

**YEAR NINE ENGLISH****LESSON PLAN 9****THE INVERSION GAME – MAKING YOUR OWN  
IAMBIC****DURATION: 40 minutes****CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

<b>STRAND</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>Literacy</b>
<b>SUB-STRAND</b>	<b>Text structure and organisation</b>	<b>Examining Literature</b>	<b>Creating texts</b>
<b>CURRICULUM CONTENT</b>	(ACELA1553)  (ACELA1557)	(ACELT1772)	(ACELY1746)

**RATIONALE**

**One of the key devices of Shakespeare’s textual construction is inversion. For the reader, the inverted text requires a multiple-staged process of complex cognition that is not applied in the interpretation of prose.**

**In normal prose text you regularly get Subject, Verb, Object sentence structure. Shakespeare, however, regularly inverts this to Object, Subject, Verb; or Subject, Object, Verb. Therefore “Jess(S) jumped(V) over the log(O)” in prose becomes “Over the log (O) Jess(S) jumped” in Shakespeare-style verse.**

**The modern reader, more familiar with a logical progression from subject through verb to object, with Shakespeare now needs to hold both ‘parts’ of the sentence in their mind, and re-arrange it, or ‘translate’ it back into prose form, in order to understand what is actually being said.**

**With many of Shakespeare’s more complex multi-phrased sentences, this can involve quite an agility of sustained thought processes which is**

entirely unfamiliar to modern readers. Even dense poetical texts like some rap and slam poetry rarely use inversion.

There are a variety of reasons why Shakespeare was thought to have used inversion, from the need to find ready rhymes more easily discovered in verbs; to the particular syntactic patterns of the English language.

As someone who has worked with the spoken word in theatre for more than thirty years, I would suggest that theatre is driven by narrative, by the energy of the spoken word. By placing the verb towards the end of the verse line, and toward the end of a phrase or sentence, the propulsion or impetus provided by that action word propels the speaker, and therefore the plot, forward.

Not only, as we will discover, does inversion make achieving an iambic rhythm a ridiculously easy construction, but propulsion, and particularly iambic propulsion engenders a sense of driving progression, which gives a sense of impending inevitable action to come, and that is what keeps an audience fixed and focused upon the stage.

Another reason for Shakespeare's inversion involves the dynamic relationship he sought to foster and enable between his plays in performance and the diverse audience of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. In modern terms, that relationship is called Complicite and refers to engaging the audience's imagination in the construction of time, place and action of the play. By using minimal set, lighting and associated production values, but by embedding details of time, place and action in the words of dialogue of his characters, Shakespeare required that the audience, in interpreting the meaning of his words, must therefore imagine for themselves the described place, time and action unfolding before them. That imagination, with each member of the audience, draws directly on personal experience and knowledge. And so, in activating their imaginations, the audience becomes complicit in constructing the reality of the play. They become personally involved and invested in the construction of the imagined reality of the play. When you consider that the inversion of those words spoken also requires that the audience engage in an active process of translation – reassembly of

the text in prose form – of which imagination again plays a vital part, then Shakespeare is invigorating the audience' complicit engagement with the performed play with every word spoken. How different is this relationship than that sought by the Naturalists who aspired to provide every scintilla of 'real world' presentation in their sets, costumes and properties, and who strove to present language in as everyday form and idiom as recognizable – leaving the audience with no challenge, no imaginative process of interpretation – completely passive.

Shakespeare's audience, through his inversion, were in an intrinsically dynamic relationship with the performance.

Whatever the reasons, Shakespeare's inversion presents considerable challenge for young people trying to 'make sense' of his work, because all too often, they are trying to decipher his meaning by using thought processes fitted to prose. Once they realize the trick, and game of inversion, it all becomes playful and easy.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

Because the Inversion Game eventually leads to exploring the construction of iambic spoken verse, it is best if students are able to stand so that they can explore some movement that activates their sense of stress and rhythm.

## **LESSON EXERCISES**

### **EXERCISE 1: LISPING THE TEXT**

There is an extraordinary psychological shift that occurs when a person chooses to speak with a pronounced lisp – their thinking becomes more simple – more childlike - more mindful in that, perhaps because of the obstacle to normal articulation, they become more focused on each individual word to be spoken.

**With that focus, and with encouragement and permission, speaking the words becomes more playful.**

**By each of us bringing out our inner Daffy Duck, we free ourselves from the patterns of our habitual speaking persona and find room to play with the shape and energy and taste of the words. It reawakens in us a childlike disposition of playing with the words with a sense of discovery of meaning embedded in syntactic shape and sound and energy.**

**Of course, people who have previously struggled with a lisp and have undergone a process of speech therapy should not engage in this exercise. Perhaps they can choose a silly cartoon or games character to similar effect.**

**By continuing to orchestrate for all of these exercises students are learning that words spoken have a physical energy. As they explore each layer of the text their hands and arms and sympathetic movement throughout their body manifests and experiences those different and developing energies.**

**Speaking with a lisp is like rediscovering the words anew. This new discovered sensation of speaking the word, brings a playful light of connection to the meaning of the word.**

## **EXERCISE 2. THE QUESTIONING GAME**

**Using the lisp again, students work in pairs to read through the text.**

**As one person reads, the other persistently interrupts them with incredulous questions about words they have spoken. “He did what?” “Is that true?” “Is on your what?” “I knowest what?”**

**The speaker must then nimbly go back and repeat what they have said.**

**The game builds up it’s own anarchic rhythm.**

**Questioners need to focus on asking questions that require the reader to go back and repeat words and phrases. Avoid “why” questions which require improvisational explanation that draws the reader away from the text.**

**The participants can alternate from reading to questioning as they progress through a scene.**

**This exercise serves again to break patterns and through its induced state of confusion, to promote a sense of play with the words. It also assists the reader in heightening their focus on the text and on what they are saying. For the questioner, it heightens their listening capability, and in so doing, promotes their clarity and efficiency of interpretation.**

**If you are seeking to develop any of the text towards a level of performance, even just as a ‘radio-style’ reading, this exercise begins the process of students extending their focus to include connecting with and interacting with their fellow readers/performers.**

**Most importantly, this exercise reminds students that they are reading a play text, and play is the essential quality of that process.**

### **EXERCISE 3. THE INVERSION GAME**

**Students can work in pairs or small groups.**

**One person makes up a simple sentence with a subject, a verb and an object order (SVO). They ‘give’ it to the other person(s) in the group.**

**The recipient(s) must invert the sentence to an Object, Subject Verb, (OSV) or Subject, Object, Verb (SOV) order.**

**TIP: The more active the verb the more participants can discover how the inversion of the verb to the end of the sentence creates an energy which propels you towards the next sentence. Verbs like ‘went’ tend to be fairly low powered and uninteresting.**

**Students will eventually start to realize that they can achieve an iambic stress rhythm.**

**There are various fun ways to explore this process. Some students find that talking like Yoda helps them think more in inverted form.**

**Other students have found that a bad Geordie, Scottish or Irish accent helps them to break free of the pattern of their own thinking and enter into the playful mindset of inversion.**

**Eventually students should be able to develop the game to a level of confidence wherein they can play in front of the whole class.**

**Now, Shakespeare doesn't seem so daunting. Now his trick has been revealed. Perhaps now might be a good time for students to return to their Shakespeare text to discover if they can recognize the inversion on the page.**

**This exercise now becomes applicable to students writing their own scenes or monologues of off-stage events or character updates and interviews wherein they can write out their text in prose first and then go about inverting it into iambic verse.**