

BRITISH  
SHAKESPEARE  
ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 22

SPRING  
2022

# teaching shakespeare

POLICY • PEDAGOGY • PRACTICE

*Issue 22 – Spring 2022*

ISSN 2049-3568 (Print) • ISSN 2049-3576 (Online)

HOW AND WHY SHOULD WE PLAY WITH SHAKESPEARE? DR JANE COLES,  
DR MAGGIE PITFIELD NICK BENTLEY, RAE GARVIN AND STEPHANIE DALE DISCUSS  
NIQUELLE LATOUCHE AND JESS HUGHES SUGGEST WAYS TO DISRUPT AND DECOLONIZE  
EXPLORE GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN NEW WAYS WITH JAMES HODGE AND ALICE PENFOLD  
CONSIDER THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LIVE SHAKESPEARE WITH CATHY BALDWIN

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This guest edited issue of *Teaching Shakespeare* is a product of a conference run by the London Association for the Teaching of English, or L.A.T.E. The London Association for the Teaching of English was established in 1947. As stated on our website, ‘we work to defend and promote progressive and inclusive versions of English curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and to celebrate the work of English teachers and their students.’

This issue of *Teaching Shakespeare* has arisen from a conference in April 2021 entitled: ‘Other Shakespeare’s Are Possible.’ Over the course of a very difficult year for many teachers, L.A.T.E met several times. In our committee meetings one prevailing issue was how we kept dialogic, collaborative meaning making alive in the online spaces in which we found ourselves teaching. There was, it appeared, a surge in popularity for pedagogies that saw knowledge as fixed, quizzing the main means through

which to assess pupils and participation very limited. We also saw, as many have reflected on, the Black Lives Matter movement take flight and schools hurry to diversify and decolonise their curriculum. L.A.T.E issued a statement on this which is written below and also can be found here: <https://londonenglishteachers.com/about/in-response-to-current-events-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

This issue showcases the ways in which over many decades and in ongoing work, teachers and academics are not thinking only about what they teach (these articles all pertain to Shakespeare, of course) but how they teach and the ways in which they position their pupils and themselves in relation to content, knowledge and ideas.

A reading list collated by our long time committee member Diane Leedham can be found here: [https://liveuclac-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/rtnvms0\\_ucl\\_ac\\_uk/EasDBg8R5AdPqGcIJT-EQ\\_EB9LHuvuVwhvTlaZaN4itGBA?rtime=nxB83vzo2Ug](https://liveuclac-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/rtnvms0_ucl_ac_uk/EasDBg8R5AdPqGcIJT-EQ_EB9LHuvuVwhvTlaZaN4itGBA?rtime=nxB83vzo2Ug)

This issue of the magazine draws on the papers from the conference including our keynote speakers Dr Maggie Pitfield and Dr Jane Coles, Rae Garvin and Nick Bentley. Each of their papers, along with King’s College London

From its very inception in 1947, LATE has been a forum for dialogue, a space where teachers can collaboratively share and develop their practice, formulating as well as responding to education policy. It is an organisation that acknowledges the act of teaching as a political one.

LATE has always been committed to inclusive and antiracist practice, pedagogy and curriculum. We stand with all those that have been marginalised and othered through the policies of neoliberalism and austerity; we stand with Black and working-class people and with all whose identities have been effaced; we stand with every teacher and student who has been excluded or silenced by the imposition of educational policies and practices that seek to enforce conformity to a mythical monocultural norm. This is important, perhaps more than ever, as we respond to the current context of the pandemic and the forces that are at play within the lockdown.

There are huge opportunities that have emerged as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement: there is more concerted effort to decolonise the curriculum, for example. There are, however, very real threats that are still posed to English teachers: threats to our ability to organise and intervene, but also that the pandemic is being used to consolidate and promote versions of English that are straightforwardly inimical to any inclusive, dialogic, antiracist practice.

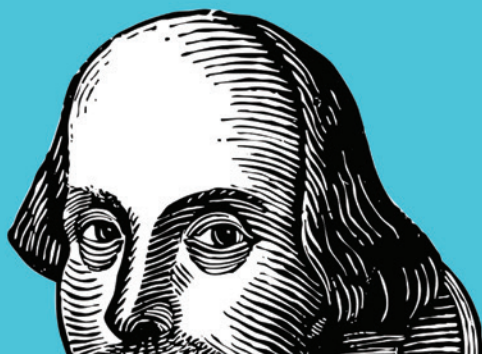
LATE continues to be an organisation that seeks to empower teachers through research of their own practice and that values student voices and identity above all else. We will continue to work alongside other campaigning organisations to bring into existence a more equitable and socially just education system, as an integral part of a better, fairer society.



A PELICAN  
BOOK

# This is Shakespeare How to Read the World's Greatest Playwright Emma Smith

'The best introduction  
to the plays I've read,  
perhaps the best book  
on Shakespeare, full stop'  
ALEX PRESTON, OBSERVER



PGCE student Stephanie Dale's, could be said to focus on active and playful approaches to teaching Shakespeare.

Elsewhere, from Alice Penfold, Niquelle LaTouche and James Hodge, we have more conceptual considerations of the plays we teach and the lenses through which we teach them: how do we explore race, queer identity and gender in our classrooms? And finally, we look to Dr. Cathy Baldwin and Jess Hughes' articles on ways in which we ask students to experience and respond to Shakespeare inside and outside the classroom.

What unites the articles in the issue is that they include real world examples of what goes on in classrooms which are both reflective and practical. They focus on the learners in the room and what they see, feel and think. Reading them opened my mind, gave me new ideas and made me reflect on my own practice. I am excited to take these ideas into my classroom this new academic year. I hope you will come away from reading with a similar feeling and, like me, might be provoked to consider how you teach Shakespeare as well as why.



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# PUTTING pLAY BACK INTO THE pLAY

## TEACHING SHAKESPEARE IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

**D**R JANE COLES taught English in London comprehensive schools for fifteen years before moving into higher education. Until recently she led the MA English Education programme at UCL's Institute of Education. Her published research focuses on the teaching of Shakespeare, creative literacies and the place of canonical literature in school curricula. She has edited three titles in the Cambridge School Shakespeare series.

**DR MAGGIE PITFIELD** has pursued a long career as both an English and Drama teacher in London comprehensive schools and an academic and researcher in higher education. Formerly Head of the Department of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths, her most recent research focuses on educational drama and how it is employed as part of the reading process in the secondary English classroom.

Recent debates about the Government's post-Covid education 'recovery' plans for young people have drawn attention once again to the importance of play in learning. Psychologists and educationalists have joined forces in arguing for a 'summer of play' (Weale 2021). Even the government-appointed 'Recovery Tsar', Kevan Collins, in his resignation letter (2 June 2021) endorsed a wider remit to 'catch up' than politicians' narrowly defined – and underfunded – programme of additional lessons will allow. Although the relationship between play and learning is more generally accepted in early years education, scepticism about its value in the later stages of schooling prevails in British culture. From a secondary perspective, however, it is worth reminding ourselves that according to Vygotsky (1931) play remains integral to learning, particularly in the development of imagination and creativity during adolescence.

Considering the place of play in the secondary English literature curriculum more specifically, there cannot be many English teachers who would argue against the proposition that *enjoyment* should be a foundational element of literary study, especially during young people's formative reading years. Enjoyment, however, seems conspicuous by its absence from the reading specifications in the current National Curriculum for secondary English (DfE 2014). Policy-makers' dispiritingly narrow and un-

ambitious vision is, perhaps, best summed up by their demand that the nation's fourteen-to-sixteen-year-olds are to be 'taught' to 'appreciate' great works from the English literary canon including Shakespeare. The level of students' 'appreciation' of these works is to be assessed solely by means of a terminal written examination that privileges narrow forms of textual analysis along with memorisation of quotations as markers of success. Presumably dissatisfied with Shakespeare being reduced to examination fodder, Emma Smith, one of the UK's best known Shakespeare scholars, remarks that Shakespeare's plays 'are wonderfully unsuited to the exam system' (2019 p. 4). It feels timely as we address the possibilities for post-Covid recovery to explore what she might mean by this – and consider what it implies for pedagogic practice and renewed professional demands for assessment reform.

Reception theorists commonly refer to literary texts as offering up play-spaces which invite exploration; we would argue that this is especially true of most drama texts with their absence of authorial voice. With regard to Shakespeare, Smith highlights the capacious reading potentialities opened up by what she calls the plays' 'permissive gappiness' and 'ambiguity' (p.3). We are reminded of Raymond Williams' characterisation of Shakespearean drama as 'inherently multivocal' (1985 p. 238), a complex notion which, it seems to us, embraces the social and collaborative nature of the plays' inception, performance and reception both in the present and across time. For all these reasons we would argue that Shakespeare's plays particularly lend themselves to an 'active' and dialogic pedagogy.

