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Exploring Teaching Shakespeare with Fan Fiction

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Paul E. Resta

Joan E. Hughes

Exploring Teaching Shakespeare with Fan Fiction

by

Mathew Evans, BA

Report

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Abstract

Exploring Teaching Shakespeare with Fan Fiction

Mathew Evans, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Paul E. Resta

Although students are exposed to the works of Shakespeare extensively from 9th -12th grade and sometimes at the postsecondary level, teachers are pressed to make the literature relevant and interesting for their classes. Fan fiction, which are stories written by amateurs out of a strong feeling of admiration and appreciation for an existing work, present numerous avenues to engage students with classic literature. I developed a fan fiction website called the *Stratford Tattler* which reimagines Shakespeare's characters and world as if they were modern day celebrities which the website covers like an online tabloid. While I wrote fan fiction articles and developed the website, I received feedback, which in turn formed an iterative design. Three university Shakespeare scholars, two high school English teachers, and one legal expert on copyright provided the bulk of the feedback and advice. Over six months, I incorporated their suggestions as the project evolved from trying to build a participatory community to developing a stand-alone learning environment which teachers could readily incorporate in their classroom. The

final result includes a website with teacher resources, namely a teacher's guide with recommendations and lesson plans directed at high school English teachers, along with a model article of fan fiction that stays true to Shakespeare's original text, a quality that most of the aforementioned experts who participated in the project found necessary for fan fiction to be educational. The teacher's guide also includes guidelines for avoiding copyright infringement when repurposing existing digital images. Along with these teacher resources, the insights of my participants and my experience writing fan fiction as related in this report hopefully provide a first step toward high school English teachers being create their own fan fiction website and engage students with classic literature.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the middle of 2011, I had the idea of creating a mashup between a tabloid news website, like the UK's *The Sun*, and fictional characters from Shakespeare's plays. I had the vague idea of somehow inserting literary characters, like Romeo and Lady Macbeth, into the mix with today's celebrities like Lindsay Lohan and Justin Bieber. The point was somehow to create a new learning experience where students could be motivated to learn about classical literature by seeing it in a new, slightly humorous context.

Then I came across Henry Jenkins' seminal white paper, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, where he highlighted a project by then 14-year-old Heather Lawver, who had created a remarkably successful website doing something very similar using fan fiction (2006). This term, fan fiction, describes "amateur fiction based on the worlds and/or characters of preexisting texts... and published pseudonymously for consumption by a fan community (Driscoll 2008, p. 285). In Lawver's case, she created a website based on the *Harry Potter* book series called *The Daily Prophet* in which she and over 100 collaborators wrote newspaper-style articles about the Potter world, treating the fictional characters as if they were real people. Presumably, the concept and name of the fan fiction newspaper is borrowed from the *Harry Potter* books and movies (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Front page of the movie version of *The Daily Prophet*. [Motion picture].

Adapted from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, by D. Heyman. 2001. Copyright 2001 by Warner Bros.

As Jenkins (2006) notes, Lawver's use of fan fiction is an excellent example of the phenomenon of individuals sharing and creating online content as part of a participatory culture (p. 3). Lawver belonged to a community involved with collaborating and using existing media, i.e. Harry Potter, to create new digital artifacts which could be spread across the internet. While Lawver's fan fiction website undoubtedly was fun for her and her collaborators, she demonstrated how young people could engage with literature in such a way that they learned English language skills and digital literacy in an informal setting, not to mention how the "the web can free teaching and learning from the physical boundaries of classrooms" (Owston, 1997, p. 27).

The intention of this project evolved over time from trying to create a participatory community for fans of Shakespeare to developing a website that could

enable teachers, whether they were professors teaching Shakespeare to undergraduates or English language arts teachers at the high school level, to use fan fiction to engage students with Shakespeare. The website's metaphor, as explained earlier, remained the same throughout the process as a tabloid that portrayed the characters and times of Shakespeare's plays as if the latter were real life movie stars and celebrities. The website would be an online gossip rag that included sensational claims and innuendo about the likes of Hamlet and Lady Macbeth. Hopefully, this would place the literature into a new context in which students could relate to the material and become a participant with the text instead of a passive reader.

At the outset of this project, I needed to tackle both technical and writing challenges. Developing the website entailed coding the site and negotiating my own limitations with technology and the needs of the project. Also, in order to establish the look and feel of the website and convey to teachers some of the possibilities of using fan fiction to teach Shakespeare, I needed to write articles myself and experience what it's like to write fan fiction.

Over the course of this project, the goals evolved from an exploration of my experience writing fan fiction based on Shakespeare and more towards how the experience could be reproduced for students in the classroom. It seemed that this website would be most useful to teachers if they could easily share the tabloid articles with students via the internet, have a platform in which students could share and comment on each other's work, and have a curricular guide with background information and suggestions on how to use fan fiction in the classroom.

Chapter 2: Fandom and Fan Fiction

While *The Stratford Tattler* appears to be the only existing fan fiction website exclusively based on Shakespeare, my pursuit to make the website is not atypical for fan behavior, nor am I alone in being inspired by Shakespeare to create fan fiction. Fans display “...a fascination, interest, and emotional investment in a particular subject...often communal...[with] an emphasis on amateur endeavors,” according to Busse (2009), a scholar of fan studies (p. 386). This type of devotion to a person or group is most obvious in sports, for example with Wisconsin “cheese-heads,” fans of the Greenbay Packers football team wearing giant blocks of foam cheese on their heads, braving snow and rain to watch their beloved home team play in the middle of winter. In terms of modern media, fans of TV series like *Star Trek* and the movie series, *Star Wars*, display a startling obsession for their favorite characters by attending conventions, participating in online discussion forums, buying and wearing memorabilia, and producing their own cultural products, such as writing their own fan fiction episodes and stories.

