

Romeo and Juliet in One Hour

In addition to offering variety to lesson plans, the use of physical activity in the classroom is particularly beneficial when combined with language learning. However, too often classroom activities lack real “activity,” as they do not involve much action or movement. An excellent way to introduce action is through the production of a drama, a poem, or some other literary work. Students will likely make concrete advances with such a technique.

Based on experience teaching university students in Istanbul, Turkey, we can recommend the following simple activity of introducing, performing, and evaluating a classical play for an EFL class. Although there are many wonderful works to choose from, the drama presented here is *Romeo and Juliet*, which we have successfully used on numerous occasions. This activity has been used in first-year classes, which dealt with English composition and language awareness, and fourth-year classes, which emphasized the use of literature in TEFL. The first-year students were pre-service teachers who were fairly proficient in written English but had not yet acquired adequate oral com-

petence. The fourth-year students, who were senior teacher trainees, had developed both their written and oral English skills but still needed practice to improve their self-confidence and their oral presentation skills, as they were required to teach lessons in local Istanbul schools.

Objectives

Enacting a stimulating dramatic performance of a memorable literary work of art offers the opportunity to select content that is highly relevant to students, which increases the quality of their experience and challenges the teacher to define specific educational objectives (Fleming 1994). The objectives of this activity are (1) to develop cognitive skills to motivate students toward the reading of classical literature in English; (2) to improve students’ knowledge of second language vocabulary and pronunciation; (3) to illustrate professional skills to teacher trainees through a communicative, interactive, and student-centered activity; and (4) to enhance the personal skills of cooperative learning, oral participation, and the affective variables of motivation, confidence, and self-esteem.

Classroom procedure

The time needed for this activity will depend on several factors, including the size of the class, the language level of the students, and whether they are familiar with the work to be performed. If students have read the play before, the play can be reviewed and the activity can aim for more lengthy and complex performances and a higher level of interpretation. If the play is being introduced for the first time, more schemata-building introductory time may be necessary.

The following five-step activity is based on one session of approximately fifty minutes. After being introduced to *Romeo and Juliet*, students receive scripts, discuss roles, rehearse, and perform the play.

Step 1: Distribution of scripts (5 minutes)

The class is divided into groups according to the number of acts in the play (five groups for *Romeo and Juliet*), with attention given to the number of characters appearing in each act. Each group receives a script that contains (1) the main characters and their roles in the play; (2) the main events of each act summarized in a few sentences; and (3) two or three short quotes for each act, usually among the most well-known or important ones (see Appendix for the *Romeo and Juliet* script). These quotes are provided for the following reasons:

- They give students a framework or anchor on which to base their interpretation and eventual expansion of meaning of the actions to be performed.
- They give students some contact with the actual lines of the play, thus making the experience more authentic and helping them to more easily memorize some of the most famous lines.
- They ensure that the students as audience will listen more carefully to their peers' performance to identify "real" lines.
- They will help students to become more aware of the rhythm, style, and manner of expression in Shakespeare as opposed to modern, everyday speech, and hopefully, students will start to appreciate the beauty of Shakespeare's language in an implicit way.

Step 2: Assignment of roles (5 minutes)

The teacher explains to the students that they are to interpret the action any way they like in a three- to five-minute dramatization of the act assigned to them. They are to use their imagination to create gestures and dialogue to illustrate the events of the particular act they are to perform. They are reminded to incorporate at least one of the given quotes into their performance. Each group will decide which students in their group will play which role.

Step 3: Rehearsal of the play (20 minutes)

Each group of students is encouraged to creatively imagine what kind of action their roles require and to rehearse their act to prepare for the performance of the drama. Props and costumes can be supplied by the teacher or created by the students themselves from materials found in the classroom or school. (An example of a prop "created" by a student: instead of a tiny, dainty vial for Juliet's sleeping potion, a student found a huge bottle of industrial cleaning fluid that Juliet could hardly pick up, and the effect was very amusing.) Rehearsal should last about twenty minutes, with the teacher walking around the classroom, helping students with pronunciation, vocabulary, the interpretation of each group's rendition, and in general being an impromptu director.

It is important to emphasize here that this activity is not supposed to be analytical or intellectual; it is dramatic, and students are encouraged to imagine how Shakespeare's characters felt in a particular situation and to represent those feelings and actions in their own way. Through this activity, students will enjoy the text and will therefore be more willing to invest the intellectual efforts needed, in and out of class, to more fully comprehend and appreciate the work. The teacher can explain the unknown vocabulary in the script, but the difficulties of Shakespeare's language should be smoothed over. Students can be encouraged to guess at interpretations, to use their world knowledge to grasp the dramatic situations as quickly as possible, and to use their imagination to a great extent in determining what Shakespeare meant in any given situation.

The three main resources involved in the activity are (1) the teacher, who is familiar with the work; (2) the background knowledge

the students will possess from their study of it, unless the activity is used as an introduction to the work; and (3) the students' imagination and creativity complemented by the enthusiasm of the teacher and the excitement and challenge of performing a whole drama in one class period. The momentum should be fast, excited, and exuberant.

Step 4: Performance of the play
(20 minutes)

Each group of students performs the play for three to five minutes in class, act by act. The non-performing groups are encouraged to carefully observe the other groups' performances and to listen for Shakespeare's quotes; after each act, the class tries to identify those quotes.

Step 5: Evaluation of the performance
(5 minutes)

The members of the class comment on the results of the performance, including the dramatization of the play summaries and the use of quotes. Then they choose the best group according to set criteria established with the instructor beforehand, which could include the effectiveness of the overall interpretation by the actors, the use of gestures and dramatic voice, the amount of enthusiasm shown by the performers, and the smooth incorporation of quotes.

