

Independence in Shakespeare's Plays and Young Adult Literature

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BACKGROUND AND GENERAL PLAN

I taught eighth grade at Lanier Middle School for the first time last year. The first semester flew by in a whirlwind of thirteen year-old poetry and delightful young adult novels, but by the second semester, having coached my students through testing and high school applications, I wondered if I was really preparing them for high school English class. Of course, when I asked an English teacher from one of our feeder high schools, the answer was a purse-lipped “no.” “Middle school teachers don’t remember how hard high school English is,” she roared. “You’re too busy reading silly stories and doing vacation Bible school activities.” Stunned, I stared into my brightly papered bulletin board and got an idea. I would teach Shakespeare. My students would stroll into ninth grade English ready to dissect any image in Shakespearean prose or verse.

My plan failed pretty miserably. Even my brightest students weren’t quite ready for weeks of drudging (that’s what it became) through *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* trying desperately to clutch its meaning. It wasn’t a total loss: they loved decorating paper hats for short performances, saying the word “ass” many times during class, and understanding something about recurrent images. But I finished the unit feeling totally unsatisfied.

Between then and now, I also became a member of a reading/writing workshop study group at my school. Though I have not adopted some of their practices, I have come to integrate much of that teaching format into my classroom. The guiding idea is that individual students and teachers cooperate to make appropriate choices of reading material and writing development for each student. We have regular large and small group discussions of what they are reading and how it links to themes and literary devices, and they keep a response journal. We also talk about strategies for reading hard texts and visualizing what you read. I also teach forms of writing using models asking students to try them out. We then have regular read-alouds of their work.

And how does Shakespeare fit into this very middle school environment? Very carefully. But very appropriately, and with a few modifications to a traditional read-a-play-every-day-until-it’s-done format. What I propose in this unit of study is to link some key moments in Shakespearean plays with pieces of young adult literature using a common theme. The theme we will use to link these texts is a teenager’s quest for independence.

Anyone who stands near a thirteen year old for a few minutes knows that independence is at the fore of his or her thinking. While this is usually articulated in

gestures of pure teenage ire, such as refusing to walk next to her mother at the mall, most eighth graders will privately confide that they are terrified of managing a high-schooler's very heavy work load. Many will face less parental involvement with homework (in some cases because the work is too advanced for their parents' abilities), and most will not have a reliable cluster of core teachers who know them well. Many are a two-year heartbeat away from the freedom of driving, and most are exploring new facets of their identity such as dating. And since I teach in Lanier's magnet program, which pulls students from neighborhoods all over the city, many of my students will not only have to accept greater academic independence in high school, but a completely new social system, minus some of their closest childhood friends.

It is the increase in individual choices – defining their identities by their peer group and depending on friends instead of parents for practical things such as transportation and bigger needs like validating romantic decisions – that will be their most demanding exercise in independence yet. These are the choices that will have a profound effect on who they become socially and academically (AND whether or not those two identities can work harmoniously) as adults. Some will get their hearts crushed by a betraying boyfriend or girlfriend, or realize their closest friends aren't as interested in cracking open their textbooks as they used to be. As my little eighth graders are revving their pubescent engines for their high school experience, little do they know that many will spend their first semester wanting to turn back the hands of time, slip back into their middle school uniform, and completely avoid the increased responsibility that comes with independence.

In other words, many of my students are on the cusp of learning that independence is often times much more a nice idea than pleasant reality. Shakespeare's characters often echo this dilemma. They want their independence, try to gain it, and have to face the unpredictable set of costs that follows. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet defies her father and mother and even lies to her closest confidant, the nurse, to pursue an ultimately doomed marriage. Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part I* refuses to accept his royal responsibility and instead becomes fast friends with the bumbling drunk Falstaff and his band of ne'er-do-wells. Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew* asserts her independence by raising a ruckus at any demand of her time or attention. Her independence is challenged by Petruccio, who intends, blow by blow, to be her match.

While my students and I will spend part of our study looking at the outcome of these quests for independence, my students will read scenes from the above plays in which those quests reach a crescendo or turning point. Each select scene will be discussed in detail in the next section of this unit. While we will not read the entirety of each of these plays, I will prepare my students with synopses and, in some cases, film versions of the plays to help them get the basic plot of the play. We will not study them all at once. Rather, we will look at a play every week or so in short daily mini-lessons. In the meantime, students will spend the majority of their energy reading and writing around this theme of independence using young adult literature and their own experiences.