While Busse notes that these adult fans were regarded with “suspicion and reproached for wasting their energies” (p. 386) in the past decades, more recently both the professional community of media creators and media scholars view them as vital parts of society. Producers of traditional media, such as TV shows and film, consider “...the creation of an active fan culture to be an important component of the production process. Networks and cable channels offer communities for viewers, with many providing message boards to support online communities for viewers” (Burns, 2011, p. 555). An active fan base translates into devoted viewers and consumers of the product who can be relied up to keep a product or franchise afloat. However, as Jenkins points out in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992), these hardcore fans are not passive zombies that accept whatever is aired over the air waves. Sure, they inspire a degree of derision by

non-fans for taking ownership of the story and characters to the point that they involve the fictional world with their real life, yet they are also critical of the media and even “subversive viewers” as Busse points out (p. 389). This devoted yet critical behavior can go beyond the form of vitriolic posts on a website forum all the way to altering the original source without permission. For example, one sci-fi fan was so incensed about George Lucas’ *Star Wars: Episode I*, particularly the character of Jar Jar Binks, a goofy long-eared alien out of character with the Star Wars world, that he edited a VHS copy of the movie and released a re-edited version, minus the offensive character (Mystery of Star Wars phantom edit, 2001). In the BBC article, Lucas said that he was “delighted” with the fan version of his movie and it is to be expected with fans in the digital age. His company released a statement saying that in legal terms, they were fine with it as long as the product was in good taste and not for-profit.

It should be no surprise that most fan fiction is based on pop culture objects like Japanese anime, video games, science fiction, and films (Van, 2011, p. 165) possibly because the fans were contemporaries of the creators of the works and experienced it first hand either in their childhood and/or when the objects originally came out. The sites are “organized by the particular source text it uses, such as *Star Trek*, *Harry Potter*, or *Lord of the Rings* [and are comprised of] different subcommunities with overlapping memberships on the sites of publication” (Driscoll, 2010, p. 285 – 286). Typically, the websites rely on text as their content with little capability of supporting images, video, or audio, borrowed or otherwise. They do allow for members to comment and provide feedback to each other’s work, which is part of the participatory nature of these sites. One of the most popular is www.fanfiction.net (see Figure 2), which includes a vast array of genres and subgenres which the fan fiction writer can use to categorize their work.

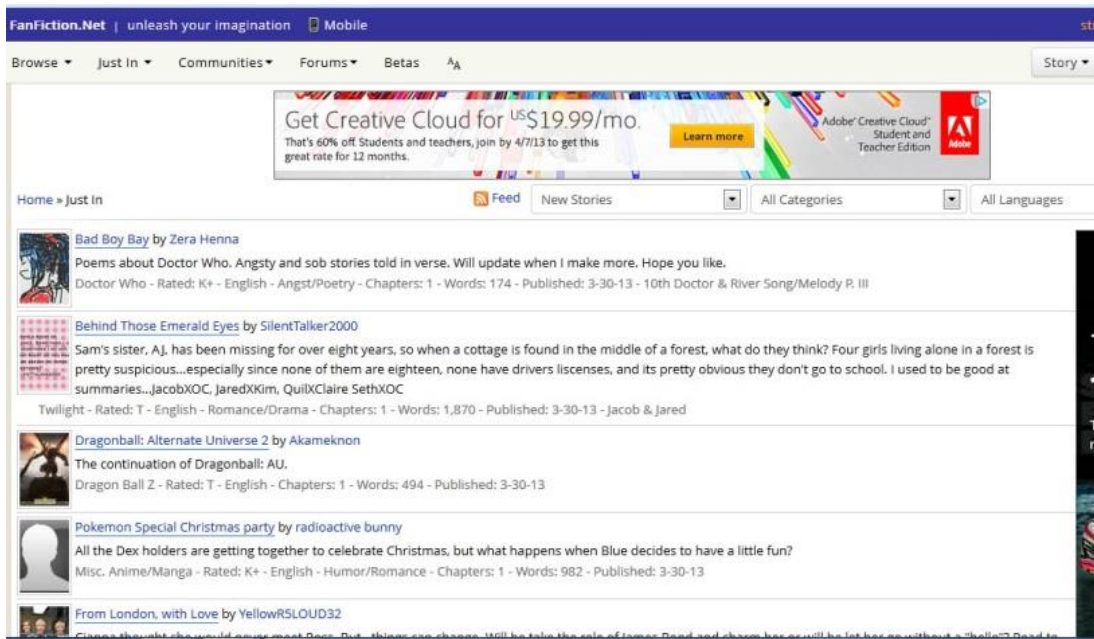


Figure 2. Latest fiction submitted to fanfiction.net. Notice the simple layout of the website and minimal visual appeal besides the text. Adapted from *fanfiction.net*, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.fanfiction.net/j/0/1/0/>. Copyright 2013 by fanfiction.net.

