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Inviting Drama into the AP® Literature Classroom

by Donna O. Carpenter

Let's face it—curling up with a good play is hardly something that many of us do on a regular basis, if at all. A good novel, a collection of short stories, a book of poetry—now that's different. The AP® students who step into our classrooms every September are no exception. Some love to read and write poetry. Others cannot devour enough of the latest best sellers and some are eager for us to recommend what we think is the greatest novel ever written. But, no, we do not see them roaming the hallways with the script of a play that they have chosen to read for pleasure.

Likewise, many of our AP students do not experience live drama beyond their school's annual play. When I ask the question, "Have you ever attended a professional stage performance," in my very typical Southern New Jersey suburban high school, only a few hands go up. Then when I ask about their experience studying drama in the high school classroom, I hear groans. "Please, Mrs. Carpenter," they plead, "don't bring out the audiotapes and tell us to follow along in the book!"

And so I find myself faced with bright and inquisitive young adults who have never learned to appreciate the value of dramatic works of literature. As their Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition teacher, I have the privilege and power to change their thinking, to create a new experience, to encourage them to peruse the Sunday paper for the next professional play coming to town. But how can I use such power in a way to make them truly love and appreciate this genre?

This collection of essays on teaching drama in the AP classroom is an excellent place to start. As each contribution reached my desk, I was galvanized by how these new ideas would inform my own approach to drama. In the words of Jim Burke, one of the issue's reviewers, "I stayed up until the wee hours of the morning changing my lesson plans for tomorrow so that I could use some of these ideas immediately." I couldn't agree more.

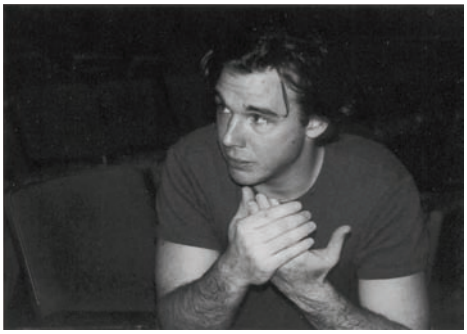
Thanks to Tim Averill, my students will approach *Hamlet* in imaginative and unexpected ways. They will follow the close reading strategies suggested by Barbara Bloy for dramatic monologues and learn to use Sharon Hamilton's approaches to Shakespearean verse. As Donna Tanzer suggests, I will introduce the works of August Wilson and help them appreciate this playwright's impact on American drama. Following Claudia Felske's and David Daniel's example, I have already begun the search for a professional actor to invite into my classroom. My students who are so comfortable reading prose will be encouraged to "make the connection" between drama and fiction as Elissa Greenwald so eloquently explains in her article. Finally, they will not sit with their elbows resting on their desks and eyes glued to the pages of dramatic texts. Jacqueline Laba's ideas, among the many others suggested in this issue, will bring the experience of drama alive in my classroom. Will they

read dramatic texts closely? Yes. Will they reach deeper levels of analysis? Absolutely! But they will also learn to live dramatic texts.

I will leave the audiotapes in the closet where they belong. My students, under my tutelage and guided by the sage advice offered here, will come to realize the potential and power of drama in their lives. My hope is that your students will gain that same appreciation.

The Role of Drama in the Classroom: A Conversation with David Daniel

by Claudia Klein Felske



David Daniel is a core company member and the educational director for American Players Theater (APT), the most popular outdoor classical theater in the country. Daniel has taught more than 5,000 students in dozens of schools in Wisconsin, offering a variety of actor-in-residence programs. He has been with APT for seven seasons, has taught theater for the past 18 years, and holds an MFA in Acting from the Professional Theater Training Program at the University of Delaware. Daniel was interviewed in mid-August after his preview performance as Marc Antony in Julius Caesar.

CKF: What is your mission as the educational director of American Players Theater?

DD: We would love to "feed the naked and clothe the hungry," as David Frank, our artistic director says, but we can't, so what we can do is inspire students to revel in language. That's one goal. Another is to introduce classic works to the everyman, to say, "Joe Farmer, this is William Shakespeare, I think you will enjoy each others' company." Our education mission is about facilitating that introduction.

CKF: What is your approach to drama in the classroom?

DD: Drama can offer students something that is grandly universal while simultaneously deeply personal. Drama should be owned. It should be worn, chewed, slid into, gulped, and rubbed vigorously in the hands and scalp. It should be used more and observed from a distance less.

CKF: What can the role of an actor teach students about interpreting literature?

DD: The number one thing that an actor can provide for students is freedom. Freedom to say "What does this mean? I don't understand what this means, and it should mean something…so let me look at this again." Actors can demonstrate that freedom, freedom to struggle with a text, but also freedom of interpretation.

CKF: Could you touch upon a few techniques that you think are particularly effective in bringing drama into the classroom, and in bringing the text alive for students?

DD: Bringing the text alive . . . . I think that students and perhaps teachers are probably at a disadvantage because we don't use language the way we used to, and I don't mean that in a romantic or nostalgic sense, but that we don't use language as a tool anymore. And young people especially tend to distrust people who are articulate and well spoken. I think the first step is taking pride in language, reveling in language, going back to the mission of APT: We inspire students to revel in language. We ask them, "Come on, say the word 'ooze' "; "No, don't say 'ooze,' say 'oooooozzze,' use those words, it's not a vocabulary word on a test, it's 'oooooze.' " It's about how sounds make and change the environment. I think that we too easily move past that and get to "Okay, here are more words, and here's how to use these words correctly." Students need to see language as a very useful tool; they need to see how characters in a play use language to achieve their purposes. We need to start by selling them on the power and the function of language. As actors, we can show them: "This is what language can do," and hopefully, when we leave the classroom we're passing that ball off to the teacher.

It's like answering the question everyone asks in math: "When am I going to use this?" So, our question is "Why study language?" "Why literature?" I think that question needs to be an ongoing conversation for teachers, year after year, and having that conversation with peers keeps you fresh and truthful and girds your loins in the battle that you have to face every day when you walk out into that wonderful sea of apathy.

CKF: Once they "buy into" the language, what's next?

DD: Once students "buy into" the language, the drama techniques will flow from that. Every time I'm in the classroom, I look at any opportunity to get people involved physically. Why physically? Because they're not when I get there. If I went to Cirque du Soleil, then I'd take every opportunity to have them to sit down in a circle and talk. Why? Because they're already bouncing off the walls when I get there. It's not that physicality is more important than the discussions and the intellectual work and the banter that goes on in the classroom; I just think it's not as prevalent, and so I'm saying, let's do something different, and whenever you're doing something different, there's going to be learning going on.

CKF: There's an endless array of ways you can teach any given play, so are there a few particularly effective approaches you would recommend for teachers?

DD: No, there's no one approach, but I think the common starting point is the why. You always need to go back to the why: Why this text? And I think that it's unfair for teachers to teach something that they don't value. I think it's unfair for teachers to teach a book that they don't enjoy themselves. Not a lot of teachers enjoy Shakespeare. So I think it's unfair for those who don't to teach it.

CKF: Do you really think a lot of teachers don't like Shakespeare?

DD: Yes. I mean, enjoy it, like reading it in your off time. And reading in your off time as an English teacher is not quite like reading in your off time if you work at a factory because your job is reading. Many actors don't like Halloween because we dress in costume for a living. But it's a little unfair teaching something you don't like. It's saying, "Look, I don't enjoy this text, but I have to teach it to you," and students read that; they know when you don't like a book.

CKF: Do you have a favorite play or even a favorite scene for use in the classroom? A piece you find eminently teachable, or a scene that can very efficiently achieve a particular effect in the classroom?

DD: I don't, and here's where my pedagogy differs as a teaching artist than as a teacher. I've found that the best material is material that I'm unfamiliar with. I think that actors are best used when modeling a real-life environment, when students see an actor authentically stand in the unknown, look at a text, and say, "I don't know what this means, but I can figure it out…let's see…" Then there's a real unfolding that the student is witness to as opposed to something that is prepared.

CKF: So do you think it's more valuable for a teacher to become an "expert" on x number of plays or to be spontaneous and model the kind of inquiry you mentioned?

DD: Of course, I am not a teacher. I've got 40 minutes when I come in to do razzle dazzle. Teachers have a long-term investment. My approach to teaching is based on a very limited window of time. However, when I give teacher workshops, I do try to inspire teachers to try something new. Some say, "Well, I'm not an actor," and I say, "What do you say when your students say that to you?" If you're not an actor, you have the perfect opportunity to get up and do something because if you get up and do it, your students will say "Well, then I can do that too." And if you are unwilling to take that risk, if you are unwilling to stand in the unknown, why are you asking the students to take that risk?

CKF: A perpetual problem for English teachers is depth versus breadth. Within our given time constraints, do we expose students to as many plays as reasonably possible, or examine fewer pieces in greater depth?

DD: Speaking from my own classroom experience, breadth usually breaks down into plot summaries and introducing major themes to a slew of what I deridingly call "fiber cereal plays." These are plays that are supposed to be good for you but taste awful and that only a handful of people actually "eat." However, the great majority of the classics that I've read happened when I was in high school, so there's your quantity—without my English teachers exposing me to these great works, I would have passed them by. Most of them I did "pass by" even then, so there's your quality.

So what's my answer? When I choose a play to teach, I'm looking for two things: first, a play that provides as many prototypical opportunities dealing with drama that I can find;

and second, the ever-elusive "hook" factor to keep them engaged. I focus on process and technique of exploring one play and then look to the other plays to grab the students at their earliest convenience. With either choice, there are successes and failures.

CKF: How important is it, in your mind, for students to see a live version of the play they're studying in class, and what would you recommend when the play is not being performed locally?

DD: It's very important. If you were teaching music and laying out a symphony, it would seem incomplete somehow until you go and hear the symphony in its entirety. Not only do you get what you were studying, but you also get this culmination of all the separate parts into this new experience, and this new experience is only heightened by the fact that you had looked at each individual part that you had been studying.

If students don't have access to a production of the play, they can see something else. I think people can appreciate *Romeo and Juliet* by seeing *Hamlet*; they can appreciate *Hamlet* by going to see *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and they can appreciate *A Streetcar Named Desire* by going to see an exhibit of photographs. I think art can inform itself.

CKF: What are your thoughts on analyzing DVD versions of a play in class?

DD: There's something about movies that I'm suspicious of. I think we as educators have to be wary of students signing off on big budgeted films as the answer. When I was growing up, if you'd have asked me about the Roman Empire, I'd have told you everything I know from *Ben Hur* and *Spartacus*, that's just my history as Shakespeare's plays were for many Elizabethans in Shakespeare's Day.

That said, I think the best resources are the ones with a collection of the same scene from different films or same actors doing the scene in a variety of ways; they're good because they empower the student to have multiple perspectives on a piece of literature rather than say, "Now, here's the answer."

CKF: Do you have any general impressions of AP English classes or their approach to the study of drama?

DD: AP students are sharp, inquisitive, and insightful. On the opposite side of the spectrum, they are not as challenging and are quite safe in their interpretations in comparison to some other classes. For instance, my Tybalt this year is a direct result of an article about a student in a disadvantaged school in Connecticut. His teacher asked about Tybalt's motivation in challenging Romeo. "Because he's been dissed," "Oh, Romeo dissed Tybalt, yes," the teacher responded. "No," the student said, "Lord Capulet dissed Tybalt. Lord Capulet calls him 'boy,' and he says 'I'm the man. You do what I say' . . . and the boy walks out and beats up the first boy he sees." And the teacher says, "Oh my God," and I say "Oh My God." But that's the

kind of insight that comes out of that kind of classroom from a young man you know had experience with that situation: an older male disempowering a younger male. And my Tybalt this year is based on that student's comment.

So AP classes are savvy, they're interested, they are always involved, but on the other side of the spectrum, there's a personal insight that they are often lacking which carries weight that is far greater in some ways. I'd say the same is true when I go to a Shakespearean play. When I go to the Guthrie or here at APT, I'm blown away by some of the productions. However, they don't come near the emotional and spiritual response I have when I go to see Shakespeare performed in a prison and I hear Claudius say, "Is there rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash this hand white as snow?"

CKF: In AP classrooms, is it harder for you to get students to come out of their shells, harder to get them out of the strictly "what-does-this-mean" mode?

DD: It is. AP students are very good at pretending. They know what works, and they use what works. There are ways to ask questions where you're not concerned about the answer, but you're only concerned that everyone heard you ask the question. I think that AP students can be easily trapped because, first of all, they're in an AP class: that tells them that they're doing something right, so they are not going to change what they are doing because it got them there. It's the same with some teachers: they are not going to change what they are doing because it got them here; they're not interested in hearing some educational director in the theater saying, "and you can try this. . . ."

CKF: So what do you do?

DD: Well, I do the same thing that I do for any class: I have to find out where they are, and I have to challenge them where they are. It's about reading them as individuals and challenging them as individuals and knowing what is an easy answer for them, what is a pat answer for them, and knowing what's a real, authentic hunger for knowledge. So, it's exactly what teachers already do.

CKF: Are there any particular resources: books, Web sites that you'd recommend for a teacher without much theater experience?

DD: Yes. One in particular is Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. I mention Boal as opposed to the more common Viola Spolin or Second City books because Boal uses drama in the world. He teaches dock union workers how to create a play that epitomizes their struggles for better conditions. In the last few years, he's created something called legislation drama where he goes into a community and through theater, the people create a play which then becomes law, so his method is all about theater as a tool for society. Most of the drama books recommended for teachers deal with drama games and self-expression, and these are great, but I think for a teacher who lacks theater experience, Boal is recommended.

He uses real people to talk to real people and theater is the tool that facilitates that conversation.

CKF: What approach would you recommend for students frustrated with Shakespeare; students who can't seem to grasp the language, for example?

DD: I think we're stepping over something vital in the question. Frustration. I think that kind of frustration is inherently bound with an "oughtness." "I ought to be able to understand this…" which is almost certainly followed with "…by now." Teachers and actors have been raised with, or created for themselves, a kind of checklist learning style:

Read it

Discussed it

Understood it

Shakespeare, and literature in general, is not a download where we measure our understanding in bandwidth—dial up for special needs students, cable for the college-bound crowd, and satellite for the few really great ones.

What that "frustrated" student is looking for is understanding, and if understanding is worth half its weight in salt, it takes time. In our modern cyber culture time, more time, is a measure of weakness and ineptness. We need to validate the journey as well as the destination; the exploration as well as the meaning. The value of the person and truth that is revealed in the journey might very well be the entire point of it all. Of course, the cards are stacked against educators. Time is not something that is in overabundance…and let's not even mention the giant war elephant called "Assessment" that is ever slumbering in the corner of every pedagogical discourse.

As a teaching artist, I am free of most of the logistical responsibilities of my fellow educators. I can, and often do, allow an entire class to explore the smallest, most trivial piece of meaning.

CKF: So it becomes a matter of how to best use the time we do have while keeping the learning authentic.

DD: We, as educators, need to help students (and ourselves) define what education is. Rather than treat high school sophomores as 70 percent of a complete human being (only three more years on the burner—stir occasionally), we could treat them as whole and complete human beings. Michael Druery talks about teaching in the present, which means that when he teaches 8-year-olds or 15-year-olds, he's teaching an 8- or a 15-year-old and not someone who will become an adult later. He uses a wonderful metaphor for education: the commercial flower industry. Everyone wants a perfect rose, so the flower industry creates roses in a week, injecting them with hormones and forcing them to grow instead of letting them grow naturally at their own pace of development.