In order to give students some choice and still keep their reading centered on the theme of independence, I have chosen several works that I think will prove useful on several levels. They are:

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind by Suzanne Fisher Staples
Romiette and Julio by Sharon Draper
The Lord of the Flies by William Golding
The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton
Hatchet by Gary Paulsen.
Parrot in the Oven by Victor Martinez.

These novels are varied in reading level, accommodating the most enthusiastic readers to the most reluctant. They are also culturally diverse and carry the theme of independence to very different ends. *Shabanu* is about a Pakistani girl who defies tradition by refusing to marry an older man in an arranged marriage. *Romiette and Julio* is a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* as an interracial relationship in which the characters rebel against their families and friends by carrying on their relationship. *The Lord of the Flies* and *The Outsiders* are classics and will be useful in presenting the struggle to navigate independence as one that's more universal than dating and driver's licenses. In the first, a group of boys must carve out a social structure after being stranded on a deserted island, and in the second, a group of "greaser" boys are stranded within a confining social structure after they accidentally commit a crime. Both are interesting in that they lack any grown-up intervention throughout the story. *Parrot in the Oven* and *Hatchet* are both survivor stories that take place in very different environments; the first takes place in a California barrio and the other takes place in a dense forest after a plane crash. In these novels, the main character must come to terms with gaining independence prematurely – both characters must make difficult choices and face the consequences of those choices alone.

Again, our emphasis will be on making connections not only among the young adult novels the students are reading, but connecting their reading to Shakespeare's characters and the language and images they find. We will also enhance our study with a search for print media, television and musical images that represent independence (and we'll make a cute but very serious collage).

THE SCENES AND NOVELS

Scenes from Shakespeare

These scenes will come from the *Shakespeare Made Easy* series, which is both affordable and practical. I like to use this series because it includes a plain-spoken translation of every line of the play on each facing page. Although some of the simplifications of Shakespeare's words are arguable, it helps students get over the initial language barriers

that limit their understanding of what's going on of the play and it helps push them to think about some of the meaty images.

Romeo and Juliet II.v-vi, III.v

Since most of my students are familiar with the plot line of *Romeo and Juliet*, I am not focusing on some of the more famous scenes of the play. Rather, we will look at two specific developments: The way Juliet's relationship to the people closest to her (the nurse in particular) changes after her marriage and the way light and dark images, and images of speed complement this change and foreshadow an unfortunate end to her choice. In this case, she asserts her independence wildly in marrying her family enemy, but that choice backfires on her in the most grave (no pun intended) of ways.

Act II. v-vi begins as Juliet awaits the nurse, who was supposed to arrange a meeting time for Juliet's marriage to Romeo. As she waits, Juliet frets that the nurse has taken too long to reach her. Love, she contends, is light and fast, while the nurse is old and slow. She says of the nurse:

Oh, she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,
Driving back shadows over lowering hills. (II.v)

When the nurse arrives, she comically puts off telling Juliet the happy news of her impending marriage by complaining of ailments from the day's travel. But in the end, she offers her approval of Romeo and speaks of the excitement to come.

In the next scene, though, Friar Lawrence, offers stern warning to the couple (foreshadowing their fate) before the wedding. He warns:

...The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in its own deliciousness,
And in the taste confounds the appetite.
Therefore, love moderately, long love doth so,
Too swift arrives tardy as too slow. (II.vi)

Even as he leads the couple into the chapel to perform the "short work," as he says, of marrying the two, the forewarning is clear: The inexperienced Romeo and Juliet associate love with images of speed and light, whereas the wise and learned Friar warns that lasting love should be moderate, in effect thousands of times slower than the short "glide of a sun beam."

Act III.v mirrors many of these images of light and dark, slow and quick. The beauty of including this scene in our study is that these images have turned upside down along with Juliet's world. Romeo has slain Tybalt, and the scene beings with the lovers parting.

