

Teacher's Notes

FOR THE SECTION ON UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT

SECTION THREE

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT

Reading To Write

Discussion

This activity is purposely calculated to present a dilemma for students.

Some students though may be driven to refer to the text glossary in the pages of their text books, a full understanding of the text eludes them.

This is certainly the case for newcomers to Shakespeare. Their expected poor performance would be seen in contrast to their eventual piece of paraphrasing of the same text at the end of this cycle of lesson. For this reason the scripts need to be graded by the teacher and pertinent points to be noted for discussion later.

The teacher collects the students' written scripts (answers). Teachers may also allow them to keep their answers for reference (after the scripts are graded, and provided no changes are made by the students to it). The lesson that follows will emphasize group vocabulary work.

The most important thing to remember is to provide students a low risk environment where they give their best and exploration, (self exploration into the meanings in this case) should be graciously appreciated by the teacher.

Vocabulary Study

Discussion

In teaching Shakespeare interpretation, the classroom presents problems. By this I mean the task of interpreting the text does pose limitations on the teacher's methods outlined in this section. One can see for instance that, he just cannot deliver an interpretation and walk away, as the critic does who publishes an essay or a book on Shakespeare. In the teacher's case his audience is ever present and articulate. If a teacher is any good, and if his students are any good, then he is going to have to argue his interpretation out stage by stage, justify it by detailed references to the text, and illuminate it by comparative analysis with other Shakespeare plays, or with any other relevant works of literature.

The teacher would also harbour some after-thoughts so to speak. He would be wondering if he had indeed encompassed everything there is in his interpretation. Even I have wondered about how it would be possible to say all to the students about a play in say eight to ten weeks or sometimes in much less time. According to Briant Vickers (1977, p.228), the truth of the matter is none of us ever do. Shakespeare's creative use of inherited genres, his linguistic and prosodic subtlety, his responses to an array of intellectual backgrounds, medieval, classical, and humanist, his complex and developing dramaturgy are almost beyond our reach to be understood as he did. To know that there is more to Shakespeare canon that we can fully impart in a semester or in a life time, is to be aware that the plays are worth the effort we put into teaching them.



Shakespeare Pedagogy Three

Unit Topic :Understanding Shakespearean Text.

Sub-topics

1. Vocabulary
2. Shakespeare's word order
3. Unusual Word arrangement
4. paraphrasing

Objective :Students can understand Shakespearean text

Materials :Set Text
:Dictionaries

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT

Children learn to read from writing and learn to write from reading

Theory and Research

Vocabulary

One of the most difficult prospect the students face doing Shakespeare is the difficulty in understanding Shakespearean vocabulary. Students at the lower level, I feel, can employ a 'translation' approach to understand Shakespeare so that it helps to demystify Shakespeare and pique their interest. However, this should not stop the others from unravelling the language in order to be able to read and understand Shakespeare's own words. Thus the Approach outlined below is aimed at doing just that.

In the SPM examination students are called upon to not only display an understanding of the play for which candidates have to deal with the intricacies of the Elizabethan language itself, but also to discuss on other issues as well. Shakespeare's syntax is also another problematic area for intending students, especially at the form four levels.

The job of a teacher therefore, would then be, to design activities to unravel the students' language problem and make Shakespeare a pleasure rather than a pain to read. The activities that follow endeavour to provide some help to address the vocabulary problems and touch a little on the unusual arrangements of words . In my opinion these are the two areas that cause a lot of problems. Students have the double task of facing new vocabulary and the almost alien looking sentence structure, at the same time. Teachers need to appreciate that, the vocabulary in question in Shakespearean plays often seem strange to students yet with a little help the meanings can become clearer to them.

Strange vocabulary can be looked up at the Shakespeare glossary. A good glossary to refer would be "*A Glossary to the Works of William Shakespeare*", by The Rev. Alexander Dyce. Lately, however there are the Shakespeare internet sites too that help to provide meanings to words in Shakespearean texts. Teachers and students should also bear in mind, that the passage of time has indeed clouded the meanings of many words and some words in use today have taken up an altogether a different set of meanings.

