

YEAR NINE ENGLISH**LESSON PLAN 8****ORCHESTRATING THE TEXT – GAMES AND EXERCISES****DURATION: 40 minutes****CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

STRAND	Language	Literature	Literacy
SUB-STRAND	Expressing and developing ideas	Examining Literature	Interpreting, analyzing and evaluating and Interacting with Others
CURRICULUM CONTENT	(ACELA1557)	(ACELT1637)	(ACELY1744) (ACELY1811) (ACELY1743)

RATIONALE

Students develop an understanding of the layers of meaning embedded within Shakespeare’s text through cumulative processes which focus upon individual qualities within the text.

As they progress through a systematic series of exercises, they are kinesthetically accumulating an experience of different qualities of pitch, tone, rhythm and euphonics as they relate to meaning. Through this physical exploration, students gain a more evidence-based intellectual understanding of these abstractions in a social environment of playful activity.

One side benefit to these exercises, is that, while exploring individual poetic devices, students continue a process of interpretation of the text.

REQUIREMENTS

If it is possible to provide students with photocopies of the text with large font and double spacing it makes reading the text while being active easier. The blank spaces on the page also clearly indicate that this is a working document requiring notations and decoding marks as a part of the cumulative process in which the student is engaged. The text for the purposes of this approach is not literature nor is it a script requiring performance. It is a working text ready for exploration.

The Orchestration exercises work most effectively when students can rest their printed text on upright music stands. This enables them to stand straight in the room, balanced forward in a half-step braced stance to energize their work, and to freely engage their arms in ‘conducting’ the energy of the words. The exercise can be achieved placing printed material on desks or even on chairs – but this interrupts the ability to stand straight, ‘in alignment’, to use a practice-led term. If you cannot access music stands take care to encourage students, where possible, to adjust their eye-line and posture to standing straight in the space as much as possible. Resting the text on a chair placed on a desk usually positions the text at an appropriate height.

LESSON EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1: HISSPER

As with previous orchestration exercises students ‘conduct’ the movement of the words as fluently and as dexterously as individually possible. Like with most active exercises, this technique grows with the student’s familiarity and with their commitment to explore and make the exercise their own. Just going through the motions is disrespectful to the exercise, but more particularly, is disrespectful to themselves.

It is important that students understand that ‘hissper’ is not a genuine whisper. A genuine whisper is ‘spoken’ entirely on breath and is almost inaudible because there is no constriction of the throat.

Hissper requires a gentle constriction of the throat so that the hissed breath can be heard.

It is also important that no ‘vibes’ are involved in hissper. ‘Vibes’ refers to the vibrations caused by the larynx as a normal part of vocalization. But just as a true whisper has no vocal vibrations, only released breath, so too does hissper have no underlying vocalization. To do so would be to speak ‘sotto voce’, to repress or ‘pull in’ the released voice. And that is to create an inner disposition of repression or curtailment. From that psychological state no exploration can be achieved, and in fact, any discoveries made are implicitly rejected or denied as a part of the repressive mindset involved in speaking ‘sotto voce’. So it is important that students understand that hissper is a true whisper with just enough throat constriction to make the whisper audible as a hissper.

TIP: Students should have water bottles on hand to maintain a properly lubricated mouth and throat. Very rarely, students not used to breathing as deeply as hissper will encourage, may experience some light headedness. This is simply hyper-ventilation and students should be encouraged to squat down or sit down until their head begins to clear. Breathing into cupped hands or holding the breath for a prolonged period can quickly return blood oxygen levels to normal.

There are a number of benefits to ‘hissper’. Because the voice is removed from the process, students are freed from the sort of self-consciousness

that 'hearing themselves' or being aware of themselves being able to be heard can cause. Also, and again because the voice has been removed from rendering the text spoken, hisser encourages students to commit more to each word in emphasis and clarity. This in turn intrinsically causes them to search more deeply to discover in each word more of the essence of meaning which gives them cause to speak. So their exploration of the text becomes more detailed and profound. The final benefit again is a direct result of removing the power of the voice from the process, which causes an increased physical engagement with and embodiment of, the words and meanings of the text. Through that increased physical engagement students are able to experience and discern more the various abstract layers of Shakespeare's text.

Usually immediately after a hisser exercise or at any point during a hisser working of the text, if the student is asked to 'come back onto voice' you should note an increased strength and fullness to their vocalized working of the text.

TIP: Exercises are a means by which students are able to focus upon one specific aspect or layer of a text or a scene. The exercise, through its structure or its stated focus, enables or gives permission for participants to place priority focus on discovering as much as they can about that particular aspect. When the student returns to a more normal working of the text separate from a specific exercise, those discoveries made should just naturally transition, but, it is often productive to devote a working through of the text to ensure and kinesthetically 'note' that transition. Such a systematic and ordered approach provides time and space to

cumulatively and consciously develop a layered understanding of the work.