In this turning point in the narrative, love is no longer associated with light; the lovers have had only one night together, and Romeo must flee to Mantua. The scene begins with the cry of a lark, the “herald of morn.” Juliet argues that this call is the cry of the nightingale, one that sings nightly in the orchard. Romeo gently tells her that the bird is the lark and that the sun is rising. These are no longer the sunbeams of love as Juliet described before, but now, the morning threatens to tear the lovers apart, for Romeo must leave before the sun rises, else he’ll be caught inside Verona. She realizes that Romeo must go and bids him farewell. Even as he descends the balcony, he cries, “More light and light. More dark and dark our woes.”

After this moment between the two lovers, Juliet’s parents confront her with the news that Tybalt is dead, and she will marry Paris in short order. Again, she must accept the speed with which her father wants her to get married. Juliet protests that she will not marry Paris and loses favor with her parents, so much that her father tells her, “Graze where you will, you shall not house with me.” Even the nurse forsakes Juliet in the end. She says of Paris

An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye,
As Paris hath. (III.v)

And unfortunately, this “quick” eye Paris has, and the quickness with which she must marry him only serve to make Juliet feel deserted and alone in her resolve to be with her new husband. In her final speech in the scene, Juliet resolves to seek Friar Lawrence out and solve her problem without the help of her once-trusted nurse.

Henry IV, PART I I.ii

I am glad to add this scene to the list of those we will study in class because it is a fairly esoteric history play my students (and most of their parents) will not have heard of, and it fits with our theme of independence perfectly. Prince Hal is the very embodiment of teenage ire. Refusing to take up his royal duties and support his father’s military quests, Hal keeps company with some of the kingdom’s lowliest folk. He has taken the infamous drunk Falstaff as his best friend, and is subject not only to his teasing, but his incitement for Hal to join the bandit’s petty thieving. While looking for links between this scene and our theme of independence, we will focus on two important pieces of this scene: Word play between Falstaff and Hal at the beginning of the scene and multiple interpretations of Hal’s final speech.

Though the first exchange of quips between Hal and Falstaff offer some more sophisticated puns that play on language and references of the time period, other play with words will be more accessible to my students. Falstaff, by his lying nature, is full of paradox. He uses it frequently in this scene. For example, Falstaff chides Hal for the company he is keeping though he is some day to become king. He scolds:

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art King,
let not us that are the squires of the day's beauty. Let us be Diana's
foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the
moon. (I.ii)

The most obvious contradiction here is the "gentlemen of the shade." Though Falstaff is making reference to the night when he uses the word "shade," we may also think figuratively of shadiness as dishonesty or treachery. And shady characters are certainly not ones we might think of as gentlemanly. To be a gentleman of the shade is perhaps to be Falstaff himself, mired by contradiction.

Hal himself is practically drowning in contradiction as he decides whether or not to assume his royal duties. It is his last speech in this scene that offers the most varied interpretations as to what is in the heart of the boy who would be king. Hal begins his speech by comparing himself to the sun:

Yet herein I will imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be wondered at by breaking through the foul and ugly
mists
Of vapors that did seem to strangle him. (I.ii)

The comparison is an arrogant one. Hal is the sun whose "beauty" is smothered up by the "base contagious clouds," and he will not come out, or show his light, until "he please himself again." In other words, he is hiding from his royal responsibilities and duties, and he will not return to them until he is good and ready. This is certainly a bold statement, and it is one that also offers multiple readings of Hal's character.

The crux of these multiple readings is the question of who or what the clouds represent. Perhaps they are Falstaff and the company Hal has been keeping. Perhaps Hal feels these ruffians and their corrupt influence on his behavior are shadowing his rising up to assume the stately behavior of a soon-to-be monarch. Maybe he is blaming them for his own failure to be a responsible royal. In this case, Hal comes off as a spoiled brat who cannot own up to his own choice of friends.

Or the cloud may be read as a representation of his father, the King's, expectations. Maybe Hal is a misunderstood and misguided young man who will shine when he is "wanted" by his father. Perhaps Hal's bad behavior comes from the innocent feeling of teenage inadequacy so many adolescents who have high expectations of themselves feel. The fact that the clouds are "strangling" him might suggest more than just the bad influence of friends; the violence of strangling may suggest that the clouds are symbolic

of a person that has a tighter grip on Hal's life. Hence his father is the more likely represented by the clouds if emphasis is placed on the word "strangling."