In education, we are not teaching students now, we're getting them ready to go into the next grade; they're not in high school, and we're prepping them for college; they're not in college, and we're prepping them for the real world. So when are we teaching the student who is actually there? Education should be an experience of life now rather than a preparation for it later, and a recognition that in the struggle to "get it," something of ourselves is revealed. This is what keeps people involved in education—students fifteen to fifty—the exploration and revelation of a little bit of themselves.

CKF: Where do you see the role of an actor and a teacher intersecting?

DD: Actors and teachers could be exemplary explorers of meaning, but the majority are professionals at distributing product and hiding struggle, handing out the "answers" in a variety of crafty and well-intentioned ways, while missing any real opportunity of sharing their own personal struggle with meaning-making.

Inherently, they're different because actors "hold the mirror up to nature" and bear no responsibility for the meaning-making that follows, while a teacher's job should begin by, after a student has looked into that mirror, guiding them through the meaning-making process. The classroom and the stage could both be sacred places to reveal and explore truths that unite and divide us, but most are operated as distribution centers where opinions, viewpoints, and "answers" are doled out to the customer.

Teachers and artists could expect and demand from each other courage in the face of the unknown, knowing that the questions and the search are exponentially rewarded with insight and understanding born from the struggle to make meaning. It's too easy for both professions to play it safe by not asking tough questions. It's too easy to just do what we always do.

Drama and Fiction: Making the Connection

by Elissa Greenwald

The most common request I hear from my students is to go see a play. This desire for live performance can be used to enliven the study of drama in the AP classroom. Extending their interest in characters and stories from fiction, students can find in drama:

1) embodiment of characters in real people;
2) unfolding of events in live action and real time;
3) a way of hearing multiple voices and understanding political events.

This essay explores how to turn fiction lovers into drama lovers (and vice versa) through vignettes that illustrate how to teach three pairs of plays and novels:

- The development of character through irony, realism, and metaphor in *A Doll's House* and *The Awakening;*
- The development of plot through on- and off-stage action and subplots in *Hamlet* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles;* and
- The reflection of world view through symbolism and the absurd in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Irony, Realism, and Character in *A Doll's House* and *The Awakening*

While irony may be difficult to perceive in prose, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* presents many layers of inescapable irony. The dramatic irony that reaches a climax at the end of Act I, when Torvald denounces liars, not knowing that his wife has lied to save their marriage—and his life—makes irony a matter of life or death in this play: "…that kind of atmosphere of lies infects the whole life of a home. Every breath the children take in is filled with the germs of something degenerate." In teaching *A Doll's House*, I ask students to discuss their first impressions of Nora after the opening scene. We revisit those impressions after the second scene, when Nora reveals to Mrs. Linde that she took a loan (an illegal act for a married woman at that time) to pay for a trip to Italy to save Torvald's life. As we look back at the first scene with that knowledge, layers of irony are revealed:

- Nora plays a spendthrift but is secretly saving;
- Nora acts like a carefree child but is oppressed by anxiety;
- The appearance of the Helmers' living room, which seems to reveal a happy, well-off family at Christmastime, is an illusion.

After perceiving the ironies in this scene, students can explore the ironies of nineteenth-century middle-class society in its rigid expectations of men and women, the multiple meanings of the doll house, and the role of playacting in the play—the incomplete knowledge each character has of the others and him or herself. We discuss the role of realism

as a function of multiple perspectives (comparisons to Henry James's *Washington Square* or *The Turn of the Screw* are useful).

We then look closely at irony in a work of fiction: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. I begin by reading Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," in which ironies multiply until the devastating conclusion. We talk about the irony created by the discrepancy between the protagonist's reveries and the expectations of the other characters, which leads to multiple—and opposing—interpretations of the ending.

After this introduction to irony, students can see the ironies of *The Awakening:* The discrepant motives and understandings of Edna and her husband as illustrated in their dialogue about a sick child (chapter 3); the varying motives of Edna and Alcee Arobin in his seduction of her; the ironic transformation of love into renunciation in the story of Edna and Robert. The ironies multiply in Edna's death, which can be interpreted as anything from a deliberate to a quixotic act on her part to the result of the machinations of fate.

Understanding irony in Ibsen's and Chopin's works prepares students to discuss the clash of dreams and reality in realism. The difficulty of negotiating gender roles and the financial anxieties of a middle-class marriage resonate from Ibsen's time to ours. Yet the symbolic aspects of the drama (the unifying metaphor of the doll's house and the sometimes melodramatic action, such as the use of letters as plot devices) militate against realism while illuminating the play's themes.

We discuss the realism of *The Awakening* in the detailed depiction of settings such as Grande Isle but note the contrasting reveries in which Edna escapes into the past or an imagined world. Such reveries (like those in "The Story of an Hour") put her at odds with the reality around her, as do the lyrical descriptions of the sea, which evoke a more eternal realm.

Students wonder how different women's roles were in the nineteenth century from today. We investigate Ibsen's role in the women's movement; Chopin's life; and divorce laws in the nineteenth century, along with writings of female writers from Mary Wollstonecraft through Virginia Woolf. At the conclusion of our study of *The Awakening* and *A Doll's House,* I ask my students to debate whether duty to self should be placed above duty to others. Students write two 3-page papers (each student is assigned to write a position paper, a rebuttal, or a closing argument for one side of the debate). One impassioned student quoted Whitman's "Song of Myself" in defense of the individualism of Edna and Nora; other papers illuminated attitudes about freedom, women's roles, and family dynamics.

Plot and Point of View in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Hamlet*

Drama brings characters to life; it also illuminates the way in which stories unfold, as seen by comparing Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* to *Hamlet*. In *Tess*, a melodrama of betrayed womanhood is absorbed into a richly described story about a woman's capacity for independence and a man's capacity for forgiveness.

Tess features crucial offstage scenes (notably, Tess's initial and later seduction by Alec d'Urberville). These scenes reverberate throughout the story, making Tess's path in life seem fated. As the initiating event in *Tess* occurs offstage and affects the protagonist's entire life, so the initiating event in *Hamlet* occurs before the play begins and echoes throughout the play in the Ghost's narration, Claudius's confession, the play within the play, and Gertrude's words and actions. Students discuss whether Hamlet and Tess are victims of fate or have free will, and how their genders influence their fates.

Like *Tess*, *Hamlet* uses subplots which echo and increasingly merge with the main plot (the fate of the other girls at Talbothay's Dairy in *Tess*; the fate of Polonius's family in *Hamlet*). Cross-cutting in the latter portions of both works (between Angel and Tess in *Tess*; between Hamlet's movements and Ophelia's degeneration and Laertes's revenge in Act IV of *Hamlet*) heightens dramatic tension.

Hamlet can be read as a detective story, ghost story, or revenge tragedy, according to critic Maynard Mack. Unlike most revenge tragedies, *Hamlet* focuses on Hamlet's self-examination-and his consequent reluctance to act—to become a play about the nature of humanity, especially in the soliloquies. After reading the first two acts, students can predict subsequent actions by playing *Hamlet* out as a chess game between Claudius and Hamlet (using the other characters as pieces on each side), emphasizing both characters' attempts to direct the action. Similarly, one can discuss in *Tess* the clash of the narratives imposed by Alec, Angel, Tess, and Hardy himself.

Seeing different interpretations of one scene can illuminate a character's point of view. Showing multiple film versions of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy reveals whether the filmmaker views it as an expression of pain (Kevin Kline), an outraged wrestling with fate (Mel Gibson), or not a soliloquy at all (Branagh). Students might write essays comparing different film versions, noting gesture, voice, and facial expression as well as cinematic elements such as lighting and camera angles, defending their favorite version by showing how it best illustrates the text. (I owe this idea to Professor Louis Grasso of Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York; and Donna Carpenter, AP English teacher, Kingsway High School, Woolwich Township, New Jersey.) I also ask students to write a modernized version of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, so they can connect their own decisions with Hamlet's existential dilemmas.

Final writing assignments for this unit could include:

- Writing a dramatic monologue for Tess, Angel, or Alec, imitating elements of Hardy's poetry, such as setting and dialogue, and aspects of Browning's dramatic monologues, such as the use of the listener within the poem or narration by an evil character.
- Comparing the roles of secondary characters in the book (Laertes in *Hamlet* and the girls from the dairy in *Tess*) and how they illuminate or affect the protagonists.
- Comparing Ophelia and Tess as tragic heroines.

- Comparing how fate works in drama versus fiction: how are sudden catastrophes, unknown facts, and the inescapability of the past presented differently in *Hamlet* and *Tess*?

Symbolism and Culture in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *Waiting for Godot*

From discussion of plot and point of view in *Tess* and *Hamlet*, we turn to the symbolic and cultural aspects of literature in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. *Metamorphosis* never fails to delight, horrify, and sadden my students. We see Kafka as a creature of his time and Gregor as a metaphor for modern man. We discuss such questions as: how is Gregor a bug before his transformation? What scenes are humorous and why? (These questions are from the Web site of Dr. George Mitrevski, Department of Foreign Languages at Auburn University, www.auburn.edu/~mitrege/ENGL2210/study-guides/kafka.html.) These issues link Kafka's work to the absurdist and existentialist drama *Waiting for Godot*. One may explore existentialist questions by staging scenes from the play: in the opening scene, for example, what elements of naturalism and symbolism would be used in the stage, setting, costumes, movement, intonation of words, timing? How could those elements reflect the despair, humanity, and hope of the protagonists?

Beckett's and Kafka's works connect with many works in other media. In *Metamorphosis,* the convention of parents bemoaning the waywardness of a child is a typical motif of the Yiddish theater, of which Kafka was a fan. The exaggerated slow-motion scenes, such as the chief clerk and the parents retreating in horror before Gregor's initial appearance, recall early silent movies. Gregor's insistence on his humanity despite his bug-like appearance can be linked to the dreamlike dissociations of surrealist painting—see Jayne R. Smith, *Waiting for Godot and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead: Curriculum Unit* (The Center for Learning, 1993, pp. 1–9) on Magritte. One might consult Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* on symbolism (Gregor as cockroach, the tree in Godot) or his analysis of the Oedipal complex on family drama in Kafka. Clips of silent film comedy (Chaplin or Buster Keaton) can be compared, for example, to the scene of interchanging hats in Beckett (p. 46) or connected through similar themes: rejection of weaker individuals, alienation from natural rhythms of time in an industrialized world (see Chaplin's *Modern Times*).

Kafka's work reflects widespread patterns of modern life in industrialized societies—routine, mechanization, isolation, alienation from work and nature. In *Waiting for Godot*, these themes are embodied in dialogue, monologue, repetition, humor, stage directions and interaction among characters. Analyzing Gregor's loss of human voice leads to a discussion of language and consciousness as means that convey humanity—or that fail to do so; it would be interesting to dramatize one of the later scenes in the book, when Gregor still has some human consciousness but acts like a bug. Beckett uses language games such as Vladimir and Estragon's game of contradictions and questions (pp. 41–2) and Lucky's philosophical monologue (pp. 29–31) to illustrate the limits of language. Students could compare Gregor to one of the characters in *Godot,* indicating why he is most like that character.

We address themes of oppression in both works (Gregor by his family, Lucky by Pozzo) by investigating their historical bases in Kafka's and Beckett's lives; for example, reading Kafka's letter to his father (available at www.kafka-franz.com/KAFKA-letter.htm) and other letters reflecting his view of being Jewish in Prague in the early twentieth century. Beckett's life in exile can illuminate events and themes in his play. Marjorie Perloff emphasizes the connection of Godot to World War II: to the horrors of war and of the Holocaust, Beckett's efforts in the French Resistance, and other experiences ("In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War," *Iowa Review* 35 (no.2), 76–103, available at www.samuel-beckett.net/PerloffBeckettsWar.html). Students could investigate those issues further in research papers on each writer's life and times.

Kafka's and Beckett's visions continue to resonate in contemporary culture. As they read more recent works, I ask students to write comparative papers which identify Kafka's international influence: in the mordant humor of magical realists Borges and Garcia Marquez or Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*; in the reduction of man to a "bare forked animal" in the works of South African writer J.M. Coetzee; in the dissociation of consciousness in the parallel narratives of Haruki Murakami. Beckett could be compared to writers like Pinter (in the use of language and of time and space) or Stoppard (in the dazzling word games and questioning of reality). Students could also write about how the fracturing of identity in Kafka and Beckett, and their blurring of the line between dream and reality, influenced movies such as *Identity, A Beautiful Mind*, or *Waking Life*. These connections make Kafka and Beckett seem more familiar than strange, contemporaries rather than distant predecessors.

Conclusion

Drama and fiction can illuminate each other and can illuminate their world and other worlds for students. Reading *A Doll's House,* or other works by Ibsen, helps students see how everyone plays roles, a theme prominent in such writers as Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ibsen shows the limits of one point of view (seen in prose in the unreliable narrator, for example) by revealing not just the blindness of Torvald to his wife but of Nora to him, and of the audience to the deeper mystery that is the individual.

To understand dramatic works with tangled plots, comparisons to short stories or novels reveal how plots develop: by interweaving multiple stories, for example. Classifying a drama in one or more genres clarifies underlying patterns (How is Hamlet like a detective? How does he gather the clues, and what are the consequences of his actions? What is the effect of grafting a family drama onto a story of detection and mystery, as in the story of Oedipus?)

Students who have never seen a play may underestimate the cultural impact of public works of art. After learning about the galvanizing effect of *A Doll's House* on its initial audiences and Ibsen's passionate defense of the play as a plea for human rights, students can better appreciate the risks taken by later playwrights like Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* and Tony

Kushner in *Angels in America* in tearing the veil of silence off "forbidden" topics, or August Wilson in revealing lives silenced figuratively and literally.

By writing and performing dramatic works, students realize drama is a means of becoming as well as masking one's self. The moments my students and I remember most from my classroom are dramatic ones: two students impersonating Huck Finn and Mary Tyrone from *Long Day's Journey Into Night* meeting and seeking common ground; an adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* that my students wrote and performed as an opera; student-filmed scenes from *Moby-Dick* and *Wuthering Heights*; a full-scale production of Act III of *A Doll's House*.

Drama allows students both to literally act out dilemmas similar to those they may have experienced or will experience and to explore situations which they may never encounter in their own lives. I can imagine no more direct way of identifying with a character than, for a while, to become that character.

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Out of the Desks and into the Play: Teaching Drama Through Performance

by Jacqueline Laba

The TNT television channel has trademarked the slogan, "We know drama." This is a mantra that our AP® students understand. They "know drama" in the media of popular culture, in the formal study of plays, and in their emotionally charged adolescent lives. However, our analytical focus in AP classes sometimes impedes the confluence of the cultural, the curricular, and the personal, turning the study of plays into a bloodless, lifeless academic exercise that removes the "drama" from dramatic literature.

I've sought to inject my teaching of drama with elements that help my students "know" drama through performance. Role-playing, choral reading, mime, tableaux, and debate get students out of their desks and into the play; these activities accomplish the close reading that an upper-level course requires without sacrificing the passion, surprise, danger, and creativity that we prize in the genre itself. The ideas in this article are not new. They have been inspired by colleagues and mentors, by professional workshops, and, most recently, by the creative drama activities discussed by Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith in their book *Going with the Flow* (98–103). These performance-based exercises can be used to introduce a play, explore dramatic conventions like the soliloquy and the choral ode, identify subtext, and close a drama unit with impact. Not every activity can or should be used with every play, but including some of them can increase the emotional and intellectual interaction students have with a great but challenging text.