Examples:

Shakespeare's meaning

Present meaning

'Gay' means happy	homosexual
'Still' means presently or ever	do not move
'presently' means immediately	now

It is not always realised though, that a lot of sound changes have also taken place between Early Modern English and the English of the present day (Kottler, 1967). In studying Shakespeare, one needs to consider these phenomena and realise that the English language has moved a long way from what it was in 1600.

However, a word of caution to teachers and students. Levels of response to Shakespeare and English literature study as a whole, correlate fairly accurately with levels of competence in the language. Here again I am inclined to remind the wise words that say, "Apart from failing to serve any purpose, it damages the enterprise if we try teaching Shakespeare or Donne, Joyce or Dylan Thomas, to a student without the necessary command of English. Whether the study of English literature thrives or declines is directly related to the size of the English Language base. It has to be broad enough." This aspect of having skill in the language is important before allowing students to study literature. By this I mean, students who cannot write proper correct sentences in English and whose command of grammar is so low that it impedes

understanding and flow of thought in writing or in speech should not be assured that just by studying Shakespearean vocabulary one can succeed in the English literature examination.

David Corson (1985), believes that success in education depends largely on the ability to understand words. This is certainly true in the case of Shakespearean text. Therefore, attempts must be made to acquire words.

Words can be learnt through mnemonics, word analysis, and memorisation to name a few. Although memorization of vocabulary list is considered out of fashion, Stevick (1982:79) sees the learning of isolated vocabulary item as "very useful in increasing the range of vocabulary that you have available to you in designing experiences that lead toward acquisition." Nation (1990), also shares this view saying that memorising vocabulary means learning many words in a short time. His argument is that memorising vocabulary list should be considered as the beginning of learning words, which will be enriched by later encounters with the word in context.

Recent researchers like Paribakht and Wesche (1997:197) have found that when students just concentrated on reading for meaning alone appear to produce significant results in vocabulary acquisition" and further, when "such reading supplemented with

specific vocabulary exercises produces greater gains for the targeted words”.

Shakespeare Word Order

Shakespeare Word Order needs also to be introduced to enable students to unravel the mystery of Shakespeare word juxtapositioning which often times is the norm in Elizabethan verse forms. Instead of the usual subject, verb and object order one encounters the object, verb and subject order peculiarities, which need to be understood and appreciated. These kinds of convoluted and inverted word orders are often times found abundantly in the text of Shakespearean plays. Students need to be shown these peculiarities and be taught about Shakespeare word order so that they can better understand and appreciate the meanings in the plays.

Unusual Word Arrangements

Shakespeare wrote the way he did for poetic and dramatic purposes. There are many reasons why he did this--to create a specific poetic

rhythm, to emphasize a certain word, to give a character a specific speech pattern, etc. Let's take a look at a great example from Robinson's *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language*.

I ate the sandwich.

I the sandwich ate.

Ate the sandwich I.

Ate I the sandwich.

The sandwich I ate.

The sandwich ate I.

Robinson shows us that these four words can create six unique sentences which carry the same meaning. When you are reading Shakespeare's plays, students need to look for this type of unusual word arrangement. Locate the subject, verb, and the object of the sentence. Notice that the object of the sentence is often placed at the beginning (the sandwich) in front of the verb (ate) and subject (I). Rearrange the words in the order that makes the most sense to you (I ate the sandwich). This will be one of their first steps in making sense of Shakespeare's language.

Teachers need to explain to students that Shakespeare's unusual word arrangements are the result of his deliberate effort not to

follow the 'basic' conversational patterns of his own day. He devised them so as to create a dramatic impact. Once students can get to understand some of these patterns, they will begin to enjoy the language, and give more attention to analysing characters of the play.

