

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING
THE SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

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Abstract

Through analysis of teachers' responses to a survey, this study examines the methods of instruction and assessment being used to teach the Shakespearean drama in southern Alberta's high schools. While teachers generally use a wide variety of teaching and assessment strategies, the majority of these are desk-bound reading and writing endeavours with a strong emphasis on viewing videotaped productions. Relatively little use is made of active, performance-based teaching techniques. Some of the factors impacting teachers' decisions regarding instructional methodologies are time limitations, class size, final exam preparation, and the students' level of comfort with Shakespeare's language. However, since teachers' personal enjoyment of the plays and their concern for students' interests and needs are the most significant factors in determining their instructional approaches, more active approaches should be encouraged. To this end, a sample unit plan (for English 20, *Macbeth*) is provided to illustrate the range of activities possible. With increased knowledge of performance approaches and greater confidence in their own abilities to lead performance activities, teachers can greatly enhance their classroom presentation of Shakespeare's writing.

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Introduction

As students progress through their high school careers, they will encounter the works of many well-known and respected writers. However, dependent on the literature selected by their instructors, certain note-worthy authors may never be introduced to students in the classroom. While most English teachers make a point of teaching one or more selections by such classic authors as Wordsworth, Tennyson, Hawthorne, Keats, Browning, Twain and others, William Shakespeare remains the only author whose writing is specifically mandated for study within most Canadian high school English programs and Alberta is no exception. As noted by Sawicki (1958), the study of Shakespeare's plays has been an integral part of Alberta's high school English curriculum since before the province's inception in 1905.

For centuries, Shakespeare's plays have been given special status within the study of literature. While critics frequently question the placement of Shakespeare's writing in a position of such incontrovertible superiority, this study is not intended to address such concerns. The Alberta high school English curriculum continues to emphasize the plays of William Shakespeare (as evidenced by the newly revised Program of Studies to be implemented beginning in September 2001) and this author does not question the significance of Shakespeare's writing or the value of studying his plays. Rather, in concurrence with devotees around the world and through the centuries, I would agree that there is tremendous value in examining Shakespeare's contribution to English literature. As Solomone and Davis (1997) note, "of all the world's writers, none has received more attention than Shakespeare. Only the Bible is available in more languages. No other writer has had a larger body of critical works generated about his writings" (p. xi).

Gibson (1998) concurs when he states, “Shakespeare’s characters, stories and themes have been, and still are, a source of meaning and significance for every generation. Their relevance lies in the virtually endless opportunities they offer for reinterpretation and local application of familiar human relationships and passions” (p. 2).

I have a personal passion for teaching Shakespeare’s plays as part of the high school English curriculum. Each semester, I look forward to the opportunity to teach Shakespeare’s plays; however, I have found that students often do not view this unit of study with the same sense of eager anticipation. For me, the question is not ‘should we study Shakespeare’s writing?’ but rather, ‘*how* should we study Shakespeare’s writing?’ How can I make Shakespeare’s plays more appealing to my students? How can I make the stories, characters, and themes within these dramatic works resonate for my students like they resonate for me? It is from questions such as these that this culminating project arose.

The Study

Formulation and Definition of the Problem

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The major purpose of this investigation is to determine the instructional strategies currently being used by high school English teachers when teaching the Shakespearean drama. Of particular interest are the methods of presentation of content, the means of assessing student learning, and the factors underlying the instructional choices made by teachers.

Since the Shakespearean drama differs from other literature studied in the high school English curriculum, one important issue to be addressed is whether the approaches used in teaching Shakespeare's plays are, in any significant way, different from the approaches used when teaching any other literary genre. Additionally, given the potential need for alternative teaching strategies, another question to be considered is the amount of time spent teaching the Shakespearean drama. Finally, the study should examine the factors that influence teachers in making instructional decisions for their units of study on the Shakespearean drama.

As stated earlier, this study has direct application to my teaching of senior high school English. Given my personal penchant for Shakespeare's works and the opposing aversion with which many of my students enter the study of the Shakespearean drama, I have a significant motivation for taking a closer look at the techniques that can be used in the teaching of Shakespeare's plays. This study, then, is an effort towards improving my teaching of the Shakespearean drama by examining the variety of instructional strategies presented in the literature and used by other teachers. Obviously, however, a study of this

nature and depth should have application beyond the single classroom of the researcher. As such, it is hoped that, by sharing the results of my study and the conclusions and suggestions that arise from it, I will be able to offer suggestions regarding alternative methods for teaching the Shakespearean drama that other teachers of high school English can implement in their classrooms. Thus, it is intended that the study will be quite practical in nature, examining what is being done in southern Alberta's classrooms at present and what could be done to ensure greater success in the future.

The Research Question

The area of interest in this project is the variety of methodologies for teaching the Shakespearean drama within the high school English curriculum. In particular, the focus will be on the methods being used by teachers of English in southern Alberta at this time. Additionally, the research will attempt to examine the reasons for the instructional choices being made by teachers. My own experience has led me to believe that, although there are a wide range of creative strategies and approaches for teaching Shakespearean drama, the time constraints inherent in the English courses as well as a lack of confidence regarding innovative strategies prevent most teachers from employing as many varied techniques as they might like. Thus, the central question to be addressed by this study is *What methods are teachers of English in southern Alberta currently using to teach the Shakespearean drama and what causes underlie the selection of these methods?*

Plan of the study

To discover which practices are being used in teaching the Shakespearean drama, I chose to gather information through the use of a mailed survey. Accordingly, a five-page questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisting primarily of checklists and short answer

questions was prepared. In late January 2001, this survey was distributed to teachers of English 10, 20, and 30 in 41 southern Alberta high schools. The survey was accompanied by a letter (Appendix B) explaining the project and asking for the teacher's assistance in providing information regarding his/her instructional practices. A stamped, addressed return envelope was provided for each survey distributed.

The questionnaire attempted to discover answers for the following questions:

1. How much time do teachers spend teaching Shakespearean drama?
2. Which Shakespearean plays are most frequently taught in southern Alberta's classrooms?
3. What teaching strategies are most frequently used in presenting the play to students?
4. What kinds of assignments are used to assess student learning?
5. If tests are used, what types of questions are used on the tests?
6. Do teachers show videotaped productions as part of the classroom study of Shakespeare's plays? If so, how are these videotapes utilized?
7. What other audio-visual and/or technological resources are being used to teach the Shakespearean drama?
8. What factors impact teachers' decisions regarding the aforementioned issues?

Limitations of the study

Surveys were distributed to teachers of English 10, 20, and 30 in 41 high schools across southern Alberta. Only teachers teaching any of these three courses during the 2000-2001 school year were asked to respond. The survey did not address the teaching of Shakespeare in English 13, 23 and 33 for a number of reasons. First, since the study of a Shakespearean drama is not mandatory in the non-academic high school English courses,

not all teachers choose to teach one of Shakespeare's plays in these courses. Additionally, due to the learning needs of the students that typically enrol in English 13, 23 and 33, many teachers employ alternative teaching strategies when teaching these courses. Thus, it was felt that adjustments to instructional methodologies could not, with any level of certainty, be ascribed to the genre being taught rather than to the demands of the students' particular learning needs.

Background Knowledge / The Literature

In examining the vast array of literature available concerning the teaching of Shakespeare's plays, I have tried to emulate the approach of Michael Flachmann (1993) who states,

I always begin [by] asking myself hard questions about [how] we [should] teach Shakespeare in the English classroom and what we hope our students will discover in the plays – not only about literature and theater, but also about themselves and their place in the universe around them. I do not have all the answers to these questions yet, but I do know that they depend in large part upon our ability as teachers to respond rightly to this unique and challenging art form. (p. 106)

Thus, in the spirit of the approach suggested by Flachmann, this literature review will examine briefly some of the responses to the questions he puts forth: How should we teach Shakespeare in the English classroom? What do we hope our students will discover in the plays? And finally, how can we best teach this unique and challenging art form?

Addressing Why We Teach Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare's writing has been studied as exemplary literature for centuries. The plays of William Shakespeare are mandatory reading for virtually every English-speaking student in the world today. What is it about Shakespeare's writing that has brought it to the forefront of literary studies? Why is knowledge of these plays considered the sign of an educated, literate individual?

Many scholars have offered practical explanations for the study of Shakespeare's plays. An examination of Shakespeare's writing, according to Roberts (1993), allows us "the pleasure of discovering how one supremely creative mind experiments with forms,

examines and reexamines themes, ideas, and characters, and constantly shapes and reshapes our vision of what the world is like” (p. 3). Evans (1966) offers this justification:

Any major Shakespeare play provides a class with a compact body of reading matter with which they can have all kinds of experiences that formulators of high school English programs have ever thought worthy of inclusion. Such a play covers, in effect, all the genres: it is short story, novel, drama, poetry, essay. It offers narration, exposition, description, argumentation. (pp. 1-2)

However, some offer less pragmatic reasons for having students study Shakespeare. Judy & Judy (1979) note that “both teachers and parents want their children to be exposed to the best our culture and language have to offer” (p. 151). Gibson (1998) suggests “a powerful argument for studying Shakespeare exists in his extraordinariness, his strangeness, his unfamiliarity. His appeal lies in a unique blend of the familiar and the strange, his relevance and his remoteness” (p. 6). But, most often, the reasons provided for studying Shakespeare are truly impassioned. For example, consider the ardent opinion expressed by Bertrand Evans (1966):

I am convinced that Shakespeare is far and away the most important author who can be studied by high school students. I believe, in fact, not merely that he is the most important, but that he is indispensable. I believe that he deserves and should have more time than any other single author in the literature program. ... I have been unable to think of any way in which, as an English class, they could be spending their time to more advantage. (p. 1)

Rationales for the study of Shakespeare's writing abound and, while a small number of critics may harbour reservations, any one of the justifications available is enough to legitimize the inclusion of Shakespeare's plays on the high school curriculum and the combination of these reasons provides an even more powerful incentive for the study of his immortal texts. Nonetheless, the question of how to present these great works of literature to the novice reader has been the centre of a much more interesting debate.

Addressing How To Teach Shakespeare's Plays

In her book *Teaching Shakespeare*, Veronica O'Brien (1982) presents the quintessential challenge for any teacher of English: "The important thing about the first encounter [with Shakespeare's plays] is that it should succeed, should be so vigorous an experience that English is for the duration everyone's favourite subject" (p. 7). This is, of course, no small task. The potential methods for teaching Shakespeare's plays vary almost as widely as do the classrooms into which the texts are taken and the teachers at their helm. But, regardless of who the teacher is or where the instruction takes place, there is plenty of common ground to be found. Pierce (1997) states, "Practically all teachers of Shakespeare believe in reading aloud in class, having students walk through scenes, using the actual bodies and voices of the students as ways of exploring and coming to understand the dramatic richness of Shakespeare's language" (p. 43).

A look at Bertrand Evans' 1966 text, *Teaching Shakespeare in the high school*, however, quickly suggests that the beliefs common today were not necessarily common a few years ago. In a chapter entitled "What activities – during and after?" Evans states, "the basic activity during the weeks of reading a Shakespearean play in class is precisely that — *reading the play*" (p. 119). Evans goes on to note that one activity, discussion, is

virtually inseparable from the reading but that other appropriate, useful activities should also accompany the reading. In this group of activities, Evans lists writing, outside reading, dramatic reading or acting out, memorization, films and recordings, and testing. While each of these activities continues to be employed by teachers of Shakespeare's plays, the intervening years have influenced significantly the prevalence with which certain techniques are used. For example, in his introduction to the 1990 issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* devoted to teaching, Ralph Alan Cohen notes that in the previous issue devoted to teaching (published in 1984), thirteen of the eighteen essays dealt with what was then the relatively new and unfamiliar topic of teaching through performance. In editing the 1990 issue, Cohen observed that the papers submitted "took for granted that presentation and discussion of performance is a practical teaching tool in Shakespeare classrooms. ... Performance pedagogy seems to have attained the status of a given" (p. iii). Thus, in addressing the research literature on specific instructional methodologies, it seems a logical place to begin.

