

***Roméo y Juliétta* Take a Walk on the West Side:
An Analysis of how Latin Culture Influences the American Performance Mosaic**

Ané Nyoka Ebie
Alexander Hamilton Middle School

OVERVIEW

As a performer, scholar and educator, I have always had a passion to provide my students with culturally relative and intellectually stimulating opportunities to showcase their talent. The Shakespeare and Film Seminar has facilitated this goal by providing me with relevant, substantial theory that will mold an interdisciplinary curriculum unit prescribing how to adapt the musical *West Side Story* to a middle school stage. With a demographic that is predominantly comprised of students of Latin descent, I feel equipped to encourage voluntary participation in this musical production as follows:

- Instilling a sense of value and self worth in my students by celebrating a culture that embodies brilliant, beautiful music, dance, and language;
- Enabling my students to recognize the overwhelming influence their culture has had on how American artistic culture is recognized and defined, and respected; and
- Liberating them to reflect on their identity as Latin Americans through the amalgamation of performative elements that make up the musical, a performance genre pioneered by Americans that illustrates, recreates, and celebrates Latino culture through music, song, and dance.

The Shakespeare and Film Seminar has equipped me with theoretically sound tools that will under gird my efforts to produce an efficacious performance. This curriculum unit has empowered me as a writer while providing pragmatic ways to adapt a musical that has informed the American Musical cannon with artistically challenging dance and music numbers, a poetic waltz between the Spanish and English languages, and politically driven subject matter. While the dance and music numbers from the musical will need to be modified for the skill levels of my students, the vacillation from the English language to Spanish language are all too familiar in my teaching environment. Further, the themes of forbidden love, racial prejudice, police brutality, racial profiling, identity crisis, and sexism, among other issues, are unfortunately all too familiar. My hope is to empower C.O.L.O.R.E.S. (Cultivate Outstanding Lives through Orchestrated Rigor and Effort for Success), the name of our performance entourage, which in and of itself reflects the diversity of our student body and our commitment to artistic excellence, to become passionate about these issues, channeling this passion into a fiercely energized and dynamic work of performance art.

Preliminary Application, Preparation, and Projection

I have already begun the process of exploration and discovery of the unit this semester by having my students view the 1961 version of *West Side Story*. We have discussed the themes, motifs, and other noteworthy events through the activity of the plot summary. I have also secured a resident choreographer who will be with us next semester. My goal for him or her will be to collaborate with the students to come up with culturally relative dance routines that will add dimension to the meaning of the music. My hope is that the English Language Arts teachers who

take this seminar will provide me with techniques that will help foster my students' intimacy with the characters and political implications of the storyline. Ultimately, I can bring these various elements together to illuminate the beauty and timelessness of this work to my students, which they will then communicate through a performance that reflects nothing short of excellence.

CURRICULUM UNIT BACKGROUND

As I pondered how I would compress the *West Side Story* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in a curriculum unit that would be culturally relative to my middle school students, I immediately went back to my collegiate roots, where I was introduced to Shakespeare through his sonnets. I recalled my difficulty understanding the language, but over and above that, I recalled how astoundingly universal the themes and motifs were that ran through these short, yet potent poetic utterances.

My recognition of the universal nature of Shakespeare was ignited at the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign in an oral interpretation of literature class. Oral interpretation simply means that you adapt your understanding of a piece of literature to a performance stage. I have come to call it the embodiment of literature and then the manifestation of this intimacy comes through on a stage, before an audience. The approach to challenging literature through embodiment met a need I had to be less intimidated by literature, a need that began in high school.

As an honors English student in high school, I had a difficult time because my teacher failed to create an environment in which I could develop a passion for literature. The literature was not very diverse, and my presumption was that he felt the works we were reading representative of a universal literary canon of which not one piece of writing by a person of any color was included. My performance in the class was low because my interest level was low. My interest level was low because I had a difficulty understanding and, therefore, appreciating the literary content of each book we studied. When I went away to college, I tried to avoid literature classes as much as possible because of my negative experience in high school.

When I took my oral interpretation of literature class in college, and the subject of performance was the Shakespeare sonnet, the old feelings of having to analyze literature that was difficult to grasp came back. My experience, however, was completely different, because my professor introduced the magic that happens when you become intimate with the literature by "eating it," digesting it, allowing it to nourish you, and then reflecting or manifesting this understanding through performance.

When I became a theatre teacher, I immediately determined to use this paradigm of thought as the signature for any program I was responsible for building single handedly. My students, most of whom are of color, experience many of the same difficulties understanding literature outside of their immediate culture as I did. Coupled with having to embrace foreign cultures and ways of living along with the language barriers that come with the complexities of the English language, not to mention the entire set of challenges that come with English being students' second language, or ESL (English as a Second Language) students whose English literacy is little to nil, many of my students are at a distinct disadvantage. However, what better literature to begin their introduction to challenging literature than the Shakespearean sonnet? Our first performance was entitled *Shakespeare in the Spring/Cleaning*, which featured students adapting Shakespearean sonnets to the stage. They infused the details of culture and ethnicity to place their personal signature on each work, and it was amazingly successful!

My history with Shakespeare's trademark as the "people's poet" made me confident that I would find significant correlations between *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, prior to my even having seen the latter film. As I feel it is important to make literature culturally relative to

students, my desire is to use the more culturally relative *West Side Story* as a vehicle by which their appreciation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* could be cultivated.

FILMS TO BE EXAMINED AS PRIMARY SOURCES IN UNIT

The best way for me to introduce the two stories to the classroom initially would be through a close analysis of what they see in the two movies. The two movies that will serve as the foundation for this curriculum unit are Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins's *West Side Story*, starring Natalie Wood. While I will be analyzing both movies in my curriculum unit, *West Side Story* will be at the forefront of my study because it is more culturally relevant to my students. *Romeo and Juliet* will function as the foundation of my comparative analysis between the two movies, operating occasionally, but not as often as a conduit for life application for my students. There are many themes and motifs that run through each film that enable them to dialogue with each other while being culturally relevant to my students. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will ensue on the four following themes, as they are most immediate and applicable to the current lives of my students:

- From Communion to Quinceanera, to Covenant: The Latino Ceremonial Trinity;
- The Territorial Imperative: The Battle For Public Space;
- Gangs as Family; and
- The Psychology of Young Male Delinquency.

From Communion to Quinceanera, to Covenant: The Latino Ceremonial Trinity

The first major similarity between *Romeo and Juliet* and the *West Side Story* are in the ceremonies that represent a woman coming of age.

The first similarity between *Romeo and Juliet* and *The West Side Story* I will introduce to C.O.L.O.R.E.S. is the weightiness and ceremonies that celebrate the young female coming of age.

In Latino culture, the quinceanera is a celebration that is given to the young lady for remaining chaste to the age of fifteen years old. My theory is that Maria's first dance is symbolic of her quinceanera. There is a tri-fold relationship between the quinceanera tradition, the context that is circumscribed around Maria attending the dance, as well as the marriage ceremony between Romeo and Juliet. I will attempt to clearly establish the interrelatedness of these events, thereby ultimately establishing a case to my students that *Romeo and Juliet* is culturally relevant to their lives.

From Communion to Quinceanera

In the *West Side Story*, Maria prepares to attend the dance with lots of excitement and anticipation. In the dialogue between her and Anita, her mother figure of sorts, we see that Maria is battling with Anita to drastically adjust her dress for the dance. While Anita is already making adjustments to the dress, Maria proclaims that the adjustments are not enough; the dress should be more revealing.

MARIA: Por favor, Anita, you are my friend.
 ANITA: Stop it, Maria.
 MARIA: You must make the neck lower.
 ANITA; And you must stop heckling me. We are working on our time now, not the old lady's.
 MARIA: One inch. How much can one little inch do?
 ANITA: Too much.
 MARIA: Anita, it is now to be a dress for dancing, no longer for praying!
 ANITA: Listen, with those boys you can start in dancing and end up praying.

