DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 456 TE 001 762

AUTHOR Matthews, Dorothy E.
TITLE The Teaching of Drama in High School.
INSTITUTION Illinois Association of Teachers of English, Urbana.
PUB DATE Feb 69
NOTE 20p.
JOURNAL CIT Illinois English Bulletin; v56 n5 p1-20 Feb 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.10
DESCRIPTORS *College Bound Students, College Instruction, College Preparation, Critical Reading, *Drama, Dramatics, *English Instruction, Literary Analysis, Literary Conventions, Literary Genres, Secondary Education, *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

For college or college-bound youth, introductory drama courses must utilize a number of approaches to equip students with a minimal understanding of the various schools and styles of drama. Emphasis should be placed on first-hand experiences (seeing a play or listening to a recorded performance), thus developing in students the ability to view a play as a play, distinct in its problems and potentialities from other literary forms. "Critical reading" ought to initially focus on the way a playwright communicates through the dramatic medium, saving intensive line-by-line analysis for more advanced work. Presenting relevant background material for the particular dramatic period under consideration and assigning plays in conjunction with units on the novel are also useful methods of broadening the student's dramatic awareness. (An outline for high school drama study and suggested classroom projects are included.) (MF)

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN
Official Publication of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English

VOL. 56, NO. 5 URBANA, ILLINOIS FEBRUARY, 1969

Published every month except June, July, August, and September. Subscription price, $3.00 per year; single copies 35 cents. *Entered as second-class matter October 29, 1941, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879.* Address all business communications to IATE Treasurer, 100 English Building, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Address manuscripts and other editorial communications to Wilmer A. Lamar, Editor, 100 English Building, Urbana, Illinois 61801; or to Joan Davis, Co-Editor, 15 Forest View, Mahomet, Illinois 61853. Member of NCTE Information Agreement.

The Teaching of Drama in High School

BY DOROTHY E. MATTHEWS

Of the three major genres, drama has long been regarded as the one most neglected in a typical English curriculum. High school teachers have in the past spent far more hours on fiction and poetry, often "taking care" of dramatic literature with an annual unit on Shakespeare, and, perhaps in the junior and senior year, a consideration of *Our Town* and *Oedipus Rex*.

Recently, however, the preparation of students coming to the University of Illinois indicates that teachers have indeed been responding to pleas to add more modern plays to their courses of study. I have found growing numbers of the students enrolled in English 102, Introduction to Drama, familiar with the works of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and even some of the absurdists, especially Edward Albee. This trend toward updating the play selections included in high school study is most encouraging. It indicates the willingness of secondary teachers to respond to demands for contemporaneity and relevance so widely voiced not only by today's youth but by leading educators as well.

The outlook for drama in the schools is even brighter when one considers the new directions within the profession. The now-famous Dartmouth Conference, attended by specialists in the field from both England and America, highlighted our need in this country to emulate the more imaginative approach to literature which so distinguishes British programs. The result has been unprecedented interest in creative, and more specifically, dramatic, activity in the classroom. The emerging philosophy bodes well for

the inclusion of more plays in the curriculum, for it conceives of literature primarily as experience, and the study of literature as a process of engagement inviting student interaction and emotional response. Need I point out that dramatic literature — with its unique demands upon the reader to infer, to interpret, and to imaginatively flesh out the bones of a script — should be a vital part of such a program? What is closer to experience than a play which is, by its very nature, a selection of life's most vivid and eventful moments? And what can speak more directly to the emotions than a form which communicates not only verbally but visually and aurally as well?

The new thinking stimulated by the Dartmouth Conference can be seen in numbers of recent publications calling for a revamping not only of our idea of what literature is but also how it should be taught on the elementary and secondary levels. For instance, James Moffett's new book, *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13,* wisely proposes that reforms begin on the elementary level. His emphasis is upon the need for increased oral activity, with drama playing a central part in the curriculum. I should point out that Mr. Moffett uses the term "drama" in its broadest sense, meaning "spontaneous and tentative expression in small groups." But the adoption of the kind of training he envisions would certainly lessen the difficulties of high school English teachers, for students would come to them with years of practice not only in the use of the spoken voice, but also in pantomime, improvisation, dramatic enactment, and even playwriting. Secondary teachers would then be relieved of the ridiculously quixotic task now imposed upon them of trying to bring Shakespeare to life in classrooms where students don't even know what a play is — much less a play using different theatrical conventions and written in what is to them practically a foreign tongue.

