

"It's Raining in Love":

Teaching Romeo and Juliet and As You Like It

To Tenth Graders . . .

In the Spring

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UNIT PLAN: Romeo and Juliet and As You Like ItDESCRIPTION OF CLASS

Here I am again, still at North High, still teaching tenth graders . . . See previous lesson plans for description of classes.

RATIONALE

I taught Romeo and Juliet for the first time last spring, and my students and I had a great time with it, so great in fact, that I am loath to give up teaching the old warhorse too quickly. But this Unit Plan assignment has forced me to consider teaching a different play. I've thought and thought, and come up with an idea for doing both: Romeo and Juliet, plus a different play -- at the same time. Happily, it's an idea that might solve a few teaching concerns I had last spring with using Romeo and Juliet.

The idea I've hit on is to read As You Like It along with Romeo and Juliet, using the two plays together to explore various notions and examples of romantic love. Youthful romantic love is the key attraction of Romeo and Juliet to my students, and their distress over the catastrophic and untimely deaths of the lovers at the end of the play is acute. Pairing Romeo and Juliet with a comedy about (more)

youthful love could prove an interesting antidote. Studying a comedy along with a tragedy would also give the students a more balanced introduction to Shakespeare's canon. Having the students read one play together in class and another play individually at home would, I would hope, improve their ability to make sense of Shakespeare as they read, since their in-class reading might be more skillful because of their attempts to grapple with the words on their own outside of class, and vice versa.

MATERIALS

Signet editions of Romeo and Juliet and As You Like It

(enough copies of AYLI needed so that each student would have a personal copy)

Handout with eight or ten assorted love poems

Study guides for at home readings (sample attached)

Recording of Romeo and Juliet

Zeffirelli movie of Romeo and Juliet

PROCEDURE

I have to make a confession here. I'm not sure whether I'd assign As You Like It to everyone in the class, or whether I'd assign it just to students who want or need "enrichment" (don't we all?). For the sake of argument, however, I'm going to pretend that I'd assign As You Like It to every student. While I'm at it, I'll also pretend that I'll have the budget for enough books for everyone. Might as well go whole hog on this.

Week 1

- Day 1. a. Distribute a handout with some poems about romantic love for the students to read and discuss. Include as many variations on the theme as possible.
Suggested poems: Brautigan's "It's Raining In Love"
"Cynara"
Alice Walker's "Grandmother wakes"
something by Donne
something by ee cummings
- b. Discuss distinctions between common forms of romantic love our society names: puppy love, crushes, love at first sight, marital love, infatuation. Talk about how one acts when "thus afflicted."
- c. If the teacher has time to do a little research, comments about the evolution of the romantic love concept throughout history, or about concepts of romantic love in non-western cultures would be interesting during this introductory discussion.
- Day 2. a. In discussion, explore the terms tragedy and comedy with students. Try to draw out the notions students have about these terms. Offer some literary definitions of the terms.
- b. Give a snappy introduction to Shakespeare -- 15 minutes max!-- and to the two plays.
- c. Pass out the books, and the first night's homework assignment: Act I, scene i of As You Like It.
- Day 3. a. Read Romeo and Juliet, I.i. in class. (Note: see my Teaching Strategy for ideas for different kinds of warmups that can be done before in-class reading.)
- b. Discuss the two readings (in class, and homework)
-- go over questions about plot in each reading
-- compare the personalities of Romeo and Orlando
-- discuss Romeo's behavior as a lover
- c. Homework assignment: AYLI, I.ii.
- Day 4. a. Read I.ii and I.iii of Romeo and Juliet
- b. Discussion points:
-- Compare Rosalind and Juliet as we first see them
-- Discuss the concept of marriage contracts
-- Compare the family situations of the two sets of heroes
- c. homework assignment! AYLI, I.iii.

Day 5. a. Read I.iv of Romeo and Juliet

b. Discussion points:

- What do Rosalind and Orlando like about each other? How do they show they're in love?
- Compare the love behavior of Romeo and Orlando
- What function does "dressing up?" serve in each play (party goers of Romeo and Juliet; disguises of Celia and Rosalind)

Weeks 2 and 3

The procedure outlined above of nightly homework readings from As You Like It and daily in-class readings of Romeo and Juliet would continue. Daily discussions would involve drawing parallels and contrasts between the main characters in the play, pointing out the concepts of love that various characters have in the plays, and clarifying the plot developments.

Suggestions for areas of discussion include:

1. "Petrarchan lover" conventions exhibited by Orlando, Romeo
2. Freedom of Arden vs constraints of Verona
3. Friendships: Celia and Rosalind, Romeo and Mercutio. Effect of romance on these friendships.
4. Tyranny of authority: Oliver, Duke Frederick, Lord Capulet
5. Imaginative disorder of Arden vs civil disorder of Verona
6. Youthful exhuberance and impulsiveness in main characters
7. Comic characters: Nurse, Jaques, Touchstone
8. Marriage procedures: negotiations of contracts; elopements
9. Mock marriage vs mock funeral
10. Scenic structure of plays

Some of these points could be explored in class discussion, while others could be explored through written study questions or brief essays.

Week 4

- Day 1. a. Discuss some of the key scenes between lovers in the two plays (balcony scene; first meeting scenes; Rosalind instruction Orlando; lark/nightingale scene) and examine carefully the difference in imagery, mood, and language between the two plays.
- b. Assign a comparative essay based on the themes of the above discussion

Day 2. . Give these days over to acting activities. Choose
Day 3. key love scenes for pairs of actors, or the ...
Day 4. Mercutio/Tybalt death scene from R&J and the
Day 5. Rosalind Prepares for Revelations scene from AYLI for bigger groups. An alternative for terrified non-performers would be to memorize selected soliloquys, which could be presented to the teacher in or out of class. I have been completely won over to the Shakespeare Outloud method, at least at the tenth grade level, and so I'd sacrifice another week of exploring the dimensions of romantic love in favor of acting activities.

Week 5

Movie, Test, and Writing Week

EVALUATION

1. Homework assignments from out-of-class reading
2. Final test on the plays
3. Final written comparative essay
4. Credit for participation in performance or memorization

FINAL NOTE

I have a few doubts about such an approach. Mainly, I don't know whether or not it would simply be too confusing for students to try to keep two plays going at the same time. (Comments would be appreciated on this point) If pressed, I would emphasize the teaching of Romeo and Juliet, and use the second play as an

interesting counterpoint for discussion purposes, without probing too deeply the themes of the second play. Another doubt about this approach stems from a questions about overemphasizing romantic love themes, and not attending to other themes and problems which the plays present.

SAMPLE STUDY GUIDE FOR
OUT-OF-CLASS READING

Homework assignment: Act I, scene i of As You Like It

1. Orlando has a problem with his older brother Oliver. What is it?
2. Why does Oliver want Orlando to wrestle Charles?

-- Predict who you think will win the wrestling match _____
3. Find a line that Oliver says when he is alone, where he describes his brother Orlando:
4. What is the lie Oliver has told Charles about Orlando?