Hamlet Unit Plan

Hamlet Unit Plan

Rob Childs
Unit Plan: Shakespeare's Hamlet

ED 123

May 13, 2010

Hamlet Unit Plan

What follows is a selection of lesson plans geared to teaching high school students, specifically seniors (though I feel that all grades could benefit from the lessons), William Shakespeare's Hamlet. I have attempted to focus the lessons on students' understanding of themes, character development/complexity, and interpretation of the text both through close reading, and through the use of film and performance analysis. I have incorporated the analysis of different film versions of Hamlet and how they compare to the text to enhance and highlight the idea of interpretation - what does the visual aspect add to the text? What is lost? In addition to film and textual analysis of the play, throughout the lessons, there is a focus on understanding the characters and themes of the play and how they are interconnected.

I feel that the time necessary to teach the play is roughly 15 to 18 days, and the lesson plans that I have included reflect this. However, depending on students' grasp of the material and the length and frequency of class periods, a longer amount of time, more in the realm of 22 to 25 days, may be necessary to complete a reading and investigation of the play. Because of this, lessons may be broken up or compressed as needed.

It is important to be attuned to the students' understanding of the play and to ask them about what they do and do not understand, or if they have specific questions about characters, plot, or action within the play. I also strongly encourage performance of the play; lessons can be modified to include student performance that can be complimented by the questions accompanying the lesson plans.

Students are expected to read in the text daily in order to be able to participate with classroom discussions and activities. Class discussion of the play, as well as various in class and homework activities will enhance the further comprehension of the text. Students are encouraged to keep a journal throughout the course of the reading of Hamlet. This journal is to be structured along the guidelines set out in Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Hamlet and Henry IV, Part I (Folger Shakespeare Library Series) by William Shakespeare, Peggy O'Brien (editor), and Jeanne Addison Roberts (editor), which appear on pages 72 - 75. These guidelines will be included in the Index of Handouts that follows the lesson plans. The journal, or log as it is referred to in Shakespeare Set Free, is meant to assist in students understanding and can be used in class by the students to help them clarify their thoughts, ask questions, or further examine the material. Students are required to make entries after reading each scene of each act so that their investigation will reflect the entire play.

Finally, an assessment is included in the Index. What is included may be used on its own or modified to be longer or more challenging. Completed student journals/logs can be collected as part of the final assessment as well, and a wrap-up discussion is highly encouraged - what did students learn? How did their expectations of Shakespeare, Hamlet, and the action of the play change from their first impressions? Is there a greater significance for this play or not? What does this play teach us?

Outline for Hamlet Unit

1. Week One
   
   Day 1: Lesson Plan 1
   Day 2: Lesson Plan 2
   Day 3: Lesson Plan 3
   Day 4: Lesson Plan 4
   Day 5: Lesson Plan 5

2. Week Two
   
   Day 1: Lesson Plan 6
   Day 2: Lesson Plan 7
   Day 3: Lesson Plan 8
   Day 4: Lesson Plan 9
   Day 5: Lesson Plan 10

3. Week Three
   
   Day 1: Lesson Plan 11
   Days 2-5: Lesson Plans 12 - 14

4. Week Four
   
   Days 1-2: Lesson Plans 15 - 16
Lesson Plan 1: Investigation of Shakespeare’s Language

Objective/SWBAT: To help students become more comfortable with the language and writing of William Shakespeare.

Resources:

- TCS (Text Coding Symbols) Sheet
- copies of Shakespeare’s Sonnets 130 and 29

Procedure:

1. Ask students to get out their materials - copies of Shakespeare’s Sonnets 29 and 130, a pen or pencil, some paper, and their Text Coding Symbols sheets - and listen to you read Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 as you have rewritten it.
2. Ask students to pay attention to cadence, as defined in this exercise from the Folger library that preceded this lesson: (http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanDtl.cfm?pid=737)
3. What did students notice? Take notes/make notations on board for students to see
4. Hand out the Rewritten Sonnet sheet that accompanies this lesson plan.
5. Organize students into groups of three or four and ask them to compare their versions of Sonnet 130 with what they have been handed (the Rewritten Sonnet sheet is a retyped version of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 - I purposely left off the title of the sonnet so that students would concentrate on the construction of the words rather than the fact that the piece was Shakespeare, since I feel that there can be some apprehension towards Shakespeare) .
6. While they are in groups, have students discuss what they notice between the two poems (along with the questions on the sheet) - what is different? What is similar? How does the punctuation affect the poems?
7. After about 15 minutes, ask the groups to wrap up their conversations and prepare for a class discussion.
8. Once the class is together, ask for student reflections on what they discovered/learned/discussed in their groups. How did they respond to the questions on the sheet or any other questions that developed in their groups?