The Moffett book is only one of many recent publications advocating changes which should simplify the work of the high school teacher of drama. For instance, Geraldine Murphy in her new book and James Hoetker and Alan Engelsman in their research report for the Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory recommend supplanting the time-honored tradition of beginning with Shakespeare with a gradual introduction to the dramatic genre. Both books suggest ideas for planned sequential secondary programs devoted to the oral and dramatic arts. It is interesting to note that they endorse a study of monologues, dialogues, play excerpts, and one acts to precede the study of full-length plays.

Bright though the future may be, hope for things to come is cool comfort to a teacher faced daily with students with no background whatsoever. And it is to the immediate needs of today that I will now turn my attention for the remainder of this article. In order to limit the topic, I will eliminate Shakespeare's plays from primary consideration since tl teaching of Shakespeare has been fully treated in other issues of this bulletin. I would like to look first at the needs of the college-bound and then at possible goals for the teaching of drama at the introductory level. This will be followed with some suggestions for procedures in a typical high school classroom.

Since many high school teachers of English are under pressure from parents and administrators to prepare young people for college, it might be useful to know exactly what the expectations are, at one university, at least. As the chairman of the introductory drama sections at the University of Illinois, I recently interviewed professors of upper-level dramatic literature courses in the hope of finding out what they expect — or want — from students in the way of background. Their opinions were surprisingly uniform. Below are the questions asked and a summary of the response.

1. What minimal knowledge (of playwrights, dramatic types, historical periods, specific plays) do you expect from students who enroll in your courses in drama?

Response: There was agreement that a knowledge of Shakespeare can usually be assumed since high schools have traditionally given this kind of training. There was, however, no preference as to a specific play. All stressed instead their conviction of the importance of students' knowing, in general, *what* a typical Shakespearean play is — that is, how it is different from other plays. Since the implication of the replies was that acquaintance with modern drama is also expected, I asked for specific titles they would like to see taught. Again they agreed that they expected only familiarity with the kind of play being written today rather than with any particular play or playwright. One instructor explained that it mattered little whether a student had read *Macbeth* or *Hamlet, Death of a Salesman* or *Glass Menagerie*; the important thing is that the student should know that there are different kinds of drama. He should, for instance, realize that a Shakespearean play operates within a different set of conventions from an ancient Greek tragedy, that a modern realistic drama presents yet another kind of experience.

Another professor stated that he expected students enrolling in

an upper-level class to be acquainted with plays from the major periods of dramatic history, but that he assumed that this exposure would be given in the college introductory course rather than in high school.

2. What knowledge and/or skills would you like to see all students master of when they enter your course? That is, under optimum conditions?

Response: Here again there was consensus. All agreed that the most important prerequisite for upper-level work is the ability to read a play *as* a play and not just as a story. In fact, this skill was considered even more essential than knowledge of various dramatic traditions. It was unanimously expressed that students should first learn how to read a play. In other words, they should be introduced at the outset to an awareness of drama as a separate and distinct genre with its own special demands upon the reader. It is only after a student has come to know "how a play means" that he can begin to be perceptive to differences and likenesses in plays representing historical periods.

3. What kinds of approaches would you consider useful for training on the most introductory level?

Response: Here there were some differences of opinion, but the single approach regarded as mandatory by all was that of stressing critical reading. Most of the teachers felt that early acquaintance with the drama should be kept free of theory, on the basis that intellectualizing should follow rather than precede a first-hand experience with a wide range of plays. A study of Aristotle's poetics and other theories of tragedy and comedy, for instance, was considered to be the province of advanced and specialized courses in college.

There was some disagreement as to the kinds of approaches which should be coupled with critical reading. One professor felt that character and thematic analysis should provide the content for beginning student papers, whereas another was strongly opposed to what he called such tangential matters as discussing characters as if they were people or extracting ideas from plays for philosophical discussion at the expense of a study of playwriting as an art. All agreed, however, that any approach must justify itself in terms of results; it must bring about increased understanding of how a playwright communicates through the dramatic medium.

4. Can you see any discernable difference between those students who have had English 102 and those who have not?

Response: This question could not be answered since none of

the professors had made any attempt to discover the previous training in drama of students, but since English 102 is not required as a prerequisite to advanced work in English, it can be assumed that many students proceed to upper-level dramatic literature courses with only their high school study as preparation. This means that teachers of introductory drama, both on the high school and the college freshman level, share common problems: how to awaken in students an awareness of drama as a genre and how to teach the critical reading of a play. These goals, it seems to me, are so vital that a teacher's pursuit of them would be of immense worth even to terminal high school students.

