

## The Power of Opinions

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On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit America's Gulf Coast states with a vengeance, leaving many parts unrecognizable. Suddenly thousands of people found themselves homeless, helpless, and hopeless. Far beyond the destruction of life, property, and environmental damage caused by this monumental natural disaster is the enormous controversy surrounding the evacuation of New Orleans' infamous Ninth Ward District. The world watched in horror as America's ugly shame of poverty and race could no longer be hidden and disregarded.

I teach theatre arts to grades 6-8 in an urban middle school in Houston, Texas. My school received close to 100 students who were evacuated from New Orleans. Prior to their arrival, I began preparing myself for the enormous emotional turmoil these students and their families' were experiencing. I wanted to be far more than a mere temporary teacher. I wanted to be of comfort and an inspiration during this time. My greatest desire was for my students from New Orleans to be excited about my classes, and, despite their current situation, I wanted them to want to be here.

To my surprise, it was not the students who were in extreme shock as much as their parents. Each morning I walked into the front office of our school witnessing several parents completely overcome with tears and shame while their children sat stone-faced trying to make the transition to this new school as easy and with as little embarrassment as possible. During this time, I became deeply troubled as several of my existing students began voicing their concerns about "those New Orleans folks." The rhetoric and prejudice that came from my students was astounding and broke my heart. Though I worked hard to dispel the constantly negative images that the media was portraying of these poor, disenfranchised African Americans, I soon became a single voice against the sudden masses that were cloaking fear in prejudice.

The issue of racial prejudice and class rights became the topic of an unexpected conversation with a young Caucasian student from New Orleans when she shared her feelings regarding those who were left in the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center. She said simply, "If they weren't so lazy and got a job, they could have gotten out in time. I don't feel sorry for any of them. They got what they deserved." While I appreciated her honesty, I was concerned about her lack of consideration, empathy, and compassion for others. This became one of those "teachable moments" where a teacher must immediately rise to the occasion or fall forever in disgrace. I chose to ask her a series of probing questions like, "Where should 'these people' find a job?" "Should their being poor, uneducated, disenfranchised, and African American be reason enough for their not receiving timely assistance during this crisis?"

The experience I have teaching middle school students has taught me that this is the most appropriate time in their emotional, mental, and physical development for a constructive conversation on ethics to occur. My students are waking up to the world around them with new young adult eyes questioning their parents, teachers, religious leaders, and world community regarding issues that many adults unfortunately believe are too mature for them to understand. Experience has taught me that not allowing and welcoming the conversation and concerns of middle school students inhibits their maturity causing frustration and anger to develop in

countless teens. It is unfortunate that many students become drawn into the negative aspects of our society such as drugs, alcohol, gangs, and sex because they feel that they have no one to talk to. I have had numerous conversations with students who speak to me in confidence because they are scared and have no where to turn to for guidance. It is my sincere hope that this curriculum unit begins a dialogue on ethical behavior and society that many students are seeking.

## CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

“The Power of Opinions” is an engaging curriculum designed to challenge students in questioning every aspect of their lives and thought processes. This unit begins with a series of written surveys ranging from lifestyle choices, race relations, love, religion, expectations, and social expectations. After I have computed the surveys and shared the results, a dialogue of human understanding will begin. I anticipate this class discussion to become quite charged and possibly explosive due to the differences in opinions that will arise as a result of the survey questions. This being said, it is my responsibility to set the ground rules for proper class discussion making certain that a safe place is created for all students by ensuring that comments are not directly offensive and that all thoughts and/or opinions are heard. Throughout this entire lecture and discussion phase, students will actively journal their thoughts, reactions, and experiences. Although the journals will not be shared before the class, they are a requirement. Students who may not feel wholly comfortable sharing their thoughts and/or opinions in public still have an opportunity to express themselves through this written form.

