<td>A stage trapdoor is the entry to time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Something Rotten</em></td>
<td>Alan Gratz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detective fiction set in Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Simon</em></td>
<td>Michael Mullin</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-year-old film student avenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s ghost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Steep and Thorny Way</em></td>
<td>Cat Winters</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural retelling set in 1920s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Story of Edgar Sawtelle</em></td>
<td>David Wroblewski</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>A mute boy finds out how his uncle killed his father</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Total Tragedy of a Girl Named Hamlet</em></td>
<td>Erin Dionne</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamlet Kennedy lives an unordinary life with Shakespeare scholar parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>To Be or Not To Be: A Chooseable-Path Adventure</em></td>
<td>Ryan North</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take control of the Hamlet ending by choosing how you want events to unfold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>A Wounded Name</em></td>
<td>Dot Hutchinson</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of Hamlet through Ophelia’s eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Julius Caesar</em></td>
<td>Frederick Forsyth</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Dogs of War</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruthless men operate by their own code</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>King Lear</em></td>
<td>Christopher Moore</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Fool</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lear’s story told through the jester’s eyes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>A Thousand Acres</em></td>
<td>Jane Smiley</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Daughters stand to gain when their father gives up the farm</td>
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<td><em>Moby Dick</em></td>
<td>Herman Melville</td>
<td>1851</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahab takes on nature to kill his prey - greed and foolishness quash his success</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Macbeth</em></td>
<td>Robin Talley</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>As I Descended</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily and Maria are willing to do anything to make their dream come true</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Enter Three Witches</em></td>
<td>Caroline B. Cooney</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Told from the perspective of the daughter of Lady Macbeth’s Lady in Waiting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lady Macbeth</em></td>
<td>Susan Fraser King</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid portrait of a woman maligned by history</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lady Macbeth’s Daughter</em></td>
<td>Lisa M. Klein</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albia is raised by three strange sisters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mac / Beth: The Price of Fame Shouldn’t Be Murder</em></td>
<td>Michelle Ray</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A contemporary Hollywood accidental murder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Something Wicked</em></td>
<td>Alan Gratz</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police arrest Malcolm for a murder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Talented Mr. Ripley</em></td>
<td>Patricia Highsmith</td>
<td>1955</td>
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</table>
Mr. Ripley wants what someone else has

**Third Witch**  
A retelling with balance of good and evil  
Jackie French  
2017

**The Third Witch**  
Fast-paced tale of revenge told by third witch  
Rebecca Reisert  
2002

**Weird Sisters**  
Three sisters return to their home to find their mother sick and their father still speaking in verse  
Eleanor Brown  
2012

**The Wyrd Sisters**  
Story of Granny Weatherwax, the unleader of a group of social witches  
Terry Pratchett  
2013

**The Merchant of Venice**  
**The Serpent of Venice**  
A satiric Venetian gothic mystery  
Christopher Moore  
2015

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream**  
**Dreamers Often Lie**  
A girl who dreams about Shakespeare characters  
Jacqueline West  
2016

**Eyes Like Stars**  
Characters from many plays are trapped in an unusual theater  
Lisa Mantchev  
2010

**The Great Night**  
Fairy tale of love, magic, and human yearning  
Chris Adrian  
2011

**Ill Met By Moonlight**  
A transparent castle in another world  
Sarah A. Hoyt  
2002

**King of Shadows**  
Nat joins an American troop to perform *Midsummer* in London  
Susan Cooper  
2005

**Love in Idleness**  
Set in contemporary Tuscany and exposes the frailties of love and marriage  
Amanda Craig  
2004

**A Midsummer Tight’s Dream**  
Tallulah is admitted to a performing arts school and tries to keep it open  
Louise Rennison  
2012

