

Making Sense of Sonnets: Making Elizabethan Language “User-Friendly”

John Lennon, Petoskey High School

Designed for Tenth Grade English Students

The Demonstration

This lesson demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:

- All students are capable of dealing with complex texts with the proper understanding of language
- We can make language and complex texts accessible by “translating” them into our own words prior to discussing them
- Our writing can be strengthened by modeling it after exemplar texts
- All texts can be related to the lives of students
- Teachers need to provide students the opportunity to test their writing out in the safe space of the classroom
- Collaboration is key to success in the classroom when it comes to challenging tasks
- Student choice is necessary for a highly engaged classroom
- By bringing media, such as music, into class, we invite students to think more critically about the types of information they are consuming

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development:

- Open by inviting students to respond to one of the following writing prompts (4 minutes)
 - Think of a time that you encountered a challenging text in class and write a reflection on your experience. What was the text and what did you go through as you read it?
 - When you encounter a challenging text, do you give up? If so, what causes you to do so? Think of three strategies that could help you to overcome this issue.
 - What’s your experience with Shakespeare so far? Reflect on what you’ve read and what you think of his writing.
- Hand out the packet of “pop sonnets” for students to use as models for the class period and the Elizabethan-Modern English translation guide
- Revisit driving questions: “What are the ‘key moves’ authors make while writing sonnets?” and “How can we make challenging texts more ‘user-friendly’?” (1 minute)
- As a class, examine the first pop sonnet in the packet (5 minutes)
 - Read it aloud once as a class and discuss what it’s saying
 - Read it alone and translate each line as best you can
 - Read it aloud with a partner and try to figure out which song it is
 - Discuss the answer and how we arrive at this answer as a full class

The Step-by-Step Lesson Development continued:

- Re-examine the structure of Shakespearean sonnets by constructing a noticings chart completed as a class (5 minute)
 - Break students up into “shoulder partners”
 - Students have 2 minutes to list out as many noticings as they can about Shakespearean sonnets based off of “Fresh Prince of Belair” poem read in class
 - Create a chart based on their noticings looking at things like rhyme scheme, meter, etc.
- Each student will be assigned a pop sonnet to analyze and translate on their own (5 minutes)
- After five minutes, students will find the partner in the room that has the same sonnet as they do. In this pair, students will discuss their ideas about the sonnet and come to a conclusion of what song it represents (5 minutes)
 - After students believe they have found what song it represents, they should come up with an explanation of how they reached their conclusion citing specific lines from the text that led them to this discovery.
- Coming back together as a class, we will take time to read and discuss each of the sonnets (20 minutes)
 - Go through each of the four sonnets
 - Have one student read the sonnet aloud when it’s their group’s turn
 - Have the other student give the song title and explanation of how they came to this conclusion
- For 20 minutes, students will be invited to choose a song they enjoy and translate it into a Shakespearean sonnet using the sonnets examined in class as a model and using the translation guide as a tool to ensure their writing is accurate.
- 5 minutes will be used to share what we have done so far on these sonnets
- Distribute Sonnet 130
- As a class, read the sonnet aloud (2 minutes)
- Next, have students read the sonnet alone and attempt to translate each line into Modern English (5 minutes)
- Split class into two groups. In these groups, create a “master” translation of this text (3 minutes)
- Have each group share half of their translation and discuss the accuracy of our whole class translation (5 minutes)
- For the next four minutes, have students reflect on how they feel dealing with Shakespearean language and challenging texts now that we’ve taken time to make them more “user-friendly”
- Take what time is left in class to debrief and discuss how we can use this strategy of translation to wade through other challenging texts

Summary of Writing Invitations Throughout Lesson

- Think of a time that you encountered a challenging text in class and write a reflection on your experience. What was the text and what did you go through as you read it?
- When you encounter a challenging text, do you give up? If so, what causes you to do so? Think of three strategies that could help you to overcome this issue.
- What's your experience with Shakespeare so far? Reflect on what you've read and what you think of his writing.
- Translate Sonnet 130 into modern English.
- Choose a song that you have a connection with. Using what you know about sonnets and Elizabethan language, turn the song you chose into a Shakespearean sonnet. Keep true to the language of his time.

Bibliography

- Didriksen, Erik. *Pop Sonnets: Shakespearean Spins on Your Favorite Songs*. Philadelphia, PA: Quirk, 2015. Print.
- Fleischer, Cathy, and Sarah Andrew-Vaughan. *Writing outside Your Comfort Zone: Helping Students Navigate Unfamiliar Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2009. Print.
- Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2004. Print.
- Gallagher, Kelly. *In the Best Interest of Students: Staying True to What Works in the ELA Classroom*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2015. Print.
- Kittle, Penny. *Write beside Them: Risk, Voice, and Clarity in High School Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

Possible Lesson Extensions and Adaptations

- Matching poems to lyrics
 - Take titles off both the poems and the lyrics
 - Give students both packets
 - Have them match the actual lyrics to the sonnet and provide a justification for their matching
- After working on translating Shakespeare's sonnets, have students translate a passage of a Shakespearean play
 - Choose an engaging selection that can stand alone (a soliloquy, dialogue, etc.)
 - Have students read the piece aloud in class
 - Work as table groups or partners to work their way through the passage to translate what it's saying into a modern context
 - Perform the translated piece in its modern context to see if the themes match up.

Affect Demonstrated Throughout the Lesson and Described by Your Students:

- Inviting manner with quiet, engaging humor
- Your knowledge made Shakespeare feel non-threatening
- The way you conveyed that Shakespeare is meaningful to you, made it meaningful to us
- Voice and smile makes the class feel welcome and included

Best Practices Modeled in the Lesson:

- Built on prior knowledge
- Choice in the prompts that allowed all students to engage
- Shared own personal experiences
- Made sure everyone's voice was included
- Teacher worked alongside the students, and then shared his own work as an active participant
- Collaborative work with more than one partner
- Engaged students with the familiar
- Demystified the language challenge of Shakespeare
- Well organized both the classroom and materials
- Gave choices but had extra options available
- Teacher positioned himself as a learner in the classroom

Common Core State Standards Embedded in the Lesson:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D
Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

Common Core State Standards Embedded in the Lesson continued:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10
By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.