

As YOU Like it:

Making Shakespeare Modern and Meaningful

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Course Abstract

This constructivist crash hybrid course of six weeks is designed for pre-service English teachers (or teacher candidates, TC's for short) to help them understand that teaching students Shakespeare doesn't have to be out-dated. The overall holistic goal of the course is two-fold because both teacher candidates might need to encounter Shakespeare in a new way while also learning ways to actually help students feel the same way. Through the use of multimedia, some fancy acting lessons, and team research, it's hoped that TC's will leave with a positive attitude and an arsenal of fun activities for students once they are in the classroom.

Course Goals

We have found a variety of over-arching 'course' goals that relate to constructivist pedagogy:

- to teach teacher candidates relevance of classic literature through personal experience and reflection
- to give teachers strategies to teach students to make connections between literature and their own experiences and other texts
- to give teachers the strategies teach students to construct knowledge through collaborative learning experiences
- to help teachers apply constructivist pedagogy to English teaching

Here are some course goals regarding content and technology in the course:

a. Content:

Focusing on only two plays, teacher candidates will learn not only how to understand Shakespeare but to find current and contemporary ways to help their students find relevancy in their lives.

The two plays are:

A Midsummer Night's Dream,

focusing on themes like:

- stealing boyfriends and girlfriends
- love
- class divisions

Hamlet,

focusing on:

- identity
- love
- loss
- friendship
- betrayal

b. Pedagogy:

We are hoping, in keeping with constructivist principles that our course is:

- flexible (students will have choice in assignment topics)
- responsive (peer evaluation of team work, sharing information in discussion groups)
- real-life oriented (role playing, situational)
- collaborative (team work, discussion)
- authentic (issues in the plays will be linked to real life experiences through journaling and reflection)
- ownership of learning (self assessment)
- alternative perspectives (students will learn how to consider alternate endings to plays, to talk about what different perspectives say about the past issues)
- feedback oriented (peer to peer, instructor to pre service teacher)

Role of Technology:

There are some specific forms of technology that we would like to make use of in this course, to link with our goals of being flexible and real-life oriented:

- Videos (students could actually act out an alternate ending to the plays and post on YouTube)
- Viewing modern adaptations of the plays on video
- Chats in "character" (even as text messages)
- Threaded discussions about topics from the plays

- Online QandA with a Stratford actor or students studying the same play
- Online acting lessons or voice lessons

Course Outcomes:

There are some specific course outcomes we have in terms of student learning:

- students will learn to use technology to help find meaning in historical texts
- students will reflect on how Shakespeare can be made meaningful to everyday teenage life
- students will work collaboratively to construct meaning and make outside connections
- students will learn how to create valuable lessons for students studying Shakespeare in high school

Weekly Schedule

(Face to Face, with some online work)

Week 1:

Getting to know all about Shakespeare and You: Introductions, team and partner divisions. Threaded discussions about topics from the plays (and connections between the two) which will be ongoing throughout the course

(Online only)

Week 2:

To be 'you,' or not to be 'you': Chats "in character" with a partner, posted afterward with some commentary on the usefulness and process

(Face to Face, with some online work)

Week 3:

What's Acting Got to do with IT?: Voice or acting lessons to help build confidence in students (acting helps with interviews, communications helps with relationships, etc.)

(Online only)

Week 4: The Taming of the Class: Online QandA with an actor or with another school group studying Shakespeare (prepared questions beforehand with some research involved), post meeting reflections

(Face to Face, with some online work)

Week 5: Much Ado about Shakespeare: Team Project is due/Peer Feedback or assessment
Moderated Partner discussion on a recent article or newsclipping about Shakespeare

(Online only)

Week 6: All's Well that Ends...: Individual work is due, Journal/Reflections are due

Course Assignments:

A. Reflective Journal

Weight 20%

This can be a written journal, electronic journal or an online blog focusing on how to teach Shakespeare in a relevant way. Students should record ideas, newfound knowledge and what you like and do not like about the course design and assignments. This project will be ongoing through the course. Topics and questions should branch out from the asynchronous discussion and readings in the class.

B. Team Project

Weight 20%

In your peer groups you will create a web page that takes one act from one of the two plays and offer tools, audio, links and photos to help students read and understand that act. Include an interactive element that will demonstrate student understanding. Alternately, groups can create some sort of video meant to help other English teachers who have to teach Shakespeare. Alternate group assignment proposals will be accepted.

C. Partner Discussion Moderation

Weight 10%

Using one of the readings provided (all of which deal with adapting Shakespearean literature to meet the needs of students) generate two- three threaded focus questions for the class in the online Blackboard/KeC. Throughout the week keep the conversation going with insights and comments to your peers' posts.

D. Individual Project

Weight 20%

Submit either electronically or in hard copy a 1000 word reflective and thoughtful essay which outlines the following: what you believe constructivist learning is when teaching English and

evaluate this course and studying Shakespeare as either fostering constructivist learning or not. Include a bibliography for any research used.

E. Class Participation

Weight 30%

This includes weekly posts, contribution to the chats in character, team feedback, involvement in question/answer session, and overall engagement in the course.

Evaluation Formats:

Peer evaluation for Team Project and Partner Moderation (one other group will evaluate)

Self evaluation for Individual Project and Journal

Chats should be posted for class to see and one other group evaluates

Course Resources:

Black Board Academic Suite

Knowledge eCommons

Chat forums (MSN, Typewithme or NING)

Personal blog (blogger, et cetera) or just Word document