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Visualizing and Vocalizing Shakespeare: Approaches to Teaching *Romeo and Juliet*

Shakespeare: the greatest mind in English literature, the worst for the classroom. He's been our pop culture for centuries, but it's a struggle teaching his work.

I remember being a freshman in high school reading *Romeo and Juliet*. I've been captivated by Shakespeare's vivid language and ideas since. As much as I loved the story, and Shakespeare, I knew my classmates were frustrated with it and didn't like it.

As a fourth-year college student, I still think about my experience with Shakespeare in freshman year. My teacher summarized scenes and had us (the students) read the text out loud. Everyone was confused and our teacher's succinct summaries were not enough for us to grasp his language. Although I was animated as we read the play, I couldn't understand it.

I've realized that simply summarizing the happenings of a Shakespeare play is not useful because it's the same as reading an online book summary in lieu of reading the entire book. Hence, teachers must help students decipher the meaning of Shakespeare's words rather than giving them the main idea in each scene.

Before starting a play, teachers must demystify who Shakespeare is. Many students think that he was always a literary scholar, not that he was an entertainment icon in his era. Peter Sawaya, a retired high school teacher, explains "I would begin by teaching the history of theater because I wanted them to know that Shakespeare is primarily a playwright". Providing background information on Shakespeare's era engages students in his work and guides their understanding and interpretations.

Students who previously read Shakespeare might still be intimidated by his language, which teachers can use as an opportunity to talk about why his language is confusing. Jesús López Vargas, director of outreach at the New Swan Shakespeare Center, says "I like teaching people that you can communicate through language and then your body can tell a different story or the same story.". Teaching Shakespeare means exploring how language can be manipulated grammatically and structurally, and how words can change people's lives. Rachel Kynor, a high school English teacher at University High School, suggests stopping multiple times throughout act one to talk about the language. As th class explores a play, teachers do not need stop so often, if at all, because students will have the skills to understand the language themselves. Building students' interest in the play is a key component in teaching Shakespeare.

Russian-Soviet psychologist Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory proposes that children's learning occurs within familial and cultural contexts in which they interact with others who are more knowledgeable. Their thinking abilities develop from active engagement and participation in their surroundings, implying that children cannot learn without social interactions. Their environment and social skills develop their cognitive functioning because observing the actions and choices of others teaches them how to think and act. Vygotsky used his theory to encourage collaborative learning environments in education curriculums to allow for the advanced students to help the less proficient students (Mcleod, 2023; Vygotsky 1978). Although student collaboration aids learning considering that students can share ideas, student collaboration is not enough to invest them in their learning. Vgotsky's theory supports introducing technological devices and activities in the classroom because student learning is more effective through using familiar tools and approaches to teach complex information. The sociocultural learning theory endorses that "monolithic instructional paradigms are increasingly

deemed inadequate for fostering comprehensive student development in the modern era,"

(Kocaarslan, Gülcan Erden, and Martina Riedler Eryaman 851). Traditional instruction methods

have little to no relevance in students' lives as the workforce starts to rely on modern

technologies. If children are expected to foster independent, original, and creative thinking skills

in school, then students must engage with the tools and activities they will use in the workforce.

As I did my research, it became apparent that teachers and scholars were repeatedly

reflecting on their experience with using visual activities to teach The Bard. Visual learning is

defined as "the capacity to structure, organize, and assign meaning to visible objects" (Gonzalez

Aguilar, Audilio, et al. 197). The eyes are the most important component in visual learning, so

material is taught with pictures, graphs, charts, and videos. Considering that finding meaning in

any physical representation is visualization, students practice visual learning by deciphering and

utilizing material through graphic means. Students associate ideas through interactive visual

devices facilitating knowledge acquisition. Visual learning respects that the learning process is

ongoing and nonlinear instead of being a fixed sequence of steps. Applying visual learning

methods "considerably improve the learning process and are used to reinforce the [learned]

material," (Gonzalez Aguilar, Audilio, et al. 198). Learning becomes relevant, dynamic and

captivating by adding visual arts.

Once I noticed that visually teaching Shakespeare seemed the most effective, I started

wondering why. As I searched for prior research and found that "[l]ittle work has been done to

introduce the analysis of visual learning tools in the classroom," (Gonzalez Aguilar, Audilio, et al

205). So now I am left with a research question: How and what kind of visual techniques can be

used to teach Shakespeare?

Line Breaks and Choral Reading

        Who could forget one of Romeo's most famous speeches in Act 2 Scene 2 "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?". It's a long passage, built primarily out of poetic images, so students might find it daunting to read. Ken Ludwig, an American author, director, and playwright, offers a succinct suggestion in his book *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*. He recommends that teachers "have your children break the lines into phrases and memorize them one at a time" (124).

        Reading in line breaks is enhanced with choral reading, as a class or in small groups, to develop fluency and motivation. Research proves that choral reading helps students decode words and expand their vocabulary (Hill 32).

It is the East,

    and Juliet is the sun.

Arise fair sun,

    and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief

 That thou her maid, art far more fair than she.

        This technique works well because the passage's vocabulary is actually fairly simple. It's easiest to break apart the lines when reading out loud as a class considering that students might miss a few words or read too fast from silent reading. To further break the passage down, teachers can stop after a few lines to ask, "what is Romeo saying?". Teachers should refrain from simply explaining the lines because simple explanations do not keep them engaged and they may have difficulty remembering the explanation.

To encourage students to interact with the text, Ludwig suggests that teachers "turn these lines into a game" (124) by questioning the text, such as "Why is the moon sick and pale with grief?". Restating the words of the text fine-tunes comprehension by blending them with modern language to flush out their meaning.

The figurative language can be broken down by having students "really act out" (Ludwig 124) the text. When reading "that I were a glove upon that hand / That I might touch that cheek", teachers can ask students to visualize Juliet wearing gloves and holding her cheek. Comparing Romeo to a glove emphasizes his fondness for Juliet because he wishes he could touch her cheek, even if he must be a glove.

Now that the play's conflict is in motion, Ludwig suggests that students and teachers talk about how teenagers can relate to *Romeo and Juliet*. Adults think that teenagers can relate to young love, but saying this to adolescents struggling with the language will only make them feel more distant from the story because the relationship of Romeo and Juliet and its barriers do not compare to modern teenage relationships. Kynor says "I teach it not as a great love story. I teach it as a tragedy because they were so young and so clearly not in love. [. . .] and a lot of my freshman get it." Students relate to the tragic situation of Romeo and Juliet more than their love for another. Instead, teachers can explain that "Romeo and Juliet feel alone in a world that doesn't understand them" (Ludwig 122), and in a world they do not understand, because modern adolescents often feel isolated from the world as they learn its ways. In fact, Juliet's parents making her marry Paris compares to "parental figures [. . .] standing in the way" (Ludwig 122) of their desires because most adolescents test the boundaries their parents give them.

Benefits of Choral Reading Shakespeare

Choral reading is orally reading a dramatic piece with various tones and gestures to create a lively meaning which can be done as a class or in small groups (Paige 435). Either way, students channel the performance and external component of a text through choral reading by thinking about how words and phrases should be read to deliver the text's meaning. This technique enables students to connect with the text and collaborate with one another to exercise their creative freedom and agency. Listening to the words' pronunciation of their peers and teachers strengthens their reading comprehension by receiving information from multiple voices.