Like most other fan fiction archives, fanfiction.net lets the writer select the content rating to warn readers about possible inappropriate language, and it includes disclaimers that the submitter is not the sole owner of the original text (Driscoll, 2010). It even includes a warning that some authors, such as the writer of popular vampire novels Anne Rice, do not permit fan fiction of their work. These options, warnings, and disclaimers are how they deal with copyright infringement of the original text and reducing the possibility of “promoting pornography and of endangering minors... both in what they circulate and how they circulate it...” (p. 286). Protecting minors is of particular concern for fan fiction websites because while fandom cuts across “gender, race, class, and national boundaries” (Mazarella, 2010, p. 283), tween and teenage girls particularly display their fan behavior through the “production of creative cultural

artifacts such as Websites, zines, and fan fiction (p. 283). Driscoll points out that “The fear that fan fiction might be dangerous for girls assumes that they are interested in its romance and fantasy elements and will thus be, either unwittingly or eagerly, exposed to pornography,” but she notes that the websites generally draw a line between what is generally considered fiction and what is porn (2010, p. 286).

NOT PROFESSIONAL, BUT RATHER EDUCATIONAL

As one of the largest fan fiction sites, Fanfiction.net has a sizable collection of submissions based on Shakespeare’s poetry and plays. Out of the over 2,000 submissions listed, one posted by WritingBookworm, a member who does not identify herself but I will refer to her as female, is a good example of how an inspired fan expresses herself by writing. She has taken the character of Viola from the play *Twelfth Night* and transposed it into the epistemological form of journal entries:

The Journal of Viola

My dear journal,

I have come to a very strange land.

But of course, as this is a journal, I believe I must report about how exactly I got here. Well, I was sailing across the sea on a ship. All was well when our paths crossed with a mighty, rumbling storm. Bit by bit, the storm ate at our ship, sinking many parts and sending others flying to who-knew-where. Many members of our crew went overboard as well, including . . . including . . . this is too hard to even write on paper. Yet I must say it.

Including Sebastian. My own brother, now drowned and dead. There is a heavy grief in my heart in which I cannot properly express. Life shall never be the same again.

Eventually I was stranded on a foreign beach. After I came to, a captain explained to me that this country is called Illyria and a few other various things as well. He told me of a great Duke that I could go work for. I knew a chance to start a new life when I saw one, and this was most certainly one.

But in order to do so, I had to disguise myself as a man, for I could not assure myself of my safety as a woman. So, from now on, my name will be Cesario.

Signed,

Viola (WritingBookworm, 2013, The journal of Viola)

In my own opinion, this work is better than most of the fan fiction submissions for Shakespeare. WritingBookworm makes no claims as to being a professional writer, but she has done a decent job of creating interest in the reader's mind with the opening crisis of a shipwreck and a fluid authorial voice. Her/his choice to use the epistolary structure of telling the story through journal entries is a well-established literary device, one that Mary Shelley used in *Frankenstein*, in an attempt to, ironically, to make her simple ghost story more literary.

Naturally, WritingBookworm's version of *Twelfth Night* was posted on a fan fiction website, and by definition, was an amateur endeavor. The writer's intention was not to sell the work; everything published on the site is for free for all involved – writer, reader, publisher. Its artistic and entertainment value is far below a professionally published work of fiction, such as for example the much anticipated collection of short stories by Linda Bamba who, in one story, reimagines Othello as a university English department where Othello is the only minority professor (2013). However, WritingBookworm's work has special meaning if understood from an English language arts teacher's perspective. WritingBookworm conveys the inciting plot point of *Twelfth Night*, that of the shipwreck and Viola's plan to disguise herself as a man, which leads to the play's use of mistaken identities, humor, and much of the dramatic tension. The writer has also tapped into Viola's character as a saddened sister who lost her brother but is a survivor determined to go on with her life as best she can. From an educator's point of view, had WritingBookworm been a K-12 student (she never says so much), she would

be doing a commendable thing. Not only is she demonstrating her knowledge of Shakespeare, but she is synthesizing that knowledge and creating a new product. As Maclellan (2011) noted in her definition of authentic learning, “Production of knowledge is a particular type of cognitive work that constructs new knowledge in a meaningful way and has personal, utilitarian, or aesthetic value beyond the demonstration of competence” (2011). By extension, we can see the personal and aesthetic value of fan fiction as a significant accomplishment both inside and outside of the classroom.

One last point about WritingBookworm’s version of *Twelfth Night*, is how it stays true to the source text. In fan fiction terms, a writer that does so is writing “canon” material because it is “faithful to the source text and thus also identifies the agreed framework through which writers’ and readers’ experiences are translated for other members of the fan fiction community” (Driscoll, 2010, p. 287). On the other hand, when a writer takes characters into different directions, for example creating a story in which Romeo and Benvolio are involved in a homosexual relationship, the work is considered “fanon”. Driscoll goes on to describe fanon material to be “associated with immature experimentalism often thought to characterize the writing and reading of young fan fiction writers”. The distinction between canon and fanon is relevant later as I discuss the reactions of Shakespeare scholars to my own attempts at fan fiction where I sometimes used and abused the source text to the amusement, and at times, dismay of some.

A fan fiction website that embraces fanon, canon, and other varieties of creative expressions of fandom has the potential of building a participatory learning environment. Fanfiction.net is an excellent example in this regard because its members need only be 13 years old and agree to follow a few restrictions about posting stories based on works of authors who have expressly prohibited their work from being used. Also, members’ stories appear on the website in an updated feed by category for everyone to see and

comment on. This fits Jenkins' description of a participatory culture by having "low barriers to artistic expression...[and] support for creating and sharing one's creations with others" (2006, p. 7). The site also enables forms of social interaction as each member has a profile and messaging capabilities which could facilitate mentoring of newbie fan fiction writers by more experienced members. Such an online community might also possess the characteristics of Gee's "affinity space" as people with a common interest come together to share what they know, novices gain knowledge from experts, and knowledge, in general, is held in high esteem as is seen in gaming communities (2004). Whether the members on fan fiction websites learn from one another or even have any interest in improving as writers has not been quantified, but these websites do provide a receptive audience for their work.

