

**Spitin' One's Love Like The Bard or Baller:  
Lessons in Love through a Comparative Study of  
Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Jay-Z's *Bonnie and Clyde*, and Usher's *My Boo***

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**? INTRODUCTION—‘*Young men’s love, then, lies not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes’ (Romeo and Juliet 2.3.71-72)***

My girlfriend and I are pretty serious about each other. I'm a year older, so I'll graduate before she does. I've been thinking about going to community college for a year, and then we can go to the same college together. If everything goes well, maybe we'll end up getting married. The thing is, my parents don't seem real excited about this idea. They say that time apart can be good and that I need to grow up a little before I'll know if we should be together. But they got married right out of high school, and they seem fine. Do you think my plan is a bad idea? (“Love, Sex & Real Life” 58)

Taken from an advice column for teens regarding issues about love, sex and real life, this excerpt best captures many of the issues our teenage students deal with on a regular basis. Does he/she really love me? Do I really love him/her? What should I do about our relationship? What's our future together? Why aren't my parents supportive? And the list goes on...

Now I'm no licensed clinical therapist, but in response to the young teen's aforementioned issue, I would advise him to go ahead and attend the college of his dreams, and use his freshman year, apart from his girlfriend, as a time to discover more about himself. Although they may be miserable, longing desperately for each other's company during the first two to three months, a year away will prove to be the ultimate test of their relationship. By the end of the year, it will provide better clarity on the extent of their love for one another. But then again, what do I know? I'm just a teacher, a fact my students often remind me of when I begin to share sound advice regarding the ever present, ever endless teen “crises” brought before me. You see, from their viewpoint, teachers are just like their parents. We've never had a crush on anyone. We've never been in a romantic relationship, let alone dated. Nor have we ever been in love. We simply grew up in a glass cylinder, glued to the books and miraculously found ourselves teaching and married or, in my case, still single. Life just passed us by.

I'm sure you may have found yourself shocked by student perception of your “inability” to relate with them on personal issues regarding relationships, and the truth of the matter is, in some ways, we can't. One teacher shared with me that one of her students wanted to know what she should do in response to her boyfriend's pressure on her to have a baby. “Have a baby?!?!?” I thought in bewilderment. You see, I'm aware that teenage pregnancy exists, but to have to deal with this issue at such a young age was extremely hard for me to grasp. At least, when I was in the seventh grade, being my girlfriend meant that she checked the little yes-box on a sheet of paper that asked, “Do you want to be my girlfriend? Check Yes or No,” far removed from the ever-growing teenage pregnancy process. I had never even encountered teenage mothers until my junior and senior years of high school. And those encounters were far and few between.

Yes, times have indeed changed, but, one issue that has transcended generations and, not to sound anymore cliché-ish, withstood the test of time is none other than *love*. As a seventh grade

Language Arts teacher, I noticed that love seems to be the most prevalent theme of the year. According to popular belief, hormones in adolescents begin to go in overdrive around the age of 11-12. From past observations as a former sixth grade teacher, I discovered that students are strongly tied to their gender group. Whenever given group work, sixth graders will arrange themselves along the gender line—boys vs. girls. But by seventh grade, it seems like puberty hits them like a hurricane caught in a tornado, and we, the teachers, often have to board our biases to do whatever it takes to avoid potential natural disasters. Even in high school, we see further signs of this teenage propensity to love.

In actuality, however, recent research suggests that raging hormones are not the cause of adolescents' "recklessness and unpredictable mood swings" (Crenson 1). It all stems from brain development (Crenson 1). According to Fulton Crews, a neuroscientist at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, "the adolescent brain is different. It's still growing" (Crenson 1). He and other neuroscientists explain that, "beginning around age 11, the brain undergoes major reorganization in an area associated with things like social behavior and impulse control" (Crenson 2). As a result of this reorganization, their studies suggest that teens do not "handle social pressure, instinctual urges and other stresses the way adults do...because their brains are not yet mature" (Crenson 2).

I would find it even more interesting if neuroscientists could identify and correlate the stages of neurological development to some of the strange behaviors we experience at school. For instance, what stage of development would you classify Maria whom you've told over and over that the passing period is not an opportunity to make-out with your boyfriend in the stairwell? Or what about Johnny, who doesn't quite seem to understand how to keep his hands to himself and not on the body parts of his fellow female classmates. If brain growth is now the new leading cause of adolescent behaviors, one wonders what then helps to advance the brain maturation process.

Again, I believe this brings us back to the issue of *love*. It's the universal song of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade self. To count the number of hearts I've seen drawn on desks or bulletin boards or to show you student love-letters I've collected over the years would take at least another twenty pages of publication. But in the interest of time and space, I must say that "[love's] the thing... [that drives] the conscience of the [teen]" (*Hamlet* 2.3).

If we look out in the world, I'm reminded of a young teenage Brazilian couple—Adriano and Fernanda—who ran away from their parents for three days because of Adriano's mother's decision to move her family 500 miles away from their current residence in Rio de Janeiro. Since the two had "promised they would never let anything come between them" (LaFranchi 15), they migrated to three of Brazil's "most dangerous cities" (LaFranchi 15) in search of employment and shelter. Meanwhile, the couple tried to negotiate marrying rights with their parents in exchange for their return home. But to no avail, as their parents were unwilling to negotiate, and ultimately, Adriano and Fernanda found themselves home again, "vowing that someday they would be married" (LaFranchi 15).

Romantic relationships are a pivotal turning point in the life of a teen. According to a recent quantitative study of 168 Israeli adolescents (ages 14-19) that examined the role of age, gender, and dating experience in adolescent romantic behaviors and perceptions, researchers Shmuel Shulman and Miri Scharf discovered the following:

- Among older adolescents there was a higher chance that they were currently engaged in a romantic relationship.
- Fourteen-year-olds reported more than 16-year-olds that they had dated in the past.
- Romantic relationships of 19-year-olds lasted longer than those of younger adolescents.

- Girls across all age groups were engaged in relationships of longer duration and reported a higher level of affective intensity with their romantic partner.
- Currently dating adolescents reported a higher frequency of interaction of higher levels of sexual intimacy and affective intensity in their relationships than adolescents reporting on relationships that had ended.

Another result I found of equal significance was that “younger adolescents emphasized aspects of friendship or companionship in their romantic relationships, whereas this tendency was lower only among the 19-year-olds” (Scarf and Shulman 7). This finding further supported previous research by Furhman and Wehner (1994), who suggest that younger adolescents (14 -16 years-old) perceive their romantic partners as friends and companions, “providing experiences of cooperation and reciprocity” (Scarf and Shulman 7), while older adolescents (19 years-old) view their partners as sources of support, comfort and care-giving.

Without a doubt, no other classic text best explores and deals with the issues of teenage love and relationships than William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Here, we have two young, ‘star-crossed lovers’ whose love transcends the violent, old hate between their families. Talk about drama. Moreover, I am equally reminded of Jay Z’s “Bonnie and Clyde” in which the rapper declares that “all [he] needs in this life of sin, is [him] and [his] girlfriend” while Usher fondly reminisces over his first love who has moved on to another lover in “My Boo.” Through their aforementioned works, I believe Shakespeare, Jay Z and Usher invite us teachers to take an academic, literary step in the name of love.

**? RATIONALE — ‘For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and Romeo’  
(*Romeo and Juliet* 5.3.319-21)**

Now, you’re probably wondering, “Why Shakespeare?” And my simple retort to this question would be, “Why not?” For decades, Shakespeare has been one the most studied playwrights in English classrooms across the country. You would almost have to bathe yourself in a vat of red wine before you could escape the sprawling shadows of Shakespeare in the high school curriculum.

I remember my first encounter with the Bard. It was the spring semester of my freshman year in high school, and we had to tackle the violence and betrayals found within *Julius Caesar*. Although I must admit that reading the text was a wrestling match within itself, especially keeping my thou’s, thee’s and thine’s straight, I truly enjoyed watching the dramatic and situational ironies unfold leading up to the very moment of Julius Caesar’s untimely death. “Wow!” I remember thinking. “What an ultimate act of betrayal!” Such study of *Julius Caesar* further caused me to reevaluate my personal friendships to determine if my “friends” truly had my best interest at heart or if they were undercover conspirators out to bring me down. I would later discover one to be a true Brutus as he sought to claim hold of my presidency of the Future Business Leaders of America (F.B.L.A.) club by a mere rumor. Moreover, the *Julius Caesar* unit that Ms. Mazzola, my freshman high school English muse, covered afforded me the first experience of connecting, what I thought to be at the time, a pre-historic text, to my modern-day world. And it was from this unit that I gained a greater appreciation for studying Shakespeare.

Likewise, I hope this unit will offer students the opportunity of relating a classic teenage love story to the relationships of their own lives, enabling them to put things into a larger perspective. Maybe your Beatrice will discover that her love for Juan is dangerous and not really a healthy relationship. Or, maybe your Juan may come to grips with the fact that he is caught between two loves, both equally grounded on feelings of comradeship and not affection. I don’t know what the outcome may be in your classroom, but I do hope that this unit will provide your students with the opportunity to explore the play’s treatment of love, express their opinions about it, construct a heightened understanding of the theme and apply it to real-life situations. Students

will be motivated to unleash their higher-order critical thinking skills as they approach the text in a way that will enrich their learning experience and overall appreciation for Shakespeare.

Now you may be wondering, “Teacher, please! I’ve taught for X number of years, and I have yet to experience the vision your unit proposes.” And this may be, in fact, due to long-held notions of how you think Shakespeare should be taught. According to Shakespearean educator and scholar Peggy O’Brien in her article, “Doing Shakespeare: ‘Yo! A hit! A Very Palpable Hit,’” many teachers in American schools still believe these old myths:

- Shakespeare is only for the very bright, the very fleet of mind
- Students should like [Shakespeare]
- [Students] should be moved by it
- It should be taught the right way
- Students should understand it all: plot, character, history, maybe sources, imagery, scansion, themes, criticism, and, of course, the meaning of every word
- Shakespeare should be read, studied, [and] pored over. (2)

I’m sure, like myself, you could have bubbled in some or all of the aforementioned prejudices, but to counter these foolish beliefs, I agree with O’Brien on these points: 1) all students, despite their ability and reading levels, can study Shakespeare; 2) the teacher’s job is to function as a tour guide and not a translator; 3) students learn best by actively engaging in Shakespeare; 4) students excel when they make their own connections with the text (3).