Since it is not reasonable to ask students to read an assignment in dramatic literature with any degree of awareness before they understand exactly what a play is, a logical first step might be to help them see the differences between drama and other literary forms, especially the differences between a play and a fictional narrative. Some basic differences can usually be brought out inductively through discussion. One possibility is to ask a class to think of a very simple and well-known story — even a nursery tale will do. After the students have agreed upon a selection and have reviewed the plot, they can be assigned as homework a choice between dramatizing the story or writing an essay pointing out the problems and the possibilities open to a playwright attempting such a dramatization. The next day can then be devoted to sharing the ideas from the compositions. Some central differences seen by the students themselves usually include the following:

1. A story can tell; a play must show.
2. A narrative has no limitation as to length; the attention-span of an audience considerably restricts a play's length.
3. Consequently, a story can go into much greater detail; a play must be economic.
4. A writer of a narrative can govern more directly the reader's response to people and events; in a play, interpretation is left largely to actors, to the producer or director, and to the audience itself.
5. A narrative can go "inside" the minds of characters; a play must externalize everything or resort to such artificial conventions as asides and soliloquies.
6. A story can portray a slow development of character and can relate events in leisurely sequence; a play must get immediately to the most crucial situations.

7. A narrator can interrupt a story to comment and explain; a playwright must communicate indirectly.

8. A novel can change scene without restriction; spatial mobility is more burdensome to a playwright.

This list could be developed in greater depth, but it should suggest the direction class discussion can take.

The distinction between a story and a play can be made even more vivid if one of the playscripts written by the students for homework can be enacted before the class. Such a dramatization often calls attention more specifically to the potential rather than the limitations of the dramatic medium. Even a poor performance can provide the class with the experience of watching three-dimensional living creatures *as* a story unfolds. They can then see human dynamics in operation, for there are possibilities for interaction not only among the actors but between the players and the spectators as well.

Asking students to recall professional productions usually elicits comments about drama's interdependence in the theatre with many arts. Meaning can come not only through words but also through such media as music, art, costume, lighting, and choreography. Thus, any consideration of drama as a unique genre should result in viewing a script as only the directions and the material for a multi-dimensional art form. Words in a play can be seen as analogous to musical notes on a sheet: they both require artists to bring them to life. That is not to say that a play *must* be performed to be meaningful, but it certainly points to the need for an imaginative reader who can bring to his view of dialogue an awareness of the extensions possible through the addition of gesture, body movement, and especially the human voice — with its capabilities for variety of volume, tone, and pacing.

Awareness of the differences between drama and narrative can be brought out in many other ways. Students can be given dramatic and narrative versions of the same story and be asked to point out the differences. They can be asked to convert a short dramatic scene into prose — adding not only the indirect discourse but also the descriptive and explanatory details which would have to be inferred from the play script. Or they can be asked to create brief original stories and then to adapt them into prose and dramatic versions. I am sure that inventive teachers can devise other methods for bringing about sensitivity to the limitations and possibilities of the dramatic genre. The best methods, of course, would involve student participation and discovery, but even a brief lecture on this subject would be better than nothing at all.

It is harder to teach students how to read a play than it is to bring about an awareness of what a play is. Critical reading implies analysis, and analysis too often leads to endless vivisection and deciphering. Let me make my position clear. I do not feel that the primary activity of the English classroom, under the graduate school level, at least, should be line-by-line literary criticism. In fact, direct and explicit critical analysis can "turn off" more beginning students than it can illuminate. But it *is* the job of a professional teacher to be master of close analysis. It is only through a thorough knowledge of a play that a teacher can know the direction class discussion should take. His own close critical examination of a play can tell him what questions to ask of students and what points to bring out in class. If he has done his homework as a teacher, he will be able to deepen and sharpen the students' own responses to the most essential matters of technique in operation in the play at hand.

Let us then first turn our attention to what a teacher should look for in a play before considering the most essential matters to stress for the students' training in critical reading. Because of the limitations imposed by article form, only an outline study guide will be given. Definitions of unfamiliar terms can be checked in any handbook for the study of drama. An especially good one is *Aspects of the Drama* by Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto, published by Little, Brown and Company. The outline is devised to be useful in the study of plays from major historical periods. For instance, the section on background gives some direction for selecting meaningful information to precede the study of pre-modern drama. Only relevant facts which shed light on the plays themselves, however, should be brought into the classroom.