Another alternative is to read the clouds as representative of a restrictive social system. To make friends as a teenage monarch in a system where social codes and rules of behavior are ornate, to say the least, can't be easy. Hal's father is in the midst of a territorial war, and Hal is expected to be a loyal, fierce war-time supporter of his father. He is expected to be a brave and gallant fighter, which Hal does not seem to be just yet. Like many of the teenagers I teach, Hal will have to find a way to reconcile his individuality with expectations of his family and the world around him.

The Taming of the Shrew, III.ii

I hope that the addition of the wedding scene of Petruchio and Kate in *Taming of the Shrew* will extend the concept of stretching Shakespeare's language to interpret his characters differently. The wedding is the culmination of the turbulent courtship of Kate and Petruchio. We learn in the first two acts of the play that Kate is known for her temper and out-and-out refusal to deal with anyone's wishes but her own. As a result, no man we meet in the first two acts wants to even go near her room. She is independent in a destructive way, both literally and figuratively. Kate is prone to fits of tossing vases at any man who tries to even speak to her in a civil tone. Her father, Baptista, is anxious to get her married, but is doubtful that any man will succeed in "taming" his daughter. Petruchio suddenly arrives, mysteriously, as if from Baptista's dreams, and stays Kate's vase-throwing temper tantrum long enough to declare his intent to marry her. And marry her he shall.

As we begin the wedding scene, we will focus not so much on what is included in the scene, but what is eventually left out. We will specifically analyze the gap between Kate's refusal to even be civil in the presence of Petruchio at the end of Act II, which I will background for my class using a film version of the play, and her sudden acceptance of her impending marriage in Act III. Though this may seem a relatively small point in the action of the play, I want my students to read this part and think about how this relatively small point in the play opens up Kate's character. In other words, the way actors and directors interpret Kate's character in part hinges on how we are to read this silence. We will also discuss the addition of Petruchio's somewhat shady presence and his inability to account for himself at crucial points in this scene.

The scene opens with Kate and the members of the wedding party growing restless with waiting for Petruchio. He is very late to his own wedding. Kate speculates as to his intentions.

I told you, I, he was a frantic fool,
Hiding his bitter jests in blunt behavior:
And, to be noted for a merry man,

He'll woo a thousand, 'point the day of marriage,
Make feasts, invite friends, and proclaim the banns;
Yet never means to wed where he hath woo'd.
Now must the world point at poor Katharina,
And say, 'Lo, there is mad Petruchio's wife,
If it would please him come and marry her!' (III.ii)

Kate is upset, yes, but she clearly identifies herself as Petruchio's wife (albeit **mad** Petruchio's wife) at the end of this short speech. She has clearly already decided that she "belongs" to Petruchio and will marry him. There is no explanation as to why Kate has suddenly decided to go along with the marriage. It is in this silence that Kate can be read in different ways. As she begins to cry at the end of the above speech, Kate's body language and tears could suggest radically different women.

Differing interpretations of Kate's character will suggest different motives for her going along with the marriage and for her tears. On the one hand, she may bawl into her fists like a bratty girl who believes she is going to be embarrassed in front of a crowd. Or she may cry like a plaintive woman who is realizing that independence might not be what she had really wanted after all. Perhaps she realizes how much her shrewish act belies a desire to be known and loved.

But this introspection, or lack thereof, does not go very far. Petruchio arrives. He comes to his wedding not only a disheveled mess, but stumbling up in all absurdity with a boot for a hat. Although Baptista, has been accepting of Petruchio's odd and somewhat abrupt courtship of his daughter up to this point, he pulls Petruchio aside and questions the bridegroom's intentions. He scolds Petruchio:

Why, sir, you know this is your wedding-day:
First were we sad, fearing you would not come;
Now sadder, that you come so unprovided.
Fie, doff this habit, shame to your estate,
An eye-sore to our solemn festival! (III.ii)

Petruchio replies:

Tedious it were to tell, and harsh to hear:
Sufficeth I am come to keep my word,
Though in some part enforced to digress;
Which, at more leisure, I will so excuse
As you shall well be satisfied withal.
But where is Kate? I stay too long from her:
The morning wears, 'tis time we were at church. (III.ii)

This, of course, is a terribly unsatisfying response for both Baptista and audience. He will not explain where he's been, except to say the story is "tedious" and "harsh to hear." He's late, has no excuse for his tardiness, and claims he is there to, "keep my word." We are, of course, to assume this might be part of the "taming Kate" process. But in his behavior, there is a hanging question of his motives. While Petruchio's behavior may be chalked up to his "tough love" approach to breaking Kate's mean spirit, I would like for my students to think about the boundary between cruelty and giving a person a taste of their own medicine. Again, this interpretation hinges not on what Petruchio says in this case, but what he is unable to explain.