Turning to our own research in secondary English classrooms, a key focus of our case studies (Coles & Pitfield forthcoming) is the relationship between educational drama and students' natural propensity for imaginative play. We explore the pedagogical possibilities and the learning gains afforded by an approach which draws productively on this connection. As Myra Barrs (1987) points out, so much of what happens in English is about enactment, whether this is the 'drama in the head' that occurs during reading, 'drama on paper' when young

**“POLICY-MAKERS' DISPIRITINGLY NARROW AND UNAMBITIOUS VISION IS, PERHAPS, BEST SUMMED UP BY THEIR DEMAND THAT THE NATION'S FOURTEEN-TO-SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS ARE TO BE 'TAUGHT' TO 'APPRECIATE' GREAT WORKS FROM THE ENGLISH LITERARY CANON INCLUDING SHAKESPEARE.”**

people write creatively, or physicalised role play as part of literary study. Nevertheless, we have interviewed teachers who remain wary of active approaches. This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the onerous demands of the testing regime underpinned by the current policy emphasis on the transfer rather than co-construction of knowledge. Too often drama is preserved for a ‘special event’, or even dismissed as an unhelpful distraction.

However, we have also observed practices that draw fruitfully on a playful approach, not simply to help students ‘access’ Shakespeare but, more significantly, to stimulate their affective and intellectual engagement with the scripts. In the most successful instances drama activity was woven into the fabric of the lesson. One teacher habitually incorporated moments of drama, moving seamlessly between role play, writing in role, discussion and reading, as her Year 10 students studied *Henry V*, and all in a classroom crowded with desks. Another teacher, confident in her use of drama, pushed the desks aside and devoted whole lessons with her class of Year 7 boys to drama-based explorations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In one lesson they predicted what might happen when Titania awakes under the influence of a powerful love juice. With half the class in the role of Titania and half as animals of their choice, they were at first afforded license to have fun with the physicality of the characters, and then moved into pairs to represent, in a freeze frame, the moment of meeting. The lesson’s playful framing enabled students to confront the uncomfortable sexual undertones of the scene, made explicit in later discussion. In another lesson this same teacher encouraged her students to negotiate unfamiliar language in a later scene by means of a drama game played sitting at desks. A third teacher used drama to revise scenes from *Macbeth*. Groups were allocated key quotations to represent as moving tableaux. Their highly creative responses prompted a discussion during which the teacher encouraged them to make the links between their dramatic representations, the wider themes of the play and Shakespeare’s use of sub-text and dramatic irony. In all these cases we noted that drama was presented as an integral part of the lessons and students unquestioningly accepted this approach to studying a Shakespeare play.

Our analysis of lessons such as these highlights the dynamic interrelationship between knowledge and experience in developing students’ understanding of the characters, themes and language of the plays. In Vygotskian (1986) terms, their everyday knowledge has interacted with and aided their understanding of curriculum knowledge. The interaction works in the other direction too, as students’ ‘diverse identities and knowledges’ (Kitchen 2020 p. 13) bring the plays to life in the classroom, disrupting the

usual monocultural discourses surrounding Shakespeare. Pedagogically the teachers have prised open the spaces for playfulness, exploration and discovery. This leads us to take issue with systems of schooling that deny the importance of play in learning, and specifically which limit opportunities for socially-engaged, inclusive and playful approaches to Shakespeare in the mistaken belief that this is somehow antithetical to rigorous literary study.

We are pleased to see that the systemic fault lines in schooling exposed by the pandemic are provoking a grass-roots re-evaluation of the pre-Covid status quo, not only in terms of curriculum content and pedagogy but also in terms of assessment. We welcome, for instance, the statement recently published by the National Association for the Teaching of English (see [www.nate.org.uk](http://www.nate.org.uk)) which insists that Covid-related ‘lost learning’ should not be measured purely in terms of a ‘knowledge deficit’ but must acknowledge a loss of social interaction and collaborative engagement. The national subject association for Drama-in-Education (see [NATD.co.uk](http://NATD.co.uk)) has been at the forefront of calls for major assessment reform that meets the needs of all young people. English and Drama teachers are embracing the opportunity to rethink what we teach, how we teach it and how we assess it. We argue that an urgent reassertion of Shakespeare’s essential playfulness and interpretive ambiguity presents us with a productive starting-point.

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## THREE INVITATIONS FROM SHAKESPEARE TO DECOLONISE OUR TEACHING OF HIS WORKS

**N**IQUELLE LATOUCHE is a British-born and Caribbean (Dominica) raised artist (Poet/Choreographer & Fine Art) and educator who is invested in encouraging creative collaboration and togetherness. She is the founder of Niquelle LaTouche Arts (est. 2014) and It Takes A Village Collective (est. 2020) which both act as spaces to facilitate proactive social change. She currently teaches English and is the Diversity and Equalities Lead Practitioner for a London secondary school.

*“Why miss? Why is Shakespeare never going to be cut? I don’t even know what he is saying!”*  
(Year 11 reaction to Ofqual’s decision on centre assessed grade topics)

This year is not the second year of teaching I was expecting to have. Teachers were curriculum deliverers, exam boards, online lesson blenders, trauma informed practitioners and multitasker extraordinaires and somewhere between lockdowns and online learning, came the realisation we have to make the best out of the cards we are dealt. The bitty hybrid delivery meant that student buy-in was at an all time low and a more discursive delivery provided the human conversations we needed during a very isolating time for all of us.

The long-standing effects of colonialism and its impact on globalised values, lenses and cultural capital had many of us reflecting on our curriculum rationale. Shakespeare unlike many of the examination components (such as poetry or 19th Century Literature) was never up for debate, never optional and to the exam boards, is essential to the study of English. I agree that Shakespeare *is* a British treasure but an ecosystem for change comes when we can recenter, reframe and refresh our understanding or use of the materials we teach. The pandemic gave me an opportunity to experiment with curriculum delivery because our traditional pedagogy was gone and we were being forced toward new, unprecedented ways of working.

I found it more important to focus on the components that would have the least external influence (by government, exam board or departmental changes) and use that to actively affect my classes’ ecosystems. Shakespeare’s work

explores love, war, marriage, child and parent relationships, gender norms and these, coupled with society’s ongoing questions about what and who may be essential was a great place to start a conversation from. I use Rudine Sims Bishop’s analogy of windows (a new lens to view it from), mirrors (a reflection of yourself in the text) and doors (a new pathway through) to describe how I navigate curriculum and it only takes a small amount of text to create one from so here are my top three:

“NAMING to many, is a SYMBOL of LINEAGE and a LINK to TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES AND HERITAGE, GETTING THIS RIGHT IS AN EASY WAY to make a PERSON feel RESPECTED AND SEEN.”

*“WHAT’S IN A NAME?”*  
(Juliet – *Romeo and Juliet*)

Preconceived labels such as SEN (Special Education Needs), Top Set, EAL (English as an Additional Language) and low/middle/high ability bear heavy influence on staff and student expectation but many, although somewhat arbitrary, become self-fulfilling prophecies like the Capulets and Montagues fate, if unchallenged.

Names are important and nothing is worse than being misgendered or mispronounced, however constantly



Photo © Shutterstock.com

explaining yourself so that others try to get it right is exhausting! Naming to many, is a symbol of lineage and a link to traditional cultural practices and heritage, getting this right is an easy way to make a person feel respected and seen. On my classroom wall I have “Dear student/staff with the big name, correct them, every, single, time” because I know there is preferential treatment of Anglicised names, and that bias is reflected in the wider world. The more “exotic” the name you have, the more likely you are to get fed up with correcting and quicker you develop a Juliet-esque habit of “deny[ing]” one’s name but we all know how that played out for Romeo and Juliet.

### BRIDGES BETWEEN WORLDS:

*“God’s bread! It makes me mad.  
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,  
Alone, in company, still my care hath been  
To have her matched. And having now provided*

*A gentleman of noble parentage,  
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly trained,  
Stuffed, as they say, with honorable parts,  
Proportioned as one’s thought would wish a man—”  
(Lord Capulet – Romeo and Juliet)*

When a student is faced with explicit, purpose-based situations, they can, by association, increase their quality of cognitive processes and language development and this imitative, risk-free version of the real world allows students freedom to generate a more sophisticated (I use this term loosely, not to mean better but different to their real-world) use of language.

Arranged marriages transcend cultural boundaries, many serve very different purposes and every time I revisit this scene student exploration is rich and diverse. The students are very ready to debate the problematic and useful nature of an arranged marriage and the knowledge from which they are able to draw from supersedes expectation. If we see the classroom as practice for the real world there are many ways to create a culture of celebration and reciprocal respect as opposed to tolerance because we are all ignorant until we learn more.

### SHAKESPEARE THE RADICAL

Despite the language usually being the most alienating

“if we CONSIDER SHAKESPEARE AS A RADICAL, A REBEL WITH WORDS WITH PERHAPS A BRUMMIE ACCENT (TO RHYME SOME OF THE WORDS HE DID), IT FOSTERS A LOT OF INTROSPECTION ABOUT OUR OWN RELATIONSHIP LANGUAGE AS A MARKER OF IDENTITY.”