The outline is necessarily general and is meant merely to suggest to the teacher points to consider in a critical approach to the study of plays. Its usefulness, unfortunately, is somewhat limited in the reading of contemporary plays, since many of the most significant ones are anti-traditional.

BACKGROUND

The Idea of a Theatre Assumed in the Play

Aim:

to provide ritual? spiritual uplift? moral instruction?
to promote community solidarity?

to teach: religion? nationalism? political doctrine? new ideas?
to satirize: social mores? behavior?
to entertain? amuse? provide escape?

Playwright's Idea of a Theatre

Physical Theatre for which Play Was Written

Type of Acting Area:

orchestra? raised platform? outdoor area? arena? church? innyard? apron stage? raked stage? multi-use auditorium? picture-frame stage?

Physical Details of Theatre:

number of acting areas? entrance and exit facilities?
size of acting area? trapdoors? stage machinery? curtain?

Audience:

size? composition: ages? social classes? sexes?
motivation for attendance? demands from play? interests?
seating arrangements: around acting area? in front of acting area? at a great distance from acting area? in close proximity to actors?

Visual and Audio-Effects Available:

lighting: natural? artificial?
sound effects? music: chorus? instruments? tape recorder?

Conventions of the Theatre:

illusionistic conventions:
- footlights as fourth wall? acting area isolated by aesthetic distance?
- audience ignored by actors?

non-illusionistic conventions:
- ancient Greek: no violence on stage, maximum of three actors, etc.
- Elizabethan: free mobility of time and space, asides, soliloquies, etc.
- expressionistic: externalization of mind's interior
- frankly theatrical:
  - epic (Brecht) — alienation of audience, emotional detachment
  - highly stylized — (Congreve, Wilde, Shaw, Coward) all speakers witty

THE PLAY IN TERMS OF PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE DRAMATIST

Selection of Material

Source of story:
legend? history? work of another author? work in another genre? original?

Choice of central action: (the single action the entire play demonstrates)

Choice of central conflict or tension:
man against God(s)? man against nature? man against society?
man against man? man against himself?

Selection of scenes:
point of attack?
parts of story to omit entirely? parts merely to report on? parts to summarize?
parts of story with greatest dramatic potential?
choice of climax — emotional high point?
determination of other climactic moments?

Structuring of Play

Plot decisions:
simple? (clear plot line which first raises then settles issue of conflict)
complex? (intricately planned interrelationship of story threads)
single or double? (a sub-plot or not?)
degree of contrivance in construction of plot?
(examples of stock plotting devices: letters that miscarry, mistaken identity, misunderstandings, deceptions, trickery, secrets, surprises, reversals, coincidences)

Arrangement of scenes:
conventional structure:
pyramidal: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement
tri-partite: exposition, complication, resolution
Shavian: exposition, situation, discussion
less conventional structural patterns:
cause-effect? thesis-proofs? state of affairs-typical aspects of it?
situation-elaboration? loosely episodic? circular?

Handling of Time

Arrangement of time sequence:

tight chronology (strict unity of time with no significant breaks)
loose chronology (general straight-forward movement within acts but with time gaps between the acts)
broken chronology (occasional deviation from straight-forward movement)
temporal flexibility (frequent backward and forward movement in time — as in memory sequences)

Expository methods: (audience enlightenment to action not presented visually)

artificial direct means: prologue? commentary by chorus or choral character?
artificial means within action of play:
minor characters discussing the background of a situation?
reading of letters, newspaper accounts, etc.?
introduction of stranger on scene to whom everything has to be explained?
clearly expository speeches concentrated at beginning of play?
gradual exposition worked in naturally through dialogue?
more subtle means such as suggestions, hints, innuendoes throughout play?

Means of showing passage of time:

choral commentary? program notes and curtain? dialogue? lighting changes? musical cues? changes in costume, make-up?

Handling of Space

Methods of presenting locale:

verbal descriptions?
physical set: realistic? suggestive only? symbolic?
conventions of staging: foreshortening of space? use of platea?

