

English 495

William French, English 495, Fall 2002, Shakespeare Performance Workshop

ENGLISH 495, SEC. 1

THE SHAKESPEARE PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

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Grades

This workshop requires no writing. But it does require ATTENDANCE and

COOPERATION. Perfect attendance and full cooperation in your group assignments

and a positive attitude will result in an A. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Three unexcused absences will lower your grade to a B (or C, depending on circumstances). Four unexcused absences result in failure of the course.

I expect you to put in an average of two to three hours each week outside of class working on scenes and characters and exercises. For many weeks early in the semester, a single hour will probably suffice. Later, especially if the class chooses a public performance, you will need to devote more time. Please anticipate spending more than the 2 hours per week during the last couple of weeks. You will discover ample compensation in the rewards of the concluding exercise and its preparation.

Schedule

The workshop meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 to 3:20 PM in 46C

Stansbury Hall.

Week 1 - Aug 20 and 22

Theoretical Background:

- Modes of Understanding Shakespeare's Plays in Performance
- Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Emotional Intelligence
- Shakespeare in Performance in the Classroom
- Theoretical Issues of Self and Performance
- Warming up and Passing the Energy
- "How ya' doin'" exercise: Getting on your feet and cooperating
- 4.1 from ADO: rapid delivery without compromising meaning or emphasis: Shakespeare, the artist of surprise

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Week 2 - Aug 27 and 29

- "Bare-bones" exercise: The Beating Heart of It
- Reading scripts carefully, looking for sub-texts and "story."
- Punctuation exercise: Punctuation does matter

Week 5 - Sep 3 and 5

- Paraphrasing: Writing and Speaking exercise, in groups
- Repeat
- Work on Tableaux & "most important line" exercise
- Rehearse a scene, sitting first, paraphrasing lines, talking over the scene, speaking the verse, then rehearse standing

Week 4 - Sep 10 and 12

- Rehearse a scene: sit first, paraphrase, then, talking over the scene, decide what story the scene is telling.
- Rehearse standing, using whatever it takes to tell the scene's story.
- Rehearse a scene: sit, paraphrase, talk over the scene, decide the scene's story, discuss how the scene's story works into the play as a whole, that is, what the play's "through-line" is.
- Rehearse standing, using whatever it takes to tell the scene's story, keeping in mind what the "through-line" of the play is.

Week 5 - Sep 17 and 19

Follow through on Week 4

Week 6 Sep 24 and 26

- Rehearse a scene: sit and paraphrase, talk over the scene, decide on the scene's story. Then each student should "tell" his/her character's story in the scene, connecting that story with the character's story in the play.

- Discuss how each character's "story" fits into the "through-line" of the play.

- Rehearse standing, using whatever it takes to tell the scene's story, keeping in mind the through-line of the play.

- Rehearse a scene standing. Emphasize blocking as cues to meaning.

- Variant Scenes: How the same scene may be interpreted in different ways

- The Infinite Variety of Shakespeare

Weeks 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, the Concluding Week 15 - Oct 1 - Dec 5

The Final Exercise: a series of workshops leading up to a final performance in week 15, integrating all the performative lessons assimilated throughout the course. This exercise may be only a private event, just for ourselves; or it may be performed for the English 150 classes, or it may be a public performance, with an invited audience. The choice is yours. Also, the final performance may be either a redaction of an entire play or a series of scenes from several plays, or a combination of the two formats. That choice is yours also.

A few notes on multiple intelligences, from Howard Gardner's *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*:

"multiple intelligences" are different ways of understanding the world that include such things as "social" and "musical" intelligence as well as the more standard "logical" and "verbal" intelligence. Given this fact, children should approach important subjects by many different routes. Any subject could be used: a teacher would introduce a topic by relating it to the ideas that children already have, and to questions children might ask. Children would then pursue a serious and detailed understanding of each topic. They would learn how science, art, or history is done. They would produce examples of scientific investigation, of artistic work, or of historical inquiry--these would be called "performances" The performances would be rigorously assessed, criticized, and analyzed by teacher and students, who would then produce revised and improved versions. The method demonstrates that children already know something about the subject matter of --whatever (say Shakespeare).

The process of generating performances and revising them parallels the natural processes of theory generation and revision. Adults use the same methods to teach sophisticated cultural skills, like hunting, cooking, or sports.

"In our culture, " Gardner says, "good sports coaches use these kinds of teaching methods (including very demanding, old-fashioned, politically incorrect coaches, who are not likely to know the work of Howard Gardner). They watch a child swing a bat, demonstrate the particular problems with the child 's stance, swing themselves, get the child to swing again. This may explain why so many children are so passionate about sports when they are so indifferent to school."

"Imagine if we taught baseball the way we teach science. Until they were twelve, children would read about baseball technique and occasionally hear inspirational stories of the great baseball player. They would answer quizzes about baseball rules. Conservative coaches would argue that we ought to make children practice fundamental baseball skills, throwing the ball to second base twenty times in a row, followed by tagging first base seventy times. Others would reply that the economic history of the reserve

clause proved that there was, in fact, no such thing as 'objectively accurate' pitching. Undergraduates might be allowed, under strict supervision, to reproduce famous historic baseball plays. But only in graduate school would they, at last, actually get to play a game. If we taught baseball this way, we might expect about the same degree of success in the Little League World Series that we currently see in science performance."

"In actually using the theory of 'multiple intelligences' in the classroom, teachers might have children draw charts of evolutionary development or stage oper (or perform Shakespeare) as well as reading books and writing reports."

During an interview, Harold Pinter--playwright, actor, director, screenwriter-- was asked about his acting in his own plays. "Does that give you a greater understanding of what the author is trying to say?" Pinter responded by saying, "The answer must be yes. Through acting you enter the life of a character through another door, and in doing so, you inevitably discover something about how the sinews and the muscles work in that character-the way perhaps you suspected in writing [or in reading]. This is very difficult to articulate, by the way. I can't give you chapter and verse how that works, but you find more about the life and the center of the character than you have imagined as a writer [or a reader]."