In order to facilitate more stimulating class discussions and personal essays, “The Power of Opinions” will be divided into several teaching lectures. This unit will begin with an in-depth discussion on *freedom*. What is freedom? Does it exist? If so, where? Can one see/observe freedom? How does freedom feel? How does the loss of freedom feel? Is freedom tangible? What is the cost of freedom? Is freedom only a physical concept? Can freedom be applied to the mental and emotional states of humans? What are the requirements of freedom?

The next lecture will focus on *choices*. The discussion will begin with several probing definitions and scientific definitions of choices. Students will explore the requirements necessary for making choices. Does a person experience freedom when making a choice? Are decisions based upon personal wants and desires versus the larger whole? Is there a cause and effect for the choices one makes? If so, then does this make one reconsider the notion of freedom?

Our discussion will then explore the notion of the “first impression.” After a definition is explored and discussed, students will examine the role of first impressions in their personal lives. Is the process making “first impressions” natural? If so, why and how? What is the basis for the initial judgements made after these first encounters? Are these judgments drawn from personal experience (which would not be the case if the encounter is a “first impression”) or are they the stored information from other sources based upon a larger whole? For example, is your preference for a particular ice cream flavor over others based upon the fact that you have tasted *all* of the others, or is it because the large photograph behind the ice cream counter just happens to be of the flavor that you prefer? I trust that an in-depth and spirited discussion will arise as a result of these probing questions.

To merge the study of ethics and theatre arts, I have chosen an iconic character of classical theatrical for my students to compare, contrast, and ultimately, dramatize: William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In doing so, students will read and study the play to develop a clear understanding for the ethical controversies and questions the character is challenged with. It is my sincere hope that this study of ethics as seen through the works of a classical dramatist truly ignites a passion and respect for continued classical study and text for my students. I want my students to see themselves as Hamlet, thereby taking full possession of the character’s thought processes, goals, and desires. Once this is achieved, I will have truly proven the classical concept of *everyman*.

## A QUESTION OF FREEDOM

### Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (*The National Archives*)

“Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides—and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.” (King)

The topic of freedom in the American classroom can be extremely dangerous if not introduced and handled delicately. It may be necessary to introduce this topic within an historical format before introducing the ethical natures of freedom. This said; use this opportunity to encourage students to explore the Bill of Rights as it relates to freedom. How does the Bill of Rights directly relate to students, their families, and the greater community? Once students have begun to explore the magnificence in the protection guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, introduce Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Where was the Bill of Rights protection for Dr. King and his fellow nonviolent protestors? Does the Bill of Rights protect everyone? I am certain that this letter clearly define the reason to struggle for freedom against oppression. I will then challenge my students to site examples of opposing the denial of freedom. Is it right to fight against oppression and struggle for freedom? Or, should people accept the denial of certain freedoms as a fact of life? Can the struggle for freedom become oppressive?

It is my opinion that freedom is quite elusive – it redefines itself within the contexts of a given situation. I do not deny that there is an unlimited number of images and examples of the denial and absence of freedom; such as political prisoners, prisons, child abuse, marital abuse, racial abuse, etc. Yet, I feel the challenge one might face when teaching the ethics of freedom is the right to walk down the street anytime one desires. Another would argue that the threat of violence on a particular given street, at a particular hour, would definitely limit and redefine a person’s freedom to travel on the street. Yes, it is the ethical questions of freedom that students must be challenged to face – not answer. Is freedom free?

### CHOICES

**Choice** *n.* choosing; opportunity or power of choosing; person or thing chosen or that may be chosen; alternative active or possibility (*Collins English Dictionary*, 96).

Students are not unlike adults in their decision-making. They are all greatly influenced by outside elements or forces in making choices. Whether these elements are advertising, television, film, video, or music, things outside of “ourselves” influence the choices we all make. The

primary goal of this lecture is to begin with a clear definition of the topic while encouraging students to discuss the cause and effect of various choices.