Performing the Introduction: Role Cards for Everybody

An actual theatrical experience begins with excitement: the house lights dim, the curtain rises, the first line sounds. Too often in the classroom our students begin drama weighed down with background information, literary terms, and guided reading questions. Introducing a play with a role card for everyone and a performance—not a staid seated reading—plunges students in the world of the play right away. This activity works especially well for plays that begin with crowd scenes (like *Oedipus the King* or *Julius Caesar*) or with action that affects an offstage group (like *The Crucible*).

Role cards, prepared in advance, are created by the teacher for each character mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the initial scene(s) of a play. They name or describe characters with dialogue, characters who may be unnamed but physically present in the scene, and entities of symbolic rather than physical import (for example, gods or ghosts). Each card also assigns a physical activity or an emotion (or both) for the performer to enact. Enough cards should be created so that everyone in the class has a role.

Here's what role cards for *Oedipus the King* might look like:

- Oedipus: confident ruler of Thebes whose speech seeks to reassure the citizens of his concern
- Priest: religious leader who desires the king to save the city from the plague (since the priest's speech is long, you might want to make up three role cards and divide his speech into three sections with the lines of each section included on each card)
- A young boy whose father has just died in the plague; he clings to his mother
- A woman who has delivered a stillborn infant that she carries in her arms
- The god Apollo who is responsible for the plague and gazes impassively on the proceedings

Before handing out the cards, the teacher describes the scene's action succinctly. After receiving their roles, only students with dialogue look in the text to find their lines. The rest concentrate on expressing the emotions of their characters and reacting as their card suggests. After brief instructions by the teacher to determine "marks" and exits and entrances, students perform the scene. During the performance only those with speaking parts have the text. The rest listen and react. Engagement, not polish, is the goal. After their performance, students write down what they felt as they participated in the scene. The ensuing discussion springs out of their impressions, questions, and observations.

First encountering the text as performance reproduces in the classroom the emotional heightening that a powerful introductory scene evokes in a theater audience. In the case of *Oedipus*, for example, students have brought the images of disease and death to life themselves, and their performance has given them a "stake" in the tragedy.

Performing Long Speeches: Round Robin and Choral Montage; Joining the Dance; Say and Sway

One dramatic convention of the classical or canonical plays in the AP curriculum is the long monologue or soliloquy, beloved by teachers but not always by students, who sometimes get lost in the shifts and imagery of a complex speech. Choral odes with their formal language, abstractions, and allusions to Greek myth can be especially off-putting. Students who perform rather than merely read these challenging passages discover and unleash the power of these set pieces for themselves. Each of the following activities zeroes in on important words and ideas in a long speech.

In Round Robin and Choral Montage, students read the speech silently and then write down the seven phrases or short clauses they deem the most significant, the most powerful, or the most evocative. Then, in round robin fashion, students read their first choices out loud. I tell them not to worry about repetitions. We do the same for their third and fifth choices. In the first part of this simple activity, students make decisions about the text; in the second part

they hear what they, as individuals, may not have noticed. At this point, I ask them to discuss (but not necessarily to defend) their choices.

Students then break into small groups to create what Wilhelm and Smith call a "choral montage" (p. 102): a cohesively arranged collection of quotations. The group narrows down the individual choices and reorganizes them into a condensed but coherent mini soliloquy/ode/monologue that is read to the class. The montage need not mirror the original order but it should use the original words of the text with only few changes or additions for coherence. After all of the montages are read, the class now has more ammunition for a closer analysis. With competitive spirits, you might vote on the best or most effective collage.

In the second choral ode of *Oedipus the King*, the chorus fearfully asks, "If all such violence goes with honor now/why join the sacred dance?" (Fagles translation lines 984–5). In this second activity, students "join the dance" in a literal way. In small groups, students read the speech on their own, choose the seven to ten most important words and then "perform" the words. I've seen line dances, drum beats, chants, call and response, and other ingenious movements. Why focus on words alone when looking at a long speech? Because the text's most profound questions are pared down to essential ideas. In the case of Oedipus's second choral ode, students identify words like *destiny*, *laws*, *god*, *pride*, *tyrant*, *abyss*, *justice*, *outrage*, *oracle*, and *reign* that resonate throughout the play. Marrying word and movement clarifies the gravitas of verbal markers for the larger themes and mysteries of the play.

In Say and Sway I divide the long speech up into sections, assign each section to a group, and ask them to perform their section as a choral reading with choreography. After a short rehearsal (10–15 minutes), students perform their segments in order, with as little delay as possible between sections. Say and Sway sensitizes to the nuances of language when they "color" words and phrases with different volume levels, elongate syllables, and combine different numbers and timbres of voices (single voice, all male, all female, high or low pitches, whispers, shouts, etc.). With a tragic play, I do remind them that deliberately trying for a humorous effect is not appropriate; they should honor the tragic mood and, as Hamlet says, suit the word to the action. "What really worked," I ask students afterwards, "to dramatize the shifts, and the message of the whole speech?" The media-savvy can videotape the performances, play the complete tape, and then show a professional version of the same speech or ode. Students can compare and contrast how their efforts intersect with and diverge from the "professional" performance.

A variation of Say and Sway is Dead Chorus Society. I have students rewrite the final choral ode of Oedipus by recasting it as a series of short speeches spoken from beyond the grave by Polybus, Laius, Jocasta, and the Sphinx. This technique gives voice to characters eliminated from the play and adds another perspective to the work's ending.

Performing Subtext: Behind the Curtain and Beneath the Line

Sometimes what happens offstage is as important as what happens onstage. Like filmed versions of plays that "open up" the action, Behind the Curtain dramatizes narrated and offstage events, making the unseen "seen" through imaginative reconstruction of extra-textual events. In one variation, a student reads a speech that describes offstage or flashback action (like Oedipus's revelations to Jocasta about his youth) while student actors mime what is described. When students perform what happens behind the curtain in stylized motions, the effect can be riveting. Improvisation of scenes that do not appear in the play, another form of this exercise, gives students even more latitude for creativity (and, it must be said, humor). What happened when Laius and Jocasta received the prophecy about their son or when Oedipus bested the Sphinx? The goal of the improvisation is revelation and exploration: students turn their unspoken inferences about a text into dramatic form.

Beneath the Line activities expose the subtexts of dialogue through mime, tableaux, and extra-textual dialogue and, like Behind the Curtain, pair the reading of text with physical or verbal "commentary." In the mime type of Beneath the Line, one student reads a speech as one or more students "become" the objects that the character refers to. For example, when the blind Oedipus addresses a series of apostrophes to Mount Cithaeron, Polybus, the Triple Roads, and the Marriages in the play, the mimes create poses or actions that suggest each entity's physical and symbolic presence.

Tableaux or "freeze frames" show the rising action of a scene and how a playwright builds tension. In motionless and wordless poses (like a stop action frame) students represent characters or objects in action in a line of dialogue. Each group gets an important but different line in a scene for which they must create three tableaux: the first depicts what happens immediately before the line, the second illustrates the line itself, and the third what occurs immediately after. The three freeze frames are presented in rapid succession, and afterwards the class determines which line the group was given and how the tableaux illustrate the movement of the scene.

In Alter Ego (Wilhelm and Smith p. 101), another Beneath the Line exercise, students who read actual dialogue aloud are partnered with an alter ego who follows the written line with improvised dialogue that reveals the character's inner thoughts or subtext in a kind of anti-soliloquy. This technique is especially effective in exposing the ironic underpinnings of a scene, as for example in the scene where Ross must tell Macduff that his family is dead.

Performances for closure: Sleuth for Truth and LID (Lines in Debate)

Closure activities summarize and reinforce major issues in the play and encourage examination of remaining open questions. Sleuth for Truth is a role-playing exercise where students "interrogate" a classmate who has assumed the persona of one of the characters in

the play. LID, while not "performance" in the strictest sense of the word, nonetheless gets students out of their desks to debate which line best sums up the play's essential message.

Sleuth for Truth simplifies Wilhelm and Smith's hotseating strategy (p. 100–101) in which one student who has assumed the persona of a character is provided with probing questions designed to uncover his or her motivations and intentions. The group brainstorms both the questions and possible responses. For example, Tiresias might be asked, "Why couldn't you answer the riddle of the Sphinx?" "Why did you marry a much younger man?" might be directed at Jocasta. After each character is sleuthed for truth by her group, the others take their turn grilling and probing even more deeply. You might award a "Best Sleuth" to the group with the best questions and "Best Truth-Teller" to the most convincing role-player.

LID (Lines in Debate) was inspired by two students who were national debate champions, so I devised this activity in order to take advantage of their skill. I chose six lines from *Waiting for Godot* and gave one line to each group, who had to come up with reasons why their line was the most important in the play. In LID, one student from each group is the designated debater for his/her team and must face the designate of an opposing team. I pit two teams against each other at a time. The remaining four teams vote for the more effective argument. Debates and votes continue until one put the "lid" on his/her line and is declared the winner.

Turning the classroom into a theater and treating students as actors and audience exploits the joys and challenges of interacting with the dramatic texts of the AP curriculum. While not intended to supplant or supersede the usual read/discuss/write format that forms the backbone of so many AP classes, they add an edge to the study of drama. Liberate students from their desks occasionally, and you'll be surprised at what happens in your classroom.

Hamlet Unit: A "New Critical" Approach for Empowering AP Students

by Tim Averill

The Infrastructure of the AP® Unit

The following unit plan on *Hamlet* is based upon four important traits of successful AP® English Literature and Composition curriculum that can, I believe, be applied to any work of literature. In my view, when we teachers share curriculum units, we are not so much sharing the literary content of the work but rather the infrastructure of the unit plan itself. This *Hamlet* unit is based upon (1) New Criticism; (2) Pre-Engagement Activities; (3) Engagement Devices; and (4) Writing and Evaluation. A new teacher of AP English Literature and Composition can especially benefit from adopting a model that they can apply to additional works of literature.

The New Criticism in AP

Even though the "New Criticism" is hardly new, having its genesis in the work of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren among others, it is still a valuable approach for AP teachers and students. In an age when other critical lenses limit our focus, New Criticism assures us that the answers to literary questions lie in the text itself. And while this approach may not allow us to deconstruct the Marxist, feminist, or capitalist influence in the author's work, it puts both the teacher and the students in the same position the students will face for the AP Exam in May: looking at a text with no previous exposure and making meaning through close reading. So the first element (and overarching characteristic) of the infrastructure of a successful AP unit is the primacy of the text as reflected in the New Criticism.

Pre-Engagement

The second element of the AP unit infrastructure is what I call the pre-engagement activity (what others may call an "anticipatory set"). The purpose of the pre-engagement activity is to place the students in the world of the literature, showing the student that he or she connects with the situations and characters under consideration. The pre-engagement activities make little or no reference to the text and are in fact conducted before any text has been read. The pre-engagement activity assists students in entering the world of the work, thinking, "I know something about this world and these people."

Engagement

Third, the AP unit has an engagement device, the purpose of which is to send students back to the text again and again for answers to the literary questions, for the major ideas and concerns, and for the evidence that will add power and clarity to their writing. The engagement device reinforces the primacy of text by resolving all questions with text, as opposed to outside authorities (critics or teacher). The AP teacher's dream is to drop by

the student lunchroom and find the students with their noses in the books, disputing the meaning of a passage. The *Hamlet* unit, then, is presented as a template of this approach to the AP curriculum.

Writing and Evaluation

Finally, the AP unit will have multiple opportunities for written expression throughout all phases of the course of study. Some of the writing will be done under time constraints and will be evaluated like the AP examination itself. There will also be opportunities for longer, more developed, and more carefully considered essays.

Pre-Engagement in *Hamlet*: Three Approaches

1) Drew Villiger

The Drew Villiger example began as my effort to show the students that the feelings and reactions of Hamlet in *Hamlet* were not foreign to their own experiences. Before I even mention Hamlet to the students, I take one class period to tell them the story of my "friend," Drew Villiger (see sample #1). I ask them to listen carefully and take notes. Despite the brevity of the notes, I embellish the story so that it takes about 30 minutes to tell. I then ask students to write me a brief analysis in which they analyze what is going on with Drew and what they see as his prognosis. Of course, many students recognize the parallel with the Shakespeare play, but all students turn in their work the next day. Then, I choose the students' sample quotations that have the most relevance for the play, type them up for class use, and have a discussion in which we make the leap from the "live example" to *Hamlet* (see sample #2). In my experience, students who have pre-engaged with Drew find the character of Hamlet and the variations in his behavior more accessible.

2) A Class Discussion

On the day that students turn in the Drew Villiger pieces, I engage them in class discussion using a technique that has been shared by many teachers (and debate coaches) in our region. In preparation for the discussion, I have cleared a large space in the classroom and placed a line of masking tape to mark the midpoint. At one side of the room, I use tape to put a + sign (for agreement), and on the opposite side of the room I tape a − sign (for disagreement). Then I begin reading the statements in sample #3, all of which have relevance for *Hamlet*. When I read each statement, students are instructed to take a position in the room that indicates their position on that statement. Then students are called upon to share their rationales for the literal and figurative positions they are taking on the statements. After each student has spoken, the rest of the group is invited to reposition themselves based upon the ideas just presented by a classmate. The movement of students is immediate and direct feedback to students about the impact of their arguments. These discussions with their movements are a favorite of my students, and they

especially help us to focus on several important ideas that will arise during our reading of *Hamlet*.

3) Polonius or Balonius?—A Parental Intervention

A final pre-engagement device for *Hamlet* and a favorite of our English department, is to have AP parents write "Polonius letters" to their students who are about to leave for college (see sample #4), just as Laertes is about to leave for Paris when Polonius offers his advice. Parents do not especially appreciate being put on the spot, but at least one parent/guardian for each student does write the assignment. (Each student is given two letters and can give them to any significant adult in their lives.) When the students open and read the letters, they share as much as they wish of the type of comments as well as some specific comments themselves. The kids are as amused with the parents' comments as they later will be by the fatuity of those of Polonius to Laertes.

Engagement Devices: Two Examples

Device #1: The Naked Text

At Manchester-Essex Regional High School, where I developed my AP materials, I observed that students reading Shakespeare were frequently "bogged down" (or distracted) by the footnotes and commentary, even when they were fully capable of attending Shakespeare performances, "hearing" the play, and understanding the text and subtext. My belief in New Critical approaches also suggested to me that students are well served by learning to grapple with the text in as unadulterated a form as possible. Using text available at Project Guttenberg, I took a complete text of Hamlet and formatted it for Microsoft Word so that I could give students a text with very few notes (except those I chose to add—see sample #5).