(*West Side Story*, Section 6)

There is symbolism in the choice to use Maria's old communion dress to transform into a dress for the dance. We are being told that the dance is reflective of Maria's quinceanera because the dress symbolizes major ceremonies that acknowledge life transitions in the world of a Latina woman. The communion represents the child's birth and rearing in the Catholic Faith and that she will be raised and taught how to govern her life through the tenants of that faith. The next major ceremony represents the girls next stage of life is the quinceanera. It is a celebration of the young girl successfully governing her life by the tenets of the faith by most importantly, setting herself apart by remaining chaste, keeping her body holy by not fornicating. It is my conviction that the dance symbolizes Maria's quinceanera because that mystical dress is loaded with symbolism, which we see in the care with which the dress is altered, the arguments that ensue over the altering of the dress, and Maria's physical movement that transitions the scene from preparation to for the dance, to presentation at the dance.

The care with which Anita alters Maria's dress clearly signals that this dress is meant for a presentation of Maria to the world as a young, virtuous woman. The careful but slight alterations to the communion dress in particular, which represents childhood innocence and unconditional commitment to the Catholic faith, is now intended to communicate young adult female virginity, and subsequent suitability for marriage. This very idea leads us to analyze the argument that ensues between Maria and Anita over the way the dress is to be altered.

When Bernardo and Chino come in the dress shop after Anita and Maria's dialogue and we see the finished product of the dress, Maria and Anita are standing in the mirror admiring the finished product. She saunters over to Bernardo and asks how he likes it, subliminally does it meet his approval enough to allow her to enjoy her first dance without his being too overbearing. She tells him what the dance represents for her – the beginning of her life as a young woman in America! This scene is followed by her spinning in the dress like a princess, creating a blur that transitions to the dance. The cinematography in the movie coupled with stage directions from the script all show Maria spinning in the dress, igniting a whirlwind transition from the dress shop to the energy and excitement of the dance.

It is Maria's first dance. She is the only one in white. Typically in a quinceanera, the star of the show is the only one in that color. The main criticism of the parallel between Maria's first dance and a quinceanera is that typically in a quinceanera, the honoree's dress is rarely if ever white. It is typically a pastel, like pink or baby blue. Ultimately, to assert that this dress is her quinceanera dress may be questionable to some. It cannot be denied, however, that notwithstanding the color of the dress, the fact that the dress must be stately, without the slightest insinuation of being "experienced," the former being a condition that the quinceanera celebrates, cannot be denied. This, coupled with the "first and last" rituals such as dances, dolls and the like, make this dance as symbolic of a quinceanera for Maria as they come. The dance commemorates a lot of firsts for Maria: her first public outing with her peers, love at first sight, her first dance with the man of her dreams. Her "father" was even there, Bernardo. Unfortunately, however,

instead him giving way to Tony, he snatches Maria and Tony apart, and makes it clear that he does not want them to interact. Unfortunately, his disapproval makes this dance the first and last time Maria will have these experiences with the love of her life, perhaps even embittering her to the entire prospect of love.

Quinceanera Interviews from a Latin Female Demographic

This discussion about the quinceanera and all it entails is taken from interviews with students and staff at Hamilton Middle School and yielded the following findings:

My interview with student Esmeralda Maldonado and colleague Crystal Garcia yielded the collective knowledge that the average age families start preparing for a daughter's quinceanera, or "fifteen," is the age of twelve. Three years before the quinceanera, preparations begin. In Latin culture, it is clear that the quinceanera is of as much importance as the wedding covenant. Whereas the average wedding takes approximately 18 months to plan, the quinceanera is allotted twice the time. There are thousands of dollars spent on this ceremony, very much like a wedding. Close attention is paid to the details of renting a venue at least one year prior, choosing people who will be your attendants for the big day, all of whom, just like wedding attendants, are uniformly adorned in a particular attire setting them apart as people representing the princes of the night. There are an equal amount of young men and ladies, who are partnered up to perform together in celebration of the richness of Latin culture, with dance, music, language, and the like. There is much more rehearsal time in a quinceanera than a wedding, the bell of the ball, her chosen partner, and her attendants rehearsing synchronized dances that will be executed on the big day. We see this particular thing clearly in *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in *West Side Story*.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, we see the mask dance, where Romeo first encounters Juliet. The entire masses of people are participating in the dance, and it completely synchronized. Romeo and Juliet encounter each other, and there is immediately love at first sight. We see this love is sealed through the physical intimacy of them dancing together. When Romeo takes himself out of the dance, he cannot leave without pulling Juliet out, and expressing his affection for her. The dance marks the beginning of their love affair together. In *West Side Story*, there is a complete shift in not only the music, but the mode of dance when we witness Maria and Tony's first encounter. The music fades from being very punchy and extravagant with loud trumpets, and gives way to very soft, flirtatious music. The spotlight focuses on Tony and Maria and fades on everyone else as Tony and Maria engage in an innocent courtship dance that communicates their love for each other as first sight. This is confirmed by their dialogue immediately after the dance, the cinematography illustrating that for Tony and Maria at that moment, they are the only people who exist and matter in the world.

Student Application and Analysis

In our continued exploration of the cultural relativism between the movies and my students' lives, we will continue to explore their ability to identify with these segments of the movies. In the quinceanera, coupled with the rehearsed synchronized dancing that takes place in the quinceanera, there are also special dances that take place, among them, the dance with the father. We will discuss symbolic nature of what they call "the last dance" between father and daughter, and how this motif also is reflected in weddings as a tradition.

The parallelism between the communion dress's transformation into a (dance) quinceanera dress, and Maria's transformation from girl child to young lady is unmistakable and ingenious. Anita's alteration of Maria's dress from that suitable for a communion to a quinceanera is symbolic of Maria's transformation to another phase of life. The continuity/relationship between *The West Side Story* and *Romeo and Juliet* is most clearly manifested in the themes that deal with a woman's rite of passage.

From Quinceanera to Covenant

There exists a clear continuum from *West Side Story* to *Romeo and Juliet* because the next ceremony that is most important to the woman in which she is presented to society and which signals a transformation is her marriage. *Romeo and Juliet* marry at a very young age, which is not atypical of the life and times in Shakespeare's day, due to a context in which the mortality rate occurred at a much younger age, causing everything to happen much earlier. Also, although *Romeo and Juliet* married in secret, their reverence for their faith is clear. They refused to disrespect their faith by fornicating. As passionate as they were for each other, they chose to marry in secret before they decided to consummate it through sexual intercourse.

There are aesthetic similarities in the stories that establish a clear relationship between the stories that will be examined in more detail later. It is important to note, however, that physical blocking the make-believe marriage between Tony and Maria in the dress shop and the actual marriage between Romeo and Juliet mirror each other. Although Tony and Maria's hopes for the future are illustrated the wedding role-play, it happens after the "quinceanera," signifying the appropriate order or ceremonies that mark the stages of a woman's life.

In addition to the motifs in *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* that address the themes of ceremonies that mark significant junctures in a woman's life from communion to quinceanera in *West Side Story*, leading to the final ceremony of marriage, as illustrated *Romeo and Juliet*, these ceremonies linking the two stories, and making them culturally relevant to each other and my students, there is one more thing concerning this final stage of ceremony which involves the covenant of marriage, which is betrothal.

The dialogue between Maria and Anita in preparation for the dance addresses the themes of marriage betrothal, which both stories have in common. While I am not certain that this practice is common in Latino culture, it is a theme that needs to be briefly addressed as if nothing else, a candidate for future research. Juliet is betrothed to Paris, for whom she feels nothing, and whom she had no hand in choosing as her future mate. Similarly, Maria is promised to Chino, Bernardo's best friend and fellow Shark, for whom she has no feelings, but happens to be one of the few people Bernardo trusts. Maria, like Juliet, has no feelings for Chino, and subsequently has an open heart for love.