“PIDGIN IS NOT WRONG, ACCENT IS NOT BROKEN, SLANG IS NOT UNEDUCATED, PATIOS IS NOT IMPROPER, OUR LANGUAGE IS THE BEAUTY OF SURVIVAL AND OUR TREASURE.”

part of studying Shakespeare, it is a crowd favourite. If we consider Shakespeare as a radical, a rebel with words with perhaps a Brummie accent (to rhyme some of the words he did), it fosters a lot of introspection about our own relationship language as a marker of identity. A poster on my wall reads “pidgin is not wrong, accent is not broken, slang is not uneducated, patios is not improper, our language is the beauty of survival and our treasure” and Shakespeare’s foreign words grant us the opportunity to discuss meaning making within limitation, literacy for students with English as a secondary language, archiving, collaboration, dialect, accent, slang, written and spoken languages without insisting on correctness.

There were very few opportunities where I felt the Hackney, Dominica and female parts of me were welcomed sources of value and interest which resulted in me avoiding bringing the “I” into what I thought academia was supposed to be. I have the privilege of educating such a diverse body of students who challenge me to engage with the curriculum in new ways and the achievement is not in the output, it is in the metacognition. If a by-product is improved confidence, sense of self and empathy for others I know that exchanging ideas will never end because the collaborative educational process is one of evolution which amidst the storms teachers have to weather, could make a turbulent ride much more enjoyable.

“I KNOW THAT EXCHANGING IDEAS WILL NEVER END BECAUSE THE COLLABORATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IS ONE OF EVOLUTION WHICH AMIDST THE STORMS TEACHERS HAVE TO WEATHER, COULD MAKE A TURBULENT RIDE MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE.”



# the transformative power of Live theatre

**C**ATHY BALDWIN is a post-doctoral research assistant in the School of Education at the Open University and teaches English part-time in a Young Offenders Institute. Her doctoral thesis explored secondary school students' responses to seeing *Much Ado About Nothing* performed live at Shakespeare's Globe in London.

Imagine, if you will, Shakespeare's Globe in London. It is March 2018, and the theatre is filled with large groups of secondary school students and their teachers, here to see a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* produced specifically with them in mind. The excitement is palpable: the students are missing an afternoon of lessons to see live theatre with their friends. Some of them have never been to the theatre before, and while the majority have, few have visited this theatre, and even fewer have seen a play performed here (see Chart 1).

In the theatre, there is a sense of wonder as the students gaze at their surroundings, and the volume increases as their voices are funnelled towards the opening in the roof. From the rear of the yard, there is the sudden sound of loud drumming, and the performance begins. Actors appear on-stage in contemporary dress, and although some of the opening lines are lost as the students settle, it is clear that their attention is caught by the unexpectedness of the costumes and the setting.

Doors at the back of the yard open, and Don Pedro enters, dressed in army fatigues and standing proud on a platform pushed around the yard by members of the crew, similarly dressed. He high-fives students who lean forward from their seats in the lower gallery to touch him, and bends down to connect with those who are standing at his feet. Then he stretches up to wave at those in the middle and upper galleries, inciting them to cheer and wave back at his triumphal entry. By the time the platform arrives at the stage and Don Pedro steps across to receive Leonato's greeting, the majority of the students are engaged.

The whole production has been designed to speak directly to the students, making Shakespeare relevant and enjoyable for them. Director Michael Oakley has chosen to cast the play with equal numbers of men and women, resulting in Don John and the Friar being played by women; Don John is now Donna Joan. The revellers are dressed as superheroes to complement their characters: Don Pedro is Batman, and Claudio is his Robin; Benedick

is The Flash; Donna Joan is Catwoman and Borachio is Spiderman. Later on, the evidence of Hero's infidelity is captured on a mobile phone, adding a layer of narrative for students who spend much of their time communicating via social media. Donna Joan's line 'Fie, Fie, They are / Not to be named my lord, not to be spoken' (4:1:88–89) is used to close down any suggestion that the footage should be shown as proof when Claudio accuses Hero during their wedding ceremony.

Other moments of relevance are more specific to each audience. In one performance, Donna Joan's speech ending 'If I had my mouth, I would bite: if I had my liberty, I would do my liking. In the mean time, let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me' (1.3.25–27), spoken by a Black actor, has particular resonance for some of the Black girls near me in the audience. In another, Leonato's request that 'all grace say amen to it' (2.1.230), when he consents to Hero marrying Claudio, results in most of the students in the audience responding with an unsolicited 'Amen'. In a third, Beatrice identifies a teacher with a beard standing in the yard, and speaks directly to him as she says, 'Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face' (2.1.22–23), to the great amusement of his students who turn and point at him. These moments demonstrate clearly how individual each performance is, and how much the students are engaged with what they see and hear on-stage.

Not everything works. A huge wedding cake arrives on-stage during 3.5 and the students' cheers drown out Dogberry's words, so that the chance of avoiding disgrace is missed by more than just Leonato, and when Claudio prostrates himself before Hero in the final scene, begging her forgiveness, one student asks loudly, 'Why is he licking her shoes?' However, there are moments that demonstrate how much the audience is focused on the story, such as the solitary voice calling out in response to Leonato's desire to 'let [Hero] die' (4.1.147), and the pin-drop silence into which Beatrice speaks the words 'Kill Claudio' (4.1.279). These students may not particularly like "Shakespeare", but their responses to this production demonstrate that they are enjoying *this* Shakespeare.

This production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is performed under the banner of Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank (PSwDB), an education programme at Shakespeare's Globe supported by Deutsche Bank, which offers free tickets to state secondary schools in London and Birmingham for a professional production





of a Shakespeare play to support the in-school study of Shakespeare that is a compulsory element of the English National Curriculum. Between 2007, when the scheme started, and the closure of theatres on 18 March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, over 200,000 students have attended a PSwDB performance free of charge. The long-term effects of attendance can never fully be measured. However, the impact of this project is extraordinary.

The four schools who participated in my research each took their entire cohort of Year 9 students to Shakespeare's Globe: a total of 836 students. The free ticket offer meant that these schools could make the theatre visit compulsory, including those who either would not or could not choose to attend if the trip were optional. Inclusion of these students' voices in the findings also offers a rare balance in comparison with other audience research where audience members are inherently in favour of theatre as a form of entertainment.

Overall, 81% of the 595 students who responded to the question stated that they had enjoyed their theatre visit, with only 13% saying they had not and the remainder remaining ambivalent. The weather in March 2018 was particularly cold, with snow falling in some performances and one performance cancelled when all London schools were closed as a result of the weather front called the Beast from the East; this was one factor that those who did not enjoy the trip included in their reasoning.

More importantly, a smaller but still significant majority of students could see some value in the theatre visit for their in-school study of Shakespeare's plays (see Chart 2).

Hermione (students chose their own pseudonyms) told me in interview:

**'The memory of this visit that Shakespeare can be interpreted and played in different ways is like useful because like when we study *Macbeth* for instance we'll see a DVD version of like the way it was meant to be in the play [...] but then we can go home and we can see another version perhaps that's more modern or another version that is like completely different [...] it basically just opens our eyes to the variety of ways that Shakespeare can be played and it gives us more of a background.'**

This growing awareness of the interpretative nature of theatre contrasted strongly with the views of many students before their theatre visit, who expected the production to be 'old' and 'posh', and who commented on needing to understand all the language in preparation for writing analytic essays in their examinations. In addition, several students commented on immersion in Shakespeare's language supporting their understanding of other plays, although those who focused on the story felt that it would only be of value if they were studying this particular play.

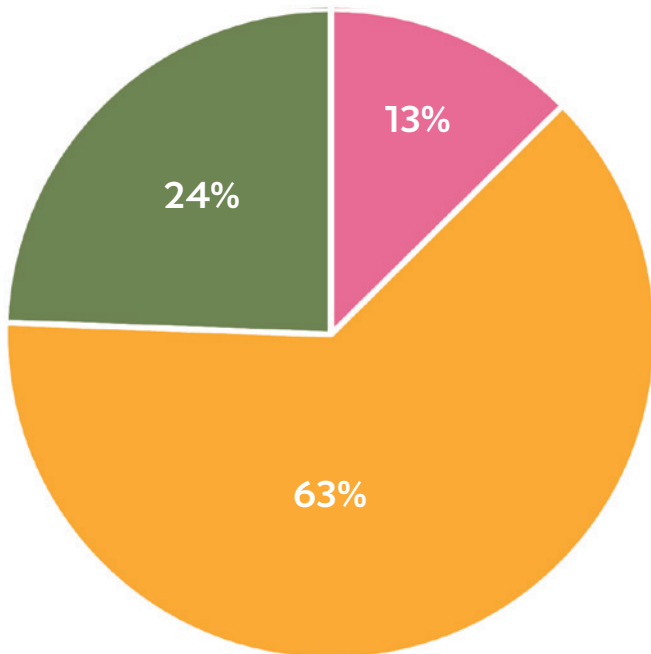
Ann, Head of English at The Massinger School (Schools were anonymised using the names of Shakespeare's contemporaries), said:

**'I would rather they went into their GCSE with a positive attitude towards Shakespearean language and the text and text for performance, appreciating the dramatic component of it'.**

While she views the trip as predominantly an enrichment experience, other teachers are clear that it has direct benefits for the teaching of context which is an important part of the GCSE in English Literature. Post-trip teaching also benefits because every student has visited the theatre unless they have had a very specific reason not to attend (Ann told me that, rarely, a student has been allowed to remain at school for reasons such as severe social anxiety at being in a crowded environment).

