

Designing Shakespeare

Teachers' Instructions

Activity 4.1 / Shakespeare Learning Commons

Canadian Adaptations of
SHAKESPEARE

www.canadianshakespeares.ca

1. Introduction

As theatrical texts, Shakespeare's plays were not meant to be solely read, but performed and seen. The role of the stage designer and the visual design of the stage has historically been an overlooked element of theatrical production, despite its importance in the creation of meaning in a performance. To fully understand Shakespeare's works as performance, it is important to explore the act of engaging visually with a play, and to analyze what that visual interpretation can bring to the play text.

2. Purpose:

To analyze a work of William Shakespeare, with the goal of interpreting the written text to create a sensitive and creative visual translation that focuses on the physical and atmospheric needs of production.

Payoff:

- Students will practice "close reading" of a text and will develop critical written and visual analytical skills.
- Students will practice expressing themselves both visually and verbally while translating ideas across disciplines.

Primary Materials

Activity 4.1 Student Handout: Instructions

http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/pdf/activity4_1_instructions.pdf

Activity 4.1 Student Handout: Worksheet

http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/pdf/activity4_1_worksheet.pdf

Activity 4.1 Resource Guide

http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/pdf/activity4_1_resource_guide.pdf

Activity 4.1 Image Source

http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/pdf/activity4_1_images.pdf

4. Activity: Preface

This activity is meant to be done in conjunction with a play by Shakespeare already being taught in the class. By the time this activity is performed, the students would ideally already be familiar with the play to facilitate the selection and interpretation of scenes.

This exercise requires students to perform a "close" reading of a selected scene in one of Shakespeare's plays with the ultimate goal being the creation of a small design portfolio consisting of: a brainstorming worksheet, a 2-3 page design rationale, a technical drawing, and a full-colour sketch(es) of the design. This exercise will encourage students to engage critically and creatively with both textual and visual materials.

Before

- Print off the Image Source PDF that displays different stagings and designs of Shakespearean plays. These images are meant to be shown to the students as examples and to illustrate the depth and variety of possible visual interpretations of the same play.
- Before the activity, conduct a class that introduces the concept of scenography/stage design to your students. Highlight the importance of approaching the design as the creation of an environment, rather than a simple backdrop for performance. Consult the Resource Guide print out for other resource sources.
- Print off stage templates from the Image Source PDF for the technical drawing activity. You may want to consider presenting your students with a choice of the type of stage they are to design for; a choice between a thrust stage or a proscenium stage, for example. These templates will help guide the students and create some boundaries for the space they will be engaging with.

4. Activity: During

Hand out the Student Instructions, Brainstorming Worksheet, and Stage Templates.

1. It may help to divide this activity up over a number of classes. The first class could be used as a brainstorming work period in which students are given time to consult the Resource Guide provided or other reference materials (books, websites, etc.) to research methods and design styles.
2. Read over the introduction and activity expectations with the class.
3. Provide reference materials for your students to consult while they are developing their designs. (See suggestions below.)
4. Provide a variety of media for the students to use such as: paint, pastels, pencil crayons, ink, magazines for collage, computer illustrations etc. The students should be encouraged to experiment with a variety of different media and formats to find what will best suit their design.

5. After

- The students will each display and present their finalized designs to the class and explain the rationale behind their design choices.
- This would be a good time to have a class critique. Encourage class discussion of the strengths of each design, guiding the class to focus on what each design would add to a live performance.

6. Extension Activities

- This activity can be extended to include the creation of a maquette of each student's design which would push the visual interpretation to the next level, encouraging further consideration of the three-dimensional performance space.
- This activity can also be extended to include an actual performance staged using one student's design as chosen by the class.