Wrap Up/Exit:

- How does changing the format of Shakespeare’s sonnet(s) help with their interpretation?
- Does the change assist in the ability to read the sonnet(s) fluidly?
- Paying attention to the punctuation is extremely helpful in reading and understanding Shakespeare.

Lesson Plan 2: Introducing Themes and Characters in Hamlet

Objective/SWBAT:

- large themes of play (revenge, individual vs. society, deception, honor, family, duty, manipulation, sanity)
- smaller themes in play that can be drawn from separate scenes within the acts
- characters in the play each have unique qualities

Resources/Materials:

- text of Shakespeare’s Hamlet
- notebook or paper, writing instrument

Procedure:

1. Ask students how they would define "theme" - take 2 to 3 minutes to jot down a definition in your notes.
2. Discuss responses and develop a definition with the class that is written on the board.
3. Ask how a theme is evidenced in literature - how can you tell that there is an overall idea being dealt with? Are there certain clues in the writing or relative to the characters that help you come to a conclusion about a theme?
4. As an example, use one of Shakespeare’s sonnets (130) and ask about its theme.
5. Write down on the board some of the larger themes from Hamlet(revenge, the individual vs. society, deception, honor, duty, love, sanity, manipulation) and ask students how they view the themes - what comes to mind when you see these themes?
6. Explain that these themes exist throughout the play and can be identified within the acts of the play, though other themes can be identified within the scenes of the acts as well.
7. Ask students to open their texts to Act 1, Scene 1 (which was read for homework the previous night) and ask what they noticed about the reading. Students should be able to comment on the mood of the scene and how that might be connected with a theme. Discuss.
8. Ask students who the characters are in 1.1 and how they imagine them to be - what do they look like? How do they sound? Encourage students to try to connect each character with an actor. What is the similarity between the actor and the character in the play?
9. Explain that the descriptive qualities of each character make that person unique, and that individuality helps to drive the play - the characters in the play are people too.

Wrap Up/Exit:

- How does identifying the themes in a piece of literature help us to gain an understanding of the overall piece of writing?
- Can the themes of a play have a connection to the characters in a play? How?
- Homework: read 1.2 and make a list of the characters. Make note of the theme in the scene.

Lesson Plan 3: Hamlet 1.2 - More characters and language

Objective/SWBAT:

- plot & characters
- identify more characters in Hamlet
- give a description of the characters and their relationship to others/significance in the scene
(time allowing: discuss the significance of Hamlet's soliloquy and what the audience's relationship to the soliloquy is)

Resources/Materials:
- text of Shakespeare's Hamlet
- paper
- pen

Procedure:
Do Now: How would you update 1.1 for modern times? What would the characters do? Who would they be? Where would they live?

1. ask students to open to 1.2 and individually write down the main characters in the scene - pay attention to main characters
2. ask students to volunteer some of their responses and record them on the board
3. choose one character and ask students to write down their observations of that character; continue this for all characters by asking students to come to the board to write and share their characteristics with the class
4. ask students to draw lines or show how each of these characters is related /connected - What do you notice? Is any character or relationship significant/stand out?
5. Time allowing, further introduce/obtain reactions to Hamlet's soliloquy - what is the purpose? Why do it (Hamlet voice his thoughts, as well as Shakespeare include them in the play)? How does it help? With Hamlet's soliloquy, what do you think he is talking about and why?

Wrap-up/Exit:
- What is the importance of studying the characters in this play?
- How does it, or does it (the soliloquy and character investigation) tie together to shape your idea of the play?
- It helps us to learn more about the plot, but it also helps us to relate to the action present in the play as well as further understand/gain insight into what Shakespeare was doing/wanted the audience to understand about this play - a better understanding of the who, why, and how.