Many of the students said that they would not have attended had the trip been optional, with 70 students offering responses such as ‘Shakespeare doesn’t interest me’ and ‘I would have assumed it would be boring’, as well as stating that the cost may have been prohibitive. Others would have watched ‘for free’ on social media channels such as YouTube or on DVD. Importantly, one reflected, ‘If I did have to pay it might of [sic] made me feel like I don’t need to go but I didn’t have to pay so I took part in this amazing trip and it helped me to understand the play much more’. This student’s comment demonstrates how important it is for schools to offer students experiences that they would not choose for themselves, introducing them to new places and activities and extending their knowledge of the world.

**CHART 1: STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF LIVE THEATRE PRIOR TO PSWDB**

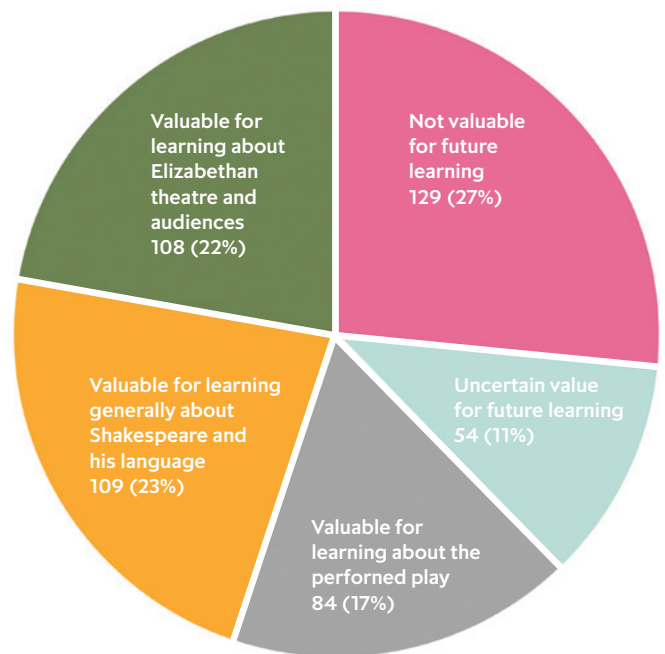


- Students with no prior experience of attending a theatre production (97 students)
- Students with prior experience of theatre excluding Shakespeare's Globe (485 students)
- Students with prior experience of theatre including Shakespeare's Globe (188 students\*)

Shakespeare has been taught in schools for decades without access to the wide variety of film and theatre versions of the plays that are now available. Even now, live theatre is not always a practicable addition to the curriculum for schools in many parts of the country. Where a live production of a Shakespeare play is available, this research suggests that even when it is not the play that the young people are studying, a theatre visit can be hugely beneficial to their understanding of Shakespeare's language and genre.

Perhaps the most important effect of this theatre project, however, is that it enables young people to find Shakespeare enjoyable. In spite of occasional comments that ‘I don’t think that was what Shakespeare had in mind. I think it would have disgusted him’, other students ‘thought it would be boring’ but came to the conclusion that ‘the play was way better than Shakespeare’s one’, and that ‘it wasn’t [sic] like proper Shakespeare’. As teachers we therefore need to find ways of demonstrating that Shakespeare is not fixed, and that the films that some of us use in lessons are only *one* interpretation, rather than *the* interpretation, of each play. Other Shakespeares are not only possible. They are essential.

**CHART 2: THE VALUE OF THE THEATRE VISIT FOR FUTURE SHAKESPEARE STUDIES**



\*Of the 188 students who had previously visited Shakespeare's Globe, 82 stated that they had seen a performance there. While some of the remaining 106 students wrote that they had not seen a performance, not all clearly stated the purpose of their visit.



## WHOSE *OTHELLO* IS POSSIBLE?

**R**AE GARVIN is the KS5 lead for English at Central Foundation Girls' School where she also leads the Diversity Working Party. She is a trustee for Maya Theatre Productions who make diverse theatre to enable social change and racial justice in the arts.

**'Men in this era would disagree with all three women as they have a strong view on women marrying whoever their father chooses, because they are their father's property. Men also have the same view as Emilia as they believe that no higher-class man should ever marry anyone such as a prostitute. Cassio does not want to marry Bianca even though he loves her.'**

This was written by Jemimah, an intellectual year 12 with a passion for human rights, after I asked the students to write about the women in *Othello*. I am surprised at her writing. Two of the sentences begin with 'Men' and the third begins with a man's name. How strange that a paragraph about women written by a self-declared feminist only deals with male perspectives. Or is it? When our world is persistently constructed through and for a single viewpoint (say that of the white, straight, able-bodied, cis-male) we become conditioned to solely adopt that standpoint. How then to enable my students (all assigned female at birth, and most of Bangladeshi heritage) to consider multiple viewpoints? How can I show them that another *Othello* is possible?

**"WHEN OUR WORLD IS PERSISTENTLY CONSTRUCTED THROUGH AND FOR A SINGLE VIEWPOINT (say that of the white, straight, able-bodied, cis-male) we become conditioned to solely adopt that standpoint."**

'Multiple viewpoints' is my layperson's translation for the fifth assessment objective for English Literature A Level. The official language is to demonstrate: 'engagement with the debate set up in the task'. Engage has many meanings: share, participate, battle, fight and confront. This excites me; I want the students to participate and share in the production of meaning. I want them to fight for their own meanings: to confront and do battle with the text. I want them to find what is true in the text for them.

While I am planning, a memory disrupts my thoughts. When my daughter was three, her friend's mother died. For months afterwards she played a new game called 'Crying at My Mother's Grave'. She would stand in front of a broken concrete bust we had in the garden and pretend to cry. It was disturbing to see but also so powerful to



Photo @ benoitb/stock.com

watch her try to find understanding of what her friend was going through by enacting how she might behave in that situation. (If you want to read more about this, Vygotsky explores this in his 1966 essay on the role of play when he describes two sisters who role play being sisters in order to make clear the rules of sisterhood.) I wonder if this strategy could help my year 12s.

In our next lesson I announce we will be doing role plays – enacting Women's Hour with Bianca, Emilia and Desdemona as the guests. I will play the host – forcing each student to step inside the minds of the characters. I start the role plays with a loud, jovial style as the host, encouraging the students to mimic me and I'm delighted they take up the challenge: their improvisations are creative, modern and witty.

Jemimah plays Bianca. 'I think that Desdemona should marry who she likes. We should all be allowed love marriages.

It's not fair when you have an arranged marriage if you don't want one.' The re-naming of Desdemona's marriage as a 'love' marriage shows how Jemimah is starting to draw on her own cultural knowledge to understand Bianca. An angry 'Emilia' (Maisha, who has already shouted at Desdemona for excluding her from the wedding) interrupts: 'Who cares what you think? You are just a strumpet who sells her body for sex. You shouldn't even be on T.V.' 'Bianca' retaliates: 'That's not fair. I'm a sex worker, it's a respectable profession. I earn my money honestly. I'm an independent woman. I should be able to marry who I choose, and Desdemona should be able to do the same.' The proliferation of personal pronouns suggests that Jemimah is truly inside Bianca's mind, but she has bought some Jemimah with her. Her human rights activism comes into play when she renames herself 'sex-worker' and demands that both she and Desdemona should be able to marry who they choose. It is this bringing of herself to the character that allows Jemimah to elevate her academic understanding.

**'Bianca is the most powerless woman in the play, she is also the most free. She earns her own money. She is the most vilified. Even her lover Cassio who loves her, hates her. Desdemona and Emilia have some sisterhood towards each other but they do not extend this towards Bianca. I think this is not so much about their marital bonds but about their snobbery and the social classes they belong to. Bianca is the only woman who does not**

**die and so she sort of becomes the most powerful woman at the end. It's like her low social status has liberated her from all the expectations that Desdemona and Emilia had to live up to.'**

Jemimah's writing before and after the role play are wonderfully different. Now she starts powerfully with 'Bianca', a stark contrast to the 'Men' she began with in her first piece. All three women are named at least twice. She writes in first person: she is owning this perspective. The translation during the role-play of 'strumpet' to 'sex-worker' not only revealed Jemimah's own attitudes about judgemental stigmas attached to sex-work, but also allowed her to realise that Bianca is a strong, independent woman rather than, as Jemimah's previous work indicated, to only look at her character through the (toxic?) male gazes of Othello, Iago and Cassio.