Choral reading is effective in heterogenous classes because students develop their comprehension with their peers to solidify their unique interpretations. Reading together helps students, particularly ESL students, advance their reading comprehension and pronunciation by hearing their peers and/or teacher read the words they are unfamiliar with. The repetition of choral reading a passage expands ESL students' vocabulary by revisiting the same words and sentence structure, helping them process English. Choral reading helps ESL students learn nonverbal communication by observing the expressions and movements of their teacher and peers as they read text. Expressions and movements contribute to understanding the text because they become a part of the story. Students first read the text applying their previous knowledge, and as they reread the text with others, expand their vocabulary and understand new concepts. Simultaneously hearing and speaking the words advances reading abilities by improving memory. The unison effort in choral reading includes anonymity that students who are shy will appreciate because they do not fear criticism from their peers or teacher if they make a mistake. If a teacher notices one student makes a mistake, the teacher must correct the class instead of drawing attention to one student.

To begin choral reading, teachers model the correct pronunciation, add expressions, and set the necessary reading pace. Teachers can slowly explain key concepts, such as historical references, during the choral reading process because students cannot chorally read without adequately understanding the words and phrases. For the Shakespeare classroom, choral reading is an opportunity for teachers to showcase how to read Shakespeare's words, considering that the pronunciation of some of words differ from modern pronunciation. Reading Shakespeare out loud alongside their peers and/or teacher helps students discover how the play's vocabulary and punctuation choices create its meaning and emotional effect because his plays are meant to be felt through auditory senses. Teaching a dramatic work's meaning along with its meter, rhyme, and rhythm expands students' exploration of the dramatic work, rather than silently reading and analyzing the piece. At the end of the choral reading session, teachers correct pronunciation errors and encourage the class or group to unify their voices.

Choral reading requires students to impersonate Shakespeare's language by propelling them into Shakespeare's world. Students interact with others (as actors do) to bring the play to life. This student interaction achieves a more sufficient response to literary works than the teacher merely summarizing key facts and moments. Interpreting the text for recitation is an immersive learning experience by requiring a strong reader-text relationship needed for advanced comprehension, close reading, and abstract thinking. Reading out loud increases awareness of the words and sentences because students need to interpret them so they can deliver them effectively. Scholars Trousdale, Bach and Willis say, "According to [Louise Rosenblatt], the meaning of a literary work does not reside on the printed page but comes into being in the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text" (319). The reader's conditions, prior knowledge and experiences, and incentive for reading influence interpretations of the text,

meaning that every student will receive a literary work differently. Choral reading is an opportunity for students to share and express their unique thoughts to their classmates. On the page, the words belong to Shakespeare. When the students recite the text, the words become their own because they say them with their own accents, expressions, and motivations.

Impersonating language demands students to memorize the meaning of every word and phrase to make a coherent presentation. Understanding and manipulating language is a nonnegotiable skill in choral reading, which will expand students' vocabulary. Theater educator Jesus Enrique Lopez Vargas says "Through these visits to high schools, I have noticed that students lack a complete vocabulary. They're unable to express what they truly feel because they just don't have the ability to manipulate language for their benefit." Because students spend most of their day on technological devices, they are used to seeing moving visuals with little to no words. They think the world exists on their devices. This hinders their ability to communicate with others, particularly those used to verbal communication. Choral reading helps develop communication skills by experimenting with words and hearing others speak. Attempting to unify their voices through choral reading helps students realize that language can be used in several ways because tone changes pronunciation, and pacing differs per person. Students recognize the power of language through choral reading by helping them discover that the way one chooses and delivers words can be more meaningful than the words themselves.

Because Shakespeare's texts are supposed to be accompanied by voices and movement, the Shakespeare classroom can discover the "oral interpretative art form" of choral reading that has "barely been touched" (Stassen 436). Once students master choral reading, teachers can divide them into groups and assign them parts of a text to perform through choral reading. Students have the freedom to choose how to divide the lines amongst their group members, the

pace of the reading, the tone changes, and the movements, if they can explain why they chose them. Research demonstrates that social interaction advances student learning and experience with literary text (Trousdale, Ann, et al 318). Choral reading initiates social interaction throughout the interpretive process because students collectively decide the division of lines, and the tones and gestures, persistently negotiating their ideas as they try which ones work and which do not. Working in groups on a choral reading project teaches students how to communicate and collaborate with those with different language backgrounds. This interaction increases cultural awareness and appreciation by recognizing that culture affects the way one speaks and expresses themselves. Performing requires them to evaluate the text to decide how to present each part in a comprehensible manner. Choral reading offers endless possibilities of interpretations and choices to deliver a text.

If teachers chose to have students do choral reading in groups, they should consider teaching students the importance of empathy while exploring character motivations. Students need to refrain from letting their biases overtake their interpretations of the characters to create an authentic and compelling performance. Vargas says, "we can't just judge our characters. We can't just [say] this is a bad person. [. . .] Let's hate them". Vargas suggests talking to students about who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist, and why. Unpacking the motivation and situation of the protagonists and antagonists helps students relate to each character and will improve how they interpret the lines. Without relating to the characters, choral reading cannot fully benefit students because they will disconnect from the language to distance themselves from the character. Choral reading is meant to enliven dramatic works through gestures and voices, allowing students to feel the words rather than intellectualizing them.

Shakespeare's plays are intended to elicit spiritual responses and connections by appealing to the eyes and ears. His vivid language and compelling characters are lost when read silently, but choral reading maintains their dramatic qualities. Choral reading has been found to let students express their spirituality through dramatic works because they freely interpret the piece by adding their own expressions and voices (Trousdale, Ann, et al 318). People, regardless of their age, cannot refrain from reading a literary piece without their emotions being invoked. Interpretations stem from those emotions, which can manifest physically rather than verbally. The process of choral reading, not analyzing the contents of the poem, became vehicles for spirituality because students manipulated, but did not change, the poem to reflect their perspective. Presenting literary works with their voices and emotional reactions advances their memorization of key concepts because they remember the connection between the words along with their choices to present them. The freedom and physicality of choral reading establishes a relationship between the student and text that silent reading does not offer.

Although Shakespeare intended his work for individuals to perform, choral reading is an appropriate substitute for individual performances because students will feel confident presenting as a group. Considering that students are seen as a group, not an individual, they most likely will not fear judgment from their peers and/or teacher for how they chose to do their presentation. Students with little to no exposure to acting may feel more comfortable demonstrating their thought process through choral reading because they still attach their own expression to the story without worrying about acting. Words and communication are the focus of reading together, and working in unison is a compromised acting activity challenging student to combine their experiences to create one cohesive presentation. Choral reading is a transformative exploration of literature, suitable for studying Shakespeare's plays.

Comic Books and Shakespeare

I can't count the number of articles asserting that teachers should not use comic books to teach Shakespeare. For example, author and English teacher Gladys Veidemanis advises teachers to avoid "Too much popularizing or trying a statement of personal belief, overhard to make Shakespeare "hep" or "a snap"; using comic books or cheapened versions which eliminate the flavor of the original style," (241). I was astounded to see educators, such as Veidemnais make this claim but not elaborate on it.

These articles neglect the fact that Shakespeare is meant to be seen and heard, not just read out loud. Students can get frustrated with simply reading Shakespeare out loud because they're only hearing it, not experiencing it with multiple senses.

Comic books are more visually engaging than words so students may find it easier to remember the story with facial expressions and stances. Also, students who struggle with language might understand the play easier with a visual.

Instead of rejecting comic books, teachers can supplement the language with the comic book. Students can listen to their peers or teacher read the play as they look at the comic book.

Teachers can put the text in dialogue with the visuals. Students can connect how a given passage reflects the characters' expressions and their conditions. Allowing students to interpret the visuals with the text lets them bring the story to life in their terms.