Students will discuss and define factors that contribute to their decision-making ability as each factor is separately on the board. After the list of factors is listed, students will then define which factors are beyond their personal control and which are under their personal control. In doing so students will immediately become aware of which factors affect their decision-making and personal choices. Students will be further challenged to continue their conversations on freedom in regards to the current discussion topic of choices. Is their freedom in choices? Is the reality of consequences an oppressive or freeing aspect of choices?

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

### **Friday, Feb. 17**

Not much to report today. I continue to wait to hear back from my potential matches. Everyday the list of bachelors who have not reciprocated my advances mocks me.

I got an email from my date for next week which was a little disconcerting. He keeps asking if I've received the photos of him. I'm not sure what he expects me to say to that. "Oh, baby, you're so hot?" It's weird. In all the scrambling around to get a date and subsequent giggling around the computer screen with my coworkers, I haven't really thought so much about what my date thinks about this whole thing. He wanted to meet about 3 steps ago (and it's only a 4 step process). I think we were supposed to exchange a flurry of emails before we scheduled a meeting. I feel zero connection to this man. Is this what chemistry feels like?

### **Monday, Feb. 13**

I continue to get new matches everyday, and—shocker—they continue to be kind of glorified frat boys. There are lots of pictures of dogs. I think my blunt profile might be too dark for this sunny crowd. The profiles also continue to blur into each other. It reminds me of that episode of *Seinfeld*: “Jimmy thinks you’re cute. Jimmy like Elaine.”

There is something kind of off-putting about a website telling me that “everyone likes Billy.” I think *Friendster* is better in this respect, because at least then you can read (or consciously note the absence of) personal testimonials about your match. I just don't think that the size of someone's index finger indicates whether or not everyone likes him.

### **Sunday, Feb. 12**

My match is not so fond of following this website's rules and keeps trying to sneak in his personal email address, etc. I don't take him up on the offer. I don't really get the attraction. It's hard to feel a “spark” with someone when it's being filtered through and monitored by an anonymous third party. (“Staffers Try out Chemistry.com”)

The topic of first impressions is sure to be an exciting class discussion. Students will immediately begin sharing their opinions of what is desirable or not in a mate. Opinions will surely be passionately voiced on physical features such as hair, eye color, fashion necessities, and body requirements. To add a different perspective to this discussion, I will introduce the above article from SEED Magazine – a hip science magazine targeted to the twenty-to-thirty something audience. This article is a compilation of various magazine writers' experience using the online dating service – Chemistry.com. One might ask, “Where is the first impression with an online dating service?” Exactly! The first impression becomes a first impression of a different sort – it is one that can be created behind the convenience and security of a computer screen. The horrific stress that is most commonly associated with dating – the first impression – is eliminated entirely. Or, is it? Within a virtual world, does the first impression become something other than physical

features? Does it become economic status and/or education levels? Can the first impression be escaped? Furthermore, can the first impression be wrong? What might the dangers and effects be as a result of a wrong first impression?

## INTRODUCING SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT

I have successfully incorporated Shakespearean Studies as a consistent component to my theatre arts curriculum for several years now. Though my methods may seem a bit unconventional to some, I have used them to achieve great success with my young players. I begin by asking the probing question, “Who watches The Jerry Springer Show?” Immediately, without fail, my students respond with a fervor of hands and voices – excited that we are about to discuss something that they truly enjoy and are familiar with. I take this energy and begin telling them the story about a boy who discovered that his mother was cheating on his father with his uncle – his father’s brother! Whew! Naughty! At once my students are captivated beyond belief and will not allow me to stop telling the story. Before I end my tale, I ask them to guess the boy’s name. I tell them that he is very famous, and they have may have heard of him. When they can’t control themselves any longer, I tell them that his name is Hamlet. Of course they are taken that this interesting story was actually SHAKESPEARE’S! I go on to explain to them that Shakespeare was indeed, in my opinion, the “Jerry Springer” of his time! The success of this teaching strategy is based upon my desire to *validate* my students’ lives and their experiences through the study of Shakespeare. Far too often, Shakespearean Studies are introduced as lofty and otherworldly. This is highly unfortunate and a severe disservice to students. As one studies the realities which surrounded the environment of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre – its neighborhood, community, and people – it becomes very clear that the Shakespeare’s daily reality was not as “lofty” as many scholars and educators would envision it to be. My immediate goal is for my students to realize that Shakespeare’s themes and theatrical environment have far more in common with what they are confronted with daily in the inner city. Once this is achieved, their perspectives change and they truly begin to possess his literature as one of their own.