Homework: What are your favorite lines from this scene? Why? Is there anything significant about them?
- TV, DVD player, HamletDVD

Procedure:

1. Ask students how Hamlet's soliloquy in 1.2 has helped the action of the play. Has he done anything in the play to this point to act on his thoughts in this soliloquy? Is he planning on acting?
2. What is Hamlet's tone when he speaks? Why would it be a certain way - what could cause him to speak as he does? Is there another meaning to what he says?
3. Ask for a volunteer to read the soliloquy, paying attention while they read to how the rest of the action in the play might be affecting how they are thinking when speaking (as though they were Hamlet).
4. What did other students notice about this reading?
5. Show the film clip of the soliloquy and discuss student reactions afterwards.
6. Ask students to turn to line 185 to 237 in 2.2, when Hamlet and Polonius are talking. Have two volunteers read the lines. Other students should pay attention to the conversation between the two characters. What is being said?
7. Ask students what "subtext" means. How could it be used in a piece of literature?
8. Now, ask students to think about what Hamlet said at the end of Act 1 ("antic disposition") and what Polonius has said to Gertrude and Claudius prior to his conversation with Hamlet. Does your interpretation of that Hamlet is saying to Polonius change? Why or why not? Hamlet is speaking to Polonius, but he is insulting him under the cover of appearing mad due to his love for Ophelia.
9. Show clip of the scene and ask students to compare the film and the text - which one does a better job of revealing subtext? How do the student performances demonstrate subtext? What could students do in their reading (performance) to better reveal the underlying themes, conflicts, meanings?

Wrap Up/Exit:

- paying attention to the subtext within the lines can help to unlock some secrets and plot clues in the play.
- Also, subtext allows us to learn more about the characters, making them more real, and in turn, more relatable.
- Looking for examples of subtext in the film can lead to a more detailed examination of the film and a more in-depth criticism of the text when the two are compared.

Lesson Plan 6: Differences in Interpretation: Investigating Video

Objectives/SWBAT:

- respond to the differences in different director's views of Hamlet
- visual interpretation of text differs

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text
- projector for computer, computer

Procedure:

1. Ask students to recall a previous exercise concerning connotation and denotation (as used from the Folger Library site).
2. How does interpretation fit with connotation and denotation? What can be gained or lost from interpreting something?
3. Watch the YouTube videos (two versions of early scenes in Act 1) and ask students to make notes about what they notice.
4. How does the idea of interpretation figure into each video? What is different about the videos on this post from YouTube vs. what we have been reading and watching in class?
5. Discuss responses.

Wrap Up/Exit:

- A director's view of the text can affect how the audience sees it.
- Is this helpful to understanding the play? Why or why not?
- Homework: respond to the above questions.

Lesson Plan 7: Soliloquy Redux: Video exploration of 3.1

Objective/SWBAT:

- there are many interpretations of Shakespeare's works - Hamlet's one that has been adapted into film many times. Each film version of the text has elements that demonstrate the director's view.
- Determine how different interpretations of the text can enhance the play or detract from the words
- Hamlet's soliloquy can be performed many different ways - each interpretation demonstrates a different area of focus for the reader or viewer - what is being emphasized in a given interpretation that makes it different from other versions?

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text - specifically 3.1.64-98
- HamletDVD, TV

Procedure:

1. Discuss Hamlet's soliloquy in the text - what is he talking about? Are there any themes present in his speech? How is the soliloquy important in light of the events prior to and following it?
2. Perform the soliloquy and ask students to pay attention to how you sound (cadence, tone, etc.). Your performance should be of your own interpretation - try not to let past performances influence you. Students should be able to distinguish between your performance and the others that will be shown.
3. Have students take notes on what they noticed from the reading and tell them to take notes on the other performances for the day.
4. Ask for volunteers to perform the soliloquy, directing them to do so in a way that emphasizes a) Hamlet's struggle with what is going on around him and b) his inability to act (the rest of the class should not hear these directions; student volunteers should also be encouraged to read in a way that takes into account their own interpretation of the soliloquy.)
5. Show 3.1.64-98 portion of the Branagh production of *Hamlet*
6. Time allowing, discuss students' reactions to the performances of the day. If no times is available, students should review their notes as part of their homework and be ready to discuss them the next day.

Wrap Up/Exit:
- There is no "one way" to interpret a performance or text - how is that shown given the day's activities?
- Because interpretation of the text in film versions can be different, the only constant is the text version, so relying on film to understand the text is not necessarily a good idea, though it is helpful in examining different views of the text and how the characters are portrayed/enhanced by interpretation.
- Homework: read 3.2

Lesson Plan 8: What's the Scenario? (3.1)

Objective/SWBAT:
- to gain a further realization of themes in *Hamlet* through interpretation and investigation of Hamlet and Ophelia's conversation in 3.1
- to show that multiple views of a scene can be used to gain understanding of characters and themes

Resources/Materials:
- *Hamlet* text
- paper, pen/pencil
- whiteboard

Procedure:

1. Draw the following grid on the board before class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>What does it add to the scene/your understanding?</th>
<th>What does it leave out of the scene/your understanding?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet does not know anything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet knows nothing at first, but then catches on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet knows all along</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Ask students to verbally outline 3.1.64-162, paying attention to the events immediately before Hamlet and Ophelia speak (the discussion between Polonius, Claudius, and Gertrude - lines 1-63).
2. Next, tell the students that lines 64-162 will be examined with the above scenarios in mind. Remind students that while discussing the conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia, they must keep in mind the parameters of the scenario being discussed.