Role-play enabled Jemimah to draw on her prior and personal experiences as a Bangladeshi, bright, political young woman: she used them to create new understanding of the play. When she returned to her academic writing, this individual insight empowered her to challenge dominant viewpoints by writing about her own.

It seems other *Othellos* are possible. And as we invite, encourage, lure the students' own lives and knowledge into the classroom we allow them to create *Othellos* that are not just relevant to them but are truly their own.

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## OTHER LEARS ARE POSSIBLE

**N**ICK BENTLEY is a Lead Practitioner, and Drama, English and Nurture Teacher at Sarah Bonnell Secondary School in Newham, London. He has completed a Masters in Teaching at the UCL Institute of Education, where he also trained for his PGCE in Secondary: English with Drama. Nick is a Steering Group member of LGBTed, a network of LGBT+ educators.

The three students directly opposite me were angrily gesticulating, pointing at me, and calling out at me from their place at the front of the classroom. This was my first lesson with the group, and yet here was a trio of learners speaking over me, at points nearing the volume of shouting, and almost preventing me from speaking. Perhaps this is not the way one might imagine an ideal introductory lesson for a group of Year 10 students in their first GCSE Drama class! So how did we get here?

This lesson came at the beginning of our work exploring Shakespeare's *King Lear*. As part of their GCSE, students are required to perform extracts from published plays and in our East London Secondary School, we have often found that working towards a whole class performance of a play is a good way to not only get the students working well together but also as a meaningful project to develop their performance skills.

During the summer holidays before I met the class, I got to thinking: What would be a good way into *Lear*? To my mind, the heart of the play is its opening scene, the inciting incident wherein Lear induces his daughters to take part in a love test in return for a portion of his kingdom. It is the moment in the play which encapsulates so many of its core themes; power, transition, and rhetoric, and so I was keen to use this as a means to get to grips with the play.

It would be inaccurate of me to say that I approached the task without trepidation. Whilst I am a teacher who finds huge value in the use of teacher-in-role as a pedagogical approach, there was a part of me that felt it could be a risky strategy. Having not had the opportunity to form relationships yet with many of the young people, I became concerned that to reaffirm their positions of safety they might treat the exercise as a pastiche or a joke. Or worse, would I be met by a wall of complete silence?

I set up my role as Mr Bantley, the outgoing boss of "Lear Corporation," and a man who, at his retirement party, was

lavishing praise upon himself before he had even turned to his employees. As Bantley, then, and admittedly perhaps laying it on a bit thick, I explained that I would be making my pay and promotion recommendations the day after the party, and that I wanted colleagues to think of reasons why I'd been such a wonderful boss. In-role, the students began their plotting. I felt relieved – it seemed as though the students felt really engaged by this task, and were working hard at thinking of the most flattering statements they could offer up to Bantley. Then, with the play at the forefront of my mind, I spoke quietly (no longer in-role) with the group of three students who were sitting at the front of the room, and without referencing *Lear* explicitly, gave them the task of challenging Bantley.

I believe it was with the words "I don't want you to be nice to Mr Bantley," or some such statement, that I approached these students. Gleefully involving this group in a shared secret from the rest of the class, I followed up by saying something along the lines of, "I want you to be brutally honest and tell him what you really think." The students nodded sagely. I do think this idea of a shared secret was one that they were excited to involve themselves in. It seemed joyously playful.

I swept myself to the front of the room, back in-role as Mr Bantley, and took feedback from the different students. They smiled at me, telling me how wonderful I was, and I nodded, agreeing with a deep, pompous sincerity. After each piece of praise, I responded by discussing how richly I would reward my former employees for their loyalty, and the students responded in kind, attempting to outbid each other by making increasingly outlandish statements. Regan would have been proud.

Not so with the final group, my pre-appointed "Cordelia" employees. As I have suggested at the start of this piece, their commitment to attacking Bantley was huge, and they went far further than I would suggest Cordelia – through her honest sharing of the word "Nothing" – ever ventured. What I really enjoyed about this moment was the way the students seemed deeply rooted to their adopted roles, and I was unable to detect a strong sense of them "holding back." No, they really did seem to have engaged fully with this idea of criticising Lear/Bantley/me – and their positioning as a group of young people with the right to challenge in my classroom seemed clear.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 . . .



## LGBT+ APPROACHES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

**JAMES HODGE** is an English educator, writer and LGBTQ+ activist currently working at UCL.

It was on a stagnant summer day in 2004 in a sticky English classroom when I was first excited by the study of Shakespeare. Whilst usually I loved English lessons, an opportunity for me to be creative and imaginative, Shakespeare seemed to stand for the very opposite: unrelatable and antiquated stories that weren't relevant to the world I lived in. *Romeo and Juliet* was a foreign land in my mind, and on this stifling day, the heat of Verona was unexciting to my friends, who were more interested in the playground fight at lunchtime than in the ridiculous brawl between the Capulets and the Montagues; more fixated on gossip about the latest break-up than in the melodrama of *Romeo and Juliet*.

My distrust of Shakespeare, however, lay deeper. As a young queer man, I wasn't disinterested in his plays – I was frustrated by them. Whilst the rest of the class were distracted by idle chatter, I was pining for a Romeo – my own 'star-crossed lover'. However, to me, this seemed an impossibility. Romeos wanted Rosalines and Juliets, not James.

Indeed, in no text that we had read in the classroom had I encountered queer visibility that gave me any vision of what my future looked like. I had roamed the town of Maycomb during a heated court case; I had wandered the Irish landscape observing nature; I had sat in an attic with a strange old woman watching her play cards. And don't get me wrong – I loved all of these stories. They opened my eyes to the world around me. The trouble is, none of them opened my eyes to the queer world in which I was going to be living in; a world that aged 15 I was yet to explore. *Romeo and Juliet* felt like just another step backwards: sonnets and soliloquies were not meant for people like me. However, true to nature, my English teacher, Ms Davies, quickly turned the classroom on its head during the course of the lesson. 'Why is Mercutio so aggressive and angry as he dies in the arms of Romeo?' she asked. Cue a conscientious and predictable response about the fact that the fight between the Montagues and Capulets has led to his death. 'Of course' she replied curtly, 'but dig deeper. Why is Mercutio keen for Romeo to forget Rosaline? Why is he always talking to Romeo about sex?

Why does Mercutio mutter his final words to Romeo?' The class was silent. 'What if', Ms Davies posed salaciously, 'Mercutio was gay?'

In that moment, my perspective on literature changed entirely. Suddenly, the open and critical thinking that my teacher had shown me allowed me to make interpretations everywhere, shining a light on every text that I read, and nowhere more than Shakespeare. Cross-dressing confusions; boys playing the roles of girls; ambiguously intimate male relationships, and sonnets addressed to young men. How had I not seen the queerness in Shakespeare before?

**“CROSS-DRESSING CONFUSIONS; BOYS PLAYING THE ROLES OF GIRLS; AMBIGUOUSLY INTIMATE MALE RELATIONSHIPS, AND SONNETS ADDRESSED TO YOUNG MEN. HOW HAD I NOT SEEN THE QUEERNESS IN SHAKESPEARE BEFORE?”**

I began my own career as an English teacher as both an LGBT+ activist and scholar of queer theory, I have always felt comfortable to 'queer' my classroom – to make it a safe space where I could facilitate discussions about identities, encouraging my students to be respectful and tolerant of one another's experiences. When it came to discussions with my colleagues, however, there was considerable worry. 'What if I don't have the knowledge I need to explore this?' 'What if I say the wrong thing?' And perhaps most commonly, 'What if students respond inappropriately?'

There is a culture of fear about engaging with equalities and diversities in the English classroom, especially at this time where we are arguably in the midst of a culture war. It is therefore all the more important that schools are celebrating diversity. One of the most powerful approaches, as recommended by LGBT+ charity Schools Out is to 'actualise' and 'usualise'. Day to day, we teach within a heteronormative context where our classroom discussions make heterosexuality seem 'the norm'. We encounter heterosexuality across the curriculum in schools and assume the heterosexual perspective in our readings. However, actualising (finding opportunities to provide concrete examples of LGBT+ issues, for example, characters, themes and narratives) and usualising (making discussion of LGBT+ issues a typical part of discussions in lessons) normalise representation, removing LGBT+ people from the position of the other.

When reading Shakespeare specifically, how can we

“THERE IS A CULTURE OF FEAR ABOUT ENGAGING WITH EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITIES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM, ESPECIALLY AT THIS TIME WHERE WE ARE ARGUABLY IN THE MIDST OF A CULTURE WAR. IT IS THEREFORE ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT SCHOOLS ARE CELEBRATING DIVERSITY”

embed authentic opportunities to actualise and usualise LGBT+ people’s experiences? In my opinion, Shakespeare is a perfect start point for such discussions because he himself is widely regarded as having been bisexual. Of course, we must remember that sexuality was not labelled in the 1500s using the same terms that we use today, but it is argued based on the addressing of Shakespeare’s sonnets to both a ‘dark lady’ and a ‘fair youth’.