Here's an example from the first scene of *Romeo and Juliet*:

Abraham
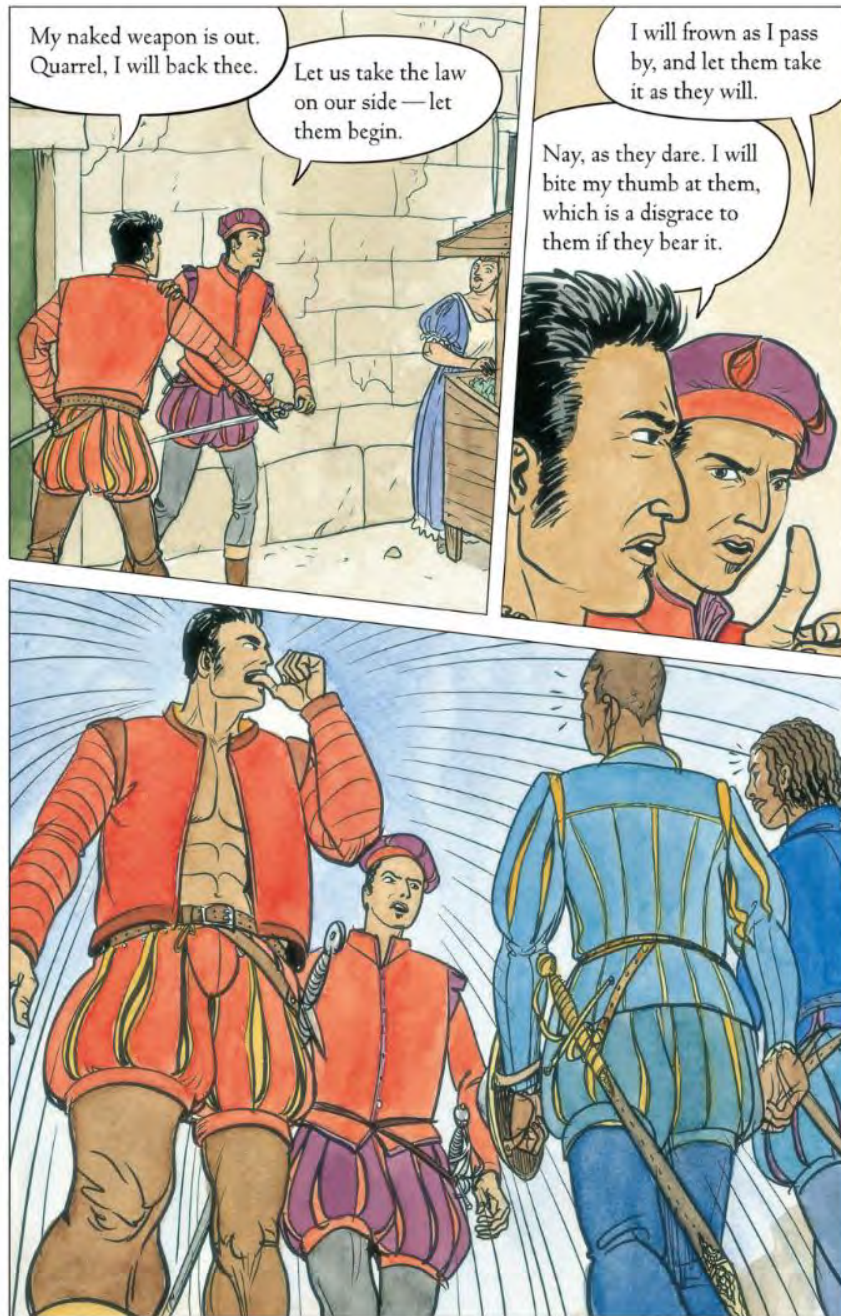
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson

I do bite my thumb, sir.

Abraham

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson

[Aside to Gregory] Is the law **of** our side if I say **ay**?

*Picture from Gareth Hind's 2013 Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Classics Graphic Novel).

Instead of explaining that to "bite your thumb" is disrespectful, teachers can ask students to interpret the gesture's meaning by looking at the picture. This picture establishes that the Montagues and Capulets do not get along because the artist emphasizes the tension between them by exaggerating their facial expressions and adding action to their words.

Letting the students unpack the story's meaning ensures that they understand the story.

Comic books bridge the gap between the text and the setting by illustrating the expressions of the

characters because people do not only interact with words but with their bodies too.

Why Comic Books?

The first Comic book appeared in 1933 in "giveaway advertising premiums" (Britannica, the Editors of the Encyclopaedia. "comic book"). In the late 1930s to the 19402, amid World War II, comic books about war and soldiers were popular. After World War II, comic books were primarily about superheroes fighting crime and confronting horror. By the 1950s, comic books were thought to encourage juvenile delinquency because they dealt with violence. In her essay "Image, Text, and Story: Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom", visual artist and teacher Rachel Marie-Crane Williams quotes comic scholar Thierry Groensteen citing four reasons for disparaging the artistic value of comic books: "they are a hybrid form combining words and images, the literary aspect of comics is seen as subpar in terms of quality, comics are perceived as closely connected to the "low" art of caricature, and comics are associated with a regression to childhood pleasures" (Groensteen, 2000, p. 34). The main audience of comic books is juveniles, so the public felt they must censor them to protect their youth. The public did not acknowledge them as valid forms of art because of their preconceived ideas that they are a poor influence on children. These attitudes towards comics changed in the 1990s. Since Art Spiegelman, the creator of *Maus I & II*, claimed "Comics fly below the critical radar" (Williams 14), the readership for comic books significantly increased and regained popularity and academic respect by 2004. Currently, in the 21st century, Japanese comic books, manga, and comic zines, a fanbase print created through noncommercial means, are popular. Comic books often cover serious topics such as mental health, abuse, war, and politics. Historians and other academics are even translating their scholarship into graphic novel form.

Despite public disdain for comic books, they have always captivated children because they combine pictures with easy vocabulary. Comic books personalize stories by giving them "a

human face" (Versaci 62). The literary form tells the story through words and images for readers to simultaneously read and see the story. As comic books became more popular, educators stopped rejecting them as "invalid" forms of literature that encourage "passive picture gazers" (Golding & Verrier 826). Because many students were introduced to comic books in elementary school, deciphering visual systems of letters and words is second nature.

Comic books are dynamic teaching materials because students are interested in them outside of school, they are affordable, and they can spark conversations surrounding visual perceptions and art. This medium presents multiple ways to explore the story: the creator's choices of words and pictures and the relationship between the words and pictures, the context, and characters. In relation to Shakespeare, there is a close parallel between a comic book and a play. Both are driven by dialogue. A comic book is a kind of script. These ways complement reading the words, rather than overpowering reading as some educators thought. Examining the relationship between words and visuals develops visual literary skills because readers choose the devices (the words, pictures, their relationship, context, characters) to consider first. Reading comic books helps students develop analytical and critical thinking skills with a story's questions surrounding life and art. Unlike traditional literature, comic books employ literary techniques and devices while blending visuals with texts. Because this relationship differs per comic book, readers must interpret how the words and picture tell the story, enabling them to comprehend the story in ways that traditional literature does not allow. Students unravel the story's meaning and messages themselves. Teachers can ask questions such as "How would you describe the style of these pictures? "How does this drawing style interact with the story?" "Why these particular pictures?" "How would a different style change the story?" (Versaci 64). Asking open-ended questions empowers students to think for themselves and offer their original ideas.