Performance Techniques

Almost without exception, current literature on how to teach the plays of William Shakespeare advocates an active, performance approach since, as Gibson (1998) contends, "it is in [the] context of dramatic realisation that the plays are most appropriately understood and experienced" (p. xii). Swander (1984) acknowledges the strengths of this approach for students, noting,

Lines physically presented and explored on the workshop floor ... never fail, however poorly "acted," to offer visual images and vocal sounds that provoke thought, stir feelings, stimulate alternative possibilities, lead to fruitful discussion,

and leave everyone, including the teacher, knowing more both about a particular play and about Shakespeare's way of working in general. (p. 533)

Flachmann concurs, noting that "unlike novels and poems, which find their most complete and final expression in the quiet solemnity of our mind, a playscript exists to be performed" (p. 100). Thus, while Shakespeare's plays clearly have great literary value, their study in complete isolation from their theatrical context drastically underestimates the worth of this exciting and complex art form. To fail to convey the unique and distinctive characteristics of drama is to fail our students. "The true discipline of drama study is to find out how drama works, how it performs under the conditions for which it was written, how it communicates and affects an audience" (Styan, 1993, p. 61). In summing up the arguments in favour of the active approach, Styan echoes Swander when he states, "one little scene alive is worth more than a whole play dead" (p. 62).

Further, many writers note the advantages performance techniques offer students who "tend to be more physical than visual and more visual than verbal" (Oakes, 1993, p. 85). "Performance techniques are praised for fostering an awareness of choices implicit within the texts, for establishing the validity of multiple readings, and for preparing students to be better audiences" (O'Brien, 1984, p. 621). According to Gibson (1998), "active methods release students' imagination" which, in turn, "gives focus and substance to the discussion, writing and design work that students undertake. ... In active work, students combine critical thought with empathy, confidence with a willingness to suspend judgement" (pp. xii-xiii). In keeping with this belief, when describing the results of their school's Shakespeare celebration, Gleaves, Slagle, & Twaryonas (1993) noted that "students benefited in many ways that go beyond objective measurement. For instance,

students improved their attitudes toward their responsibilities, gained renewed or new-found confidence as learners, and enhanced their self-esteem” (p. 182).

Although widely recognized as a significant improvement on more traditional methods of presenting the plays, nonetheless, the active approach (or ‘direct method’ as it is sometimes called) is not without its drawbacks. Carroll (1977), for instance, notes that some students will be reticent to participate in performance activities. As well, Millard, Ziegler, & Custer (1984) note the difficulty that may be posed by the teacher’s own fears. Many veteran teachers are hesitant to depart from the familiar territory of reading and explaining a text. A further challenge arises when students expect the teacher (as ‘authority’ or ‘expert’) to tell them exactly what a scene means, not expect them to work out its meaning for themselves (see Johnson, 1993, pp. 190-191). Finally, many writers (Carroll, 1977; Gibson, 1998; Gilbert, 1984; Styan, 1993) acknowledge the large quantity of time required as the most significant challenge associated with teaching Shakespeare through performance. Gilbert, however, notes that while performance may be a time-consuming method of dealing with the play, it has the corresponding advantage of promoting “the close scrutiny of small sections of text [which] can produce extraordinary results” (p. 603).

In advocating an active approach to teaching Shakespearean drama, few writers would suggest that it be used exclusively, independent of more traditional teaching strategies. Rather, the consensus is that when performance techniques are mingled with familiar text-based teaching strategies, student comprehension will be increased. When teachers “encourage students to appreciate the dramatic as well as the literary value of

Shakespeare's scripts[,] what we quickly discover ... is that the two seemingly divergent approaches complement and reinforce each other brilliantly" (Flachmann, 1993, p. 101).

Reading the Text

Although performance techniques have received the lion's share of attention in the literature over the past few decades, reading the text remains the central and most basic approach teachers use in presenting Shakespeare's plays. Nonetheless, there is little consensus as to the best manner in which to read a play. As Veidemanis (1993) observes, "reading Shakespeare is not easy for students" (p. 4); therefore, how the reading of the play is accomplished is of great consequence. Evans (1966) derides individual, silent reading as "not ... generally successful" and "quite unsatisfactory" (p. 87). In contrast, he suggests that "reading aloud of Shakespeare by students is not only highly desirable, but indispensable; the study of no play should be considered finished until every student in the class has had his chance and made the most of it" (p. 90). Still, many writers (including Evans) argue that students read Shakespeare aloud so poorly as to present a major obstacle to comprehension and, certainly, appreciation.

In response to this concern, a number of authors (Gibson, 1998; Rygiel, 1992; Veidemanis, 1993) have advocated the use of choral speaking or reading in an attempt to minimize the negative effects of individual students' reading difficulties. A further option is to have the teacher read passages aloud to the students or to have students listen to audio recordings of the play. While these alternatives avoid the deficiencies resulting from students' weak reading skills that are inherent in previously mentioned methods, each of these approaches also comes with its own set of disadvantages including reduced

independence and responsibility for learning as well as an increased likelihood of boredom and inattention (see Evans, 1966, pp. 83-86 and 94-112).

Assessment: Written Assignments, Activities, and Examinations

Nearly every teacher includes, as part of the unit of study on Shakespeare, some method of assessing the students' learning, whether in the form of written work, tests, or creative assignments. Assessment is, after all, a necessary part of any teaching context. Here, as with all other decisions regarding teaching strategy, there are a multitude of options available to the informed teacher. Gibson (1998) provides a general rule to guide not only one's assessment of Shakespeare but of learning in any subject: "it is to be concerned that assessment does not *dominate* and *drive* [italics added] the teaching and learning that takes place" (p. 236). Gibson further advises that assessment should be characterized by variety and, whenever possible, provide students with the opportunity to display their imagination and inventiveness.

Nearly every author (and teacher) has teaching and assessment strategies he/she prefers or which he/she feels are fundamental to a complete and appropriate examination of the play. For instance, O'Brien (1982) believes "note-book work is an essential part of the study" (p. 36); Swope (1993) advocates the response journal which "provides a place for students to use language to make sense of what they are reading" (p. 224); and Veidemanis (1993) states that "selective paraphrasing, though not a technique to be overused, must be regarded as 'basic' in Shakespearean study" (p.5). Veidemanis further states,

Every Shakespearean play offers rich material from which varied writing assignments can be generated: character studies, comparison/contrasts, critical

analyses of scenes and speeches, paraphrases and interpretations, and so forth. ... Interspersed throughout the study of a Shakespearean play, assignments like these promote not only writing fluency, but also thoughtful reflection of the ideas and style of the play. (pp. 11-12)

As these authors (and many others) suggest, the range of assignments and activities that can be used in conjunction with the study of any of Shakespeare's plays is really only limited by the teacher's and/or students' creativity.

The truly thorny issue with regard to assessment is the question of the place of testing in the teaching Shakespearean drama. Some authors, such as Gibson (1998) and Rygiel (1992), see testing – even standardized testing – as a given part of instruction; others, such as Plasse (1997), look for alternative methods of testing such as the take-home exam; still others, such as Whitehead (as cited in Christenbury, 1993), deplore testing, suggesting that it will cause “the ‘certain destruction of [students’] enjoyment” (p. 37). Realistically, testing of some form is often unavoidable, especially if marks are to be distributed fairly and with reasonable precision. However, as with assignments, a wide range of testing strategies is possible. Teachers who wish to can implement alternative testing strategies instead of or in addition to more traditional testing methods.

Using Video, Computer, and Other Media Resources

Over the last few decades, video and media resources have become an integral part of classroom instruction in all subject areas. In the English class, units of study on Shakespeare have often led the way in this regard. “Major movie productions of his plays, computerized resources, and Internet communications have sent Shakespeare zooming into the twenty-first century as if he were indeed our contemporary” (Beehler,

1997, p. 247). Video productions of Shakespeare's plays are readily available for use by classroom teachers and allow students who might never have the opportunity to see a stage production the opportunity to engage in insightful performance study. Using film versions of the plays has become an integral part of Shakespeare instruction and raises its own unique set of questions and issues (as evidenced by the publication of at least one text devoted entirely to the topic: *Teaching Shakespeare with film and television* by H. R. Coursen, 1997). While some authors offer precise directives on when and how videos should be used in the classroom [e.g. "never ... introduce the film before your students are comfortable with the text" (Kissler, 1997, p. 201) and the contrasting "the use of film to promote understanding is usually 'wasted' by presenting it after the play has been read in its entirety" (Christel & Christiansen, 1993, p. 197)], most recognize that the options for using video are virtually limitless and that teachers will employ whatever techniques best suit their purposes in each individual classroom circumstance. In this vein, Gibson (1998) observes that "within [the] great variety of practice and belief, one essential principle governs the use of the video: *active, critical viewing*" (p. 200). Coursen (1997b) provides one example of active, critical viewing:

Where two or more productions of the same script are available, the contrast between productions can suggest invaluable to students of Shakespeare that no "right" version of a scene or a speech exists, indeed that manifold options are available to actors. (p. 193)

Halio (1997) cites a similar advantage of this method: "by comparison and contrast, the student is led back to the texts and forward to modern interpretations. In this process, the plays come alive as never before" (p. 276). Similarly, Griffin (1989) lists the following

benefits of using videotape in the Shakespeare classroom: (i) helps students perceive the atmosphere of a play, (ii) increases students' understanding of the subtext of a scene, (iii) allows students to see that the same scene can be validly interpreted in different ways, and (iv) teaches students to become more intelligent readers and perceptive viewers of the plays.

Despite their prevalence, videotapes of the plays are not the only media resources used in Shakespearean classrooms. Beehler (1997), Flannagan (1993, 1997), Gathergood (1997), Gibson (1998), and Saeger (1997) are just a few of the authors who have, in recent years, addressed the proliferation of Internet, computer, and multi-media resources available for use in teaching Shakespeare. With regard to these resources, the most significant challenge is in keeping abreast of the rapidly developing technologies and finding ways to employ them productively.

Conclusions from the Research Literature

There are a multitude of instructional strategies available to teachers of the Shakespearean drama. Because no single methodology provides the perfect approach, teachers will, thankfully, continue to use a wide array of tactics to engage and instruct their students. The results of the southern Alberta study presented in the following pages reflect this variety and resourcefulness with regard to teaching and assessment strategies.

In drawing conclusions based on a recent study conducted in Britain, Andrew Stibbs (1998) notes that previous distinctions between desk-bound and social, imaginative, and physical approaches to teaching Shakespeare are no longer mutually exclusive. Desk-bound study, Stibbs observes, need not be individualistic. Rather, teachers are employing greater collaboration in desk-bound work (reading, completing

written assignments, watching videos, etc.) and integrating these approaches with performance-oriented, exploratory, and imaginative social and physical activities. As Styan (1993) asserts,

The golden rule is that there are no golden rules. But it does not matter. If drama is a fallible human process of communication, perception, and response, so teaching is also an uncertain human process, one in which, finally, there are only attempts at communication, perception, and response. The art of drama and the art of teaching have a good deal in common. (p. 71)

The Sample

Procedure Used to Obtain Data

A five-page survey (see Appendix A) was mailed out to teachers of English 10, 20, and 30 in 41 southern Alberta high schools. Surveys were not addressed to specific individuals. Rather, a phone call to each school determined the number of teachers assigned to teach one or more of the designated courses and the corresponding number of surveys was sent *en masse* to each school. A letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting the teacher's assistance accompanied each survey, as did a stamped and addressed reply envelope. One hundred and ten surveys were distributed to the schools at the end of January 2001 and responses were requested within a six-week period by mid-March 2001.

The Returns

In order to ensure the anonymity of respondents, no identifying information could accompany any of the surveys. Thus, it was impossible to follow up on which teachers in which schools had or had not responded to the survey. Unfortunately, this resulted in a rather disappointing rate of return for the study. If a follow-up phone call could have been made, certainly a slightly larger sample could have been obtained.

Nonetheless, 40 surveys were returned (36.4%) and provided a small but informative sample from which to draw inferences and conclusions. Although the response rate was rather low, the majority of respondents provided substantial written comments on the final two pages of the survey, suggesting that their responses to the survey overall were carefully considered and thoughtful.

Demographic Information: The Respondents

The first page of the survey was intended to provide background information to identify general characteristics descriptive of the respondents. Based on responses to the first question, each of the respondents was teaching at least one class or section of English 10, 20, or 30 during the 2000-2001 school year; no respondent taught more than six classes of the courses indicated during the year.