**Station 11**  
Pandemic causes the world to appreciate Shakespeare  
Emily St. John Mandel  
2015

**This Must Be Love**  
Hermia and Helena search for their soulmates  
Tui T. Sutherland  
2005
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Treachery of Beautiful Things</em></td>
<td>Ruth Frances Long</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenny struggles to navigate a fairy world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wings: A Fairy Tale</em></td>
<td>E.D. Baker</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamisin learns she was adopted from Fairyland when wings sprout from her back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
<td>Jody Gehrman</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Conessions of a Triple Shot Betty</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of mistaken identities and just enough romance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Manga Shakespeare: Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
<td>Richard Appignanesi and Emma Vieceli</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A graphic novel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Much Ado About Murder: A Shakespeare in The Catskills Mystery</em></td>
<td>Simon Hawke</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complications arise when British Actress arrives to play the role of Beatrice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Mal Peet</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Exposure</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer player falls for white pop star</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I, Iago</em></td>
<td>Nicole Galland</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iago takes center stage and reveals his motivation for ruining Othello</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Iago: A Novel</em></td>
<td>David Snodin</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>An adventure story where Othello leaves off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Richard III</em></td>
<td>Richard Tey</td>
<td>1951</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Daughter of Time</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Detective Alan Grant takes an interest in a much-maligned king</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Requiem of Rose King</em></td>
<td>Aya Kanno</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic novel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Richard Revisited</em></td>
<td>Els Launspach</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Novel based on the recent finding of Richard’s skeleton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Romeo and Juliet</em></td>
<td>Kim Askew</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anyone But You</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Montes are still fighting the Caps</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Arcadia Awakens
  New Yorker Rosa falls in love with Mafia son in Sicily

I Am Juliet
  Juliet as helpless victim

The Juliet Club
  Kate travels to Verona after She is burned by love

Juliet Immortal
  Juliet doesn’t kill herself; she is murdered by Romeo

Juliet’s Nurse
  Tragicomedy about Juliet’s nurse who still mourns her own daughter

Letters To Juliet
  Letters come to Verona from romantics seeking advice

Prince of Cats
  Hip-hop retelling

Romeo x Juliet Omnibus
  Juliet survives a massacre and turns on the Montagues

Ronit and Jamil
  Contemporary retelling in verse

Saving Juliet
  Time travel transports Mimi to early modern period

Still Star-Crossed
  The story of Rosaline and Benvolio after R & J

Sung in Shadow
  Parallel world retelling

Warm Bodies
  Zombie Apocalypse version

When You Were Mine
  Modern recounting through Rosaline’s eyes

Shakespeare (general)

All Night Awake
  Fairy Lady Silver tracks a supernatural beast

Any Man So Daring
  Hamnet disappears in the realm of an Elvin King

Interred With Their Bones
  Jennifer Lee Carrell 2008

344
A killer re-enacts the most bloody Shakespeare murders

**Kill Shakespeare, Vol. 1: A Sea of Troubles**  
The Bard’s heroes are pitted against his villains  
Connor McCreary et al  2010

**The Late Mr. Shakespeare**  
Pickleherring, an old friend, writes Shakespeare’s story  
Robert Nye  2000

**Loving Will Shakespeare**  
The story of Anne Hathaway and her love for Shakespeare  
Carolyn Meyer  2008

**The Man Who Built the Castle**  
two people meet and connect by their love of art  
M. Wellman  2016

**My Father Had a Daughter**  
Judith Shakespeare runs away to London to find her father  
Grace Tiffany  2004

**My Name is Will**  
Grad student Willie Shakespeare meets playwright William  
Jess Winfield  2008

**Perchance to Dream: Classic Tales from the Bard’s World in New Skins**  
New takes on several plays  
Lyssa Chiavarri, ed.  2015

**Playing With My Heart**  
Romance at the Globe  
Valerie Wilding  2014

**Serenissima: a Novel of Venice**  
Venice Film Festival just senses Something mysterious  
Erica Jong  1997

**Shakespeare’s Daughter**  
Suzanna yearns to travel  
Peter W. Hassinger  2004

**Soliloquies: The Lady Doth Indeed Protest**  
A collection of female characters’ soliloquies  
Chris Wind  2011

**Shakespeare Makes the Playoffs**  
Kevin meets a girl who shares his love of verse at Mic Night  
Ron Koertge  2010

**Shakespeare Undead**  
Questions Shakespeare’s authorship  
Lori Handeland  2010

**Swan Town: The Secret Journal of Susanna Shakespeare**  
Susanna longs for excitement  
Michael J. Ortiz  2006

**The Tragedy of Arthur**  
Family drama about a long lost Shakespeare play  
Arthur Phillips  2012

**William Shakespeare’s Star Wars**  
Ian Doescher  2013
Star Wars told in iambic pentameter

**Sonnets**

*Fortune and Men’s Eyes*
An off-Broadway play based on sonnet #29
(film released in 1971)