Reading comic books advances students' comprehension of digital modalities. Students need to learn how to read and understand visuals in a society bombarding them with them. Developing visual literary skills will help them identify images that are the most useful for them in any setting. Students who struggle with reading text alone as well as those who exceed reading expectations benefit from exploring comic books because engaging with the comic's words and pictures (not one alone) enhances their thinking.

Comic books bridge the classroom with contemporary arts to foster empathy by examining personal narratives. According to Williams, "Empathy is one of the most important topics generated by this type of material," (15). The art form teaches students about the artistry behind compelling texts, fostering empathy and human connection in a classroom by attaching visuals to the words.

Most students associate literature with sophisticated and complex texts that they most likely struggle to understand and do not enjoy. Implementing comic books in the classroom sparks questions surrounding "what is literature?" and invite students to consider how society and culture categorize some literature "high" and other works "low". Many students internalize that comic books are not literature because they are considered juvenile. Also, the most respected stories are told traditionally. Comic books can and should be a part of the literary canon because they can tell sensitive and important stories in a compelling and digestible way. Comic books make literature approachable and encourage students to question the criteria of giving a piece its literary value. Students will learn not to judge literary forms on their appearance or popularity because doing so dismisses their potential and value. Hopefully, students will realize that literature is for them, and their thoughts and interpretations of a literary piece are important.

Tony Versus Romeo: the Case of West Side Story

 Whereas teachers geek out over Romeo's "I fear too early" speech in the later part of Act One, students groan about having to analyze and memorize another complicated passage. The language is compelling and vivid but is still difficult to make sense of to a modern audience. It's a pivotal moment in the play where Romeo's uneasy feelings about the Capulet party predict and foreshadow the end of the play, so students must home in on it.

 At this point in the play, students might get frustrated not only with the language, but why they are required to read a play they may not see themselves in. They have a feel for the story and are not halfway through. Reading this speech is an appropriate time to stop and question why we read *Romeo and Juliet*.

 Simply put, students must read Shakespeare because his work introduced themes we know and love in modern stories. The various adaptations, such as the musical *West Side Story*, of his work prove this. The recent remake of *West Side Story* in 2021 proves that Shakespeare continues to have a significant role in popular culture.

 If students are familiar with *West Side Story*, teachers can compare the musical to *Romeo and Juliet* to explain the universality of Shakespeare across generations. In turn, students have another mode of processing the story's messages.

 Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents were clearly inspired by both the storyline and moments of *Romeo and Juliet* as they wrote *West Side Story*, and Romeo's "I fear too early" speech is an example. The speech can be compared to Tony, the character based on Romeo, singing "Something's Coming". Romeo and Tony feel that their coming nights will determine their fate, and both are right in their predictions.

 Below, I've placed Romeo's speech and Tony's song side by side to compare the two works:

Romeo, *Romeo and Juliet*

I fear too early, for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despisèd life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But he that hath the steerage of my course,
Direct my sail. On, lusty gentlemen.

Tony, *West Side Story*

There's somethin' due any day
I will know right away, soon as it shows
It may come cannonballin' down through the sky
Gleam in its eye, bright as a rose

Who knows? It's only just out of reach
Down the block, on a beach, under a tree
I got a feelin' there's a miracle due
Gonna come true, comin' to me

Could it be? Yes, it could
Somethin's comin', somethin' good, if I can wait
Somethin's comin', I don't know what it is
But it is gonna be great

With a click, with a shock
Phone'll jingle, door'll knock, open the latch
Somethin's comin', don't know when
But it's soon, catch the moon, one-handed catch

Around the corner
Or whistlin' down the river
Come on, deliver to me
Will it be? Yes, it will
Maybe just by holdin' still, it'll be there

Come on, somethin', come on in, don't be shy
Meet a guy, pull up a chair, the air is hummin'
And somethin' great is comin'
Who knows? It's only just out of reach
Down the block, on a beach, maybe tonight

Maybe tonight, maybe tonight

Though teachers repeatedly remind students that Shakespeare's plays are meant for theater rather than reading, students might struggle to remember their theatrical focus because their efforts to comprehend the play distract them from observing the cadence and figurative language. In her book *Something's Coming, Something Good: West Side Story and the American Imagination*, Misha Berson writes "As theater director Norris Houghton noted in his preface to the joint paperback edition of Shakespeare's script and the text of West Side Story, just reading the musical's libretto is not enough to 'lift it toward the heights of poetic rhapsody that Shakespeare's verse accomplishes unaided," (132). Comparing the two works sparks conversations about the literary devices and musicality of Shakespeare's work because his language was adapted for a famous Broadway love story. Comparing *West Side Story* to *Romeo and Juliet* helps students register the play's theatrical presence by helping them notice that the songs and sounds of *West Side Story* cannot be appreciated through reading alone, just as Shakespeare's cadence and figurative language cannot be appreciated through simply reading the text. Reading the lyrics in *West Side Story* sounds bizarre because they miss the sounds and emotional effect of the instruments.

When teaching *Romeo and Juliet* with *West Side Story*, teachers must respect that these works are similar, not identical. Focusing on their differences is an opportunity to understand the social context of each piece, considering that the family feud in *Romeo and Juliet* differs from the gang rivalry in *West Side Story*. Whereas Romeo and Juliet are "both alike in dignity" in terms of their race and socioeconomic status, Tony and Maria are separated by their race, ethnicity, and culture. Due to racial differences, the Sharks (Maria) and Jets (Tony) are not "both alike in dignity" (Merrill 104) because the Jets, who are white, are seen as American but the Sharks, who are Puerto Rican, are not. Whereas the Capulet and Montague feud is generational,

the Sharks and Jets feud over territory rooted in cultural and racial prejudice. Exploring *Romeo and Juliet* with *West Side Story* sparks conversations about racial privilege and socioeconomic status because they shape the dynamic of the feuds and determine the difficulties encountered by each couple. For example, Juliet wishes for Romeo to denounce his name so they can surpass their linguistic surroundings, but Tony and Maria must combine their languages and cultures to maintain their relationship.

Because Shakespeare's works manifest race, gender, and sexuality, students will most likely question them in their interpretations. Respecting and answering students' questions is integral to exploring Shakespeare to understand the presupposed universality of his plays. Kynor says "I work really hard [. . .] to create this environment where people feel safe" to ask these questions. She encourages students to respectfully ask questions regarding race, gender, and sexuality and will correct them if their phrasing is inappropriate. Although these questions can appear at any point in the play, comparing *West Side Story* with *Romeo and Juliet* highlights differences of identities because race is a driving component in *West Side Story*, unlike *Romeo and Juliet*. Students might question the depiction of race in *West Side Story* because both movie adaptations, the 1961 version and the 2021 version, are criticized for poorly depicting Puerto Ricans. In her article "New 'West Side Story' by Steven Spielberg lessens racism in the original, but not enough" Puerto Rican Journalist Luisita Lopez Torregrosa writes that both versions are a "depressing portrayal that ultimately only further degrades the Puerto Rican experience rather than elevates it". Rather than shying away from these conflicts, teachers can take this comparison as an opportunity to talk about how literary works change through being adapted and the importance of authentic representations of all identities. *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*

were both written to capture the human experience, so thoroughly exploring character identities lends it to a complete understanding and keen close reading.