Teacher Preparation

Respondents were asked to indicate their subject area major(s) and minor(s) based on their university studies. Their responses are summarized in Table 1. Since many respondents indicated multiple majors and/or minors, totals in both cases exceed 100%.

Table 1

Major and Minor Areas of Study for Respondents

<u>Subject Area</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Minor</u>
English	28 (70%)	8 (20%)
History / Social Studies	5 (12.5%)	19 (47.5%)
Sociology / Psychology	0	9 (23%)
Physical Education	4 (10%)	4 (10%)
Drama	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)
French / German	1 (2.5%)	4 (10%)
Other	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)

Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that English was either their major or minor area of study in university. Accordingly, ten percent of those teachers responding (and thus teaching at least one high school English course) did not have either a major or minor in English. The responses further suggest that history, social studies, and social sciences are the most common minor areas of study for the respondents. Finally, five of

the respondents (or 12.5%) indicated that they had completed substantial study in drama. This total is of particular interest given the focus of the study, Shakespeare's plays.

Of the forty teachers responding to the survey, 75% stated that they had taken a course specifically on the writing of William Shakespeare at some time during their post-secondary education. Interestingly, a positive response to this question did not necessarily correlate with a major or minor in English. That is, four of the respondents had neither a major nor a minor in English. Two of these four individuals, however, had taken a course specifically addressing Shakespeare's writing during their post-secondary careers.

Teaching Experience

The respondents had a wide range of teaching experience. Two respondents indicated that they were first year teachers; on the other hand, one respondent had 32 years of teaching experience. The mean for all respondents was 16.4 years of teaching experience. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the years of teaching experience of the forty respondents.

Class Sizes

In order to get a general sense of the size of classes with which respondents work, teachers were asked to indicate the number of students in the largest and smallest English classes they taught. Of all responses, the smallest class taught consisted of just five students while the largest class had forty students. The mean class size for those teachers responding to the survey was 24.5 students.

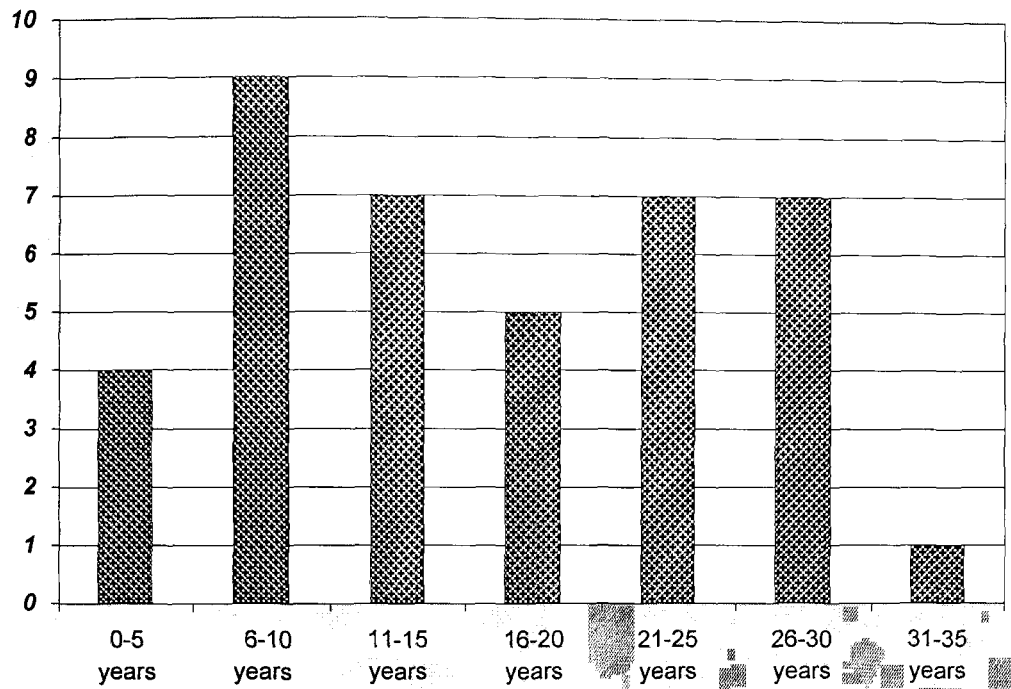


Figure 1

Years of Teaching Experience of Respondents

Questionnaire Responses

Time Spent Teaching Shakespearean Drama

Based on responses to questions regarding the length of class periods at the school and the number of periods spent teaching Shakespearean drama, the researcher was able to determine the total amount of time respondents spent teaching this unit at each grade level. There was wide variation in responses throughout this category as, for instance, the length of class periods ranged from 40 minutes to 180 minutes (for schools on the quarter system). My expectation was that, when considered in relation to the number of periods spent on the Shakespeare unit, the numbers would balance out somewhat. That is, those teaching shorter periods would use more classes for the study of the play while those teaching longer periods would use fewer classes. However, this was not always the case. Table 2 summarizes the totals obtained based on responses to question #4 on the first page of the survey.

Table 2

Time Spent Teaching Shakespearean Drama

	English 10	English 20	English 30
Number of Classes			
Greatest	50	38	36
Least	12	10	10
Mean	21.4	20.9	21.7
Total Time (in minutes)			
Greatest	4680	3600	3600
Least	804	825	700
Mean	1616	1531	1658
(in hours)	26.9	25.5	27.6

The greatest total amount of time indicated by a single respondent was 4680 minutes (or 78 hours). This total would suggest that the teacher spends more than half of his/her total time for the English 10 course on the Shakespearean drama. My suspicion is that there was some confusion by this respondent as to how the question should be answered; however, since the surveys were anonymous, I have no way of confirming that suspicion. Nonetheless, the average time calculated provides a reasonable means of comparison from one grade to the next.

Certainly, when considering the amount of time to be spent on the Shakespearean drama, there is no 'right' answer. Most teachers would acknowledge that the amount of time they spend teaching a play varies from one year to the next dependent on a wide range of factors. Nonetheless, given the length and complexity of the plays typically taught at the high school level, most teachers seem to agree with Veidemanis (1993) who advises,

lively pacing is crucial. Still, anything less than three weeks on a play is likely to be ineffectual. ... Teachers who wish "The Shakespeare Experience" to be something more than a blurred and superficial exposure must be flexible in providing the necessary time for discussion, reflection, and synthesis. (p. 11)

Plays Taught in Southern Alberta

Teachers were asked to state which play(s) they typically taught at each grade level. Many respondents provided more than one play title, indicating that they sometimes (i) teach more than one play to a group of students; (ii) offer students a choice regarding which play they prefer to study; (iii) teach a different play to their advanced placement or honours class; etc.

The most commonly taught plays are *Romeo and Juliet* (English 10), *Macbeth* (English 20), and *Hamlet* (English 30) but there are a wide variety of other titles taught less frequently at each level. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the range of plays selected for English 10, 20, and 30 respectively, based on responses to the survey.

It is interesting to note that a number of plays (*The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, and *Richard III*) are taught at more than one grade level while one play (*The Taming of the Shrew*) was cited as being taught at each of the three grade levels.

Table 3

Plays Taught in English 10

Title	Responses
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	32
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	10
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	5
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	3
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	2
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	2
<i>As You Like It</i>	1

Table 4

Plays Taught in English 20

Title	Responses
<i>Macbeth</i>	30
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	3
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	2
<i>Richard III</i>	1
<i>Henry V</i>	1
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	1
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	1

Table 5

Plays Taught in English 30

Title	Responses
<i>Hamlet</i>	25
<i>King Lear</i>	6
<i>Othello</i>	5
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	3
<i>Henry V</i>	2
<i>The Tempest</i>	2
<i>Henry IV – Part I</i>	2
<i>Richard III</i>	1

Introducing the Play: Providing Background

Most teachers spend one or more class periods on introductory material before commencing the study of the play itself, believing, as Willson (1993) does, that “without this careful preparation, students will have difficulty grasping the growing sophistication with which this consummate playwright used his tools” (p. 49). Based on this assumption, the survey asked teachers to indicate the approximate amount of time they spent at each grade level on a variety of introductory topics and activities.

Topics Addressed and Time Spent Introducing the Shakespearean Drama

Six introductory topics (historical background to the play, historical overview of Elizabethan times, the Elizabethan theatre and theatrical conventions, the life of William Shakespeare, examination of Elizabethan language, and study of Shakespeare’s poetry) were presented on the survey and space was provided for respondents to indicate any other areas they address which were not listed. Three topics were added by one or more

teachers: examining the authorship debate, showing video clips from *Shakespeare in Love* (to provide historical context), and completing internet research and reports.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 reflect the amount of time teachers spend on introductory topics in each of English 10, 20, and 30 respectively.

Table 6

Time Spent on Introductory Topics: English 10

Topic	<u>Number of Periods</u>					C.*
	0	1/2	1	2	3 or >	
Historical background to the play	2	8	17	2	0	
Overview of Elizabethan times	1	7	15	5	1	
Elizabethan theatre and conventions	2	10	15	1	1	
Life of William Shakespeare	4	6	12	5	2	
Examination of Elizabeth language	4	9	10	3	0	3
Study of Shakespeare's poetry	13	2	7	4	2	1

*C. = continuous; the respondent indicated that the topic was taught, as appropriate, during the study of the play

Table 7

Time Spent on Introductory Topics: English 20

Topic	Number of Periods					C.*
	0	1/2	1	2	3 or >	
Historical background to the play	0	7	10	2	0	1
Overview of Elizabethan times	1	7	12	2	1	1
Elizabethan theatre and conventions	1	11	9	1	1	1
Life of William Shakespeare	4	8	10	0	1	1
Examination of Elizabeth language	1	7	9	1	0	6
Study of Shakespeare's poetry	8	1	8	5	0	2

*C. = continuous; the respondent indicated that the topic was taught, as appropriate, during the study of the play

Table 8

Time Spent on Introductory Topics: English 30

Topic	Number of Periods					C.*
	0	1/2	1	2	3 or >	
Historical background to the play	0	10	10	3	0	-
Overview of Elizabethan times	2	6	11	0	0	-
Elizabethan theatre and conventions	3	7	9	0	0	-
Life of William Shakespeare	6	4	7	1	1	-
Examination of Elizabeth language	3	3	5	3	1	4
Study of Shakespeare's poetry	7	1	7	2	1	1

*C. = continuous; the respondent indicated that the topic was taught, as appropriate, during the study of the play

In general, it appears that introductory topics are given more class time in the English 10 course than they are at the other levels. This is a logical arrangement since students should become progressively more familiar with Elizabethan times and theatre as well as the life of William Shakespeare as they proceed through their high school careers. By contrast, the amount of time spent providing the historical background to the play does not seem to change significantly from one grade to the next. Again, this is a logical pattern since each year a new play is studied and each new play will require students to become familiar with its unique historical background and significance. The third relationship that is evident from the results is that the interest in or concern for teaching the poetry of William Shakespeare increases slightly from grade ten to grade twelve. This may be a factor of the students' increasing maturity and sophistication of understanding or, perhaps, a response to the emphasis the English 30 diploma exam places on comprehension of Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic writing. Finally, the results indicate that the examination of Elizabethan language is the topic most likely to be accomplished as an on-going examination throughout the reading of the play rather than being discussed in isolation at the outset. This is a sensible way of proceeding since students are likely to have frequent questions about the language as they encounter it in the text of the play. A teacher, therefore, would be wise to continue to address this issue throughout the unit of study in an attempt to get his/her students to not only understand but also appreciate the complexities of Shakespeare's language.

Teaching Strategies

Using a checklist, teachers were asked to indicate the frequency with which they employed a variety of teaching methods during the Shakespearean drama unit. To allow

for unique and creative procedures, teachers were encouraged to suggest additional ideas in the 'other' category. Nearly one quarter of the respondents did so, suggesting the wide range of activities teachers are using to engage their students in the study of the plays. Table 9 provides a summary of the responses received. In the table, the teaching strategies have been divided into four generic categories (Reading, Lecture and Discussion, Performance, and Extension) for the purposes of discussion within this paper. On the survey, however, this was not done. Instead, the strategies were listed in a relatively random fashion in an effort to encourage the respondents to give each teaching strategy equal consideration without weighing them against other strategies intended to accomplish similar outcomes.