The Novels

***Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* by Suzanne Fisher Staples**

Shabanu is a strong-willed Pakistani girl who is wary of the responsibilities and restrictions becoming a woman will bring. In a strange turn of events, she decides to leave her home and family to avoid becoming the fourth wife of an older man. Although this novel becomes a physical survival story, it delves into the more complicated issue of seeking independence from cultural constraints. As with Juliet, there is also ultimately a question of whether or not Shabanu's struggle for independence was worth her hardships.

Shabanu is a fine middle-of-the-road read. Many of my students have considered it an easy read. One stumbling point for even some of the most astute readers has been dealing with names and places that are not culturally familiar to them. This tends to impair the fluency of their reading. As a pre-reading activity for this novel, I recommend having students skim the book and make a pronunciation guide for names (there will usually be at least one student who is willing to help with pronunciation). I might also have students skim for and identify the names of places in the book. I might have them look the places up and label them. This not only helps to give them a schema for understanding references in the novel, but to appreciate how far Shabanu traveled on her own.

***Romiette and Julio* by Sharon Draper**

Though purists will despise this rip-off of *West Side Story*, Julio Montague and Romiette Cappelle can draw in some of the most reluctant readers. Told in part through conversations and on-line "chats," this is the story of Romiette, an African-American girl, and Julio, who is Hispanic. The two meet on-line and discover they attend the same high school. It's love at first sight until the school's rival gangs get wind of the relationship. They kidnap Romi and Julio and set them adrift on a boat. Several other bizarre events make for a silly ending to this novel, but many students can identify with some of the racial and cultural issues this novel brings up. In this case, Romiette and Julio must assert their independence by continuing their relationship.

Reading the chats and dialogue can be a little off-putting, especially for students who have limited experience with cyberspace. Despite that constraint, many students, particularly those who desperately want to read about dating issues, will begrudge the novel its peccadilloes. Sometimes I will ask students who have the means to rent *West Side Story* or read a simplified version of *Romeo and Juliet* before they begin this novel.

***The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding**

This is truly a classic tale of survival on a deserted island. A group of British boys are stranded on a deserted island and must learn to create rules and moral codes in the absence of any grown-up authority. This novel is rich in its exploration of independence because it presents the ways each character will forge their own identity in this newly forming society. Some prosper and others become targets of the group's savagery.

This novel is denser than the others I have chosen here. Most consider it a high school level book. I think, though, that more advanced readers will be challenged by the language Golding uses and the loaded imagery the novel presents. I think that reading this novel in the context of our study of independence will also help students to focus their reading. With this novel, I sometimes have students research some concepts they aren't quite familiar with yet. Knowing concepts like mob mentality and Darwinism and reading for the way Golding makes these concepts concrete in his novel can help them feel more organized when they approach a difficult reading task. It is also sometimes helpful to download and define a short vocabulary list for the novel before the students start reading.

***The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton**

This is another classic. While the imagery in this novel is not as volatile as that used in *The Lord of the Flies*, this novel is often a crowd pleaser. This is the tale of Pony Boy and his cronies, the greasers, tough guys who are growing up on the wrong side of the tracks. They are constantly at odds with the "socs," the privileged set, who see fit to scrap with the greasers at every turn. When Pony's friend Johnny kills a soc in a rumble, the two must run from the law and stand strong against the ensuing hardships of living completely independently and secretly.

Again, students from all walks of life love this book, despite its weathered edges. Plot-wise, they are usually taken with the idea of two young boys living on the lam. And it is their exercise in independence under dire circumstances that makes the novel such a compelling read. There is a great film version of the novel starring young brat-packer Rob Lowe, Ralph Macchio, and Patrick Swayze. There are significant differences between the novel and the film, so I usually try to have students watch the film when they are finished. I make this clear from the beginning in order to hedge the reluctant reader who might try to watch the film instead of reading the book.

***Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen**

Hatchet is a good old survivor story. Brian Robeson is 13 and stranded in the woods after the pilot of the single-engine plane he is riding in has a heart attack. Brian, of course, is the only passenger of the ill-fated flight and must learn to use every ounce of his mental muscle to survive the harsh environment. During this adventure, Brian must also learn to have courage and discard self-pity for a can-do attitude.

Hatchet is a fine choice for a reluctant reader. It is short and fairly action packed. While the survivor ideas in this novel tend toward the macho, many students enjoy this kind of reading like they enjoy watching an old movie again and again: it is predictable and somehow welcoming.

***Parrot in the Oven* by Victor Martinez**

Manny is the central character of this tale of independence. In this case, he has to survive the chaotic environment that seems to continually test his mettle. Some of Manny's conflict in the story comes from his own family; his father is an alcoholic, his sister is promiscuous, and his mother is trying her best to keep everyone in one piece. The other part comes from his school environment, which presents Manny with a continuous stream of tough choices.

Parrot is a wonderful novel not only for its sensitive, thoughtful take on the darker moments of everyday life, but the lyric metaphors Manny uses to interpret his world. This novel is jam-packed with figurative language, which can stall easily-discouraged readers. There is a wonderful book on tape version of the novel that students can listen to as they read. I find that this helps students distinguish between literal and figurative as they try to follow the narrative.

TEACHING METHODS

What I like most about using a workshop format is the fact that I get to focus on what each individual student knows. Current theory of education and classroom management holds that we cannot approach teaching with a "one size fits all" mentality. Rather, we must forge a new kind of curriculum that is flexible enough to accommodate students with a wide range of abilities. The great challenges to this type of curriculum are management and accountability. If I'm not going to make every student read out of the same novel at exactly the same time, I have to design a system that will hold students accountable for both actually reading the materials they choose and thinking about that reading in an increasingly sophisticated manner. The following are some of the teaching strategies and methods I use in my workshop:

Reading Log

I typically have students keep a reading response journal while they read. In that journal, they are required to summarize what they've read after 30-40 pages and make what I call a connection. These connections (which are limited to 3-4 sentences long) come in four different types:

Text to self

The student makes a connection between herself and the content of her reading. A basic connection might go as follows: A student reading *The Lord of the Flies* connected to the fact that the older boys govern the younger boys much the same way her brother bosses her around. I encourage students to dig deeper into the text and connect to a specific image or more meaningful idea. A deeper connection to *The Lord of the Flies* include similar content to the one I described, but would talk about the fact that her brother uses physical strength to intimidate her, or that her parents sometimes don't intervene, forcing her, like Ralph, to have to use her own resources to cope with this bullying.

Text to text

The student connects her current reading to something she's read before. A student who has read *Romeo and Juliet* and is currently reading *Romiette and Julio* will have many opportunities to connect not only through similar specific details, but through ideas such as rivalry and fidelity as well.

Text to literary vocabulary

This simply means a student applies a particular literary device to their reading. Some of the easiest devices for students to pick out are similes, metaphors, irony, personification, and dialect.

Text to world

This is the catch-all connection. A student can connect her reading to someone else's experience, to their knowledge of world events, to generalizations about culture, or to media other ones that are text-based. Usually students will connect to movies, songs, stereotypes, a friend's story, etc.

Roundtable Discussions

Since small groups of students will be reading the same novel, I will use this technique to assess who is reading and who isn't. I will moderate these discussions with questions when groups get stuck. For the most part, though, I listen to them talk about their book. It becomes painfully clear which students have not done the reading; they don't have much to say. While they talk, I jot down notes to use when I confront the "non-readers." I will also refer to these notes when I give them a participation grade.

Inner/Outer Circle

This is another form of discussion I like to use. The "inner circle" is just a group of students sitting in a small circle, and the "outer circle" is a group of students who are paired up with ones on the inside circle. They form a slightly larger circle on the "outside." I like to use this format for both literary discussions and less involved peer editing (grammar and form). When you start rotating around the circles, students who don't normally interact will talk to each other.

Writer's Notebook

This is a composition book students keep. In the front cover of this notebook, they keep a list of forms for writing, such as lists, dialogues, poems, and stream of consciousness, to name a few. Sometimes I ask students to write whatever they feel like writing about, using their list of forms for help. Other times I set a topic.