Below appears a few more examples for the students to examine.

The honourable lady of the house, which is she? (Twelfth Night I:v.66)

In familiar language it would mean a question that asks who is the honourable lady of the house.

Preferably 'which is she' should come first. And to make the sentence more contemporary 'which' should be replaced with 'who'. In the final analysis it should read, "Who is the honourable lady of this house?", or even better, "May I know who is the honourable lady of this house?" We can cite further examples during class discussion and point out that usually visitors do not walk into the principal's office and ask, "The principal of this school, which/who is he/she?" When students get such explanations they become more interested in discovering more of such syntax constructions.

Unusual placing of verbs.

(What dost thou know?)

Too well what love women to men may owe. (2:iv:106)

Here the verbs (may owe) appear at the end of the sentence. The usual subject verb object order is transgressed for the sake of dramatic impact. It could be read as, "Only too well. I do know what love women may owe to men."

A good book to refer for this purpose would be the one by Randal Robinson titled, *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language: Help for the Teacher and Students*.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing exercises are an integral part of the tasks set by teachers in understanding Shakespearean language, for it helps students to pin point the meanings that need to be stated or written in contemporary English. Paraphrasing exercises have become a part of understanding the text. Such exercises often provide clues

to understanding the text and, "...serve as a cognitive foothold for memorising new words."

Interpretability does not necessarily be embedded in the text as such rather, it serves to trigger off responses in a myriad of ways depending on what the reader brings to the text. Students with different backgrounds and different talents , experiences, and with their own individual schemata may interpret the same text differently. Therein lies the richness in studying literature : the discovery of our own beliefs, values an experiences.

The purpose of the study of content vocabulary in this approach to teaching *Twelfth Night* therefore, is calculated to lead to paraphrasing exercises . The question that begs an answer is "how effective is vocabulary study and paraphrasing methods for teaching Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*."

This section presents samples of work done by students (see appendix E) to convince teachers that the approach proposed is indeed worthy of consideration. As a matter of fact, it is my belief that properly done it is a very effective pedagogical tool for teaching this literature component.

Nevertheless, often teachers face the dilemma, "To paraphrase or not to paraphrase." When handling Shakespearean text like that found in *Twelfth Night*, paraphrasing becomes a serious issue. For a serious critic paraphrasing is 'heresy'; it is unthinkable. To them it is impossible to decipher the content meanings of a literary work, 'being conceived as one, are indivisible, there is no separable quantum of 'meaning' that can be made worse readily accessible by altering the words in which meaning is couched' (Walter Nash, 1986: 70). The following by Richard Wilbur is a defense of this notion.

'It does not upset me to hear poetry paraphrased and it's 'subject matter' stated. But I don't usually care for the poem which too readily submits to paraphrase. A poem ought not to be fissionable. It ought to be impossible satisfactorily to separate 'ideas' from their poetic 'embodiment'. When this can be done to a poem, it is a sign that the poem began with a prose 'idea' - i.e. began wrongly - and that the writer was not a poet but a phrase maker.' (Richard Wilbur, 1950:6)

Language teachers have often used paraphrasing exercises as a customary tool, while critics look upon it as a discredited procedure according to Walter. In the widest sense according to Walter again, teachers use paraphrasing because it helps students in reformulating, defining and translating, and seeking parallels as well. The position taken by Walter is that, 'there is an element of 'literariness' in language, a deposit of practice, as it were, that invites analysis by any means at our disposal.'

So one is eventually forced to consider if paraphrasing is inevitably heretical, or as this teaching file proposes to show, may it not sometimes serve a heuristic purpose. Indeed according to Walter, it serves to omit, or 'filter out' things essential to the communicative art of the text.

