

YEAR NINE ENGLISH LESSON PLAN 3.

SKILLS FOR SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE.

DURATION: 40 minutes.

PUNS, METAPHORS AND ONOMATOPOEIA

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

STRAND	Language	Literature	Literacy
SUB-STRAND	Language for interaction	Examining Literature	Interacting with others
CURRICULUM CONTENT	(ACELA1552)	(ACELT1772)	(ACELY1740)

The following are a series of games that assist students to familiarise themselves with some of Shakespeare's most commonly used poetic and literary devices.

The games are simple to play. Because they are collaborative everybody gets to share the challenge and the gains.

REQUIREMENTS

Although these are word games and can be played seated, if students stand they tend to be more energised in their commitment. So, it might be necessary to clear some space among the desks and chairs.

You will also need to download a broad selection of pun jokes and sentences and print them out on separate slips of paper. The pun-slips can then be placed in a container from which students can randomly select.

LESSON GAMES

PAINFULLY PUNNY

Have students ‘lucky-pick’ single slips of pun-paper. One by one they read their pun to the group. Students will naturally try to make the pun work, or at least, less Dad-jokey. Encouraging a party atmosphere where students applaud or groan and boo, or throw balled up paper ‘rotten fruit’ all helps to acknowledge that puns, in the modern context, are pretty lame. But it will also encourage students to try to make them work. Once students are familiar with the game, you can get them to work in delivering the pun in pairs. One person does the set-up; the next person delivers the punchline. See if they can use their natural sense of comedy to play with the rhythm, play with the spatial configuration; play with their voices. Getting them to do the game using very thick ‘Daffy Duck’ lisps usually starts fostering the right level of silliness.

The exercise can finish with students being challenged to find the best punning meme on their IT devices and presenting them to the group.

Discussion could focus on the fact that a pun can be based on multiple meanings for a single word; or on the sound of a word; or on the context or situation in relation to popular knowledge.

The Elizabethans loved word games and Shakespeare in particular utilised puns in a wide range of contexts and to a wide range of audience responses.

A pun does not just entertain or torture the audience. It also keeps the audience actively engaged, because in order for a pun to work, the audience member has to mentally put the two different meanings together to make a third. Therefore, by using puns, Shakespeare is constantly invigorating the audience’ mental faculties.

Is that not one reason why memes are so popular? They engage the recipient in a quick game of double meaning to make a third within a popularly understood context. They are mental exercises of creative cleverness.

WHAT'S A METAPHOR FOR?

This is another simple word game that has several different levels.

Two students stand facing each other. Person A begins with the most simple of statements: “Yesterday I walked my dog.” Person B responds by simply asking ‘What’s a – “ and then saying the last word Person A spoke. In this case it would be, “What’s a dog?” Person A then responds by using a metaphor; “happiness on legs”. Person B, “What are legs?” Person A, “Pins to hold back gravity.” Person B, “What’s gravity?” Person A, “Flight’s reality.” And so the exercise continues.

To begin with students will think literally and try to get their answer ‘right’. They must be encouraged to get it ‘wrong’. To think in dream language. To respond by thinking what the subject in question means to them. However they associate with the word in question. Gravity could be ‘heaviness of soul’. It could be ‘a dark brown lump’. It could be ‘a selfish world.’ It could be ‘a brief moment of flight and then a thump.’ All of these I have just written in stream of consciousness. Some of them will be laboured and obvious metaphors. Some of them may be startlingly poetic.

This is not a game that is conquered at the first attempt.

A variation on the game is free flow between the two students. Person A might begin, “I ate a sandwich.” Person B, “pickles and carbs.” Person A “ Energy to burn.” Person B “ a mind on fire to learn.” Person A, “Tricks of the trade.” Person B, “a house is made.” (I am just free association writing now....) Each person makes a metaphor of the last word spoken by their partner.