Our first strategy, then, might be to explore Shakespeare’s sonnets as love poems and to usualise discussions around said poems by questioning which ones are categorised as ‘Dark Lady sonnets’ and which belong to the ‘Fair Youth’ sequence. Sonnet 20, in particular, most explicitly foregrounds desires for a man. He describes the young protegee as his ‘master-mistress’, a boy who ‘steals man’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth’. This interpretation of dual attraction might be further developed by considering the fact that the narrator states that because nature has ‘pricked’ the young man, he does not seek a physical relationship but to simply ‘be thy love’.

As a teacher approaching this sonnet, my start-point would be to facilitate discussion about the identity of the narrator and the identity of the fair youth. Simply by framing ‘What if this sonnet is not between a man and a woman but between two men?’, students are pushed out of the heteronormative position and asked to posit alternative interpretations. For a more subtle poem, Sonnet 18 – ‘Shall I Compare Thee To A Summer’s Day?’ – also addressed to the fair youth – may provide some stimulating discussion, with metaphors and motifs that might not be considered typically masculine. Further discussions could include comparing the form, language and structural choices when addressed the youth in comparison to the lady.

Of course, queer theory does not simply explore sexuality alone but also interrogates the concept of gender. Shakespeare’s plays, performed in a period where men would typically play the female role and where sub-plots often involve cross-dressing and gender-bending, offer much discussion of gender. Key here is understanding of the concept of performativity – the idea that gender is something that is socially constructed that we learn through mimicry and performance. Gender performativity, best highlighted itself through the culture of drag, with men able to ‘become’ women and women men, is frequently

presented too in Shakespeare’s plays. Such discussion can be facilitated by considering whether characters fit into stereotypical gender roles, and to what extent such stereotypical roles are questioned or undermined.

For example, *Macbeth’s* central partnership explores the theme of gender through the swapping of power positions between husband and wife. During the Jacobean era the patriarchal structuring of families situated the man in the position of power with the wife in the position of submission to his will. This is very much turned on its head here, with Lady Macbeth portrayed as a forbidding, power-hungry figure who controls her anxious and unsure husband, Macbeth. So aware of the limitations of gender is Lady Macbeth that whilst she can publicly play the role of the demure hostess as expected, she secretly wishes for the spirits to ‘unsex’ her and give her the masculine traits that will lead to fulfilment of her ambitions. Other examples might be the cross-dressing women of Shakespeare: Portia, Rosalind and Viola, who, when disguised as men demonstrate their own intelligence, wit and strength.

We must, of course, remember that Shakespeare is not written to be read but to be performed and performances of Shakespeare (whether theatrical or cinematic) may provide some interesting talking points for students. For example, *Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo and Juliet* presents Mercutio as a fey, glamorous cross-dresser who represents transgression and change. Indeed, Mercutio’s very name stems from ‘mercurial’ meaning unpredictable and fast-changing. Is Luhrmann trying to suggest that Mercutio is not only transgressive as a character but through his sexuality and gender? Similarly, in *Richard III*, the eponymous villain is played by gay icon and activist Sir Ian McKellen who brings a strong element of campness to the role. Through this lens, is there an implication that Richard is so hateful towards women and so vengeful towards his family because he is in some way repressed and unable to be his true self?

Of course, these are just interpretations and some might argue that in a knowledge-based culture where we are context-centric in our readings, there isn’t space for such ambiguous approaches. Indeed, I myself may not fully buy into some of these interpretations wholeheartedly. That isn’t the point. The point is that in helping our students to think critically, to think outside of the box, and to look at things differently, we open up doors for them to see the world. Literature reflects life and it’s time that our literary study in schools represents life in all its different forms. After all, in this narrative, isn’t it time for all our students to know that there will be a happy ending awaiting them, regardless of their gender or sexuality?

# ‘BUT’ SHAKESPEARE: a pedagogy of questioning

JESS HUGHES is an English teacher in London, most recently spending the last 7 years at School21 in Stratford, East London. She has a particular interest in how high quality teaching craft can make the classroom a place for every child, the role of talk to deepen thinking and project based learning.

## “Play ends / Cali still enslaved / Bruh / that shit fucked” – Inua Ellams ‘Fuck/Shakespeare’

The problematic pull between Shakespeare’s more apparently enlightened moments and his dark side of ingrained prejudice has long been the conversation of English teachers across the country. As Inua Ellams captures in his brilliant poem ‘Fuck / Shakespeare’, here is a writer who seemingly managed to produce ‘literary fire / race-theory brimstone / middle-passage gold’ in one breath with *Othello*, and in another breath . . . *The Tempest*. The challenge of Shakespeare’s work is captured perfectly in Ellams’s one-word central stanza: “but /”.

‘But’, indeed. *The Tempest*. A powerful exploration of the lure of power. *But*, a non-critical painting of entrapment and oppression. A lesson in the awakening for an abuser of power. *But*, an acceptance – or arguably an active celebration – of colonialism. And yet, it’s a text that sits on secondary school curricula up and down the country.

Let’s be honest: through either active avoidance, willful side-stepping, or simply taking the simpler path, the problematic nature of this text (and others) is too often disguised when taught. It feels like there can be a tendency in the English teaching world to seek justification for racist, sexist, antisemitic and generally reductive views – to post-rationalise, explain away, or just quietly accept a world view that is quite simply, not ok. The flip side though, is the Shakespeare teaching that ignores these problems, skirting around them with a sanitised take on his work that can let students travel through school unaware.

So what is a third way? How can we invite students to critically engage with the conflicts within study of Shakespeare?

“a powerful exploration of the LURE of power. BUT, a NON-CRITICAL painting of entrapment and oppression. a LESSON in the awakening for an ABUSER of power. BUT, an acceptance – OR ARGUABLY AN active CELEBRATION – of COLOnIALISM. AND yet, it’s a text that SITS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULA up AND DOWN THE COUNTRY.”

In the shadow of the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, we went back to our curriculum to review both text and pedagogy across our teaching. We re-evaluated the core need for the range of texts on our curriculum to offer both windows and mirrors for students: a window into another world and a mirror into our own.

	Mon&S	Tues 7	Weds 3	Friday 7	Assessment point	Deadlines
WB 7th Sept	NO LESSON - Coaching	Launch - Meet the characters	Immerse Tempest: predictions	Immerse Tempest: Plot		
WB 14th Sept	STAR and Reading + Immerse Tempest plot	Let's Think (Ama)	Immerse Tempest Character	Tempest: THE STORM	STAR reader	
WB 21st Sept	Reading + Tempest: Act 1: The storm	Tempest: Prospero + Miranda	Tempest: Prospero + Miranda	Tempest: Prospero + Miranda		
WB 28th Sept	Reading + Tempest: Caliban	Let's Think (night in the cottage)	Tempest: Caliban	Question forming session		Questions formed
WB 5th Oct	Reading + Tempest: Prospero's power	Tempest: Utopia	Tempest: Utopia	Essay shape and planning		
WB 12th Oct	Reading + Drafting session 1.	Let's Think (Birthday Party)	Utopia (Caliban gets drunk)	Drafting session		
WB 19th Oct	Reading + Tempest: Overthrowing Prospero	Tempest: Overthrowing Prospero	Tempest: Overthrowing Prospero	Drafting session		Essay full draft 1
WB 2nd Nov	Reading + Recap + 5 act play (categorisation)	Let's Think (Shaun Tan)	Critique	Drafting session		Paragraph Crit
WB 9th Nov	Reading + Tempest: Act 4 Scene 1 (freedom - prisoner or jailer)	Tempest: P+A plot revenge on the avengers (motivations focus)	Tempest: end of Act 4 Scene 1: C, T+S caught out	Drafting session		Redraft due - JWB&M add comments
WB 16th Nov	Reading + Reading assessment	Let's Think	Re-drafting based on teacher comments	INSET	Reading assessment (for comp ass)	
WB 23rd Nov	Reading + Tempest: (resolutions - Act 5)	Tempest (Act 5: Prospero's forgiveness)	Tempest (Act 5)	Drafting session		
WB 30th Nov	Reading + Tempest (Act 5)	Let's Think: 1984	Tempest	Tempest	Assessment data due (Mon 30th)	Essays final draft
WB 7th Dec	Reading + Tempest (Epilogue)	Drafting	Comparative judgement crit	FINAL DRAFT DEADLINE		
WB 14th Dec	Vivas/reflection	Let's Think	Vivas/reflection	HALF DAY	Vivas	

Image 1: An image of our term plan showing how the essay moments (green) and assessment points (yellow) were cemented in, allowing the focus on our *Tempest* study lessons (white) to respond to student interest/need.

