

Understanding the World of the Play

by Maria McConville

Before diving into the text of the play itself, here is a lesson that can kick-start your students' engagement.

This lesson can be used for introducing a class or a cast to any play, really. I have used these particular exercises when teaching Shakespeare and I think they will be especially helpful when introducing the *Shakespeare, Clearly* adaptations by Jon Jory. Before sitting down to read, the student engages with the story in kinesthetic, visual, and auditory ways.

Ideal group

Middle School and High School student actors new to Shakespeare.

Goal/Aim

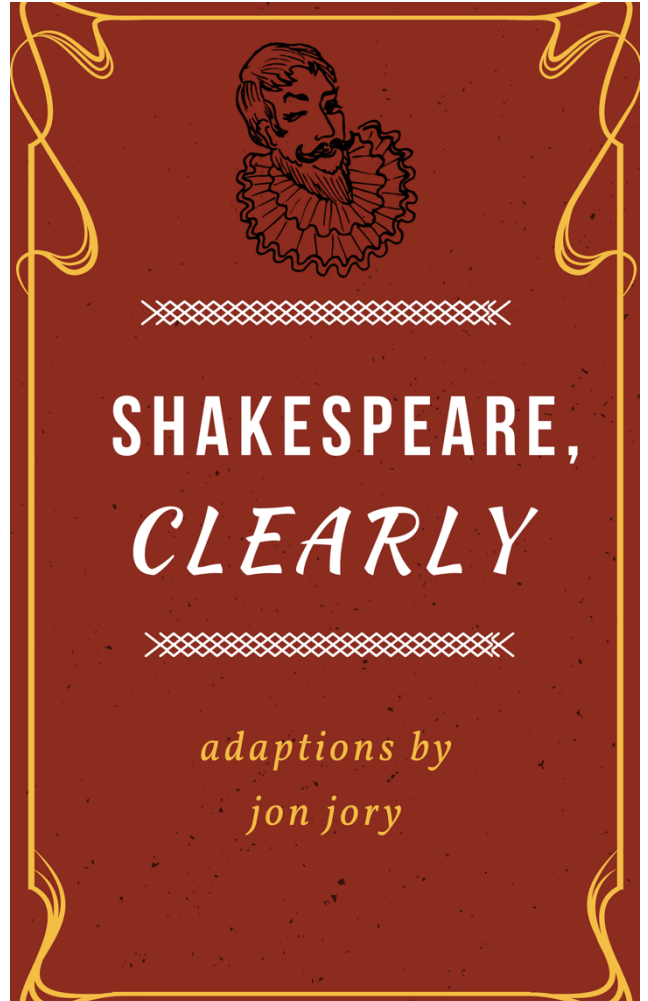
Students will have an understanding of the setting, characters, and themes of the play before reading the text.

Length of Lesson

This was created with a 45-minute class session in mind. It can be drawn out or broken up over the course of a few sessions.

Materials Needed

Scripts and index cards.



ACTIVITY 1

Make a tableau!

1. Read through the scene your students are working on.
2. Establish that a tableau is a still and silent picture that tells a story.
3. Ask student volunteers to create a tableau. Example: Hero, Villain, Friends eating ice cream.
ex. Teacher: I'd like to see a tableau of someone who is in love. 3-2-1 Curtain!
Actors: Create a still, silent statue with their bodies of what they think someone in love looks like.
4. Ask the students how they know what type of character they are seeing? What is the actor doing with their body to communicate?

ACTIVITY 2

How important is Distance? Levels? Gesture?

1. Now layer in the theatrical element of DISTANCE to your tableaux. Put two of the students' tableau characters on the stage together. What does it mean when they are close together? What does it mean for the story when they are far apart?
2. When the idea of Distance is understood, add the element of levels. What if one of the characters is physically higher than the other? What does it tell the audience if the characters are on an equal plain, etc?
3. Next add Gesture. Student actors should add a physical gesture to their tableau. This is included with the previous elements.

Discussion Questions

What relationships do you see?

Can you imagine where these characters are?

How does the relationship change when one of these elements is adjusted?

ACTIVITY 3

Break class into 10 groups. Give each group a line of text from the 10 main plot points of the play. Just from the text, have them create a tableau that uses Distance, Levels and Gesture. When the tableau is established, the actors should recite the text.

Example Text:

(These lines are from Jory's *Romeo and Juliet*. Please use 10 lines that help show the beginning, middle and end of whichever piece you are working on.)

1. Three brawls between you, Montague and Capulet have disturbed our streets.
2. You have a sword - if love be rough with you, be rough with love. Prick love for pricking.
3. If your love is honorable, and your purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow by a messenger I'll send where and what time our marriage will be and all my fortune I will give and follow you across the world.
4. Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio. How do we find the price for this spilled blood? I exile him.
5. When I see you in the garden down below it will be as one at the bottom of a tomb; you look pale, my love.
6. Next Thursday morning the gallant and noble young Paris, will make you at St. Peter's Church a happy bride.
7. Her body sleeps in the Capulet's vaults, sir. She is with the angels now. I saw the funeral. Forgive me, Romeo, for bringing you this news.
8. Here's to my love. O true apothecary. The drugs are quick.
9. I must be brief. O happy dagger. This is your sheath. There rust and let me die.
10. Capulet! Montague! See what payment is laid upon your hate? And for lenience to your houses have lost two kinsmen. All are punished.

Share!: Each group should share their tableau and text in numerical order.

Discussion Questions

What do they infer about the play from watching the groups in order?

What words pop out?

What characters and relationships might this play be about?

Teaching standards met by this lesson

New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theatre

Theatre Making: Acting; Developing Theatre Literacy; Making Connections Through Theatre;
Working with Community and Cultural Resources; Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning

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