Let me make it clear that we do not read and discuss the play as unenlightened readers. Instead, I take responsibility for Act I and present to the class many of the words, questions, ideas, and answers that good readers will expect to cover. After that point, each student becomes responsible for a scene, and will meet with me, consult critical sources, and prepare a lesson for the class on their scene. I have found that using naked text leads to greater student engagement in the material, both as learners and presenters. If one does not use an e-text of *Hamlet*, then the Dover Thrift edition ($1) is a wonderfully clean copy. In addition, teachers may have an e-copy of my *Hamlet* text (public domain) by e-mailing me a request at timaverill@comcast.net

Device #2: The Fever Chart

The most effectual engagement device I have used for *Hamlet* is the fever chart, essentially the graphic representation of a student's notes on an analytical question about the play. In the 1970s, the fever chart was a simple graph in which the *Y* axis represented the degrees of

sanity/insanity that a character might display and the *X* axis the statements and actions of Hamlet in the play. The *Y* axis points (sanity/insanity) arose out of class discussion about how we would describe the points on the continuum from sane to insane behavior. Early fever charts looked at the issues of Hamlet's outer and inner life, Polonius's observation that "Though this be madness, yet there is a method in it," and the theme of appearance versus reality. The fever chart is presented as a graph, usually on poster board, with 40 to 50 citations from the text to support the student's view of the character (see samples #6 & #7).

From these simple beginnings have come far more complex and interesting fever charts as students have transcended the question of Hamlet's madness. Recent fever charts have explored Hamlet's capacity for love (see sample #8), Ophelia's route to suicide (see sample #9), Gertrude's self-awareness, and Shakespeare's view of resolution versus contemplation using Hamlet/Horatio/Fortinbras and Hal/Hotspur/Henry IV and examining parallel quotes from both plays.

It is during the course of our discussion of the play that students develop their research questions, and students help each other to find relevant text citations. The finished charts are quite impressive, but they are part of the process, not the product. Students present the chart to their classmates, defend them, and then write their essays on *Hamlet*. In other words, the fever charts serve as a graphic representation of the notes the student has made on the play. Papers written with the aid of the fever chart are well documented and defended, fully supported by a close reading of the text.

In addition, class presentations by me and students also included seeing four DVD versions of Hamlet's great soliloquies to compare the interpretations, performing scenes from the play under different directional interpretations, and responding in character to questions posed by students dealing with issues of the back story of the play. But the dominant mode for the class is a new critical approach, answering all questions with the text rather than with critical viewpoints.

Further Writing and Evaluation of the *Hamlet* Unit

The *Hamlet* unit is evaluated on many levels. There are quizzes for each act, student presentations of their scenes, class participation, the fever chart, and the culminating essay based upon the fever chart. The final evaluation is the essay examination, two samples of which are provided below. The first is a typical AP prompt, to which I have attached a rubric. The second is a quotation test (see samples #10, #11, & #12).

Conclusion

While this unit has been prepared to present ideas about the teaching of *Hamlet*, it is clear that the devices being used could easily be translated to other plays and even to prose fiction. One of the joys of teaching AP is the freedom teachers are given to prepare top-quality literature, to expand the canon, and to bring their own love of literature to the students.

Sample #1

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

DREW VILLIGER: A CASE STUDY

Drew Villiger, Jr.
D.O.B. 4/1/71=19 Years Old
College Freshman

Valedictorian in High School
Participant in Sports, not a star, but passable.
Father recently deceased.
Father had been great booster, successful businessman.
Mother remarried (while Drew at College) to old family friend, business associate of the father.

Drew is dropping out of college.
Is depressed, looks down on past achievements.
Neglecting his appearance.
His girlfriend has tried to help, he spurns her assistance.

Sample #2

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

DREW VILLIGER: Your Responses

The following are some of the things that you read in class that I highlighted for you to keep in mind over the next few weeks.

—His mother's quick and relatively hasty relations with another man seem to give Drew the feeling that she has completely forgotten about her husband.
—His vicious, insulting manner of treating her is a reaction to his loss.
—"I never thought I'd see the day that she would kiss another man."
—Not only does Drew have to deal with the loss of his father but he also loses touch with his mother.
—When a person loses someone very close to them, they begin to question themselves, their whole reason for existence.
—Drew…is falling apart also because he is distracted by the thought that his father was murdered. His mind is probably focused on this thought.
—Drew recognizes the possibility that he could have murdered his father and then quickly and all too helpfully arranged the funeral.

—In order to avert any suspicion, it is all too easy to suddenly emerge as the saviour, and arrange things in his interest.
—Drew's actions are abnormal considering the additional evidence. He is obsessed and instead of pursuing his suspicions with temperance, he destroys his life in pursuit of nothing. His reaction serves no purpose. There are better ways to deal with it. Whether or not he is right is irrelevant. His bizarre, obsessive behavior didn't change. He scorned her affection and shut her out of his life.
—He thinks the combination of the loss of his father, coupled with the loss of control in his life devastated Drew.
—The probable remarriage of his mother so soon after his father's death most likely makes Drew's mother look like she cared very little for his father.
—I was having too much trouble keeping myself sane, and I really had nothing more to live for.
—Why did he even bother to work so hard? I guess that's my big question, "Why bother?" If it's all going to just come crashing down, why bother to build it up?
—All the things he had been doing in his life . . . the whole set-up of his life, had not helped his father.
—The reaction to his girlfriend as he spurned her consolation revealed his fear of losing her, too. He would have felt it better to get rid of her on his own and remove the attachments himself.

Sample #3

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

Hamlet Pre-reading activity

Put a piece of tape on the floor in the front of the classroom. Explain to the students that one side of the tape is "agree, the other "disagree," and the tape itself is neutral. The distance from the tape indicates the strength of feeling. As students hear the statements, they move according to their beliefs and then discuss the item.

The list:
It is important to have a good relationship with your parents.
We owe a debt to our parents.
Adultery is always wrong.
There is an afterlife.
Ghosts are real.
Revenge is appropriate.
Suicide is always wrong.
Murder is always wrong.
Insanity is a subjective term.
It is very important to think before you act.

Sample #4

Polonius Letter

Date

Dear AP Mom/Dad,

I am about to make an unusual request. I would like to ask you to do a bit of homework this weekend. Don't worry—this is not being graded!

As you may or may not know, we are beginning to read *Hamlet* in our AP English class. Early in the play a father (Polonius) offers advice to his son (Laertes), who is about to leave home for France. He tells him, among other things, to never borrow or lend money, to be very careful in his choice of friends, to listen well to the opinions of others but to speak his own sparingly, to avoid wasting his money on flashy clothes, and, above all, to always follow his heart.

I would like to offer you the same opportunity to share your thoughts with your own child as they prepare to leave home. How do you feel about this moment in time? Are there values you would like them to remember as they head off into the world? Are there lessons you have learned in life that you wish to impart to them? In short, do you have any advice for them? My purpose here is twofold: to personalize their experience of the play and to give you a chance to remind them of the lessons you have been trying to teach them over the last eighteen years.

Please seal your letters in an envelope and give it to your student to bring to class on Monday. The letter will be opened in Monday's class. (Students will not be forced to reveal the contents of the letter under any circumstances. This is a letter between you and your child. Should they wish to share their reactions, however, they will be encouraged to do so.) Thank you very much, in advance, for your participation in what I hope will be a special moment for your child.

Sincerely,
Tim Averill

Sample #5—Naked text page (my comments and questions are marked AVES)

CORNELIUS and VOLTIMAND
In that and all things will we show our duty.

AVES Can you spell obsequious?

KING CLAUDIUS We doubt it nothing: heartily farewell.

[Exeunt VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS]

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit; what is't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane,
And loose your voice: what wouldst thou beg,
Laertes, That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.
What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES My dread lord,

Your leave and favour to return to France;
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark,
To show my duty in your coronation,
Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

KING CLAUDIUS Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

LORD POLONIUS He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave
By laboursome petition, and at last
Upon his will I seal'd my hard consent:
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

KING CLAUDIUS Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!
But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,--

HAMLET [Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

AVES Define kin and kind as used here.

KING CLAUDIUS How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.

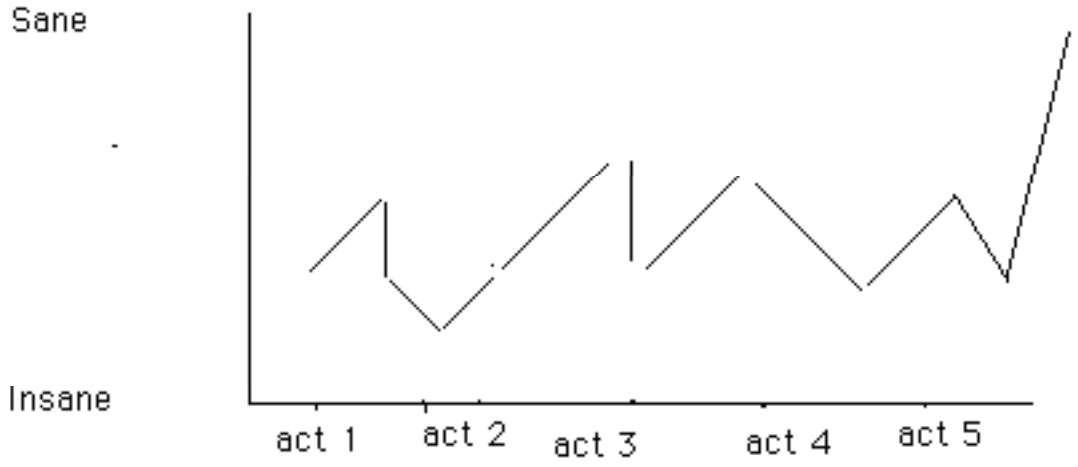
AVES What do Hamlet's first two speeches reveal about his attitude towards his uncle, the new King? What do they reveal about Hamlet's intellect?

Sample #6

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

HAMLET: THE FEVER CHART

The purpose of the fever chart assignment for Hamlet is to allow you to do a close reading of the text, which will lead to an essay that supplies evidence for the idea you are developing. The basic idea of a fever chart is that you are tracking Hamlet's psychological state through the course of the play, using your own created (SANITY-INSANITY) scale as the "*Y*-AXIS" and using direct quotes from the play as the "*X*-AXIS." A careful look at your fever chart will allow you to draw conclusions.



You can choose to do Hamlet alone, or you can have several lines for several different characters. Try to invent a new or fresh approach to the assignment.

Sample #7

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

Hamlet Fever Chart
Evaluation Form

Name _____

Originality of Format (1–20) _____

Use of the Text: # of citations (1–40) _____

Presentation: Art, Construction, Neatness (1–20) _____

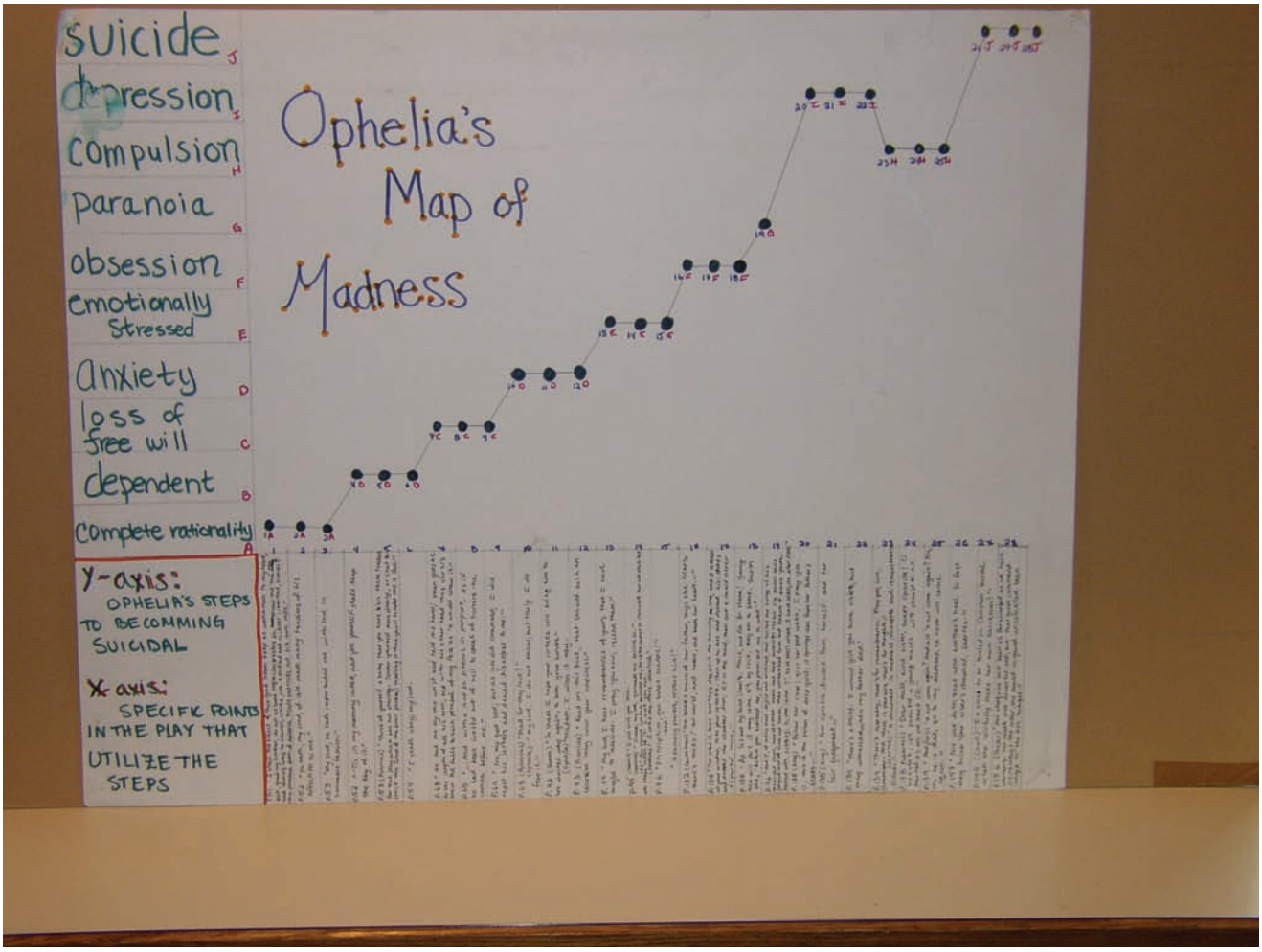
Clarity and Demonstration of Thesis (1–20) _____

Total Points = _____

General Comments:

Sample #8—Fever Chart on Hamlet's capacity to love.

Sample #9—Fever chart on Ophelia's descent into madness.



Sample #10

A.P. English
Mr. Averill

HAMLET ESSAY EXAMINATION

The great English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his Lectures of 1811–12, Lecture XII, said of the character Hamlet:

Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the chief end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing, until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. In enforcing this moral truth, Shakespeare has shown us the fullness and force of his powers: all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

In a well-written essay, assess the validity of Coleridge's commentary on Hamlet. Use specific references to the text, and avoid plot summary.

Sample #11

AP Scoring Rubric for Coleridge Essay examination on *Hamlet*

9–8
These well-organized and well-written essays clearly demonstrate an insightful understanding and well-reasoned assessment of Coleridge's commentary on *Hamlet*. The insights put forth in these essays fluidly integrate an analysis of Coleridge's commentary with specific, relevant, and well-organized evidence from the text, resulting in interpretations that extend well beyond mere plot summary. These responses also incorporate effective use of the language unique to the criticism of drama. Though not without minor mechanical flaws, these essays demonstrate the writer's ability to read perceptively and to write with clarity, sophistication, and fluency.