*Paint*
Emilia Bassano strategizes how to preserve her own solitude

**The Taming of the Shrew**

*The Taming of the Drew*
Cass lands the role she is meant to play

*Vinegar Girl*
Doctor schemes to have his daughter marry his lab assistant

*Wise Children*
Twins, doubles, and paradoxes

**The Tempest**

*Ariel*
Ariel entices Prospero with her visions

*Blast of Tempest*
A sorceress promises to help find a family’s killer

*The Chosen Prince*
Two princes and a mysterious girl on a magical island

*Dream of Perpetual Motion*
Steampunk retelling

*Hagseed*
An ousted stage director brings *The Tempest* to life in a revenge plot

*The Gentleman Poet*
Astonishing events that may have led Shakespeare to write *The Tempest*

*Brave New World*
An outcast is despised for his appearance

John Herbert 1967
Grace Tiffany 2016
Stephanie Kate Strohm 2016
Anne Tyler 2017
Angela Carter 2007
Grace Tiffany 2005
Kyo Shirodaira et al 2010
Diane Stanley 2015
Dexter Palmer 2011
Margaret Atwood 2017
Kathryn Johnson 2010
Aldous Huxley 1932
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Mama Day</em></td>
<td>Gloria Naylor</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emancipated woman tested by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Island’s dark forces</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Prospero Lost</em></td>
<td>L. Jagi Lamplighter</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporary Miranda discovers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>her father missing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Prospero’s Daughter</em></td>
<td>Elisabeth Nunez</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set on Caribbean island during</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>height of tensions between</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>natives and British colonists</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Rough Magic</em></td>
<td>Caryl Cude Mullin</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both prequel and sequel to</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tempest</em></td>
<td></td>
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<td><em>Twelfth Night</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Cakes and Ale</em></td>
<td>Somerset Maugham</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>A novel about literary snobbery</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Fool’s Girl</em></td>
<td>Celia Rees</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>An adventure tale with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare, Violetta, pirates,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>social issues, and love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Madness of Love</em></td>
<td>Katharine Davies</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>An interwoven love story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Two Gentlemen of Verona</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Two Gentlemen of Lebowski</em></td>
<td>Adam Bertocci</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of ridiculousness, bowling,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and mistaken identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Winter’s Tale</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Exit, Pursued by a Bear</em></td>
<td>E.K. Johnston</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerleading captain faces</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles when someone slips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>something into her drink.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Gap of Time</em></td>
<td>Jeanette Winterson</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes place in London after</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a storm-ravaged American South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Winter’s Song</em></td>
<td>Jeana Watters</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatched couple find letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>addressed to a dead baby</td>
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</table>
Figure 86. YA Retellings. Epic Reads, http://www.epicreads.com/blog/an-epic-chart-of-162-young-adult-retellings/.
Appendix I

Teacher Surveys

The following Google Form Survey was sent to the teachers who participated in this dissertation project, providing various lenses for their feedback: 4 teachers observed their students working with me; 3 observed other teachers’ students to take back strategies to their own classrooms; 2 met with me outside of class to discuss how to work with documents in their classrooms; and 1 teacher served all three roles. Following are seven teacher responses.

TEACHER SURVEY: TEACHING SHAKESPEARE USING PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

1. In previous years, what has been your primary approach to teaching Shakespeare?
   a. Close reading of the text (3/7)
   b. Performance of many scenes or all of the text (0/7)
   c. Reader response or creative responses to the play (1/7)
   d. Viewing movies or theatrical performances of the play (1/7)
   e. Other (Shakespeare was not taught at this grade level (1/7); I have never taught Shakespeare before (1/7)

2. How anxious were you to teach a new approach?
   a. Excited (1/7)
   b. Willing (6/7)
   c. Leary
   d. antagonistic

3. To best learn a new approach, I would rather
   a. Watch someone teach (7/7)
   b. Watch a video
   c. Listen to a lecture
   d. Take a class
e. Read an article or book

f. other

4. Primary documents from the early modern period (check all that apply)
   a. Helped my students understand Shakespeare’s world  (7/7)
   b. Helped my students understand Shakespeare themes  (2/7)
   c. Helped my students understand today’s world  (1/7)
   d. Helped me do a better job of teaching Shakespeare  (3/7)
   e. Other

5. Now that you have taught Shakespeare using primary documents, would you consider using the documents again the next time you teach the play?
   a. Yes  (6/7)
   b. No
   c. Not sure (1/7)