Word Power

This is something I made up to keep students focused on building their vocabulary. Every couple of weeks, we construct a list of words. Usually, they are words that are relevant to what we're studying. In every list, I include some grammatical and literary vocabulary. Every day, we start out with a warm-up where we study the words. We make analogies, study etymology, and connect useful root words and stems to other words. Every time students successfully use a word in context, or can correctly use a grammatical or literary concept, I let them put their name on the board. Every time they use an additional word, they can put a check by their name.

I try to "finesse" this activity by sometimes going around the room and making every student participate, so each person gets their name on the board. I also give one extra credit point for each time they have their name on the board. If attention to word power wanes, I also have given quizzes and special assignments on which I require students to correctly use the words.

Book Clubs

This is another concept that keeps the reading workshop going. A Book Club is a group of students who are reading the same novel. I have done this in different ways over the years. Currently, I like to shuffle these groups around every time I ask students to read a book with more than one person. Some teachers like to keep these groups constant, asking the Book Club members to select a book as a group. Book Clubs help alleviate some of the isolation of reading a novel alone. I use these clubs to get students talking about their reading and to think about what they bring to a text individually and as a group.

TYPICAL CLASS DAYS

Toward the Beginning

Warm-Up (30 min.)

1. Each student will receive a notecard with a word from Friar Lawrence's speech in Act II scene vi:

These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite:
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so;
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.

The notecards will be numbered on the back so that we can put them in order.

2. Once the student gets their notecard, they will create a gesture or funny way of saying their word to draw attention to it.
3. Students will be lined up according to the number on their card. We will go one by one, and each student will say their word and do their funny voice or gesture. On this round, we will discuss the words that show we're reading Shakespeare (thy, doth, etc.) and their meanings.
4. We will read them through a little more quickly this time and discuss the words that stick out the most to them, usually words like violent and delights. I will lead students to point out the paradoxes in the speech, such as "violent delights" and "loathsome deliciousness." We will add some of these words, along with the word paradox, to our WordPower list.

5. We will repeat our readings, and each time I will lead students to a new issue, such as images of speed and light (which we will read for in the future). I will close with an interpretation of the meaning of this speech and connect it to the characters.

Shakespeare Study – Romeo and Juliet (30 min.)

1. We will watch 15 minutes worth of film clips or read from the children’s version, dependent upon the level of the group and availability of equipment.
2. Students who have been selected in advance will do a dramatic reading of Act II scene v (all or part if time). We will talk about light and dark, fast and slow images in the scene.

Book Club Time (Last 30 min.)

1. Students will have begun their novel (one from among the choices I’ve discussed) and will update each other as to where they are in the book.
2. They will have a short discussion as to how they see independence in their novel so far, among other issues. I will circulate and moderate where necessary.
3. Students will set reading goals to be finished before the next class.

In the Middle

Warm-up (25 minutes)

1. We will refresh our memories of the terms abstract and concrete. Reading groups will think about their choice of two of the following abstractions: light, dark, responsibility, joke, teenager, heir, expectations. They are to think of as many concrete images as they can to match with the abstraction of their choosing.
2. Students will list as many words and images as they can on the board that are organized by abstraction. Exceptional images will be added to the WordPower.

Shakespeare Study – Prince Hal (45 min- 1 hour.)

1. Students (in their reading groups) will copy Hal’s final speech onto butcher paper. On it, students will be asked to “think through” Hal’s speech (all or part, dependent on the level of the class). In other words, they must read and translate the speech into words they understand.
2. Once they’ve thought through Hal’s speech, students will share with other groups in an inner-outer circle format. It will be a globular circle, but they are to compare their results with what other groups wrote.

3. We will do some group comparisons of the result. If the issue is not brought up, I will begin a discussion of Hal's character in the last speech. Is he a brat/ jerk or is he a misunderstood teen.

4. Some student volunteers will read the speech using some interpretive tone in their voice (brat vs. misunderstood). Other students will participate by "directing" them in groups.

Book Club Time (Remainder of period)

1. Students will focus on making connections in their discussions. They will turn these connections into some sort of writing and presentation project that is to be determined by the group and me. Their project must in some way carry out the theme of independence in the novel. This takes lots of individual conferencing for some groups. Some past examples of projects include writing a play version of part of the novel, compiling a book of poems written from different characters' points of view, and writing a series of literary analysis papers that cover different aspects of the novel.