Another motif running through both stories is the idea of young people as trail blazers in a society plagued by discrimination. While *West Side Story* focuses on a young couple's desire share their lives being circumvented by society's intolerance of interracial relationships, Romeo and Juliet's situation focuses on dissention between two entities that is more arbitrary. Both couples, however, are able to see each other for the content of each other's character. At a school that is seventy-five percent Latino, in which each kid indiscriminately call each other "Nigga" and "Wetback" as terms of endearment, a recognition, appreciation, and celebration of differences needs to be affected with a sense of great urgency.

The transcendental nature of Tony and Maria's paradigm of love and acceptance is also illustrated in the play. Tony proclaims to Maria that he is not one of "them." This statement has a two-fold meaning. First, Tony no longer distinguishes himself by gang affiliation. Whereas his dialogue with Riff clearly insinuates he once did, Tony has been delivered from this mentality through his apprenticeship under Doc. Secondly, he doesn't perceive himself to be superior to Maria because he is Caucasian and she is Latina. He has not been influenced by society's declaration that his whiteness makes him better. Furthermore, he reinforces to Maria her response to Bernardo at the dance when he asked her if she realized Tony's affiliation as one of "them." Everything and everyone became a blur, illustrating love at first sight, expressed best by Maria, who asserts the contextually enigmatic statement, "I saw only him." Tony appropriates this same

response to the fire escape scene preceding the altercation at the dance imploring Maria to “see only me.” The power of word repetition and echoing is noteworthy in this dialogue.

Transcendental love is also illustrated in the relationship between Romeo and Juliet. They didn’t care about the centuries old arbitrary feud between the Capulets and Montagues that plagued and cursed generations to come by inheritance. I believe Shakespeare’s literary trademark of giving no reason or history behind feuds between opposing entities in his works, is an intentional tactic that affords war no legitimacy. I believe he is intentionally making a political statement that hatred is idiosyncratic and usually cultivated by ignorance. Furthermore, he typifies and caricatures the instigators of hatred almost as if to interrogate to humanity of those who do hate.

Romeo and Juliet, much like Tony and Maria, are ahead of their times. Both couples are created as change agents in a society that teaches separation and hatred as a result of arbitrary differences. Furthermore, we all know that both stories, one Shakespeare conceived, and the other, Shakespeare inspired, communicates to me one thing that has inspired my heartfelt admiration of Shakespeare, and my conviction that opinions about Shakespeare being racist are eclipsed by his inconceivable ability to be precisely attuned to the nature and tendencies of human kind.

One major tendency that we see between the couples is desiring what is forbidden, and that hatred of any kind is taught, innate, and most importantly, inhumane.

The transcendental nature of Tony and Maria’s love is offset by dialogue between the Sharks, which illustrates their frustration at the dichotomous relationship between European Americans and Latino Americans and explains Bernardo’s disapproval of Maria’s relationship with Tony.

Fear and frustration with systemic racism is a cause for familial non-acceptance of interracial relationships. Bernardo wishes to shield Maria from the constant reminders that she will be considered inferior to Tony.

Student Application and Analyses

My students will be able to clearly relate to how middle school has fostered a painful awareness of their sociological identity and how they are treated as a result. This place in young person’s mental and physical evolution is a where students are made shockingly aware of how society sees them as a result of race, class, and often, gender. Everyday, every other word you hear out of a student’s mouth is “Nigga,” “Wetback,” “White Trash,” and profane expletives, most often beginning with a “b” or “m.” Students often determine who they want to be associated with based on how they look and what they have, leaving the “outcasts” to seek solace in community in their identity as misfits. Whether or not they are able to relate their experiences of isolation in a society that did not (and in many cases, does not) under-gird interracial relationships, they are able to relate to their worth being circumscribed by their society.

Territorial Imperative: The Sociological Realities of Limited Space

Another aspect of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* that are synonymous in their relationship to the student demographic I teach is the issue of gang violence and those subsets that accompany it. One is the dominion claimed over territory and the absence of at least parent in the home, compelling youth to seek non-traditional forms of family to help fill the void of the missing parent figure. These issues are both reflected in gang activity and often incite gang violence. They may even be considered requisites for gang activity and violence.

Typically, gang members fit the prototype of being members of an underrepresented race and/or a lower socio-economic class. The societal conditions that prescribe discrimination practices against these particular people use urban development as a vehicle by which they are

done away with or ignored. *West Side Story* happens to fit easily into this conspiracy because it is set in a ghetto that reflects nothing other than streets, alleys, fire escapes, and other dark and rough things. In New York, like other major cities, sequestering, or ghetto-ization, and gentrification are a common occurrence that effect underrepresented groups. Subsequently, the Darwin theory of survival of the fittest manifests.

The battle for territory that amounted to a gang war in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* entail young men of European descent. While the angst between the young men of Verona seems to be arbitrary, *West Side Story* features the Jets, who are suspected to have mostly Irish and Italian backgrounds, living in a not so reputable area of New York. Even within races there is a hierarchy of contrived superiority. This is known as intra-racial racism.

These young men, whose parents were probably relegated to this unfavorable neighborhood because of poor employment and race discrimination, are perhaps considered a little better than or equal to the Sharks. Edward T. Hall, an anthropologist who specializes in the dynamics of proxemics, validates the gangs' angst against each other is a culture clash ignited by limited public space. Hall's theory of proxemics argues that:

Human perceptions of space, although derived from sensory apparatus that all humans share, are molded and patterned by culture...differing cultural frameworks for defining and organizing space, which are internalized in all people at an unconscious level, can lead to serious failures of communication and understanding in cross-cultural settings. (Hall, in Brown 17)

Hall's theory conjures the memory of a dialogue I had with my students, who again are mostly Latino descent, that for me, has done away with a lot of stereotypes that American society has perpetuated with the presupposition that "they have no choice." One of those things had to do with the idea that Latin families drive around, one on top of the other, because there is only one vehicle. Hence, there is the referral to "Mexicans" when it comes to an over-abundance of people in a car. The term usually is, "We are going to be packed up in a car like a bunch of Mexicans!" One of my students laughed at the stereotype when we were discussing the subject because she confirmed the stereotype as it applies to her family, but the explanation why instigated an immediate paradigm shift. The student explained that although they have three fully operational cars, they pile up together in one car to go to the grocery store because this is an occasion that allows them to come together as a family. They simply like the close proximity and togetherness that family fosters. This revelation may be applied to the Sharks and their families who have migrated to the United States. In line with Hall's theory, the Sharks culturally feel comfortable with close physical proximity which may foster feelings that there is plenty of space, and they have a right to share it, with the Jets who have been socialized that plenty of space means power and authority, subsequently rebelling due to socialized claustrophobia.

Although the Jets don't own one piece of land in the neighborhood, they have appropriated it as theirs because they do not know anything else outside of it. Ultimately, these involuntary conditions amount to behaviors that reflect a classic case of Darwinism, survival of the fittest. Krupa reflects on the innate tendency in the following commentary:

As the largest concentrations of the disenfranchised are located in urban areas, ignoring them has become increasingly easier for those that took advantage of the government sponsored suburban exodus through mortgage tax credits, gas subsidies, highway construction and federal and state mortgage guarantees. Cities are becoming so economically and racially segregated that it is now possible for marketing companies to target specific types of demographic groups based on zip codes alone. For those affluent citizens that have chosen to remain or even come back to the city, an increasingly popular

solution has been to create semi-public... or gated communities that exclude undesirables not just in buildings, but in neighborhoods (2).