6. If you used the documents again the next time you teach this play, what changes would you make?  (teacher-generaged responses)
   a. I would try to reserve more time for reading/discussing them with my students
   b. The choice of primary documents used on the final assessment.
   c. I would use less documents, only choosing a few important ones to help them understand the time period, and not use them to teach on a theme. The students had a difficult time connecting the two and I struggled with explaining it.
   d. Allow more time in class to read and interpret the documents and connect the documents to scenes in the play.
e. I would not use them as the primary focus. To me, the main objective is an understanding of the play. When the documents can aid this without taking away time from learning the play itself, I will use them as supplements to increase student understanding.

f. Compile all primary docs into one "packet" that can be given to students and addressed one at a time...help kids see them as all connected and together giving a picture of the time period.

g. One teacher left this blank.

7. What did you learn from using primary documents?

a. I learned that it's important for students to realize Shakespeare didn't write his plays in a vacuum. He was aware of the world around him and it is reflected in his work. I think knowledge of this helps students see the humanity of Shakespeare and his work. He's not just a writing icon.

b. How valuable they are in further teaching what life was like during the writing and performance of this piece.

c. Using primary documents was a new learning experience for my students. I believe they were able to integrate information from the documents to help grow understanding.

d. I learned about the time period in which Shakespeare was writing, and how this shaped his thinking.

e. They are interesting for understanding life at the time. They may not be necessary to use as "primary documents" themselves. It may be possible for teachers to learn about the documents' information and then present it themselves
to students in various forms that may be easier to understand than the documents themselves.

f. This was a great approach for students to understand the time period quickly. It was also helpful for students to see that primary documents are useful in ways beyond their experiences in history class.

g. I gained a more accurate picture of how Shakespeare's plays would have been understood in his time.

*Teacher Survey: Teaching Shakespeare Using Primary Documents.* Google Form, 06 May 2016 through 21 March 2017. Docs.google, https://docs.google.com/a/nvps.net/forms/d/1jf6BOm-qNGe6QJc2LCJQwKWRKVJMuaK5ONrUIDmr04/edit.
Appendix J

Student Feedback

Students provided valuable feedback at the end of each unit of study. The following comments are organized by play in the order they were taught. I am certain I improved my skill in teaching Shakespeare using primary documents, which may have a bearing on student feedback. Other factors may include the ages and ability levels of the students.

*Romeo and Juliet*  (samples from honors 9th grade English class)

I was truly dreading the idea of studying Shakespeare because many people told me that the language is utterly difficult. I have a hard time with vocabulary and wasn't sure if I was going to survive such a long unit. Learning about Shakespeare was so much more fun than I would have imagined. I truly enjoyed the way we learned and the environment. It varied from easy to difficult, depending on the day and what we were doing. I think acting is easier, but days when we had to read a document and decide what the theme was and what the text was telling us, was more difficult. Learn the culture and environment was also very important. Reading Shakespeare gives you perspective on what it meant to live then, and how your actions reflect back onto you. It helps you with language, why he used the words he did, and pronouncing. Learning and reading Shakespeare helps you relate to what is happening today.

Shakespeare created a new way of writing and almost his new language. I understood Shakespeare's language more. Also with that being said acting out loud helped me feel more comfortable with speaking infant of class.
I thought that learning Shakespeare was important and I'm glad I got my first time studying it out of the way. There were many times where I dreaded learning it and it got boring but I am glad that I can say I've done it and now I have some background knowledge on it. It was hard and boring at parts and I am mostly glad I did it.

Shakespeare is his own kind of genius, in this day and age no author rights in such a language with such themes as Shakespeare did. It is important for us to learn his works to expand our horizon on writing, acting and the ways themes are developed.

I really enjoyed learning Shakespeare this way. It was much more engaging than previous experiences with Shakespeare where we would just read it on our own. This method made me understand more about Shakespeare's plays and more about that time period.

I think that it is important to read Shakespeare's work because it expands one's knowledge in grammar, and in history.

I think learning about Shakespeare like this was much more effective and interesting than what I have done before, which I read on my own and then took a multiple choice test and essay on A Midsummer's Night Dream. Shakespeare is important to learn multiple themes and ideas of the time period to better understand how culture has developed and grown since the 1500s.

I thought this would be hard but how it was taught made it way easier and it is important to read Shakespeare because it opens up your range of reading.
I thought that reading Shakespeare was a very interesting and fun experience. I thought it was very interesting [reading] about the cultural and focusing on the history of the books and what things mean. It is important to study this because it is important to understand the cultural and the history behind the plays and work.