Table 9

Frequency of Use of Teaching Strategies for Shakespearean Drama

Teaching Strategy	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Reading				
Watching scenes on videotape	33	7	0	0
Oral reading - students taking parts	29	8	3	0
Listening to scenes on audiotape	11	11	4	14
Teacher reading scenes aloud	7	15	12	6
Students read scenes silently	3	11	13	13
Choral speaking of lines	2	10	13	15
Lecture & Discussion				
Teacher-led, whole class discussion	32	8	0	0
Small group discussions	21	13	5	1
Lecture on concepts (theme, plot, etc.)	19	11	10	0
Debate	0	15	11	14
Performance				
Acting scenes / walk throughs (with text)	8	19	6	7
Role play	5	19	8	8
Student improvisations of scene (no text)	4	16	8	12
Tableaux (frozen images of scenes)	0	6	6	28
Extension				
Reading of related texts	13	19	6	2
Games and puzzles	6	19	9	6
Guest speakers	0	2	11	27

Reading the Play

Six of the teaching strategies listed on the survey specifically addressed the methods teachers employed when having students read the play. The overwhelming preferences were for oral reading with students taking parts and watching scenes on videotape. All forty respondents stated that they used these techniques at least some of the time. Over 80% indicated that they frequently had students watch scenes on videotape

while over 70% stated that they frequently had students take parts for oral reading. Choral speaking of lines and silent reading of scenes were much less popular; more than 60% of the teachers surveyed reported that they rarely or never used these strategies. In the middle range were listening to scenes on audiotape and having the teacher read scenes aloud. The responses related to the use of audiotape were interesting, however. While 55% of respondents stated that they used audiotapes occasionally or frequently, 35% said that they never used this approach. These results may simply be a reflection of whether the teacher has access to audiotapes of the plays he/she teaches (although this seems somewhat unlikely since all teachers have managed to obtain copies of video productions of their plays) or there may be a more complex explanation involving personal teaching preferences and/or students' interests.

Lecture and Discussion

The teachers responding to this survey are regularly making use of three of the four teaching strategies in this grouping. Teacher-led whole class discussions were used at least occasionally by all of the respondents and were used frequently by 80% of the teachers. Small group discussions and teacher lectures on concepts such as plot and theme were each used frequently by approximately 50% of the respondents and at least occasionally by more than 75% of those responding. These three approaches appear to be quite fundamental methodologies, at least for the majority of respondents to this survey. Debate, on the other hand, was rarely or never used by more than 60% of the teachers surveyed. It should be noted, however, that while formal debate may not be particularly common, students regularly debate informally when participating in large or small group

discussions on ambiguous aspects of the text although their teachers may not have felt such deliberations would qualify as debate for the purposes of this survey.

Performance Techniques

None of the teaching strategies involving performance were tremendously popular as none was used frequently by more than 20% of the respondents. However, all except tableaux were used at least occasionally by more than 50% of the respondents. These results may be a reflection of some of the drawbacks of using performance-based instruction listed on page 12. It is interesting to note that the two performance techniques that were most commonly used among the teachers responding to the survey involve the least departure from familiar territory. Role play, for instance, should be familiar to most students as it is commonly used in many subjects and often employed in other units of study within the English curriculum. Similarly, walk-throughs with text allow students and teachers the comfort of having the exact words of the Bard to guide their tentative initial attempts at performance. Tableaux and improvisations of scenes without the text, on the other hand, are the strategies requiring more dramatic flair and comfort. This sense of relative security may, in part, account for the differences in how frequently these strategies are used.

The most significant conclusion to be drawn regarding performance techniques, however, lies in their overall lack of popularity among the respondents. As noted in the literature review, the active approach is considered to be the most effective method of teaching dramatic literature. However, for the most part, the teachers responding to this survey are not employing this teaching strategy to the degree that the literature suggests it should be used. Nonetheless, their occasional use of active, performance teaching

methods is encouraging given that theory must always precede practice and a complete transformation, like most pedagogical revolutions, is likely to be slow in evolving.

Extension

Of the three methods in this category, the reading of related texts led the way in frequency of use. Related texts would include such things as parodies of the play or of particular speeches as well as poems and stories containing allusions to Shakespeare's writing. The publication of the *Global Shakespeare* series (1997) may have had some impact on the use of related readings as each textbook in the series provides a number of associated texts for students to examine. As a result, teachers with access to these books would have no difficulty locating samples to illustrate the frequent references to Shakespeare's writing in other authors' works.

Games and puzzles were relatively common extension activities, as well. Eighty-five percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they use games and puzzles at least some of the time. Guest speakers, however, were extremely uncommon with only five percent of respondents using them on occasion. This finding is likely indicative of the scarcity of readily available specialists within the region as well as the frequently prohibitive costs involved in bringing in speakers from other areas.

Additional Teaching Strategies

In the space provided for 'Other' teaching strategies, respondents suggested six additional teaching strategies that were not listed on the survey. Three of these suggestions fit loosely in the 'Reading' category: (i) comparison of two video productions, (ii) film study of a video production, and (iii) reading the prose version in *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (1953) to introduce the plot of the

play; one is an example of ‘Lecture and Discussion’ (teacher explanation or paraphrase of text); and the final two are examples of ‘Extension’ activities: (i) field trips to see live productions and (ii) showing companion movies.

Conclusions Regarding Teaching Strategies Indicated in Survey Data

The results of the survey indicate that there is significant variety in the methods teachers are using to present the Shakespearean drama to high school students. However, there is less emphasis on the use of performance techniques and active methods than the literature would suggest there should be. The majority of the most commonly used strategies are teacher-centered and desk-bound rather than student-centered and dynamic. It appears that old habits do, indeed, die hard. While the message regarding direct and dramatic approaches to Shakespeare has clearly been expressed (in many ways and by many individuals), the actual use of the methods recommended is not prevalent (at least, not in the classrooms represented by this sample).

There are many possible reasons for this finding. As suggested, it may simply be a case of the slow progression from formerly accepted practices to the most current way of doing things. On the other hand, there are likely other factors at play here as well such as the availability of a suitable space since, as Gibson (1998) notes, “many classrooms are ill-suited for active group work [because of their] small size and the number of desks, chairs or tables” (p. 157). In addition, time constraints greatly influence the teaching strategies selected by many teachers. It takes much longer for the class to study a play using performance techniques than it does to study the same play using less active methods. Finally, and possibly most significantly, “nontheatrical teachers are nervous about using performance as a technique” (Potter, 1999, p. 238). The best way to

overcome such nervousness, however, is simply to face the fear head on by gradually beginning to intersperse a few active techniques among the more traditional methods the teacher is accustomed to using. Once teachers see some of the positive interactions that result when students are provided with a chance to enact a portion of Shakespeare's text, most will be encouraged to try additional performance exercises in the future. The benefits of the active method are significant; once teachers (and students) experience those benefits first hand, performance pedagogy will become a priority for them.

Teachers of Shakespeare have a singular opportunity to involve their students directly in the material being studied. ... students of Shakespearean drama can actually create the thing they study. By becoming themselves involved in the complex interaction of text, actors, and audience that constitutes a play in performance, students can gain unique insights into Shakespearean drama and the Elizabethan theatrical culture that produced it. (Loehlin, 1999, p. 286)

Any teacher would wish such outcomes for his/her students. The first challenge, then, is to see that teachers are made aware of the endless variety of active teaching strategies that can be employed. Next, teachers must gain the confidence necessary to employ these techniques with their students. These goals can, in part, be accomplished by offering workshop sessions where teachers can engage in the performance activities with other teachers like themselves. The truly difficult work, however, still lies with the teacher him/herself. A workshop session will only impact the students if the teacher actually employs one or more of the techniques learned there when he/she returns to the classroom.

Assignments and Assessment

A similar checklist format was used to determine the types of assignments and methods of assessment teachers employed during the Shakespearean drama unit and the frequency with which they were used. Table 10 presents a summary of the responses received. As was noted for the teaching strategies, although the survey did not group the assessment strategies originally, they have been grouped here for ease of comparison.

Table 10

Frequency of Use of Assessment Strategies and Assignments

Assessment Strategy	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Review Work				
Identification of significant quotations	33	5	2	0
Homework questions on scenes or acts	23	11	5	1
Paraphrasing assignments	16	16	6	2
Character sketches	15	18	5	2
Scene / plot summaries	12	12	10	6
Reading journal or logbook	12	12	6	10
Written Assignments				
Paragraph writing assignments	21	17	1	1
Essay assignments (< 500 words)	21	12	4	3
Essay assignments (> 500 words)	13	17	1	7
Research projects / papers	9	15	13	3
Creative writing (modern English)	8	23	5	4
Modernized version of a scene	2	24	5	9
Creative writing (Shakespearean English)	3	11	9	17
Oral, Performance, and Creative Work				
Group projects	20	17	2	1
Art projects (collage, drawings, etc.)	16	13	10	1
Interpretation / Presentation of a scene	13	16	6	5
Speech memorization - Individual students	8	15	6	11
Speech memorization - Choral groups	2	9	8	21
Tests and Quizzes				
Exam on entire play	36	1	1	2
Exam / quiz on each act	24	10	4	2

Review Work

Since most teachers spend two to three weeks of class time (or more) covering a Shakespearean play, assignments to help students review the characters and events of the play are generally required. As well, review work such as identification of significant quotations and paraphrasing of speeches can help students to more fully understand the language of the play. The most commonly used review assignment was the identification of significant passages or quotations. Its frequent use is likely the result of the fact that it achieves both objectives cited above simultaneously. That is, by identifying where a specific passage fits in the context of the play and determining who spoke the line, the student must recall the events that have transpired and the characters involved in them. In addition, the student is re-introduced to particular passages of Shakespeare's writing and afforded the opportunity to recognize the beauty and artistry of the language once the basic outline of the play is familiar to them.

It is interesting to note that all six of the strategies considered to be review work were utilized quite heavily overall. That is, each of them was used occasionally or frequently by more than 60% of the respondents. This pattern is indicative of the belief that some form of review work is necessary during the study of Shakespeare's plays. It also suggests that most teachers try to vary the review work assigned so that students do not become bored by the repetitive use of a single method of review.

Written Assignments

Paragraphs and short essays (under 500 words) were the types of written work most commonly assigned by the teachers responding to the survey. Longer essays (over 500 words) were used only slightly less often, however. Overall, expository writing

assignments were utilized much more frequently than were creative writing assignments. Since expository essays are required on Alberta's English 30 diploma examination, the assignments given by classroom teachers seem to reflect the critical, analytical nature of the writing this exam demands of students. That is not to say that teachers have dispensed with creative writing assignments altogether, though. Of the three creative writing assignments listed on the survey, only the one using Shakespearean English was used infrequently (over 40% of respondents never used this type of assignment, suggesting that the students' facility with Elizabethan English as a written form is of little concern to teachers). Modernized versions of scenes and creative writing assignments using modern English, on the other hand, were each used at least occasionally by more than 60% of the respondents.

Oral, Performative, and Creative Work

While assessments based on oral work or speech memorization were relatively uncommon, the majority of teachers responding used group work, art projects, and performance assessments quite regularly. The frequent assignment of art projects (40% of teachers use them frequently and over 70% use them at least occasionally) may, in part, reflect the emphasis on representing as a strand of English language arts in the new curriculum documents scheduled for implementation in September 2001. Performance work such as a presentation or interpretation of a scene is a further example of engaging students in representing. It is interesting that although performative work was not particularly popular as a teaching methodology, nearly half of the teachers surveyed used student performances as a means of assessment at least occasionally.

Tests and Quizzes

By far the most commonly used assessment strategy was an examination on the entire play. Ninety percent of the respondents reported using this method of evaluation frequently but 5% stated that they never use it. As well as exams covering the whole play, many teachers also ask students to write tests or quizzes on each act of the play. In fact, a further 85% reported using this assessment tool occasionally to frequently. Thus, the majority of students are writing exams or quizzes on each act of the play studied in addition to a unit exam on the entire play. It is likely that this compulsion towards testing is a consequence of an education system that is very results-oriented. Report card grades must be calculated, provincial diploma exams are written by our grade twelve students, and parents, administrators, and students all expect an exam at the end of the unit to test the knowledge students have gained.