FAN FICTION AS A FULL EXPERIENCE

What is lacking in fanfiction.net and other fan fiction archives is a rich visual experience of the metaphor in which the fans are engaged in. The writer is essentially pretending to add to the storied world, the canon, of the source which has so inspired them. However, fanfiction.net offers little aesthetically and is based entirely on sharing text-based creative works. While it provides a venue for every imaginable genre and mashup of fictional worlds, its layout and look and feel resemble a discussion forum dating back to the 1990s. A fan might want to express himself through dramatizations or reenactments in video or images which could be shared in this online community, rather than posting it in a generic context, such as Youtube or Tumblr. Of course, my observation is not meant to be a slight and the focus of the site, after all, is to share text-based creative products. However, the website leaves much to be desired for feeling like

you are contributing to the fictional world that so inspired you. In effect, by being a platform for every genre, it's a platform for none of them. A notable exception to this pattern of theme and design is the website www.pemberley.com, a self-proclaimed "haven for Jane Austen Addicts (2013, FAQ). Besides offering extensive background information about Austen's novels and dedicated discussion boards, the "Republic of Pemberley" contains a remarkable archive of Austen-inspired fan fiction (Van, 2011) presented with a background that resembles a book page, as shown in Figure 3.

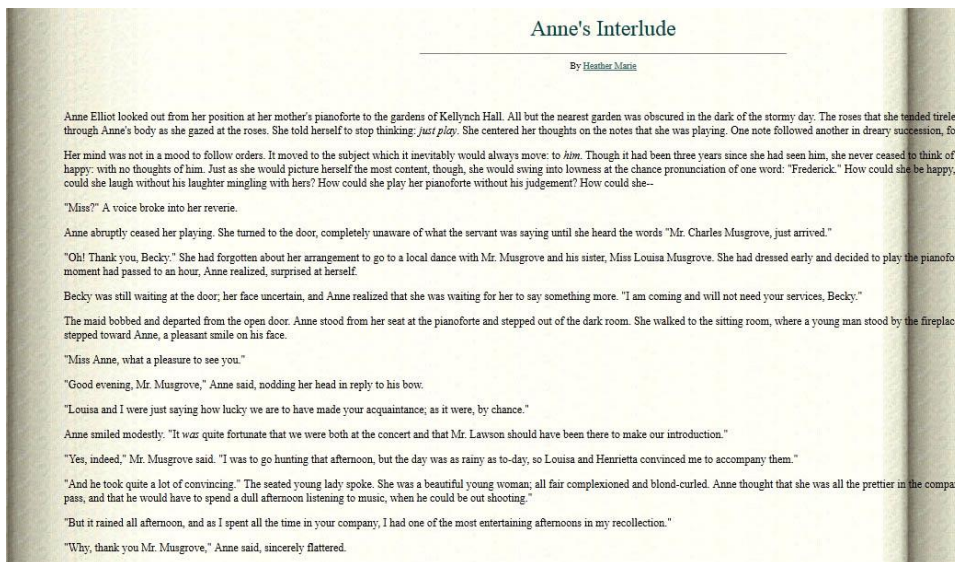


Figure 3. Fan fiction story in Republic of Pemberley. Adapted from [pemberley.com](http://www.pemberley.com), 2013. Homepage. Retrieved from <http://www.pemberley.com/faq.html#who>. Copyright 2012 by The Republic of Pemberley.

WHY NOT SHAKESPEARE TOO?

Besides The Republic of Pemberley, the internet seemed wide open for a fan fiction website based on canonical literature. The reason why it seemed like a worth-

while endeavor is because on the one hand, young people like Lawver, are engaging with books through creating new media in exciting ways, like fan fiction, yet Shakespeare often comes across as a dead, untouchable jumble of words to a typical student. Adults and young people alike, speak of *Hamlet* with enough reverence that Shakespeare no longer was a man in merry old England writing with quill and parchment but Moses with the word of God written on stone tablets. But what every high school English teacher is hoping is that her students enjoy the plays and appreciate their artistic value while improving their critical thinking and writing skills. Perhaps what is in order is for students to be allowed some of the subversive and participatory characteristics of Trekkies and potterheads in order for them to engage with the literature in a meaningful way.

Chapter 3: Developing the *Stratford Tattler* Website

Several challenges needed to be overcome in order to make the fan fiction website resemble an Elizabethan tabloid where users could interact in a user community.

Although I had a working knowledge of HTML/CSS and PHP, I did not have the time to develop those skills to the degree necessary to create the website from scratch in a single semester. Also, the design elements I could incorporate to convey the look and feel of the time period were also an important consideration. Along those lines, I believed creating a distinctive brand name that could be easily associated with the idea of a fan fiction website for Shakespeare was also important.

The creation of the site started with picking a name. I wanted something that conveyed the idea that it was a tabloid or a rag, yet at the same time, told the potential visitor that it was about Shakespeare. In the end, I went with *Stratford Tattler* because it referred to Shakespeare's hometown, Stratford-Upon-Avon, and "tattler" implied tabloid-type news.

Transposing the look and feel of old European print publications to the digital world of today was part of the fun of this project. The first newspaper in England did not appear until 1622, about six years after Shakespeare's death, but during his lifetime news was printed on single sheets of paper, or broadsides, while news from the other parts of Europe was translated and published in cheap booklets (see Figure 4), neither of which were produced with much quality (Hotchkiss, Robinson, & Grolier Club, 2008). While their fonts are highly stylized and beautiful, this aspect of their design was not transferrable to my website because the current convention of today's web design is to use simple fonts, like sans-serif, because they are easier to read on a computer screen. Also, the news booklets and broadsides of that time lacked the exquisite artistic design of that era's etchings, which is unfortunate since the 17th century was the heyday of that art

form with notable masters such as Rembrandt creating timeless masterpieces, so I did not find any usable inspiration for designing the header or layout.