Handling of Scenes

Identification of "beats" (small segments of action demonstrating unity)

function of each "beat":
important to plot: as exposition? part of chain of events? transition?

important to play: provide mood? comic relief? contrast?
important to characterization?
tempo of each "beat":
determination of tempo by:
amount of stage movement? physical action?
number of pauses in delivery of dialogue?
length of speeches? (long speeches, slow pace)
emotion portrayed? (excitement increases pace)
recognition of "beats" providing "agons" (an "agon" is a segment of dialogue which incorporates its own building and release of tension)

Artistry of scenic arrangement or rhythm:

arrangement of "beats" or scenes for special effect: contrast? gradual building of emotion? alternation of tempo?

Characterization

Choice of characters:

protagonist:
class: aristocratic? royal? middle class? lower class?
kind of depiction: realistic or theatrical? heroic or non-heroic?
basic skeletal type?
antagonist? foil? confidente? raisoneur?

Treatment of characters:

flat or rounded?
static or dynamic?
stock characters? (braggart, sly servant, gossip, sweet young woman, lovesick young man, etc.)

Function of each character:

important to plot? — needed for causal chain of events?
important to play? — as comic relief? contrast? representation of viewpoint?

Choice of Diction

General description of dialogue:

representational: colloquial? naturalistic?
somewhat formalized but simulating actual speech?
presentational: frankly theatrical? stylized? witty?
poetic?
rhetorical?

Dramatic possibilities offered by dialogue:

opportunities for: movement? stage action? business? vocal variety? effective use of pause? audience inferences? character differentiation? creation of mood?

Opportunities for tempo variation:

variation in length of speeches?
variation in density?

Qualities of dialogue: economy? appropriateness? beauty? wit? power to evoke emotion? verisimilitude?

Means of Providing Emphasis

Verbal means of giving emphasis:

through dialogue: repeated phrases or words? verbal imagery?

through character: raisoneur? (character who comments on action) choral character? (character who may address audience directly)

Non-verbal means:

sound effects: off-stage noises? silences, pauses? dramatic use of music?

setting: scenic symbols? lighting? use of stage space? (pictorial composition of actors)

stage movement: small gestures? stage business? movements required by dialogue or stage directions?

Other possibilities for communicating meaning:

repetition of any kind

proportion (elements which receive the greatest expansion usually are considered most important)

position (most emphatic positions are at beginnings and ends of scenes and of play)

focus (unusual emphasis upon any element [mood, character, idea, etc.])

choice of title

The above outline should give a teacher some direction in reading a play critically by suggesting what to look for. Use of the study guide should at least clarify some of the choices open to a playwright, and appreciation of form surely comes with a sense of these choices.

Using the outline to study a number of plays should bring out

similarities and differences between kinds of plays. For instance, salient differences between the plays of Shakespeare and Sophocles become obvious if one considers just the first section of the outline on background. Ancient Greeks considered plays as part of a religious festival, an annual community affair where people of all ages assembled to see enactments of legends with which they were already familiar. Theatre to them meant a form of ritual: The plays hammered home the necessity for men to live lives of moderation, avoiding excess pride lest they offend the gods. The acting area itself, an outside circle or dancing-place, reminded the audience of the seriousness of the drama, for in its center was an altar to the gods and within its circumference a stately chorus chanted odes counselling prudence and humility. How different is the idea of a theatre revealed in Elizabethan drama! Plays were presented for commercial profit by professional acting companies, so the tastes and desires of the theatregoer were naturally catered to. A love of physical action, an exuberant patriotism, a sense of humor, and a taste for the spectacular and grotesque — witches, ghosts, insanity, blood, and gore — are all reflected in the content of the plays. The fact that the audiences attended the theatre primarily to be entertained certainly can account for the multi-level appeal in Shakespeare.

Many differences between Greek and Shakespearean plays can also be seen if one considers the physical theatre. Actors in the time of Sophocles performed in an outdoor area that could be most aptly compared to a modern football field. In order to be seen by spectators sitting in the top rows, the players had to wear padded costumes and elevated shoes; in order to be heard they spoke through crude amplifiers constructed within their large cumbersome masks. Is it any wonder the script does not call for rollicking stage action? Since speeches were often not audible to everyone, they were often accompanied by pantomimic gestures and choreographed reactions on the part of an ever-responsive chorus. Certainly one would not expect dialogue in a Greek play to be subtle or fast-moving. On the other hand, the Shakespearean actor was physically close to his observers, who almost surrounded him in a small intimate theatre. This proximity offered Elizabethan playwrights good opportunity to communicate with the audience through familiar asides, facial expressions, and soliloquies. The fairly large apron stage projecting into the seating area allowed much freedom of movement for actors, who could stage battles, fence, or engage in any kind of horseplay the dramatist might care to devise. A Shakespearean script reflects the flexibil-

ity that the Elizabethan theatre, with its many unlocalized acting areas, provided.