Additional Assignments Suggested

In the 'Other' category, six respondents offered suggestions of assignments they use that did not fit any of the categories provided on the survey. Two of the suggestions would likely be examples of review work: (i) plot diagramming and (ii) games while three are writing assignments: (i) language creation assignment, (ii) Shakespeare as a second language, and (iii) Shakespearean newspapers (suggested by two respondents). The final suggestion, an Elizabethan food fair, is an example of creative group work that definitely extends student learning well beyond the basic levels of knowledge and comprehension.

Conclusions Regard Assessment Strategies

While teachers use a wide range of assessment strategies (including creative and interpretive work) on occasion, testing and the companion review work that leads up to it are the overwhelming frontrunners in frequency of use. Although it is hard to state unequivocally which is the cause and which the effect, there is a definite connection between the types of assessment and the instructional strategies being used. That is to say that if a teacher presents the material using an active, performance approach, but assesses his/her students' learning using traditional pencil and paper methods such as exams and essays, there is little opportunity for students to demonstrate through the assessment what they have learned in practice. Thus, there seems to be a strong connection between the relatively infrequent use of performance teaching methods (coupled with the corresponding predominance of desk-bound, teacher-centred approaches) and the frequent use of tests, quizzes, and expository writing assignments for assessment.

Types of Test Questions

The overwhelming predominance of testing as an assessment method necessitates an examination of the kinds of tests students are being asked to write. As such, the survey asked respondents to indicate which types of exam questions they used at each grade level. Two respondents noted testing procedures they used which were not listed on the survey: (i) terminology / definition questions and (ii) take-home examinations. Table 11, which outlines the teachers' responses to this section of the survey, suggests that most teachers use a variety of question types at all grade levels with the exception of the oral testing of memorized passages, which was not common at any level. There are, however,

some interesting trends (either increased or decreased use of certain question types) from one grade level to the next.

Table 11

Test Question Types - Frequency of Use by Grade Level

Question Type	English 10 *n=36	English 20 *n=31	English 30 *n=28
Multiple choice	81%	81%	93%
True and false	53%	55%	43%
Matching	81%	71%	54%
Short answer	89%	94%	96%
Essay	86%	87%	89%
Identification of speeches	86%	94%	86%
Questions about Shakespeare's life and times, Elizabethan theatre, etc.	69%	61%	32%
Comprehension questions using text not previously studied	33%	52%	86%
Paraphrasing questions	50%	55%	57%
Oral testing of memorized passages	25%	29%	21%

* The variation in the number of responses for each grade level is a result of the fact that not all respondents taught each of the three grade levels.

Differences Between Grade Levels

Generally, there is consistency from one grade level to the next in the types of questions to which students are asked to respond with a slight increase in expectations at the higher levels. For instance, where 50% of teachers ask students to paraphrase a passage on the exam in English 10, 55% do so in English 20 and 57% in English 30. In some instances, though, there are patterns of use that differ significantly from the expected trends. True and false questions and, more notably, matching questions are used much less frequently at the senior level. While these types of questions are used with

some frequency in English 10 to check students' knowledge of the play's events and characters, by English 30 comprehension of these more basic aspects of the play is presumed and the focus, instead, is on higher order thinking skills such as evaluation and analysis of the literature which can better be tested by use of short answer, essay, and (in some instances) multiple choice questions. The use of each of these three types of questions increases slightly at the English 30 level.

In considering the manner in which teachers introduced their Shakespearean drama units (as outlined in the section beginning on page 26), it was noted that progressively less time was spent at each successive grade level on providing background information about Shakespeare's life and times, the Elizabethan theatre, and so forth. It is a logical consequence, then, that fewer teachers test this content at the English 30 level (32%) than at the English 10 and 20 levels (69% and 61%, respectively).

The incidence of use of multiple choice questions rises at the English 30 level. In English 10 and 20, 81% of teachers reported using multiple choice test questions while 93% of English 30 teachers reported using them. This increase is quite likely a response to the format of Part B of the English 30 diploma examination, a multiple choice reading test. However, the most dramatic difference with regard to the types of test questions used at each grade level is in the use of comprehension questions for a passage of unfamiliar Shakespearean text. Students are given a scene from a Shakespearean play other than the one they have studied and asked to correctly answer a series of multiple choice questions based on what they have read. While only 33% of English 10 teachers use this type of question, 52% use it at the English 20 level, and 86% employ it with English 30 students. This style of question is the form used on the English 30 diploma

examination, Part B. These results strongly suggest that there is a correlation between classroom testing procedures and the format of the provincial diploma examinations in English.

Multiple Readings of the Text

Twenty-seven of the respondents (67.5%) stated that they expect their students to read the play more than once. The expectation for multiple readings arises, in many instances, in response to “the most obvious obstacle to immediate apprehension, Shakespeare’s language. Students today thus need to be encouraged to recover the labor of love involved in ‘reading’ a Shakespearean play not merely once, but several times” (Holmer, 1993, p. 90). Although Holmer notes that a “good reader is not ... necessarily looking for something in particular,” (p. 90) according to the survey respondents, subsequent readings of the play were most often to be completed by students independently in order to complete homework, assignments, or review questions (52.5%). Other methods of accomplishing multiple readings of the text included reading in class (12.5%), reading along with audio or videotapes (17.5%), and through performing scenes (15%). In their written comments, a number of teachers acknowledged that, given the methods of accomplishing subsequent readings, it was unlikely that the majority of the students read the play over in its entirety.

Use of Videos

Prevalence

All respondents (100%) reported showing all or part of a videotaped production of the play studied to their students. Twenty years ago, such would most certainly not have been the case. However, with video becoming a significant part of our day-to-day lives in

the twenty-first century, top-quality productions of virtually every play are readily available for classroom use.

Procedural Variety

What is most interesting about the use of video in the Shakespeare classroom, then, is not whether it is used but how it is being used. Respondents were asked to indicate the methods by which they implemented videotaped productions in their classrooms. The two most commonly used strategies were showing the complete video at or near the end of the unit after the play has been read and showing one scene or act at a time to correlate with the students' reading of each section of the text. (Since each of these strategies were mentioned by more than 50% of the respondents, it is safe to assume that the same strategy is not used for every play or at all grade levels.) Additionally, nearly half the respondents (42.5%) stated that they asked students to note comparisons between the text and the video production viewed. Numerous other uses of video were employed less frequently. These included (i) showing clips of the video rather than the entire play, (ii) pausing the video for discussion at appropriate points, (iii) showing the video after the unit exam has been written, (iv) teaching the video as text, (v) showing related videos [such as *West Side Story* (Robbins & Wise, 1961) or *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994)] which borrow themes and/or plots from the play being studied, (vi) contrasting different video productions of the same play, (vii) using the video to introduce the play's plot and themes to students, and (viii) having students make their own videos of the play studied. The tremendous diversity evident in the responses to questions regarding the use of video reflects the creativity and ingenuity of the teachers responding to the survey and of English teachers in general. This diversity is also

indicative of the remarkable flexibility of video, especially when contrasted with the 16mm film of just a few decades ago.

Other Media and Audio-Visual Resources

In addition to showing a video of the play read, over 70% of the respondents indicated that they made use of additional audio-visual, media, and/or technological resources when teaching the Shakespearean drama. These can be divided into two general categories: (i) electronic media including audiotapes, music, video (other than of the play), and computers and (ii) non-electronic media including artwork, charts and diagrams, posters, models, costumes, and cooking. In terms of their relative popularity, respondents cited 41 instances in which electronic media were employed while only 15 instances of non-electronic media use were reported. This result reflects the trends towards increased use of technology and electronics evident in our society in general.

Computer and the Internet

The single most commonly reported use of technology other than video is Internet searches. Twelve respondents (30%) reported having students conduct Internet searches on various topics concerning the play or its author as well as connected topics. An additional five respondents indicated that students used CD-ROMs to complete research and/or access background information. Finally, five respondents indicated that, during the Shakespearean drama unit, students used computers for PowerPoint presentations and other similar purposes. Indeed, the responses suggest that classroom teachers are employing many of the new technologies available. Perhaps these teachers feel, as Roy Flannagan (1993) does, that “there is virtually no limit to what we can do electronically to improve both our own understanding and that of our students” (p. 157).

Reasons / Causes Underlying Choices

The final page of the survey was an open-ended question asking teachers to consider the factors underlying their choices of teaching strategy for the Shakespearean drama. While a small number of surveys (less than 8%) were returned with no response to this final question, the majority of respondents provided numerous, detailed answers to the question. So as to avoid directing respondents towards any particular answer or type of answer, no suggested responses or examples were provided for this question. As a result, the wording of the responses varied widely. However, once the information was tabulated, certain common themes emerged. These themes and some of the specific survey responses relative to each of them are outlined below.

Student Interests and Needs

The majority of respondents cited the interests and needs of the students as their prime motivating factors when deciding how to teach the play. Fully one half of the teachers responding listed the students' background and familiarity with Shakespeare's writing as significantly impacting their classroom interactions. Additionally, one half of the respondents mentioned the importance of generating and/or maintaining the students' interest in Shakespeare's works as an important consideration in planning and presenting their units. The composition of the class relative to gender, age, academic levels, and class size was referred to by 38% of the respondents as influential in determining the approach(es) the teachers used.

Teacher Interests and Knowledge

While students' interests and needs were foremost in the respondents' minds, their own interest in and enjoyment of the material were almost as significant. Some of the

responses in this vein include: (i) “I love Shakespeare and would teach a whole class of it if there was enough time. I think (hope!) my enthusiasm carries over to my students.” (ii) “I am a Shakespearen-holic [sic] I guess you might say. I love his use of language and the images he presents ...” and (iii) “I believe that my ‘love’ of the subject shines through and because I appreciate Shakespeare’s works most of my students do as well.”

While their passion for Shakespeare’s writing is, for many teachers, highly influential, a significant number of teachers also noted that their level of knowledge of the play, their experience in teaching it, and the successes they had previously encountered when teaching a play also influenced their current manner of teaching it.

The Nature of the Text

Fourteen of the respondents (35%) cited the unique features of the dramatic form as having an influence on how they taught the Shakespearean drama. An additional 35% of the respondents stated that they were conscious of the need for creativity, variety, and student involvement when planning their instructional approaches for the plays. Nearly 25% noted that, in their presentation of the drama, they were cognizant of communicating a theme from the play to which the students could relate. A further 27% noted that the accessibility of the text and the striving for a depth of understanding by the students influenced the methodologies employed in instruction. Finally, two teachers stated that their style of teaching clearly reflected the ambiguity of the play text by making students aware of the multiple interpretations of each play that are possible.

External Factors

Respondents referred to several external factors as having a significant influence on how they chose to teach the play. The amount of time available for teaching this

aspect of the English curriculum was the most commonly cited, receiving mention by nearly 30% of the respondents. The resources and materials available to the instructor were mentioned on 20% of the surveys as having an impact on their teaching methods. Five percent of the teachers referred to specific aspects of the program of studies (for example, representing as a strand of the language arts in the new curriculum or the communication and technology outcomes expected of students). Finally, 10% of teachers stated that preparation of students for final examinations influenced their classroom instruction.

Conclusions

Based on the wide variety of responses given to the open-ended question, it is apparent that teachers of the Shakespearean drama must carefully weigh many factors and influences as they plan the methods of instruction they will employ. While this is true for any unit of study (in English as well as other subject areas), because of the unique nature of the Shakespearean drama, the instructional choices must be adapted accordingly. Based on the responses given to this final section of the survey, it appears teachers are keenly aware of the singular demands of teaching the Shakespearean drama. It is also apparent that the majority of teachers are, for the most part, rising to the challenge admirably.

Inferences and Implications

It is evident from an analysis of the results of this limited study that the majority of high school English teachers employ a wide variety of teaching strategies when presenting Shakespeare's plays to their students. All of the teachers surveyed make frequent use of videotaped productions of the play(s) taught but there is great variation in the manner in which videos are viewed and/or analyzed. Other commonly used strategies include oral reading of plays, large and small group discussions, and lecture. While a range of instructional methods are evident, those used most regularly are desk-bound, text- or teacher-centred, and relatively passive approaches. Teaching strategies employing performance techniques are used infrequently by the majority of the respondents despite the fact that active, performance-oriented methodologies dominate the literature on how to teach the Shakespearean drama.