7–6
These essays also demonstrate an understanding and provide an assessment of Coleridge's commentary on *Hamlet*; but, compared to the best essays, they are less insightful, thorough, or precise in their analysis. These essays do provide relevant and well-organized evidence from the text in support of the thesis, but the analysis or interpretation of the evidence provided is likely to be less well-supported and less incisive. While these essays demonstrate the writer's ability to express ideas clearly, they do so with less mastery and control over the hallmarks of mature composition.

5
While these essays respond appropriately to the task, they rely on the more obvious observations offered in Coleridge's commentary on *Hamlet*, and the assessment of the validity of Coleridge's commentary may be somewhat simplified or cursorily supported, without complexity or depth of interpretation. Though these essays do provide textual evidence in support of the thesis, the analysis of this evidence may be vague, implied, or bordering on plot summary, but not without some interpretation. Though the writing is sufficiently clear to convey the writer's thoughts, these essays lack stylistic complexity or fluency of expression.

4–3
These lower-half essays often reflect an incomplete, over-simplified, or even inaccurate understanding of Coleridge's commentary on *Hamlet*. The assessment of the validity of Coleridge's commentary may be vague or implied, resulting in a weak or unclear thesis. Typically, these essays fail to respond adequately to part of the question. The evidence provided and the analysis of that evidence may be meager, irrelevant, inaccurate, or unclear, which may be the result of misinterpretations of the text. The writing demonstrates uncertain control over the elements of effective composition. These essays usually contain recurrent stylistic or mechanical flaws.

2–1
These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4–3 range. Writers may seriously misread Coleridge's commentary on *Hamlet* or fail to assess its validity altogether. Frequently, these essays are unacceptably brief. They are poorly organized or developed and may contain many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. Essays that are especially inexact, vacuous, and/or mechanically unsound should be scored 1.

Sample #12

Quotation Test on Hamlet

Simian Anglais
M. Averill
Petit exercise pour votre plaisir!

Votre Nom_____

Oh, that this too, too solid test would melt…

Identify the speaker and the moment in the play for each of the following passages.
1 point for speaker, 1 point for moment.

1 A little more than kin, and less than kind.

2 For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire:
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

3 Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!

4 But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.

5 If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her.

6 …and there put on him
What forgeries you please; marry, none so rank
As may dishonour him; take heed of that;
But, sir, such wanton, wild and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.

7 Both your majesties
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,
Put your dread pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty.

8 I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

9 What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!

10 Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief: your noble son is mad:
Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?

11 Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

12 O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

13 O my prophetic soul! My uncle!

14 I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame,

the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

15 The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
More relative than this: the play 's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

16 He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it.

17 Her father and myself, lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If 't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

18 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

19 O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

20 Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any

thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

21 The instances that second marriage move
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love:
A second time I kill my husband dead,
When second husband kisses me in bed.

22 Very like a whale.

23 My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

24 Do not forget: this visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But, look, amazement on thy mother sits:
O, step between her and her fighting soul:
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:
Speak to her, Hamlet.

25 O heavy deed!
It had been so with us, had we been there:
His liberty is full of threats to all;
To you yourself, to us, to every one.
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answer'd?

26 Truly to speak, and with no addition,
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it;
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

27 That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot
Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow
Of my true mother.

28 And so have I a noble father lost;
A sister driven into desperate terms,
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,
Stood challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections: but my revenge will come.

29 Exceedingly, my lord; it is very sultry,—as 'twere,—I cannot tell how. But, my lord, his majesty bade me signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head: sir, this is the matter,--

30 For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.

****

Select four of the passages above. In a developed paragraph or two, explain the significance of each passage. This does not mean paraphrase. Deal with the major ideas, themes, or motifs Shakespeare was attempting to advance in the play. This is the time to write about the "big picture."

Please select passages that will allow you to explore a variety of ideas. In other words, don't repeat yourself.

Each response is worth 10 points.

Legacies of the Blues: Teaching August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

by Donna C. Tanzer

In 1965, the young August Wilson played a 78 rpm recording 22 times in succession and discovered through the blues of the incomparable Bessie Smith a voice and purpose that shaped his writing for the next 40 years. We can use those same blues to help our students discover August Wilson and his imprint on American drama. Responding to the epiphany that sparked his love of the blues, Wilson infused his dramas with the poetry of that American art form he often called "the wellspring of my art" (quoted in Shepard 110). Wilson's plays and the poetry, music, and art that influenced him can enrich our classrooms as we familiarize our students with this significant contemporary voice. He has been called our country's greatest African American playwright, yet this label blinds us to the scope of his words. Although August Wilson passionately advocated theater by, for, and about black Americans, he addressed human struggles common to all cultures. His legacy surpasses racial boundaries and embraces the human race.

Wilson's Legacy: The Pittsburgh Cycle

Wilson's untimely death at the age of 60 in October 2005 inflicted an excruciating loss on American theater and literature, but Wilson did not leave us empty-handed. Earlier that year he put finishing touches on *Radio Golf*, the final installment of a ten-play cycle chronicling the lives of African Americans in the twentieth century. Often named the Pittsburgh Cycle for the city of Wilson's boyhood and set in the Hill District where he grew up (with the exception of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, his first commercial and critical success, set in Chicago), this epic series includes a play for each decade of the century. Wilson did not write the plays in chronological order, nor did he set out with this grand scheme. Musing on connections among three of his plays, he became intrigued with the possibility of dramatizing African American history and life decade by decade. The result is a theatrical treasure trove of vignettes that surprise and disturb, captivate and horrify, satisfy and edify.

Title	*Year set*	*Summary*	*Year first produced*
Gem of the Ocean	1904	Guided by the magical Aunt Ester and Black Mary, Citizen Barlow undergoes a spiritual journey to the mythical City of Bones built from the remains of slaves at the center of the ocean.	2003
Joe Turner's Come and Gone	1911	Several characters, each in search of his own "song" or destiny, pass through Seth and Bertha Holly's boarding house as they move northward to find a life free from the chains of "Joe Turner"—jail, suffering, and systematic oppression.	1984

Title	*Year set*	*Summary*	*Year first produced*
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom	1927	Trumpeter Levee rails against the racism of the white music industry; he and fellow band members banter and bicker as they await Ma Rainey's arrival and her rendition of the symbolic title song.	1982
The Piano Lesson	1936	Amidst an ensemble of the Charles family men, siblings Boy Willie and Berniece struggle over the family piano, a painful symbol of slavery, and evoke the ghost (who also claims the piano) of a descendant of the family's former owners.	1986
Seven Guitars	1948	Floyd Barton's wife and friends mourn the death of this blues musician as, in flashback, we witness his expansive post-World War II dreams and explore the question of who killed him and why.	1995
Fences	1957; 1963	Two generations view history and change through their own lenses as former Negro League baseball player Troy Maxson, now a bitterly nostalgic trash collector, thwarts his son Cory's dreams of a professional football career.	1985
Two Trains Running	1969	The planned demolition of Memphis Lee's diner for urban renewal embodies the sweeping changes of extraordinary times as the diner's regulars struggle to maintain their lives and spirit in the aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.	1990
Jitney	1977	Becker, manager of a jitney service providing low cost rides for the black community, swaps stories and repartee with four other drivers until his son Booster arrives; a searching discussion of honor versus violence ensues.	1982 (rewritten in 2000)
King Hedley II	1985	In Wilson's darkest play—often compared to Shakespearean tragedy—King, an intense, driven ex-convict, strives to rebuild his life and respect, but his own family heritage foils his vast dreams.	2001
Radio Golf	1997	Wilson's final play completes the Pittsburgh Cycle, ending as it began in Aunt Ester's home; the affable politician Harmond Wilks must confront the past he is running from.	2005

While *Fences*, an audience favorite and Pulitzer Prize winner, is widely anthologized and touches students with its central parent-child conflict, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *The Piano Lesson* (the latter having earned Wilson's second Pulitzer) have also earned the status of contemporary classics. The remaining six plays in the cycle are not far behind. At any given time, theaters across the country are producing plays from this cycle and Wilson's earlier works. For example, in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area where I live, two of Wilson's plays were professionally produced in only a two-month span in 2006—*The Piano Lesson* and *The Gem of the Ocean* (the earliest play in the cycle, set in 1904, but the next-to-last that Wilson wrote). Teachers who live in areas where live theater abounds might well consider teaching a play from Wilson's epic cycle that their students can see onstage, undeniably the best way to experience and know drama.

A searing family drama, *The Piano Lesson* is like an earthquake with a significant symbol of African American past, present, and future at its epicenter. This painful symbol, an old piano with carvings representing the Charles family's past, evokes comparisons to Amanda Wingfield's glass menagerie as a pivotal element hovering over the play's characters and themes and is only one element making this play a strong choice for AP study.

Laying the Groundwork: Preparatory Questions and Activities

Anticipating *The Piano Lesson*'s issues, dilemmas, and tones can prepare students to read more closely and with greater sensitivity to nuance and language. Like theater-goers who attend pre-play seminars, they can become active, perceptive participants in drama.

Prepare students for the narratives Wilson weaves into the play by asking them to listen to family members' oral histories. Specifically, ask students to interview parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles about family heirlooms, or how they came to live where they do, or what jobs they had when they were young. If parents and grandparents cannot provide real stories, encourage students to speculate, inventing or embellishing details. Have students write down these real or invented narratives and share them with the class.

Wilson's characters mesmerize listeners with stories of their ancestors' experiences in slavery and of slavery's enduring impact. Encourage students to research and report on slave narratives, available at the public library and online. When they read *The Piano Lesson* and other plays by Wilson, they should listen for common themes and emotions as well as for the cadences that we hear in both the historical narratives and in Wilson's characters. Specifically, Doaker's powerful narrative of the trading of his grandmother and the little boy who would grow up to be his father ("one and a half niggers") for the piano (Act One, Scene 2) reflects the agony mixed with painful resignation that we hear in slave narratives.

The Piano Lesson is set in 1936 in the midst of the Great Depression. Not all students will realize that the Depression hit African Americans particularly hard, nor will they necessarily

realize that this same era encompasses the Great Migration of African Americans moving north from about 1910 to about 1950. Familiarize students with the effect of the Depression on African Americans as well as the impetus for and effects of the Great Migration, which figures significantly throughout Wilson's ten-play cycle.

Ask students to consider Wilson's title, beginning with their anticipation of its "lesson." How many students have taken piano lessons? How important is music—as well as musical instruments—in their lives? Do they think the play will deal with a literal piano lesson? What other lessons might a piano teach? What might a piano symbolize?

August Wilson frequently cited as his most important influences what he called his "four Bs—the primary one being the blues, then Borges, Baraka, and Bearden" (qtd. in Lyons 375). Point students in the direction of Amiri Baraka's controversial poetry and political stance; the Web site www.poets.org provides solid background on Baraka, the Black Arts movement, and jazz poetry. Prepare students for the narrative thrust of the play's monologues as well its inclusion of ghosts with a Luis Borges short story incorporating magical realism.

Bearden and the Blues

Among Wilson's acknowledged influences, the blues and Romare Bearden's artwork offer the most compelling connections to his use of language and specifically to *The Piano Lesson*. The play's title directly alludes to one of Bearden's great collages, and the rhythms and moods of blues music pervade the play. Teachers can bring Bearden and the blues into the classroom not only as anticipatory activities but as part of a vivid continuing backdrop guiding students' close reading of the text.

Play the Bessie Smith song that changed Wilson's ideological approach to writing and gave song to his words: "Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine." Wilson states that before he heard this song, he was oblivious of the rhythms and impact of African American speech. How could this one song have so strongly influenced how Wilson listened to people and, ultimately, how he wrote? Bessie Smith's "Yellow Dog Blues" can also underscore the significance of the lore of the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog in *The Piano Lesson*.

Play recordings of traditional blues (available from libraries and online vendors) throughout the unit, perhaps at the start of each day's class and even softly under the reading of the play.

Bring the play to life by playing the traditional "Berta Berta," an authentic prison work song sung by Boy Willie, Lymon, Wining Boy, and Doaker in Act One, Scene 2. It is available on the album *Roots of the Blues* distributed by New World Records (www.newworldrecords.org or 212-290-1680). In his informative liner notes Alan Lomax provides a fascinating glimpse of the culture and history that shaped Wilson's characters and examines songs from

the Parchman prison farm referenced throughout the play (www.newworldrecords.org/linernotes/80252.pdf).

Show students a reproduction of Romare Bearden's collage *The Piano Lesson*, the source of Wilson's title (Schwartzman 36). Before they read the play, ask students to examine the image for its dramatic elements or to create an original story about the characters and setting. (Wilson saw in it a little girl named Maretha and her mother.) Have them predict how these elements might play out in the drama. Reproductions of the collage are available online and can be purchased as inexpensive posters, but a more complete and visually appealing source is Myron Schwartzman's book *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art* with an eloquent foreword by August Wilson himself. Have students look at several of Bearden's depictions of African American life as they consider Wilson's words: "From Romare Bearden I learned that the fullness and richness of everyday ritual life can be rendered without compromise or sentimentality" (qtd. in Lyons 375).

Reading the Play, Hearing the Poetry

Theater touches us not only through eloquent dramatic language but in the fullness of theatrical experience—the visual rendering of a play through scenery and lighting, the music of words delivered passionately through the medium of acting, and the communal experience of bearing witness as a member of the audience. Words on a page, though potentially vital in the imagination, are a shadow of the full experience of a play. But when we study a play in the classroom, we sometimes forget we're dealing only with a script. We need to remind our students that the essence of theater includes the full experience of eyes and ears, a reminder that is particularly applicable to this play. Students need to get up from their desks to enact scenes, improvise dialogue, and bring the play's conflicts to life. *The Piano Lesson* includes many two-, three-, and four-character scenes students can readily prepare in small groups with minimal but effective staging—characters sitting around a table, standing beside the symbolic piano, arriving or preparing to go out—and the class can and should read the rest of the play aloud. The poetry of August Wilson demands full vocal expression.

That poetry may challenge our students because of its vernacular, oral tradition source—the "fullness and richness" of everyday expression that Wilson found in Bearden, Baraka, and the blues and learned from the streets. Reading both Amiri Baraka's and Langston Hughes's poetry can help students find rhythm, metaphor, and raw truth in Wilson's lines. Baraka's "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" (see box) evokes in its few short lines the same blend of desolation, love, and purpose we find in Wilson's words and the same bluesy sound. Many other poems from Baraka's *Transbluency*, a collection which derives its title from a Duke Ellington composition, can help students learn to listen to blues in poetry as well as poetry in the blues.

Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note

Lately, I've become accustomed to the way
The ground opens up and envelopes me
Each time I go out to walk the dog.
Or the broad edged silly music the wind
Makes when I run for a bus…

Things have come to that.

And now, each night I count the stars.
And each night I get the same number.
And when they will not come to be counted,
I count the holes they leave.

Nobody sings anymore.

And then last night I tiptoed up
To my daughter's room and heard her
Talking to someone, and when I opened
The door, there was no one there…
Only she on her knees, peeking into

Her own clasped hands.

—Amiri Baraka

Similarly, some of Hughes's most evocative poems are built upon the same blues rhythms and astute metaphors we hear in Wilson's dialogue. To recognize and explore Wilson's poetry, students might first read Hughes's "Mother to Son" (see box) aloud, feeling the rhythms and hearing the metaphor in: "Well, son, I'll tell you / Life for me ain't been no crystal stair" and later "But all the time / I'se been a-climbin' on, / And reachin' landin's, / And turnin' corners, / And sometimes goin' in the dark / Where there ain't been no light." Then, as they read *The Piano Lesson*, students should record and respond to passages they find poetic—those with metaphors or musical cadences. A few apt examples can help them get started. In the play's opening scene, when Willie Boy states, "This time I get to keep all the cotton," his words signify more than just the literal cotton he will farm; "cotton" becomes a metaphor for hard work, dignity, and achievement. Can students hear the cadence in

Doaker's plaintive words about the railroad in the same scene? Do they think of more than a literal train and tracks when Doaker reflects, "Now what I done learned after twenty-seven years of railroading is this…if the train stays on the track…it's going to get where it's going. It might not be where you going. If it ain't, then all you got to do is sit and wait cause the train's coming back to get you. The train don't never stop. It'll come back every time" (Act One Scene 1). The students' examples can prompt searching discussions of the characters, their history, and their present choices while also serving to assess understanding of Wilson's language.

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

—Langston Hughes

Another conduit to that understanding is the DVD/video of the noteworthy Hallmark Hall of Fame television production of *The Piano Lesson*, the only one of Wilson's plays to be filmed. Adapted by Wilson for the small screen and directed by Lloyd Richards (who directed the original stage production), the teleplay features three actors, including Charles Dutton, from the original Broadway cast. Wilson's commanding writing leaps off the screen through the nuanced performances of actors who deliver the uneasy subtext as well as the poetry. The videotape also contains a succinct, classroom-worthy discussion of the teleplay and its meaning with commentary from Wilson, Richards, Dutton, and others.

Claiming the Piano: A Legacy and Its Costs

No study of drama is complete without an incisive analysis of its conflict, characters, and themes. Wilson himself provided us with essential questions when he began work on *The Piano Lesson* after contemplating "How can one acquire a sense of self-worth by denying one's past?" Placing himself "on one side of that question" as he found the means to narrate it, he determined that this play ultimately asks, "How do you use your legacy?" (qtd. in Savran 25), a probing question also examined by Richards in the videotape's post-teleplay discussion.

The questions of legacy and identity illuminate all the characterizations of this ensemble drama. Students can and should explore the effect of Doaker's years as a railroad man, Lymon's eagerness to find work and women in Pittsburgh, Wining Boy's reluctant identification with the life of a musician, and Avery's quest to establish a black ministry while also working as an elevator operator. Eleven-year-old Maretha, reminding us of the Charles family future, closely observes the family's interactions, an awareness keenly highlighted in the Hallmark production as we see her listening from the stairs. But above all, the play's dialogue exudes raw, ungovernable intensity in a war between brother and sister—the conflict between Boy Willie and Berniece. Ostensibly over the disposition of the piano, this conflict ultimately epitomizes their diametrically opposing views of life and living.

Is Boy Willie denying his past—his family legacy as encompassed by the piano-in his intention to sell the instrument? Does he see anything beyond what he wants? Does he recognize the needs and concerns of others, or does he treat them as obstacles or assistants in his quest, dressing up the pursuit of his own desires as a quest for restitution and justice? Or is his desire to purchase land from Sutter's family—the same family of slave owners who owned his ancestors and the same land the slaves had farmed—truly a way of embracing the future and demonstrating his equality with the white man? When Boy Willie suggests that he'll cut the piano in half and sell only his half, many students will see the biblical allusion to Solomon, but they should also recognize that this allusion emphasizes the difficulty of the dilemma and even suggests a possible legitimacy to both claims.

Students might too readily consider Berniece's claim to be the stronger one; after all, she refuses to sell the piano that embodies the legacies and ghosts of the past. But by holding on to the piano, is she cherishing the legacy? Why does she refuse to play or even touch the piano (until the closing scene)? Why has she told Maretha that the piano's images carved by Berniece's great-grandfather Willie Boy "just always been like that since she got it"? Should she, as Boy Willie exclaims, "mark down on the calendar the day that Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house"? Although Boy Willie wants to sell the piano, students should consider the significance of his fierce desire that his niece learn the family narrative so "she could walk around with her head held high" (Act Two, Scene 5). In Boy Willie's acknowledgement of the piano's significance, Harry J. Elam, Jr. sees an analogy to "the position of prominence that Wilson believes slavery must achieve in African American cultural life" (78).

Teachers will also want to guide students in a discussion of gender roles and male-female relationships in this ensemble. What motivates Berniece? Why does she cling to her anger at Boy Willie? What underlies her profound need for quiet and order, a need students may recognize as irreconcilable with Boy Willie's ceaseless noise of self-affirmation? How do her dreams, memories, and hopes differ from those of the men whose vibrant personalities dominate the play? In a chilling monologue Doaker narrates the details of the piano's possession and the terrible toll in human life that resulted when Boy Charles laid claim to it ("Say it was the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it . . . he had us"), but Berniece reminds us of the effect of Boy Charles's gruesome death on her mother: "Mama Ola polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years she rubbed on it till her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in . . . mixed it up with the rest of the blood on it . . . You always talking about your daddy but you ain't never stopped to think about what this foolishness cost your mama" (Act One, Scene 2). As they debate whether the cost of Boy Charles's taking the piano was too high, students should explore Wilson's characterization of "a certain kind of black male," men like Boy Willie, Wining Boy, Lymon, Doaker, and Berniece's late husband Crawley—"warriors"—and the women "who support them, who nurse them, who feed them, who comfort them. And without these women, they couldn't exist. Berniece is one of those women. But she never knows when she's gonna go to another burial. That's what those women do: They bury their men" (Wilson qtd. in Livingston 52). What gives Berniece strength? What wearies her about the men in her life? Students should realize that Berniece's need for order is fueled by the painful losses of her parents and husband; she does not want to go to another funeral. The unanswered question of Boy Willie's possible complicity in Sutter's death is another piece of these intensely conflicted portrayals.

Berniece's desire for peace and order, exacerbated by her uneasiness over the piano and Boy Willie's sudden, dominating presence, seems even more poignant in the light of her daily struggle to provide for herself and Maretha as a black single parent in the 1930s. Since the Charles family men, particularly Doaker, are continually urging her to marry Avery, students may find her sudden physical attraction to Lymon surprising and revealing. Why does she fear this attraction? Why does she discourage Avery? We cannot ignore the stunning, seemingly anachronistic independence we hear when Berniece asserts, "You can just walk out of here without me—without a woman—and still be a man . . . Everybody telling me I can't be a woman unless I got a man. Well, you tell me, Avery—you know—how much woman am I?" (Act Two, Scene 2) These questions only begin to touch upon *The Piano Lesson's* array of characters. The ensemble texture provides many more dramatic details to generate thoughtful discourse during and after the reading. It is essential that students see the complexity and honesty of Wilson's characterizations and explore these in discussion and writing.

Spirits and Symbolism

Throughout the play the Charles family members react to the ghostly presence alternately with acceptance, bemusement, humor, and fear, but the full force of this spectral element comes to bear only with the play's harrowing climax. Again we experience the force of

Wilson's blending of the literal and the figurative. The supernatural, including belief in ghosts and the presence and influence of ancestral spirits, pervades African folklore (like that of many cultures), and Sutter's ghost is a literal presence in the context of the play. A probing discussion of these facets, however, will not ignore Boy Willie's metaphorical "wrestling with ghosts" or Berniece's confrontation of the spirits (legacy) she has fled before she finally overcomes her "self-imposed taboo" (Wilson qtd. Grant 175) and plays the piano.

Because the symbolism of the piano looms so enormously, students should ponder this symbol continuously as they read. In their notes they should speculate on the piano's evolving meaning: how it illuminates the past, defines the present, and offers a glimpse of the future. Wilson relished his choice of the piano as the centerpiece of this play, noting that "Every time you look at it, you see something different . . . And every new piece of information you learn about the piano, the piano changes. Hopefully, your attitude toward the piano keeps changing, which makes the piano get bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and it becomes more and more and more important" (qtd. in Livingston 52–53). Wilson's energetic vision of the piano's effect can guide students to look intently at this complex and paradoxical symbol: what does it mean to each character? How does it embody both the past and the future? How does it encompass the significance of music in African American history and culture-what kind of music is played on the piano? How has it killed, and how has it saved? How is it able to epitomize both love and hate, freedom and bondage? How do Willie Boy's original carvings embellish the legacy and the meanings? By contemplating these questions and raising their own, students can solidify their grasp of this momentous, haunting symbol. Though this play lends itself to many potential writing prompts, an essay on the literal and symbolic significance of the piano could be the most all-encompassing assessment of students' depth of understanding.

Finally, consideration of *The Piano Lesson*'s spirits and symbolism returns us to the play's conflicts. We can't forget, nor can we allow our students to overlook, that the struggle over the piano's rightful disposition is not limited to Berniece and Boy Willie. What does Sutter's ghost—representing the horrors of slavery and racism as well as the efforts of white society to co-opt and commodify African American culture—want out of this conflict, and why does it interfere when Boy Willie tries to move the piano? Why has the ghost appeared previously, as Doaker reminds us it has? Has it been waiting for Boy Willie to show up? Does it want to "reclaim" the piano as a reminder or the Sutter family's own legacy? (Since it's a ghost, how would it reclaim it?) Or might it merely need to haunt the piano, reminding its possessors that the Sutter family once possessed it—and also possessed their own ancestors? When Reverend Avery's attempt to exorcise the spirit fails, Sutter's ghost answers Boy Willie's angry challenge with a perilous, life-and-death struggle. Berniece, answering a call to song from deep within herself, cries out to her parents and grandparents to help her rid the ghost, save her brother, and claim her heritage. As Boy Willie relinquishes his claim, preparing to return to the ancestral South, he gently reminds her to "keep on playing that piano"—another subtle metaphor urging her to revel in her own voice—or he and Sutter will be back. In its closing moments, *The Piano Lesson* reminds us that the critical challenges facing the Charles family

come not only from within but from the scourge of racism and hate that is as much a legacy of slavery as the piano.

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Reading Shakespearean Verse: The Shared Blank Verse Line and the Long Monologue

by Sharon Hamilton

Reading Shakespearean verse presents a special challenge for students. One reason is that they tend to read a play as though it were a narrative spoken as a monologue, rather than a script comprised of individual voices. An added factor is that Shakespeare's plays are also dramatic poems, written largely in blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—though also containing passages in rhyme and in prose. Students need guidance in noting the rhythms, sounds, and emphases in dramatic dialogue. They need help in understanding not only key words and phrases but also the syntax of the lines—the patterns of and connections between the words. Two kinds of passages can benefit especially from such aspects of close reading: the single blank verse line that is shared between two or more characters and the long monologue. One means of teaching them is through guided class discussion of key examples. A basic vocabulary of literary terms, introduced in the course of the discussion, can help students to focus on and compare Shakespeare's stylistic techniques. If it suits the needs and time frame of the class, these close reading skills can be reinforced in a brief paper.

The Shared Blank Verse Line

The shared blank verse line marks a departure from the usual poetic line in a Shakespearean drama: five feet of iambic pentameter, each foot comprised of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable, spoken by a single character. For example, in *Othello* when the hero is reminiscing about his courtship of Desdemona, he says:
Shĕ lóved / mĕ fór / thĕ dán / gĕrs Í / hăd pássed,
Ănd Í / lŏved hér / thăt shé /dĭd pí / tў mé.
(I.3.176-68)[1]

As the markings for scansion show, the syllables of a word, such as "dangers," may be divided between two metric feet. Such regular meter usually conveys a confident tone and implies that the speaker is feeling calm and in control.

In contrast, a variation in the meter, in which a different foot is substituted for the regular unstressed / stressed iambic foot, usually signals a change in the speaker's tone. A spondee, two stressed syllables in a row, may show that he or she is distraught or excited. For example, when Othello greets Desdemona after both have survived a dangerous storm, he says:
Í cán / not speak / enough / of this / content;
It stops / me here; / it is / tóo múch / of joy.
(II.1.195-96).

1. All quotations from *Othello* are from the Pelican edition, ed. Russ McDonald (New York: Penguin, 2001).

For emphasis, only the two spondees are marked. Those spondaic feet, the first one in the first line ("I can") and the fourth foot in the second ("too much") convey the force of his elation at being reunited with his bride. In contrast, earlier in the play, when Desdemona's racist father Brabantio discovers that she has eloped with the Moorish general, he tracks down Othello and denounces him: "Ó thóu / fóul thíef, / whére hást / thóu stówed / mý dáugh / tĕr?" (I.2.62). This line, comprised almost entirely of spondees, conveys Brabantio's outrage. An additional irregularity in the iambic meter is that the line ends with an extra unstressed syllable, so that it contains eleven syllables instead of the usual ten. An unstressed final syllable is called a feminine ending. (In contrast, a stressed final syllable is termed a masculine ending.) The unstressed ending usually suggests that the speaker is uncertain or off balance. Here, for all the strength of his fury, Brabantio senses that Desdemona has escaped his control and that he is powerless to change that situation.

A further means by which Shakespeare uses blank verse to suggest characters' feelings and motives is by having them share a blank verse line between them. Editors signal such a variation by means of the spacing on the page. One character begins the line and the next speaker's dialogue appears directly beneath the point where the first has left off, in mid-page. For example, in the following exchange, a senator informs Othello that the state of Venice needs him to resume leadership of their armed forces immediately:

SENATOR
Yŏu múst / ăwáy / tŏníght.
OTHELLO Wĭth áll / mў héart.
(I.3.278)

The regularity of the blank verse and the shared line suggest that Othello is in perfect accord with the order. The fact that one character completes another's line implies a synchrony of thought and feeling: they are quite literally thinking along the same line, perhaps even using the same imagery or diction, and one speaker responds eagerly as soon as the other pauses. The reason may be that they are in perfect harmony, like Othello and the senator here or Romeo and Juliet during the balcony scene. In contrast, a shared line may reflect an attempt of one character to dominate another or a sign that one speaker is hanging on another's words, out of curiosity, infatuation, or submissiveness.

Another important sign of tone is the blank verse line that stops short of the usual five feet but is not completed by a second speaker, creating a deliberate pause. If the speech is a soliloquy (from the Latin words for "to speak alone"), a monologue spoken by a character who is alone on stage, the short line usually suggests that the speaker is contemplating, and perhaps about to shift focus. If it occurs in a dialogue, the short line suggests that the second speaker has been caught off guard and is considering how to reply. In other words, the way that a speech is spaced on the page presents a series of implied stage directions and cues to the actors about how the lines are to be delivered and to the audience about how they are to be heard. An additional benefit of this exercise is that it provides students with some

additional means for gauging tone, the speaker's attitude toward the subject matter and toward the audience. In a play, the reader or viewer has the advantage of directly observing the speaker's effects on the character addressed, and of measuring those reactions against his or her own.

These principles can be demonstrated by choosing two students to play the roles in a dialogue that contains shared lines. Here the example is from Othello. At this point the villain, Iago, is attempting to destroy Othello's happy new marriage by planting totally false doubts about Desdemona's fidelity. His scheme is to shake Othello's confidence in his bride by convincing Othello that she is having an affair with his junior officer, the handsome Cassio. Iago is jealous because Othello has given Cassio the promotion to lieutenant that he himself coveted, so another of his motives is to ruin Cassio and shift Othello's loyalties to himself. At the same time, Iago knows that he is playing a very dangerous game with the powerful general and that he must preserve the pretense of his own loyalty and benevolence. The obstacles to his goals are that Othello is passionately in love with his new wife and that Desdemona is a paragon of virtue and beauty and equally devoted to Othello. Yet Iago is counting on his understanding of Othello's inexperience in love and his self-doubts as a black man in a racist society and a foreigner in Venice. Iago is also depending on his past military service under Othello, which has been exemplary, and his reputation for honesty, which is totally undeserved.

The following dialogue takes place just after Desdemona has pleaded for Cassio, whom she values as a friend to her husband, to be restored to the lieutenancy that he has lost through a secret scheme of Iago's. Othello responds fondly that he will "deny her nothing" and promises to join her shortly. After she leaves, he gives the following impassioned testimonial to his love:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
> But I do love thee! And when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again.
>
> (III.3.90-92)

The teacher could set up the exercise by asking what feelings Othello's words evoke in the audience. We might hear this hyperbolic declaration with some alarm, as unwitting foreshadowing. The imagery of the play has already depicted Iago as the devil, whose aims are to capture souls and send them to "perdition" (hell) and also to create "chaos" out of what had been moral and emotional order. Ironically, Othello, believing that his marriage is totally secure, is unwittingly anticipating that very damnation if he were to stop loving Desdemona.

The dialogue immediately follows his statement. The close reading exercise involves casting two students as Iago and Othello. They should be told to pay attention to the cues in the spacing: to complete the other's line immediately if it is shared or to pause if it is a short line. It also helps to break up a scene into beats—points at which the tone shifts—stopping at the end of the beat to discuss what the class has noticed. This could be the first beat in the dialogue:

IAGO
My noble lord—
OTHELLO What dost thou say, Iago?
IAGO
Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
Know of your love?
OTHELLO
He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?
IAGO
But for a satisfaction of my thought;
No further harm.
OTHELLO Why of thy thought, Iago?
(III.3.93-98)

The first question that might be asked is: Who is in charge here? On the surface, it might seem to be Othello. Iago addresses him with deference as "My noble lord," while Othello calls him by name and uses the familiar second person pronoun "thou," customary for addressing those of lower rank. On the other hand, it is Iago who asks the provocative question that first suggests the possibility of an affair: "Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / Know of your love?" Othello does not complete that line, the pause indicating either that he is inattentive—although he did respond instantly to Iago's opening line (93)—or that he is thrown off balance by this new and potentially troubling issue. When he does answer, he poses a question that suggests some concern: "Why dost thou ask?" Iago responds by playing the innocent, pretending that his has been an idle question, but he uses two suggestive words in the process: first, he says that he has asked only for "satisfaction" of his curiosity. The word has sexual connotations, however, a meaning that Iago alludes to openly later in the act (see ll. 393-96). He also claims that he has meant no "harm." Othello catches those innuendoes and poses another question about Iago's underlying feelings, taking the bait by again completing his line: "Why of thy thought, Iago?" The name "Iago," which ends on an unstressed syllable, gives the line a feminine ending that also suggests Othello's uncertainty. Iago, the inferior in rank and social station, is leading on his superior officer.

At this beat, the teacher could switch casts, to give other students a chance in the spotlight and to signal the darker tone that the dialogue begins to assume. This is the concluding section:

IAGO
I did not think that he had been acquainted with her.
OTHELLO
O, yes, and went between us very oft.
IAGO
Indeed?
OTHELLO
Indeed? Ay, indeed! Discern'st thou aught in that?

Is he not honest?
IAGO Honest, my lord?
OTHELLO Honest. Ay, honest.
IAGO
My lord, for aught I know.
OTHELLO
What doest thou think?
IAGO Think, my lord?
OTHELLO Think, my lord?
By heaven, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something.
(III.3.99-108)

Iago begins by telling what the audience knows is a lie: "I did not think that [Cassio] had been acquainted with her." In fact, earlier in this scene he was eavesdropping while Desdemona described Cassio's role as intermediary in their courtship, pleading on Othello's behalf. In keeping with that benevolent function, Othello's initial response is off-handed and open: "O, yes, and went between us very oft." It contains, however, an unintentional connotation: "went between" could also mean that Cassio was having an affair with Desdemona at the same time that he was acting as their messenger. Iago instantly seizes on that possible innuendo by asking a loaded one-word question: "Indeed?" The long pause afterwards suggests that Othello has been caught off guard. When he does respond, it is to demand Iago's meaning and to ask his opinion of Cassio's trustworthiness: "Is he not honest?" Instead of answering the question, Iago echoes the key word—"honest"—, which makes Othello reiterate it. In a single blank verse line (103), spoken alternately by Othello, Iago, and then Othello again, the word recurs four times. When Iago does answer the question it is not with the reassurance of Cassio's integrity that Othello clearly wishes. Iago says only "for aught I know," leaving room for further doubt. That short line, three iambic feet instead of the regular five, suggests a pause during which Othello again waits for him to continue.

Finally Othello responds with still another question, again demanding to know Iago's opinion of Cassio: "What dost thou think?" The two successive spondees convey the anxiety in his tone. Instead of giving a direct answer, the wily Iago again echoes Othello, and Othello completes the line by re-echoing him, in a pattern that repeats that of the "honest" line above. This time, however, Othello reiterates not only the key word, "think," but the term of polite address that Iago persists in using, "my lord." The sarcasm in Othello's tone is signaled by the fact that he would not address an underling by such a noble title. He explains the basis for his sarcasm in his subsequent lines, in which he accuses Iago of the very techniques of manipulation that, in fact, he is using: "By heaven, thou echo'st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown." The short first line shows Othello taking thought, while the simile that follows unwittingly pinpoints Iago's motives. He does have a

"monster in [his] thought"—the beast/devil into which he is striving to turn Othello. The simile also suggests Iago's actual nature: he is a "monster" who is attacking Othello's mind.

Othello then goes on to repeat his conviction that Iago is implying some accusation: "Thou dost mean something." The double spondee again shows his urgency and rising anger, and the feminine ending ("sóme / thĭng") suggests how nonplussed the formerly secure husband is feeling. With such petty devices as innuendoes, echoed words, and pregnant pauses, all signaled by the rhythm and pacing of the blank verse, Iago has begun to set his insidious trap. We in the audience, made privy to his nefarious schemes through his soliloquies, must watch helplessly as he ensnares the credulous Othello.

The Long Monologue

A long monologue is a speech in which one character addresses another or, in the more specialized form of the soliloquy, in which a character speaks his or her thoughts aloud to the audience. The exercise consists of having students read the passage in segments, one student at a time, and pausing for the class to analyze the lines. The first student reads until the first full stop—a period, semicolon, exclamation point, or question mark—that marks the end of an independent clause. That clause may consist of a single line of verse or of several lines, either linked by commas or continued over several lines with no punctuation at the end. The reader should pause at the end of a line only if it contains a mark of punctuation and is therefore end-stopped. If the line ends in a comma or dash, the student should pause briefly and then continue reading until the next full stop. If that comes in mid-line, the reader's pitch should drop and he or she should pause longer, the vocal signals for the end of any independent clause. Such a mid-line pause is called a caesura. The term for a line that contains no end punctuation is enjambed; the noun is enjambment. These terms apply only to lines in verse, which the editor indicates by beginning them with capital letters and leaving a wide right margin. Lines in prose, which are presented without those poetic markers, like the sentences in a typical novel, are not so described. The student who comments on the clause might be told to do any of the following: ask a question about the meaning of a word, say what the excerpt reveals about the speaker's feelings or motives, speculate on how the situation or the listener (in a soliloquy, that is usually the audience) might react to the speech; comment on the order and selection of the details; the figures of speech or imagery; and the tone. Once that student has commented, the rest of the class is invited to join in. Finally, the teacher may summarize, probe further, or simply voice approbation if the students have done a thorough and perceptive job. Then the next student in line reads to the end of the next independent clause, the person next to her comments, and the process continues until the monologue is complete.

Going through a monologue in such careful detail usually takes about thirty to forty minutes, a sizeable investment of class time. It can pay off, though, in reaching far beyond the individual speech, teaching students techniques for the close reading of every passage.

Shakespearean drama was written to be spoken. Just hearing a passage aloud can make students more aware of the difference between the unit of poetry—the single line—and the unit of syntax—the independent clause, which may be made up of several lines. It can also show how the editor has used punctuation to suggest the rhythms of the lines and how that punctuation might serve as cues for the way that the lines should be read. Another way of putting this is that there is no such thing as the "general meaning" of a complex passage: the key to understanding tone, motivation, and the aspects of the style that convey them is in the subtle nuances of word choice and rhythm that are at the heart of Shakespeare's art. The exercise can also be a means of building confidence, especially in the awkward or reluctant reader. With this approach, no one has to stumble through an entire speech or analyze every aspect of it. It does help to begin the process with an expressive and able reader. Once the class has gone through the monologue piece by piece, an additional aid is for a volunteer or the teacher to read the entire speech aloud. Having studied the details of the passage, students are more prone to understand and appreciate it as a whole.

Enobarbus's Monologue from *Antony and Cleopatra*

This exercise can be done at any point in the study of a play—for example, for *Romeo and Juliet* with the opening Chorus—though it tends to be more useful after the class has been introduced to major themes and characters. To take an example: in Shakespeare's tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Roman soldier Enobarbus has just been summoned back to Rome in the company of Marc Antony, his renowned commander. Antony, one of the three triumvirs who rule the Roman Empire, has incurred the wrath of the emperor, Octavius Caesar, by abandoning his duty to Rome to carry on a passionate affair with the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. Enobarbus's Roman counterparts, Caesar's followers Agrippa and Maecenas, are avidly curious about the exotic femme fatale who has captivated not only Antony but also several Roman leaders before him—Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. Agrippa asks Enobarbus about the "report" he has heard that she is "a most triumphant lady." The challenge is for Enobarbus, who is a blunt, rough-hewn soldier, to explain her charisma to these skeptical political opponents. In a larger sense, Shakespeare must accomplish those same ends for his own audience, and, although he could not have known it at the time, for the countless members of future audiences who would meet Cleopatra through his play.

The means that the playwright uses is to give Enobarbus a monologue that evokes a vivid recollection of Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra, in which she appeared to Antony on her barge "upon the river of Cydnus" and "purs'd up his heart."[2] The explication that follows is a sentence by sentence summary of what might come up in discussion about the content and style. The speech is divided by the three phrases in which Agrippa marvels at the account. This is the first section:

2. All quotations from *Antony and Cleopatra* are from the Pelican edition, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin, 1999).

ENOBARBUS
I will tell you.
The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
The winds were lovesick with them. The oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amourous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description. She did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
O'erpicturing that Venus here we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers colored fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they did undid.

AGRIPPA O, rare for Antony.

The first independent clause is Enobarbus's response to Agrippa's request to hear from an eye witness whether Cleopatra is as extraordinary as she is rumored to be: "I will tell you." The line is short—only two iambic feet instead of the usual five in a blank verse line, suggesting the pause that Enobarbus takes while he considers what to say. Also, both feet are spondaic, creating an emphatic tone that perhaps conveys his determination to be precise. With the next sentence, he launches into a description of the barge on which Cleopatra arrived, which he compares in a vivid simile to a "burnish'd throne"—a polished gold substance that reflects her royalty. The effect of that image is emphasized by the alliterated b sound—"barge," "burnish'd," and "burnt." The verb "burnt" is given extra emphasis by appearing at the start of the third line. It also suggests the heat of passion that the queen inspires: even her barge "burns," and, in a seeming paradox, it is not extinguished by fire's contrary element, water. The next sentence ("The poop . . . them," ll. 202-04) sustains that impression, this time using the word "gold" outright and adding another royal color, "purple," to the picture. In addition, Enobarbus evokes the imagery of smell, stating that the sails are "so perfumèd" that the "winds" that fill them are personified as "love-sick with them." The next independent clause ("The oars . . . strokes," ll. 204-07) adds two more senses to the imagery, hearing and kinesthetic movement: the "tune of flutes," romantic instruments that set the stroke for the oars, which are pictured as so enticing that the water that they "beat" becomes "amourous of their strokes" and is driven to "follow faster." The imagery establishes the sensual atmosphere surrounding Cleopatra and sets the scene for the preliminary impression of the woman who is irresistible to all who encounter her.

The description, which has paused at the mid-line caesura, now shifts to Cleopatra herself: "For her own person, / It beggared all description" (ll. 207-08). That sentence presents an

apology in advance for the supposed inadequacy of mere words to convey the charm of the woman herself. Then Enobarbus continues not with a description of her features and figure but of her posture, her props, and her effects on those who see her. She "lie[s] / In her pavilion" the verb suggesting a seductive pose; the structure, a sort of ornamental tent, is made of "tissue" of "cloth of gold"—a rich and gaudy fabric. Students may need help glossing the dependent clause in ll. 210-11: in a hyperbolic comparison, Cleopatra is said to surpass a well-known picture of the Roman goddess of love, Venus, which was famous for having the painter's imagination ("fancy") surpass ("outwork") even the mythic beauty of the original ("nature").

The queen is then described in two long sentences as being surrounded by attendants whose own beauty and grace reflect and enhance hers: "pretty dimpled boys," compared to "smiling Cupids," who carry varicolored fans that alternately "cool" and "make glow" the "delicate cheeks" on the barge, Cleopatra's and their own. A student may note Shakespeare's sly reference to the conditions of his own theater, in which the Egyptian queen herself would have been played by such a "pretty boy." On stage, though, the dramatic illusion is not broken, as Agrippa reacts to the depiction of passion alternately roused and calmed by completing Enobarbus's blank verse line: "O rare for Antony!" The spondee in the first foot (Ó ráre) suggests Agrippa's rapt tone. The implication is that he is relishing vicariously the sensual appeals that captivated Antony.

This is the second part of the monologue:

ENOBARBUS

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereids,
So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthroned i' th' marketplace, did sit alone,
Whistling to the' air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

AGRIPPA Rare Egyptian!

The first sentence varies and reiterates the effects, using similes to compare Cleopatra's female attendants to "Nereids"—sea-nymphs in Greek mythology—and to "mermaids." The sense of touch is added to the imagery with the mention of the "silken tackle" [ropes] that "swell" at the "touches of [the] flower-soft hands" of the "mermaid" who steers the helm. The

next sentence describes the "strange invisible perfume" emitted by the sails, which "hits the sense" of the wharves. Like every other object in this sensual realm, they have been charmed into personified life by the queen's magical aura. Her effect on her human subjects is depicted in the longest single sentence in the passage—it goes on for six lines. The Egyptian citizens are drawn irresistibly to the wharves, leaving Antony alone on his throne "i' th' market-place." In Enobarbus's humorous account, Antony too would have rushed to "gaze on" this wonder, except that he did not wish to create "a gap in nature" by leaving the entire town empty. Again, Agrippa is the captivated listener who stands in for the larger audience, paying tribute to Cleopatra with another exclamation that completes the narrator's last line: "Rare Egyptian!"