Comparing *West Side Story* to *Romeo and Juliet* teaches students that Shakespeare's work is a living text, consistently subject to interpretation because readers and directors unravel a work's meaning through their perspective. Teachers can use *West Side Story* as an example to teach students about the various adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, from ballets, to operas, and movies to explain the story's cultural relevance. Merrill says, "the way in which the texts can be made to work on each other can (and should) be constantly redetermined," (113). Interpretations should not be rooted in one discipline but allow for multiple interactions amongst different texts related to the same storylines, themes, and/or messages. Teachers must empower students to present their perspective on *Romeo and Juliet* and its adaptations to foster independent and original thinking skills. Perhaps they will create an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* when they are older, or write a research paper, or retell the story to their children, to keep the play alive for future generations.

Drawing

        When I took a Shakespeare class in community college, the professor had us draw a picture for a small passage from the first play we read, *Othello*. Her goal was to introduce us to Shakespeare and show us that we can handle the language.

        The class enjoyed the activity. We compared each other's drawings and talked about how these comparisons reflect the passage's meaning. This activity is more effective than unpacking its meaning in a lecture because drawing the passage invites students to analyze the lines carefully to accurately illustrate its setting and context.

        Drawing a passage is useful for deciphering any Shakespeare passage, particularly for students who draw regularly and prefer pictures to text. Students can explain why they chose to draw their image and how their drawing relates to the play's themes and tensions. Unlike a comic book, drawing empowers students to put forth their interpretation of the text and demonstrate how they envision the story.

        For example, I drew a picture from Juliet's speech to Friar Lawrence about how she'd do anything to avoid marrying Paris (from act 4, scene1):

O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,

From off the battlements of yonder tower;

Or walk in thievish ways; or bid me lurk

Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears;

Or shut me nightly in a charnel house,

O'ercovered quite with dead men's rattling bones,

With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls;

Or bid me go into a new-made grave

And hide me with a dead man in his shroud—

Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble—

And I will do it without fear or doubt,

To live an unstained wife to my sweet love.

Of course, my drawing is simple, but the idea is there. The drawing took about ten

minutes because I diligently worked through each line to visualize the meaning of Juliet's

comparison. Juliet's lips are quivering because these thoughts "have made me [her] tremble". The

red X covers Paris and Juliet on their supposed wedding day to depict her refusal to marry him. I

chose to put green check marks above the gruesome situations she describes to emphasize that she considers these alternatives better than marrying Paris.

Drawings can be a study guide because they engagingly and succinctly summarize moments, conflicts, and occurrences. The picture may help students memorize the words because they might find themselves repeatedly reading the words to decide how to draw the passage. Pictures enliven the text by experiencing the ideas in another outlet.

Students will benefit from sharing and explaining their drawings with their peers because they will recognize that the play can be interpreted in many ways by comparing their artistic decisions. Peer collaboration enhances memory because students easily memorize their classmates' ideas and the ideas they explained to them.

Drawing and Learning

Educators know that the material taught is not exactly learned by students because "What is learned is what students take from their experiences, not only as shown in tests and performances but also in terms of how students process their experiences," (Pflaum, Susanna W., and Penny A. Bishop 202). Providing students with creative learning avenues empowers them to personalize their learning, increasing their cognitive skills. Drawing stimulates their interest in the material, increasing their engagement, which in turn develops higher-level thinking. Learning becomes approachable for them as drawing is a learning strategy for students to demonstrate their unique thought processes and interpretations, considering that many young people are artistically inclined.

Generative drawing is a learning strategy in reading that requires students to draw pictures based on the presented content. Generative drawing encourages students to analyze the main aspects of a piece and consolidate related segments instead of linearly processing the information. This process demands flexible thinking and the transfer of knowledge in various contexts to integrate knowledge across different representations. Students combine varying formats with verbal and nonverbal representations of information, improving learning because drawing requires students to construct a nonverbal depiction based on words. Drawing links verbal representations with nonverbal representations to shape a picture that accurately portrays the information. Drawing activates previously learned concepts to assist comprehension and inferencing processes. Combing preexisting knowledge with new information drives learning by ensuring that new information relates to the student's perspective rather than existing as its own entity.

The term learner-generated is defined as a student being "the primary causal agent in the construction and/or appearance of the drawing" (290). The term implies that learners use their hands and tools such as pencils, pens, and blank paper (avoiding computer tools) to create their own pictures. Mental connections are made between elements of to-be-learned material and prior knowledge, drawing "should prompt high levels of generativity because the learner must choose which specific information from text to include in the drawing, represent spatial relations in the drawing, and draw on prior topic knowledge to make meaning of the phenomenon being sketched" (Cromley, Jennifer G., et al 218). Generativity theory conveys that drawing motivates students to consider the details in a text, such as the most important information and their relationship to another, to accurately draw a picture. Astute consideration of details efficiently improves their learning because they carefully evaluate terms and research unfamiliar terms, committing the information to long-term memory.

The cognitive theory of multimedia learning (CTML; Mayer, 2009, 2014) states that generative cognitive processing occurs in three processes: selecting, or prioritizing which information to focus on in instruction, organizing, or determining the appropriate mental pattern to arrange that information, and integrating, or making connections between oral communication, written communication, and visual representations with other knowledge from long-term memory (Hellenbrand, Johannes, et al 1148). Drawing as a teaching method depends on all three processes because selecting, organizing, and integrating ensures that students comprehend the material. Students cannot separate the processes while drawing because their decisions depend on insightful assessments of the terms and how they create a meaning together. Drawing while reading any text urges students to determine how and which elements to depict and do so by applying prior knowledge to neatly draw an accurate picture. Drawing the text ensures that

students actively engage in analyzing the information rather than passively receive the information.

Drawing is a self-regulated learning process. To start a drawing, students decide on which and how many details are needed to make connections between the presented ideas, focusing their attention on key elements and their relationship to the ideas. Drawing transitions students from oral to written expression by stimulating story formation and being a factual and familiar expression. Their assignment and/or certain ideas most likely dictate their decision process, establishing a performance standard. Students expand their process by applying other learning strategies, such as elaboration and relearning, to help them select and organize information. Students then reflect on how their ideas for their drawing communicate the information which channels metacognition. The inability to understand one's drawing and/or the inability to draw information informs students that they are not successfully comprehending the information. Self-monitoring and self-regulation processes are at the forefront of drawing and can be enriched by working with their peers. Students can compare each other's drawings and revise them based on peer feedback. Revision enables revisiting information and reevaluating concepts to strengthen their interpretations and understandings.

Some scholars and researchers believe that drawing to learn is meant for advanced students with strong study strategies, despite drawing being a familiar activity for any student. Strong background knowledge, such as expanded vocabulary, is needed for drawing unfamiliar content. Nevertheless, others assert that drawing can help students advance their thinking without inhibiting their current study skills. Younger learners and those who struggle in school still benefit from the reading comprehension required by drawing. Drawing might encourage them to research unfamiliar terms, expanding their vocabulary more effectively than simply reading a

text in which unfamiliar terms are skipped. Regardless of their learning level, high school students are suitable candidates for drawing to learn because they have adequate background knowledge and continue developing their learning strategies. When drawing a passage and/or scene from a Shakespeare play, they encounter words they cannot define. They need to research the term then analyze its meaning in its context to draw the passage and/or scene. Thorough analysis and research are a key component of drawing, not unlike a traditional essay.

Regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and language, children learn by creating mental images. They are familiar with reading stories including pictures since many learn how to read with them. A child's preference for learning through words or pictures relates to their identity and background considering that "while middleclass children in the U.S are likely to be proficient in the verbal-analytical mode of the left hemisphere encouraged by schools, the urban poor, who are largely Black or Hispanic, are likely to prefer the spatial global mode of the right hemisphere," (Sinatra, Richard 540). Allowing students to draw their interpretations makes learning accessible within the classroom by allowing another opportunity to demonstrate knowledge. As situational context aiding vocabulary, drawing pictures benefits ESL students by connecting expressions and connectives. If an ESL student struggles to communicate a certain thought to their English-speaking classmates and/or teacher, drawing can empower them to contribute their ideas.

Expecting students to use added pictures to make meaning of a text is not the same as drawing the text because students rely on passively receiving the information from the picture instead of understanding how the picture represents the information. There is little to no research process in connecting how the picture relates to the content because students have no need to research unfamiliar terms nor see how those terms affect the picture. Students might not

understand the artist's decision in a certain drawing considering that drawing is a unique

interpretative process typically lacking an intensive description. Real comprehension of a text,

such as a Shakespeare play, is rooted in a student's ability to both authentically and individually

express their thoughts and interpretations without interferences of another scholar.

Modern Translations and Shakespeare

Teachers are often advised not to teach Shakespeare with modern translations from sources such as Sparknotes and LitCharts because students might only read the translations which hinders their comprehension of the play by neglecting its prose and poetry. However, Lori Cardoza-Starnes, an English teacher at Garden Grove High School, teaches Shakespeare in a way that demands students to use the original text to create their own modern translation.

On Thursday December 14, 2023, Cardoza-Starnes invited New Swan Theater actors for acting demonstrations on *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*. As a part of my research, I observed the classroom.

After performing a set of lines, the actors asked for student volunteers to read them. They asked the volunteers to recount the meaning of the lines then asked them to perform them with contemporary language and gestures. The volunteers got to look at the original lines for guidance but could not simply repeat them.

The other students got to give suggestions, like a director, to the volunteers on how to deliver the lines and use body language to convey meaning. The students encouraged the volunteers to try different versions of certain characters, such as playing Lady Macbeth as a bloodthirsty heroine or as a gentle wife encouraging her husband.

The activity was engaging and entertaining. Students laughed and were attentive throughout the one-hour exercise. I was enthralled by how the students interacted with the text and their take on the story.

These acting demonstrations cohesively supplement students' modern translations with Shakespeare's Early Modern English and makes them inseparable. Instead of reading modern translations by scholars, students attach their own ideas in their words to comprehend the story.

They interpret the story through their perspective which improves their insight and empowers them to form a creative evaluation of the story's themes and messages. Working with their peers to explain the story builds invaluable cooperation and teamwork skills needed for the work world.

Kinesthetic learners will benefit from this activity because the kinesthetic student "learns best while moving" (Higbee, Jeanne L., et al 6). They learn the most effectively from unravelling the events and character motivations through group work and physical movements. Kinesthetic learners will positively respond to experimenting with the storyline by applying their peers' suggestions on acting or suggesting how their peers should perform a set of lines. Reenacting the story helps them retain key moments because they employ their minds and bodies to enliven the play as Shakespeare intended.

After I read the original text out loud, I recognized that Lady Capulet is dismissing Juliet's sadness for her loss. Lady Capulet thinks that Juliet is upset that her cousin died, but she is distressed about Romeo's banishment.

Original Text

Lady Capulet
[From within] Ho, daughter, are you up?

Juliet
Who is 't that calls? Is it my lady mother? Is she not down so late or up so early? What unaccustomed cause procures her hither?

LADY CAPULET enters.

Lady Capulet
Why, how now, Juliet?

Juliet
Madam, I am not well.

Lady Capulet
Evermore weeping for your cousin's death? What, wilt thou wash him from his grave with tears? An if thou couldst, thou couldst not make him live. Therefore, have done. Some grief shows much of love, But much of grief shows still some want of wit.

Juliet
Yet let me weep for such a feeling loss.

Lady Capulet
So shall you feel the loss, but not the friend Which you weep for.

Juliet
Feeling so the loss,
Cannot choose but ever weep the friend.

Lady Capulet
Well, girl, thou weep'st not so much for his death, As that the villain lives which slaughtered him.

My translation

Lady Capulet
(from within) Are you awake Juliet?

Juliet
Mom, are you calling me? She's awake very early or very late. Oh, for what reason is she awake right now?

Enter LADY CAPULET

Lady Capulet
How are you Juliet?

Juliet
Mom, I don't feel well.

Lady Capulet
Is it Tybalt? Do you think your tears can wash him out of his grave? And if that was possible, it wouldn't bring him back to life. Be done weeping. A little grieving proves you loved Tybalt, but grieving too much makes you stupid.

Juliet
Let me be upset in peace.

Lady Capulet
Fine. Crying won't help you remember all the good times you've had with Tybalt.

Juliet
I've got no control over whom I feel sad for.

Lady Capulet
If that's the case, you're not upset about Tybalt's death but Romeo being alive.

My translation uses fewer words than the original text possibly because Early Modern English used about ten words to express an idea that modern speakers express in one word. I interpreted Lady Capulet as an unfeeling mother and Juliet as a whining teenager who feels misunderstood. I replaced the word "madam" with "Mom" to omit the formality of Juliet's speech because children have a more casual relationship with their parents than children in Juliet's era.

This activity helped me memorize this specific moment of the play by slowly reading each line to create an accurate translation. I could not have done this activity without interpreting the moment because my interpretation affected my word choice. For example, I had Lady Capulet say "Fine" in response to Juliet's excessive crying because I felt that she cannot empathize with her daughter.

Theater in the Classroom

Shakespeare's work is meant for performance, not for reading in a classroom. Although teachers are constantly reminded this, theater pedagogy in an English classroom is new and still rare. Resistance to theater in a classroom relates to the Puritans despising theater for its display of immorality and distraction from worship. The Puritans at first prohibited the formal teaching of Shakespeare due to his explicit themes. The poor reputation of theater propelled teachers to consider Shakespeare's plays inappropriate teaching materials. Yet in the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's work was added to the curriculum as lines of poetry for speech and memorization purposes. They were carefully presented to ensure that students were not tempted by the preconceived dangers of the stage (Haughey 60).

The start of the twentieth century brought positive attitudes towards theater, particularly when the Methodist Church ended their ban on theater in 1912. The formation of Drama League, a professional theater association founded in 1910, indicated the rise in popularity of theater. English Literature Professor Joseph Haughey quotes American journalist Mary Grey Peck explaining that "the United States was searching for a new identity, one that could be found through this new breed of drama" (61). In a time of war and new technologies, theater became a space for people to process their new reality. The historical accuracy of set design and costumes along with its emphasis on realism captivated 20th century audiences. The public's newfound acceptance of theater paved the way for performance as an instructional method.

When integrating theater techniques into the teaching of Shakespeare, teachers can still rely on lectures and discussions to introduce the language and historical context. Teachers, however, can shift their focus to how the plot, context, characters, and language are acted, not read. This will help students explore the meaning of the language. To help students transition from the

academic side to the theatrical realm, teachers can have a theater teacher introduce acting

techniques, such as how actors find meaning in a text and the choices they make to deliver

meaning. This approach teaches Shakespeare "without overwhelming the students" (Smith 136).

Discussions and lectures should complement theater techniques to keep students engaged by

providing them knowledge for how to apply theater techniques in their exploration of

Shakespeare plays.