Learning about Shakespeare is very important because of the fact that Shakespeare is one of the most famous writers in the English language. Shakespeare's plays/stories have a lot of impact on today's society so therefore it is very important to learn about the history of Shakespeare. The unit of Romeo and Juliet has for sure helped me understand what it was like to live in Shakespeare's society, and how it has impacted today.

*(Hamlet (samples from two classes of 11th grade general English classes))*

I thought it was very educational and interesting. I think that the Shakespearean language helped me understand our English a bit better and seem like our English is so simple. I also thought that comparing Shakespeare's themes with our life had helped us understand some things better and realize there isn't much difference from then and now. I think that it is important for us to read Shakespeare because it makes us realize how different and same our worlds are from between then and now.

I believe it was important because he told life lessons and different themes you didn't know existed.
It was confusing at first. The primary documents were really confusing. However, over time I began to understand how people preferred to do these things in the past. Overall, my understanding of Shakespeare's plays expanded as I continued to read into some of his documents and plays.

I think that helps us understand earlier years and everything about how they were but the story itself didn't help me in anyway. I didn't mind the play, I liked Romeo & Juliet way better.

I think that it is very important to read Shakespeare's work because it gives you a great chance to understand the history of the world. When reading Shakespeare, you learn a lot about the way themes were developed. While learning about these, I had a lot of fun. I really enjoyed being able to fully understand Hamlet.

I learned that things were very different back when Shakespeare was around. I believe that it is important to read Shakespeare's work because it is very relevant to today. Learning Shakespeare is very good to do because it helps us think about how things today are similar to back in his time. Looking at his work and today are not that different.

Shakespeare to me has been very boring. I feel it was a waste of my time. The part I liked most was watching movies. This overall could have been a lot of simpler if we didn't have to read aloud.
I can't say I enjoy learning about Shakespeare but I am glad that we did it the way we did.

Without the primary documents, I think this would have been really hard.

**Macbeth** (samples from 5 classes of 11th and 12th grade AP Literature)

I think that the use of primary documents was very helpful in studying Shakespeare because they helped in understanding the thoughts and events that drove some of the themes of the play. I also feel that reading the play together was helpful, especially when Mrs. Steelman helped explain the plot during some scenes. Watching scenes from the movie also helped in understanding what was going on when I did not understand the language. Reading Shakespeare today is still important because many of the themes translate into events that take place currently or can be modified a little bit to fit today's social climate. Overall, Shakespeare can help us understand why things are the way they are today.

Reading Shakespeare has helped me understand the importance of the themes, and how they are still relevant today. It is important to understand how the world has changed, but also, how the world is still similar to Shakespearean times. Learning Shakespeare always seems to be better than you would think. However, you have to adjust to the way he wrote. It is harder to adjust to his writing because of the time period he wrote in. Reading a book that was written in the late 1900's and early 2000's is easy to adjust to when compared to books written in Shakespeare's time.

I found it to be very interesting to study Shakespeare this way because I have never had a teacher approach it from this point of view. The closest representation would be by a history teacher.
when we use documents to connect ideas and understand whole concepts. I think this makes Shakespeare's work much more interesting because, finally, instead of scrutinizing every small detail of one play individually, we looked at the big picture and why Shakespeare wrote the way he did and how events then might have influenced him. It is important to read Shakespeare's work in order to understand not only that history is cyclical and many of the problems he faced we are facing today, but that the big concepts he approaches in his play can still be understood and even learned from in audiences today.

I thought that learning about Shakespeare would be learning more about him personally rather than his writing. I believe it's important to learn about him because people need to know what literature was like back then and how things were. Learning about history helps us prevent repeating it.

I find Shakespeare's stories engaging and interesting. Learning about the linguistics of Shakespeare's work, specifically the iambic pentameter gave me a new respect for Shakespeare. In the teaching of Shakespeare, I would've liked to have spent more time linking primary and secondary documents together. Primary documents are important to understanding the story and the audience that the story was intended for, but I think it is also important to be able to apply Shakespeare's themes to today. Shakespeare's work is important for that very reason; his themes are still relevant in today's world. I don't think that enough time was spent learning about the modern ramifications of Shakespeare.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream (samples from 1 8th grade general English class with special education inclusion)

I thought it could have been more interesting

I think its imported because if you Shakespeare document you can learn so much about the 400 years ago. Also their language we can learn so much about them.