In examining the causes underlying the teachers' choice of teaching strategy, the most commonly cited external factor was the time available for teaching the play. Many teachers would argue that having students enact or improvise scenes from the play is a time-consuming endeavour and that the same content could be covered much more quickly using reading, lecture, and discussion. While there is some truth to this argument, O'Brien (1984) sagely counters that

the most efficient means of dispensing information is not necessarily the most effective means of teaching. Students who see themselves as passive receivers of packaged wisdom are likely to learn less than those who find themselves actively engaged in a process of discovery. (pp. 621-622)

Given that the respondents' most commonly cited underlying factors were their students' needs and interests, it seems apparent that greater effort should be made to employ active, performance teaching methods whenever possible. As O'Brien suggests, "While both the 'literary' approach and the 'performance' approach can be used to establish the same points about the text, the latter seems ... to engage the students more fully" (p. 623).

Many similar observations could be made relative to assessment as were made with regard to teaching strategy. That is, although there is a good deal of variety in the assignments given and the methods of assessment employed by teachers during the study of the Shakespearean drama, the majority of these approaches are desk-bound, pencil and paper style assessments. Exams and/or quizzes are used by over 90% of the respondents; review work such as identification of quotations, homework questions, and paraphrases are also very common as are paragraph and essay writing assignments based on the play. However, relatively little use is made of performance-based assessments.

It is apparent from the responses to this survey that the majority of high school English teachers embrace diversity; almost all of the respondents employ an assortment of teaching and assessment strategies in their lessons on Shakespeare's plays. However, the distinctive qualities and characteristics of dramatic literature require that English teachers make use of instructional approaches borrowed from the stage and the drama classroom rather than relying exclusively on the techniques that have served them well in the study of narrative and expository literature. The particular features of the drama demand that it be studied not merely as words on a page to be read and analyzed but rather as speeches and actions designed to be seen and heard by an audience. The text of a play was never intended to be static. It is a dynamic entity given its meaning through

the interaction of actors and audience. While video productions can help students to visualize the characters and action of a play, viewing a video is a passive activity that suggests a single, definitive interpretation of the play. There is little room for differing interpretations and less opportunity for interaction with the performers. If students are never provided with opportunities to experience the dynamics of performance directly, they can never be expected to fully appreciate the expertise of Shakespeare, the playwright.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teaching the Shakespearean drama presents a unique challenge to the high school English teacher. Not only do most students view Shakespeare's writing as out of date or old-fashioned, but the nature of the dramatic form itself also demands particular instructional approaches if it is to be taught successfully in the classroom. As such, English teachers must recognize the particular characteristics of the drama as a text and employ the kinds of specific teaching strategies that will enable students to more fully understand and appreciate this unique literary form. With this central tenet governing my comments, a number of recommendations can be made as a result of this study.

First, teachers should place increased emphasis on active, performance teaching techniques. In addition to preparing scenes for presentation, active approaches can include a wide variety of activities such as role plays, improvisations, tableaux, puppet shows, character explorations, interviews, mock trials, and so on. The literature offers hundreds of examples of activities that lend themselves to dramatic interpretations, many of which require little preparation time by the students (see Davis & Salomone, 1993; Gibson, 1998; Riggio, 1999; Salomone & Davis, 1997). Workshops and seminars providing practice with some of the most common and/or useful performance strategies would enable teachers to feel more confident in employing these methods with their students. Once teachers are using more active approaches to teach the plays, it follows naturally that they will begin to incorporate corresponding performance-based assessment strategies. Here again, seminars outlining appropriate methods of grading performance tasks may be beneficial to some teachers since evaluation of performance can be a very

difficult undertaking because of its subjectivity. Providing teachers with suitable means of evaluating students' active work is vital to the success of a performance approach.

In conjunction with this increased emphasis on performance, it is recommended that there be a corresponding decrease in the emphasis currently placed on desk-bound approaches to teaching the Shakespearean drama. While some oral reading, lecture, discussion, written work, and even examinations will always remain part of teaching Shakespeare in the English classroom, a lessening of the emphasis on these strategies will provide both students and teachers with a welcome reprieve from the read-reflect-write cycle that is typical in studying the majority of literary genres.

Teachers are to be commended for the manner in which they have embraced the use of video, computers, and other media in the Shakespeare classroom. These media tools can be extremely beneficial in helping students become better acquainted with the myriad possibilities and interpretations associated with the works of William Shakespeare. Teachers should be encouraged to continue to employ the most recent technological advances if they will benefit the student by increasing his/her understanding and appreciation of the plays.

In making these or any other adjustments to their teaching methods, teachers are encouraged to continue to keep the needs and interests of their students as their primary motivation. When the students' needs and interests are central, instructional choices will always benefit the teacher as well. Finally, teachers are encouraged to remain passionate about Shakespeare's writing and to convey that passion in their teaching. On this matter, Carroll (1977) advises, "That we love Shakespeare and find his poetry marvellous we must show and with every part of our being" (p. 62). In doing so, teachers may be able to

spark a similar enthusiasm for the Bard's writing within their students, something all teachers of literature desire.

In keeping with the recommendations outlined above and the instructional approaches suggested throughout this paper, a sample unit plan for teaching *Macbeth* in English 20 has been provided (see Appendix C) as an illustration of how teachers can incorporate more active teaching and assessment strategies. This unit plan is not intended to be prescriptive but, rather, is merely one example of how the theory outlined in this paper can be applied in classroom practice.

The study of Shakespeare's plays can and should be active and exciting, like the plays themselves. It should challenge and engage both students and teachers intellectually, physically, and emotionally. Effective teaching of Shakespearean drama recognizes that through active processes (such as performance, response and reaction, collaborative investigation, questioning, representing meaning, etc.), students gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the plays as well as a greater appreciation of the beauty of Shakespeare's language. As Tippens (1984) observes, "Being a student of Shakespeare is like being a student of life; you never finish learning" (p. 654) and, I might add, you learn more quickly and with greater conviction through active, personal experience than you could in any other fashion.

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Appendix A

Survey of High School English Teachers

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Indicate the **number of classes** of each English course you are teaching this school year (2000-2001).
English 10 _____ English 20 _____ English 30 _____
2. What is the total number of students you teach in **all** your English classes? _____
3. How many students are in your **largest** English class? _____
How many students are in your **smallest** English class? _____
4. How long are your class periods? _____ minutes

Approximately how many class periods do you typically devote to the study of Shakespearean drama?
English 10 _____ English 20 _____ English 30 _____
5. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____
6. What was your subject major in university? _____
What was (were) your minor(s)? _____
7. In your post-secondary education, did you take any courses specifically on Shakespeare's writing? Yes _____ No _____
8. When you teach the Shakespearean drama to your students, what plays do you teach? If you teach more than one play to your students in a term or if you do not always teach the same play, please indicate additional or alternate choices at the bottom of the page.

English 10 _____

English 20 _____

English 30 _____

On the chart below, indicate which components you teach when **introducing the Shakespearean drama** to your students. (Use a number to reflect approximately how many periods you typically devote to each topic.)

	English 10	English 20	English 30
Historical background to the play			
Historical overview of Elizabethan times			
An overview of the Elizabethan theatre and theatrical conventions			
An examination of the life of William Shakespeare			
An examination of Elizabethan language			
Study of Shakespeare's poetry			
Other(s) _____ _____ _____			

Use a checkmark to indicate on the chart below the frequency with which you use each of the **teaching strategies** listed when teaching the Shakespearean drama.

TEACHING STRATEGY	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Teacher reading scenes aloud to students				
Oral reading with students taking parts				
Students read scenes silently				
Choral speaking of lines				
Listening to scenes on audio tape				
Watching scenes on video tape				
Student improvisations of scenes (no text)				
Acting scenes / Walk throughs (with text)				
Tableaux (frozen images of scenes)				
Games and puzzles				
Teacher-led, whole class discussion				
Small group discussions				
Debate				
Role play				
Teacher lecture on concepts such as theme, plot, etc.				
Reading of related texts (poems, stories, parodies, etc.)				
Guest speakers				
Other(s) _____ _____				

On the chart below, indicate the frequency with which you use each of the following **assignments** and/or **assessment strategies** when teaching the Shakespearean drama.

Assignments / Assessment Strategies	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Homework questions on scenes or acts				
Identification of significant quotations				
Paragraph writing assignments				
Essay writing assignments (< 500 words)				
Essay writing assignments (> 500 words)				
Reading journal or log book				
Paraphrasing assignments				
Scene / plot summaries				
Character sketches				
Speech memorization (indiv. students)				
Speech memorization (choral groups)				
Interpretation / Presentation of a scene				
Written, modernized version of a scene				
Creative writing assignments using modern English				
Creative writing assignments using Shakespearean English				
Research projects / papers				
Group projects				
Art projects (collage, drawings, etc.)				
Exam / quiz on each act				
Exam on entire play				
Other(s) _____				

Indicate which **types of questions** you typically use in testing students' knowledge of the Shakespearean drama.

Type of Question	English 10	English 20	English 30
Multiple choice			
True and false			
Matching			
Short answer			
Essay			
Identification of speeches			
General questions about Shakespeare's life and times, Elizabethan theatre, etc.			
Comprehension questions using text not previously studied			
Paraphrasing questions			
Oral testing of memorized passages			
Other(s) _____			

Multiple Readings of the Play

1. Do you ask/expect students to read the play more than once? If so, how are the second (third, etc.) readings of the play to be accomplished? (eg. in class, as homework, orally, silently, etc.)

Use of Audio-Visual Aids and Technology

1. Do you typically show your students a video of the Shakespearean play read?
Yes _____ No _____
2. If so, please explain the method(s) in which you make use of video productions of the play.
3. Besides video productions of the play studied, do you make use of any other audio-visual aids and/or technology in teaching the Shakespearean drama? If so, what are they and how are they used?

Reasons Underlying Strategies Used

Please consider your teaching of the Shakespearean drama in relation to the following question. Your response may **offer as many factors as you are able to identify**.

What factors underlie my choices of teaching strategy for the Shakespearean drama?

Appendix B

Letter to Accompany Survey

P.O. Box 2230
Claresholm, AB
T0L 0T0
January 19, 2001

Dear Colleague:

As a teacher of high school English, I have a particular interest in the teaching of the Shakespearean drama. Currently, for my culminating project in the M.Ed. program at the University of Lethbridge, I am conducting a study of the methods used to teach Shakespeare's plays within the high school English program. As such, I am sending the attached survey to all teachers of English 10, 20, and/or 30 in southern Alberta.

I would greatly appreciate your thoughtful consideration of the questions in the survey. I know that you already have many demands on your time; therefore, I have tried to keep the survey as brief as possible. Much of the survey is in the form of checklists to minimize the time you will need to spend responding to questions. The final two pages ask for short written responses. Since I am certain that you will have many insightful comments and suggestions that will contribute significantly to the study I am undertaking, any additional remarks you would like to make would be welcomed.

Please note that all information will be handled in a confidential and professional manner. When responses are released, they will be reported in summary form only. Further, names, locations, and any other identifying information will *not* be included in any discussion of the results.

If you choose to participate, please complete the survey and return it in the envelope provided by **March 10, 2001**. If you have any questions or would like to inquire about the research results, please feel free to call me at (403) 625-4641 or e-mail me at mvmadsen@telusplanet.net. Alternatively, you may contact the supervisor of my study, Dr. Leah Fowler, at (403) 329-2457 (leah.fowler@uleth.ca) and/or the chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairman of the committee is Dr. Keith Roscoe (phone: (403) 329-2446; e-mail keith.roscoe@uleth.ca).

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my work.

Sincerely,

Valerie Madsen
Faculty Associate, University of Lethbridge
(403) 625-4641
mvmadsen@telusplanet.net

Note: If I have not provided enough copies of the survey, please feel free to make additional copies so that *all* teachers of English 10, 20, and/or 30 in your school (even if they teach only one English class) can respond to the survey.