A look at the modern realistic theatre reveals striking differences in our idea of the theatre and in our physical playhouse. No longer is drama at the core of community life. Our plays seldom reveal either religious or patriotic overtones. Only the most affluent can attend important Broadway openings. Nor are our performances given under natural light on a stage open to the sky. We take our seats in a darkened auditorium and wait for curtains to be raised — offering us a kind of peep-hole look into the lives of people who are separated from us by footlights and framed within a proscenium arch. We don't expect anyone on stage to "break the aesthetic distance," to say anything to us directly nor even to show any consciousness of our presence. It's as if we are eavesdroppers watching and listening in on real events. We are ready to believe that what we see is actually happening, and we are assisted by artificial lighting, sound effects, and perhaps even music in being transported into this world of illusion. We would be disturbed if the dialogue sounded like speeches; we expect to hear the language of ordinary life.

These contrasts, then, are merely illustrations of the sort of comparative observations that would be helpful to a class in understanding plays as scripts written for a particular audience seated in a special kind of theatre with their own set of expectations. Is it any wonder that plays from different historical periods differ from each other? Long lectures on background are not required, but pertinent information that might throw light on the kinds of plays produced would be meaningful. The emphasis, of course, should not be upon facts for their own sake but for their utility in providing insight into the form drama takes.

Now let us turn to the part of the outline devoted to the play in terms of the problems confronting the dramatist. Even a quick perusal should reveal that the playwright shares many of the same problems as a writer of fiction: creating characters, telling a story, and having the story yield meaning. But a dramatist also encounters special problems and choices which are posed by the nature of the dramatic medium. In the study of a play *as* a play, these specialized problems should receive attention. Discussion, in other words, should not be confined to story, character, and meaning. In fact, such questions as "what happens in the play?" and "who are the people?" should be mere preliminaries to a confrontation with the central issue: Just exactly *how* does a play mean? Although students, especially in high school, need not be

bothered with all the detail suggested by the study guide, there are certain things they should be asked to look for in their study of any play. The following ideas may be helpful.

I have found that since the plot of a play is usually what is of most interest to young people, they are very likely to read only for the story, ignoring everything else. For this reason, it is often a good idea, before making an assignment, to familiarize the class with the plot line, especially if the play is a difficult one. If the drama exists in prose form, it is very helpful to acquaint the students with this version first. An alternative is to read a good summary or to tell the story orally. In other words, a good way to prevent a class from reading superficially is to see that they know the outcome beforehand.

Another effective preliminary to assignment is to suggest a hypothetical situation, in terms relevant to the students, which involves the same basic conflict as the play to be read. Then the class may be asked to work out improvisations of how they believe people might behave under these circumstances. Then, after this preliminary involvement with an analogous situation, they can be informed of the playwright's handling of a similar conflict. The British find this kind of improvisational activity an effective lead-in to dramatic literature.

Before assigning the reading of a modern play, it is often a good idea to go over the stage directions carefully with the class. Information that would be presented gradually and in detail in a work of fiction is usually left for the reader to infer from a play's dialogue or from the stage directions. If a teacher can make "getting into" a play easier, he will help his students overcome what is to them a real barrier to reading enjoyment. Actually reading the first few pages of the first act to the students, helping them to see the necessary inferences that must be made, would make the assignment of finishing the play on their own less of a chore.

All the foregoing suggestions, however, are to my mind poor substitutes for what I consider to be the best way to introduce a play to a class — taking them to an actual performance or at least letting them hear a professional group give the complete play on phonograph record. Since the first possibility is rarely possible, why not choose to teach only those plays which have been recorded? Then have the class simultaneously listen to and follow with their eyes the text in front of them. In this way, they can respond directly to the drama with a minimum of difficulty. I firmly believe that a high school student's first introduc-

tion to a play should be made as pleasurable as possible. They shouldn't be bothered the first time through with academic questions. Plays were written to be experienced — not studied. And emotional response is certainly blocked if the listener is preoccupied with critical matters or with reading obstacles.