According to Frederique Krupa, cities have become a series of racially and economically segregated private enclaves (1). The Jets are in this neighborhood because of their class and because of their race. Apartment living probably means that they live on top of each other. As in most urban cities, buildings are built vertically and very close together leaving little space in between for the purpose of “smooshing” as many members of the races and classes that are an embarrassment to American society together as possible. In any environment where there is overcrowding, there is also frustration, and even nervousness. In “A Room of My Own,” Sandra Cisneros uses her protagonist Esperanza to communicate a desire for more space. She shares a room with her sister and often has to clean behind her sister and brother. In the excerpt, Esperanza expresses a desire to have her own space with her specific signature:

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody’s garbage to pick up after.

Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.
(108)

Esperanza’s desire for her own space transcends getting her own room or home. This excerpt more importantly symbolizes Esperanza’s struggle to bloom in a hostile environment, striving to reach beyond race and class boundaries for self-definition. Esperanza’s process of individualism is thus initiated by her resolution to escape the confinements of her socioeconomic status. Esperanza’s desire is to extricate herself from a stifling environment. The connection between Esperanza and the Jets and Sharks establishes the fact that this issue transcends New York “ghettoization” and establishes that this is a national epidemic. Esperanza is commenting on her desire to be free of the confinement that she has inherited as a member of a certain race and class in Chicago, Illinois. While her vindication comes from writing, the young men in *West Side Story* are taught to validate their existence through gang affiliation and violence. Robert Ardrey comments on this reality in his assertion that man has an innate drive to defend his property in *The Territorial Imperative*:

A territory is an area of space, whether of water or earth or air, which an animal or group of animals defends as an exclusive preserve. The word is also used to describe the inward compulsion to animate beings to possess and defend such a space. A territorial species of animals, therefore, is one in which all males, and sometimes females too, bear an inherent drive to gain and defend an exclusive property. (3)

Perhaps this frustration, coupled with Krupke’s instigation that there is not enough space to accommodate the influx of so many people, has fostered the ideology that there is no possibility of coexisting in the same environment together, making a fight over territory necessary for survival. Coupled with sequestering, or forcing many people in the same area with an inefficient amount of space to accommodate them comfortably is the idea of gentrification. As an implication for future research, it would be of interest for me to investigate the change in demographic of more spacious areas, or even the area they already live in. Was it always as sectioned off or isolated? Was its upkeep always ignored? Is money invested in fixing potholes, cracked sidewalks, planting greenery, picking up garbage on a consistent basis? Are cities redeeming dilapidated or abandoned homes for the inhabitants already there and not just for the middle class people who will move there with the precondition that the aberrants will be forced to move out? This last question stems from my witness of this occurrence in Chicago, my hometown.

There are subsidized housing neighborhoods such as Cabrini Green and Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago that are being demolished for the purpose of rebuilding a gang and drug free neighborhood with condos and town homes for sale. Why? To meet the demands of an elite group that feels that neighborhoods so close to the heart of the city are being wasted on the likes of underrepresented races that are an embarrassment to American society. Since sequestering them in a small space isn't working because the space is in the heart of the city, making them a constant and painful reminder of those things that are not right and perfect, why not move them far out into the suburbs where we can really forget they exist. How they will survive, establish and maintain employment without the immediate convenience of the city's public transportation system is of no concern, just isolate them or move them out as far away as possible so we can forget they ever existed.

Whereas *Romeo and Juliet* doesn't reflect the societal issues of race and class we see reflected in *The West Side Story*, what we do see is a seeming competition for the space in the town square. Although the Capulets and Montagues live on opposite ends of town, there is implicit competition for the space that is supposed to be shared since they refuse to co-exist together. The town square is synonymous with the basketball court in *The West Side Story*. In both movies, the youth own the streets, and the parents are invisible. In fact, anyone who could be a parent is invisible. There is no village; there are only children. This could be so for many reasons. In the gang infested neighborhoods I have experienced, the older generations are afraid of the children, because they have been left and unattended for so long that any regard for adults is non-existent. Movies like *City of God*, which is based on a true story, reflect the genocide that occurs in neighborhoods when children are left to themselves due to the absence of their parents. As that movie ended in the literal genocide of an entire neighborhood, the genocide in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* is ignited and hopefully eradicated.

Student Application and Analyses

It will be important for my students to understand that much like *West Side Story*, sequestering and gentrification is happening in their neighborhoods as well. Houston Heights is evolving as a neighborhood that accommodates plantation-style homes that are owned by European Americans. Many Latino and African American families who have lived in the neighborhood for years are offered money for their homes and land so that they can move out and companies can build homes that will accommodate their white counterparts of a higher class status. We will examine this epidemic. Further, we will examine how "value" is placed on neighborhoods, and how a neighborhood's appraisal is circumscribed by the race, class and affluence of its inhabitants.

Another way that gangs stake claim on territory that does not belong to them is through tagging. My students have witnessed many tagging incidents on our school, and are knowledgeable that they are gang related. Even on a public school, a building that belongs to the city, gangs stake a claim on it with their symbols, with the intent that it will communicate to the community their position as pseudo-realtors through tyrannical influence.

Gangs as Family

As a result of parental absence in the home, the youth seek each other as role models for family. The most dominant of the group become mother figures and father figures, and they look to each other for their financial, emotional and security needs to be met. They look to each other for protection, and their sense of identity and worth is predicated on the condition of the gang. So in order to maintain their identity, they do whatever it takes to maintain the cohesiveness of the gang.

If one does not have associative alliances, then he is in trouble, if he chooses to be in that particular neighborhood. My students will be able to identify with this, because even in middle school, students recognize the importance of somebody “having their back.” The kids who tend to be picked on are those who are outcast and friendless. The bullies who mess with them know that there will be no retribution, no intercession on the victim’s behalf. Because there is so little space, one has to earn their ability to reside in it, and then fight to maintain it.

Tony is able to relinquish his affiliation with the gang because he has gained a father figure in Doc, the pharmacy owner. Doc serves as a role model for Tony through his entrepreneurship, and affords Tony a way of the gang with a healthier alternative to feeling significant. Tony is not revolting against apprenticeship as the others are doing. Reflected in Riff and Tony’s conversation is an ethical tug of war: It appears that Riff’s revolt on apprenticeship is out of his hunger for community and family, whereas the Sharks’ revolt is political statement against being overworked, underpaid and disrespected as people from a different race. The systemic racism that underrepresented people fall prey to, such as doing the same or more work as their white counterparts for less money and minus the title is reflected in the dialogue the Sharks have on the roof. From Riff’s dialogue, we know that he has been from home to home. He has lived with Tony, and currently lives with his uncle. Where Riff’s parents are is a mystery. What we do know, however, is that whoever is looking after him has not taken out the time to nurture his growth, and introduce new possibilities for the future. In lieu of Maria’s parents, she reveres Bernardo as a father figure and Anita as a mother figure, and they act this way. Bernardo is the father-figure of the Sharks, Riff of the Jets. The blind leading the blind.

Gwendolyn Brooks uses her ironic poem to frankly proclaim the fate of young people who establish unhealthy gang relationships:

We Real Cool

We real cool. We
Left School. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We
Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
Jazz June. We
Die soon.

~ Gwendolyn Brooks

Brooks’s poetic proclamation also serves as prophecy for what culminates to be the fate of the Jets and Sharks. Both entities believed that as long as they had each other, they were invincible. They believed that their youth and virility would eclipse their mortality. Unfortunately, their short sightedness, coupled with their dysfunctional way of showcasing their manhood ended in their pre-mature deaths.

Psychology of Young Male Delinquency

The fourth and final issue I wanted to explore that my children will be able to relate to, is the psychology of young male delinquency and how it is instilled and perpetuated in young men who are underrepresented or marginalized as a result of their race and/or class. They live in a neighborhood which is a microcosm of a society that discriminates against them as a result of their race. They are pointed out, treated unfairly as a result of their ethnicity. I’d like to begin this portion with a true anecdote that affected my husband and me on Memorial Day Weekend. Any time there is a three-day weekend, there is the huge and rightful promotion of “Click it or Ticket.”