- The first scenario deals with Hamlet having no knowledge of Polonius' conversation with Claudius and Gertrude
- The second scenario deals with H not knowing about P, C, & G's conversation beforehand, but becoming aware of it as he speaks with O.
- The third scenario deals with H knowing about P, C, & G's conversation/plans all along

1. Fill in the appropriate boxes in the columns as you discuss the various scenarios. Pay attention to how students react to the scenarios and encourage them to think about the characters and their reactions given the specific scenarios.
2. Take note of themes that arise from the discussion and note them in the grid.

Wrap Up:
- Take a vote as to which scenario is the most believable and works the best with the play thus far.
- Remind the class of the objectives and ask them to pay attention to the characters as the play is further investigated.
- Homework: read the rest of Act 3

Lesson Plan 9: Mother, I Have a Sneaking Suspicion...

Objective/SWBAT:
- identify major themes in *Hamlet*; treachery/deception, parental relationships, doubt, revenge, honor
- connect characters to their various motivations
- expand on character descriptions

Resources/Materials:
- *Hamlet* text
- paper, pen - for notes

Procedure:

1. divide the class into four groups that will discuss the following:

a) 3.1.176-203
b) 3.2.405-432

c) 3.3.1-103

d) 3.4

1. In their group discussions, students should pay attention to the characters in the scene, what the scene’s focus is, and how the characters are interacting with each other, or what they are speaking about, if they are alone. Also, students should try to come up with a theme or two that best describes the specific scene.

2. After about 15 minutes, bring the class together and discuss what each of the groups has recorded for each scene (characters, theme, interactions).

3. While in the group setting, ask students to keep their smaller discussions in mind and try to make a connection with what is being revealed about the other scenes as they are discussed. How do the other scenes enhance or reveal information about your scene? What is revealed by the scenes as a whole?

4. Discuss these findings as a class, and record characters, themes, and interactions on the board and in notes.

Wrap Up/Exit:

- How does a close examination of scenes help you understand the overall picture of the action in Hamlet?
- What do you notice about the complexity of the characters? How do their interactions with each other add to your definition of them as individuals?

Lesson Plan 10: The Castle is a Big Place and Many People Live There

Objective/SWBAT:

- examine 3.4 using in-depth analysis of characters
- learn more about characters in the play through close analysis
- examine Hamlet’s relationship with his mother and its significance to the rest of the play
- discuss the role of women in Hamlet through examination of Gertrude in 3.4

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text
- pen/pencil and paper for notes

Procedure:

1. Draw a chart on the board, two columns by four rows. Label one column "Character" and the other column "Characteristics/Description."
2. Ask students to name characters in 3.4 and write their responses on board - one for each row. Responses should be: Queen (Gertrude), Polonius, Hamlet, Ghost
3. Ask students to volunteer descriptions for each of the characters and fill in their responses in the column that corresponds with each character.
4. Ask students to pay attention to the characters and their descriptions and how these relationships might influence how the character acts and how an actor might perform the role of the character.
5. Take student volunteers and read 3.4 in class, reminding students to think about how their character would appear in the scene, given the situation. Students in audience should be able to comment on student performers and give them constructive criticism.

Wrap Up/Exit:

- How does a close examination of the makeup of a character help you understand the overall picture of the action in Hamlet?
- Does this examination of Hamlet and Gertrude shed any light on the specifics of their relationship? How do they treat each other? How would you characterize their relationship - as mother and son, or something different?
- What do you notice about the complexity of the characters? How do their interactions with each other add to your definition of them as individuals?
- How does this exercise help to further define the role of women in Hamlet?
- Homework: read 4.1-4

Lesson Plan 11: Why is Everything Happening so Quickly?