All alternatives to listening to the play on record leave much to be desired. Reading the play aloud in class with students being assigned to the roles is helpful only if the readers are unusually gifted. Most unrehearsed class readings are disasters. Some teachers have successfully used the method of breaking the class into groups and having each one responsible for a rehearsed presentation of a scene. They then have these readings given in front of the class in sequence so that eventually the entire play has been heard. The success of these methods depends in large measure upon the abilities of the students involved. Personally, I recommend the use of the professionally produced recorded play.

After a pleasurable first acquaintance has been made, the students may be encouraged to share each other's reactions. Allowing time for opinions to be expressed, even if they are uninformed opinions, is salutary. Students frequently want to compare their views of individual characters or to discuss the outcome. Eventually the teacher can bring the discussion around to the central issue of meaning. Here again the ideas of the class may be disappointing, but students should be allowed and even encouraged to express them. If a consensus cannot be reached that is satisfactory to the teacher, he should suggest they postpone consideration of the play's meaning until after a second reading.

An excellent entree into the critical study of the play can result from a teacher's query about the emotions evoked from listening to the record. He might ask, "Did the play arouse any emotions in you?" "Was the playwright making an effort to tap universal responses — such as laughter? sympathy? fear? anger?" "Did any particular scene succeed in arousing you?" If the class can agree upon a scene which is particularly moving, then this scene provides the best starting place for critical study. The class members can be asked to turn to this section in their books in order to see if they can determine exactly *how* the playwright was able to evoke their responses. If the selection is at all typical, the scene will probably be a highly dramatic one. Pinpointing the conflict is the first step in analysis. "What is the nature of the tension?" "What are the characters feeling during the scene?" "How has the dramatist suggested this feeling?" "How much of

the emotion is carried in the dialogue?" "Does it come across in the words themselves or in the way they would be said — the tone of voice, the volume, the timing of delivery?" "Are pauses or silences necessary to give the lines meaning?" "Can you visualize a performance of this scene?" "Can you picture the gestures or body movements that might accompany the dialogue?" Perhaps a replaying of the recorded scene would help if the class is slow to see the "how" of it. A professional reading, heard for a second time, can awaken new awareness of the contribution made by such subtle effects as tempo and rhythm. Nuances brought out by vocal inflection and even melody pattern can often be spotted that were not noticed before.

After this kind of attention has been given to the parts of the play that most impressed the class, the teacher can then assign a second reading of the entire play — made purposeful by asking students to look for very specific things. If the class is new to playreading, the assignment can be parceled out to groups, each one re-reading with a different goal. For instance, one group could be asked to look specifically for character relationships. Members would consider not only the delineation of the protagonist and the antagonist, but they could also try to determine the dramatic function of the minor characters. Is there a foil for the protagonist — that is, a character whose function is to serve as contrast? Does the dramatist use one of the characters as a mouthpiece for his own views? Is this mouthpiece a raisoneur — a character who plainly serves the play by providing commentary? Or is there a character whose viewpoint can be assumed to be representative of the author? Since a dramatist cannot fill his stage with non-functional people, usually every character given any prominence at all serves either the plot or the play as a whole. He may be there to provide comic relief, to represent a viewpoint, or he may serve as a confidente — that is, an artificial sounding board providing the dramatist with an opportunity to externalize the ideas and motives of the protagonist. Class consideration of characterization should be largely in terms of function. It is a mistake to allow students to digress into loose generalizations about characters outside the context of the script.

Another group might be sent to their second reading with the task of finding clues to the play's meaning by searching in the dialogue for repetitious words or phrases and in the stage directions for possible symbolic importance in the stage objects, movements, and lighting called for. Modern plays are especially dependent upon these means of communication since naturalistic

conventions prevent the playwright from using more direct means. In today's theatre, lighting and stage movement often convey mood, a function performed in Shakespearean drama largely by the poetic dialogue with its possibilities for suggestion through imagery.

A more difficult assignment, but one well worth the doing, would be to have a group study the play in terms of its aural impressions. They can, for instance, look for the function of the sound effects called for by the script. Playwrights from Shakespeare to Tennessee Williams have exploited sounds of thunder and high winds to add background excitement to dramatic scenes. Chekhov makes especially effective use of off-stage snatches of laughter and conversational fragments to provide a kind of choral counterpoint to on-stage dialogue. Songs which appear to be casually brought into a scene are often highly functional. It is not by chance that "Paper Doll" is the tune Arthur Miller chooses to be sung in *A View from the Bridge.* Another kind of aural impression is provided by the tempo of a scene. Listening for effective use of pauses on the recording would be very worthwhile. Or finding especially rhythmic scenes illustrating the impact of a rapid-fire give and take of lines (stychomythia) would call attention to this technique, employed by every major dramatist.