It is a concerted effort toward enforcing safety since there tends to be more alcohol consumption and driving on holidays. Whereas I do not have an issue with the enforcement of the law, I do have a problem with the law being enforced on a particular group of people, exempting others from the consequences of disobeying the law. It believe that we were profiled and a young African American couple in a nice car.

We were driving down Westheimer, about to make a right onto the 610 feeder when a policeman signaled for us to slow down. He looked through my side of the window, the passenger side, looking for seatbelts. Mine was on, but then he had me to sit back in order to see whether or not William had on his seatbelt. After discovering that William didn't have on a seatbelt, he had us pull over into the gas station and proceeded to write us out a ticket, without ever saying a word, until William demanded that he communicate with us about what he was doing. The driver was also suspicious of the ownership of the car because it had temporary plates. He tried to insult William's intellect by asking where the plates were, and William irritably told him to check the back of the car where they belonged. Approximately 30 seconds after we were pulled over, the second policeman on duty in the same Shell gas station parking lot, pulled in another driver, who also happened to be an African American male driving a nice car (ours was a Mercedes). This was coupled with a conversation we had with other friends the next day, when an African American in the circle shared that when he went to pay for his ticket, he saw nothing in the court but other African American and Latino people, laced lightly with a few "white red necks," but no members of the white middle class. This is not to say that that these people did not violate the law, but it is my conviction that police are more intentional about singling these groups out and enforcing the law on them. This incident made me wonder how many European American or even Asian Americans were pulled over to be checked out. Fortunately we recognize it for what it is, and may even have the power to call it for what it is, with enough credibility to contest it in the courtroom. Others are oblivious to the fact that they are being singled, out and it begins to affect them psychologically. Or they know exactly what's going and feel disempowered to do anything because of a lack of resources, or the knowledge that they will not be taken seriously because their color alone makes them lose credibility.

This very thing happens to the Jets and Sharks. They are pointed out either because they are the wrong race and/or class, or they are guilty before proven innocent. They are subsequently singled out, treated uncivilly, and generally harassed by law enforcement, ambassadors to a society that is ashamed of them and embarrassed to have them around. The idea of young male delinquency is instilled and perpetuated: instilled by absent parents and abusive police and perpetuated because they are at an impressionable age. For a young man who has no role model to build him up, the affects of being profiled will be detrimental, and the accusatory behavior becomes instilled and perpetuated.

This effort at dysfunctional agency in hopeless circumstances would be understood and applauded Susan-Lori Parks, a politically driven playwright whose thrust is using her works as a vehicle to empower "victimized" underrepresented people with a new twist on history featuring active agency in their fate, empathizing with the fact that in a stifling society, this is ironically the only way to vindicate them in their inevitable, and unfortunate fate. According to S.E. Wilmer, "Parks uses the characters in her plays to foreground the disappearance of the real," while lamenting its loss, rather than producing postmodern work that "simply ironizes the pastiche of disparate historical, contemporary and fictional images and events, Parks uses her characters and stage space to mourn the evanescence of her lineage and ancestry," ...culminating in "funerals or memorial scenes for disempowered [African-Americans]" (Wilmer 3).

Student Application and Analyses

A final word on young male delinquency and the commonality of this epidemic as it relates to my kids, is the idea that in an environment, where there are disempowered and voiceless, delinquency, as reflected in the fight over territory, and their overt disrespect for authority, their delinquency is the only way they can assert some kind of power in an environment where they are so disempowered. If they can stake their claim on territory that doesn't legally belong to them, but there is enough deference and respect in the neighborhood, everybody knows that there is an unspoken claim over certain areas of the neighborhoods, and it is to be, therefore, handled with care.

Much like the Jets, our children are often stigmatized by teachers, and labeled as a "problem child." They matriculate through school with this label because teachers share their negative experiences with a child and instigate prejudice against the child by future teachers. Hence, the child is never able to start off on a clean slate, because the teacher will not give him the benefit of the doubt, and treats him harshly. Since the child feels like he can do nothing to combat this active prejudice, he gives up trying to prove that he has redeemed himself, and chooses to display to the teacher the aberrant behavior that is expected of him. At least this way, he feels he can assert control over a hopeless situation by feeding into the prejudice, since no redemptive behavior can do away with it.

Besides the playground, the drugstore, which is owned by Doc, is another place in which the Jets would congregate and stake a claim on as "their territory." Their numbers, and lack of respect for authority is what would propel them to talk to Doc in any old kind of way, using threats and disrespectful tones and force him to retire to particular areas of the pharmacy when they didn't want him around while they had business meetings on how they were going reinforce their reign over the neighborhood through violence that would amount in proving who is most tuggish. Riff treats Doc as a servant when the Sharks meet them at the drugstore for a war council. He establishes contrived ownership of the drugstore by designating it as the place to meet for the war council. When the Sharks arrive at the drugstore, Riff says, "Cokes all around, Doc!" He expects the proprietor of the store who is seasoned enough to be his grandfather to serve him and the other hoodlums. We also see this assertion of abusive power through territorial ownership when Anita comes to the drugstore as a messenger for Maria. They use the power of their numbers and the authority they stand on in "their" drugstore as license to harass Anita with the justification that she deserved it or should not have expected to be safe because she infringed on their territory.

Just as the youth seem to own the street without adult supervision in *West Side Story*, *Romeo and Juliet* illustrate this epidemic as well as the dire consequences of allowing this to ensue. The Town Square by virtue of its name is a place in the middle of town for people who live in various areas to congregate. Oxymoronicly, the patriarchal community allows the square to be a place where unsupervised viral young men at the peak of ego-tripping testosterone fits let off steam through horsing around that ultimately gets out of hand. Subsequently, women with voices are no longer welcome, allegiances are claimed and compromised through bloodshed and incumbent death, curses are uttered and fate foreshadowed. When Juliet sends the nurse to relay a message to Romeo, she is greeted with unwelcome verbal jeers and inappropriate physicality by the young men of the town that culminates in her being thrown in the fountain and being the butt of a joke. It was the price she paid for coming into their territory and interrupting their boyish banter.

We also find this unruliness in our public school system, especially in schools that have a significant number of unrepresented students. Hamilton Middle School, my home school, is approximately 75% Latino. The school is filled with young people from single parent households. Many of young men have a rebellious nature and a disregard for authority because their mothers are ill equipped to discipline them, and the men are too audacious to try. A young man's take on

male authority is that it is trivial and a joke. The feeling is: “How are you going to try to control my behavior when I have never had a male figure in my life to guide me?” or “You don’t know me like that, and if my own father can’t do it, do you really think I’m going to allow some loud-talking man who doesn’t care about me do it?” These young men laugh in the faces of older men who don’t come at them “correctly” or with the respect that they haven’t earned but have tried to force through violence. These young people feel that not only do the people in the system that have rule over them know them, but they also are apathetic about speaking to their needs in a desire to make themselves look good or to avoid the complicated intricacies of the challenges they face daily. Below is an e-mail that reflects apathy to the reality of their lives in my fight to do *West Side Story*. For privacy sake, the name of the administrator will remain confidential. After proposing *West Side Story* for the annual spring musical, the administrator responded by asking:

ADMINISTRATOR: Is there not a musical that is more fitting for a middle school production? I am not crazy that the plot is a love story and it revolves around gangs.

My response, entitled “A humble attempt to address your concerns,” was as follows:

MRS. MOUTON: Why not focus on its {*West Side Story*’s} celebration of the ways Latino culture heavily influences the American performance mosaic? There is a lot of beautiful singing and dancing that has alone gained its distinctiveness from this musical (10 TONY awards). In response to your concern about the play focusing on love and gangs, what is the moral of the play? It teaches that gang violence and racism are destructive, thrusting the importance of oneness and the eradication of these ills. Also, the love story is extremely innocent, and the fight scenes are so beautifully choreographed that we can modify them to take place without weapons. I believe that for a school that is approximately 75% Latino, that is plagued by gang violence every other week (i.e., graffiti), as well as the fact that there has been an overwhelming overall teacher and student response to the proposal of this musical, I truly believe that this musical is more than appropriate, and most importantly, educational.

(E-mail, January 17, 2005)

This e-mail convinced the administrator to approve the musical, and it was a great success. I am in no way vilifying this administrator. I am making the statement that I believe that educators, and parents for matter, ignore dealing with the issues that define the reality of young lives they are responsible for everyday. It is dysfunctional that we deal with issues by ignoring their existence, trying to avoid them all together. This just reflects the reality that we do know all the answers and are afraid to explore the issues because we do not. Theatre is the perfect tool for us to partner with our youth in dealing with the real issues they deal with everyday. It is cathartic and safe for us as humans to use performance as a vehicle by which we face, negotiate, and ultimately resolve issues we face daily. In the safety and masking of theatre, we are also encouraged to become vulnerable, opening ourselves to the efficacy and therapy that is needed for personal transformation. This cannot be affected until we are courageous enough to use the dynamics of theatre for its intended purpose: a tool that fosters political awareness and involvement within the frame of an academic setting.

In a middle school setting, the reality is that youth approaching puberty start developing feelings for their peers of the opposite sex, to the point of developing relationships, culminating in physical intimacy, some to more degrees than others. It is also a reality that many if not most of these students have had some kind experience with gangs, and that gangs are definable as the

cliques they establish with their friends, finding courage and even audacity in the presence of the group.

Moreover, the assertion of power through control over territory, attitude, back-talk, and generally trivializing the authority of adults is another way youth use delinquency to assert authority and control in a society in which their voices are not heard, and the reality of their experiences are not addressed. In a report by the Houston Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, a gang is defined as:

Three or more people who have common sign symbols, leadership, and come together on a regular basis to commit crimes. Criminality is the real focus. A gang member is described as someone of the average age of 18, almost 19 years of age, predominantly Hispanic, predominantly male. About 10% of the gang population is female. (Section 4-3)

Clearly the application of this fact as it applies to my students is that a substantial amount of the demographic I teach is at risk for gang affiliation. The Mayor's Anti-Gang Office confirms this by commenting that:

Most gangs have both adult and juvenile members. The adult-juvenile interaction exposes the younger gang population to increased victimization and criminal prosecution because younger members are utilized by older members to commit both gang oriented and revenge crimes. This occurs in part because juveniles are subject to different sanctions and in part because they lack experience and judgment. (Section 4-3)

Ultimately, my students are at higher risk for the legal repercussions for gang activity because they are used as pawns for the commission of crimes. At an age when youth are attempting to establish an identity, allowing their peers to determine their worth, and trying to "get in where they fit in," a gang serves as a place where they have to prove themselves, especially if they live in a household where parents are too absent or apathetic to instill a healthy sense of self. Our performative exploration of *West Side Story* will reveal the repercussions of dysfunctional relationships, where the respect of your peers is earned and established by your transgressions towards your neighbor.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The comparative analyses between *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* has been an amazing journey of exploration and discovery. My students will be able to grasp the culturally relative aspects of both pieces, with *Romeo and Juliet* as the foundation and *West Side Story* as a subject for performative adaptation. My students have already begun to point out similarities and recognize their state in understanding the political motifs in *West Side Story* that apply to their lives and motivate them to participate in this undertaking. The process of discovery in this unit has compelled more questions and a desire to conduct further research on ideas and concepts coming from these works that would continue to benefit my students, using performance as a tool for political awareness and involvement.

UNIT PLANS

An introduction to the pragmatic application of this unit warrants exposure to the environmental circumstances governing my lesson planning. The areas to be addressed are Hamilton's *student demographic, academic context, surrounding environment, my unit timeline, lesson plan format, and cross-curricular/interdisciplinary application.*

Student Demographic

As stated in the unit introduction, Hamilton's student demographic is comprised of a population which is 75% Latino. If the students are not affiliated with a gang, they have directly

or indirectly experienced gang violence, even in its mildest form. The school itself has been vandalized on numerous occasions with spray paint illustrating gang symbols and the like staking a claim over the school as part of their territory. The vandalism alone comments on the need for theatre to serve as a political tool by which students are exposed to the fact that gang violence affects the community. It is difficult to have pride in a school riddled with spray paint and gang signs. This, coupled with the fact that the school is dated, makes for aesthetically environmental inhibitors to student motivation.

Academic Context

Coupled with the fact that Hamilton has experienced severe vandalism, the school is not an attractive edifice in general. The school is almost ninety-years old, and on the inside especially it looks like it. Fortunately with our Spark Park renovations, we have been able to make the outside look more attractive, but with Spark Park, we are also required to keep the park open to public when school is not in session, granting easy access to the school for vandalism. The inside looks very old, and there isn't much that can be done to remedy it, short of demolishing the entire building and starting from scratch. While adults can have an appreciation for the overall quaintness of the school, students see it as simply being old and unattractive. The school has a fine faculty and staff, however, and we do what we can to incite motivation through other avenues, such as student-managed gardens and plans for an outdoor classroom.

Environmental Context

There is a juxtaposition of two environments surrounding the Hamilton campus. You first have the humble working-class and middle-class households that have been inhabited by families of color for years, who probably have two or three generations that have already gone through Hamilton. The Heights has been going through the process of gentrification, however, and realtors are trying to buy these families out of their land, so they can demolish their homes and build more contemporary town or plantation style homes to cater to the interests of white middle-class and upper-class families.

Unit Timing

The theory behind the Unit will last one month, and the application of the unit, which will consist of the performance process, will last three months.

Lesson Plan Format: Retrospective Checks and Balances

“What worked?” “What did Work?” “What Can I Improve?” These questions will function as accountability tools as I execute the lesson and gauge student receptivity and overall effectiveness. Although I will not be able to predict the answers to these questions, after the lesson is over, the questions and space will allow me a literary platform for immediate reflection.

Cross-Curricular or Interdisciplinary Application

Galvanizing English Language Arts, Reading, and History teachers to partner with me in addressing some of the political and culturally sound aspects of the performance will not only further equip my students for performance but also keep them excited through the long, arduous process of analyses and execution.

LESSON PLAN ONE

Objective

What will my students be able to do by the end of this lesson?

How appropriate is the objective given my students ability and prior knowledge?

Students will work cooperatively in a timed brainstorming competition to come up with words or common phrases from *West Side Story* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The group that comes up with the most words and/or common phrases that no other group has wins. By the end of this lesson, students will realize that challenging themselves to think creatively and out of the box will be the quality that sets them apart from their peers. Given my students ability to brainstorm and apply their recognition of synonymous words to this activity, this lesson is quite appropriate.

Purpose

How and why is this objective relevant to my student's real life experience?

Why do my students need to know this?

This activity will allow students to engage in friendly competition will challenge them to think outside of the box while coming up with sophisticated words that they do not believe their peers will come up with. It will also compel them to view the films and reflect on the character development activities through the rehearsal process to make a mental record of discoveries made. The activity is also meant to illustrate the different ways in which people think. People's background and experiences elicit various frames of reference. With that said, this activity is meant to expose and cultivate appreciation for the various contributions each student will make based on the distinctive thought patterns of each individual.

This objective is relevant to my students' real life experience because it is a safe avenue by which they can dare to be different in order to come out on top. In a middle school, that is a difficult thing to negotiate as they try to fit in, and they often compromise their individuality to become a social clone. It also exposes them to the fact that people's differences enable them to make distinctive contributions that benefit the whole.