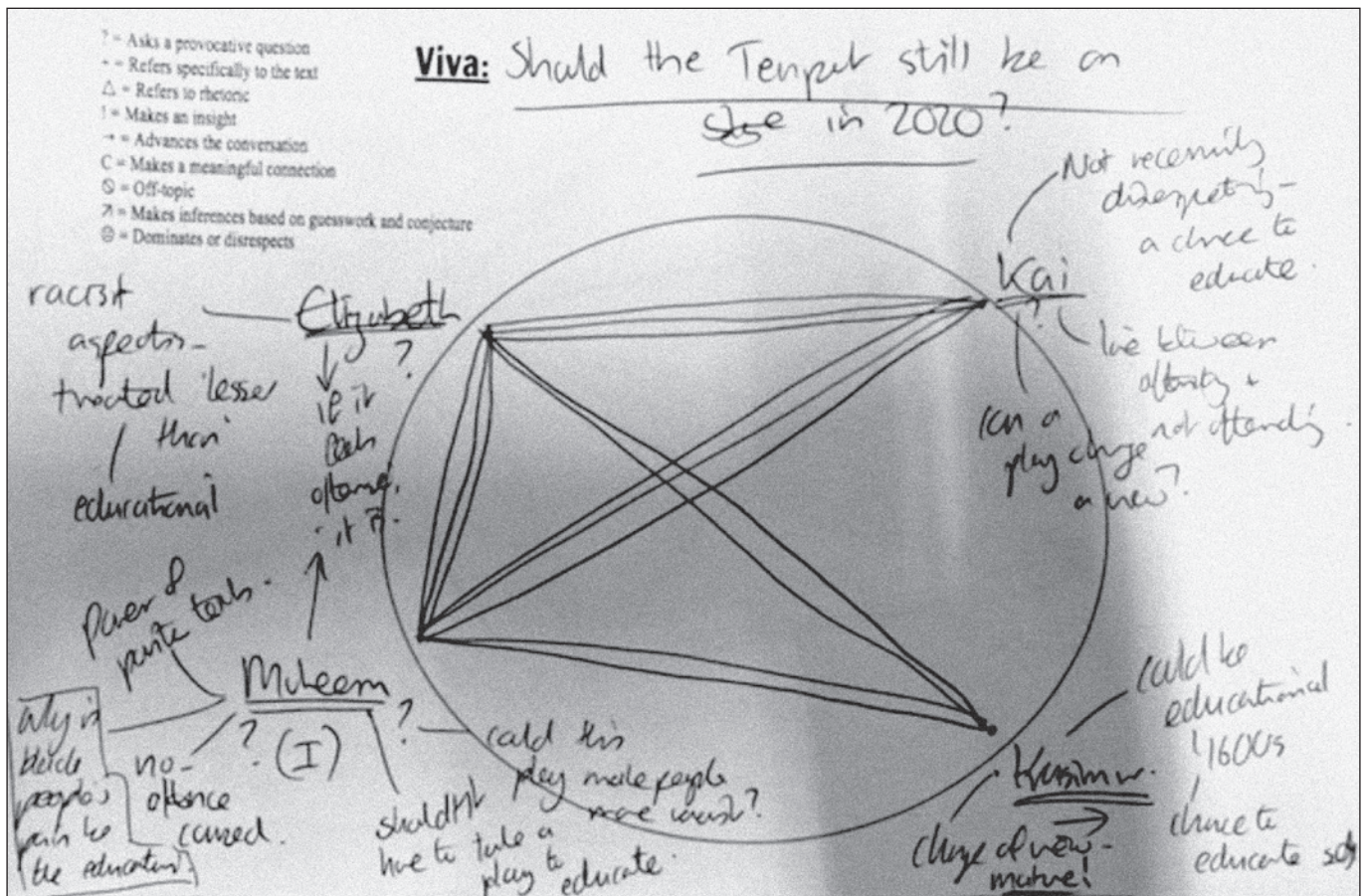
### TALKING POINTS

- The ending is unfair.
- This story is a celebration of vengeance.
- None of the characters are likable.
- Caliban is the true hero of the story.

Image 2: An image of talking points used in week 1, on first experience of the story. Protocolled paired talk around these led to independent question forming.



Image 5: An image of one of the mapped viva discussions.



We talked long and hard about the place of Shakespeare within this curriculum, the validity of his plays (or whether we have kept Shakespeare in simply because we think we ‘should’). And of course, we talked about which of his plays should sit across our English curriculum.

Our current year 9 English course is built around three of our ‘big ideas’ about English study: finding joy through criticality; seeing text as construct; building interpretation. And as a school, we view year 9 as a year of lighting fires: content (and student output) should be challenging, stretching students beyond GCSE, not a bridge to GCSE. This felt like the perfect place to take on some more problematic content and to challenge the Shakespearean status quo; to set the stage for the idea that *other Shakespeares are possible*. For us, *The Tempest* is one of the more problematic Shakespeare plays out there, so we had a go at teaching it differently.

So what did this look like in practice? Over the 14 week term, students each designed and crafted their own essay exploring a critical view of *The Tempest*. For the first 4 weeks, as we immersed ourselves in the text, and delved in depth into the first few acts, discussed, explored, questioned and played, and alongside, students banked questions that the text raised for them. In this time, we

leaned on intentional, protocolled exploratory talk, with varied talking points and probing questions to draw out critical approaches to the text.

At the end of week 4, students narrowed their questions down and designed one question that would form their personal essay, and they used this as a lens to undertake their own inquiry as our study of the text progressed. In a Y9 class of mixed starting points, this was a powerful model for ensuring access and stretch for all, and questions designed by students were insightful, critical and exploratory. Some students chose to focus on specific characters (‘Does Shakespeare portray Prospero’s actions as justice or revenge?’), some on key themes (‘How is language used to abuse power in *The Tempest*?’ and ‘Is revenge really worth it?’) and others took on broader contextual issues the text raises (‘Does power affect how women are treated in *The Tempest*?’ ‘To what extent does *The Tempest* celebrate and romanticise slavery and injustice?’ ‘Is *The Tempest* a celebration of men? If yes, how?’).

By week 7 they had a full first draft written. Over the following 5 weeks students drafted and redrafted as they explored the play in more and more depth. Time each week was given explicitly to drafting, but the essay work, from design, to drafting, critiquing and redrafting took place

concurrent to study of the text, meaning our planning could be responsive and truly student led; we could hone in on scenes in response to student interest and inquiries to help deepen or disrupt their thinking. For example, the concept of resolution emerged as central to student thinking in this play, drawing together their new knowledge on the difficulties in categorisation of *The Tempest*, their questions over Shakespeare's intentions over the 'othered' characters in the play and therefore the wider messages

What kinds of power does Prospero have over Miranda?	Does Miranda have any freedom?	Does Miranda exert any power in the scene?
How are women presented in this text?	How does the father/daughter relationship function here?	What is the role and purpose of Miranda in this story so far?
Why is there an absence of powerful women in this story?	Is Prospero presented as a negative force in the story?	Are both Miranda and Prospero victims of gender stereotypes?

**Image 3:** An image of a range of questions which pairs selected from in order to discuss and unpick an early scene between Miranda and Prospero. Students had drawn attention to Miranda's role as a woman, and her status as both oppressed/oppressor, so we designed these questions to deepen and disrupt this thinking.

1. Can power be used for good reasons?
2. How are people other than P treated in the tempest?
3. How can racism benefit white people in power?
4. Does the use of racism and slavery in the story teach us how not to be?
5. Is revenge really worth it?
6. How does the tempest show examples of discrimination?
7. If you had power, what would you do with it?
8. Is the play S's view of the world?
9. Do people with high status abuse their power?

**Image 4:** An image of some student-formed questions on the text. Regularly across the first 4 weeks, students 'ghosted' (shared without hands up, speaking when they felt they wanted for teacher to scribe) questions which they felt a particular scene had raised – this allowed for then some discussion of what makes a good question for critical evaluation of a text, and for students to share, steal and critique each other's ideas.

of the play. This led to a significant amount of time being given to deeper exploration of the play's denouement, and in turn, led to some really interesting critical consideration of the 'outsider' archetype within literature.

In the final two weeks of term, students took part in viva circles, discussing their essays and wider thinking with other students who have explored similar topics to take on some larger emergent questions. For the vivas, students were grouped around similar essay themes, and set an overriding question which they prepared for using their essay. These assessed conversations were fascinating, rooted in academic study and deep knowledge of the text, critical and exploratory and making powerful cross-curricular links.

Two terms on, our final term saw the same year 9 classes immersed in the rich and diverse world of poetry. A couple of weeks in, we explored Kae Tempest's 'What We Came After' and Inua Ellams' 'Fuck/Shakespeare'; both poems lean on *The Tempest* and it's injustices. Students lit up. Seeing some of their own critical views reflected in the work of another, their depth of knowledge and applied criticism came to the forefront. These students weren't passive recipients of Shakespeare; they were active and thoughtful critics.

#### OTHER LEARS ARE POSSIBLE – CONTINUED . . .

This is certainly not to say that my approach was beyond critique. Whilst of course the students had been empowered to criticise "me," this is something that I had in actuality preempted by telling them what "I don't want" and "I want." My instruction had led to none of the simple phrasing of Cordelia's "nothing," and one might be forgiven for coming away from this moment of drama with the impression that Cordelia hated Lear. Also, with Mr Bantley's and Mr Bentley's various directions, had my whole approach really demonstrated an example of drama with that "alive" feeling of multiple possibilities open for the learners to shape the work?