Other group assignments can be made as the teacher sees fit. After having studied the play in detail himself, he would know the most profitable kind of analysis to assign. Usually matters of structure are worth only a few comments from the teacher himself. Structural analysis has limited value for beginning students. They are usually able to point out the central emotional climax and the major turning point, but such matters are not worth belaboring. In deciding what to emphasize for student practice, a teacher should consider chiefly the relevance of the technique in the play at hand. For instance, if a dramatist has not used sounds in a significant way to convey meaning, then they should not be bothered with. If, as in *The Lesson,* by Eugene Ionesco, pattern and rhythm are important to meaning, then these matters should receive class attention.

When students have finished their second reading and have pooled their findings in group discussions, the reports can be made to the class. The teacher can conclude by adding additional insights as he sees fit. It is my opinion that study of any work on a high school level should not be pushed too long nor too hard. Every vein of gold need not be mined. If students have enjoyed the play and have finished their study knowing a little bit more

about how drama operates, a teacher should feel satisfied. The best indication that the unit has been a success is a clear appetite for more plays on the part of the students. I would recommend the inclusion of more plays in the curriculum and less intensive work given to each one.

Perhaps the best way to encourage a wide acquaintanceship with dramatic literature and, at the same time, to enrich the class work is to assign play reading as part of outside projects. While a class is studying a novel, for instance, groups could be formed to search for scenes that might be presented in class in correlation with the work being studied. The class presentation could be a rehearsed reading of scenes or, better yet, an actual performance — complete with costume, props, and of course, memorized parts. Or students could make tapes of scenes to play in class at the appropriate time. This use of drama in the classroom would not only give variety and interest to the period, but it would lead students to a wealth of dramatic literature that would otherwise not have found its way into the classroom. Furthermore, the plays would provide opportunities for everyone to become involved in the experience of bringing literature to life rather than treating it as a specimen for academic exercises in analysis. The presentation of a scene can teach more about timing, character interaction, and the relationship of dialogue to action than can verbal literary dissection.

There are dramatized versions of many works frequently studied in high school classes. For instance, Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars* is a dramatic version of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country.* There is an excellent playscript for Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* by Louis Coxe and Robert Chapman. Scenes from Frances Goodrich's *Diary of Anne Frank* would be most effective if presented in class while students are reading the autobiography.

While a class is working in detail on a Shakespearean play, why not have groups reading other plays as homework? Excellent paper topics for the collegebound could come, for instance, from a contrast of Shakespeare's treatment of Julius Caesar and that presented in Shaw's anti-heroic *Caesar and Cleopatra.* Or while the class is on *Macbeth,* mature students could profit from exploring a different handling of the theme of o'er-riding ambition in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus.* Or even greater contrast could be seen by reading Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* to search for a scene to present in class showing a modern version of the man-corrupted-by-power theme.

Under ideal circumstances, drama shouldn't have to be taught. It is a literary genre whose works survive only so long as they can please. Shakespeare's plays can truly justify their longevity — not in the study, but in the theatre. Such works as *Oedipus Rex* and *Dr. Faustus* can move an audience in 1969 just as surely as they could centuries ago. Because drama is the most living and pulsating of the literary arts, I hate to see it treated in the classroom in too academic a fashion — especially in high school classrooms. If the first experience in reading them is made as enjoyable as possible, and if subsequent discussion is analytic only to the extent that appreciation of them as plays can be increased, then the best interests of secondary school students are well served. Furthermore, if students are provided with more and more opportunities to present dramatic scenes, they will learn drama in the best way possible — through meaningful experience.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

March 15, 1969 — English Club of Greater Chicago — Spring Conference

Time and Place — University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus, beginning at 9 A.M. and ending with a demonstration of micro-teaching at 1:30 P.M.

Theme: "Break Down the Walls: New Ideas and Techniques for the Teacher of English"

Information: Contact Lucien Thomsen, Thornridge High School, Sibley Boulevard and Grove Avenue, Dolton, Illinois 60419

May 2-3,1969 — Midwest English Conference at Thomas More College (formerly Villa Madonna) at Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky, just across the river from Cincinnati

Theme: "The Context of Literature"

Information: Inquiries concerning the conference should be sent to Miss Sandra Cuni, English Department, Thomas More College, Box 85, Covington, Kentucky 41011