## FREEDOM AND HAMLET

- Hamlet:* Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?
- Guildestern:* Prison, my lord?
- Hamlet:* Denmark’s a prison.
- Rosencrantz:* We think not so, my lord.
- Hamlet:* Why, then ‘tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.
- Rosencrantz:* Why then your ambition makes it one. ‘Tis too narrow for your mind.
- Hamlet:* O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.
- Guildestern:* Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.
- Hamlet:* A dream itself is but a shadow.
- Rosencrantz:* Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that is but a shadow’s shadow.
- Hamlet:* Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars shadows. (Act II, Scene 2)

William Shakespeare confronts the theme of freedom from the perspective of one who is being denied such. In the above cited scene, Hamlet is confronted by two childhood friends who suddenly come to visit him amidst extreme turmoil within the palace. The controversy surrounding his father's sudden death, mother's abrupt marriage to his uncle, and the sighting of his deceased father's ghost prove to be far too much for young Hamlet to mentally conceive and emotionally digest. He then becomes immediately entrapped within the spiritual maze of indecisiveness. Those in whom he had entrusted his life are now either dead (his father, the King) or have revealed their true selves as being so selfish and evil (his mother, the Queen) that he is engulfed with insecurity, doubt, anger, and mistrust. Hamlet's emotional pain is so great that he begins to impose his fears and mistrust on everyone who dares enter into his company.

This said, Hamlet immediately greets Guildenstern and Rosencrantz by questioning what misfortune brings them to prison. Having been previously briefed on Hamlet's sudden irrational behavior, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are both puzzled by the prince referring to the castle as a prison. Hamlet remarks further that the whole of Denmark is a prison. To which Rosencrantz feels the need to wittily reply that then too is the whole world. Surprisingly, Hamlet agrees with his remark while further asserting that Denmark is then the worst in the entire world. Convinced that this conversation is proof of Hamlet's mental instability, Guildenstern straightly disagrees with Hamlet's impression of Denmark as the worst prison in the entire world. To which Hamlet effectively responds that in his mind Denmark is indeed a prison.

Shakespeare effectively chooses for Hamlet to compare Denmark to a prison as an efficient tool of incorporating the theme of loss of personal rights and freedoms to his audience. Shakespeare is clever in choosing prison as the topic of Hamlet's comparison. For when one speaks of prison, immediate visions of unbearable constraint, disgust, denial, extreme personal loss of freedoms, hostility, and insecurity immediately arise. Although this conversation between Guildenstern, Rosencrantz, and Hamlet is short; it is still most effective in communicating to the audience Hamlet's personal perspective on the atmosphere of Denmark. The audience is certain to note this brief conversation with high concern due to Hamlet's position as a prince in the royal family. It is highly uncommon for those who are privileged in any society, much less those who are born into royalty, to feel the stressful burdens and denial of rights which are most often the case of those who are members of the working and lower classes. Yet, Hamlet vehemently asserts that he feels imprisoned by his current state.