I thought at first it would be too hard to read and I wouldn't understand it but I ended up loving this unit and it was very interesting. Shakespeare's work is important to read because the themes he developed are still in the world today.

I loved reading and learning about the shakespeare era, I love acting in general so this was right up my alley. His method was so interesting and really unique. I think this is important because, most plays of today are not written like how he did it so I feel like we should do it more often.

I thought it was cool learning about some of the history behind it all. Shakespeare totally changed how people thought back then. Some of the topics and ideas are still relevant today.

why do i need to know this i thought in the beginning and at the end
i thought it was completely uses
Shakespeare's work is impeccable. Absolute perfect. People need to read his scripts to truly understand what a good play is. Not focusing on the future of plays, go back when it was popular.
Appendix K

Teacher Online Resources

**Hamlet**

5 “Hamlet” To Be Or Not To Be Soliloquys. 23 Oct. 2012.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCJ4hKJvgJw
Five different performances of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy in one place

Bhaneja, Raoul. *Hamlet Solo*. Hope and Hell Theater.
http://www.raoulbhaneja.com/hamletsoolo/index.php#trailer
Performance of *Hamlet* where Bhaneja performs all parts


Painting of Hamlet encountering ghost (1808)

Character List. Shakespeare Folger Library.
2 handouts: character list from folio and character map

Steps for developing skill in process writing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYiYd9RcK5M
Famous soliloquy in original pronunciation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYfM0RFZ5cs
Slide presentation on the Globe and early modern culture

*Experiencing Shakespeare*. PBS in partnership with Folger Library.
https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/77df496-31b0-45e1-9270-b44f069857b/experiencing-shakespeare/#.WV-q_dPyv-Y
Explores Folger Library deep vaults

“Famous Last Words from Shakespeare.” Folger Shakespeare Library.
Quotes from death scenes from a variety of plays
Discusses sonnet eulogy to Hamnet “Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day”

Portrait of Queen Elizabeth in gown covered with eyes and ears

A fast-paced John Green “rant” about Hamlet

Mel Gibson as Hamlet

Film performance of gravedigger scene in Act V

“Hamlet”: To Be or Not To Be. Performance by Mel Gibson, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdp6dpiK8Ko
Film performance of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy

“Hamlet”: To Be or Not To Be. Performance by Adrian Lester. Shakespeare Solos. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/video/2016/feb/01/adrian-lester-hamlet-to-be-or-not-o-be-shakespeare-solos-video
Film monologue performance of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy

“Hamlet”: To Be or Not To Be. Performance by Toby Stephens, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2004. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OJtjUJ33vA
Live performance of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy

Prisoners perform Hamlet

If Shakespeare Insults Were Used Today. 24 Sep. 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_Uej8LJ48Q
Spoof on Shakespearean insults

Animated video on language with background on “fishmonger”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZarqSs1odXE
Informational video on history of The Globe

Monty Python Hamlet. 25 May 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsXKT5RhJf8
Spoof on Oedipal Hamlet

Educational 4-minute video exploring Ophelia’s madness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC5ImDDs4ZQ
Five different directors’ versions of Ophelia in 13-minute clip

Representation and Abstraction: Milais’ Ophelia and Newman’s Vir Heroicus Sublimis.
Khan Academy, conversation with Sal Khan, Beth Harris, and Stephen Zucker.
Art history lesson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU73kj5Sw9M
Johnny Carson’s interview with Robin Williams about Mel Gibson’s Hamlet

Rose Theater Virtual Environment. 09 May 2012.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EApTZ1QuoHs
Computer animated virtual tour of the Rose Theater during early 1600s

French, Esther. “Shakespeare and Early Modern Girlhood.”

http://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2016/12/16/hamlet-laurence-olivier-toy-theater/more-4466

http://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2016/04/08/portraits-in-hamlet-shakespeare/
Blog posts on historical/cultural significance of Hamlet

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3VGa6Fp3zI
Live tour of Globe.
Boyle, Francis. “...Or Not To Be” Shakespeare Magazine. 08 Mar. 2015, pp. 38-43.
https://issuu.com/shakespearemagazine/docs/shakespeare_magazine_06
https://issuu.com/shakespearemagazine/docs/shakespeare_magazine_11/48
Free online magazine dedicated to exploring and celebrating Shakespeare