As living works that are subject to interpretation, theater pedagogy encourages students to

experience Shakespeare's plays because they insert themselves in the play rather than passively

reading. Performance-based pedagogy succinctly fits itself into the classroom with respect to the

play's intended purpose of being seen and felt. Haughey writes that Horace Mann High School

was created believing that "plays can never be intelligently read without training in the difficult

art of visualizing them as drama- not the thing told but the thing acted" (62). Theater is meant to

invigorate people with sights and sounds, not words alone. Reading the play may frustrate

students from feeling a sense of inadequacy, stemming from not seeing and feeling the play.

Analysis must not be the goal, but rather experience: "Experience outweighs explanation" (188).

Experiencing the play varies so students have opportunities to put forth their ideas without

worrying about being right or wrong.

The most productive close reading activity and literary analysis for dramatic works is

performance because they are meant for acting. Theater techniques require the use of prior

knowledge and worldly experience to successfully interpret the play. This gives students a

critical perspective of cultural inheritance. Unlike writing, performance necessitates analysis of

every aspect of the play from the words of the characters to why and how they say them.

Comprehending the lines, characters' motivations and their thoughts progresses decision-making

skills because students must interpret each in a way that makes them compatible. Students must decide how their character should express emotions because students know their character's lines but not the stage directions telling them how to present their character. They decide which movements are appropriate for their character and situation by selecting the best nonverbal movements to match their lines because acting encompasses words and actions. This process unpacks the themes and character motivations by ensuring that students fully engage with the play.

Theater techniques compel students to interpret the play because performance depends on interpretation. Students cannot perform the play without thoroughly understanding its context, language, structure, themes, and storylines. Theater techniques concentrate on "the processes of discovery and interpretation" (Esposito 183) in studying the messages and figurative language to enhance interpretive thinking skills. Engaging in this complicated mode of expression allows students to develop their abilities to think, invent, and discover. This makes theater pedagogy "close reading on one's feet" (Esposito 183) because students heavily invest themselves in the language and characters to take the play off the page.

Theater techniques help students digest and internalize Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare's economical use of words (due to meter) inspires students to do the same to effectively communicate. In turn, they master English vocabulary because Shakespeare created more than 1,700 English words and phrases (Smith 136). Shakespeare's unique grammar, such as omitting syllables, forces students to attentively listen to each word to understand a set of dialogue. This process "stimulates the sematic region of the brain more strongly than plain English and activates other brain regions not typically activated by language processing" (Smith 137). They can use the context of unknown words to decipher their meaning, cultivating their

skills in viewing their work from outside perspectives. When saying an unfamiliar word, they must select the most appropriate body language to contextualize the word.

To perform the play for the class, students must memorize their lines and movements. Shakespeare's lines are easy to memorize because his lines mimic natural speech and have a steady and pleasing cadence. Memorizing the lines will strengthen their memory with any type of information. Memorization expands their vocabulary because they get exposed to unfamiliar words in a metrical pattern.

Students connect with Shakespeare's characters through performances, allowing them to relate to them. Performances remove the plays outside an academic lens as Shakespeare intended, to realize that the events are happening to people. The empathy with which students approach Shakespeare's plays makes them universal and accessible. Smith quotes Gibson (2016): "students make immediate connections with emotions and motivations that link with their own feelings and experience . . . Enacting Shakespeare can help students confront and control their own emotions. The resultant understanding of others can lead to greater empathy" (145). Performance is a resource for students to learn how to match the character's emotions with their intensive situations for an audience. This process builds their skills to handle their emotions.

The challenges of performing Shakespeare's plays make collaboration inevitable to comprehend the complicated language. This is an opportunity for students to advance collaboration skills in an analytical and creative setting by collectively forging the themes and messages of the text by comparing each other's thoughts. Sharing observations with peers deepens a student's understanding of their own thoughts as their peers give them feedback. They have the freedom to change their thoughts according to their peers' observations, introducing them to the various ways of thinking. This exchange of ideas through their unique perspectives

encourages students to empathize and identify with one another. This teaches them to consider each other's ideas, build on those ideas, and respond to their questions. They bond over their process of comprehension, even when they feel frustrated, reaching a conclusion together will reward them.

Students can perform parts of the play to their peers and listen to their peers' critiques and suggestions. Performing parts of the play for their peers, watching others' performance, and comparing their decisions enables students to see the variety of interpretations and ways to present a play in a way that writing cannot. They discover that a play can be staged in several ways with the same accuracy. Responding to critiques and suggestions increases collaboration skills that students will use in the workforce. Developing effective collaboration skills is a lifelong skill for every student, regardless of their career path.

Students observing their peers' rendition of the play (or even a part of the play) allows them to see themselves in the characters, enabling them to assess how they would handle the character's situation. In doing so, they evaluate morality and how to exercise judgment by employing their imagination in the complicated world of Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare's plays are morally complicated, so students have the chance to address and challenge the definition of morality. Watching characters balance rationality and emotion, or favor one, in their decision making motivates students to ascertain the process of making valuable decisions. They learn from the successes and failures of character on how to navigate difficult situations. They can use these observations to resolve future conflict.

Unpacking Shakespeare's text and performing the play empowers students to embrace challenges because of the sheer difficulty of processing and presenting Shakespeare's Early Modern English for a contemporary audience. Students gain skills in approaching challenges

from encountering Shakespeare because they feel accomplished in their ability to decipher classic literature. New York student and actor R.D Smith notes "While analyses can certainly be challenging, working with Shakespeare's language never feels futile because I know that Shakespeare intended his words to be understood" (142). Students successfully make academic and creative achievements after analyzing the play for their performance which increases their self-confidence.

Teaching with Technology

As technology becomes a greater part of our lives, students depend on internet sources to guide them in their studies. Some students find a video more engaging than reading because videos have a sound and visual appeal to aid comprehension and memory.

Deirdre Faughey, an English teacher at Oyster Bay High School, documented her experience with using podcasts to teach her students *Romeo and Juliet*. She let them choose their topics and gave them these instructions:

Podcast Planning Sheet

What is interesting about *Romeo and Juliet*?

The history

- What was life like for Romeo and Juliet?
- Why did Juliet's parents want her to marry so young?
- Why did the Prince yell at the Montagues and Capulets to stop fighting? Why weren't there police?
- How are teenagers today different from teenagers back then?

The story

- Why do people keep telling this story?
- Why do people enjoy this story?
- How is this story relevant today?
- What questions do you have about the plot?
- Why do you think Shakespeare wanted the audience to know things that the characters did not (dramatic irony)?

The characters: Juliet

- What do you like about Juliet?
- Would you like to be her friend? Do you think she has any friends?
- Why do you think Juliet falls in love with Romeo so quickly?
- Do you think Romeo is good for Juliet?
- Do you think it's weird that Juliet tells her parents she will "obey" them, when she doesn't really mean it (subtext)?

The characters: Romeo

- What do you like about Romeo?
- Would you like to be his friend?
- Why do you think Mercutio and Romeo are friends?
- Do you think it's weird that Romeo goes from loving Tybalt to hating him so quickly?
- Do you think it's odd that Romeo goes from loving Rosamund to loving Juliet so quickly?

Are there other things about this play that you find interesting? If so, what?

Some of Faughey's students did their podcast on debating who is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, comparing parent-child relationships in the early modern era to today, and how the story's message changes through its multiple adaptations. She observed "As a result, the students, who are often perceived by themselves and others to be "struggling," have

found opportunities to shine" (68). Using 21st-century technology that students use in their daily lives promotes a student-centered learning environment where students feel empowered to study the material and how they can best process it.

