

Note: This document, along with the accompanying lectures, slide shows, and exercises, can be downloaded at <http://www.alecwild.org/workshop>.

Imagery/Sound

From Act IV of *Henry V*

For this exercise, take the class through the speech – line by line, word by word (“What do we think ‘conjecture’ means?” “What does it mean then, to ‘entertain conjecture of a time?’”) Be sure to be specific: “It’s really dark” is no substitute for really probing what “poring dark” might mean. The monologue paints a grim picture of two armies about to go to battle, and particularly calls attention to the *sounds* we hear. Note the wonderful alliteration in “the country cocks to crow, the clocks do toll,” as well as the way Shakespeare puts whispering into the actors mouth with “the hum of either army **stilly sounds**/ That the **fixed sentinels** almost **receive** the **secret whisperings** of each others **watch**.”

Now entertain conjecture of a time
When creeping murmur and the poring dark
Fills the wide vessel of the universe.
From camp to camp through the foul womb of night
The hum of either army stilly sounds,
That the fixed sentinels almost receive
The secret whispers of each other's watch:
Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames
Each battle sees the other's umber'd face;
Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs
Piercing the night's dull ear, and from the tents
The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
With busy hammers closing rivets up,
Give dreadful note of preparation:
The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll,
And the third hour of drowsy morning name.

Romeo and Juliet **balcony scene exercise**

As in the previous exercise, take your students through the scene, line by line, thought by thought. Encourage thorough participation by asking lots of questions (“What does he mean here? Why do you think she says this”) rather than explaining the text. Help the students see that there’s an *argument* going on; that there’s intense conflict between Romeo and Juliet.

Sympathetic attraction exercise

This is designed to help students understand the Renaissance world view, and how characters in Shakespeare's plays viewed relationships. (It also helps answer questions like "Why do they fall in love so fast?" or "Why does Tybalt hate Romeo so much?")

On separate cards, write each of the following words (or download the printout from my website):

Wisdom
Grace
Nobility
Honor
Charity
Deceit
Virtue
Power
Gentleness
Treachery
Villainy
Passion
Beauty
Patience

Each word is written on two cards – there are two "Wisdom" cards, two "Deceit" cards, etc. – so that each student has a partner when cards are chosen. The above list of words will serve an exercise for 28 students. If you have fewer, take out some of the words. If you have more, you can add some of your own.

(If you have an odd number of students, take out one of the cards, but leave its partner card. This will mean someone doesn't have a partner at the end, but you can use this to illustrate how sometimes, in Shakespeare's world, there are people left without partners or friends – Malvolio, Jaques, Don John, *R&J's* Prince.

Fold the cards and toss them randomly on the floor; have each student take one, read his or her word, and put it in his pocket. They can't show anyone their words. Now tell them that each of them has a partner, and that their task is to find the person that has their word – without speaking.

(Here I'll often ask them to stand in a circle and stare at each other for a few minutes, and try to figure out who has their word just by looking. This being impossible, I then explain that we have to have some outward signs that can give clues.)

Now each student must create a "statue" or pose with his or her word as the title. It's usually good to pick a more outgoing student to be first. Go around the circle, and ask general questions about each of the statues (strong or weak? Good or bad?). Go around the circle twice, asking each student to do his or her statue again.

Now most will have a pretty good idea of who their partners are. Ask them to move around the room, feeling a kind of magnetic attraction to their partner. After a bit, ask them to make physical contact with their partners.

Some will be right on the money, and some will have mistaken the signs. Sort it out by asking one partnership at a time what their words were, and having the right partners do statues with each other.

“Your letter pleased me greatly” – Renaissance writing exercise

Ask your students to come up with 10 different ways to write “Your letter pleased me greatly.” Share the results, and talk about how Shakespeare did this exercise in the second grade. But he had to come up with 200 ways! (For twenty-five or so Renaissance answers, go to www.alecwild.org/workshop)

Thou/Thine vs. You/Your

Talk with your students about the difference between “thou” and “you:” “thou” is disrespectful, or for very close friends, and “you” is formal. Have them go through a passage and circle the “thou’s” and underline the “you’s.” Ask about how the characters use the different words at different times.