Reiss, Benjamin. “Shakespeare and Insane Asylums.” Episode 9,
Williams, Deanna. “Shakespeare and Girlhood.” Episode 60, interviewed by Neva Grant. included in Folger blog Performance of Girlhood, 2014.
http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/girlhood
Folger Library Podcasts covering an array of historical/cultural topics

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/23/arts/international/londons-globe-theater-is-winding-up-hamlet-world-tour.html?_r=1
Article on 400th anniversary world tour of Hamlet

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2M7U8eCeHA
Lecture on famous Millais painting

https://www.amazon.com/Slings-Arrows-Season-1/dp/B003NDPPY2
Modern interpretation of Hamlet

https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/approaching-shakespeare
Podcast lectures on all Shakespeare plays

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Teaching Shakespeare: A Folger Education Blog. Teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu
http://teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu/2014/05/06/hamlets-ophelia-how-imagery-supports-characterization/

**Historical and cultural ideas for and by teachers**

https://www.learner.org/workshops/conversations/conversation/rethinking/

**Various perspectives on reading Hamlet from a cognitive standpoint**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geev441vbMl

**Short biography on Shakespeare**


Cooper, Director of Education at the Globe, provides historical background

**Macbeth**

*Anecdotal Shakespeare.* Podcast (section on Macbeth begins at 11:00), Soundcloud,
https://soundcloud.com/search?q=anecdotal%20shakespeare

**Anecdote about the curse of Macbeth**


**Two lessons on teaching Macbeth with drama teacher**

Inspired from lines, “And pity, like a new-born babe, Striding the blast”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPhB8AzAnlk

**Analysis of the first scene with the witches**

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03nxwmw

**Dench podcast and her analysis of Lady M.**

Gibson, Susan. *Primary Source Spotlight: Holinshed’s Chronicles.* Folger.edu,
http://www.folger.edu/primary-source-spotlight-holinsheds-chronicles

**Shakespeare’s source play in sections**

**A Bible-based article on witchcraft as responsible for poverty**


*Copy of Malleus Maleficarium, or Hammer of Witches,* written by catholic witch hunters in 15th century


**Effects of climate change**


*Macbeth at the Globe - meeting the witches*

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**Macbeth.** Folger Shakespeare Library, Folgerpedia, http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Macbeth

**Variety of primary and secondary teaching and scholarly resources**


**Podcast with sound effects of play with famous directors and actors**


**Interview about Macbeth’s madness**


**Apocalyptic/supernatural images in popular culture**


**Graphic novel brings Macbeth to life**


**The Supernatural and Shakespeare’s world**
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/intro-to-teaching-macbeth?fd=1

**British drama teacher demonstrates strategies for middle school students**

*Teaching Shakespeare!* A Folger Education Blog. [teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu](http://teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu)

http://teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu/2016/03/29/an-alternative-to-the-traditional-literary-essay/

**Ideas for teachers by teachers**

[http://tinyurl.com/yadrhn5x](http://tinyurl.com/yadrhn5x).

**Representations of Lady Macbeth**

https://issuu.com/shakespearemagazine/docs/shakespeare_magazine_11

**Performing Macbeth in a cave**

*V for Vendetta.* Directed by James McTeigue, performances by Hugo Weaving and Natalie Portman, Warner Brothers, 2006. [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et6M2r3yTAw),  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et6M2r3yTAw

**Pop culture movie on vigilante groups (anon) using Guy Fawkes masks as symbol of retribution**

[https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/world-war-g-zombies-energy-and-geosciences](https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/world-war-g-zombies-energy-and-geosciences)

**Book review**

*Witchcraft in Shakespeare’s World.* [Pbslearningmedia](https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/asset/witchcraft-mezz.mp4),  
https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/asset/witchcraft-mezz.mp4

**Shakespeare’s audiences and witches**

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

*The Ambassadors.* Khan Academy, discussion with Beth Harris and Steven Zucker.  