Appendix C

Sample Unit Plan for *Macbeth* (English 20)

Overview of Unit

This is a genre-based unit on William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*. The emphasis within the unit is on active, performance approaches so that students can gain an appreciation of the unique characteristics of dramatic literature. Performance methods highlight the speaking, listening, viewing, and representing strands of the language arts. As well, some of the activities suggested focus on the language of the play and allow for an examination of the text as a literary work. These activities highlight the more traditional reading and writing strands of the language arts.

Experienced teachers will want to combine a selection of the activities outlined in this unit with many of the activities, assignments, and exercises they have found to be successful in the past. This unit plan is not intended as a replacement for units currently in use; rather, the intention is that some of the strategies provided here can be integrated with some familiar, perhaps more conventional approaches to create a unit that is personally suited to each teacher and his/her classroom.

Rationale

Within the English language arts curriculum, the study of drama is unique. Drama is the only literary genre that is not written for an audience of readers. Shakespeare, like most playwrights, never intended for his plays to be studied as works of literature. A play is meant to be performed on stage for an audience. In order for students to appreciate the unique characteristics of the dramatic form, plays should be studied differently than other forms of literature are studied. The majority of research writing addressing the teaching of Shakespeare's plays advocates the use of active teaching approaches; this unit will emphasize active approaches but will also provide opportunities for the study of the play as a literary text, acknowledging Shakespeare's craft as a writer.

The study of *Macbeth* as a work of literature will provide the most significant connections to prior units of study. For instance, the examination of figurative language within the play will review concepts from the study of poetry; consideration of plot development, characterization, setting, and themes will review concepts previously introduced through the study of short stories and novels.

Objectives / Relationship to Program of Studies

Study of a Shakespearean play is required in English 20-1 in Alberta's new Program of Studies (2001). This unit of study on *Macbeth* will address, to some extent, all five of the general outcomes outlined in the Program of Studies; however, the strongest emphases will be on outcomes 2, 4, and 5.

- G.O. 2 Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual, and multimedia forms and respond personally, critically, and creatively.
- 2.1 Construct meaning from text and context
 - 2.2 Understand and appreciate textual forms, elements, and techniques
 - 2.3 Respond to a variety of print and nonprint texts
- G.O. 4 Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to create oral, print, visual, and multimedia texts, and enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.
- 4.1 Develop and present a variety of print and nonprint texts
 - 4.2 Improve thoughtfulness, effectiveness, and correctness of communication
- G.O. 5 Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to respect, support, and collaborate with others.
- 5.1 Respect others and strengthen community
 - 5.2 Work within a group

Resources and Materials

- Brent, H. (1997). Different daggers: Versions of *Macbeth*. In R. E. Salomone & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *Teaching Shakespeare into the twenty-first century* (pp. 215-221). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Gibson, R. (1998). *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grigg, L. (2001). Shakespeare in the dark. *Alberta English*, 38 (1), 23-26.
- Kurosawa, A. (Director). (1956). *Throne of blood*. [Videotape]. Toho Company and Brandon Films.
- Nunn, T. (Director). (1979). *Macbeth*. [Videotape]. Royal Shakespeare Company and Thames TV.
- Oakes, E. (1993). Enacting Shakespeare's language in *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In J. E. Davis & R. E. Salmone (Eds.), *Teaching Shakespeare today: Practical approaches and productive strategies* (pp. 85-89). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Polanski, R. (Director). (1971). *Macbeth*. [Videotape]. Playboy Productions.
- Renino, C. D. (1993). *Macbeth*. In P. O'Brien (Ed.), *Shakespeare set free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and A Midsummer Night's Dream* (pp. 201-274). Toronto: Washington Square Press.

- Rozett, M. T. (1993). Getting to know a play five ways. In J. E. Davis & R. E. Salmone (Eds.), *Teaching Shakespeare today: Practical approaches and productive strategies* (pp. 39-47). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Saliani, D., Ferguson, C., & Scott, T. (Eds.) (1997). *The tragedy of Macbeth with related readings*. Toronto: International Thomson Publishing.
- Welles, O. (Director). (1948). *Macbeth*. [Videotape]. Republic Pictures Corporation.

Learning Activities / Instructional Strategies

A variety of learning activities and instructional strategies are presented in this section. They are divided into three categories according to when they might best be used within the unit (introductory, developmental, and culminating). It is not intended that all of these activities would be used with a single class. Rather, the expectation is that a teacher would choose from the possibilities presented here those activities most suited to the students' (and teacher's) needs and interests.

I. Introductory Activities

- Introduction of Themes through the use of Parallel Episodes
(Renino, 1993, pp. 204-205)

Purpose: This activity is designed to familiarize students with some of the play's themes as well as getting students actively engaged in performance activities at the outset of the unit.

Format: Prior to commencing the study of the play, divide the class into small groups. Each group of students is given one of the scenarios listed below to discuss.

The following questions will provide a good starting point for discussion:

- a) What do the characters choose to do?
 - b) What motivates each character's actions?
 - c) What external forces contributed to the characters' decision(s)?
 - d) How might this experience affect future actions or decisions?
- Situation #1 - While walking home together, two close friends are told by a reliable source that each will get the thing he or she covets more than anything else: a date with that special someone; the one and only car of its kind; the last ticket for the greatest performance of a favourite band or team. The problem is that there are two friends but only one date or car or ticket and each of the friends wants it.
 - Situation #2 – An ambitious man sees a dishonest way to become head of his company but his cautiousness and loyalty make him indecisive about pursuing his goal. His motto is “Maybe tomorrow.” He shares his ambition with his equally ambitious wife who is refined and elegant on the outside but has much more of a ‘killer’ instinct. Her philosophy is “Just do it.”

- Situation #3 – Several long-time friends get together for a meal. After the ice cream, they take a siesta only to be awakened by the cries of one of the guests who discovers that his money is missing.

Once each group has discussed their scenario, they should create and briefly rehearse a short skit based on their discussion; these will then be performed for the class.

- Establishing mood and introducing theme
(Grigg, 2001, pp. 23-26)

In order to encourage students to consider the nature of evil (an important concept for a successful study of *Macbeth*), the teacher may wish to initiate a discussion of the features and characteristics associated with evil in our culture and, more specifically, in Shakespeare's play. Grigg (2001) suggests that such a discussion be set "in a darkened classroom with about a dozen lit candles strategically placed on tables and shelves, or better, in a black drama lab with soft haunting music playing in the background" (p. 24). Not only does such a setting lend itself to the topic for discussion, it also provides students with a powerful object lesson in how simply mood and atmosphere can be established.

- Beginning the play – Act I, Scene i
(Gibson, 1998, p. 147)

Purpose: The opening scene of *Macbeth* provides an ideal opportunity for students to present a dramatic interpretation of one of Shakespeare's most memorable scenes with relatively little preparation or rehearsal. This activity introduces students to the idea that there may be many very different versions of the same scene, dependent upon the choices made by actors and directors.

Format: The students will work in groups of three; each group member will play one of the three witches. Their aim is to present the scene as dramatically as possible. To this end, they might consider some of the following questions:

- a) How might sound effects be added: thunder, rain, battle sounds, cats, toads, and so on?
- b) How do the witches enter?
- c) How do they move?
- d) Are they old or young? Are they male or female?
- e) Do they like each other or hate each other?
- f) How is each witch different from the others?
- g) How are they dressed? What, if anything, are they carrying?
- h) What do they do as they speak?

After the groups have had a chance to discuss, prepare, and rehearse their scenes (possibly the next day to allow students a chance to obtain costumes and/or props, if desired), each group will perform its version of Act I, Scene i.

Presentations should be followed by discussion regarding the choices made by the various groups and how the mood and message of the scene changed as a result of these choices.

II. On-going / Developmental Activities

A. Characters / Characterization

- Working in pairs, students can use a simple inquiry framework of questions to guide their investigations of character. A good scene to work with is the discussion between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth immediately following the murder of Duncan (Act II, Scene ii). Begin by having each pair read through the scene aloud once or twice to give an initial impression of character. Then, remaining in their assigned role and based on the evidence of the language they have spoken, each student should explore the answers to four questions:
 - a) Who am I? How am I related to other characters involved in the scene?
 - b) What am I saying?
 - c) Why am I saying it? (Consider what you want, what you think about other characters and the situation, what emotions you are experiencing, and what your personality is like.)
 - d) How do I speak?

Students should first work independently to record their answers to the four questions listed. The scene can then be rehearsed and performed incorporating the meaning, motivations, and methods determined in the exercise. (Gibson, 1998, p. 112)

- Have students work in pairs to prepare a series of tableaux showing Macbeth's relationships with various other characters (such as Lady Macbeth, Duncan, Banquo, Seyton, and Macduff).
- Job Interviews
(Gibson, 1998, pp. 116-117)

The names of the major characters in the play can be written on slips of paper and one slip given to each group of students (so that no group knows any other groups' characters). Each character is interviewed for the same job. The interviews are conducted without the interviewee's name being mentioned. Audience members have to guess which character is applying.

A fun variation on this activity is to have students think of a very unlikely job for which their character could apply. For instance, Lady Macbeth might apply to be a nanny or Macbeth could apply for a position as a bodyguard.

- Once students have some familiarity with the play, divide the class into groups of about twelve; prepare a dozen slips of paper with the name of a character on each. Each student in a group is given a slip and takes the role of that character for the activity. The task is for the group to line up in order according to certain criteria (such as oldest to youngest, highest social status to lowest social status, most moral to least moral, most trustworthy to least trustworthy, most false to least deceitful, or most ambitious to least ambitious). There will be animated discussion as students argue about just which character stands next to which. (Gibson, 1998, p. 122)

B. Soliloquies

- Verbalizing the Inner Arguments of the Soliloquy
(Gibson, 1998, pp. 75-76; Renino, 1993, pp. 223-224)

Using Macbeth's "If it were done ..." soliloquy from Act I, Scene vii, students can share the speech as a tortured conversation between two persons who set out their reasons against the murder. Each student reads one thought segment (until he/she encounters a period, semicolon, question mark, or exclamation point). As they speak in alternating turns, the students are able to catch the see-sawing effect of Macbeth's thoughts.

As a large group, discuss briefly the conflicting feelings Macbeth experiences as he contemplates the murder of Duncan. Divide the students into groups of six and give them their mission: to break the soliloquy up so that it reads like an argument conducted by the many voices of Macbeth's personality, debating the wisdom of going through with the murder. They are to indicate on the script each new reason for or against committing the murder by enclosing those lines in a box. Once finished, tell groups to assign one of the boxes of lines to each group member. Then, have the class form a large circle. Ask the members of a volunteer group to arrange themselves in a tight circle within the larger circle. Tell them that they will read the soliloquy again, with each member of the group reading his/her boxed lines. Urge them to build the volume and energy as they read. The various voices of the six students should sound like six internal voices in Macbeth discussing the wisdom of committing the murder.

- Visualizing a Soliloquy – Physicality in Shakespeare's Language
(Gibson, 1998, p. 16)

Shakespeare's language provides actors with built-in cues for physical action. Macbeth's vision of the dagger he sees in the moments before he sets off to murder Duncan is an excellent opportunity for students to perform an action as they speak each line. In groups of four or five, have students work through the soliloquy determining what action(s) suit(s) each line. Groups can then perform their versions of the soliloquy for the rest of the class.

- Sequencing a Soliloquy
(Gibson, 1998, p. 212)

Make several photocopies of a speech (for students' first experience, keep the passage relatively short – about nine or ten lines). Cut the copies into strips, line by line. Each set of strips is jumbled up and given to small groups of students to re-assemble in Shakespeare's original order: a sequence that makes emotional and dramatic sense. When they think they have assembled the lines correctly, have students speak the lines aloud and accompany them with actions to test out the dramatic effectiveness of their sequence.

C. Shakespeare's Language

□ Echoes

(Gibson, 1998, p. 178)

This activity helps students recognize how Shakespeare used repetition and variety to emphasize an idea and create atmosphere through language. Have one student read Act I, Scene ii out loud, taking all the parts but speaking the lines very slowly. The remaining students must pay careful attention to the reading since their job is to echo every word that has to do with war, fighting, or armies. Following the activity, students will be well prepared to discuss Shakespeare's craft as a writer in the scene.