My students need to know this because they need to know that cultural relativism in these plays is something they can easily identify with their initial impressions. Their experience in viewing the movies, coupled with their experiences outside of the classroom, is what enables them to draw conclusions about the characters. Even associative words that come to mind function to inform us about culture.

Anticipatory Set/Focus

Does it grab the students' attention?

I will peak the students' interest by first getting them to think of anything that comes to mind when they think of their peers within the assigned group they are working. They will brainstorm these words given a limited time frame, about each other.

Rules

The rules are very loose and depend on each situation. Students will typically use nouns, proper nouns or verbs, but are more than welcome to use other parts of speech, as long as they make sense, and are applicable in some way to the subject matter. There will be some instances in which a mode of thinking may not make sense to the rest of the class. Typically this will result in accusation and interrogation of the way in which that person surmised a particular word or phrase. It is in that case that students will express a desire for clarity in a rough, confrontational way. The following script is a prescribed standard by which students will be allowed to interrogate and seek clarity without offense, while providing the group an opportunity to argue for, defend, or explain a word choice. It will be the responsibility of the teacher to censure negative commentary or gently defend or incinerate a contribution, thereby preserving a safe environment for self-expression.

Am I creating mental awareness by relating lesson to prior experiences?

Input/Modeling

I will model what I want them to do by sharing a brainstorming session of another student in the class or another character from a piece of work we have been exploring. It cannot be about them, however, because they know too much about themselves.

Do I use a variety of instructional techniques and strategies?

Are the students actively engaged?

Guided Practice

The guided practice will stem from the input/modeling I allow them to engage in through the brainstorming analyses of their peers. The facilitator of the game calls the name of the character while timing the activity. Students should be allowed no more than one minute and a half to corporately brainstorm words or phrases associated with a particular character. Students are to assign one scribe per group, and it is important to emphasize that this should be the scribes' primary responsibility. The scribes are to record everything they hear. Other group members should be verbally throwing out words for the scribe to catch with their writing implement to be stored and preserved on paper. It is important to emphasize that just because the scribes record the words, they are not wholly responsible for the thought that must go into getting the project done.

- How are my students going to practice with guidance, the objective?
- Is the practice directly related to the objective?
- Are my students actively engaged?
- How am I providing frequent, specific feedback?
- How do I check to make sure all students understand?
- How will I know when to move into independent practice?
- Am I re-teaching or providing the necessary amount of guidance when necessary?

Independent Practice

Students will be given a character and work feverishly and cooperatively together to come up with as many words as possible that they directly or indirectly associate with that character.

Students are to throw words out on the table, and the scribe is to record as many as possible within the time frame. They are not to interrogate each other's contribution during the brainstorming activity because this is a timed activity. The scribe, however, can use his or her discernment in determining whether it would be appropriate to document. It is better to record it and have it thrown out by the facilitator than to never know. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ultimately determine whether a word is appropriate for a particular brainstorming segment. It will also depend of the level of ability of the class as well as possible challenges the instructor may be putting on the group. The level of the group may determine the standard of excellence.

- Have I modeled my expectations?
- Does the independent activity practice the lessons objective?
- How will I give students feedback on the independent activity?

Closure

Bringing it back in

Each group will be rewarded after each session. Visibly witnessing groups get rewarded will give other groups incentive to work harder to try to win the next round.

- Have I reviewed the main concept/ideas?
- Is the importance and relevance of the objective to the students emphasized?
- Are my students actively engaged?

Reteach/Extension

- Have I prepared alternative engaging activities to re-teach the objective?
- Have I prepared alternative activities to challenge students?

An example of a character brainstorming of “Anita” from the *West Side Story* is as follows:

Feisty	Puerto Rican	Bi-lingual
Red Dress	Experienced	Vocal
Sultry	Bernardo	Sharks
Seductive	Maria	Spic
Sexy	Mother Figure	Pollack
Latina	Seamstress	Messenger
Spanish	Dancer	Stick to your own kind
Spain	Botox	Anita Baker
		The list could go on and on...

Lesson Timeline: *Two days*

LESSON PLAN TWO

Theatre of the Oppressed

Visual literacy...embodiment of literature...how do you read the way things look? These bodies tell you what...?

Objective

By the end of this lesson, my students will be able to use their bodies as vessels by which their peers will be able to read segments of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*. I will give them synonymous scenes from each movie, place them into groups, and have them perform duo scenes. The scenes will be selected based on main themes motifs and discussed prior. This will be their first performance. They are embodying or becoming the literature, and their peers will be able to read them: Visual literacy. They will then have the option of applying the scene to a real life experience by sculpting a scene that applies to their own lives and that in some way relates to the scenes they sculpted.

- What will my students be able to do by the end of this lesson?
- How appropriate is the objective given my students ability and prior knowledge?

Purpose

How and why is this objective relevant to my student's real life experience?

This objective is relevant in that it allows the students to have an efficacious outlet to reflect on and process what they witnessed in the movie. The students will also learn the importance of respectfully touching each other.

Why do my students need to know this?

This activity will allow students to engage in friendly competition will challenge them to think outside of the box while coming up with sophisticated words that they do not believe their peers will come up with. It will also compel them to view the films and reflect on the character development activities through the rehearsal process to make a mental record of their discoveries. The activity is also meant to illustrate the different ways in which people think. People's background and experiences elicit various frames of reference. With that said, this activity is meant to expose and cultivate appreciation for the various contributions each student will make based on the distinctive thought patterns of each individual.

Anticipatory Set/Focus

Does it grab the students' attention?

Students will be summonsed to attention by viewing freeze frames of the movie. I will first freeze scenes before the students even see the movie, or know the storyline, so we can examine and interpret what we see through body language, facial expression, physical proximity, and the like.

Am I creating mental awareness by relating lesson to prior experiences?

I will also use my students' obsession with photos as an impetus to help them understand that still pictures tell a story.

Input/Modeling

Do I use a variety of instructional techniques and strategies?

Yes: Photo's, movie freeze frames, and ultimately modeling before I have them engage in the activity.

Are the students actively engaged?

Guided Practice

I will divide the students into groups of between six and eight. They will sit in their groups as they get my specifics directions about what they are to do. I will model with at least one student from each group, and students can witness it. I will emphasize through modeling the importance full physical engagement from head to toe: The importance of focus, facial expression, the importance of the specific positioning of each limb, the importance of physical risks, etc., even if that means temporary discomfort, and most importantly, remaining in character. They must also choose one student in the group who will actually do the molding. This designated person may not be part of the freeze frame. I will also introduce the importance of cross-gender performance. If there is a freeze frame that does not include one gender, or includes an animal, it will be emphasized the importance of someone enacting that role for the sake of the entire group.

- *How are my students going to practice with guidance, the objective?*
- *Is the practice directly related to the objective?*
- *Are my students actively engaged?*
- *How am I providing frequent, specific feedback?*
- *How do I check to make sure all students understand?*
- *How will I know when to move into independent practice?*
- *Am I reteaching or providing the necessary amount of guidance when necessary?*

Independent Practice

I will give each group two comparative scenes: one from the *West Side Story* and one from *Romeo and Juliet*. The rest of the class will not know which ones a particular group has. The students must illustrate what scene they have through physical embodiment. One group at a time will engage in their specific freeze frames. The rest of the class will be able to look at and interact with them as if they are physical sculptures, and from the details of their physical placing, they must surmise which scene they are examining.

- Have I modeled my expectations?
- Does the independent activity practice the lessons objective?
- How will I give students feedback on the independent activity?

Closure

We will conclude the assignment by discussing what we saw, new discoveries made, giving constructive criticism and kudos, levels of commitment, and grading each other based on a prescribed rubric. We will ultimately culminate in a discussion of how this helped the artists develop more intimacy with the text through embodiment, and we will discuss how the viewers were able to achieve more intimacy with the text by “reading” the bodies.

- Have I reviewed the main concept/ideas?
- Is the importance and relevance of the objective to the students emphasized?
- Are my students actively engaged?

Re-teach/Extension:

For an extension of what has already transpired, I will have each group come up with a theme that ran through the particular scene they framed and apply it to a real life experience a member of the group may have had. They will sculpt the bodies one more time, and then the students will share what they “read” from the body language.

- Have I prepared alternative engaging activities to re-teach the objective?
- Have I prepared alternative activities to challenge students?

Who am I? CSI: Character Artifacts Investigation.

LESSON PLAN THREE

Objective

What will my students be able to do by the end of this lesson?

By the end of this lesson, my students will be able to establish an even closer intimacy with the characters of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, by exploring the personalities of the people by what we imagine they may have. These items can exist in the form of props, costumes, and the like, that the students themselves will provide. This assignment will enable them to work together to explore particular items their assigned character might own. They will accumulate these items from their own households, and whatever props they do not own, they will have to make. They may choose to make more intimate props like letters, photos, etc. The more effort they place, the better their grade. Not only will the students have to produce props based on the character’s personality, they will have to produce archetypal items based on the context—the times and conditions in which the character lives. This will culminate as a research project as well, because they may have to engage in computer research that governs things that are applicable to a particular era.

- How appropriate is the objective given my students ability and prior knowledge?

Purpose

This objective is completely appropriate because it helps them to realize that people learn a lot about each other from their possessions. A person's personality is often revealed through their possessions. You can usually tell a person's race, class, gender, and the like, from what they carry around with them.

- How and why is this objective relevant to my student's real life experience?
- Why do my students need to know this?

Anticipatory Set/Focus:

My first anticipatory set will be an excerpt from CSI. I will particularly use an episode of a man who died because he did not have any more air in his inhaler. Without the crime team ever having to look at his medical records, they saw his inhaler near him, on the floor, and after further examination, discovered it was empty. This informs us that we even learn about people's illnesses from what they have. We will also play, or at least refer to the alphabet game, if we have played it already, to tie in the discoveries made about peers through this cooperative learning and team building activity.

- Does it grab the students' attention?
- Am I creating mental awareness by relating lesson to prior experiences?

Input/Modeling

What I will do is bring in a set of items from a "minor" character we have interacted with in one of the plays, and bring a box of archetypal items that reflect an intimacy into the nuances of his/her character.

- Do I use a variety of instructional techniques and strategies?
- Are the students actively engaged?

Guided Practice

We will corporately conduct research in the school computer lab to get an idea of the time and conditions the character lived in. We will also spend a day in the library doing the same thing. Once the kids are introduced to one experience, they can follow with independent Internet research and library visits.

- How are my students going to practice with guidance, the objective?
- Is the practice directly related to the objective?
- Are my students actively engaged?
- How am I providing frequent, specific feedback?
- How do I check to make sure all students understand?
- How will I know when to move into independent practice?
- Am I reteaching or providing the necessary amount of guidance when necessary?

Independent Practice:

Students will ultimately present their projects to the rest of the class, and there will be a small class fair at which we will display each other's work and interact with it, thereby gaining a closer look and increased intimacy with the lives of the characters.

- Have I modeled my expectations?
- Does the independent activity practice the lessons objective?
- How will I give students feedback on the independent activity?

Closure

The students will explore what they learned from this project and how people's possessions tell us a lot about them.

- Have I reviewed the main concept/ideas?
- Is the importance and relevance of the objective to the students emphasized?
- Are my students actively engaged?

Reteach/Extension

Students will have an extended project of creating a collage from all the research they gathered that will culminate in the finale of their research project on each character. A further extension will examine archetypal items these characters would have if they lived in our day and age: how they would dress, things they would own, and where they would live today. This juxtaposition of eras would be reflected in their collages.

- Have I prepared alternative engaging activities to re-teach the objective?
- Have I prepared alternative activities to challenge students?

Projected Timeline: 2-3 Weeks

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

Books

Ardrey, Robert. *The Territorial Imperative: A Personal Inquiry into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations*. New York: Kodansha America Incorporated, 1997.

This piece has been instrumental in facilitating an understanding of human's tendency to be possessive of space that is limited yet communal. This book will support future research aspirations that focus on the commodification of women as property to be fought over and conquered as well.

Cisneros, Sandra. "A House of My Own." *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Random House, 1984. 108.

Sandra Cisneros's charming book of literary vignettes captures the essence of the Latin *barrio* (another word for *Mexican ghetto*) experience through the transcendental eyes of a young visionary, *Esperanza* a name meaning *hope*. This work, which served as the primary text in my first HTI unit, revealed the frustration of a young person of color who feels suffocated and frustrated due to limited living space.

Scholarly Articles

Brown, Nina. "Edward T. Hall: Proxemic Theory, 1966." Regents of University of California.

<<http://www.csiss.org/classics/content/13>>.

Brown's examination of Hall's theory of proxemic comfortability across cultures facilitated my understanding of how culture clashes can occur based on differing perspectives on the importance of various degrees of personal space. Since the fight over space was a primary bone of contingency in *West Side Story*, this article exposed how people who come from different backgrounds come with disparate paradigms when it comes to perceptions about public space.

Wilmer, S.E. "Restaging the Nation: The Work of Suzan-Lori Parks." *Modern Drama*. Fall 2000. Volume 43, 3.

This work supported my theory that in hopeless circumstances, it is sometimes human nature to assert control by acting as an agent in one's fate. This idea is developed in the section "The Psychology of Young Male Delinquency."

Films

West Side Story. Dir. Robert Wise & Jerome Robbins. Per. Natalie Wood. MGM, 1961.

This work served as the primary source from which this curriculum unit was inspired. This timeless classic deals with the ever-evolving issues of race, class, and gender discrimination that has ironically been juxtaposed against ideal of the American Dream

Romeo & Juliet. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Paramount, 1968.

This work also served as the foundational source upon which the curriculum unit was inspired. This Shakespearean play illustrates his critical commentary about the arbitrary issues that foster hate in humankind.

Interviews

Garcia, Crystal. Interview. Starbucks, Uptown Park Shopping Centre, Houston. 28. April 2005.

This interview exposed me to a young adult female's retrospective account of her quinceanera.

Maldonado, Esmerelda. Interview. Alexander Hamilton Middle School, Houston. 15. May 2005.

This interview afforded me exposure to the "in the now" preparations that one of my students is in the midst of for her quinceanera.

Poetry

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *We Real Cool*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1966.

Thesis

Krupa, Frederique. *The Privatization of Public Space*. M.A. Thesis. Parsons New York, 1993.

<<http://www.translucency.com/frede/pps.html>>.

This article examines the Darwinist tendency among humans to stake claim over public territory, driving other out, and coercively gaining respect. Gangs tend to evoke fear in communities due to this tendency, making space in an already isolated exiled community that much smaller.

Musical Compositions

Bernstein, Leonard. *When You're a Jet*.

This song exposes the mentality youth who establish their identity through their gang affiliation, and can be further examined in the section, "Gangs as Family."

Bernstein, Leonard. *Gee, Officer Krupke*.

This song is an ironic, cynical account of a misunderstood young man in the ghetto whose journey culminates in him becoming a statistic. This Song is examined in further detail in the Section, "The Psychology of Young Male Delinquency."

Government Publication

City of Houston Mayor's Anti-Gang Office Presentation. Gang Reduction Team. *A Victim's Service Program to Reduce Gang Violence in Houston and the Greater Harris County Area*. Houston, Texas: Section 4-3, 2001.

This Publication confirmed exposed the Latino Male demographic as the main component that makes up gang affiliates. This article justifies the need for this modern day issue to be addressed through the performative adaptation of *West Side Story*.