Objective/SWBAT:

- examine Act 4, Scenes 1 - 4 using a graphic organizer
- discuss the action of the play in relation to the characters
- connect characters to their various motivations
- expand on character descriptions

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text
- pen/pencil and paper for notes

Procedure:

1. Draw the following grid on the board before class and ask students to copy it into their notes before the discussion begins:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Action/Events (what is going on in the scene)</th>
<th>Character(s)</th>
<th>What connections can you make?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Begging with 4.1, ask students to volunteer information that can be used to fill in the appropriate boxes in the chart; do this for the rest of the scenes in Act 4.
2. During the conversation with students, discuss various connections that are made, what they (students) are realizing about the characters in the play, and the action of the scenes.
3. Ask students if they have come to any new realizations about the characters, the play, or both - record these observations.

Wrap Up/Exit:

- Why are the scenes in this act so short?
- What does the length of the scenes do to the action and the characters? Does it enhance or detract from the play overall? Why?
- Do you think that Shakespeare had a specific reason for writing these scenes the way that he did?
- Homework: read the rest of Act 4 (scenes 5-7)

Lesson Plan for 4.5-7 (#'s 12 - 14): Women, Words, Flowers, and Writing Letters

Objective/SWBAT:

- expand on students’ idea of the role of women in Hamlet
- make connections between action in the play and character behaviors/characteristics
- hypothesize on the meaning of various characters’ actions - “why did they do that?”
- perform Hamlet in class

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text
- pen/pencil and paper for notes
- DVD’s of Kenneth Branagh’s production of Hamlet and the RSC’s 2009 version of Hamlet as produced by the BBC, TV

Procedure:

1. Over the course of the next three days, use the following "Do Now" exercises to focus students' thoughts on the scenes before acting out the scenes in class.
2. Assign roles to students and ask them to perform the scenes.
3. Students should also pay attention to blocking and placement/movement while performing - students in the audience should be encouraged to help direct/envision the scenes (politely and in a non-disruptive manner, of course)
4. Discuss the scene as a class or in groups. The main focus of each class should be the performance of the scenes enhanced by the students’ knowledge of characters.
5. If time allows, show clips of the scenes acted in class AFTER students perform them and ask students to compare their performances to those of the actors. What do they notice?

Do Now’s:

a) 4.5 - What is the role of women in Hamlet? Has your view changed or been modified since our discussion of it in 3.4? How are women treated? Why do you think?

b) 4.5 - What is the significance of Ophelia’s words and song? What is the significance of her mention of flowers? Is there a greater meaning here?

c) 4.7 - What do you think Hamlet is trying to do by writing the letter to a) Horatio and b) Claudius? What is Hamlet’s reasoning and/or hoped for outcome?

Wrap Up/Exit:

- Homework: read Act 5; introduce Final Assessment (to be found in appendix)

Lesson Plan (#’s 15 - 16): This is the End, My Friend

Objectives/SWBAT:

- discuss and make connections between action in the play and character behaviors/characteristics
- hypothesize on the meaning of various characters’ actions - “why did they do that?”
- identify major themes in Hamlet: treachery/deception, parental relationships, doubt, revenge, honor
- perform Hamlet in class

Resources/Materials:

- Hamlet text
- pen/pencil and paper for notes
- DVD’s of Kenneth Branagh’s production of Hamlet and the RSC’s 2009 version of Hamlet as produced by the BBC, TV

Procedure:

1. Over the course of the next two days, use student performances of the last act of the play to help facilitate discussions about the end of the play. What happens? Are problems resolved? Does Shakespeare do a good job of tying up the plot? Why or why not? What is the point of the the Gravediggers and their interaction with Hamlet and Horatio?
2. Assign roles to students and ask them to perform the scenes.
3. Students should also pay attention to blocking and placement/movement while performing - students in the audience should be encouraged to help direct/envision the scenes (politely and in a non-disruptive manner, of course).
4. Discuss the scenes as a class or in groups. The main focus of each class should be the performance of the scenes enhanced by the students’ knowledge of characters.
5. If time allows, show clips of the scenes acted in class AFTER students perform them and ask students to compare their performances to those of the actors. What do they notice?

Wrap Up/Exit:

- Are problems resolved? Does Shakespeare do a good job of tying up the plot? Why or why not?
- What makes this play a tragedy? What is tragic? Could you change anything to make the play more or less tragic? Would you want to? Why/why not?
- Given the themes that we have discussed (treachery/deception, parental relationships, doubt, revenge, honor), were they successfully represented in this play? Are there any other themes that can be found in this play? Why - defend your reasoning.
- What, if anything, can be learned from this tale - why do you think that Shakespeare wrote Hamlet? Why is this play important?