Yes, with these newfound teaching philosophies that have “stood the test of time and experience in schools all over [the U.S.],” (3) this Shakespeare unit will surely be a ‘palpable hit!’ Yet, given the context of your unique learning environment, the only thing you may find to be a ‘hit’ is your head up against the wall over and over again as you scramble for innovative ways to hook your students into Shakespeare. You may be that helpless teacher assigned to instruct a group of minority students who constantly complain about your class. They find the subject matter you teach to be “stupid and boring.” They find the texts you cover to be “stupid and boring.” And, of course, they find your thirty-minute monotonous lectures everyday to be an outright, detestable bore. Sitting in your classroom for them is like watching a rerun special of some random still life, black-and-white movie from the thirties. BORING! BOORING! BOOORING! Hence, you definitely do not want to encourage this attitude to plague their initial encounter of Shakespeare and his works.

As a result of your potential fears, I decided to take a *Dewey-an* approach to this unit. Reflecting on some of the educational philosophies of past pioneers in American education, I believe that no other pioneer seems to come close to hinting towards a possible solution to motivating student learning than John Dewey. Perceiving students as “socially active human beings who are eager to explore and gain control over their environment” (Ornstein and Levin 146), Dewey believed that learning came through experience. Students learned as a result of interacting with their environment and using their problem-solving skills to meet the personal and social challenges they faced throughout the process.

Moreover, Dewey viewed education as ‘that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which add[ed] to meaning of experience, and which increase[ed] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience’ (Ornstein and Levin 147). In other words, Dewey believed that education stemmed from one’s cultural heritage, which was in turn used to shape his/her subsequent learning. Therefore, he asserted that ‘some interest, some bond of connection must be found’ (Hootstein 478) between students and school curricula.

In his article, “Enhancing Student Motivation,” Edward Hootstein mentions that Dewey urged educators to focus on the “whole child” (477), thus, prompting them to relate the subject

matter to the students' needs beyond the confines of their classroom. Similarly, as part of his motivational strategies to make learning interesting and relevant, Hootstein encourages teachers to give students a sense of control of their learning and help students connect learning to their needs and interests. Still, Hootstein's Dewey-inspired strategies seem to fall short in practice because none of his explanations on how the strategies will work seem to address the social and, most importantly, cultural issues students face. In fact, the scenario of the two students' educational experiences interwoven throughout his article only appears to skim the surface of student motivational issues. Hootstein's strategies are not grounded enough in reality, especially for an urban educator.

Although this may come across to some novice teacher as disappointing news, there is research that supports strategies that do, in fact, work. These strategies are not just things to do to meet students' immediate needs in the classroom. Instead, they stem from a theoretical framework. If we continue thinking along Dewey's student-centered philosophies but advance them to meet modern societal challenges, a possible solution to motivating student learning and increasing academic achievement could be found in a culturally relevant curriculum, elements of which I incorporate in this unit through the use of two popular hip-hop songs.

Because students do not live in a vacuum, devoid of human interaction, their respective cultures play a dominant role in their education. By definition, culture is defined as "all the continually changing patterns of acquired behavior and attitudes transmitted among the members of society" (Ornstein and Levin 296). It is a group's repertoire of shared ideas, accumulated beliefs, traditions, rules, memories, habits, and values. Thus, Allan Ornstein and Daniel Levine contend that "neither a single individual, nor a group, nor an entire society can be understood without reference to culture" (296).

Yet, educational researchers Donna Ford, J. John Harris, Tyrone Howard and Cynthia Tyson note that discrepancies arise, often times, when teachers view culture from a deficit perspective through such terms as *culturally disadvantaged* or *culturally deprived*. According to these researchers, such terms imply "the mainstream culture as the norm and its responses as 'normal,' while deviations are viewed as dysfunctional or in some other way inferior" (398). They explain that this perspective poses a threat to minority students to whom education becomes a repressive force. But regardless of the cultural view an educator may hold, the "cultural mismatch theory" (Ford, Harris, Howard and Tyson 399) suggests that when the teaching and learning dynamics between a teacher and student are culturally incongruent, negative outcomes reflect on student achievement (400). Therefore, it seems imperative that the teaching practices and curriculum of educators be "culturally relevant" (Ladson-Billings 160) to students.

In her article, "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," Gloria Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant teaching as "a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (160). Like critical theorists, most culturally relevant educators view the conventional curriculum as Eurocentric, racist, sexist and imperialistic. They argue for it to be deconstructed and then reorganized to include different cultural experiences and perspectives, especially those neglected in the past. Thus, from this perspective, schools serve as liberating agencies. Ladson-Billings further explains that the foundation of culturally relevant teaching rests on three principles:

- (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (160)

Hence, Ladson-Billings feels that these principles will enable a culturally relevant pedagogy to produce successful results in the classroom.

Throughout her article, Ladson-Billings reports her findings from a three-year study she conducted of eight successful culturally relevant teachers of African American students. During her study, she admits that she initially could not find any patterns or similarities in their teaching until she was able to reflect on her research. After doing so, she was able to “see that, in order to understand their practice, it was necessary to go beyond the surface features of teaching ‘strategies’ [and into] the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their [teaching]” (162). She, likewise, reports that all of the teachers strongly identified with the field of teaching, held themselves accountable to guaranteeing the success of each student, attempted to create bonds with all of the students, maintained a presence in their students’ community, encouraged students to learn collaboratively, and displayed a passion about what they were teaching. These teachers also did not depend on state curriculum frameworks or textbooks to decide what and how to teach and remained critical of the content of their district’s curriculum.

To move away from the theory and into the strategies, however, Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote a previous article entitled, “Reading between the Lines and Beyond the Pages: a Culturally Relevant Approach to Literacy Teaching,” in which she cites some specific examples of culturally relevant teaching practices of two of the eight teachers in her three-year study. Although one would assume that both teachers were African American, one teacher was, in fact, Italian American. In this sixth grade teacher’s “visually and aurally busy” (315) classroom, the students developed webs and mind maps to categorize and classify their thinking about various aspects of a class novel (*Charlie Pippin*) that dealt with the strained relationship between an 11-year-old African American girl and her Vietnam War-veteran dad. The students also worked in groups to write letters to the main character and to the author, while their interest in the Vietnam War culminated with a display of books, posters, pictures, maps and student writing about the Vietnam War. Ladson-Billings also notes that the teacher further connected war-related issues in the novel to, at that time, present-day concerns about the Persian Gulf War. Their classroom discussions, consequently, inspired students, like one of the main characters in the novel, to make paper cranes as symbols for peace.

In the other teacher’s classroom, however, Ladson-Billings describes the second teacher’s practice as completely opposite to that of the first. The second teacher, who is African American and teaches 4<sup>th</sup> grade, introduced vocabulary words, set the purpose for reading, called on various students to read aloud and asked questions to check for student comprehension. Hence, Ladson-Billings mentions that the second teacher “appear[ed] to place more emphasis on assessing students’ skills and mastery of the individual elements taught each day...[and] often [set] up competitive structures in her classroom but [built] them within a cooperative framework (i.e. team contests)” (316).

Of the similarities between both teachers, one culturally relevant strategy Ladson-Billings acknowledges, before slipping into theory mode again, is that both teachers use African American culture as a frame of reference for all texts and embrace the linguistic aesthetics within the Black vernacular. She points out that, because both teachers are fluent in “Black English” (317), they gain access into the students’ world and provide students with easy access to standard forms of English. Known by many linguists as “code switching” (317), Ladson-Billings contends that students are better prepared to accept Standard English because the teacher is able to teach them by both “precept and example the usefulness and appropriateness of the Black linguistic style” (317).

Still, Ladson-Billings’s comparison of the two teachers’ strategies briefly covers an equally important concept that educators must further embrace in order for a culturally relevant curriculum to work. Simply stated in “Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms for Gifted African American Students,” “the more educators understand the cultural background and styles

of minority groups, the more minority students will achieve” (Ford, Harris, Howard and Tyson 400). In other words, teachers must develop and maintain a cultural competence of their students.

Throughout the article, the researchers cite past research as having pinpointed the occurrence of cultural differences along four dimensions in dealing with Black youth—communication style, social interaction style, response style and linguistic style (402). According to research conducted by Pasteur and Toldson, African Americans have an expressive style called “frankness of matter” (402) or telling it like it is. Ford and Harris, et al. explain that from a Black student’s perspective, this “frankness of matter” can be culturally viewed as being honest and direct whereas White teachers may “receive it as abrasive, confrontational or disrespectful” (402). In addition, they contend that, nonverbally, African Americans are adept at showing their words and reading body language. In terms of social interaction style, they note that much research supports the idea that African American students are social and often prefer to work in groups. This group of researchers states that “collective or shared responsibility, group needs, cooperation and patience are all valued [within the culture]” (403). Other cultural observations supported by research that they mention include the notions that African American students engage in a great deal of affection, actively and consciously attempt to “make statements about their resistance to invisibility and conformity to White norms,” are creative with language and thus enjoy “storytelling, jokes, puns, paradoxes, proverbs, innuendoes and wordplay” (403-4).

Ford, Harris, Howard, Tyson and Ladson-Billings’s research studies provide us with an understanding of cultural idiosyncrasies of African Americans, but one still wonders about how a culturally relevant curriculum would affect other minority groups because when you consider the disappointing statistics such as Hispanics having the highest drop-out rate among minorities that is nearly twice the national average, one begins to question why researchers seem to have overlooked other minority groups. In fact, not once did any of my research on culturally relevant pedagogy imply teaching strategies for Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Alaskan native or Native American students. All of the research studies seemed to have had an Afro-centric focus that ignored the other 18% of minority children who comprise 33% of U.S. children between the ages of 5 and 17 (“Public Schools Help Us Meet Vital Needs of Students” 7). On the other hand, this lack of research could indicate the need for more studies to be done on other minority groups.

Nevertheless, this discrepancy led me to reflect upon my own field experience as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher in a predominately Hispanic middle school. Although I could easily relate to a lot of the researchers’ cultural findings on African American students due to my own African American heritage, I couldn’t help but to ponder, from an educator’s point-of-view, the similarities between Hispanic students and African American students that would embrace a culturally relevant curriculum designed to motivate student achievement. And after hours of deep thought, an epiphany hit me—no matter where you teach in the U.S., most kids nowadays love and crave hip-hop. Why not consider a culturally relevant curriculum from a hip-hop perspective?

In Dianne Hayes’s article, “Educating the Hip-Hop Generation,” Hayes sheds light on how hip-hop music has become a mainstream phenomenon. She cites its strong presence in commercials, at professional sporting events and all throughout the media. Haynes even extends the music to epitomize the culture of today’s youth. For instance, she states, “[Students] are the generation of fast visual images, working parents, expendable income and street knowledge,...and when it comes to education, [they] wish to see themselves fairly reflected in [it]” (30). Moreover, to refute the popular criticisms of hip-hop as being sexist, violent, misogynistic and outright profane, Haynes contends that there are many other rappers who preach unity, self-esteem and self-respect and further foresees their creativity and talent funneled into the classroom. However, she offers no pedagogical possibilities.

Despite her shortcomings in terms of connecting this “indisputably...dominant youth culture” (Evelyn 24) to the curriculum, there is, indeed, evidence of hip-hop entering the public school system. For example, in a local elementary school in St. Petersburg, Florida, ballet is being replaced by hip-hop. Apparently, due to a very low student-interest in ballet, which was “one of [the school’s] most intriguing features when it first debuted in 1999” (King 1), the school’s dance teacher decided to replace it with hip-hop. Over eighty kids signed up for lessons as a result. Meanwhile, kindergartners in Bergen County, New Jersey are ‘learning [to read] a lot faster’ (Han L03) through singing “hip-hop nursery rhymes” (Han L03).

Similarly, high school students in Piney Woods, Mississippi are grooving to a hip-hop CD their principal produced to instill values within his students—values “about ambition, about behavior [and] about learning the lessons of life” (Beady 5). The principal, Charles Beady, explains, that “if [educators] can find a way to tap into the popular culture that captivates youngsters and use its power to motivate and educate, we will have a powerful teaching tool at our disposal” (4). Therefore, I envision a more extensive use of hip-hop in the classroom.

If we revisit Ladson-Billings’s “But That’s Just Good Teaching,” part of this vision is realized as Ladson-Billings describes how one culturally relevant teacher’s love of poetry is shared through the students’ love of rap music. In this example, she notes that the students were encouraged to bring in samples of non-offensive rap lyrics and perform the songs before the class. Meanwhile, the teacher made transparencies of the lyrics to discuss their literal and figurative meanings in addition to literary conventions in poetry. She not only suggests that this lesson integrates academic achievement with cultural competence but also reveals that “[the students’] understanding of poetry far exceeded what either the state department of education or the local school district required” (161).

From another angle of culturally relevant pedagogy rooted in hip-hop, Jabari Mahrin’s qualitative research on a hip-hop curriculum aligns even closer to the precepts of what I envision a culturally relevant hip-hop curriculum to be. In his article, “Streets to Schools,” Mahiri reveals his findings of a research project he conducted in the eleventh-grade English classes of two teachers from different urban high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the article does not feature specific components of the curriculum, the two teachers, essentially, used various texts and media from hip-hop to have students initially develop skills in writing similar texts and then transfer those skills to other kinds of writing.

Among his observations, he notes that one of the biggest challenges experienced by the teachers was the distinct generational differences between themselves and their students. Mahiri explains that “it [became] problematic when these two teachers’ students were more knowledgeable than their teachers on many aspects of the project’s curriculum content” (336). But what enabled the teachers to overcome this problem was their decision to see themselves as ethnographers and their students as “‘informants’ [of] their cultural knowledge and experiences” (336). Mahiri also points out that, in some instances, the students realized that they did not know as much as they thought they knew about the cultural material, and by the teacher acting as an ethnographer, the students “[took] more responsibility for and [felt] more ownership of their learning” (337).

Moreover, Mahiri mentions that other challenges dealt with cultural resistance. He reports that, initially, some students, who viewed their education and life as separate experiences, resisted being taught from this culturally relevant pedagogy because they were not comfortable with the curricular connections to their world or with the teachers, whom they considered to be outside of their culture despite shared ethnicity. But Mahiri contends that most of the students were drawn to the curriculum by the very content of the cultural material. He explains his rationale:



Because hip hop and rap texts inherently bring into their critique perspectives of race, class, gender, ethnicity, power and authority that are problematic in schools as well as in the larger society, students who had felt marginalized found that a context had been created for their voices and participation. (338)

Another cultural resistance issue involves language use. Although Mahiri and the teachers set up rules about what was and was not permissible before the project, he admits that they did encounter problems in honoring student views and voices but that these problems opened the way for them to address both ethical and aesthetic aspects of curriculum materials and encouraged the discussion of the students,' teachers' and researchers' concerns about learning. Overall, Mahiri concludes that the curriculum motivated and enhanced student learning in many ways.

What does all of this research suggest?

Simply put, student motivation and achievement will occur when students' culture is invested into the curriculum. Regardless of race, ethnicity, regional location, economic status, gender or religion, hip-hop is a way of life for many of our students. Just from an industry's perspective, we see its success. For according to a 2001 article in *Ebony* magazine, "one out of every ten records sold in America is hip-hop; hip-hop passed country music last year to become the third largest music category behind pop and R&B; and it is an industry that grossed \$3 billion last year" (qtd. in Beady 32).

Now why can't we, educators, enjoy parallel success in our classrooms through tapping into this cultural phenomenon, especially when teaching Shakespeare?

So far, hip-hop is slowly creeping its way into literary studies. For instance, in a Crenshaw High School language arts classroom, English teacher Patrick Camangian segues into classical texts using hip-hop. In one lesson, he has his students choose a song that has made a significant impact upon their life. After reading a typed copy of the rap lyrics, he and his students discuss and analyze its content and aesthetic qualities. "I [want] them to understand the vividness and sound of language so that they'll come to realize—wow, the sound of words is a beautiful thing," Camangian says ("Shakur Joins Shakespeare" 1). Eventually, he notes that this is "[one] way of getting into *The Great Gatsby*" ("Shakur Joins Shakespeare"1). Meanwhile, in a 2002 study of an Oakland High School program that uses hip-hop as a companion piece with classical texts, University of California researchers reached the conclusion that 'hip-hop can be used as a bridge linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the world of academics.' (The Age 1) In other instances, college students have even translated Shakespearean texts into hip-hop raps such as that found in *The Bomb-itty of Errors*, an 'ad-rap-tation' of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* by four NYU theatre majors (CNNfyi.com 1).

Although hip-hop is gradually breaking ground in mainstream education, your eyes still may be searching for the "cheat sheet" or teacher's guide to this up-and-coming teaching tool. Unfortunately, I must admit that, throughout my research, I could not find a single curriculum unit that explored the use of hip-hop to teach Shakespeare. Some articles had "hip" titles such as Peggy O'Brien's *Doing Shakespeare: "Yo! A Hit! A Very Palpable Hit!"* Others even offered broad lesson plan ideas that failed to incorporate specific hip-hop music. Yet, none provided me with sample lessons of how this revolutionary pedagogical possibility could transfer into the secondary language arts classroom of an urban educator. I know. To quote Balthazar, 'I do beseech you sir [or madam], have patience. Your looks are pale and wild and do import some misadventure' (*Romeo and Juliet* 5.1.27-9) Be not distraught. In creating this ground-breaking curriculum unit, I had you in mind. So sit back and enjoy the lessons that unfold in the following pages. I hope you'll find it to be *da bomb!*

**? THE BARD AND THE BALLERS—‘O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?  
(*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.35)**

**The Bard**

Like most great teachers, you probably anticipate introducing your students to Shakespeare from a biographical standpoint before diving immediately into his work. You may even use details from various biographies as a motivational tool to hook them into the unit since most of your students may have at least heard of his name but have little to no knowledge of his background. In any case, I always like to introduce my students to the *E-True Hollywood* version of an author’s life. No matter how sensational it may sound, it always manages to spike their curiosity.

Imagine this. You’ve written 37 plays, 154 sonnets and two epic narrative poems that are studied, quoted and appreciated as the most prolific works of all time in the English Language, and you never once attended a university. Or, you married a pregnant woman eight years your senior at the age of 18 only later to move hundreds of miles away from her and the kids to a bustling, metropolitan city for almost two decades.

Such details could be shared with your class to acquaint them to some of the most interesting events in Shakespeare’s life. However, one of the most significant ironies to Shakespeare is that no one really knows much about his personal life’s story.

Hmmmmnn...Who was the man behind the masterworks?

According to a baptism record, scholars assume that he was born in April of 1564 to his parents—John Shakespeare, a glove-maker, whittawer (a person who works with white leather to make various goods), agriculturalist and prominent local politician and Mary Arden, the eighth daughter of Robert Arden, an affluent landowner and farmer. Moreover, in terms of schooling, it is speculated that Shakespeare attended the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford, where scholars suggest he would have received an education that consisted of a “thorough knowledge of Latin, Logic and Rhetoric and also [classical] History” (*Shakespeare’s Stratford on the Web* 2). After the age of thirteen, no information is known about further schooling, which leads many sources to conclude that Shakespeare did not attend college.

In 1582, at the age of 18, we learn that Shakespeare married a pregnant Anne Hathaway who would eventually birth their first daughter, Susanna, in May of 1583. Twenty-one months later, the couple would become the proud parents of a set of fraternal twins, named Hamnet and Judith in February of 1585, but Hamnet, Shakespeare’s only son, would eventually die at just eleven years of age in 1596.

Known by many as *The Lost Years*, the years between 1585 and 1592 remain a mystery as there is no evidence of what Shakespeare did during that time period. Some sources suggest he might have taught while others propose he might have done some type of work with the law considering his extensive knowledge of the law revealed in several of his plays. Nevertheless, from a “petulant complaint” (*Shakespeare’s Stratford on the Web* 3) of a rival Robert Greene, calling Shakespeare ‘an upstart crow’ (qtd. in “Life and Times of Mr. William Shakespeare” 1) in Greene’s *A Groatworth of Wit*, we can infer that Shakespeare was gaining recognition as an actor, poet and playwright. Apparently, due to reasons unknown, he had left his wife and three kids in Stratford to live in London and pursue his craft. One source mentions that Shakespeare would usually visit his family during the Lenten season while theaters were closed “in accordance with the traditional banning of all forms of diversionary entertainment around this important Easter event” (*Absolute Shakespeare* 3).

On April 18, 1593, Shakespeare entered his first poem *Venus and Adonis* in the Stationers' Registrar and his second poem *The Rape of Lucrece* on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1594. One source infers that he wrote poetry because the authorities closed all of the theatres due to a deadly outbreak of the plague (*Shakespeare's Stratford on the Web* 3). But by 1594, Shakespeare reunited with theatre, working with The Lord Chamberlain's Men, "one of the most successful acting troupe's in London" ("Life and Times of Mr. William Shakespeare" 1). Although the troupe lost the lease of *The Theatre*, where they usually performed, they began acting at *The Globe*, their newly constructed theatre south of London, built from the timbers of their former *Theatre* by July of 1599. Then, by May of 1603, it is believed that King James I changed their name from The Lord Chamberlain's Men to the King's Men and allowed them 'freely to use and exercise the art and faculty of playing Comedies, Tragedies, Histories, Interludes, Morals, Pastorals, stage plays...as well for recreation of our loving subjects as for our solace and pleasure.' (qtd. in "Life and Times of Mr. William Shakespeare" 1-2).

Many scholars believe that, during the late 1590's and early 1600's, Shakespeare was "rolling in the dough" joining the ranks of the high-class society. For instance, according to records with the College of Heraldry, he was granted a coat of arms and motto Non Sanz Droict (Not Without Right) in 1596, which his father was ironically denied months earlier. The next year, he purchased the second largest house in Stratford called The Great House of New Place and moved his family there. This three-story grand estate featured five gables, beautiful garden orchards and land that sprawled towards the River Avon. In addition, it stood in the center of town on Chapel Street right across from the Guild Chapel. Other sources report that in 1605, Shakespeare made "his greatest financial gain" (*Absolute Shakespeare* 3) with the purchase of leases of real estate near Stratford that eventually earned him an annual income of sixty pounds (*Absolute Shakespeare* 3).

Still living in London, Shakespeare continued working with The King's Men at *The Globe* until June 19, 1613, when, supposedly, during a performance of his last play, *King Henry VIII*, a loose canon from the roof of the theatre ignited a fire that burned the entire theatre down to the ground. Although *The Globe* was rebuilt and up to par a year later, thanks to the finances of Shakespeare and other patrons, sources believe that Shakespeare decided to retire from the hustle and bustle of London to reside in the quiet, simple village life of Stratford. Three years later, documents indicate that the Bard revised his will March 25<sup>th</sup> and died less than a month later in April of 1616. Although no one knows the exact cause of his death, some scholars entertain the most popular notion that Shakespeare died from contracting a fatal fever after getting drunk with his boys (friends), Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson (*Shakespeare's Stratford on the Web* 5).

Regardless of the cause, Shakespeare's death marked the end of some of the best verse and prose to ever grace the London theatre and the world beyond for hundreds of centuries to come. Laid to rest in a tomb at Holy Trinity Church, the Bard will forever be remembered for his ingenious way with words. Just read his tombstone, for there you will find:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here!  
Blest be ye man that spares thes stones  
And curst be he that [moves] my bones. (qtd. in *Absolute Shakespeare* 4)

Now that I have given you a thorough *E-True Hollywood* version of the Bard's life despite the scant details scholars have discovered, I hope you have gained enough information to talk intelligently to your students about the man as if he were a close family relative. If not, then I suggest you pack your bags and take a guided tour of Stratford and London, England this summer or simply watch Michael Wood's *In Search of Shakespeare* PBS home video.

## The Ballers

First off, you may be wondering who/what is a *baller*. Is it someone who makes basketballs? NO! Is it someone who plays basketball? NOT! Or, is it someone who loves basketball? NO WAY! According to my “hip-hop-ictionary,” a *baller* (bôl'?'r), *n.* may be defined as someone who is at the top of his/her figurative game (albeit career, family or social life). He/she must also have lots and lots of money and live a lavish lifestyle. For instance, if you consider the price of meals to determine which one you will eat before ordering, then you would not be considered a *baller*. If you buy off-brand clothes and flaunt them as if they were made by the latest designers, then you are not a *baller*. If you disguise your voice over the phone to deceive possible bill collectors or creditors, then you, as you guessed it, would not be considered a *baller*.

In today’s hip-hop world, there are a slew of *ballers* from the likes of P. Diddy (Sean Puff Daddy Combs) to Jermaine Dupri. But for the purpose of this unit, we will explore the lives of two male *ballers* highlighting their musical and personal accomplishments. Like I did previously with the Bard, I hope this will give you a biographical context of the artists so that you too can be *ballin’* (with background information, that is).

### Jay-Z

At 35 years of age, Jay-Z may be considered today as one of the most successful artists in the rap industry. Having produced countless chart-topping singles over the span of ten albums, he has solidified his reign in the industry as a well-respected artist, producer, writer and entertainer. But such success did not come easy.

Born Shawn Corey Carter on December 4, 1969, this Brooklyn native had to learn the tough lessons of survival while growing up in the impoverished, crime-infested Marcy Projects of Brooklyn, New York. One source mentions that at the age of 9, Jay-Z “shot his brother in the shoulder for stealing his ring” (“Jay-Z: Biography” 1). Three years later, his father divorced his mom, leaving her with the sole responsibility of providing for and raising the children in a ruthless neighborhood.

Eventually succumbing to the harsh pressures of his environment, Jay-Z resorted to the streets for a way out as he openly admits to being a “street hustler,” (*In My Lifetime Vol. 1*) someone who distributes or sells drugs to make money. On the other hand, this street-hustling lifestyle helped to finance his career as an up-and-coming rapper whose friends, at the time, called him ‘Jazzy’ (“Jay-Z: Biography” 2) due to his stylish wardrobe. He would later shorten his nickname to Jay-Z.

By his late teens and early twenties, Jay-Z had solidified his reputation as a respected street rapper in Brooklyn working under the tutelage of Jaz-O (a.k.a. Big Jaz), a local New York rapper who had a record deal but made no significant sales. Meanwhile, he also rapped briefly with a group called Original Flavor to further break into the industry and learn more tricks of the trade. This subsequently would prepare him to maximize upon his eventual big break into hip-hop.

Likewise, in 1996, at twenty-seven years of age, he, along with friends Damon Dash and Kareem ‘Biggs’ Burke, decided to create their own record label, Roc-A-Fella Records, which was an unprecedented move since most aspiring rappers usually signed on with already established record labels. One source points out that “Jay-Z’s main purpose was to eliminate the middle man...[enabling himself to receive] more profit” (“Jay-Z: Biography” 2). And after landing a distribution deal with Priority Records, later renamed Def Jam Records, the rest was history.

Throughout his musical career, Jay-Z has worked with the likes of artists such as the late Notorious B.I.G., Ja Rule, DMX, Missy Elliot, Ludacris, Snoop Dogg and some of the hottest producers like Clark Kent, DJ Premier, Teddy Riley, Kayne West, Neptunes, Timbaland and

Swizz Beatz to name a few. His music has “greatly influenced the rap industry and established many of the trends [that were pervasive] during the late ‘90s and early 2000s” (Birchmeier 2). Interestingly enough, critic Jason Birchmeier believes Jay-Z’s music has shifted over the years from gangsta rap (hardcore) to “pop-rap” (3), a style of rap music that has garnered mainstream appeal. Nevertheless, songs like “Streets is Watching” or “Cash, Money, Hoes” continue to keep him true to his urban upbringing and hardcore image.

Just four years ago in 2001, Jay-Z was sentenced to three years probation for stabbing record producer Lance “Un” Rivera at a New York nightclub in 1999. Although one would expect this to have an adverse effect on his career, Jay-Z, however, continues to rake in the millions. He is not just a rapper but also a savvy businessman. He owns a clothing company (Roca Wear), co-owns a record label as previously mentioned and has appeared in several Hollywood blockbuster films—a quintessential baller.

You may be wondering about his personal life, and he is equally blessed in that area as well. Dating Beyoncé Knowles, 24, of Destiny’s Child for the past three years, Jay-Z is not ashamed to express his unwavering love towards her, especially in their 2003 single “Bonnie and Clyde,” which we will explore more closely in this unit. Some critics believe that they are a match made in heaven, while others doubt just how long this relationship will last. But despite the criticisms, both Jay-Z and Beyoncé have decided to keep the details of their romance private (*Ananova* 1). Finding out the 411 (info.) on their relationship is like combing through a stack of hay in search of a needle. I could not find any sources via Internet or print that disclosed the juicy details of their love affair. One report, however, mentioned that Jay-Z allegedly announced, “This woman beside me is my best friend. I love her so much, and I will marry her very soon” (Femalefirst.co.uk 1) at a celebration party in honor of Island Def Jam Records president Lyor Cohen.

Ironically though, in a *Romeo and Juliet*-like twist of events, Beyoncé’s dad, Matthew Knowles, former manager of her group Destiny’s Child, has openly expressed his disapproval of his daughter’s boyfriend. In a November 2004 web article entitled “Beyonce’s Dad Dislikes Boyfriend Jay-Z,” Knowles told reporters, “I don’t care for [Jay-Z] at all. No, I’m not close to him. He is not somebody I like to spend time with” (Femalefirst.co.uk 1). The reasons explaining his strong dislike towards the rapper were not mentioned in the article, but it is rumored that Knowles does not approve of Jay-Z’s street-hustling background. Only time will tell the fate of this somewhat controversial couple. Meanwhile, their undying love appears to be stronger than ever as Jay-Z was featured on Beyoncé’s summer debut single, “Crazy in Love” from her solo debut album *Dangerously in Love*.

Without a doubt, Jay-Z has risen above his hard-knock life to enjoy musical, commercial, and personal success. This quintessential baller knows what it takes to succeed in the industry and has proven himself an undisputed champion over and over again. To acquaint yourself with his music, I would suggest you buy his CD’s or borrow them from your students **prior to** this unit. Although you may find some songs to be explicitly violent, materialistic, sexist or hedonistic, within his lyrics lay autobiographical narratives of his past, present and future. Afterwards, you will gain an even heightened sense of Jay-Z the Baller.

In October of 2003, Jay-Z announced his retirement from the recording and performing aspect of his craft, saying that he wanted to “devote [more of] his time to the business side of the music industry” (MP3-Find 2). Below is a discography of his musical accomplishments.

*Reasonable Doubt* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 1996)

*In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 1997)

*Vol. 2: Hard Knock Life* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 1998)

*Vol. 3: Life and Times of S. Carter* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 1999)

*The Dynasty: Roc La Familia 2000* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 2000)  
*The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 2001)  
*MTV Unplugged* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 2001)  
*Best of Both Worlds with R. Kelly* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 2002)  
*The Blueprint 2: The Gift & The Curse* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam, 2002)  
*The Blueprint 2.1 Special Edition* (Roc-A-Fella / Def Jam 2003)  
*The Black Album* (Roc-A-Fella, 2003)

## **Usher**

Usher or more affectionately pronounced *Ūr'sh? r* (Ursher) reigns as one of the most popular, sought after male R&B artists out today. With dance moves like Michael Jackson, a rippling chest the semblance of “a He-Man action figure” (Bottomley and Ives 1) and a sultry voice reminiscent of Marvin Gaye, this Romeo-casanova sends thousands of women screaming his name by the mere wink of an eye or flex of a pec. Although his career spans only four albums, this relatively young baller is enjoying multi-platinum success.

Born Usher Raymond IV October 14, 1978 in Dallas, Texas, Usher grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee until he was 13 years old. A single parent, his mother, Jonnetta Patton moved the family to Atlanta, Georgia to raise him and his younger brother. There, Usher sang in a church choir his mother directed. One year later, at the age of 14, Usher found himself auditioning for La Face Records co-founder L.A. Reid, who had spotted him singing at a local talent show. Eventually, La Face signed the young “gospel choir boy” (Lane 1) to a recording contract.

Immediately, Usher and La Face records began working on his debut album that same year. In 1994, after much hard work and late night hours, Usher released his first, self-titled album, *Usher*, which P. Diddy helped produce as executive producer. Critic Linda Lane notes that the album’s first single, “Thinking of You,” garnered Usher “notoriety and reached gold status” (1). Yet, this was not all that catapulted his career.

In 1995, Coca-Cola recruited Usher to record a national holiday jingle. He also worked with several top male R&B vocalists to form Black Men United for the single “You Will Know” that later appeared on the *Jason’s Lyric* soundtrack. He then joined the young R&B singing sensation Monica on her album to do a remake of Latimore’s “Let’s Straighten It Out.” By 1997, after graduating from high school, Usher’s fame and fortunes were on the increase. Releasing his sophomore album that year, Usher had reached new heights as an artist. Lane notes that Usher co-wrote six of the nine songs “to display his maturity and songwriting abilities” (5), recruiting the talents of Jermaine Dupri, Babyface, and P. Diddy to produce *My Way*. Moreover, the album’s first single, “You Make Me Wanna” topped the R&B charts for eleven weeks, “[making] him a crossover sensation” (Lane 1) with other platinum singles like “Nice & Slow” and “My Way.”

The next year, Usher sang as an opening act for Janet Jackson’s *Velvet Rope Tour* and starred in the 1998 horror spoof *The Faculty*. He continued his budding acting career the following years in the 1999 urban high-school drama *Light It Up* and 2001 adventure western *Texas Rangers* with Ashton Kutcher. By 2000, it was time for him to release his third album, *All About U*, but because his tracks were leaked to Napster, an Internet music-sharing files service, before the release date, sources report that his new label, Arista Records, decided to delay its release as Usher began recording new tracks for the album. Retitled *8701* after the date it was released, Usher dropped his third album, which “moved him from a teen pop star to a sultry R&B singer” (Lane 2).

Three years later in March of 2004, Usher released his fourth album entitled *Confessions*. Unlike previous albums, this one marked record success in his career as “1.1 million copies”

(Britt 10) were sold in the U.S. during its first week debut. In a recent interview with journalist Bruce Britt, Usher shares that the concept behind this album was “to talk about things men don’t usually talk about or deal with...to...give people some kind of release” (10). Exploring the dynamics of being in a loving relationship, this album had been regarded by many critics as his “break-up record” (Bottomley and Ives 2) in light of his split with TLC’s Chilli. Yet, Usher mentions that that wasn’t a major concern. He says he wrote “not just about [his] recent relationship, but [about past] relationships and issues that happened three, four years ago, that [he] just locked away” (Bottomley and Ives 3). Regardless of the personal dramas, *Confessions* earned Usher 3 GRAMMYs, eight nominations and 12 million albums worth of record sales (Britt 10).

Although Usher considers himself to be a “sucker for love” (*Confessions*), he is currently not in a serious relationship. In her article, “The Secret Side of Usher,” Jeannine Amber points out that Usher has transformed from the “confused,” love struck young superstar of 2004 into “an earnest businessman with a strong brand name and an agenda to uplift” (128). This lady’s man-baller plans on producing and starring in films, co-owning the Cleveland Cavaliers and starting an apparel, cosmetics or clothing line. With these projects on his agenda, we will definitely see his baller status skyrocket to even higher levels of success.

For the purpose of this unit, we will focus on “My Boo,” which features Grammy Award-winning R&B artist Alicia Keys and is found on his *Confessions* album. Below is a discography of his musical accomplishments.

*Usher* (La Face, 1994)  
*My Way* (La Face, 1997)  
*8701* (Arista, 2001)  
*Confessions* (La Face, 2004)

### ? LOVE DEFINED—‘*Is love a tender thing?*’ (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.4.25)

Once upon a time in a land far, far away lived a beautiful young princess who was looking for love in all the wrong places. She swam 100 miles east of her town in hot pursuit of love but did not find it. Returning to her castle, she decided that maybe true love awaited her in the west. So the next day, she decided to run 100 miles westward over scorching sands and stony roads. Still, the princess unfortunately discovered that true love was no where to be found. Then, it hit her!

“Since cupid has wings and flies in the air, maybe I need to venture up north,” she reasoned. So with much excitement and anticipation, she decided to climb the tallest mountain 100 miles north of her town. But when she finally reached the summit, all she could see were clouds upon clouds of air. Then, it hit her once again!

“If I drive 100 miles south, I will definitely find my true love,” the hopeless romantic envisioned. So the next day, the ambitious princess loaded her station wagon and headed 100 miles down south. During her trip, the heat was so unbearable that her car became exhausted and refused to move another mile. It simply broke down, leaving her stranded and 50 miles away from nearest filling station.

“Oh no. Oh no. What am I going to do? If I don’t get this fixed, I’ll never find love!” cried the hysterical princess. Then suddenly, out of nowhere appeared a red AAA pick-up truck driven by this brawny, handsome tow-man. Seeing the young lady in distress, he swerved over by the roadside to give her a hand.

“Can I help you, Ma’am?” asked the tow-man.

“Yes, I was just driving along when my car broke down, and I don’t know what to do,” she exclaimed wiping the tears from her eyes.

“Not a problem. I can help you!” assured the tow-man. And the two fell instantaneously in love and lived happily ever after. The End.

I’m sure at one point in our lives we have all been fed this ridiculous type of fairy tale about how the prince or, in this case, tow-man, rescues the princess from her distress, and they subsequently fall madly in love to forever live a life of bliss together. We are constantly told, “Child, don’t look for love. Let love find you.” And so in our hearts, we hold on to this obscure, fairy tale notion of love until we realize the startling imperfections of our dear prince- or princess-elect. He snores when he sleeps! She constantly nags me about fixing things up around the house! We hardly ever go out anymore! Yet despite the laundry list of criticisms, are you truly in love with that person? No matter what your response may be to that question, we are redirected to answering one of the most simple yet philosophical questions of all times. What is love?

In his article “What is Love Anyway?” psychotherapist Stephen B. Levine mentions that often times we make the mistake of reducing love to a simple feeling. Instead, he asserts that love is “a label we give to a range of transient emotional experiences that is always complicated by past, present and future considerations” (145). He points out that when a person says “I love you,” the emotion of love is always complicated by the person’s motive for saying it. For instance, you may tell your spouse that you love him hoping that he will buy you that diamond tennis bracelet. Or, he may tell you that he loves you to hide the fact that he forgot to pick up your dry-cleaning for the third time in a row. No matter how it is expressed, Levine contends that “the meanings and motives for expressing love change all the time” (145).

Moreover, Levine breaks down this complicated emotion by defining it even further. First, he calls love an ambition. He points out that the ambition is to “abide with a person in such a way as to enhance each other’s opportunities for mental and physical health, sexual pleasure, vocational accomplishment, financial stability, parenting and so forth” (145). In other words, both partners are working together to enhance each other’s state of being. Levine also defines love as a moral commitment. He notes that, when a bride and groom join in holy matrimony, their love is expressed as a “public promise” (146) to honor and cherish each other through good and bad times. No matter the circumstances, the couple must uphold their moral commitment. Moreover, I believe Levine’s next view of love is one we all can relate to—love is a mental struggle.

Realizing that our idealized version of our partner was simply just an ideal, Levine states that we often struggle to “maintain cooperative kind behaviors” (146) to suppress our disappointments. Ultimately, he feels that “love is the struggle engaged in to maintain the moral commitment” (146). Although your spouse may drive you crazy, you love him/her because of you all’s moral commitment to stay together...FOREVER! Furthermore, Levine also describes love as a force of nature. This force is so powerful that it “originally creates a unity out of two individuals” (147). In other words, you may not be in love with your partner because you all have shared so much of your lives together that he/she is “inextricably [apart] of [you]” (147). Hence, Levine notes that this type of love can be found more in older couples.

Moreover, Levine’s description of love as a deal seems to appeal more to the young bachelor or bachelorette. He mentions that, from this perspective, we initially evaluate the value a potential mate can add to our lives, and subsequently accept what is offered. In this situation, he explains that love means “an acceptance of the package” (149). And once we accept our partner, we may begin to feel more affectionate towards him/her. Lastly, Levine describes love as a stop sign. Like the analogy implies, love seems to go nowhere as a partner may be unwilling to think more deeply about his/her relationship to his/her significant other. For instance, John tells Sue



that he loves her. Then, Sue asks John, “Why do you love me?” And John replies, “I don’t know. I just do!”

In this example, Levine points out that individuals like John may not be willing to express the reasons for their love because they may be trying to guard their feelings of failure. Such failure, he states, results from feeling the gap between believing the cultural notion that love is a simple feeling and “the actual experience of its complexity” (150).

Although Levine’s article gives us a framework to shape our classroom discussions about love, I believe it may be a bit too complex for our teenage romantics to grasp, especially considering the growing number of relationships a teen can accumulate within a week. Now I know what you’re thinking. What if you had a student who truly believed teenagers could experience mature love? I would simply tell you to quote child psychologist Gregory Fouts for your defense. For according to Fouts, ‘[adolescent] relationships are based around image because [they’re] still trying to figure out who [they] are [themselves]’ (Tayler 21). Likewise, he says that ‘mature love means not trying to impress each other and being comfortable enough with a person to be able to reveal your vulnerabilities’ (Tayler 21). Now if your students say that they are not concerned with image, just “accidentally” spill your Diet Coke on their shirt and see what happens. As expected, Fouts’s argument alone will be all the ammo you need to prevent class discussions from turning into young love versus old hate debates.

But generally speaking, we must admit that love is indeed a very complex word filled with many meanings. For example, it is said that one may find “ninety-six [different] words” (Gill 1) to express the various meanings of love in Sanskrit, while love can be expressed in up to eighty different words in Persia. So to provide a framework for this curriculum unit throughout our exploration of this thing called love, I propose using the Greek paradigm that was later developed and explained by C.S. Lewis in 1960. Let’s define love along the following forms:

- Eros**— (erotic love)—This type of love refers to a passionate and intense yearning for something. Often short-lived and carnal in nature, it is usually referred to as a sexual desire. Hence, we get the modern-day term ‘erotic’ from the Greek word *erotikos*. (Answers.com 1)
- Storge**— (family love)—This type of love may be found among family members who experience warmth, interpersonal comfort and satisfaction in being together. *Storge* is based on familiarity and repeated time together. (Levine 147)
- Philia**— (brotherly / friendship love)—This type of love may be found among friends, co-workers, classmates, roommates or neighbors who share common interests, insights, and tastes. *Philia* is characterized by cooperation, mutual respect and understanding. (Levine 147)
- Agape**— (selfless / spiritual love)—Often referenced in the Judaic-Christian faith, this is the type of love God displays towards his people. It is an unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another without the expectation of a reward in return. For instance, one may be willing to die for the well-being of the other person. (Answers.com 1)

Yes, these will be the forms we shall use to navigate our journey through love. They will help shape our class discussions, guide our analytical inquiries and, most importantly, keep the teacher from having to answer personal questions regarding his/her love life or the lack thereof.

**? LOVE IN THE WORKS — ‘Ah me, how sweet is love itself possessed’  
(*Romeo and Juliet* 5.1.10)**

**Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet***

**Summary**

Like you, I also find myself too busy to breathe let alone read and prepare notes on a new text we will be covering in class. As a result, in addition to already having read this play (wink! wink!), I recommend you refresh your memory by reading the summaries and critical analyses on the following two websites: [www.gradesaver.com](http://www.gradesaver.com) and [www.awerty.com](http://www.awerty.com). There you will find scene by scene synopsis along with critical commentary. I know this seems like the unscholarly thing to do, but desperate times call for desperate measures. Besides, no one will ever know—just like back in college. SSSssshh...go ahead...it’ll be our little secret!

***The Word on the Streets (of Academia, that is)***

The academes have contributed tons upon tons of research on *Romeo and Juliet*. Just type in the title, and you are liable to find thousands of journal articles and books in over five different languages on the play. Having neither the time nor the energy to read and synthesize each one, I narrowed my search down to include current articles I felt would be of most interest to you and useful for this curriculum unit. Below are three-second overviews of various scholarly discourses on *Romeo and Juliet* in no particular order...Word up!

- In Cynthia Marshall’s “Who Wrote the Book of Love?” Teaching *Romeo and Juliet* with Early Rock Music,” Marshall points out the “striking congruencies” (105) between the play and early rock music of the 50’s and 60’s. She explains how the intertextuality of the play and the music proves to be useful in “negotiating [teacher and student] cynicism” (98).
- Through her psycho-analytic approach, Julia Kristeva discusses how the dynamics of the law, death and hatred function throughout *Romeo and Juliet*’s love relationship in her article, “*Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple.*”
- In Karl Zender’s “Loving Shakespeare’s Lovers,” Zender asserts that “before we see the young lovers as flawed, ... we need to see them as valuable” (137). Therefore, he contends that studying *Romeo and Juliet*’s development enables students to empathize with the young couple’s plight.
- Ivo Kamps argues that *Romeo and Juliet* are plagued by “erotomania or love madness” (38) in his article, “I Love You Madly, I Love You to Death: Erotomania and *Liebestod* in *Romeo and Juliet.*” Unlike the traditional notions of *Romeo and Juliet*’s love, Kamps conveys it as a psychological disease.
- In Dymrna Callaghan’s article, “The Ideology of Romantic Love,” Callaghan takes a feminist new historicist approach and contends that the romantic love in the play constitutes an ideology created by protestant ideologies of marriage and family, which she believes were being formed while Shakespeare wrote this play. As a result, her essay studies the role of *Romeo and Juliet* in “the cultural construction of desire” (86).
- Carolyn Brown challenges the traditional view of Juliet as the passive, reserved virgin in her article, “Juliet’s Taming of Romeo.” Thus, she conveys her as the metaphorical falconer, who “[overtly controls] *Romeo and her life*” (1).
- In Edward Dowden’s article, “The Forces Driving the Play’s Main Characters,” Dowden argues that *Romeo and Juliet* presents “the deliverance of a man from dream into reality” (52). He provides further character analysis that adds a new perspective to the reader’s view of the young couple’s love affair.

Now let’s journey to the world of hip-hop...

## **Jay-Z's *Bonnie and Clyde***

### **Summary**

Before reading this summary, I recommend you purchase Jay-Z's album *The Blueprint 2: The Gift & the Curse* to listen to "Bonnie and Clyde." The cover will provide you with the lyrics as well. But in case you can't afford or do not wish to purchase this CD, I recommend you do a google search ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) for the lyrics and print them out. Do not download the music from the Internet as I believe it robs from the artist and is ethically wrong.

In "Bonnie and Clyde," we meet a young couple in route to who-knows-where possibly driving down the freeway of love (no pun intended). Jay-Z, the boyfriend, describes his love towards Beyoncé in the first verse. He then gives advice to 'dudes' in terms of being in a loving relationship and explains what he does to solidify theirs. Likewise, Beyoncé, the girlfriend, equally expresses her strong love towards Jay-Z, especially in the line, 'Nobody or nothing will ever come between us,' reminiscent of Shakespeare's Juliet. Hence, do note that she begins her verse with the conditional qualifier 'if,' which may add another level of interpretation. Meanwhile, the chorus suggests their love for each other as a life necessity and that their bond is impregnable. Furthermore, this song lends itself to becoming intensely autobiographical as we, **prior to** study, know that Jay-Z and Beyoncé are an actual couple in real life.

## **Usher's "My Boo"**

### **Summary**

Like with Jay-Z, I recommend you purchase Usher's album *Confessions* to listen to "My Boo" before reading this summary. The cover will provide you with the lyrics as well. But in case you can't afford or do not wish to purchase this CD, I recommend you do a google search ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) for the lyrics and print them out. Do not download the music from the Internet as I believe it robs the artist and is ethically wrong.

In "My Boo," we meet an older lover who reunites with his former flame (past girlfriend). Fondly reminiscing over their first kiss, the ex-boyfriend says that he can still see the love for him in her eyes. Ironically, Alicia Keys, the persona of the ex-girlfriend, admits that she still has strong feelings for him "no matter how [much she tries] to hide" it and despite the fact that she is currently in a relationship with someone else. Although the couple has argued in the past, they declare that they will forever be each other's "boo" in the chorus.

Regardless of the term "boo" not being defined in the song, it is safe to assume that boo is a slang derivative of the word "beau," which means a woman's sweetheart. However, news reports do not confirm that the situation expressed in the song has any factual bearing on the current relationship between Usher and Alicia Keys. Needless to say, this song won them *Best R&B Soul Single by a Duo or Group* at the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Soul Train Music Awards.

### **The Word on the Streets (of Academia, that is)**

Unfortunately, I did not find any scholarly discourse on Jay-Z's "Bonnie and Clyde" and Usher's "My Boo." Because I believe this to be a ground-breaking curriculum unit unlike any other, I contend that research is desperately needed in this area. As hip-hop is "now well-established as a respectable field of tertiary study" (The Age 1), I suggest future research be conducted and published in more academic journals.

However, the only article I found close to initiating some academic approach to examining the theme of love in the lyrics of the aforementioned songs is Donald Horton's "The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs." In this article, Horton gathered 235 lyrics of popular songs that were published in the June 1955 issues of four periodicals. Of the lyrics gathered, he discovered that "86.8 percent of the total songs" (575) dealt with love. Now I know what you're thinking.

Yes, the 50's were indeed a totally different time and era compared to nowadays. And yes, rap and hip-hop did not even exist back then, but wait. Horton's research reveals very interesting findings that could be applied to our analysis of "Bonnie and Clyde" and "My Boo."

The purpose of his research was to discuss the social-psychological functions of language and contribute to the analysis of lyrical studies. As a result, Horton noticed that "the popular song provides a conventional conversational language for use in dating and courtship" (569). Likewise, he categorizes lyrics to various stages of a love relationship that he arranges as "'scenes' in a drama of courtship" (570).

Horton begins by introducing this "drama of courtship" (570) with a prologue. At this stage, he notes that the personas are wishing and anticipating a future love affair although they are not currently in a relationship. These types of lyrics also share "some general recommendations of the state of love" (570). Moreover, he states that the first act focuses on courtship. It is here, he contends, the persona attempts to woo his/her reluctant mate, declare his/her devotion, plead, make "heroic promises" (571), humble him/herself, cry, ask for "further reassurances and commitments" (571), struggle against loyalties or become impatient. Next, in Act II, Horton denotes this as "The Honeymoon" (572) phase, where the persona is exhilarated by love. He mentions that "if this happiness is troubled, it is only by a doubt that anything so wonderful could be so real and by the pain of parting at night" (572) since he believes the lovers are not yet married.

Yet, by the third act, Horton contends that the love takes a downward course. He points out that the persona deals with uncertainties, loneliness, antagonistic forces, jealousy or even infidelity. As a result, the other lover may respond with threats of leaving, and by the fifth scene, "the final parting occurs" (573). Likewise, in Act IV, Horton asserts that the ditched lover goes from longing for the other lover's return to hoping for a new prospect. In any case, I believe Horton's categories can still apply to today's popular love songs, especially those in hip-hop and R&B. Although the music and lyrics are different, I believe the love issues the personas deal with remain the same.

### **? LEARNING GOALS—'What must be, shall be' (*Romeo and Juliet* 4.1.21)**

This unit will focus on meeting the following learning goals. Extracted from the *Standards for the English Language Arts* by the National Council of Teachers of English, students will be able to do the following:

- read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.
- apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features.
- adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language and genre to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts.
- use a variety of technological and informational resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions and social roles.

- participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**? IMPLEMENTATION — ‘Romeo I come! This do I drink to thee’  
(Romeo and Juliet 4.3.60)**

Now that you have read the abovementioned learning goals that will drive each lesson, in the wacky words of rapper-turned-actor Will Smith, let’s get “jiggy” with it!

You’ve been reading and reading away with much delight (I hope), and now we’ve come to the part where my specific vision for this curriculum unit will emerge before your very eyes. Picture it. It’s the month of February, and we are beginning to teach this very special love unit in your classroom. But before we begin, let us do a little bias-busting.

If you think reading Shakespeare will frustrate your students causing them not to enjoy this unit, go ahead and bust that bias from your mind. If you feel that you are not competent or capable to teach Shakespeare with hip-hop, bust that one too. Or, if you believe Shakespeare has to be taught “the right way,” then add this one to your bias bin as well, for this six-week unit is designed specifically for all middle and high school students of all learning levels. I leave it open for you, the teacher, to modify at your discretion and determine your own means of evaluating student work.

