

Title: "Hawk or Handsaw? Researching Hamlet's Madness. A Theatre Studies Library Lesson Study Plan

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Discipline or Field: Theatre Arts and Information Literacy

Course Name: Theatre Studies II: Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century

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Course Description

This course is second in a four course sequence. The first three courses, Theatre Studies I through III, acquaint students with the history, practice, and dramatic literature of Western theatre from its origins in ancient Greece to the present day. Theatre Studies IV examines non-Western theatre. The Theatre Studies sequence is considered foundational for all emphasis areas in the theatre major and minor, providing background for actors, designers, stage managers and general emphasis students. The course usually enrolls 25-30 students, who are mostly sophomores and juniors. The course utilizes as much "active learning" as possible, with discussions, performances in class and a wide array of visual aids and critical thinking exercises. We meet in a classroom with movable desks and DVD, photo projection, and internet capabilities. For this lesson, however, we met in the library.

Executive Summary

Learning goals were to introduce and deepen students' knowledge and interest in library resources for theatre research. We wanted to ignite their curiosity and thrill them with the possibilities of finding information for their use in work for the stage. We designed a worksheet of questions, based on real-world scholars' debates about Shakespeare's Hamlet and interpretations of the title character. We found that when given a structure and real questions, students dug in and found strong information.

PART II: THE LESSON

Students had some library background, and background in questions that actors and designers need to research for theatre production. These questions are all matters of interpretation, and so very subjective. We chose those kinds of questions in order to use challenging, intriguing and deep questions to prompt investigation of library materials.

Students all read the play Hamlet before beginning the lesson, and had written a short play journal, which included plot synopsis and initial analysis of meaning of the play.

The Lesson

Four team teachers participated: two theatre professors and two library experts. We had designed a worksheet based upon the question of whether Hamlet was really mad, or only feigning madness. There were three parts to the assignment they were to complete in small groups of three to four students.

First: Textual Discrepancies

We selected two passages from the play, which are edited very differently in different published editions of the play. Students had to make an argument for or against madness based upon each edition.

Second: Design Visuals

Students were to find visual images in three categories: historically accurate depictions of places, such as medieval Danish castles; historically accurate props or clothing; and conceptual images that represented their group's opinion about madness and communicated the feel of the play –what we call 'visual fodder' for a design team.

Third: Production history

Students were to find reviews of productions of the play. Required were four different productions, one from before 1950, at least two had to include images from the production, etc. From these reviews, they were to deduct how the madness question was addressed in that production of the play.

Students presented their findings to the class at the end of the exercise. We allowed three full class periods, over a weekend, for this work. We required a log of their research endeavors, to track where they looked, and where they were successful and where they were not. We assigned tasks to each student group member: Task master; Whip (who kept them on subject); Standards-bearer (quality control); and Scribe.

Students felt really intrigued by the questions and learned much not only about the library and research but also about editing of plays – Shakespeare's in particular. They were frustrated with lack of time for research and in presentation time, and wanted more structure –we felt somewhat ambiguous about this, as a certain amount of struggle (trial and error) we felt was a principal way of learning to research.

Student Learning Goals

- To increase your familiarity with library resources for text analysis, reviews, and information for design
- To increase your ability to access quality material
- To increase your ability to conduct research
- To be able to describe the value of research to a production
- To be able to think critically about the construction of theatrical texts

- To be able to describe the decision points involved in the research process
- To understand the parameters of specific library resources and using that information to make appropriate research decisions.

Rationale for the lesson topic and the student learning goals.

Theatre students need to know how to use research to create theatre: characters, designs, etc. We have terrific resources, and the challenge is how to show them those resources in a way that excites them. Our goals were intended to be—‘real-world’ goals, not academic.

How the Lesson is Intended to Work

Students were presented with a resource list that included standard reference works for theatre, including journals both online and hard copy. They were presented with sample questions in class, which they all worked from their online stations, as practice questions. They were then presented with the assignment, which we went over verbally. We advised them to make a plan for their work, and to start right then, with about 35 minutes left in the first class, so that they could ask us questions right away, before class ended. The next two class sessions, they were required to check in, but then free to do their work. We hopes they would organize well, but found that they needed prompts to help them organize, as some groups spent the entire initial 55 minutes trying to create an order for their work, and to split up assignments.

PART III: THE STUDY

Approach

We collected written observations from all four team teachers. We collected the student logs of process, and written students responses after the lesson was done.

All four teachers observed, filling out the brief form. Each teacher stayed with a single group for the most part, trying to track how they were processing the lesson. This did not work completely, as students interrupted to ask questions, and so we were sometimes distracted. Also, when students divided up work and each went to do a task, we could only track one student from the group.

We each took notes, then met afterwards and discussed those notes, compiling a class response to the lesson.

Findings

We found that student group presentations were really interesting. Students had indeed engaged with the material and the questions. They had learned much about editing of classic texts, and about interpretation. They were stunned by how different productions of t single play can be, and they found very evocative ‘visual fodder’ pictures.