I am one to concur with the notion that often paraphrasing is the beginning of a journey of discovery. It is true as Richard Wilbur says; "It ought to be impossible satisfactorily to separate 'ideas' from their 'embodiment'". Yet, we need to realise a very subtle point about paraphrasing. That is, if one were to learn anything from the experience of paraphrasing a great literary artefact, it is simply this; we realise how inadequate, feeble and foolish our attempt looks in sharp contrast to the text. It is when one begins to discuss the vocabulary of the artefact and its lexical patterning, that one begins to appreciate how the plainest texts often seem to be most impenetrable.

It cannot be denied that students look at paraphrasing as a daunting task, since the crudest essay in reformulation requires a refined linguistic competence which our students often times do not always possess. But, as Richard Wilbur says, such a retreat from the problem is both vain and unnecessary, for 'ordinary' language is also full of the seeds and weeds of literariness.

The tasks designed in this pedagogical approach therefore follows a
calculated progress that eventually leads the students to be confident in
paraphrasing. It starts with identifying probable meanings of words then
phrases that lead to meanings of sentences and the eventual meaning of the
text.

In my opinion the need to paraphrase therefore is to reveal the greatness of
a literary piece. As discussed earlier it shows how impenetrable it is to
realise the full meaning of simple texts in great verse forms. Moreover,
the breadth of the meanings of such texts is the myriad of ways it serves to
educate us by stating a case, and revealing its inherent power to illuminate
universal truths, analogies and variants.

Reading to write and writing to read.

Lastly, let us also remember as children read literature they are also learning to write. There is therefore a strong connection between reading and writing. To borrow from John Bushmen's (1993) ideas, when reading students do not need the grammar book to learn the language conventions used in writing. He says through literature, students will see the use of metaphor, simile, dialogue, imagery, and the many other conventions that authors use effectively. This teaching file expands the idea that students, by involving in Shakespeare literature will see for themselves the influential effect that literary conventions have on readers. To realise this they must involve in reading literature. They then slowly learn to choose and use these devices in their own writings.

Lesson One

Reading Act 1, scene i. Vocabulary study

In this lesson students concentrate on a part of the text from the play: Act 1, scene I, lines 1 – 23. [*Twelfth Night* ,(I:i:1-23), see this extract in the accompanying pages] See appendix A.

Lesson objectives

1. To develop learner response to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* by using personal knowledge. Students should try their best to comprehend the dialogue in the play by using their own experience and knowledge.
2. To make students realise that they do not need knowledge of the terminology of literary criticism to be successful at Shakespeare.
3. Students need to understand that Shakespearean vocabulary and word order are different from the contemporary English they do in class.

- 4 To employ Bromley's (1989) idea that both research and theory support the notion that combining instruction in reading and writing in the classroom enhances children's literacy learning.

Beginning class activity

PRE-TEST

Task 1 (Time allotted, 10-15 minutes.)

Reading for main ideas only

Students read Act 1, scene I of *Twelfth Night* in class.

This is a pre-reading activity. It is also designed to see how the students respond to the text bearing in mind that they have already seen the play as a movie. This is also the first time the students encounter the actual text.

These are crucial moments, therefore the teacher needs to assure the students that this exercise is actually to gauge how much of help they need to tackle the text. This exercise also helps to pitch the level of help the students would need, so that the teacher can prepare materials in advance. The best thing to say to the students, in my experience is, "This is not a test." The pre-reading follows a writing activity.

Task 2 (Time allotted, 25-30 minutes)

Writing activity

[*Twelfth Night* ,(I:i:1-23)]

They will then attempt to paraphrase a part of the text they have read without recourse to any help from the teacher or other sources. The teacher should bear in mind that this is a rather difficult exercise for the students. There will be a lot of apprehension about the task given. The teacher should give as much assurance as possible to allay any fears that the students will be penalised if their work is not up to the mark. The best way to assure students is to say that we know students are going to produce one of their worst works of literature assignments but it is for the purpose of helping them better.