Near the End

Warm-Up (25 min.)

1. Students will write a rant in their Writer's Notebook. A rant is a piece of writing where students can "go off" on a topic. They can write about something that's happened to them that bothered them. They can write about something that is happening in the world that is bothering them. If they are having trouble with this, they can write about the last time they got really mad.

2. Students will read their rants and discuss in small groups. For the sake of time, they will select one to read to the class.

Shakespeare Study (30 min.)

1. Select students will draw a slip of paper with a state of mind on it. The states of mind might include: rage, calm, sociable, stressed, etc.

2. Select students will "perform" that state of mind without words. The focus of this activity is to get them thinking about how body language and physical persona create a character.

3. We will begin reading the marriage scene with Kate and Petruchio. If the class is able, we will rotate between these two characters with different students reading different states of mind as we go.

Book Club Time

1. Students should make final adjustments and arrangements for their writing/presenting project. Each group member is responsible for a component of the project.
2. During this time, I will pull members from different groups in for roundtable conferences. This will give students who are reading different novels a chance to talk about what they've read.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Draper, Sharon. *Romiette and Julio*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1999.

This is a young adult retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*. In this case, Romiette is an African-American girl and Julio is a Hispanic boy. The two must face pressures from family and friends as they continue their relationship.

Golding, William. *The Lord of the Flies*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1962.

This is for more advanced eighth grader readers but I think it will keep our discussion from centering on just the struggle for independence between parent and child. With this novel, we can talk about what happens when kids do not choose their independence, but must create their own code of rules by which to live without the input of any grown-up.

Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.

Again, this is a novel in which there is no grown-up to speak of. We can explore how each of these boys deals with the independence their life's circumstances have afforded them.

Lamb, Charles. *Tales from Shakespeare*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

Students can familiarize themselves with the basic plot of many of Shakespeare's plays in this illustrated retelling for children.

Martinez, Victor. *Parrot in the Oven*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996.

This is the story of Manny, a boy who has to fight the chaos of his environment to survive. This is a short read that is full of figurative language.

Paulsen, Gary. *Hatchet*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987.

This is a short read, perfect for a less-than-enthusiastic reader. In this survival story, Brian is stranded in the forest alone and must learn to rely on his wits.

Shakespeare, William. *King Henry IV, Part I*. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In this play, we will focus on a representative scene that distinctly reveals the rebellious Prince Hal. Though he is often rebellious in deed, we will focus on his words.

———. *King Henry IV, Part I*. In *Shakespeare Made Easy*. New York: Barron's, 1985. This is a version of the play that has a simple translation of Shakespeare's language on each facing page.

———. *Romeo and Juliet*. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Talk about independence gone awry! While many students are familiar with the plot of this play, and can probably see how it links to our theme right away, we will focus our energy on the scene where Juliet and her father are in conflict about her impending marriage to Paris. Since adaptations of this play portray Juliet in wildly different ways, from crybaby to wise beyond her years, we might also look at several film adaptations of this scene.

———. *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Shakespeare Made Easy*. New York: Barron's, 1985. This is a version of the play that has a simple translation of Shakespeare's language on each facing page.

———. *Taming of the Shrew*. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. In this play, we will concentrate on the marriage scene. In particular, we will look at the way Petruchio and Kate's characters are developed not so much by what they say, but what they don't say.

———. *Taming of the Shrew*. In *Shakespeare Made Easy*. New York: Barron's, 1985. This is a version of the play that has a simple translation of Shakespeare's language on each facing page.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. New York: Knopf, 1989. In this novel, Shabanu is a Pakistani girl who is promised to an older man in marriage. She must decide whether to marry him as her parents would like or defy her family and culture.

Filmography

King Henry IV, Part One. BBC, 1980. This can be dry for students, so I would only show the selected scene to them. There is a nice rhythm in the jokes between Falstaff and Henry in this version.

Luhrman, Baz (director). *Romeo and Juliet*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1997.

This is a modernized telling of the story. Since it's rated PG-13, I only show select scenes.

Zeffirelli, Franco (director). *Romeo and Juliet*. Paramount Pictures, 1968.
Olivia Hussey's Juliet is perfect for our character analysis.

Zeffirelli, Franco (director). *Taming of the Shrew*. Columbia Tri Star, 1967.
This is a useful film adaptation of Shakespeare's play.