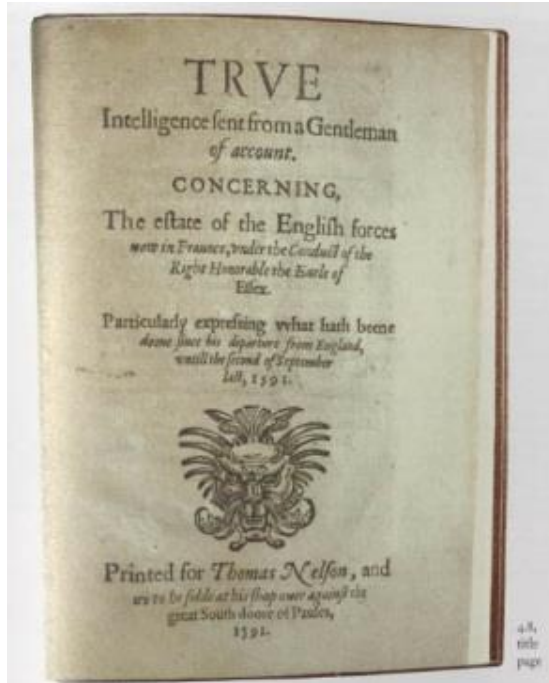


Figure 4. Front page of a news booklet printed in London, England in 1591, reporting on events of a war in what is today Belgium. Reprinted from *English in Print from Caxton to Shakespeare to Milton*. (p. 121), by V.R. Hotchkiss, F.C. Robinson, & Grolier Club, 2008, Urbana: University of Illinois Press. Copyright 2008 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

Jumping further ahead in time to the 18th century, I found more specific design elements that I could use for *Statford Tattler*. The front page of the *The London Packet*, January 2, 1795 issue provided an excellent example of a design for the masthead that conveyed the feeling of news from an older era, see Figure 5 (Schietinger, Kennedy, &

Labert, 2001). Also, the blockish layout of the articles on the front page inspired me to consider a simple layout for the arrangement of the content.



Figure 5. Front page of *The London Packet* 1795. Adapted from *Print Culture of Eighteenth-Century England*, by J. Schietinger, M. Kennedy, & D. Labert, 2001. Retrieved from http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/print_culture/. Copyright 2001 by the University of Michigan.

Taking inspiration from this 18th century newspaper, I chose to use the font, Cloister Black, for the masthead and a simple black and white theme so that the website resembled a newspaper or old-style print publication. Later, an artist contributed to the project by designing a logo that would make up the center of the website's header with a more stylized font and Shakespeare's portrait in the center (Figure 6). The background image that appears on both sides of the content area is a picture of Elizabethan London, origin unknown. The somewhat simplistic layout of the different sections of the website – feature story, recent stories, etc. – which are the telltale signs of a WordPress website are

at times frowned upon for being too rigid by some website designers, were appropriate in my situation as they resembled the layout of *The London Packet*.



Figure 6. Screenshot of the *Stratford Tattler* homepage. Adapted from www.stratfordtattler.com, by Mathew Evans, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.stratfordtattler.com>. Copyright 2013 by Mathew Evans.

The fact that the *Stratford Tattler* bears resemblance to the online version of the *New York Times*, as some have commented, is due in part to how I overcame the challenge of building the website itself. Having only a month to develop the website and my limited programming skills meant that I needed to consider options other than coding the site by hand from scratch. The other option was to learn a website platform, such as WordPress, Joomla, or Drupal, which already included the JavaScript and php functions I needed. WordPress seemed to fit my needs as it had a reputation as having an easy learning curve and an enthusiastic developer community. The latter was a strong selling point to choose WordPress because I expected, correctly, to run into difficulty

customizing my website. So I purchased a theme developed by WPZoom called Tribune which has a “newspaper” layout and customizable color scheme that could be set to black and white, causing the *Stratford Tattler* to look like the *New York Times*.

Armed with a premium WordPress theme, I expected to be able to simply add in my content of articles and images into the website and welcome enthusiastic fan fiction writers, but this was far from the case. There were compatibility issues between the theme itself, the version of the WordPress platform, and the website host, iPage, I was using for this project. The featured story (Figure 7) function in the theme did not allow for the image to be enlarged or display multiple articles. Also, the theme is designed to display thumbnail-sized images with a short blurb from the articles in the mid-section of the homepage, however, the images were distorted and the blurbs were too short to be comprehensible. The theme’s custom functions in these cases, and many others, were inoperable as a result of the incompatibility between theme, platform, and host already mentioned. Fortunately, the customer support forum at WPZoom’s website provided some answers as did the developer community at wordpress.org, which gave suggestions on inserting custom HTML and CSS code.