### **HAMLET IS CONFRONTED WITH CHOICES**

Hamlet is at odds with himself debating the overwhelming choice he is suddenly forced to make. This inner turmoil has been brought on by the mysterious murder of his father, the king, and made all the more complex by the visitation of his dead father's ghost requesting that Hamlet seek immediate vengeance upon Claudius (the present king and Hamlet's uncle and now step-father) for the murder of the former king. As the royal prince, Hamlet is fully aware of the imminent danger he must face if he chooses to seek revenge upon Claudius:

*Hamlet:* To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep –  
No more-and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to! 'Tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep-  
To sleep-perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause. There's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life. (Act III, Scene 1)

The stress one feels when they are faced with a difficult decision becomes a huge emotional weight especially when the circumstances surrounding the decision carry extremely burdensome consequences. This being said, it should also be dutifully noted that Hamlet is a young adolescent teen with very little experience to the greater challenges that the world has to offer. Hamlet has been sheltered within the safety, wealth, and beauty of his royal palace. The events surrounding his father's death and mother's sudden marriage to his uncle have catapulted young Hamlet into an adulthood for which he is not emotionally and mentally prepared. He is suddenly forced to accept the challenging circumstances before him and shed his boyhood charms for the maturity, strength, and courage of a mature man. Yet, it is Hamlet's indecisiveness which causes him to spend invaluable time in mental anguish versus necessary immediate action. It is Hamlet's inexperience in making decisions for himself which causes him to become overwhelmed in inner conflict versus being decisive in action:

Hamlet's problem, in its crudest form, is simply the problem of the avenger: he must carry out the injunction of the ghost and kill the king. But this problem, as I ventured to suggest at the outset, is presented in terms of a certain kind of world. The ghost's injunction to act becomes so inextricably bound up for Hamlet with the character of the world in which the action must be taken – its mysteriousness, its baffling appearances, its deep consciousness of infection, frailty, and loss – that he cannot come to terms with either without coming to terms with both. (Mack 250)

Hamlet's current crisis causes him to reevaluate his perspectives on life itself. He begins to see death as the only true freedom – escape – from life's inherent turmoil. Hamlet perceives death as a peaceful sleep that carries with it beautiful dreams; ending the pains and heartache of this life. He continues to imagine death as a peaceful angel freeing him from his earthly burdens and begins to long for this peaceful state versus the turmoil he currently faces. He speaks of it almost in a lustful manner as he imagines suicide in his most beautiful and poetic terms:

Suicide in the teen population is not unknown. Popular data shows that suicide is the third-leading cause of death of young people ages 15 to 24. But attempted suicide among young Latinas was another story. The very idea was considered by many to be an oxymoron; Latino families are known for their close ties and cohesiveness, two deterrents of teen suicide.

But suicide attempts by Latina teens are growing, a fact which is gaining increased recognition by the medical community. According to a July report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Latina teen-agers are significantly more likely than white or black adolescent girls to have attempted suicide. (Trevino)

I would be remiss not to take this opportunity to discuss the uncomfortable fact that far too many of our students fantasize committing suicide at least once during their adolescence. Like Hamlet, they consider suicide to be a viable answer to life's challenges. I feel teachers should take advantage of every teachable opportunity to educate students on issues such as suicide. It has been my experience that students truly appreciate and participate more passionately in the learning of curriculums that have a direct correlation to their life. Recently I had a Hispanic student who began to exhibit self-mutilating and suicidal behaviors in an effort to cope with her emotional challenges. When I spoke with her at length of my concern for her health, she shared the fact that cutting gave her a sense of euphoric freedom from life. Fortunately this student was able to receive intensive outside counseling to intervene with her suicidal behavior. Yet, there are

countless other students who are experiencing the same suicidal thoughts who never receive the proper counseling they should. This said, I strongly encourage teachers to use *Hamlet* has an teachable opportunity to bridge the gap between the academic and the social while possible saving many of their students' lives.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The reality of first impressions has always been an interesting topic to me for many reasons. The foremost being that I could never firmly decide which side of my own internal debate I was on concerning whether first impressions are a positive or negative aspect of our humanity. What I do know is that we are incapable of escaping the fact that first impressions will be made of us. Questions then arise as to the basis for these judgments and the weight they hold in the future. What am I being judged on? Are first impressions ethical? Can first impressions be changed? These questions begin the introspective study I want my students to take on this topic in direct relation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Through the course of this study, I want my students to become aware of the first impression. I want them to be conscious of when they are making it of other people and when it is made of them:

*Laertes:* Perhaps he loves you now,  
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
The virtue of his will; but you must fear,  
His greatest weighed, his will is not his own.  
For he himself is subject to his birth.  
He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends  
The safety and health of this whole state;  
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,  
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it  
As he in his particular act and place  
May give his saying deed, which is no further  
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.  
... Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,  
And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
Out of the shot and danger of desire. (Act I, Scene iii)

Shakespeare employs the effects of the first impression throughout *Hamlet*. In the above monologue, Laertes warns his sister Ophelia against loving Hamlet. Though Laertes' reasoning and fundamental motivation are for his sister's good, his thoughts are still opinions of Hamlet. Laertes has no way of knowing whether or not Hamlet's affections for Ophelia are true or not. In this monologue Laertes makes a clear definitive judgment of Hamlet based upon his prior knowledge and experience of being around royalty. Though Laertes' experiences are real, they do not render him capable of knowing Hamlet's every personal desire:

*Hamlet:* Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet you cannot make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. (Act III, Scene ii)



It is quite clear that Hamlet is aware of the judgments that are being made of him. This brief monologue effectively brings to light the oppressive weight that judgments have on people. Hamlet attempts to fight the dangerous effects of these judgments in declaring that they truly do not know who he is or his capabilities. It is important for students to recognize the weight that the first impression holds on the part of the one being judged. I would like to challenge my students further in asking if there was validity in the first impressions made of Hamlet? Did the first impressions made of Hamlet play a significant role in his personal choices? Lastly, did Hamlet have any control over the first impressions which were being made of him? Answering these questions will surely provide the basis for a spirited discussion on the ethics of first impressions.

### **Implementation of Films**

I encourage all teachers to use film and other media to provide additional learning resources for their students. I have found that using films in theatre is an excellent method to reinforce methods and clarify concepts. I do realize that ensuring that students actually read the play when a film version will also be viewed is a bit of a challenge. This said I generally practice the read – discuss – view method. For this study of *Hamlet* I will have students read Act I before a class discussion is held to clarify the plot, characters, and background information. Afterwards we will watch the film version and pause at the end of Act I. Doing so will ensure that students not only read the literature but also gain a strong knowledge of the characters and events necessary to proceed to a full theatrical production.

### **Suggested Films**

*Hamlet* (2000) Directed by Michael Almereyda. This is a modern version of Shakespeare's Hamlet set in the high rises of New York City. I feel students will become immediately captivated by the films interpretation and acting. The film stars Ethan Hawke.

*Hamlet* (1990) Directed by Franco Zeffirelli. This is a classical interpretation of Shakespeare's Hamlet set against beautiful landscapes and elegant castles. This films stars Mel Gibson and Glenn Close.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan One: Experiencing the Box of Freedom**

#### ***Topics***

Theatre, Psychology, Social Science

#### ***Sub-Topics***

Creative Writing, History, Current Events

I suggest implementing this lesson directly after teaching the segment on freedom. Arrange chairs in a large circle and place the *box of freedoms* in its center. The *box of freedoms* is literally a box (or bag) which contains various fun and exciting items which students can immediately make use of such as hats, scarves, radio, CDs, crayons, paper, scissors, snacks, and/or candy. The objective for this lesson is for students to get a clearer sense of what freedom and the denial of such really is.

- 1) After students are seated in the chairs around the box, select two students to go to the center of the circle. Preferably, these are two students who are not close friends.
- 2) Once two students have been chosen and moved to the center of the circle, ask the remaining students to turn their chairs around while still seated in the circle. Afterwards, seated students should have their backs towards the box of freedoms. Please explain that seated students may

not look into the circles, make noise, or get up. They have essentially become invisible. They are denied freedom.