□ Understanding Imagery through Word Tracing

(Renino, 1993, pp. 215-219)

(This activity makes a good pre-writing exercise for Expository Writing Assignment #4 in the Concluding Activities.)

Assign small groups of students (2-4 students per group) a frequently occurring and imagery-laden word from the play. Some good examples are *blood, hand, sleep, night, death, thoughts, fear, eye, and heart*. During the reading of the play, each group's task is to note and record each occurrence of their word or a variation of it. At the end of each act, the groups get together to compare notes and discuss the meaning(s) associated with their word within the act. Once students have read the entire play and found examples of their word throughout, each group will present a summary of its findings to the rest of the class.

This exercise helps students to recognize the subtle manner by which Shakespeare creates and develops significant images and symbols within the play. A good companion essay for students to read is "The Imagery of *Macbeth*" by Caroline Spurgeon in *The tragedy of Macbeth with related readings* (Saliani, Ferguson, & Scott, 1997).

□ *Macbeth* in a Nutshell

Once the play has been read and students are familiar with the story, they can be assigned the task of selecting ten to twelve key lines from the play which, when combined, provide a basic outline of the story. (This activity provides students with an excellent opportunity to review the plot of the play.)

Working in small groups, the students should first write a 'bare bones' outline of the play's events in their own words. Then, using this summary as their guide, they must review the play and find no more than a dozen significant quotations that correspond to the outline they have written. Each group can present their version of "*Macbeth* in a Nutshell" to the rest of the class as a readers' theatre, with one student reading their outline while the others interject Shakespeare's words at the appropriate times (either in chorus or taking individual roles).

D. Performance Activities

□ Critical Incidents

(Gibson, 1998, pp. 142-143)

Every moment in a Shakespeare play has a dramatic charge, but some episodes are climactic (such as the murder of Duncan or the appearance of Banquo's ghost). Within these intensely dramatic scenes, some lines have particular dramatic potential because every character on stage has a particular interest in them. The line affects them in some way and they need to respond, even if that response is to conceal their true feelings with a show of indifference. Minor or non-speaking characters also recognize that what is being said is crucial and they want to see how major characters respond. The purpose of this activity is to help students understand that complex relationships between characters can be conveyed through action and reaction.

Students can work in groups of eight to twelve. Each student steps into role as a character (critical incidents often occur when many named characters are on stage, but extras such as Lords and Ladies, guards, servants, and so on can be added as appropriate). Students then discuss how their characters are likely to behave at a precise moment. (Two good examples are Act II, Scene iii, Line 115 – when, after Macbeth says that he killed Duncan's guards, Macduff asks, "Wherefore did you so?" or Act III, Scene iv, Lines 61-62 – when Macbeth addresses the ghost of Banquo, "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake thy gory locks at me.") Students can discuss what various characters will do in response to the critical incident. Who looks at whom? Where is each character positioned in relation to the others? What facial expressions, gestures, or body postures are appropriate? The aim is for each student to work out what his or her character is thinking and feeling as the line is uttered.

Groups will likely need ten to fifteen minutes to prepare before presenting their version of the critical incident to the class. Critical incidents may be presented as tableaux or may take the form of a mime unfolding in slow motion. The students who are viewing can try to identify who the characters are based on their position and body language. It is helpful to follow the presentations with students having a chance to put questions to the characters (such as "Lady Macbeth, why were you not looking at Macbeth? What were you thinking at that moment?").

□ Relationship Tableaux

Have students sit in a circle. One student is chosen to begin. He/she comes to the centre of the circle, names a character from the play and strikes a pose as that character. A second comes forward, says the name of another character and the two students freeze into a tableau that shows their relationship. After ten seconds or so, another student can step into the circle and tap either of the two students in the tableau on the shoulder. The tableau un-freezes, the new volunteer says the name of another character and a new relationship tableau is struck. Students succeed each other in unfreezing and stepping out of frame to be replaced by another character.

□ Improvisations

Gibson (1998) suggests two different improvisation activities that can further students' understanding of the play. The first asks students to extend their understanding of characterization by having them explore how certain characters might behave when they are not on stage. Students can step into role as particular characters and, in spontaneous enactments, play out conversations, meetings, or happenings that do not occur in the play. For instance, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth argue about which TV programs to watch or the three witches recall their high school prom. Students will eagerly suggest other improbable situations.

The second improvisation asks students to explore a theme or situation of the play, but not as Shakespearean characters. For example, they might role play an ambitious wife, determined to further her husband's career.

□ Acting a Scene

This familiar performance technique can be used as a developmental activity and/or as a concluding activity. Scenes for student performance should generally not involve more than 80-100 lines (at least for early attempts).

In *Macbeth*, some good scenes are

- Act I, Scene ii, lines 1-75 (five characters)
- Act I, Scene iii, lines 1-86 (five characters)
- Act II, Scene ii, lines 17-91 (two characters)
- Act II, Scene iii, lines 64-164 (seven characters)
- Act III, Scene iii (four speaking characters and Fleance, who does not speak)
- Act V, Scene i (three characters)

In preparing their performances, students will want to address the five Ws:

- WHO? Who are these characters? What are they like?
- WHAT? What is going on?
- WHERE? Where does the scene take place? What might the set look like?
- WHEN? What time of day does the scene take place?
- WHY? Why do you think the characters say what they say and behave as they do? What does each one want?

Once students have addressed these questions, the most significant question remains:

- HOW? How does an actor lift these words off the page and act out a performance that will hold an audience?

Following these initial discussions, as they begin to prepare their scenes, students will intuitively address such practical concerns as how characters enter and leave the stage, where they stand in relation to one another, and so forth.

If students' performances are to be graded, be sure to give them plenty of time to prepare and rehearse their scenes; also, it is crucial that students are aware of the criteria by which their grade will be determined. (See the Evaluation section for a sample scoring rubric for performance work.)

- Start and End Tableaux
(Gibson, 1998, p. 194)

The class is divided into two or three large groups (8-12 students per group). The teacher lists an appropriate number of characters that each group has to portray (one per student). Each group allocates parts and prepares and presents two tableaux: Tableau #1 shows the character relationships just before the start of the play; Tableau #2 shows the characters at the end of the play (some of the characters are no longer around at the end, so the students must decide how to integrate such characters into this final tableau). Each group presents its two tableaux to the other group(s) whose task is to guess who's who.

III. Concluding Activities

- Comparative Viewing of Videotaped Versions of the Play
(Brent, 1997, pp. 215-221)

Students can view two (or more) films based on the play *Macbeth* and examine the similarities and between them. Some good choices include (but are not limited to) Orson Welles' *Macbeth* (1948), Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1956), Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971), and Trevor Nunn's Royal Shakespeare Company Production starring Ian McKellen (1979). This activity may be accompanied by a written assignment (as suggested in Brent's article) or it may be used primarily for discussion purposes.

- Creative Writing Assignments
 1. Write an additional scene for *Macbeth* following the style and atmosphere of Shakespeare's play as closely as possible. Choose from one of the suggestions below or create a similar context of your own.
 - a) the thanes meet in council, after the death of King Duncan, to elect a new king
 - b) the coronation of Macbeth as king, with the thanes swearing loyalty
 - c) Macbeth arranges for the killing of Macduff's family
 - d) the death of Lady Macbeth: does she say anything? does anyone witness her death?
 2. Write two different versions of Lady Macbeth's obituary. For the first, write from the perspective of the gentlewoman who attended Lady Macbeth during her final days. For the second, use Macbeth's point of view.
 3. Write two different accounts of the banquet scene in *Macbeth*. First, record the events as Macbeth might have done in his journal that night. For the second, imagine that you are one of the lords who was in attendance at the banquet; write a letter to Macduff (who did not attend the banquet), telling him of what transpired.

□ Expository Writing Assignments
(Rozett, 1993, p. 40)

1. You are in charge of props for a production of *Macbeth*. Go through the play carefully and compile a list of all the props needed for the production, with indications of when and how they are to be used. Accompany your list with an essay on the thematic or symbolic significance of key props or groups of props. Avoid inventing props, aspects of scenery, or costumes that are not called for in the text.
2. You are the leader of an acting company in 1610 and you are preparing to stage *Macbeth*. You have a company of seven trained professional actors, or shareholders, but will need to hire boys for the women's and children's parts and men for the non-speaking roles. How will you arrange the doubling of the parts to make this work most efficiently; that is, with the smallest number of hires? Include an essay on the possible dramatic effect of using the same actor to play two or more roles and make some suggestions about how that actor should handle the multiple roles.
3. You have been offered the opportunity to do an experimental adaptation of *Macbeth* for an off-Broadway theatre. The purpose of the adaptation is to shed new light on a well-known and often-taught classic in a way that makes a social, political, or aesthetic statement. You can be as radical and daring as you like in transforming the play and its characters, but you must be prepared to explain why you have changed them. Submit an outline or synopsis of your adaptation accompanied by (i) short comments on or descriptions of each character, (ii) a sample scene, and (iii) an explanation or critical statement of what your play is intended to portray.
4. The words 'blood' and 'bloody' appear frequently in *Macbeth* (over 40 times). Other frequently occurring words are 'hand(s)' (33 occurrences), 'sleep' (26), 'night' (22), 'death' and/or 'dead' (35). Using one or more of these words as the basis for your essay, indicate how the word(s) possess metaphorical or symbolic meanings as well as literal ones and how Shakespeare uses these words to set up thematic patterns in the play.

□ Court of Inquiry
(Gibson, 1998, pp. 206-207)

The class can hold an inquiry into the causes of events in Scotland from the death of King Duncan to the accession of King Malcolm. Assign five students to play the role of a panel of assessors; their job is to hear evidence, question witnesses, and deliver the verdict. Assign a number of students to portray the witnesses (Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the three witches, Banquo, Malcolm, Macduff, Lennox, the Porter, Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman, the doctor, Seyton, and so on). Give the students a day to prepare for their roles.

On the day of the inquiry, each witness called will be asked to give an account of his/her knowledge of the events that took place. This account must not take more than five minutes and can be in any form the witness prefers. Witnesses may then be questioned by the panel for up to ten minutes. Once all testimony has been given, the panel can make a statement regarding their findings.

- *The Dunsinane Times* – Compiling a Class Newspaper
(Gibson, 1998, pp. 207-208)

The classroom becomes a newspaper office; the aim is to produce a full edition of *The Dunsinane Times* in two hours, using as much of Shakespeare's language as possible. Students work in pairs and each pair takes responsibility for one or two sections of the newspaper, chosen from:

- News Items
- Obituaries
- Advertisements
- For Sale and Wanted
- What's On?
- Weather
- Nature Notes
- Food and Drink
- Cartoons
- Letters to the Editor
- Reviews of films, books, or plays
- Sports Page
- Business News
- Property for Sale
- Travel Page
- News in Brief
- International News
- Help Wanted
- Gossip Column
- Advice Column
- Horoscope

An editor-in-chief should be appointed to coordinate, assist, motivate, and keep the writing flowing; this role may be assigned to a student or the teacher may choose to fulfil the duties him/herself. It is usually advisable to set the 'publication day' for the paper immediately after one of the climactic moments in the play (for example, Duncan's murder) to provide a main lead story with eyewitness accounts and so on.

Evaluation and Assessment Tools

Assessment of expository and creative writing assignments for this unit can be accomplished using any appropriate scoring rubric(s) with which the teacher is familiar and comfortable.

For many of the introductory and developmental activities, formal evaluation is neither necessary nor appropriate; marks for participation and effort will suffice. However, for teachers wishing to assess one or more of the performance activities, a sample scoring rubric is provided on the following page.

Dramatic Presentation – Scoring Rubric

Scene Performed: _____

Student: _____

Character Portrayed: _____

Each category will be graded using the following scale:

1	2	3	4
Room for Improvement			Ready for Broadway

ASPECT OF PERFORMANCE	SCORE
Evidence of rehearsal and preparation	
Use of props and costumes enhance scene	
Delivery suggests comprehension of scene and language	
Appropriate voice modulation and projection	
Appropriate pacing	
Proper pronunciation and enunciation	
Uses language/speech to help portray character	
Uses appropriate gestures and movements to portray character	
Blocking is appropriate and interesting	
Reacts appropriately to other characters' speech and/or actions	

TOTAL: _____ / 40

Comments and Suggestions: