



5-5-2014

# Communicating Shakespeare: How High School Educators Should Approach the Great Playwright

Samantha DeFilippe

Follow this and additional works at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors\\_proj](http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

DeFilippe, Samantha. (2014). Communicating Shakespeare: How High School Educators Should Approach the Great Playwright. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 36. Available at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors\\_proj/36](http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/36)  
Copyright © 2014 Samantha DeFilippe

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

**Communicating Shakespeare:  
How High School Educators Should Approach the Great Playwright**

Samantha DeFilippe

Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Commonwealth Interdisciplinary Honors in English and Communications  
Studies

Bridgewater State University

May 5, 2104

Dr. James Crowley, Thesis Director  
Prof. Nicole Williams, Committee Member  
Dr. Maria Hegbloom, Committee Member  
Dr. Michael McClintock, Committee Member

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is being done to show how relating Shakespeare's plays, specifically the characters, themes, and events in his plays, to high school students can increase their appreciation and understanding of the famous writer. It discusses better methods for teaching Shakespeare than line-by-line interpretation so that students may see the valuable insight his works have to offer, rather than skimming the readings and using unreliable online resources, such as Sparknotes, because they are uninterested. Previous research has shown the importance of trying to relate readings to students so they are able to form a connection with the characters and main plot, rather than focus on line-by-line interpretation. Most students need to be more engaged and mentally stimulated with the plays. Line-by-line interpretation is not the best method for teaching Shakespeare. Instead, mental stimulation can be done by making the four-hundred year old plays relatable to the students in terms of common themes and events that happen, such as love, loss, and the desire and difficulty of seeking justice when one has been victimized. Since there is a large time gap between Shakespeare and modern students, not everything can be translated without a degree of loss, but broad themes and lessons can still be taught to students, such as the effects of human folly. In this study, other methods of teaching Shakespeare are suggested and explored.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In terms of increasing student interest in literature, many high school English classes seem to fail miserably. The lack of student interest seems to be a result from the lack of effective teaching methods. Most students do not classify reading a book and having to write multiple pages on a topic not of their choosing or of their interest as entertainment, nor should they. Add the factors of studying a man who writes in Elizabethan English compared to today's world of

“LOL” and “TTYL,” and it is clear how some students struggle with this foreign language that is also called English. Some high school students are confused by the vocabulary used in Shakespeare, being unfamiliar with his writing style from a lack of engaging classroom lessons, reinforced by teachers who instruct word-by-word, rather than for overall understanding. Most of these students end up not understanding Shakespeare, leading to frustrations and a lack of appreciation.

Most students sit in their room hopelessly flipping through the pages of a play, running their fingers through their hair, and not soaking in a word the text has to offer. Slowly, they lift their bloodshot eyes from the page before them, realizing that it has been over an hour and they cannot get past the second line. Their minds wander. Their hearts sink. They begin to realize that they do not understand this reading and should move on to other homework before it becomes too late at night for them to study. *Forget this reading*, they think with frustration. *At least I tried. It's probably not even worth my time and effort anyway.* These students are unable to recover themselves after their struggling attempt in understanding the reading material. Determination has left their mindset as they turn on the computer, open Internet Explorer, and search for Sparknotes. In most students' minds, this is not cheating. They are trying to get the work done. Comprehension is no longer the goal. They do not see the importance of this long ago world of kingdoms. After all, why study a man who died hundreds of years ago? When reading Shakespeare for homework, it is difficult for some students to understand the text without the constant assistance of the teacher.

With the easy access to Sparknotes and similar venues, students are able to read a summary of the play and grasp a basic plotline—enough to allow participation in class discussion. Sparknotes, often a general online summary that lacks in-depth and thought-

provoking insight to the text, does not teach the students how to analyze what they are reading for themselves, nor lead them in the right direction so they are able to learn these skills for future readings where themes and analysis are not as easily at hand. While there is a discussion of major themes and a general analysis on these online venues, they fall short of providing students the necessary experience of conducting in-depth analysis themselves. Instead, these students are left at a broken foundation that is unable to support further explication. However, these students do not need to worry about their lacking analytical skills because class discussion is focused on line-by-line summaries, rather than interpretation (O'Brien, 1995, p. 167).

Many high school students, aged between fifteen and eighteen, find Shakespeare's works boring and hard to relate to, yet we can understand why some students think this way, and how to improve it, leading to a change in teaching methods or curriculum. In fact,

College students' [wrote] evaluations of their own secondary-school experience [that] read: 'teachers kill Shakespeare by line to line explanation,' [and] '... The interpretations of the instructor were used as a basis for examinations in the course. Any divergence from the instructor's interpretation would net a very low grade. (O'Brien, 1995, p. 167)

O'Brien's study serves the purpose of discovering the treatment and teaching methods of Shakespearian plays in the classroom, hoping to find an appropriate and effective method that inspires students to actively explore the playwright's works. She asked various students to write their experiences of how they were taught Shakespeare's plays. Her goal was to provide evidence that few teachers have figured out the best way to teach Shakespeare, leading to the lack of appreciation for the playwright. She discovered that teachers who have students read line-

by-line disrupt the flow of the text, making it hard to understand, making the play more complicated than it needs to be.

Improved teaching methods may help to encourage interest and engagement with these texts, despite the difficulties with understanding the language. Times have changed, but all too often, teaching methods have not. The line-by-line teaching method has been one traditional way of educating most students on Shakespeare: the instructor goes around the classroom having each student, one-by-one, read the character lines (O'Brien, 1995, p. 167). Most of the time, teachers plan it so every student must read multiple times, one sentence or a short passage for each student, regardless of finishing off a character speech. Other times, teachers have students read line-by-line through character dialogue. Line-by-line teaching is an ineffective method because it covers reading Shakespeare, but neglects the in-depth discussion of it. Without comprehensive discussion, most students are unable to analyze the text. Analyzing is interpreting a text for a deeper meaning, discovering themes and symbols, and examining character relationships and actions in how they affect the plot. Analyzing is an important skill that leads to further understanding.

Line-by-line methods of teaching have students look at the text as individual lines, rather than seeing the text as a whole. Line-by-line methods do not provide an overall in-depth picture of the text, making students struggle between focusing on what is said and what is important to know. Summary of each line of the text leads to a broader summary of the plot. Summary, while useful in forming a basic foundation of understanding, is often overtaking the importance of analyzing. Teachers are frequently educating line-by-line, explaining what is happening in the text, rather than focusing on the importance of events, actions, judgments, and interpretation of the summarized plot, for example.

Despite what most students believe, Shakespeare is an important author to study in high school for many reasons: he offers valuable lessons in his plays that many students can apply to their lives, such as learning how to deal with the cost of a friend's betrayal, the effects of ignorance, ill deeds, and seeking justice, and how love is never an easy course. However, most students often miss these lessons due to a poor teaching method. When teachers proceed with line-by-line, these students begin to focus on the words, often coming across words they do not understand. At home, students can skip these words and still get a general comprehension of the passage, but in the classroom, teachers focus on these words as a way to enhance understanding and vocabulary in students. Unfortunately, sometimes large vocabulary words make the text seem more complicated, leading to confusion in the students, and eventually to frustration and anger in some. For those who struggle with vocabulary, this method does not help them.

Students who focus on the words individually, rather than as parts of a whole sentence, may miss the purpose of the reading. They begin to think that understanding Shakespeare's every word is more important than understanding his overall meaning. They may understand who and what is being talked about in the text, but broader interpretation is lacking. Giving attention to line-by-line reading can cause some visual and non-auditory learning students to forget what was read aloud in the passage, leading to further confusion from the lack of flow from the transfer of lines being read aloud by different voices. The disoriented and choppy sounding flow then may lead students to re-read the same lines silently to themselves, which can be frustrating for most students.

Confusion and frustration affects many students by causing them to become disappointed with themselves, feel hopeless that they will never understand the language, think they are ill-equipped in their analytical ability, or begin to think they are unable to comprehend and derive

meaning from such ‘foreign’ words. However, if taught with methods that go beyond linguistic analysis, then some students are more likely to build confidence with themselves, feeling able to connect and relate to key concepts and themes of the studied plays. Teachers are supposed to provide students with the knowledge of how to analyze, but if they focus on word denotations, they prevent students from developing this useful skill. While necessary to a degree, word denotations are over-emphasized by some teachers. Instead of students analyzing the text themselves, while they are reading, they wait for what the teacher has to say. Line-by-line teaching trains students to not be independent learners. Instead, most of the class is focused on summary without analytical depth.

Fortunately, teaching methods can change if the instructor wants them to. High school classrooms can change and be adapted so that students are able to appreciate and understand the lessons that Shakespeare presents his audience, rather than dread him. With an increase in enjoyment in English class, there may be an increase in English majors, or students may be more likely to stay in school and not find it a waste of time, as well as to learn to appreciate high-quality texts. English is an important subject to know because every day, we communicate with each other through our words and writings. It allows the practice of analytical skills that will be used in every student’s life, as well as provides the opportunity to learn, understand, and appreciate other cultures.

Shakespeare’s plays must be taught in a way that makes a three-to four-hundred year old text engaging to a present day reader, where the world seems completely different than the duels and royal hardships that Shakespeare writes of. Focusing on elements of humanity that transcend time, such as falling in love, the ambition to reach a goal, and the desire for revenge and justice

to be achieved, are some ways that teachers may make these connections clearer for student readers.

Different teaching methods may be used to engage most students in a more productive manner than line-by-line analysis. Students will be mentally stimulated and challenged with these methods, leading to the promotion of positive educational experiences and personal growth. One method that will be explained in further detail later, for example, is taking a scene and altering it into modern day setting, or changing the gender or ethnicity of a character, and seeing how it affects the play's outcomes, events, and other scenes. This allows some students to see how pieces of the play connect and effect each other. It also shows the instructor how well the students understand the characters and plot of the play because by altering an element of the text, such as the setting, the students need to be able to analyze and become creative as they engage with the text, going beyond individual words and into concepts of the play in its historical context. This method of teaching may also be applied to other subjects, such as history in terms of culture, which will help engage students who are disinterested in literature classes by relating literature to a subject they prefer. These methods will help students learn in more engaging ways, and may encourage students to further their education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: READING THEORIES**

### **COMMUNICATING SHAKESPEARE**

Communication can be seen as the distribution of messages through a series of channels. A clear understanding of communication is crucial for teachers because if the channels are blocked, the students are unable to understand messages and learn. The blockage of communicative channels makes students incapable of appreciating their education in literature by not receiving a sufficient amount of understanding to be effective in their lives, causing the

feeling of frustration and boredom. They may feel their time is being wasted because they are not getting the messages the teachers are sending them. Communication is more than words and nonverbal cues; it influences our relationships with other people and their cultures. Shakespeare helps his readers think about their decision making process, understand others, and understand culture. Student reflection and understanding is accomplished because Shakespeare is an English playwright from an earlier century whose plays contain common themes, such as love and rage that allow students to access the text in a more relatable way. Character interactions with each other and their environment allow Shakespeare's characters to be relatable to the reader. For example, when characters seek out revenge, students can relate to the situation at hand because they have had an experience where justice needs to be delivered. Therefore, teachers need to communicate Shakespeare in an effective manner that moves away from the method of line-by-line discussion and more towards methods that allow students to interact with the self and text as a whole.

### **READING IS AN INTERACTION OF EXPERIENCES**

Recent studies show that when students are given all the information they need, there is little interaction between the reader and the writer. In *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Wolfgang Iser claims that there is no correct or incorrect way to interpret a fictional piece of writing. Iser suggests that the reader must fill in the blanks and gaps in a story with imagination to gain meaning. In this approach, interpretation leads to meaning, which comes from the imagination from the reader's past experiences. Gaps in reading are the subjective vagueness that the author gives us so that each reader can gain a personal experience with the text (Iser, 1989, p. 5 and 26). The reader's background, which varies in experience and interpretation from person to person, shapes the reader's meaning. Sharing through discussion

helps students see different perspectives, so they form a broader understanding, based on that discussion.

Iser explains reader manipulation, a writing approach used to mislead readers into thinking the plot is heading in a certain direction when it is not, by mentioning how Charles Dickens, for example, creates suspense by adding chapters and new plot threads. Iser's reader manipulation allows room for the reader to use his or her imagination because what is concealed through the suspense spurs the reader into action by forcing the imagination to be engaged through filling in gaps in the text (Iser, 1989, p. 9 and 14). Although reader manipulation appears controlling, the reader is ultimately the one who brings life to the text by using his or her imagination. The reader is then attracted to the literary world because it either contradicts or echoes the reader's own life, making it appear either fantastic or trivial (Iser, 1989, p. 19 and 29). Interaction with the text offers the chance for students to participate in meaningful experiences not only with characters in the text, but with other students as well. Students read and create another life within the boundaries of the text.

Although Iser's theory is focusing on prose fiction and Shakespeare's plays are drama, Iser's theory can still be applied when teachers give a lesson on Shakespeare because prose fiction and drama are similar genres in the sense that they both can be acted out. Prose fiction is often translated into movies and drama is performed on a stage. Teachers often summarize each page, going line-by-line, so that every student has the same understanding (Kidd, 2011, p. 74). While summary may help to a degree if a student does not understand the text, teachers go beyond summarizing who, what, when, and where of the text, and include an interpretation of what they feel the text is about, changing summary into a form of analysis. Teachers provide their own interpretation in the summary by mentioning smaller details and not just plot

information, such as themes and symbols, which presents interpretation as a matter of fact. A teacher's interpretive summary can cause confusion in students who interpreted the same passage differently because it makes the students think their interpretations, if they have one, are incorrect when their views on the text do not agree with the teacher's views. Interpretation involves how one perceives and understands a reading and gives the text meaning by analyzing its characters, themes, and contextual connections. Interpretation involves analysis, whereas summary is a basic understanding of events that happen in the text. There are multiple ways to view the same piece of text, but when teachers present their views as fact instead of one possible way to interpret the text, then there may be a poor discussion because the students may not want to embarrass themselves in front of the class, feeling insecure for not interpreting the text the same way as the teacher, leading the students to stay quiet during class (Kidd, 2011, p. 84). Teachers, instead, should emphasize the importance of multiple interpretations as beneficial to discussion by enlightening parts of the text that other students may have been confused with. If the teacher attempts to interpret all the minor details in the play, then it is difficult for the students to interpret the text for themselves and participate in discussion.

Louise Rosenblatt supports Iser's theory on tactics to create interpretation in *Literature as Exploration* by expanding it and creating her own theory emphasizing the reader. It is through the experience of reading that the imagination can filter the text and allow students to create their own meaning (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24). Each reader takes away something different from the reading because, according to Rosenblatt's theory, reading is done for the experience and interactions with the text, for entertainment. Students often ask why they are reading works such as Shakespeare. They want to know why it is important to them if they are going to spend hours of their time reading a play (Cunningham, 1998, p. 297). Since students do not want to feel their

time is being wasted; they begin to use online summaries, such as those that Sparknotes provide, instead of reading the assigned material because they are disengaged and need a simple summary to avoid confusion with the plot. Therefore, it is wise to make the text's interesting themes more accessible to the students by showing the interesting aspects already associated with the play. Otherwise, students will be disengaged, which may lead to the use of online venues, such as Sparknotes.

No student can interpret the play for another student, so it is important to understand that reading is a "carry away" process. The "carry away" process allows teachers to begin to focus on improving a student's capacity to evoke meaning in a reflective manner between text and self (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26 and 32). The reader must be emotionally ready to construct language so that it makes sense. The reader is comparing and contrasting events and character traits to his or her own encounters. The role of the teacher has manifested to fostering interpretation between text and reader, which is done through relating the text to the student's experience, rather than line-by-line summary as a check for understanding. From these past experiences, the student is then able to predict the outcome of the plotline by understanding the characters and events through his or her own relatable eyes (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38 and 63). By reading about these characters and understanding their moral judgments, students can apply character actions to their own lives when in similar situations. The text is not there to define morals, but to show morals through character actions and reflect upon how we can learn from these actions in dealing with students' own moral issues. A teacher aids this process in revealing what literature has to offer, rather than dictating a specified message from the text.

It is important that teachers increase the literary engagement and immersion into the world of literature that students have when interacting with a given text because having the

awareness of contextual events helps students handle their reactions and responses to the text. Students will read to get away from their current situation and seek help in finding a similar solution to a similar problem (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 39). Since student situations and environments are constantly changing as their lives move on, the students' interpretation of the text are constantly changing as they re-read it. Therefore, the text becomes almost anything the student wants and needs at the time. However, the student cannot react much if he or she is not enjoying the text because he or she does not see it as engaging.

Relation to the text leads to discussion because students then have something to talk about and personal experience to back up their formulated opinion. Teachers need to emphasize this importance because students who are able to see how classical literature can still be related to today's experiences are able to develop their curiosity about life and literature in the context of their own emotions (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 64). It is the teacher's job to help students realize what literature means to them. Otherwise, it is ineffective to teach it.

## **READING HELPS WORLDLY UNDERSTANDING**

As Frank Smith states in *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, reading allows the text to have a purpose. Smith's theory consists of the aspect that reading needs a purpose (Smith, 2004, p. 170). If students have previous knowledge on the story they are reading, such as the setting and historical context, they will still not be as engaged as they can be in the reading unless it provides insight that relates to their own lives, giving the reading an applicable purpose (Smith, 2004, p. 178 and 181). Reading is not appreciated by the student if it is not engaging, and to become engaged in the reading the student must be able to relate to the text and learn something from it. Shakespeare, for example, has many themes that students can relate to, such as love that is found and lost, conflict, forgiveness,

the desire to want justice and revenge, and the fragility of time. If teachers continue to instruct with line-by-line analyzing, students will miss these themes because they will too focused on understanding plot summary, rather than working on their analyzing skills (Gilbert, 1984, p. 601-602).

Global predictions allow the reader to gain meaning because predictions are a certain set of expectations for the reader. Smith suggests that students use “global predictions” to influence their decisions on how they interpret specific events during a character’s journey (Smith, 2004, p. 171). Readers predict a character’s course of action based on their own experience as a way to understand the context of events in the plot, rather than defining individual words. Such predictions are global because students can predict character actions and events based on their own experiences in similar situations. Thus, a teacher should enforce reader predictions to help engage students, rather than defining words line-by-line because it is focused on summary instead of analysis. Literal methods do not allow the opportunity for students to engage in prediction. It is better to show how a word is used than define it (Smith, 2004, p. 168). Smith is suggesting that it is better to contextualize a word and show the student the significance of a specific word, than to give the student a definition to build vocabulary. If a student identifies words one at a time, then there is a comprehension failure. The student will be unable to succeed in general understanding and analysis. Therefore, understanding of the text’s plot should come from the guidance of the educator, such as through interactive assignments and in-depth class discussion.

Connecting to the text is an important aspect of reading, according to Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. They suggest that students conceptualize the world around them; they read the world. In the classroom, students can use

experiences to perceive and understand the text, but the teaching method must permit this to happen. Context and text connection are two crucial aspects of reading that are needed in order to visualize to better understand the plot. Students view the world differently due to multiple perceptions of the same event. Experiences shape their social context and give the world meaning. Students' observation of the world allows them to form connections and interpret readings so they can relate concepts and lessons that they learned from the reading and apply them to their own lives based on their past experiences (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 29 and 32). Since each person experiences life differently, there are multiple ways to relate to the reading, and therefore, multiple interpretations of the same lines.

Reading should not be made up entirely of decoding written words or language because decoding silences the reader's right to interpret and analyze. Instead, reading should be the analysis of how such words create and interweave knowledge of the world. Language and reality are interconnected, so in order to understand critical reading of a text the reader must first see the relationship between text and context (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 34 and 152).

Students should be active readers, those who question the text and respond to what they are reading. They look deeper into the text and are aware that they are filling in gaps in the text. As they read, they should be analyzing, trying to understand and give meaning to the events that happen around them. Analyzing aids students in how they understand the world and the words on a page that form a play. They give meaning to the words (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 35 and 37). 'Love,' for example, is a word that means something different to everyone based on personal understanding of the world and experiences with that word. When they read that word in a play, the students draw on their experiences and create an understanding, a meaning, of what is happening in the play so that it relates to them. Discussing ambiguous language allows the

opportunity for new perceptions and perspectives by sharing different interpretations on the ambiguous language.

Multiple interpretations students have are lost when a teacher goes line-by-line, defining each word so all the students have the same meaning for the word. Line-by-line methods do not allow the students to draw on their own experiences and relate to the text in a more personal manner to allow deeper meaning (Gilbert, 1984, p. 603). Teachers should not be giving “reading lessons,” where they teach students words and sentence summary, but rather, showing their students how to analyze and think for themselves to understand a text because mechanically memorizing the description of an object, for example, does not mean the object is known (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 33). Analyzing skills, such as the ability to identify themes and character relationships, can be applied anywhere and are more helpful when seeing the text as a whole rather than line-by-line segments, in terms of student understanding. Though teachers think it is helpful for students to be on the same page by providing a summary of events, they are, in fact, preventing students from being original, creative, and intellectual by interpreting for them.

Students should not only look at words individually, but rather, as how the combination of such words influences the text as a whole and provide meaning to the text. Students will then see how words work together to form a story, themes, and important messages. Since teachers have limitations, such as time restrictions, they can only focus on a few things and not everything, and understanding the text as a whole is more important than learning vocabulary. Therefore, as a teacher, it is important to decide what scenes to go over in class so the students are able to understand the plot first, and then go in depth in those chosen scenes. Analysis, such as identifying themes, evaluating historical influence and allusions to society, encourages students to form their own interpretations and express them. Students should gain meaning from

the reading and focus on depth, rather than breath with minor depth, which confuses the student. Interpretation is the desired outcome. By focusing on words instead of themes, time is wasted and not used for the student to understand the larger message of Shakespeare's written morals.

Literacy creates culture because when students read, they take the culture of the text and apply it to their lives to influence their culture. Teaching technical language found in Shakespeare, for example, does not aid in formulating interpretation and prevents culture to be built and created. Literacy should not be viewed just as the development of skills to learn the dominant standard language (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 34). Reading is a cultural experience, but when there is an over emphasis on the technical language in the reading, it is difficult for students to relate the reading and gain knowledge beyond the words. Cultural experiences translate those words into meaning so that students can relate to them and learn from them, developing a story. When students read with the main purpose of gaining technical reading skills, the students only gain a larger vocabulary, so less emphasis should be on technical reading. The students do not understand why they must read the story, causing them to neglect and be unable to see the purpose of the story, the value of the story, or the sheer experience in practicing useful analytical and understanding skills (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 147 and 149). The students would appear to be reading simply because they are told to, which then makes the experience less pleasurable and appear almost torturous.

Additionally, it is important that the teachers choose readings, if they are able to, that reflects various cultures so students are able to question the text, which allows them develop skills of interpretation. A school system that focuses on reformulating the programs of geography, history, and the Portuguese language, for example, and attempts to change all the texts that are heavily filled with colonialist ideology, is gaining diversity in the curriculum so that more

students are able to relate to the events. If the reading does not embrace every student's culture, then it is necessary for the teachers to plan a lesson that focuses on relating the reading across a diverse classroom so that every student can understand and embrace the readings in their own way (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 144). Students are more likely to stop reading, use Sparknotes, not participate in classroom discussions, or become disinterested in reading altogether, as a result of not having diverse material.

Academic approaches to reading emphasize mastering reading skills and focus on how readers engage and interact with the objective world and each other. Interaction with the world, according to the cognitive development model, helps the construction of meaning (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 147). By focusing on meaning in relation to the world of Shakespeare, for example, rather than the self, the student can see modern day connections and analyze how reading provides insight into real world problems and situations. By connecting the reading to the student's life, reading a story written hundreds of years ago can then prove to still be relevant in a different time period.

Connections are the easiest and best way the human brain digests information and learns. Connections between text and reality draw on the reader's emotional response, such as engaging the reader in empathy, humor, sadness, and fear, allowing historical facts on the text that are given by the teacher to be easier to mentally manage (Metzger, 2002, p. 23 and 25). A teacher should provide students with a contextual or historical fact or two, about Shakespeare's time period, for example. The teacher can link the facts to a related concept for the students, then go back to the text and have the student make connections between the fact, relatable concept, and text. Drawing various connections and providing an emotional response in students is important because the brain becomes less responsive within three to five minutes of constant activity,

causing the need for it to rest (Perry, 2014, par. 3). In fact, only four to eight minutes of factual lecture time can be mentally tolerated before the brain engages in other activity, such as daydreaming or people watching out the window to keep its attention (Perry, 2014, par. 5). Connections provided by teachers between text and concept are not the result of the student's mind, nor relatable to everyone in the room, because it is the teacher's interpretation given to the students, not their own imaginative powers at work. Teachers should use the students' lack of attention span as a way to actively involve the students by addressing their need for more creative and interactive assignments. Teachers should take advantage of their students' imaginative abilities to further engage them in the reading.

The imagination of students is important for teachers to take advantage of because Shakespeare's plays were meant to be seen. In fact, reading is interpreting the assembling of written expression of something said orally. The teacher cannot put pieces of words, interpretation, and understanding together for the student; that is the student's creative task. While some students say a good text is all you need to form a mental picture, other students find it difficult to read something without having a visual for it, so those students need a visual to help them re-enact the events in their mind. Words express a language filled with anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams. They should be filled with meaning of a student's experience and not the teacher's experience because it is how the students learn words and apply words to their environment and daily life events (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 35 and 148). They are based on the cultural context they are used in when read, and it is the job of the reader to decode these words in a situation in order to find the meaning and understand how humans affect the world. We read the world before we are able to read words (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 32 and 142). From birth and early childhood, students are trying to learn the ways of the world. They are trying to

understand how to communicate among each other by reading social cues and nonverbal body language. The students are learning about how to fit in and survive, reading the world and allowing it to easily be pictured in the mind, aiding in the connection process when reading words. Connections between student and text can also be made through seeing the text performed, for example, because students will be given a visual on how characters interact to help form an understanding of how certain scenes of the play work together to form meaning.

## **METHODS OF TEACHING**

Ideas that have been raised about the importance of engaging students through multiple interpretations, connections to personal experience, reader predictions, understanding context beyond summary in the previous literature review will be brought to the classroom through the following suggested teaching methods. The goal of these methods is to show how teaching methods, beyond line-by-line summarizing, that involve creative writing, historical context, character-relating, and body language, encourage students to actively interact with Shakespeare's plays. These methods will help teach students how to develop in-depth analyzing skills so the students are less reliant on online venues for basic understanding of the text.

## **CREATIVE WRITING METHODS**

Time does not allow teachers to thoroughly go over a large section of a play. Multiple texts will be read over the course of the year and with a class time of fifty minutes, it is unreasonable to think a teacher can cover every page, symbol, theme, and element of a play within such time restraints. Therefore, a teacher should choose a few important scenes of the play to discuss in class because a small portion, as small as one line, of a scene is all students need to get involved. Creative writing may involve having students focus on sections of a

Shakespeare play. It is a more effective method to consider as alternatives to the traditional line-by-line method.

One creative assignment that a teacher can use is having students write eulogies for lost characters. Writing a eulogy, from either the character's or student's perspective, involves students choosing a dead character and writing memorial moments of that character that create an image of the character viewed from another character (Millard, Ziegler, & Custer, 1984, p. 615). Eulogies show relationships between characters and will have students combine real events that happened to the character mentioned in the reading with created events to emphasize a certain character trait about that dead character. For example, in *Hamlet*, Hamlet's father dies and becomes a ghost. A student might write a eulogy written by Hamlet that speaks about how his father has always valued tradition. The story about how his father's ghost visited Hamlet and wants him to follow the tradition of seeking revenge for his murder can be mentioned and mixed with a made-up story about when Hamlet was a child and his interactions with his father regarding the concept of following traditions, such as how it may have been a tradition for the family to always invite traveling players in to entertain the court. Specific scenes will be exploited to derive meaning behind character traits and fiction can be fused with the scene to add multidimensional characters.

Another assignment a teacher could ask students to complete is re-writing the end or a specific scene of the play. Re-writing endings or scenes show that students understand the original version enough to change an element of it and apply a cause and effect relationship. For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, shows Hamlet's desire for justice and intelligence by creating a play that re-enacts his father's murder to see if his uncle shows signs of guilt. The scene is a pivotal point in the play that proves King Claudius's guiltiness. A student

may choose this important scene to rewrite. The re-writing may change the perception of Hamlet's values from justice to his love of art. Instead of creating the play to prove his uncle's guiltiness, he may have created the play because of his love for plays and entertainment, in this version. The uncle then may not be displaying guilt, but rather, a dislike for Hamlet's taste in art, leading to a conclusion that Hamlet needs a new plot to prove his uncle is guilty of murder, which the student can then create. Dislike for Hamlet's taste may also lead to the conclusion that the plot of the Shakespeare play has changed from seeking revenge to seeking common ground between two characters with opposite taste. Re-writing a scene will allow students to mold the story in a direction they would like to see it go, and in doing so, they will see how by changing one element of the scene leads to a different conclusion or story in general. Students will then be able to see how scenes are connected and interdependent on each other, understanding that Shakespeare wrote specific scenes on purpose. They will be able to see how each scene serves a purpose to continue the plot, such as creating a mystery, showing doubt in a character, make an allusion to historical events, or creating audience suspense for better engagement.

## **THEORIES AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT METHODS**

Some teachers ask their students to analyze and interpret characters and the plot of the Shakespearian play. When students interpret, they create a theory, a human constructed system of ideas intended to explain something or account for a situation or course of action. Since they are humanly constructed, theories are not objective or always true. A theory can contain multiple points of view that are not always sound. Therefore, it would be beneficial to share these theories in class so students can obtain a well-rounded view and understanding of the play.

Part of creating a theory involves prediction. A teacher can use prediction, where one understands, predicts, and controls what will happen under certain circumstances, with historical

context to frame a background and help students understand the circumstances of situations that happen in the plot. For example, to aid students in understanding the historical frame of Shakespeare plays, a teacher can first discuss the Elizabethan theatre through the use of PowerPoint slides of information and pictures that provide practical and architectural information at the time Shakespeare wrote the play. Then, a teacher can generate a discussion that involves students comparing the Elizabethan past to the present time and place in which the students are reading it (Collins, 1990, p. 254).

Furthermore, giving a historical survey of the Elizabethan era as a foundation for the play in terms of political issues, class standings, and economic power struggles, is helpful for students to understand and grasp what life was like when Shakespeare wrote the play. It provides insight into the struggles the characters face in Shakespeare's plays that drive them to make the decisions they do. In fact, Sharon King, a high school Drama and English teacher, writes about her own experience teaching the playwright's works using a historical method approach in "From Page to Stage, Bringing Shakespeare to Life." King states, "We investigated Renaissance music, dance, and culture. We created masks and talked about their significance and what they suggested about the party where Romeo and Juliet meet. I followed the directions to teach the students a medieval dance ... My final assessment was a character analysis essay ... that dissects the motives of characters" (King, 2007, p. 10). When given a historical background, students are able to understand the context of the play better and relive the time period, understanding the mental decisions and actions of the main characters.

Teachers can give students an assignment that has them use their imagination and creativity to form a theory of how the play's plot would be different if the setting were changed, and then write a short story re-telling of the scene or play in it. The setting can be changed in

terms of location, or time. For example, in *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, where Hamlet puts on a play that re-enacts the murder of his father to prove his uncle's guiltiness, a student could change the time and location to present day New York City. Changing the time and location will show the student how setting greatly influences the plot.

In our day, Hamlet would not be able to stage a play so easily because there would be no traveling players to listen to him. Instead, King Claudius would be put on trial because policemen and technology would be able to place him at the crime scene with fingerprints, photos, or some sort of DNA. Plus, there is no concept of royalty in the United States of America. Thus, the plot of revenge and the entire cause of murdering to become King would not exist. The plot might change into a corporate battle where one man murders another to become president of a company, but the concept of seeking revenge would still be different because there is no cycle of revenge today that sons are obligated to continue when a family member dies. The plot may change from a man who tries to seek justice for the death of a loved one to a plot where the murderer faces no consequences and his crimes are never found out. As a result, character actions, attitudes, and values might change as well. Possibilities are numerous in how the play would change. Moreover, the students can create their own production of the play with how it would have been done in Shakespeare's time period, as they come to terms with some of the problems presented in the plays, exploring the ramifications of both versions.

However, in order to write a short story set in the present day or New York City, the student needs to understand how the historical context of the original version has influenced the play. For example, if a character speaks in verse, he or she is of nobility. However, no one regularly speaks in verse today, so telling if a character is noble would be done through different physical and behavioral observation techniques, such as what brand or type of clothes the

character is wearing, and how well a character may speak or carry him or herself. From seeing how the language itself would change to seeing how the very foundation of the plot would change, setting and its historical context influences the play, and by having students play around with those influences, students can see how various parts of the play connect. Seeing connections of how certain parts are dependent on each other will help students improve their understanding of the work as a whole. Providing historical context allows students to bridge the gap between Shakespeare and the modern world, allowing students to understand the gravity of Shakespeare's works.

## **CHARACTER-RELATING METHODS**

Shakespeare raises several questions about morality and justice that allows students to relate and observe character development. Character-relating methods consist of a teacher choosing a few characters from the text and discussing how these character interact with others and events in the text. The teacher then generates a list of character traits, values, and morals with the students so that students may be able to see commonalities between their own identity and how the characters are portrayed. Students will then be able to understand why characters act and make the decisions they do in the text by relating character thought processes, feelings, actions, and influences to their own experiences. For example, students may be able to relate when Juliet is abandoned by her father, mother, and nurse in Act 3, scene 5, of *Romeo and Juliet*, leaving her utterly alone in a moment of greatest need. The stage is empty and we are able to see the agony in our own society when children who are left by their parents go through the difficult world.

Character-relating methods can be applied to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, because students are able to relate to the character of King Claudius, for example, in terms of his

feeling of guilt and his desire to want power. King Claudius is watching a play that re-enacts how he murdered his brother. He begins to feel guilty, ridden with shame and fear that someone knows he is the murderer. He stands abruptly and leaves the play, confirming Hamlet's suspicions that he is guilty. Students are able to relate to this scene because guilt is an emotion that we have all experienced in life. Students can discuss how various scenes, such as this one, can be applied to their lives in order to form connections with the characters that go beyond text-surface level.

One assignment that applies to the character-relating method is having the students keep a journal where they can relate to the emotions of the characters at the moment, which allows the students to think about how they would react in certain situations. As students begin to read into character emotions and actions, they will begin to identify with characters and learn how characters develop over time, creating a certain attachment to some characters. By having an emotional attachment with the text through character-relating, students can then analyze the actions and decisions made by certain characters, and then see how the plot develops and concludes based on those decisions.

These journals should be reviewed to make sure the students are interacting with the text, making it important that the teacher announces before the assignment that he or she will be reading the journals. The teacher should let the students know they should not write anything too personal or private that may make them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, but also let the students know that the teacher will be keeping confidentiality when it comes to such personal writing. . Journal writing aids in not only understanding characters, but with students' writing as well.

In Act 3, scene 2 of *Hamlet*, for example, King Claudius is experiencing guilt, which may lead to journal entries where students write about a time they experienced the same emotion. These entries may contain a discussion of when a student spoke poorly of a friend behind their back, or stereotyped someone, or went to a party when they were not supposed to, then felt bad about doing such actions afterward.

A more creative assignment that combines the character-relating method with the creative writing method is for students to relate to characters in Shakespearian plays by writing a short story or re-tell a scene from the perspective of a different narrating character that the student relates to. The student can write the scene or short story based on what they would have done if they were the character in the situation. The students will be able to empathize with the characters whose voice they are representing. For example, in Act 3, scene 2 of *Hamlet*, it can be seen that Hamlet is acting as narrator through his various monologues that provides the audience with insight into his plan of creating a play that re-enacts the murder of his father in order to unleash the guilty conscious of his uncle. A student can then re-tell the scene through the perspective of King Claudius. King Claudius is rarely heard from in the scene, and by having a student write his perspective, it allows the student to relate to and understand how the character is feeling, and what the character is emotionally, mentally, and physically going through. The student could write about King Claudius's thoughts on the play that Hamlet created, for instance, which could focus on the guilt he feels for murdering his brother since guilt is a relatable feeling. The students can be creative in this assignment, allowing them to break away from the constant of writing formal papers, and encouraged to use the right brain of conceptual involvement, rather than the more traditional left brain's linear approach (Flachmann, 1984, p. 646). Plus, if a student

can write from the perspective of a character, then the student is displaying an understanding of the play.

Another assignment that uses the character-relating method is having students write a paper on how they relate to one character in the text. For example, allow students to choose one character from the Shakespeare text, such as *Hamlet*. Students will come up with a concept the character values, such as justice or family that matches their own set of values. Students can compare and contrast the character's and students' value in terms of how they both show they value that concept, why that particular concept is valued, and how the value has influenced their actions or decisions.

For instance, in *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, we see that Hamlet values justice. Hamlet spends his time plotting and planning *The Mousetrap* as a play to set his uncle up and see if King Claudius is guilty of killing his father or not. Hamlet creates the play that re-enacts the murder of his father, rather than taking the ghost of Hamlet Senior's word that King Claudius murdered him. The value of this plan can be seen that Hamlet can give his uncle a fair sentencing of his crime, rather than to kill him at any time based on a ghost's word. The value of justice can be seen when Hamlet tells Horatio, "Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt / Do not itself unkennel in one speech, / It is a damned ghost that we have seen'" (Shakespeare, 2008, p. 158). Students can then relate to the value they chose. For example, a student might compare Hamlet's discovery of his uncle's guilty conscience as he seeks justice of the murder with a moment where a friend told the student a rumor and the student decided to find out the truth behind the rumor before deciding to believe it or not. In both cases, justice is being sought after and valued. Through comparing characters to student feelings and experiences, the student can further identify with the events and actions in the play.

Values in Shakespeare's plays raise questions that students "must face in their own lives, questions about death and separation; love and lust; loyalty and betrayal; the competing claims of justice and mercy; the acquisitions and use of power; ... the passing of time and the changes...it brings with it" (Collins, 1990, p. 253). By allowing students to use their power of original thought and personal examination, they are able to read subjectively, rather than objectively. Reading subjectively means students are able to individualize the text, which allows students to express their own theory about the character actions and development, as well as analyze the motives underlying these actions. Individualize the text allows the student to make their own criticisms and thoughtful interpretations of the text as they relate it their own experiences (Maxey, 1893, p. 108).

Relating the plays to students by having them analyze characters and their interactions with other characters is useful because they are more motivated to continue the experience and read more. In fact, "Motivation, inquiry, and integration are keys to the successful learning experience. The student must be motivated and willing to learn. The student needs to seek information that will be valuable in decision-making and lifelong problem solving" (Tippens, 1984, p. 654). Students frame characters based on their own experiences, using a mixture of imagination and reality. When students use their experiences to create an understanding of characters, a connection is formed between students and the play, helping students become more engaged with the reading. The connection is created because students begin to identify with the characters through the relation of similar experiences that happened in the student's own life, allowing students to form an understanding and perception of such characters by comparing and contrasting these similar experiences. Understanding characters through personal connections will then enhance student understanding of the play.

## **BODY LANGUAGE METHODS**

Body language is an important lesson to cover because it can help the student look at character interactions in a more understanding manner. Body language is non-verbal communication that is equally important to look at in a Shakespearian text as the dialogue because these texts are plays. Plays are meant to be seen. Since the plays are being read, the students must take it upon themselves to imagine the silent interactions between characters because it is through these interactions that strong evidence can be provided on how one character may be feeling. A teacher can use this method by educating students to go beyond stage directions in the text by teaching students how to read body language and gestures through the use of visual aids, such as a video. Visual aids show how people communicate with each other and convey thoughts and emotions with their body, such as facial expressions. Once students understand how to interpret body language, the students can then look for moments of non-verbal communication in the text to see how it affects the other characters in the scene and the overall understanding of the scene. Body movements enhance what is being said by a character and may convey a contrast to what a character may be saying, which then provides insight into the character's motives, for example. In fact, "much that is educational about classroom drama is focused on discoveries – both the characters' discoveries and the students' discoveries about what is going on and what it means" (Robbins, 2005, p. 65 ). By teaching body language and showing how characters may use it in the text, students will discover how non-verbal communication is used to convey meaning.

Body language is one method of teaching Shakespeare that can motivate students to physically interact with one another by using a text as a guide. To use body language as a teaching mechanism, the teacher must first provide the class with a short lesson on how to read

body language. The lesson on body language will vary based on how much depth the teacher is able to cover in class. The more in depth the teacher goes, the better the students will understand and be able to apply the material to real world situations and the Shakespearian text the students are analyzing. However, not every teacher has the time to teach body language and stray away from the reading material for a whole class period, for example. Therefore, it is up to the teacher to decide how many body language activities the students should do until it is time to apply the concept to teaching Shakespeare.

Teaching body language should go beyond simple explanations of gestures, the respective meanings and attitudes associated with those gestures, and the stage directions mentioned in the text. Instead, teachers can provide a short scene from a popular TV show at the time that students are interested in, allowing students to relate and enjoy the process of analyzing body language in the scene. Students will enjoy the process more because they will be entertained by their interest in the show, which will lead to the motivation to pay attention. The scene method will also allow students to have a visual aid to reinforce the verbal explanation of body language.

Students who learn about body language will be able to analyze the sending, transmitting, and receiving messages, known as the Shannon-Weaver Model, of non-verbal communication. Messages are thought up by the sender, transmitted, and leave the receiver to decode the message and reply to the message with necessary feedback. The feedback is the most important aspect of this cycle, because without it, the sender is unclear whether the message was delivered correctly, accurately, and in an understandable manner that provides meaning for the receiver. Feedback creates room for improvement in communication.

After the teacher has chosen a scene to aid in teaching body language, the scene can then be analyzed in the following fashion to allow students to learn these analyzing skills by like detectives. Students will try to discover what meaning is implied by non-verbal communication alone, and how verbal communication re-enforces it. Showing a video of a short clip allows students to become social scientists, relating to other disciplines that may attract and engage students who are uninterested in the subject of English. For example, if the scene is about a historical event, then the students interested in history will be more engaged in the lesson.

For this paper, a scene from the TV show *Seinfeld*, “The Boyfriend” episode will be analyzed for communicative uses as a template for teachers to follow when teaching acting through body language. *Seinfeld* was chosen based on the popularity of the show during my own high school experience and generation. It is also a familiar show with most educators, due to it being a generational show. By knowing the chosen show, the educators can then understand the importance of teaching body language and adapt this template to use in their classroom. By choosing a well-known show, students will become more engaged in the lesson. The chosen *Seinfeld* scene for this paper contains a “magic loogie” story that is directly paralleled to the story of the John F. Kennedy’s magic bullet story, which contains a theory about how the JFK assassination must have a second shooter.

In summary, the scene re-enacts an event where two characters were spit on by, they believe, Keith Hernandez. Another character does not believe the story and proposes the idea of a second spitter. Throughout the scene, the characters use facial expressions and gestures, such as crossed arms, an open chest, and eye rolls, to convey their thoughts and feelings to each other. For example, a character who rolls his eyes shows he is uninterested in listening to the story, and that he is bored and defensive. These gestures and stances are important to point out to the

students because they help promote an understanding of the story. Other uses of body language that can be discussed is head nodding to provide feedback of understanding and agreement, hands on the hip or behind the lower back to show confidence, chin stroking to show deep thought and evaluation, and rubbing palms together to show eagerness and anticipation. Body language is used to emphasize the events happening in the scene and the words that the characters are saying. The vicinity of characters may also be discussed to show character relationships.

The teacher can have the class take notes on the scene with the intention of having a large class discussion when the scene is over, and can pause throughout the scene to discuss, with the students, about the body language the characters are using. Watching the scene without sound may also be taken into consideration so the only communication cues seen by the students are body language, allowing the students to see how much they can “read” from this information. The teacher should show the scene once without stopping so students become familiar with the events that are going on in the scene. Once the scene has been viewed, the scene can then be replayed in the stop-and-go manner for open discussion. It is important that the teacher does not stop-and-go too much during the scene because then it acts more as a distraction than a visual aid used for teaching body language.

Some questions to ask the students throughout the stop-and-go of the scene, in order to get them thinking, include: What gestures are being used in this scene? How has body language influenced our understanding of the characters so far? How would (insert character’s name) body language make you feel if you were in the scene? How might (insert character’s name) body language influence (insert another character’s name)? Who seems to have the power in this scene? How can you tell? These questions can then be asked when looking at scenes in the text

to help students see how gestures that may not be included in the stage directions of the text convey meaning. These questions may also be asked if a teacher chooses to show the film version of the Shakespearian scene the class is focusing on and discussing.

The scene shows how actions speak louder than words. The body language exercise can then be applied to the Shakespeare text the class is learning at the time. To continue with the same scene as before from *Hamlet*, where King Claudius watches the play that Hamlet has set up to prove his guilty conscious and confirm Hamlet's suspicions that he killed Hamlet's father, the body language method can be applied to show how different meanings can be conveyed to bring a different meaning to the text. Shakespeare writes the body language in Ophelia's lines by having her say, "The King rises" (Shakespeare, 2008, p. 162). However, there is more to body language of rising up from a chair that is happening in this scene that lets the audience know the King is feeling guilty or "frightened," as Hamlet puts in (Shakespeare, 2008, p. 162). What were the King's facial expressions? Was he doing anything with his hands? How did he convey his emotions? By having a few students re-enact this scene, without talking, only using their body language to convey the King's thoughts, students will begin to realize how important body language is to understanding the text as a whole.

The body language method can be used by having students break into equal groups to re-enact lines 230-248 of Act 3, scene 2, where Player Lucianus pours poison in the play the court is watching, which causes King Claudius to rise, stop the play, and leave the scene. Depending on whether the class is outgoing and active participants or whether they are shier, give each group either a different piece a paper that describes how King Claudius should act while watching the play at this part in the scene, or have students create their own ideas on how they

want to portray King Claudius. A more active group is more likely to come up with their own outcome, while a shier class may need more direction by being given a way to act.

Once the groups know their assignment, the teacher should give the groups roughly five to ten minutes to practice. After the allotted practice time, have each group present in front of the classroom for their classmates. For example, one group may decide to portray King Claudius as “happy” and another group may portray him as “guilty.” “Happy” and “guilty” have two separate body language distinctions. The “happy” group may use facial expression of smiling and look eager to watch the play by having wide, open eyes. The group may have King Claudius clapping or putting his hand to his face in a thinking manner. Meanwhile, the “guilty” group may have the student acting as King Claudius looking around the room with shifty eyes, sink lower in his seat, look around the room for an escape or to see if anyone else is looking at him, and have restless hands that are tapping the arm of the chair or that he is fidgeting. To prevent nerves that some students have when they present in front of their peers, the body language method has students take the chosen scene and perform it through body language alone. No words can be spoken.

After each group presents, the class will then discuss what body language was used to convey a certain meaning of the scene. For example, when discussing the “happy” group, the discussion may mention how when King Claudius stood up, it appeared as if he had to go to the bathroom or something came up, but not that he intentionally wanted the play to stop. He may have seemed he did not want to inconvenience anyone and just wanted to excuse himself, rather than felt guilty for seeing the correlation between the play and his own actions of killing King Hamlet. However, the discussion about the “guilty” group may lead to the conclusion that King Claudius found parallels between the players and himself, regretting, and feeling guilty about his own actions, fearing he would be found out that he killed the previous king.

These different reactions of King Claudius in the scene provide different meaning for how the scene can be interpreted. If Hamlet saw King Claudius as happy while watching the play, then his plan would have been foiled and he would need to find a new way to find out whether King Claudius killed his father or not. Then, after a discussion of each group's portrayal, a discussion on how the students interpret the King to be acting in Shakespeare's scene should happen, allowing the students to revisit the text and become enlightened in how the lines Ophelia say means nothing without the body language of King Claudius. It is the King's gestures and facial expressions that aid the audience in learning what he is thinking that leads to Hamlet to suspect him as guilty. Since the play is being read and not seen, it is then important to use the body-language method to show students the usefulness of reading between the words written on paper and interact with the text.

Once the students understand the concept of body language, this body language teaching method then consists of having students perform a scene from the play, focusing on a single character. The students should then see how that character relates to other characters by exploring how the scene may be presented in various ways (Millard, 1984, p. 614). Focusing on a character and his or her actions allows students to discover traits about the character, as well as make discoveries on what is going on and what it means (Robbins, 2005, p. 65).

The body-language method involves a lack of words, which lessens the stress of memorizing lines, the ineffective approach that is part of the line-by-line method. Students that memorize lines "often spend their focus on remembering instead of reacting to what is going on around them" (Robbins, 2005, p. 68). Students need to react to character actions, thoughts, and events in order to interpret the text and connect to it. Writing down the teacher's notes during a lecture on Act One and discussing the topics in the introduction of the play might help students

attain good grades in the examinations. However, “the best way of preparing for an examination on a Shakespeare play is to act in it. To act any part one has to understand the lines...and acquire a full knowledge of the character based on what he does, what he says, and what other characters say about him” (Muir, 1984, p. 642). When students act out scenes, it is easier for them to remember and convey lines because the speaker has found connections with the lines, becoming the character and not just restating words (Gilbert, 1984, p. 603). Therefore, when students perform, even with only their body language, they must understand their character in order to be able to present their character in an understandable manner to their peers.

Once the students understand the importance of body language, they will realize that volume and tone of voice can only go so far. The body speaks a language that everyone can understand, helping students in applying this lesson to Shakespeare and real life by creating effective communication. By using appropriate gestures to emphasize key points, as well as enforcing and helping understanding of what the students are trying to say, students can enhance their understanding for the playwright.

Understanding body language allows teachers to use performance mechanism to further engage students with their Shakespeare text. Performance as a reading technique may move beyond line-by-line to incorporate a broader reading of context and connection. Body language performance is a useful method because “Drama-based classroom activities can promote active learning” (Robbins, 2005, p. 65). Active engagement with the text, such as performance, allows students to learn through physical interaction with the language because the human brain is better at remembering what is seen and can relate to, than reading words on a page (O’Brien, 1995, p. 168). It is better to involve students in performance activities than to provide them with a ‘correct’ interpretation of the text (Millard, Ziegler, & Custer, 1984, p. 615). Interpretation

should not be provided by teachers and given to the students. Students need to learn analytical skills on their own. Analytical skills can be learned through practicing interpretation, which can begin with seeing how body language influences the understanding of the characters, events, and issues in the text.

The body language method can also be applied to teachers who have their students watch the movie version of the Shakespeare play. Instead of watching one movie, which may bore students, the teacher can view clips from various movie versions of the plays and compare and contrast these versions' use of body language. The different versions can be analyzed in terms of character gestures to see how the same play was interpreted by each director differently to portray various meanings. These various meanings can then be analyzed to see how it influenced the students' understanding of the play. When viewing these clips, some questions to ask include: Are the gestures the same? Which version do you prefer based on the body language? Why? What does it tell us about the characters?

Viewing different versions of a play can change the students' overall perception and understanding of that play. Perception is important because it provides a basis for how interpretation can be found and supported, rather than the teaching of an interpretation and telling students how to view the play (Gilbert, 1984, p. 607). Perception allows students the opportunity to have their own interpretation of the play that is not based off what the teacher tells them during lecturing and discussion.

The purpose of the body language method is so that students can apply their knowledge of non-verbal communication and give off a desired meaning from the scene that the class must interpret. Basically, it is so students can send a message with the body and speak with the hands,

the face, and the body, instead of the mouth. The gestures that characters make influence our understanding of those characters.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, reading is a process of connecting with the text. It is relating previous experiences through the use of background knowledge to create an understanding of the reading. By making reading relatable, texts can be more easily understood because it engages the student as a reader, allowing the interaction between text and imagination to fill any informational and content gaps in the readings, making the reading unique to each reader, allowing multiple meanings of the same words.

Teachers need to allow their students to communicate with the text and each other by enforcing multiple interpretations. They also need to stimulate the creative ability of the imagination to make connections with the text. Multiple interpretations enrich classroom discussion, rather than summarizing the text line-by-line, where all students have the same, basic interpretation, which is not mentally stimulating. Line-by-line methods lead to student mental fatigue and shallow learning because students are less engaged with readings they cannot relate to. They begin to get frustrated with readings that seem difficult to understand because they may have seen the reading differently than the teacher, yet are taught the teacher's view. Line-by-line teaching does not help students understand the text, and this factor contradicts a teacher's role. Instead, more engaging methods, such as creative writing assignments, providing historical context, having students relate to characters, and using body language in the text as an important source of communication, are preferable. Engaging the student through these methods, rather than line-by-line summary, provides the student with more opportunities to interact and make

connections with the text. And this is how Shakespeare can be communicated effectively to students.

## REFERENCES

- Almansouri, O., Balian, A. S., & Sawdy, J. (2009). Student voices: How has performing Shakespeare helped you appreciate his work? *English Journal*, 99 (1), 35-36. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org>.
- Collins, M. J. (1990). For world and stage: An approach to teaching Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (2), 251-261. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Cunningham, K. (1998). Shakespeare, the public, and public education. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49 (3), 293-298. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- David, L., & Levin, L. (Writer), & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1992). The boyfriend, part 1 [Television series episode]. In Castle Rock Entertainment (Producer), *Seinfeld*, Los Angeles, CA: CBS Studios.
- Flachmann, M. (1984). Teaching Shakespeare through parallel scenes. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 644-646. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Friere, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Gilbert, M. (1984). Teaching Shakespeare through performance. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 601-608. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Shakespeare, W. (2008). *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford edition* (Vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Greenblatt, S. (Ed.). pp. 116-204. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Halio, J. L. (1990). Team learning. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (2), 230-234. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Iser, W. (1989). *Prospecting: From reader response to literary anthropology*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kidd, D. (2011). The mantle of Macbeth. *English In Education*, 45 (1), 72-85.

doi:10.1111/j.1754-8845.2010.01083.x

King, S. (2007). From page to stage, bringing Shakespeare to life: Using all four standards to motivate students to read the world. *California English*, 13 (2), 9-11. Retrieved from <http://www.cateweb.org>.

Maxey, C. L. (1893). Teaching Shakespeare. *The School Review*, 1 (2), 105-108. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

Metzger, M. (2002). "The villainy you teach me...": Shakespeare and AP English literature. *English Journal*, 92 (1), 22-28. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

Millard, B. C., Ziegler, G., & Custer, G. R. (1984). 'Playing out the play': Actors, teachers, and students in the classroom. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 609-615. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

Muir, K. (1984). The wrong way and the right way. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 642-643. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

Murphy, P. E. (1984). Poems and poetry: Writing useful for teaching Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 647-652. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

O'Brien, P. (1995). 'And gladly teach': Books, articles, and a bibliography on the teaching of Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (2), 165-172. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.

Paquette, M. G. (2007). Sex and violence: Words at play in the Shakespeare classroom. *English Journal*, 96 (3), 40-45. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org>.

Perry, B. (2014). How the brain learns best. Retrieved from <http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/brainlearns.htm>.

- Powell, M. G. (2010). Moving into Shakespeare: Using kinesthetic activities to teach Shakespearean text. *California English*, 15 (4), 6-8. Retrieved from <http://www.cateweb.org>.
- Robbins, B. (2005). Using the original approach to teach Shakespeare. *English Journal*, 95 (1), 65. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1995). *Literature as exploration* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America.
- Scholnicov, H. (1995). An intertextual approach to teaching Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (2), 210-219. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Smith, F. (2004). *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Thompson, A. (1990). 'King Lear' and the politics of teaching Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (2), 139-146. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Tippens, D. (1984). Crossing the curriculum with Shakespeare. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (5), 653-656. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.