EXERCISE 2. Falsetto and Bottom End.

Notions of pitch and tone are difficult to understand when talking about spoken dialogue or even poetry. In a contemporary context we generally accept that when speaking aloud our ‘natural’ voice simply manifests pitch and tonality that is within the range of our own daily speaking ‘instrument’ and is largely influenced by the circumstances in which we are speaking and the meaning of our words. Outside of singing a melody, it seems ludicrous and unnatural to consider ‘placing’ our words according to pitch or tone or even rhythm in any artificial or stylized manner. That would be like walking down the street but thinking about how we step and where we place our feet every step of the way.

And yet Shakespeare’s text, which are supposed to be the spoken words of his characters, are also supposed to be spoken according to some sort of heightened style which includes pitch and tone. How does someone achieve that and not sound like a complete loser?

As with most explorative work involving different organized energies embedded within text, it is enough to simply experientially explore the extremes of each individual quality. With regard to pitch, by working through the text all in falsetto; pitching the voice up into the resonant chambers of the head, and then by working through the text again, this time with the voice as deep as you can comfortably go – we have ‘opened up’ the spectrum of ‘pitch’ to the text. The normal patterns of vocalization have to some degree been disrupted and our vocal

instrument has learned a new possibility. Working through the text then a third time, allowing for the possibility of the voice to range freely across pitch according to the sense of what we are saying begins the process of discovering the heightened style of Shakespeare's language as a spoken communication.

TIP: There is no 'right' response or outcome for this process. If students are exploring possibilities, and whatever small discoveries they make – it all contributes to their losing their fear of Shakespeare; of their learning that they can play with and manipulate Shakespeare's text, and that they are building an understanding of the components of his work.

EXERCISE 3. SCATTING

To explore the shifting rhythms and emphases of meaning, or different stresses in the words it is useful to remove the words entirely from the equation.

Using the jazz technique of 'scatting' students simply speak out loud nonsense syllables and sounds – gibberish – instead of the words of their text. They do however, continue to read and stay connected to the sense of what they are saying; the thought changes, images and meaning – it is just that, in order to explore rhythmic changes, stressed beats and variable patterns or shifts in energy – they scat.

It is important that students are reminded that they are exploring. And an essential component of exploration is play. Don't use an existing or known rhythm or melody – let the sense of what you are saying generate it's own rhythm or melody.

Once the students have explored the text to the full through scattng, they should work back through the text again speaking out the words, and noting any vitalization or rhythmic awareness that they have discovered through the exercise.

EXERCISE 4. SWIFT AND SUSTAINED

This exercise is focused on rhythm and is again based on the principle of ‘opening up the spectrum’.

Students should orchestrate through the text in as sustained or slow way as possible. Young people often find this a confusing experience because they equate extreme slowness with sleepiness or loss of energy. They need to work with an image of being made of honey, or pushing through an atmosphere of honey or mud – so that they maintain their energy while sustaining as slow a rhythm as possible. Working in a filmic slo-mo style can give a quick entry into the sustained rhythm and it is surprising how quickly the state starts to feel quite natural.

As they work through, s

tudents should simply take note of the 99.5% of the time when such a sustained rhythm does not feel like it matches the sense of the words, and the .5% of the time when it actually does!

The next stage of the exercise is for students to speed up the rhythm of their being to the most rapid rate possible – they need to become a human hummingbird or be in the inner state of a world class boxer. They need to power through the text, still being specific to thoughts and individual words – taking note of the 99.5% of the time when the swift

rhythm does not seem to support the words or meaning, but also noting the .5% of the time when it does. They should also give themselves permission to let the words fly out of their mouths in different ways – and to note that difference. Nothing is set yet in the way that they ‘should’ speak the text.

Having opened up both ends of the rhythm spectrum, students then progress through the text in free flow – exploring when the sense of what they are saying impels them to change their rhythm - to hold, or propel through thought changes, to rush to the end of a phrase or sentence; to falter and feel their way through other sections.

POINT OF INTEREST: In professional acting circles infinitesimal shifts and changes of rhythm intrinsic to the circumstances of the character and what they are saying are viewed as an indication of the very high standard of an actor’s capability.

TIP: At the very earliest encounter with the text, when students were reading out loud without any understanding or familiarity with all of the components thus far explored, it might be interesting for students to video themselves reading. Then, at the completion of these exercises, have the students stand, without orchestration, holding internally everything that they have thus far experienced, and read out loud the text again. Video record this reading and then compare the two. Students should be able to see how far they have progressed and how much mastery they now have in engaging with Shakespeare’s work.