This game can be played as a group. It can be played as a competition or without competition. If in competition, everyone numbers off from 1 to however many players there are. Number 1 always begins each iteration of the game and is considered the highest position in the circle. So No. 1 may say, (for example) “ I sailed a yacht” and in so saying, may point to any other person in the circle. Whoever is pointed at must then respond to their final word (in this case) ‘yacht’. “Ego with a sail”, and they point

to someone else in the circle, who responds.... And so the game continues until someone gets stuck or is not able to respond. When that happens, the person who cannot respond changes position to the last person (number) in the group. The aim of the game is to progress up towards No. 1 and so to topple anyone above your number by throwing them metaphor challenges.

This exercise encourages students to think outside their logical and literal faculties and to develop an imaginative and creative approach to and appreciation for figurative language.

SILLY SIMILES

This game can also be played in pairs or in a group. In fact it can be played on one's own, simply by throwing the questions at oneself.

Person A asks of Person B any subject: "Your Mum." And the answer must begin with either an 'as' or 'like' sentence. So, "Your Mum", 'is as angry as an ant with a sore toe'. "High" – "as a planet." "Mixed", - "like blood and water." and so the game continues. The more mundane and even silly the choice of initiating words, the more freedom there is to play with making a simile. The game can be played alternately between the two participants.

TIP: It is often useful for the teacher/workshop leader to demonstrate these games first. Put yourself in the 'hot seat', so to speak, and let the students see you struggle and achieve. This then makes it possible for them to take on something entirely new.

Again, it is a word game that allows students to explore with a range of possibilities and meanings in creating similes. It is a game that offers challenge and immediate reward. And it is a game that opens the mind to the interpretive appreciation of figurative language.

It is also a game that the whole class can play simultaneously without undue attention on their outcomes.

SOUNDS LIKE....

This is simply a game of exploring onomatopoeia. Students play this game in pairs. Sometimes it is better to play with eyes closed as it allows people to work more freely from self-consciousness. Beginning with any letter of the alphabet, students alternately play with speaking out loud words that may sound like they mean. “Blob”, “bounce”, “bomb”, “Batter”, “Bite”, “Bark”, and so on – progressing through the alphabet.

Once students start to gain their confidence with this game, encourage them to explore making a physical shape and movement when they say the word – to explore the quality of energy, the rhythmic ‘movement’ or energy within the word. Again, they may feel more comfortable doing this with their eyes closed. It might also be an idea for them to try several attempts at physicalizing the word as they say it – to allow the sensation and the movement to grow more substantive.

A variation on this aspect of the exercise is to ‘throw’ the sound and movement of the word back and forth between the two students working together, with each iteration letting the sound and movement grow a little stronger, a little bigger and louder, until they are both speaking out the word and making the physical movement of the word in synchronicity.

If this exercise gets too loud for neighbouring rooms, have the students begin the exercise on ‘hissper’ – a hissed whisper progressing gradually onto voiced vibes.

Working on hissper often enhances the internal sense of the word or phrase. Hissper makes the words seem more intense, more important, and wanting to burst free from inside us.

Sounds Like is a game that assists students in making the startling discovery of how many words there are that have some vestige of their meaning in their sound, and rhythm and energy.

APPLICATION TO THE TEXT

Choose a page of Shakespeare's text.

Assign pairs of students as specialists in Puns, Metaphors, Similes or Onomatopoeia. Give them a limited amount of time - not enough time to struggle with the detailed meaning of the section of text, but enough time to scan the text in search of their specialist devices. Have them make a list and present that list to the rest of the group or class. Have them explain WHY the items on their list are the devices that they claim.

LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT

If students on their first attempt are able to struggle through each of the games, even with only one or two successful iterations of making each of the devices; and if they are able then to recognise those devices in Shakespeare's text and to EXPLAIN the criteria for that recognition, then they have just begun the process of demystifying and unpacking Shakespeare's language on their own terms.

Reading and comprehending his work just got one important step closer.