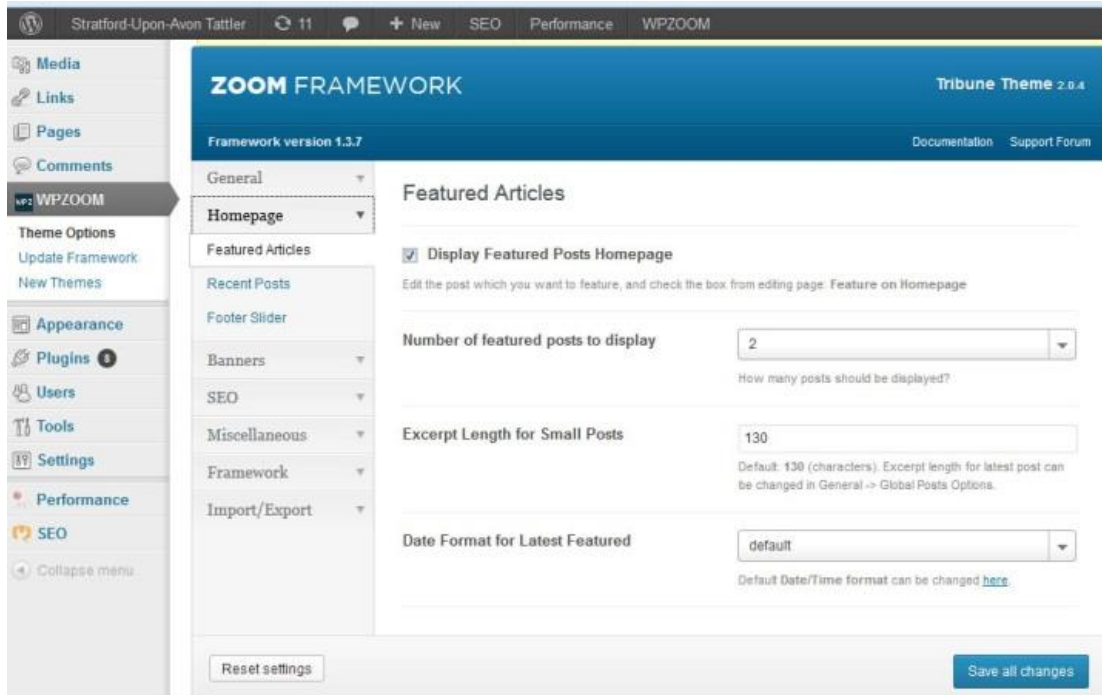


Figure 7. Screenshot of the Tribune theme’s control panel by WPZoom. Adapted from pemberly.com, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.stratfordtattler.com/wp-admin/>. Copyright 2012 by WPZoom.

While the incompatibility issues were time consuming to negotiate, the theme and platform for WordPress had many positives. Each posted article allows for users to comment, which is a key feature for fan fiction writers. WordPress also has an active developer community which has developed widgets, or add-ons, that can add a forum and profiles to facilitate a community effect on a website. These widgets are interchangeable within the platform, along with other widgets that enhance a site’s search engine optimization, security, and multimedia capability.

In terms of adding widgets to make the website more interactive and dynamic, I incorporated a forum for discussion, a contact page so that visitors could reach me

directly, and widgets that listed the most popular and recently posted articles. Visitors to the site can submit articles via e-mail to the site administrator who would act as editor and gatekeeper to the content. By having the content curated, it is easier to maintain the quality and look and feel of the site. While this may pose a barrier to participation, it also means that any future teachers that wish to use the site can be assured of the safety of the content for their students. In the future, a membership or approved user system may be implemented to allow for individuals to upload on their own, possibly for an entire class.

REFLECTION

We are all quite familiar with internet buzz words such as “dynamic” and “user feedback” and “interactivity” but the technical know-how, i.e. JavaScript and PHP, to actually instill these features into a website are beyond novice and even intermediate technologists, such as myself. But with WordPress I found that I could apply my limited knowledge of coding to pre-made widgets and templates that I could not have created on my own, but I could customize to meet my needs. That is the exciting thing about WordPress – with a little knowledge, you can have an amazing website. And once I became comfortable with a certain level of functionality, such as the SEO settings, I am able to venture to the next level adding more layers of detail in the customization by seeking out information online in the developer forums.

One strategy that saved me time and money was to practice using a free WordPress theme. I was able to explore what the platform could do and not do while at the same time learn the basic functions and understand what I should be looking for in a premium theme before I paid money. Playing around with a free theme showed me that in most cases themes are customizable and practically made to be disassembled. WordPress as a platform is seamless and robust enough to be stripped down and built back together

to your liking like a digital Mr. Potato Head but with many many more pieces to play with.

Chapter 4: Creating Fan Fiction Articles for *Stratford Tattler*

The initial goal of creating content for the *Stratford Tattler* was to set the tone for the website for others to follow and explore what fan fiction was like for myself. From October 2012 to February 2013, I experimented with different approaches ranging from fanon writing, not strictly adhering to the original works of Shakespeare, and canon writing, which is the opposite, and to writing historic fiction set in the late 16th century. My writing evolved over the time period as I sought out feedback from my immediate friends and classmates as well as from Shakespeare scholars and high school teachers. Since I considered images an important part of a visitor's experience when using a website, I also designed pictures with captions for each article so that the website would be more visually appealing.