- 3) The students in the center now get to experience the *box of freedoms*. They may do whatever they wish with the items inside the box. They are given freedoms.
- 4) As your freedom students become more relaxed and aware of their privileged state, make them aware of their responsibilities and restrictions. They are not allowed to communicate with any other student other than the one within the circle. They are not allowed to leave the circle at any time and for any reason.

### ***Reflection***

After about 10 minutes of this activity, ask students to reflect upon their experience through both written form and class discussion. How did the denial of freedom feel to those seated on the perimeter of the circle? Did you feel ignored or outcast? Did you become angry and wonder why you were not chosen to go to the *box of freedoms*? Were you willing to do something to gain entry to the *box of freedoms*? If so, what would you have done or risked? Furthermore, how did you feel about the students who were chosen? To the students who were given the *box of freedoms*, were you free? How do you feel about the restrictions you were forced to work within? Did these freedoms limit your pleasure of the *box of freedoms*? Did you in fact pay a price for your freedom? Explain.

### **Lesson Plan Two: First Impressions Board Dating**

#### ***Topics***

Theatre, Creative Writing, Psychology, and Current Events

#### ***Sub-Topics***

English, Social Studies, Character Development

This lesson plan directly relates to the discussions on internet dating. Through this lesson, students are challenged to create alter personalities of themselves as a part of a classroom internet exchange.

- 1) After reviewing copies of online dating descriptions, students are to create a description of their own altered personality to be posted on the classroom's board dating. Dating advertisements must include the person's physical description, age, race, and sex. The advertisement may also include what the person is searching for in a date such as sex, race, physical attributes, occupation, and/or other details. Students are encouraged to write a creative eye-catching capture for their title.
- 2) Once all personal advertisements have been collected, categorize each and hang on the board so that students have easy access for viewing.
- 3) Students must select one on-board personal to write a response to.
- 4) Before the class, each student shares the on-board personal advertisement they chose to respond to and their written response. Afterwards, the student will explain what attracted them to that particular personal advertisement versus others.
- 5) After the student has completed their presentation, the student who created the on-board personal advertisement will reveal themselves.

## **Reflection**

Throughout this exciting process, students should journal their thoughts and personal discoveries. Students are expected to make a comparison study between their alter ego and themselves. Why did they create this particular image or lifestyle versus another? Does your alter ego say anything about your self-image? After further reflection, is it positive or negative? How did you feel when someone responded to your alter ego? At any time during this exercise, did you feel as if you were promoting and/or sharing mistruths about yourself?

## **Lesson Plan Three: *Hamlet!***

### **Topics**

Theatre, Performance, Public Speaking, Speech

### **Sub-Topics**

English, History, Classic Studies

During the play reading process, I encourage students to become familiar and comfortable with the textual language early into the production process through role play and scene study. This lesson allows students to focus on the events and characters of the play through improvisation. As with all performance study exercises, it is important that all students actively journal their experiences throughout this process for documentation, reference, and further study.

- 1) After students have read and discussed the first Act of Hamlet, divide the class into small cooperative groups of no more than 4 students each.
- 2) Each group is responsible for selecting a scene from the first act and performing it. Of the students in the group, one will become the director and the remaining two will be actors. Students are encouraged to use improvisation and creative license in their interpretations, yet the language must be true.
- 3) Each director will present their mini-performances before the class for class comment, criticism, and study.

## **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Works Cited**

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## Supplemental Resources

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- Illinois Shakespeare Festival*. Illinois State University. 2006. <<http://www.thefestival.org>>. Official site of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival containing essays for additional understanding and research.
- Machoian, Lisa. *The Disappearing Girl: Learning the Language of Teenage Depression*. Boston: Penguin Group (USA), 2005. Excellent research describing teenage female and their emotional and logical reasoning skills through detailed actual stories and case studies.
- Nesbit, E. *The Children's Shakespeare*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2000. A collection of Shakespeare's most popular comedies and tragedies written in short form and adapted for young readers.
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