The “how?” this unit will be implemented can best be answered by carefully reading the following lesson plans. The first seven lessons are included to kick things off, but the rest relies on your creativity. I have also included brief throw-downs (mini-lessons) you can use over and over throughout this unit in addition to instructional suggestions for various scenes. Conceptually, I start by focusing on love and then advance it to hip-hop. Next, I present Shakespeare as an ol’ school rapper to segue from hip-hop to Elizabethan times. Once we gain a biographical and historical context for Shakespeare, we move immediately into his work, *Romeo and Juliet*. Hence, steering us along the way are the following three driving questions: 1. What is love? 2. Are Romeo and Juliet really in love? 3. Does love conquer all?

**ACTION!**

**ACT I, SCENE I - *The First Day of the Unit; Your Classroom***

[Enter You, Me and Chorus]

**Chorus** Two teachers both alike in dignity,  
 In [*insert your school name*] where we lay our scene  
 From scholarly grudge, break to new learning opportunities,  
 Where discussion about love raises eager hands of a teen:  
 From forth the daring questions will our appreciation grow,  
 A class of star-crossed students enhance their life:  
 Whose learning adventure will feature some raps for sho’,  
 Doth with their work bury their ign’t strife.  
 The fearless design of their masks will groove  
 And the continuance of reading each page,  
 Which but one’s finger nought could remove,  
 Is now the six week traffic of our stage.  
 The which if you with patient eyes attend,  
 What here shall miss, Harrison shall strive to mend.

[Exit **Chorus**]

## ? LESSON PLANS

I've always been the kind of person who enjoys living upstairs. I prefer gazing upon the BIG PICTURE any day before seeing how the parts make the whole. So to give you a bird's eye view of this unit, the first week will focus on the concept of love, background information about Jay-Z and Usher, and how love is expressed in their songs. The second week will introduce Shakespeare and hopefully tackle all of Act I. The next week, we will cover Act II followed by Acts III, IV and V for weeks 4, 5 and 6 respectively. Make sure you have enough texts of *Romeo and Juliet* for student use.

### Week 1 - Lesson 1

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this lesson is to engage students into discussion about the concept of love. It encourages them to think of love in tangible forms and abstractly.

#### *Materials*

The materials you will need for this lesson are Lauryn Hill's *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (CD), a CD-player, white construction paper, scissors, a class set of red ink pens and one white poster board.

#### *Procedure(s)/Activities*

1. Students will quietly listen to the interlude at the end of track #4 (beginning at 4:33) of Lauryn Hill's CD. The interlude features a class discussion on love.
2. You will give each student one sheet of white construction paper for students to cut out the largest possible heart. Meanwhile, you will construct the largest possible heart using the white poster board.
3. Using their red ink pens, students will brainstorm as many ideas that come to mind regarding what love means to them. The object is to keep writing non-stop until the heart is filled with ideas.
4. Each student will share his/her ideas with the class and add them to the large poster board heart.

### Week 1 - Lesson 2

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this lesson is to establish a context for defining love. A Greek paradigm will be used to help guide future discussions.

#### *Materials*

The materials you will need for this lesson are chalk or vis-à-vis with transparency, bag / bowl, loose-leaf paper (student supply), pen / pencil (student supply), 1 diskette per group, 1 computer per group.

#### *Procedure(s)/Activities*

1. You will define love using a Greek paradigm (*eros*, *storge*, *philia* and *agape*) and write definitions on the board or on transparency for students to copy as notes. You may resort to the *Love Defined* section of this unit as a reference.
2. You will group students randomly by counting off or pulling names from a bag/bowl.
3. Students will work with group members to create a five-minute skit that illustrates one of the four forms of love. The forms may be secretly assigned to each group at your discretion, but groups may not tell other groups which form they are doing.

4. Groups must first pick one of the following scenes for their skit: the school auditorium, the nurse's office, gym, school library, principal's office, computer lab or cafeteria.
5. After the skit is written by group members, one student from each group can type up the final draft of the skit scene to be saved on a diskette. **Prior to** this activity, you may need to review the proper format for typing a skit and the correct way to save a file on disk.
6. The student will print out as many copies needed for each group member.
7. Groups will rehearse their skits in designated areas of the classroom.

### **Week 1 - Lesson 3**

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this lesson is for students to apply their knowledge of the four Greek forms of love to real-life scenarios. It will also help them become comfortable performing before an audience.

#### ***Materials***

The materials you will need for this lesson are one video camera with tape, camera cable cords and television. Props are optional.

#### ***Procedure(s)/Activities—***

1. You will allow groups a final rehearsal before the main presentation.
2. Students will present their skits before their peers using great eye contact, voice projection and other dramatic techniques. You may want to discuss the importance of using dramatic techniques **prior to** group presentations.
3. Meanwhile, you will video tape each five-minute performance.
4. After each performance, audience members (other students) have to guess which form was presented and explain their rationale.
5. If time permits, you may replay the recorded presentations to discuss the importance of using dramatic techniques during a performance. For example, you may note that one student was not heard clearly because his voice was low and his back was facing the camera.

### **Week 1 - Lesson 4**

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this lesson is for students to connect to the content, express themselves clearly and concisely and evaluate the effectiveness of their writing as it relates to the lesson. Also, students will gain a biographical context of hip-hop rapper Jay-Z and R&B artist Usher.

#### ***Materials***

The materials you will need for this lesson are 4 markers, tape, construction paper, internet access (computer lab), 1 large brown bag, printer paper, loose-leaf paper (student supply), pen / pencil (student supply), pimp-daddy / fly-mama hat and large feathery pen.

#### ***Procedure(s)/Activities***

1. Students will become a love form (*eros, philia, storge* or *agape*) and write a love-letter to their boyfriend / girlfriend that sounds like their form (i.e. sounds *agape-ish*) on a sheet of loose-leaf paper. Please stress that they may not use the name of their love form or its derivative or any inappropriate words in their letter. If they do not have a significant other to write to, then they may choose a family member. This activity may be timed.

2. When all students have completed their writing assignment, they may then fold up their love-letters like the regular ones they write during your class (when you're not looking) and hand it to you.
3. You will then put all of the love-letters in a bag and shuffle them up.
4. You will also write the name of each love form in large letters on construction paper and tape each sign to the board, setting up a chart.
5. For dramatic effect, you will unveil your big feathery pen, put on your pimp-daddy/fly-mama hat and pretend you're the students' love doctor. You will then read each letter out loud anonymously.
6. After reading each letter, students will help the love doctor (you) classify the letter according to the posted love form categories on the board.
7. After reaching a consensus as to where the love-letter belongs, the love doctor will then tape the letter to the appropriate category. You can have the students classify the love-letters for as long as you like.
8. Next, you will ask the students about entertainers they love. I'm quite sure Usher and Jay-Z will be among their responses. If not, then make it so, but write their names on the board with a huge question mark next to it.
9. For whole group instruction, you may create a class web of all of the information your students already know about Jay-Z and Usher.
10. Then, you will escort them to the computer lab for them to verify their information.
11. While assigned to a computer, students will surf the internet to find biographical information about Jay-Z and Usher. They may record their findings on a sheet of loose-leaf paper. **Prior** to the search, you may need to provide guidelines regarding the necessary biographical information.
12. Students will also surf the net to locate and print out song lyrics to "Bonnie & Clyde" and "My Boo" for the next day's lesson.

## **Week 1 - Lesson 5**

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this lesson is to gain a biographical context of Jay-Z and Usher and identify examples of various literary devices hidden within their lyrics to see how love is expressed in each song.

### ***Materials***

The materials you will need for this lesson are chalk or vis-à-vis with transparency, post-it notes (amount depends on class size), 2 poster boards, scissors, glue / tape, highlighters, colored pencils, large photo of Usher, large photo of Jay-Z, a CD recording of "My Boo", a CD recording of "Bonnie and Clyde" and a CD-player.

### ***Procedure(s)/Activities***

1. **Prior to** this lesson, you will cut out two large hearts using poster board and affix a large photo of Jay-Z and Usher to the center of each heart.
2. Each student will write down one detail regarding Jay-Z's life on one post-it note.
3. Next, he/she will share it with the class and post it on the big heart. Students should not post the same information as each post-it note should reveal different details about the artist.
4. **Prior to** the next step, you will need to retype the correct lyrics (according to the album) of both songs, leaving blanks at random for missing words. As you guessed it, your worksheet will become a cloze activity as you may omit as many words as you'd like to make it challenging.



5. You will pass out the lyrical cloze activity sheets for “Bonnie and Clyde” to engage students’ active listening skills.
6. While the song is playing, students will have to fill in the missing blanks.
7. Afterwards, since this song features Beyoncé, two students should be chosen to read the lyrics aloud. A boy can read Jay-Z’s, while a girl can read Beyoncé’s. If the chosen students tend to sing it while reading, it’s okay. You may use this opportunity to point out the effects of rhythm and rhyme on language.
8. You will then read the lyrics like a poem in an attempt to detach students from the musical aspects. One source points out that because rap is “intensely narrative,” if you strip the music and rhythm of it, “the structure is that of a short story” (The Age 2). Here, you can ask students about the situation occurring in the song to check for comprehension. “What’s going on in the song?” “What’s happening?” you may ask.
9. **Prior to** this lesson, you may want to review the meanings of the following nine literary terms: *allusion, figurative language, simile, metaphor, personification, symbol, imagery, irony* and *situation*.
10. You will replay “Bonnie and Clyde” while students highlight examples of the aforementioned literary terms. Students will then use a colored pencil to label each highlighted lyric by the literary term it represents.
11. You and your students will then discuss your analytical findings in the song.
12. You may repeat steps 2-8 for Usher and “My Boo.” Additional question: What is a boo? You may encourage students to use a dictionary to define that term. As previously mentioned, “boo” is a slang derivative of the word, “beau.”

## Week 2 - Lesson 6

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this lesson is to gain a biographical and historical context of William Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre and to heighten student interest in Shakespearean times.

### *Materials*

The materials you will need for this lesson are the front page of the local newspaper, a large picture of Shakespeare, a TV/VCR and a video cassette of Michael Wood’s *In Search of Shakespeare*.