My creative process started with finding inspiration either from one of Shakespeare's plays or from browsing tabloids. Often, one would put me into the frame of mind to find a story in the other. For example, I often visited one of England's more popular tabloids, the online version of *The Sun*, which often contained over-the-top gossip about celebrities, bizarre stories about everyday people, and sensational stories. With these tabloid tidbits in my imagination, I watched one of my all-time-favorite movies, Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*, on Netflix, and let amusing ideas come to me. Michael York's portrayal of Tybalt was so aggressive and masculine that I thought it would be funny if his pet dog or cat went missing and he cried over it. I suppose the situation came to me because I had read about how Paris Hilton, a celebrity that is famous for being famous, lost her pet Chihuahua. Hilton had offered a \$5,000 reward for its return and put up wanted signs all over West Hollywood (Thomas, 2004). So I substituted one ridiculous socialite with one macho man in tights and came up with the first article for the *Stratford Tattler*, "Pooch Breaks Tybalt's Heart." In the article,

Tybalt has lost his beloved pit bull and he vows revenge for those who kidnapped his best friend. The article can be classified as fanon fan fiction because although it more or less stays true to Shakespeare's important themes from the play, such as the rivalry between the two houses and untempered passion, the article's humor turns on the parody of Tybalt as the aggressive man. In the article, he cries when he misses his dog, both an event that never took place in the play's plot and behavior out of character for Tybalt. And perhaps that was the fun in it for me writing this piece of fan fiction. There is a kind of devious delight in taking something as revered as the most famous love story of all time, not to mention taking a character gushing with testosterone, and essentially turning them into something so silly.

The effort itself to write a mere 285 word fan fiction article took more than a single night writing at the computer however. Like the other articles for this project, I typically wrote several drafts much like how I would write a short story, taking up between 15 to 20 hours each. And that's when the article turns out well. I had many false starts and bad ideas that never turned into a publishable article in spite of the time invested into it. Considering the vagaries present in creative writing, this is why I only ended up with just five articles for the *Stratford Tattler* by the end of the project.

Creating the image for "Pooch Breaks Tybalt's Heart" was even more fun than writing about Tybalt crying over his dog. Taking Paris Hilton's lead, I used Photoshop to create my own Wanted sign for Tybalt's missing dog. I searched online for a tough dog that Tybalt might have owned and knew immediately when I came across an image of a pit bull in metal armor that I had found the right one. To give a degree of realism to the image, I printed and posted the Wanted sign on a light pole and took a picture of that to bring this fantasy into the real world, see Figure 8. I tagged it "exclusive" in pink, again using Photoshop, so that it resembled the graphic strategies of *The Sun* tabloid.



Figure 8. Image created for the fan fiction article “Pooch Breaks Tybalt’s Heart”. Adapted from www.stratfordtattler.com, by Mathew Evans, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.stratfordtattler.com>. Copyright 2013 by Mathew Evans.

The feeling of creating a piece of fan fiction is comparable to being a high school kid and tee-peeing your secret admirer’s house in the middle of the night. You wish you could see the expression on her face when she comes outside the next morning only to find yards and yards of toilet paper strewn in her front yard but of course you are safely hiding at home hoping you don’t get into any serious trouble. Then again, what would such an act of fancy be without witnesses?

Chapter 5: Initial Feedback and Participation

An important part of any creative act is sharing it with other people. When I wrote the majority of the articles, I was in Dr. Joan Hughes' Teaching and Learning with the Internet class and had the good fortune of having a captive audience of classmates who had to look at my website. Their feedback included "super creative," "fun," "unique," "hilarious," and other positive comments posted online in the class discussion forum. I considered my classmates as an ideal audience because they were all receptive to new ideas in using technology in education and generally supportive throughout the semester as we all completed internet-based projects for the class. To generate visitors to my website outside of class, I posted the site as an update in my Facebook account and invited friends and family to also comment.

By December of 2012, I was led to believe that I potentially had hit on a concept that could grow like Lawver's Harry Potter website. My website host, iPage, displayed user traffic that averaged 10 to 15 unique visitors per day for October and November, which would have been astounding considering I had not extensively used social media, such as Twitter or Pinterest to draw in new visitors. Could the Stratford Tattler grow organically at such a pace or was my inexperience with internet analytics clouding the picture? For a week or two, I believed that Shakespeare had found a new popularity through fan fiction.

One fact I could not ignore was that out of all of the visitors to the website, no one had left any comments with the articles and the forum was left unused. Other slightly disconcerting experiences were when I showed non-teacher and non-technology friends my fan fiction articles. They looked bewildered when they tried to read about Tybalt's lost dog, a sex scandal about Queen Elizabeth's spymaster Sir Walsingham, and the curious impressions Europeans had of the sweet potato when it was first introduced, and

the other articles were disconcerting. One coworker who spent considerable time blogging and posting in social media frowned when she saw one of the articles and said, “I don’t get it.” So what sort of impact was my website having with so little participation on the website and the average person didn’t know what to make of the articles?

Most certainly fan fiction is an acquired taste shared mostly by people who are engaged in the same hobby. Hobby is the apt word because although I was proud of my articles and images, they did not possess the qualities of fiction that would be of interest to a paying audience. In other words, no one would actually pay money to read fan fiction. For the writer it is truly a labor of love, an expression of our admiration and inspiration about something or someone. To judge a work of fan fiction by professional standards is simply not fair and not the point. So why did it seem like so many people were visiting the Stratford Tattler? While it may be possible that the popularity of the website during the early months could have been due to friends and relatives visiting and spreading the word, the analytics provided by the iPage host turned out to be unreliable. The hundreds of “visitors” recorded in the host’s traffic data may have been real people coming to read the articles or they may have been me. During those two months, I was constantly making small changes to the layout and formatting of the website. For example, I would increase the margin next to the feature article section on the homepage by 20 pixels and check to see the result, again and again, refreshing the web page in the browser. If I checked the progress of these small changes 5 to 10 times, many times a week, that could artificially inflate the site traffic by hundreds. In more ways than one, I was certainly the biggest fan of the *Stratford Tattler*.