That said, this lesson placed the learners immediately at the heart of the play, gave them a sense of the tension between Lear and his family, and had them working excitedly using dramatic and theatrical approaches. For its energy, its inclusive immediacy and its empowerment, I submit that using teacher-in-role is a wonderful way to approach Shakespeare. And despite how it might sound, I really do hope to have many more moments where my students are placed in opposition to me – *within the world of the drama*.



# “I am a man again”

## IS MACBETH MURDERED BY DESTRUCTIVE MASCULINE IDEALS?

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### “Are you a man?” (3:4:57)

Lady Macbeth’s manipulation of her husband throughout Shakespeare’s tragedy *Macbeth* is centred on challenging his masculinity. This interrogative, delivered during the banquet scene as Macbeth’s sanity unravels following King Duncan’s murder, echoes her previous definition of his manhood from Act 1 Scene 7: “When you durst do it, then you were a man” (1:7:49). Macbeth cannot fully express his guilt or grief, instead internalising his emotions and descending further and further into madness. What would have happened if Macbeth – unlike his foil, Macduff – had not suppressed his feelings for fear of sounding like a “woman’s story at a winter’s fire” (3:4:64–67) but had been given the space to articulate his vulnerability?

*Macbeth* is one of the most popular choices of Shakespeare play to teach GCSE students, recently topping TES Resources’ list of the ten most popular Shakespeare plays. Many students are even taught *Macbeth* twice: at Key Stage 3 in preparation for Key Stage 4. It could be easy for students to assume that this play is nothing more than a necessity, a hurdle to jump over to achieve a decent English Literature grade. What relevance could a play written in 1606 still have in 2021?

On top of the formulaic essays, rote-learned quotations and annotated extracts that students must work through, the play offers hugely relevant commentary on contemporary issues, particularly ongoing stereotypes about gender and masculinity. The play, I argue, is fundamentally about deconstructing narrow definitions of “what may become a man” (1:7:47) and the importance of embracing the universal qualities that make us human, not only in Jacobean England and in our society today: most particularly, the necessity of emotional expression and not defining “a man” purely on physical prowess and tough exteriors.

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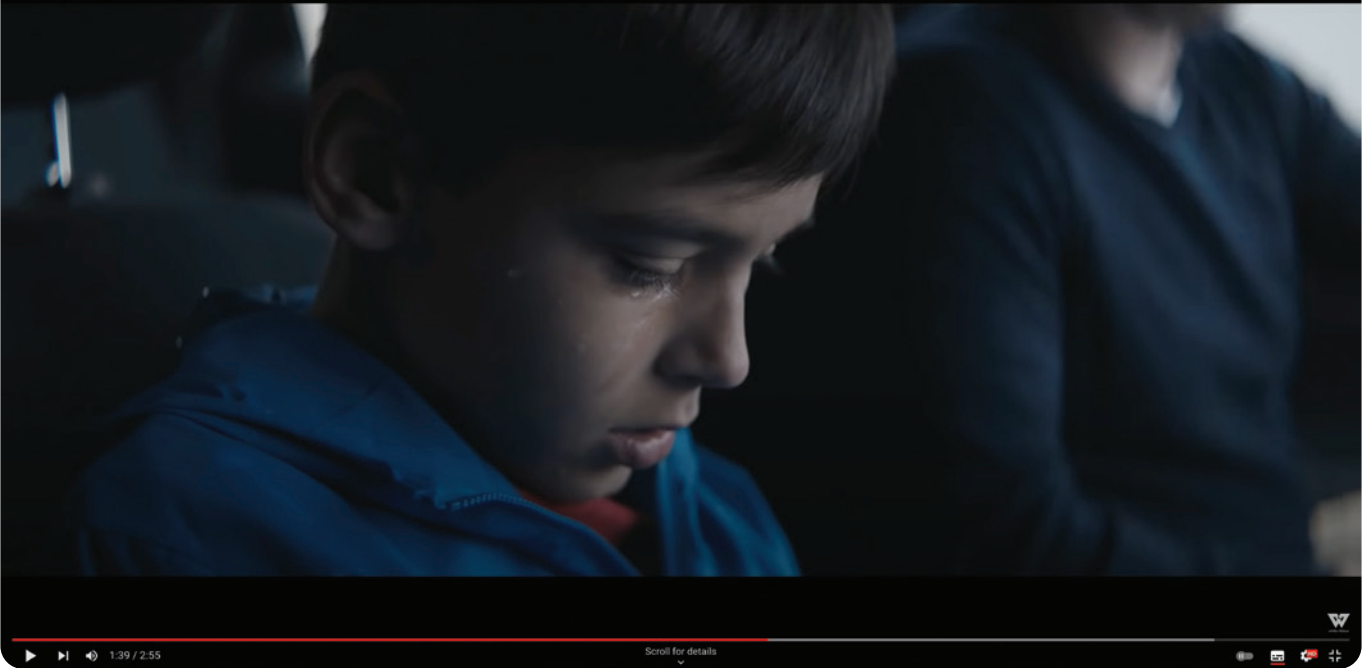
So how does this translate into classroom practice? I asked one class the open question: “What are the biggest inequalities that face people in London today?” The answers were wide-ranging and thoughtful, with three common themes: racial tensions; class and economic divides; toxic masculinity. Gender equality is a topic that students should and do want to explore in a safe classroom space. Beyond discussions, ‘Do Now’ starter activities can be used to immediately engage students with the play’s relevance to contemporary discussions of gender and the consequences of internalised misogyny and inequality. As well as focusing on recall and retrieval at the start of a lesson, making space for open discussions is vital, reminding students why English Literature matters and the relevance it has to their own lives and the world today.

By providing a platform for students to understand contemporary issues of masculine and feminine ideologies from the very beginning of lessons, before diving into the more traditional analysis, historical context and essay practice, students are encouraged to understand Shakespeare’s relevance and, ideally, be best placed to challenge ongoing assumptions about what it means to “be a man”.

“students are encouraged to understand Shakespeare’s relevance and, ideally, be best placed to challenge ongoing assumptions about what it means to ‘be a man’.”

### Here are a few activity examples:

Start with an open task, perhaps one without writing or words: “Draw a witch” or “Draw a man”. This task is accessible to students of all abilities and offers a space to discuss and deconstruct stereotypes and ensure students’ voices are heard. Putting this into practice this year, I saw many stereotypical witches – long hair, broomsticks and pointy hats – but several more experimental, modern, gender-fluid pictures too. The task led one student to



ask why witches are always women, sparking a class discussion about the history of the witch-hunts, the power of stereotypes and the pervasive fear of powerful women.

Make direct links to contemporary news. This has practical uses across the GCSE English Literature and Language specifications (think AQA's Language Paper 2 and the requirement for students to grapple with 19th, 20th and 21st century non-fiction writing) and, importantly, draws immediate connections between the themes of *Macbeth* and ongoing issues in our society. Some statistics. Examples could include the use of celebrities, such as Professor Green (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/29/men-express-themselves-professor-green-suicide-express-feelings>) or sporting stars (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/17/boys-cry-male-suicide-dean-windass>) as well as messaging from young people themselves.

Make time for the character of Macduff. It is Macduff who perhaps best embodies modern messaging about challenging masculine norms. After the murder of Macduff's wife and children, Malcolm commands him to "Dispute it like a man" (4.3.221), to which Macduff replies, "I shall do so, / But I must also feel it as a man" (4.3. 222–223). Shakespeare uses Macduff to show that masculinity should not just be defined by violence and aggression; emotional expression is at the heart of being human, regardless of gender.

Deconstructing masculinity is crucial when studying

*Macbeth*, particularly considering the mental health crisis amongst young people and the ongoing challenge of articulating emotions faced by adolescents. For those aged 16–24, approximately only 13.2% of young men experiencing a mental health problem will access mental health services (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X1730407X>). We have not yet broken this masculine stereotype, the same masculine stereotype that Shakespeare tackles in *Macbeth*. The 2019 video, 'Boys Don't Cry' (<https://youtu.be/fjo-hwAKcas>), explores the dangerous impact of stereotypical masculine ideals, including the pressure on young boys to prove their masculinity to peers and live up to the perpetuating model of masculinity, based on rationality, strength and an absence of vulnerability.

Reading *Macbeth* through this lens will not single-handedly change society. However, by encouraging students to see the relevance of Shakespeare's message that being "a man" involves an articulation of challenging emotions, we can continue to chip away at the prevalent effects that narrow gender expectations can have on young people's mental health and in encouraging a cycle of entrenched misogyny. By explicitly linking Shakespeare's messages to contemporary issues, using open, creative and discursive activities and the character of Macduff, we can use the play to promote a healthier, happier and more gender-equal society.