Conclusion

This drama activity combines the use of authentic material with students' improvisation to help them make a difficult literary work their own through interpretation and self-expression. This activity is much different than a totally scripted performance where the students create nothing. As a combination of play summaries and real quotations, it allows the students to use their own ideas, gestures, actions, interpretations, and expressions to flesh out their interpretations of Shakespeare's characters. As they experience the excitement of interpreting, rehearsing, and performing a Shakespeare play in a very short time, students invariably become inspired by English literature. This is important, because it exposes them to the way Shakespeare uses language poetically to create a special and powerful effect.

In six years of use in many classes, this activity has had very positive reactions from both teacher trainees and the students in their training schools, as well as from their teachers and mentors in those schools. This is evidence that the use of drama helps develop professional skills by showing teachers the benefits of a communicative and student-centered activity that utilizes many important skills, including those of cooperative learning and professional oral presentation.

One reason for this success is because all people react to good stories, especially ones with meaningful action and relevant themes. Cockett (2000, 22) notes a simple but very true fact: "Students have a sense of drama." This sense of drama may be intensified, made more conscious, and channeled into improving students' overall English skills by studying and performing a play like *Romeo and Juliet*.

References

- Cockett, S. 2000. Role-play in the post-16 language class: A drama teacher's perspective. *Language Learning Journal* 22, 17–22.
- Fleming, M. 1994. *Starting drama teaching*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Wells, S., and G. Taylor, eds. 1994. *The complete Oxford Shakespeare: Histories, comedies, tragedies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JUDY MONTHIE-DOYUM holds an M.Ed. from the University of Georgia and a doctorate from the University of Paris, the Sorbonne, in Applied Linguistics for Foreign Language Education. She has taught in the United States, France, and Turkey. She has produced eight Shakespeare plays with the students of the Foreign Language Education Department at Bosphorus University in Istanbul.

GÜLAY ÖZTÜRK graduated in 2003 from Bosphorus University, Istanbul, where she is currently pursuing a Master's degree. She acted in the department's production of *Othello*, and is now an English instructor at Yıldız Technical Institute in Istanbul.

Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

Main Characters

House of Capulet

Juliet: Daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet

Lord and Lady Capulet: Rich couple in Verona, Italy; enemies of the Montagues

Nurse: Juliet's nurse

Tybalt: Juliet's hot-tempered cousin

Friar Lawrence: Priest in Verona; counselor to Romeo and Juliet

House of Montague

Romeo: Son of Lord and Lady Montague

Lord and Lady Montague: Rich couple in Verona, Italy; enemies of the Capulets

Mercutio: Romeo's friend

Act 1

1. Juliet is not yet fourteen, but her mother and father think it is time she got married! Lady Capulet tells her that a young man named Paris wants to marry her; he will be at the Capulets' ball that evening.

Lady Capulet: "The valiant Paris seeks you for his love."

2. Romeo decides to go (uninvited) to the ball with his friends, including the witty, exuberant Mercutio.

Mercutio: "Come, we burn daylight, ho!"

3. Romeo and Juliet see each other for the first time and it's love at first sight.

Romeo: "Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!"

Juliet: "My only love sprung from my only hate!"

Act 2

1. After the ball, Romeo stays in the Capulet garden, sees Juliet at her balcony and hears her declaration of love for him. He also declares his love for her. They plan to get married the next day.

Romeo: "See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!"

Juliet: "Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow."

***Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare**

2. The next day, Juliet sends her nurse to find out from Romeo the details of their marriage that day. Nurse comes back and tells her to go to Friar Lawrence's cell and Romeo will be there.

Juliet to Nurse: "How art thou out of breath when thou
hast breath
To say to me that thou art out of breath?"

3. Romeo and Juliet are married by Friar Lawrence.

Friar Lawrence: "You shall not stay alone
Till holy Church incorporate two in one."

Act 3

1. Tybalt saw Romeo at the Capulet ball and is furious at him for having "crashed" the party. He is looking for a fight with him. He finds Mercutio instead; they start fighting. Romeo appears and tries to stop the fight; Mercutio is killed by Tybalt in the confusion.

Mercutio: "A plague o'both your houses!"

2. Romeo, in turn, becomes furious with Tybalt for having killed Mercutio. He kills Tybalt.

Romeo: "Oh, I am fortune's fool!"

3. Juliet is waiting for Romeo in her room at the Capulet palace.

Juliet: "Come, night! Come Romeo! Come thou day in
night."

4. Romeo has been banished to Mantua, Italy. Romeo and Juliet spend the night together; then, he has to leave the next morning. It is difficult for the lovers, now husband and wife, to part.

Juliet: "Yond light is not daylight; I know it, I."

5. Lady Capulet tells Juliet that she will marry Paris the following Thursday. Juliet is devastated!

Juliet: "He shall not make me there a joyful bride!"

***Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare**

Act 4

1. To avoid marrying Paris, Juliet decides, with Friar Lawrence's help, to take a potion that will make her appear to be dead.

Juliet: "Romeo, Romeo, here's drink. I drink to thee."

2. Nurse, Lord and Lady Capulet find Juliet in her bed the next morning. She appears to be dead, and there is great sorrow.

Lord Capulet: "Death lies on her like an untimely frost
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field."

Act 5

1. Romeo does not receive the letter from Friar Lawrence informing him of Juliet's decision to take a potion to make herself look dead, so he rushes to Verona when he hears of her "death." He goes to her tomb, sees her "dead," then takes a powerful poison to kill himself.

Romeo: "O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a
kiss I die."

2. Juliet wakes up from the potion, sees Romeo dead beside her, and decides to kill herself with his knife.

Juliet: "This is thy sheath; there rest, and let me die."

3. Through the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet, the two families are reconciled.

All: "For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."