Hip Hop and Language play

One of the most interesting things about modern music is its use of classical rhetorical figures and language play – the same stuff Shakespeare used in his writing. Look at this song by the rap artist Mos Def:

Habitat

We all got to have, a place where we come from
This place that we come from is called home
We set out on our travels, we do the best we can
We travel this big earth as we roam

We all got to have, a place where we come from
This place that we come from is called home
And even though we may love, this place on the map
Said it ain't where ya from, it's where ya at

(verse one)

I come up in the street around some real wild brothers
With more than one name and more than one baby mother
More than one chase, been on more than one run
Got more than one enemy and more than one gun

While these cats that's less privileged is just more raw
Less space cause the projects laced with more flaws
Less sleep cause the nights ain't peace, it's more war
The can is raw like thirsty, rainy season thunder claps
On the block with your old pop pleading number act
To the spot with the red top fiends is huddled at
To the crib where the little kids spend their summers trapped
With the jungle cats, lions and tigers, leopards and cheetahs
For gazelle you get chased like a zebra, they blaze
cheeba-cheeba
And dominate the weaker on the street
Hungry bellies only love what they eat and it's hard to compete
When they smile with your heart in they teeth
And the odds is stacked high beyond and beneath
Son i been plenty places in my life and time
And regardless where home is, son home is mine

(chorus)

Some people live out in-New York City
Some people live out in-Atlanta
Some people got to live-Chicago
Some people do live-Miami
All my people at-California
And other people got to live-London
And everybody got to live in the whole big world
Together just you and me

(verse two)

When i think of home, my remembrance of my beginning
Laundromat helping ma dukes fold the bed linen
Chillin in front my building with my brother and them
Spending nights in Bushwick with my cousins and them
Wise town and Beat Street, federal relief
Slowly melting in the morning grits we used to eat
Sticking to your teeth and teeth is hard to keep
With every flavor Now & Later only a dime apiece
Old timers on the bench playing cards and thangs
Telling tales about they used to be involved in things
Start to drinking, talking loud, cussing up and showing out
On the phone, call the cops, pick'em up, move'em out
And it's all too common to start wildin
I'm a pirate on an island seeking treasure known as silence
And it's hard to find
Block parties in dark lobbies
Funeral homes packed but only dark bodies
I can't sleep hardly, stirred up like Bob Marley
Marley Marl played the symphony, remember we recall
Son i been to many places in my space and time
and whatever my home is, son home is mine.

There are so many Shakespearean-style word games going on its hard to know where to begin! Rhetorical figures are used to help make an audience listen, to perk up our ears and help us get the point. Rhyme, alliteration, antithesis, chiasmus, repetition . . . they're all here. Look at the repetition in the first verse:

"We all got to have . . ."
"We set out on our travels"
"We do the best we can"
"We travel this big earth"

more than one
more than one
more than one
more than one

And in the chorus:

Some people live out in-New York City
Some people live out in-Atlanta
Some people got to live-Chicago
Some people do live-Miami

This is called *anaphora*, the use of the same word or words at the beginning of each phrase or sentence. Here's Margaret in Richard III:

For happy Wife, a most distressed Widdow:
For joyfull Mother, one that wailes the name:
For one being sued too, one that humbly sues:
For Queene, a very Caytiffe, crown'd with care:
For she that scorn'd at me, now scorn'd of me:
For she being feared of all, now fearing one:
For she commanding all, obey'd of none.

Can your students find antithesis, or opposites, in the song?

it ain't where ya from, it's where ya at
the nights ain't peace, it's more war
rainy season thunder claps/spend their summers trapped
jungle cats, lions and tigers, leopards and cheetahs/gazelle
everybody/just you and me
my brother and them/my cousins and them
Spending nights/morning grits
Now & Later

Antithesis is used all over Shakespeare to help make a characters point. On any page of any scene, students will be able to find them. The Margaret speech above is a good example.

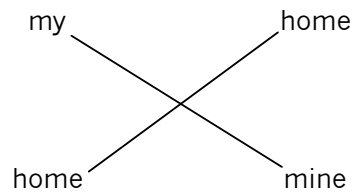
What about alliteration?

Bushwick/Beat Street
remember/recall
plenty places

. . . and many others. How many can they find? Compare these to the “pestiferous prelate” speech Paul gave you from *Henry VI, part one*.

Finally, the most important point of the song comes in a *chiasmus*, the X pattern:

whatever my home is, son home is mine.



This is used all the time in Shakespeare, and in other great speeches and writing:

Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country (Kennedy)

Since every Jack became a gentleman, there's many a gentleman become a Jack. (Shakespeare)

With my mind on my money and my money on my mind. (Snoop Dog)

Word play is not exclusively the province of Shakespeare and English professors. It's a human impulse, and helps us to listen to the message, the speech, the character, the song.