**Art criticism of Holbein painting**

Folger Theater’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,  
http://www.folger.edu/events/midsummer-nights-dream

**Actors/Actresses talk about their roles in Folger production**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqmoIyIPEcc

**Fight scene with Helena and Hermia**

*A midsommer nights dreame*, first folio copy, 1600. Contributed by Folger Shakespeare Library,  

**Original 1600 copy of MND**

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream: The Love Potion*, Shakespeare Uncovered, *PBSlearningmedia*,  
http://tinyurl.com/ycc2bjw7

**Love potion origins**

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Online script.  
https://docs.google.com/a/nvps.net/document/d/1TBkCzoVNKV-CS60DV6QdDBCbBoRJwpiX6Xxmt1Js0/edit?usp=sharing

**Student copy of play**


**Thug Notes summary (some swearing)**


**Spark Notes summary**

Puck and Oberon. Stage play production, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC9jq4ZHw4Q

**Oberon tells Puck to put juice in Athenian’s eye**

Rude Mechanicals in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. *Study*,  

**Explains the job of each rustic**

*Shakespeare Magazine*. Shakespearemagazine.com  
https://issuu.com/shakespearemagazine/docs/shakespeare_magazine_11

**Magazine articles for “all the Will in the world”**

Shakespeare Steps Out. 15 July 2015, partnership with Folger Library.  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLrxvB9Rigs

**Teaching Shakespeare in middle school**

William Blake’s Paintings inspired by Shakespeare. 1786. Online Magazine.  

**Beautiful paintings by Blake**
Brief biography of William Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Ted Talk

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzRxAi1ZXZv1U19rZzcwWlZiVHM/view

High school senior delivers monologue from Act IV, scene i, lines 292-316.

Claybourne, Anna and Rebecca Treays. The Usborne World of Shakespeare. 1996.
http://www.usborne.com/quicklinks/eng/?loc=uk

Resource book on Elizabethan England with accompanying website

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oNxyYc3j4Y

Interview with Damian Lewis about playing Capulet in 2013 film adaptation

Five Modern Day Shakespeares Whose Legacies Will Live On, illustrations by Leigh Cox.
http://www.vulture.com/2017/06/five-modern-shakespeares.html

Illustrations and short biographies of current popular culture artists

Folger Education Teacher Blog

http://teachingshakespeareblog.folger.edu/2017/05/17/thirteen-reasons-not-shakespeare-netflix-teachable-moment/

Blog post on runaway brides or marriage where the female uses marriage as rebellion, including Othello, Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet

Grundhauser, Eric. “When High Class Ladies Wore Masks That Made It Impossible to Speak.” 27 Feb. 2017, atlasobscura,
http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/visard-mask-elizabethan-visor-blank-16th-century

Article on sixteenth-century women wearing visards to avoid sun
Accessible article on poisons used in Shakespeare’s plays

Article reflecting on pros and cons for teaching Shakespeare in high school English; includes pro and con articles

Spoken word poet on bullying

The Late Late Show with James Corden. 08 June 2017.
Soundtrack to Romeo and Juliet with Emily Blunt

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu-lMzHSNnk.
Trailer for newest version of Romeo and Juliet

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0PfVHmkcjUAAwNvT11ZRHEyb2c/view?usp=sharing
Complete lesson plan for Mini-Qs in Literature and all resources

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0PfVHmkcjUAN5fZ1NJTmxMcTQ/view?usp=sharing
Student copy for Mini-Qs in Literature

McMahon, Vanessa. “Elizabethan Street Fighting.” Episode 24, interview with Rebecca Sheir.
Merrill, Lisa. “When Romeo Was a Woman.” Episode 13, interview with Rebecca Sheir.
Sheir Rebecca. “Romeo and Juliet Through the Ages.” Episode 12.

45-minute podcasts on timely topics.


College student reflection high school experiences with Shakespeare


Infographic displaying deaths in Shakespeare’s tragedies.

Sonnets


Ideas for teaching sonnets


Purchasing new domain names (ideas for projects)


Podcast on Didriksen transformation of popular music into sonnet form


Background on the sonnets, including #18, #116, and #130


Ted Talk on how communities shape poetry

Article on teaching Shakespeare


Sonnets set to contemporary music


Reading the sonnets in American sign language

Sonnet Project Rubric Templates

https://www.google.com/search?q=creating+rubrics&oq=creating+rubrics&aqs=chrome.69i57j0l5.4973j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8


http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/Documents/Tutorials/Rubrics/index.htm

http://rubric-maker.com/

Sonnet project rubric templates


Starbuck’s attempt to rewrite sonnets in brief form

Voicethread
https://voicethread.com/products/k12/

Creating voicethread projects


Website devoted to the sonnets with focus on dark lady and the fair youth
Appendix L

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: September 29, 2015

To: Allen Webb, Principal Investigator
    Sheridan Steelman, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-09-31

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “16th Century Shakespeare and 21st Century Students” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 28, 2016