They may choose to write the meaning of the passage given in a paragraph form or provide a line to line meaning of the text given. The important thing to bear in mind is to give them a free hand by just asking what they understood in the pre-reading assignment. Blank sheets by students saying they don't understand anything is not allowed (especially weaker classes or students). Students need to make an effort at conjecturing the meanings as well, since it is also going to be a part of a strategy for reading Shakespeare.

Lesson Two (1 lesson of 40-45 minutes)

Vocabulary study

Using dictionary and other resources to find meanings.

In this part of the lesson students use the same text that was examined in the earlier session. (For some it could have been the last lesson)

Lesson objectives.

1. To give students resources through which they can continue paraphrase more effectively.
2. To develop the initial skill of looking for meanings of words in the text.

Task 1

The students and teacher list down all difficult words in the passage.

Often times, students also list down phrases.

(A good textbook to refer would be, "A Glossary to the Works of William Shakespeare by The Rev. Alexander Dyce)

The following words can be expected to give problems in understanding to students.

1. *excess* : more
2. *surfeiting* : suffering? Or surfeit or enough (discuss)
3. *appetite* ; (in this case it has very little to do with food or gastronomical).
4. *Strain* : line of the music
5. *Sweet sound* : the sound of gentle breeze
6. *Stealing and giving ordour* : (a rather difficult phrase to digest)
7. *Notwithstanding thy capacity* : although love's desire can hold as much as the sea
8. *Receiveth as the sea* : generously receive like the sea (Why sea? Discuss, why did he choose this imagery?)
9. *Nought enters there* : nothing enters? Discuss
10. *Validity* : value
11. *Pitch* : excellence
12. *Falls* : price is cheapened and loses its value, how? discuss
13. *Shape* : imagination ? discuss
14. *Fancy* : love
15. *Fantastical* : very imaginative
16. *Hart and heart* : play of words, punning
17. *Was I ... me* : is a reference to a classical mythology about a hunter named Actaeon who turns into a stag upon seeing the Goddess Diana. His own hounds then kill him.

The 'I' format method for facilitating paraphrasing activities.

Passage from the text

Student's version

<p>If music be the food of love, play on, Give me excess of it, that surfeiting, The appetite may sicken, and so die. That strain again, it had a dying fall: O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound That breathes upon a bank of violets, Stealing and giving odour. Enough, no more; 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before. spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou, That notwithstanding thy capacity Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there, Of what validity and pitch so'er, But falls into abatement and low price Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy, That it alone is high fantastical.</p>	
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The students can employ this format to carry out paraphrasing activities. When students can see the text they need to handle side by side they get a better picture of what they are doing and exercise a better control. The advantage here is getting to see the 'whole picture' so to speak.

The teacher provides input on meanings of the vocabulary list put up by students. It is important that the class go into discussion to validate or prove that the meanings are correct and acceptable and that which are not.

The teacher helps to decipher the meanings in context and lead the students to the discovery of a richer meaning of the play. The students too, grow in appreciation of the play. This aspect of the growth in understanding and appreciating the meaning of the text motivates students to further discoveries and joyful learning.

This way students can do independent reading on their own, covering the text in installments as assignments or homework (see lesson plan on reading log). When they are back in class, they can contribute this knowledge and interpretation to help in the learning process of the play. When Shakespeare's meanings and intentions become clearer, students get to visualise better. In fact understanding Shakespeare's imagery helps in raising the level of appreciation of his work.

Teachers need to look for other passages from the text to help students so that they get a lot of paraphrasing practice during the course of this programme.

Lesson Three

Writing Skill

POST TEST

This part of the lesson is the culmination of the vocabulary work and Shakespeare's word order.

In this lesson, the students are required to paraphrase the same extract that they did in the pre-test exercise.

The accompanying pages under appendix E in the research report show the results of this exercise of two students who were given similar instructions and tested with the same materials outlined in the tasks. The same students took part in a survey to see if this method of approach was indeed helpful to their overall understanding of the play.