

LESSON:

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE.

EXAMINING ACTION AND ESCALATING VIOLENCE THROUGH LANGUAGE.

(ACT 1, SCENE 1)

Learning Strands: Literature Studies and Reading, Language

Overall Expectations

LIV.01D

Read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary and informational texts, from contemporary and historical periods;

LIV.03B

Identify and explain the effect of specific elements of style in a variety of literary and informational texts.

LGV.02B

Use listening techniques and oral communication skills to participate in classroom discussions and more formal activities, such as storytelling, role playing, and reporting/presenting, for specific purposes and audiences.

LIV.02D

Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of a variety of literary and informational forms, with a focus on-plays, short stories, and short essays;

LGV.01D

Use knowledge of vocabulary and language conventions to speak, write, and read competently using a level of language appropriate to the purpose and audience;

Specific Expectations

This lesson plan works as an introduction to Shakespearean language and sets the stage for discussion of literary devices and themes throughout the play. It has been designed with ENG1D1 (English 9 Academic) Ontario Curriculum Course Expectations in mind. To view all Course Profiles and Codes in detail, please visit www.curriculum.org.

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE.

PART 1: EXAMINING ACTION AND ESCALATING VIOLENCE THROUGH LANGUAGE

SCENE SUMMARY (ACT 1, SCENE I)

A pair of Capulet's servants meets a pair of Montague's servants in the street. An insulting gesture from one to the other results in a brawl. Lord Montague and Lord Capulet, along with their wives, also join in, until Prince Escalus arrives to break up the fight. Montague, Benvolio, and Lady Montague are left behind to talk of Romeo's bizarre behavior of late. Benvolio then catches up with Romeo and we learn that Romeo is lovesick for Rosaline. Benvolio gives his cousin some good-natured and "manly" advice, though Romeo is not convinced.

1. EXAMINE THE ACTION OF THE SCENE WITH THE CLASS.

To begin, make a quick list of different kinds of rivalries. In what kinds of situations do we find that allegiance to one group puts us at odds with another? What experience do you have with rivalries between or among families, gang rivalries, ethnic rivalries, maybe even rivalry between different cliques at school? Introduce the idea that in *Romeo and Juliet*, no cause for the feud between the families is given; the Chorus speaks only of an "ancient grudge" – this feud has been around for a long time. Imagine possible origins for a feud between two otherwise respectable families. (LI1.01D, LI1.07D)

2. READ THROUGH SCENE 1 AS A GROUP – either chorally, or perhaps with each student taking a line in turn.

When everyone has had a turn to speak, take a moment to answer any questions about the meaning of the words (especially the puns) and the action of the scene. Clarify the "teams" – Gregory and Sampson on one side, Abraham and Balthazar on the other. (Although the 4 characters have male names, Gregory and Balthazar are played by women in CTP's production.) Why has Shakespeare chosen to include a silent character in the scene? Why is Balthazar there, and what does he do? What effect does his presence have on the impact of the scene? (LI1.02D, LI1.03B, LG1.03B)

3. INTRODUCE "BLOCKING" AND GO OVER A FEW EXAMPLES with students in the Chorus.

For example, ask students, how would they demonstrate on stage: "Two households, both alike in dignity?" (Fingers indicating two? Miming houses with their arms above their heads?) Then, in scene i, how would they demonstrate "Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals?" (Sampson chucks an imaginary bag of coals? Gregory rubs his sore shoulder?) These are just some examples. Encourage students to visualize the scene and be creative in annotating their blocking instructions. This helps them move into the action of the play and familiarize themselves with what is happening, losing fear of the new language. (LI1.02D, LG2.01D, LG2.02D)

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE. (CONT'D)

4. DIVIDE STUDENTS INTO GROUPS according to the number of players indicated in each mini-scene.

Accommodation: There are 19 players and 9 "directors" (28 students) needed to work on the 9 mini-scenes. If there are more than 28 students, assign a few shyer students as "directors" or in charge of props. If there are less than 28 students, ask a few keen students to participate in more than one mini-scene. The objective is to get all students to actively participate in this activity. (LG2.07D)

5. GIVE STUDENTS TIME TO REHEARSE AND BLOCK their mini-scenes.

6. PERFORMANCE.

Ask them to stand at the front of the class in order of mini-scenes and perform according to their scene study without breaks in between. This should be really fun, and the first time the words and actions come alive for the students! At this point, teacher may ask the "players and directors" to discuss their "blocking direction" choices in the actions of the scene. They do not need to memorize their lines but should be invited to use action and props found in the classroom. (LG2.03D, LG2.04D, LG2.05D)



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PART 2: LANGUAGE IN FOCUS

REVISIT LINES 28-48, provided in the following handout. This scene has been cut here to closely conform to the version that Classical Theatre Project uses in performance.

The language in the scene is relatively simple; within that simplicity, it offers an excellent opportunity to explore the varieties of rhythm that drive this early scene of the play, and to examine the sound values of the language that help shape the meaning and playing of the scene.

Have a quartet of volunteers read through the scene, so as to hear each character with an individual voice. What do you notice about the language and rhythms of the scene? As you continue, you might now have everyone speak lines of interest all at once; encourage experimentation with rhythm, tone, and volume. (LG2.06D, LI3.01D)

How does the language build, and lead to the moment where physical violence breaks out?

- What repeated words and phrases stand out? Why so many repetitions of the word “sir”? Experiment with changes in tone or emphasis to lend clarity and meaning to the repetitions, as when Abraham repeats the line “Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?”
- Notice the internal rhymes in Sampson’s aside to Gregory (side, I, ay). Can you use that rhyme to enhance this moment of privacy? Observing the rhyme in the first line (two, Montagues) draws attention to important new information – the arrival of the enemy.
- What do you notice about the rhythm of the scene? Be alert to shifts between long lines and short lines. What does it say about Sampson that he has all of the longest lines?
- In Sampson’s line, contrast the long phrase “quarrel, sir” with the short phrase “no, sir” – can you take advantage of that shift in rhythm? What do you make of the fact that there are only 2 multi-syllable words in the scene (quarrel, better)? What does the quick repetition of those words say about the characters or the relationship between them?
- How does the quartet of short, quick lines at the end of the scene lead into the moment where violence erupts? What if things speed up here?
- What does Sampson imply with his final line, “Draw, if you be men”? What vocal quality or emphasis can you use to make that a fitting “last straw” for the scene?

Having spent a few minutes exploring these words, sounds and rhythms, think about how the meaning of the scene is clarified through such attentive use of the language? Do you learn anything new about the scene, or the characters?