Writing assignments do not help every student demonstrate an understanding of the material. Most teachers focus on writing assignments to teach and grade their students on *Romeo and Juliet* though writing itself is a separate skill from having ideas about the story. Students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, may struggle to organize their thoughts and opinions in a paper despite having solid arguments about the story. Podcasts are a valuable teaching technique for students, particularly those who are auditory learners, because they get to repeat concepts and their ideas back to their teacher and classmates. Students are more familiar with podcasts than writing assignments, so a podcast will most likely help them develop their thoughts better than an essay because they do not have to focus on both learning how to write and elucidate their ideas.

Considering that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be experienced with sight, sounds, and feelings, podcasts translate well with reading his stories because students engage their auditory senses, visual senses, and their own thinking to interact with the storyline. It's often easier for students to listen and remember the podcasts of their classmates because they relate to another better than the teacher's lecture notes. If teachers find that their students learn the material the best with verbal communication, podcasts are invaluable.

Despite teachers' efforts to inform students that Shakespeare was a part of popular culture, rather than a literary scholar, students disregard his cultural significance as they painstakingly work through his language in traditional academic settings. As commonly used entertainment devices, teachers can add technological applications to their curriculum to better communicate that Shakespeare was popular culture by having students engage in his work through media, a tool from their popular culture. English curriculums require creating and composing, so "As teachers of language arts, we need to view technology as a means of collecting information, capturing ideas, and making meaning, where students summarize, synthesize, evaluate, select, reject, listen, read, organize, interpret, talk, write, edit, and revise," (Bowman, Cindy, et al. 89). Some students use technological applications to assist their learning endeavors, such as watching YouTube videos, searching unfamiliar terms, and listening to podcasts. Students use them for self-paced learning to relearn misunderstood material and review the complicated material. Listening to the material might be more approachable than reading because listening is more familiar and requires less mental effort. Less mental effort to comprehend the material leads to thorough understanding and interpretations.

Students are accustomed to using technology in their daily life to communicate, store regularly used information, and record information. Many students begin school as competent technological users so implementing technology in their learning appeals to their interest. As podcasting becomes more accessible and common, using various technologies for creating audio content is transparent to students. Transparency is crucial in education because students regularly move through social settings and academia. Integrating technologies in educational curriculum expands learning by introducing students to the modes of communication and content creation they will most likely use in professional settings. Podcast projects create a self-paced and

independent learning environment because students can select their own settings and choose where to use their podcast. Students can record audio content outdoors, in their house, or on their campus, wherever they are the most comfortable working. Students discover that learning is not confined to academic settings because they see they can demonstrate their interpretations in casual settings. Personalizing and relating learning to daily life not only builds professional skills but motivates student engagement because they can apply prior knowledge in demonstrating their learning process.

According to Philips (1995), podcast projects must cater student interest, provoke their thoughts, and be inextricably apart of the curriculum for the best academic value in the classroom (Dick Ng'ambi, and Annette Lombe 186). Podcasts help students memorize information and reflect on them. Reflection is dependent on memorization, and reflection is an important part of learning by motivating the meaning-making process after material is first learned. This process of meaning-making lends to effective reflection resulting from keen critical engagement perceived through students' ability to comprise their knowledge through their perspective and others'.

Constructivism is a learning theory asserting that students learn most effectively by applying and developing new material with preexisting knowledge and foundations. Atherton (2005) argues that constructivism "initiates discourse, with the primary objective of helping students to reach an understanding" (Dick Ng'ambi, and Annette Lombe 183). Retention and cognition develop through active learning by building student interest. Constructivism focuses on the role of cultural and social factors in cognitive functioning considering that this theory explores the creative, active, and social parts of learning eliciting different perspectives and knowledge. Deciphering the meaning in podcasts is an active and reflective process that demands

the application of prior knowledge. Students take control of their learning by acquiring knowledge based on individual mental activity, social interchanges, and their own experiences. Dick Ng'ambi and Annette Lombe quote Mayes and de Freitas (2004) claiming that constructivism "conceives learning as the realization of understanding through active discovery, dialogue, and collaboration" (183). Mayes and de Freitas believe that constructivism concentrates on internalizing skills and knowledge then integrating those skills and knowledge with those preexisting. In a society dominated by technology, utilizing technological devices in curriculums is a practical learning strategy to appeal to students' experiences. Student-generated podcasts are suitable for constructivism learning environments because students critically engage with material to make one, requiring active involvement and complex cognitive processes as they research and formulate concepts. The research process is similar to writing, but the formatting is different because verbally explaining the information demands shorter sentences and easier vocabulary than written works. Students who dislike or struggle with writing might benefit from making podcasts by realizing they can express their thoughts in a casual and simple manner.

The inability to read and understand words, a common struggle for students with learning disabilities, hinders comprehension. Traditional academic activities, such as writing, often challenge students with learning disabilities regardless of the material and their thought process because written communication is an obstacle. Teachers interpret their struggles as poor comprehension skills. Technological assistance supports students with learning disabilities in completing assignments "more efficiently and independently and results in improved performance on a variety of reading and writing tasks" (Forgrave, Karen E 122). Technology compensates learning disabilities while strengthening cognitive skills without compromising the learning process. Some students might prefer expressing their thoughts through oral

communication because the criteria and expectations for oral work do not interfere with their disability. The oral communication component of podcasts teaches students of the various modes of informing others and the differences among each mode. Technology unifies classroom interactions by facilitating student communication regardless of speaking proficiencies and language uses. Technology limits barriers between students by providing another option to receive the information and ease cognition. Introducing students to the variety of communication formats prepares them for success in the work world by ensuring they are flexible and open-minded thinkers with awareness of how the choice of format influences how information is presented and received.

Concluding Thoughts

We study the humanities to make sense of the human condition, which is why Shakespeare's plays remain so impactful and compelling. His themes, characters, and messages prove that human nature rarely changes because younger generations continue to relate to them. Particularly in *Romeo and Juliet*, the situation of the titular characters stages the struggles of young people to understand their world. Students can relate to being young and unsure of themselves, if *Romeo and Juliet* is taught correctly. Veidemanis explains that teaching Shakespeare "must be found to an approach that is mature, yet not stuffy; scholarly, without being pedantic; dramatic, yet also literary; thorough, but not exhausting; contemporary as well as universal" (241). Through my research, I've learned that implementing accessible tools, such as video recordings, graphic books, and drawings, helps students navigate the difficulty of Shakespeare's plays. Sticking to reading and writing is simply not enough.

Using Shakespeare's plays as methods of fostering social skills, empathy, and visual literacy enhances students' exploration of Shakespeare. Studying them only for their literary value distances students from his work because most of them start their exploration of classic literature in high school, when students may not have a solid understanding of what makes a work last through generations. However, dynamically and creatively studying Shakespeare can allow students to individually discover what makes a literary work everlasting. Doing activities and analyzing pictures develops independent thinking skills by engaging in various ways of interpreting information.

My goal in this project was not to find the ultimate method of teaching Shakespeare, but to explore how The Bard remains accessible to high school students. I've read many articles and interviewed educators on their teaching experiences and found different accounts in each

resource. Teachers must respect that every classroom is different, so approaching Shakespeare, or any material, will vary depending on students' needs. Peter Sawaya claims "the primary method that is not really a method [. . .] is to come at the teaching of Shakespeare with great enthusiasm and know the stuff." Despite the avenue that teachers choose, being enthused by The Bard is critical to motivating student engagement. Developing student engagement allows teachers to share their knowledge of Shakespeare in hopes that students will discover new ways of reading his work. Ultimately, the goal of teaching Shakespeare is to not memorize his famous lines nor praise him as a scholar, but to ensure that his texts remain active and living through each generation's unique interpretations.

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