They tended to get stuck in a couple of places: dividing up work and creating a flow chart of what to do next. We gave them a more descriptive thorough guide the second time we taught this, which helped, but they still need more assistance with that. They get

frustrated when they don't find what they want right away. This is a typical part of any researcher's process, however, so we found that we had to reinforce that they had to keep looking or try something else. Assignment of roles for group members helped to distribute responsibility, but there were still slackers. I think close observation of groups, and perhaps to sign out at the end of the session might have helped more.

Discussion

Students were very interested in production reviews, and in different editions of the same play. I think they realized the need for critical thinking when approaching any published work. I think they were surprised at how interesting a review from pre-1950 could be, which opened their eyes, however briefly, to the interest that materials NOT on the internet can hold.

What the lesson reveals about student thinking such as their misconceptions, difficulties, confusion, insights, surprising ideas, etc.

We needed to remind ourselves how little they knew about the library, and the layers of menus and search engines there are in a modern library. We could have helped more by reminding them that even seasoned researchers spend lots of time going down blind alleys, and by encouraging any successes they had.

I think that the practice questions at the beginning have to be very specific and finite. Save the open-ended questions for after they have a fraction of confidence. We mixed more senior students with newer students, which I think helped, and tried to equally distribute the likely slackers among groups.

I find over and over that the more "real world" we can make the work they do in the classroom, the better. To challenge them with the very questions that we as professional theatre artists have to answer makes their work better and more worthwhile for them.

Appendix

THIS IS THE ASSIGNMENT STUDENTS COMPLETED IN GROUPS

Theatre studies library lesson study

The story:

Your group is a team of dramaturges, whose job it is to do research for a theatre company and director planning a production of Hamlet. There is a big divide between those who see Hamlet's madness as merely an act, and those who see it as a real madness. Your job is to support your position, completing the specific investigations below, and preparing a presentation to the production team, which will take place on March 1.

Assign these roles within your group:

Taskmaster: who makes sure all parts of the assignment are completed.

Scribe: Takes notes on the process of the group using the template. Also turns in list of names with assigned roles noted on it.

Whip: Keeps everyone on task. Brings group focus back when it wanders

Standards-bearer: assures that the quality is high. Questions whether your group can do better.

Your group needs to find answers in these three areas, and turn in, **typed**, the required writing and bibliographic information:

I. Textual discrepancies

Explanation: The Second Quarto (Q2) edition of *Hamlet*, published from 1604-1605, and the edition of *Hamlet* contained in the First Folio (F1) of *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, published in 1623, are the two main sources editors consult when compiling their editions of *Hamlet*, as do theatre professionals when contemplating a production. These two texts do not always agree with each other.

Assignment: Find the following three textual discrepancies between the First Folio (F1) and the Second Quarto (Q2) of *Hamlet*.

1. Act II, scene ii
Q2 omits 32 F1 lines between
Hamlet's line: "Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true."
and
Hamlet's line: "But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?"
2. Act III, scene iv
Q2 omits
Hamlet's line (*within*): "Mother, Mother, Mother!"
and
has his entrance two lines earlier than the F1 edition.
3. Act III, scene iv
F1 omits 9 Q2 lines between

Gertrude's line: "Alack, I had forgot. 'Tis so concluded on."
and
Hamlet's line: "This man shall set me packing."

Make an argument **for using either the F1 or Q2 version** of these passages of text based on how they support your production's position on Hamlet's madness. In each case, analyze how the differences in the text would affect how the scene plays, and, in turn, how it affects Hamlet's character in regard to madness.

Turn in: 3-4 sentences for each discrepancy listed above, describing the main idea your group has about that discrepancy and its effect.

II. Design/visuals

N.B.: None of these images may be from a play production, movie, or other dramatic event.

1. Find two images that are historically accurate for Danish castle interiors.
2. Find two images for historically accurate props necessary for this play.
3. As a group find **six** images that **conceptually** represent your view of Hamlet's madness, and may be visual 'fodder' to the production team.

For these images: submit a bibliography that enables the reader to find the images again. Bring to the presentation day the image itself (the book or whatever it is in) and a xerox of each image to be turned in to me. The books you will return to the library after the presentations.

III. Production history

1) Find reviews of four different productions of Hamlet. The more descriptive the reviews the better job you can do with the rest of the assignment.

One review **MUST** be from either microfilm or compact storage sources.

Two reviews must include at least one image from the production under review.

One and one only may be an internet-only source.

One review must be from before 1950.

NO reviews may be of a movie, ballet, opera or other mode of presenting Hamlet.

They must all be of the stage play Hamlet by William Shakespeare.

Xerox the reviews. Create a bibliography. Be prepared to describe the productions to the director and designers of the company in terms of the madness issue. In other words, how might a particular character approach or scenic design either support or undermine your group's position on the madness issue?

Turn in: Xerox or otherwise printed copies of the four reviews.

Presentations will be in class on Wednesday March 1. Be prepared to present on all three of the parts of this assignment.

Please list all group members' names on the front page of the work you turn in.

This project is worth 75 points, which will be added to the total available for the class.