The monologue concludes with Enobarbus's summary of Antony and Cleopatra's subsequent meeting:

ENOBARBUS
Upon her landing, Antony sent to her,
Invited her to supper. She replied,
It should be better he became her guest,
Which she entreated. Our courteous Antony,
Whom ne'er the word of "no" woman heard speak,
Being barbered ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
And for his ordinary pays his heart
For what his eyes eat only.
AGRIPPA Royal wench!
(II.2.200-36)

The first two sentences recount Antony's initial invitation to supper, an offer that Cleopatra counters with a suggestion that it would "be better he became her guest." The long last sentence reports Antony's infatuated reaction. Pictured with wry amusement as "our courteous Antony," a man who has never been known to say "no" to a woman's invitation, he shows his vanity by first "being barbered ten times." Then he pays for his "meal," consumed only with his "eyes," by giving his "heart." Enobarbus's irony suggests both his skepticism about the value of the love object and his understanding of the temptations that could make Antony willing to sacrifice his loyalty to Rome to indulge in a forbidden liaison. Again, Agrippa serves as the appreciative listener. His exclamation—"Royal wench!"—implies the two sources of Cleopatra's charisma—her regal status and her quintessential femininity.

A Related Writing Assignment

A follow-up writing assignment to either of these oral exercises is to ask students to choose a ten-to-fifteen line passage from the play and to write a 500–750-word analysis of it, applying the techniques that they have been learning during the discussions. The choice may either be left to the student, or the teacher can designate four or five distinctive dialogues and monologues from which to choose. The essay should introduce the context of the passage in the action of the play and in the development of the characters. The thesis should be based

on such points as the following: What the speaker or speakers may be inferred to be feeling, the aspects of the style that suggest those feelings, and the ways that the content and style of the monologue or dialogue are characteristic or uncharacteristic of the speaker[s] to that point in the play.

This is a useful essay to assign about halfway through the study of a play, as a way to give students a chance to practice gauging tone and selecting and presenting evidence in a brief, focused piece of text. It allows them a range of choices about the section of the play to analyze, and it has the advantage of providing reasonable assurance that the work will be their own, rather than something taken from the Internet. Such practice in the skills of close reading can be valuable in helping students to prepare for both the multiple-choice section of the English Literature AP Exam, which is based on questions about the meaning and style of literary passages, and for the essay section, in which they are asked to write analyses of a poem or a passage from drama or fiction. College Board support materials—such as Released Exams, free response questions, and sections of the Course Description Guide—reveal that past examinations have included soliloquies from Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and monologues from such plays of his contemporaries as Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, as well as sonnets and narrative poems. Not only can these exercises serve as means to greater understanding of such passages, but they can also contribute to the larger aims of the AP Program: to encourage and guide students to a lifetime of reading for insight and pleasure.

Inside the Dramatic Monologue

by Barbara Bloy

Across Three Genre

In reading fiction, the genre they have the most experience with, our students need only a bit of prompting to identify who is telling the story, and become aware of what bias or deficiency in understanding the narrator may have. They have had plenty of experience with narrators, whether omniscient, only partially so, or seemingly "objective," and they are aware that narrators select what to show us, recording scenes and reporting dialogues that advance their attitudes toward the situations and characters, thus manipulating the reader. Readers of fiction understand that some narrators characterize directly, doing for us some of the work of discovering personality, attitudes, and desires of some or all of the characters—and that we believe them at our peril. They have had some experience with such devices as shifting points of view and interior monologue used in modern novels.

Our students may have had less experience with drama, but they know that in most plays there is no narrator, so we must listen carefully to the dialogue to discover who is who, what relation the characters have to each other, and what happened before the curtain went up. Their first Shakespeare play will have shown them that an older convention that allowed for interior monologues in the form of soliloquies, and asides told audiences how to respond to what was going on.

Dramatic poetry is both like and unlike fiction and drama, and we must offer both a review of what understanding they bring to its techniques and guidance in how to read this sophisticated and nuanced form of poetry. Why bother? The body of literature which may be called "dramatic poetry" is ancient, large, distinguished, and popular among modern poets writing in English. Tracing its origins shows its debt to drama: in ancient Greek plays, actors wore masks, and the Latin word for this mask is "persona." In a dramatic monologue, the speaker is also called the persona, and readers must not assume that the persona is the author. The invention of the genre can be credited to Ovid. Chaucer imitated Ovid, Dante's lost souls speak dramatic monologues, and many Elizabethan poets display Ovid's direct influence. A high point in the use of the form came with Tennyson and Browning, followed by Pound and Eliot, Frost and Robinson, and the last several decades have seen yet another renaissance of the form. A list of dramatic monlogues that work well in the AP literature classroom is appended to this article.

Dramatic Monologue Defined

Broadly speaking, a dramatic monologue is a poem in which the speaker, in some significant moment, reveals his or her essential character. Sometimes an identifiable listener is addressed, but responses are not revealed. The monologue may be in the form of a letter. The speaker may be static or dynamic, either clinging to an attitude or experiencing a revelation.

The speaker may be naïve, making the self-revelation unintentional. And certainly the speaker may be unreliable: imperceptive, ignorant, self-deceived. Dramatic irony frequently abounds.

The Case for Reading Dramatic Monologues

A dramatic monologue is among the most compelling of poems, partly because students have read fiction for many years, and are both skilled in and engaged by character analysis. Consistently lower scores on the poetry essay compared to the other two on the AP English Literature and Composition Exam suggest that many of our students are intimidated by poetry. They seem to need far more practice on techniques for getting inside a poem, including working with literary devices, and far more facility in recognizing how those devices support meaning. Practice with the artistic strategies used in dramatic monologues and how they create and convey meaning can help break the barriers to understanding.

The questions raised by dramatic monologue are raised from the first line: Who is speaking and why? What is distinctive about this voice? What mood does it create? What is its subtext? Tone? With no authorial clues as to the values and assumptions of the speaker, close reading is demanded. Practice in posing useful questions leads not only to understanding of the poem, but to the acquisition of a toolkit that will help open any poem.

Four Poems for Close Reading and Analysis

Students will learn what to look for in any poem as they work through the questions following each of the four poems below. They will discover that a paraphrase of the literal level of such a poem is only the first step toward analysis, and finally, understanding, but that it is an essential first step, using the form and structure of the poem as a guide. The skill of useful annotation must be practiced, including charts, diagrams, and lists. Students with a strong sense of spatial relationships can work out form and structure, and those with good ears for sounds and rhythms can share their expertise as they sort out complex issues of prosody. The patterns of rhyming words can lead directly to meaning. Variations in meter always have meaning. A poem's title conveys meaning, or at least orienting information. Without a narrator to describe the setting, the antecedent action, and the protagonist, readers must discover these for themselves. The questions call for close reading in order to find patterns of diction by listing nouns, verbs, and modifiers separately, and then considering connotation and its significance, especially in creating the tone. They lead students to isolate images in order to connect them to the situation and feelings of the persona. Close reading also involves rhetorical devices, especially repetition, leading students to discover how such an obvious device can intensify meaning. Finally, they must follow the cues to whatever figurative level a poem may contain. These four lessons model the kinds of questions students need to apply to any poem they encounter. The analytic essay suggested for each poem will put together the results of all this close reading and demonstrate how well each student has met the goals of each exercise. The writing of the essay will also convince students that close reading is precisely what is essential to analysis.

Group Work and Individual Work

Each of the four poems could be worked on by a group, and then each group could "teach" its assigned poem to the rest of the class, providing a reading both before and after the "lesson," then taking the class through the questions and answers and providing an annotated version of the text. If each lesson is followed by the assignment of the essay prompt, everyone learns the necessity of close reading and its close link to analysis.

If every group works on the same poem, an instructive culminating activity could be hearing the poem read by one person from each group, embodying in the reading all the understanding that group has arrived at. The group would, in essence, be "staging" the poem, writing director's notes, deciding together on blocking, movement, gesture, and the voice's pace, volume, and "color" and then coaching the student who will become the character and "perform" the poem. In general discussion, the class could compare the readings (both the performances and what they imply about interpretation). Armed with all of this, students could then individually tackle the essay prompts, finding that the job of analysis has already been done through close reading. The essays easily lend themselves to AP-specific scoring guidelines, and if such rubrics are shared with the students, and they apply them to each other's work, they will further internalize the difference between literal description and analysis.

The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter*

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever, and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed
You went into far Ku-to-Yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden
They hurt me. I grow older,
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you,
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.
by Rihaku
translated by Ezra Pound
(*A free translation from the 8th century Chinese poet Li Po.)

Questions for Ezra Pound's "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter"

1. Each of the poem's six stanzas indicates the passage of time and the changing feelings of the speaker. Paraphrase, stanza by stanza, the plain sense of the poem. Briefly describe the setting, the actions, and the feelings of the letter writer.
2. List the common and proper nouns that identify places and consider what they contribute to the characterization of the letter writer. What do their connotations tell you about her situation and her feelings?
3. Examine the imagery in the poem, and connect important images to the situation, the chain of events, and the feelings of the letter writer.

Essay

Chronicle the changing feelings of the letter writer, as they are revealed through choice of detail and imagery.

Video Blues

My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,
and likes to rent her movies, for a treat.
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

The list of actresses who might employ
him as their slave is too long to repeat.
(My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,

Carole Lombard, Paulette Goddard, coy
Jean Arthur with that voice as dry as wheat . . .)
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

Does he confess all this just to annoy
A loyal spouse? I know I can't compete.
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy.

And can't a woman have her dreamboats? Boy,
I wouldn't say my life is incomplete,
but some evening I could certainly enjoy

two hours with Cary Grant as my own toy.
I guess, though, we were destined not to meet.
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,
which makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

—Mary Jo Salter

Questions for Mary Jo Salter's "Video Blues"

1. Define a villanelle by describing the stanza pattern and rhyme scheme of this poem. How many different end rhymes are there? How many times is each sound repeated?
2. Which words are repeated exactly at the ends of lines, and in what pattern? What do these repeated words suggest about the crux of the poem?
3. Which entire lines are repeated exactly and to what effect? Which are slightly varied (consider even punctuation)? What are the effects of changes? Consider that incremental repetition tends to accumulate significance. Even minor changes or changes in context enhance and intensify meaning.
4. How does the last stanza use the rhyming words? Why is this pattern appropriate at the end of the poem?
5. The b rhymes, in the middle line of each tercet, are not repeated, but the connotation of each adds something important to the tone of the poem. What is the significance, in each case?

Essay

The villanelle form is circular, presenting variations on a theme or subject. Its argument doesn't develop or move forward. Its static form conveys the emotional treadmill of a preoccupation or obsession. Take as your thesis the proposition that the tight form of a villanelle is the perfect vehicle for "Video Blues"—that repetition is precisely the point of the poem. How does the incremental repetition and circular movement of the form create the tone and meaning of this poem?

At Kresge's Diner in Stonefalls, Arkansas

Every night, another customer.
One night it's a state trooper,
the next a truck driver going all the way

to Arlington, Georgia. Tonight
it's only a tourist, a northerner.
I prefer the truck driver.

You can trust a truck driver.
Tourists are effeminate, though good customers.
I hate it most on Thursday night
when that hog who wants me to go all the way
with him comes in; some state trooper!
I'd rather go to bed with a pig, a northerner!

Well, maybe not a northerner.
They do have peculiar ways.
Still, they're good customers.
I think I hate that fat trooper
as much as I hope my truck driver
comes back on Thursday night.

Only three more nights!
How long does it take a good driver—
'course he doesn't have a Buick like the trooper
or a sports car like that northerner—
to cross Georgia? If I didn't have customer
I'd go all the way

to Georgia after him, all the way!
I bet I could send a message with that northerner.
You know truckers are the safest drivers.
He's not only my favorite customer
but I dream about him at night.
Maybe I could send a telegram with that trooper

but then I hate asking the trooper
for favors 'cause he wants favors on Thursday night.
Still, I wish he was here instead of that northerner.
You can make a life with a truck driver.
I wonder if he would ever take me away
with him. I wish he was my husband instead of my customer!

O maybe this Thursday night that truck driver, my favorite customer,
will push aside the trooper and flick ashes at the northerner,
o and maybe he will take me away.

—Edward Hirsch

Questions for Edward Hirsch's poem, "At Kresge's Diner in Stonefalls, Arkansas"

1. Identify the dramatic situation (who, when, where) in this poem by examining the title and reading the poem aloud and then, sentence by sentence, paraphrase the speaker's feelings about the three men and her gradual revelation of what she wants.
2. Describe the form of the poem. It is called a sestina. Instead of looking for a rhyme scheme, look for the pattern created by the last word of each line. The last three lines, called the envoy, provide the final repetitions, not all at the ends of lines. In writing out and then describing this intricate pattern, you will be defining a sestina. What is your first impression of the effect of this form on the poem?
3. List separately the important nouns, verbs, and modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) in the order in which they appear in the poem. Isolating these key words will reveal patterns of connotation which in turn reveal the speaker's attitude. Modifiers can be blatant cues to attitude, and even the order the words appear in, especially the verbs, provides cues. What does the diction tell you about tone?
4. Consider the impact of the repetition in the poem. Begin with the effect of the seven uses of each end word, but also examine what incremental repetition, successive minor changes in connotation or in context, reveals and how it intensifies meaning.

Essay

Analyze the appropriateness of the six end words chosen for this sestina. How do their repetitions in various contexts help articulate the theme of the poem?

Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt*

On the rough diamond,
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,
we rehearsed the strict technique
of bunting. I watched from the infield,
the mound, the backstop
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.
You could drop it like a seed
down either base line. I admired your style,
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,
no few lives. I could homer
into the garden beyond the bank,
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,
and still you stressed the same technique,

the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing
just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch
about basics never changing,
  and I never learned what you were laying down.
Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,
let this be the sign
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice.

—David Bottoms

*This unglamorous but basic technique in baseball is an important game strategy. The coach signals to the hitter that he is not to swing at the ball. Instead, the batter faces the pitcher, and slides one hand halfway up the bat, holding it horizontally in order to deaden the ball and send it slowly down a baseline so that it will be difficult to field. One effect of this "sacrifice bunt" is that the batter is usually thrown out at first base, but the other is that a player or players already on base can meanwhile advance or even score a run.

Questions for David Bottoms's "Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt"

1. What is the significance of the title?
2. Paraphrase the three parts of the poem, describing for each the setting (time and place), the activity, and the speaker's feelings.
3. What is conveyed by the choice of verbs (and their adverbs) in the poem? Consider connotations, perhaps with the help of a dictionary.
4. Consider the significance of the puns in the poem. Look for puns in lines 1, 18, 20, 22, and 23 (which has two). Hint: baseball fans know that the act of bunting is often referred to as "laying down a bunt." How do the double meanings disclose the poem's metaphor?

Essay

Take the poem to the figurative level: the poet uses the vehicle of baseball to comment on his true subject. Beyond its literal value to the baseball team, what is the value in life of sacrifice?

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Donna C. Tanzer teaches undergraduate writing courses at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and graduate education courses and English methods at Marian College of Fond du Lac in Wisconsin. She formerly taught AP English Literature and Composition and all levels of high school English for the School District of West Allis–West Milwaukee in Wisconsin, where she also directed over 25 plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, Inherit the Wind,* and an original adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. She earned a bachelor's degree in English and speech (theater emphasis) from the University of Minnesota–Duluth, and a master's degree in education from Marian College. An AP Exam Reader, Donna co-wrote the *Teacher's Advanced Placement Guide* (2007), a manual to accompany *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, with Claudia Klein Felske. Her essay "Tone and Voice in Macbeth" appeared in the 2005–2006 Professional Development Workshop Materials. She has also written online text reviews for the College Board and essays on poetry, drama, and education for the *Utah English Journal*.