### *Procedure(s)/Activities*

1. **Prior to** the lesson, you will paste a picture of Shakespeare on the outside of the front page of your local newspaper.
2. You will sit in front of the classroom pretending to read an article on Shakespeare and use your acting skills to reveal tid bits (details) about the Bard. You may resort to the *Bard* section of this unit as a reference. Make it fun and exciting as if reading a tabloid. Your students will love you for it (I hope).
3. Students will watch Michael Wood’s *In Search of Shakespeare* and answer comprehension questions throughout the video. **Prior to** viewing the video, I recommend you watch it and prepare a set of comprehension check questions so that your students are actively watching the video.

## Week 2 - Lesson 7

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this lesson is to continue developing biographical and historical contexts for Shakespeare. It will also provide the students with a gist of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* **prior to** reading the text. I believe this component will help them comprehend the play at a higher level.

## **Materials**

The materials you will need for this lesson are a TV/VCR, a video cassette of Michael Wood's *In Search of Shakespeare*, DVD player and a DVD of *Shakespeare The Animated Tales Vol. 3*, class set copies of Charles and Mary Lamb's tale *The Story of the Star-Crossed Lovers*, plastic bags, poster board (1/2 sheet per student), glitter, glue, tape, scissors, markers, rulers, CD-player and the text of *Romeo and Juliet* (1 copy per student).

## **Procedure(s)/Activities**

1. Students will finish watching Michael Wood's *In Search of Shakespeare* and answering comprehension questions.
2. You will review the answers to generate a classroom discussion about the life and times of William Shakespeare. Then, you will segue into a thematic discussion on love as it relates to *Romeo and Juliet*. For example, you may ask, "Have you ever loved someone your parents loathed and prevented you from seeing?"
3. **Prior to** this lesson, you will take copies of Charles and Mary Lamb's *The Story of the Star-Crossed Lovers*, laminate them and cut them into puzzle pieces. Do not include the part of the story from where Romeo approaches the tomb to the story's ending. (You'll see why later). Then, place your puzzle-story pieces of each copy in a bag.
4. Students will then watch the animated version of *Romeo and Juliet* to give them an overall understanding of the play's plot.
5. You will stop the video right at one of the play's climaxes when Romeo approaches Juliet's tomb.
6. You will then group your students in groups of four and distribute one bag of the pre-packaged puzzle pieces to each group.
7. Each group will take the story pieces and rearrange them to fit the story line of the animated tale. You may time this activity to make it more challenging.
8. After about 10 minutes, you may read excerpts of the story to the students for each group to rearrange their pieces in search of the correct placement.
9. If time permits, you all will begin reading Act I using the *Class Act* strategy. (SEE THROW-DOWNS)
10. **Prior to** reading Act I Scene five, students will construct Me-Masks using colorful card board. Students will create a mask in the shape of an object that best symbolizes their identity. For instance, a student who considers himself to be bright may cut out the shape of a light bulb. Make sure they cut out at least four holes in their Me-mask large enough to see and breathe. Lord help the child who suffocates from poor ventilation.
11. Me-masks—Students will then tape a ruler to the back of their mask and decorate them with markers and glitter. You may have students share their masks with the class and discuss the significance of its symbolic meaning.
12. Also **prior to** reading Act I Scene five, you may bring a strobe light and encourage students to bring appropriate hip-hop party music and wear attire that helps recreate the masquerade scene. Meanwhile, students will wear Me-masks while reading the scene.

## **Week 2 – The Last Lesson**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this lesson is to get students to think critically about love as they compare and contrast its treatment in *Romeo and Juliet* to "Bonnie and Clyde" and "My Boo." This lesson will also bring closure to this six-week long adventure.

## **Materials**

The materials you will need for this lesson are recordings and lyrics of “Bonnie and Clyde” and “My Boo,” texts of *Romeo and Juliet*, a CD-player, post-it chart paper, camcorder(s) and markers.

## **Procedure(s)/Activities**

1. Students will retrieve their lyrics of both songs from Week 1 Lesson 5 and review their notes to familiarize themselves with the content.
2. You will group students in groups of 4 and give each group three sheets of chart paper and three markers. At the top of each paper will be one of the following titles: *Romeo and Juliet*, “Bonnie and Clyde” and “My Boo.”
3. You will then ask students to define love according to how it is expressed in each of the three works. This activity will answer our first driving question.
4. Next, you will organize the class into two opposing parties—the Montagues and the Capulets. You may want to have a pre-made list of opposing parties **prior to** this activity to save time.
5. Students will debate the following questions using details from the play: 1. Are Romeo and Juliet really in love? 2. Does love conquer all? 3. What is the major tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*? But before they answer each question, give each side time to prepare their response.
6. Based on their arguments, you will award one point to the team with the strongest argument per question. The winners should receive some type of pre-announced incentive to heighten the competitive edge.
7. Students will retrieve their best rap songs from the Rap-it-Up throw-downs and perform them before the class while you or preferably another student videotapes their performance. If you choose to have students video tape each other, I recommend that you rotate the camera operator so that all students get a chance to work the camera. Also, to prevent from having to re-explain how to operate the camera, I recommend that you explain it to your first student camera operator who in turn trains the next camera operator and so forth and so on. **Prior to** taping, you may want to give a video taping tutorial on operating the camera.
8. Students can watch and enjoy their pseudo-rap videos. You may provide a rubric for them to critique each production.

## **Throw-Downs (On-going Student Activities)**

The following fun activities should be used continuously throughout this unit to enhance your lessons.

### **Class Act**

In agreement with Peggy O’Brien, I believe Shakespeare is best learned “by doing Shakespeare” (3). Therefore, this throw-down is a way for students to actively learn the plot of the play. While reading each act, you may assign students the characters and have them read their parts aloud in front of the class. Each character could wear a different hat for visual effects. **Prior to** reading their lines, you may give students their scene in advance for them to practice their performance at home or after school. I strongly recommend doing this throw-down throughout the entire play.

### **Rap-it-Up**

This throw-down activity should be done at the end of each act. You may assign students to groups or allow them to group themselves. Groups should be no larger than four in which each

member may function as the recorder, lyricist(s), rapper(s) or DJ for his/her group. Each group chooses a significant scene from the act the class has just finished reading and rewrites it into a modern-day rap. The recorder writes down the group's lyrics and is responsible for its written presentation (typed or written neatly). The lyricists create the rap that includes at least three original lines from the scene. The rappers perform the rap while the DJ is responsible for securing the equipment and instrumental hip-hop music. **Prior to** this throw-down, you may share the script or possible video of Gregory Qaiyam, Erik Weiner, Jason Catalano and Jordan Allen-Dutton's *The Bomb-itty of Errors* as a model.

### ***Looking for Love***

During or after reading each scene, students can jot down details that display any form of *eros*, *philia*, *storge* or *agape*. **Prior to** this throw-down activity, I recommend preparing a worksheet for students to record their details. It should include a column for actions and one for quotes since we learn a character best by what he says, does or what others say about him. A review of writing quotes correctly and paraphrasing may be needed **prior to** this throw-down. It later can be used to generate critical discussion on the theme of love.

### ***Blind Date***

Students can attend a blind date for you to gauge their comprehension of character and develop their character analysis skills. **Prior to** this throw-down, students should be partnered up. Partner A is blindfolded, while Partner B assumes the identity of a character from the play. Partner B may choose the character or may be assigned it on an index card. Moreover, Partner B gives challenging clues to Partner A as to his/her identity, but Partner B must not reveal his/her character's name. Partner B may use lines of dialogue or even his/her feelings toward something. Meanwhile, Partner A can ask questions to Partner B for more clarity of character. Eventually, Partner B will guess the identity of Partner A from his/her clues, and, if correct, the date is over.

### ***Drama for yo' Mama***

Students will trace their hand on a sheet of construction paper and cut it out with scissors. On one side of the hand, they will list a major conflict from each scene/act and write it on the palm of their hand (i.e. Romeo commits suicide.). On each finger, students will write, "Who?" "What?" "When?" "Where?" and "Why?" using a dark-colored marker. Then, they will answer each question in ink as it relates to the conflict. Who is involved? What is the conflict? When does it happen? Where does it happen? Why is it a conflict?

On the other side of the hand, students will write the word 'Solutions' on the palm in bold letters. Then, on each finger, they should list a solution to the conflict. **Prior to** this throw-down, a lesson on internal and external conflicts may be needed.

### ***Un-Scene***

After reading each act, students may create the next scene of a play using the characters only from that act. Here, they have a chance to be psychic and predict what they think will happen next in the play or what they want to happen next in the play. Work may be done best in groups. **Prior to** reading a new act, students may share their unseen scenes before the class.

### ***Bling! Bling!***

Using aluminum foil, students create objects that symbolize some aspect of the play. First, they use imagery to write a paragraph describing the object. Then, they write a second paragraph explaining how their object relates to what it is symbolizing. Journeying through all of the steps of the Writing Process, the final draft should be written on the front and back side of a fluorescent-colored index card and pinned to the object with a tack. A review on *symbolism* and *imagery* may be needed **prior to** this throw-down activity.

## ACT ATTACKS (*Instructional Recommendations*)

### ACT I:

- Scene V—Create Me-Masks **prior to** reading scene; bring a strobe-light and other things to recreate the party scene; encourage students to bring clean hip-hop party music that can be played in the background during the reading of this scene; depending on the leniency of your school’s dress code policy, you may even have them dress up like they were going to a dance (nothing hootchy, of course!).

### ACT II:

- Scene I—Show video clip of this scene using Zeffirelli’s 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Scene V— Show video clip of this scene using Zeffirelli’s 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

### ACT III:

- Scene I—Create open space by possibly arranging your desks in a circle for the fights; bring three fake swords for props.
- Scene III—Discuss what it means to be banished **prior to** reading.
- Scene IV—Have students discuss the crazy things they have done or have known someone to do in the name of love.

### ACT IV:

- Scene I—Create a harmless yet intriguing potion as a replica of the one Friar Lawrence gives to Juliet; have the students examine it by color and smell; remind them of your safety rules when handling chemical substances.
- Scene II—Discuss the ironic elements within the scene.
- Scene IV—Show video clip of this scene using Zeffirelli’s 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

### ACT V:

- Scene 3—Mention to students that this is where we ended the animated tale from Week 2 Lesson 7; show video clip of scene from when Juliet wakes up using Zeffirelli’s 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

## ACT V, SCENE 3

*The Last Day of the Unit; Your Classroom; 4:00 p.m.*

[Enter **Principal**]

**Principal:** A refreshing peace this evening with it brings.

The moon for joy will shine ever so bright.

Go hence to others to share of these things.

Some shall be practiced, and some take flight,

For never was a curriculum unit of more bravado

Than this hip-hop remix of the Bard’s Juliet and her loving Romeo.

[*Exeunt...Peace Out!*]

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