Why this mattered was because the initial goal was to create an online community using fan fiction to generate interest in Shakespeare. Without site traffic and active participation, there would be no community and without the community, there would be

none of the educational benefits credited by Jenkins and Gee with online learning communities and communities of participation. In December of 2012, I implemented Google Analytics into the website's code to better track site traffic. According to this metric, about 25 unique visitors viewed the site per month from January to March, which seems to be a more accurate picture, see Figure 9.



Figure 9. Graph of site traffic for the beginning of 2013 from Google Analytics. Adapted from Google Analytics, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/analytics/web/?hl=en#report/visitors-overview/a36675650w64830863p66586271/>. Copyright 2013 by Google.

FIRST FEEDBACK

As I wrote the articles for the *Stratford Tattler*, I kept in mind the original goal of developing a learning experience that could help teach Shakespeare. To this end, I asked a former English professor of mine at a large research-university, Dr. Barbara Holt, for any suggestions she had, particularly how to make the concept of fan fiction relevant to

teaching Shakespeare to university or high school students. Note that her name and all names appearing in this report have been pseudonymized.

I correctly assumed Dr. Holt could provide her honest professional opinion. Through an exchange of e-mails, Dr. Holt explained that while she found the website and use of fan fiction “creative,” she had doubts to its educational value. “If you want your site to be useful in a purely educational manner,” said Dr. Holt, “then what you need to do is be creative with the actual facts. Don’t add bits like Tybalt’s dog or Walsingham being in love with a mermaid.” She found fault with the fanon quality, or poetic license, that I took with the text and with historic facts. Furthermore, she cautioned against “being overly creative and stepping out of the text or away from the historical facts.” She suggested I “familiarize [myself] with the dramatic works more thoroughly, and use actual content complemented by accurate historic facts, for example the history of Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra...” From Dr. Holt’s perspective, my fan fiction was not sufficiently rooted in the text, nor did it demonstrate an understanding of the plays or history of the period.

WHERE TO MOVE FORWARD?

While Dr. Holt’s opinion of the *Stratford Tattler* was unexpected, I think her point of view reflects a proportion of educators and Shakespeare scholars who prefer students to focus on doing textual analysis and writing essays that expound on more traditional lines of academic inquiry. For student work in the classroom, Dr. Holt seemed to value understanding the original text more so than producing creative works (although she was basing her opinion on a fanon-style article.) Perhaps fan fiction, in general, does

not have a place in the formal classroom as far as many teachers were concerned. They prefer to reserve such activities for another time and place or not at all. While it's not possible to appease every educator with an approach such as using fan fiction to teach literature, Dr. Holt and my classmates in Teaching and Learning with the Internet class provided many possible avenues to take the project forward.

Dr. Holt provided a wealth of alternative ideas that were focused more on working with the text of the plays and writing essays. Responding to my question about creating teacher materials, she suggested developing writing guidelines for descriptive and cause-effect essays; however, these directions for the project would mean abandoning the fan fiction element of the project which I decided was not an option. She also brought to my attention a board game, graphic novel, archives, historic tabloids, and other resources, which were helpful as resources and sources of inspiration.

Comments written by classmates in the online forum of the class had a wide range of interesting suggestions. They suggested adding more background information about Shakespeare and the plays so that the website could be a resource for students, developing templates so that teachers could make their own fan fiction website, and make scaffolding for the activities.

Deciding to take this project forward into the next semester, I chose to set aside the goal of creating a fan fiction community on the website and instead focus my energies on developing resources for teachers so that they could incorporate fan fiction in their classroom.

Chapter 6: Feedback for Canon Article and Copyright Issues

For the next phase of the project, I shifted the focus of the website toward being a stand-alone resource that teachers could use “off the shelf” and incorporate in their classroom with minimal prep time. I created a rough draft of a teacher’s guide which explained the concept of fan fiction and included lesson plans. I also wrote another fan fiction article for the *Stratford Tattler* using a canon-type approach. In order to have feedback for my iterative design, I solicited suggestions and advice about the website and the materials from high school English teachers and more Shakespeare scholars. I also sought the advice of an expert in copyright law since the images I was creating for the fan fiction articles – something that students would also be doing – used existing works of others, bringing up potential issues of copyright infringement.

NEW MATERIALS - CANON ARTICLE AND TEACHER’S GUIDE

Taking into consideration that my previous articles for the *Stratford Tattler* were fanon in nature and set in the late 16th century, I tried my hand at a canon work of fan fiction, one that adhered to the original text as much as possible. However, I included one twist – I transposed the events to the modern times. This might have risked introducing another “fanon” element by changing the source text’s setting to the 21st century, but it seemed like a new angle that would make the content, Shakespeare, more accessible to students if they saw it in a contemporary context that they could possibly relate to.

Following the same creative process as before, I browsed celebrity news websites and tabloids in the checkout line of the grocery store. I happened to recall Ophelia’s funeral scene in Hamlet where her corpse is lying in a coffin and her brother and Hamlet get into a first fight over who loved her more. Naturally, I made the connection between

celebrities pulling each other's hair and Shakespeare's two characters making a public spectacle at a funeral – thus the article was born – “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven?” (see Appendix B). As close as possible, I included events in the play as events in the article, for example referring to Ophelia's mental disintegration and her being ignored and taken for granted by the other characters. Writing this type of article was as equally as fun as writing the fanon articles as I thought up modern day equivalents to events in the play, such as rehab for Hamlet and homeschooling for Ophelia.

The teacher's guide included a description of the website, the concept of fan fiction, and two lesson plans. The first lesson plan sought to use fan fiction in a new way – literary analysis – by directing the teacher to introduce a discussion of the second to last scene of *Hamlet* by way of the “Laertes and Hamlet” article. The reimagined world of Shakespeare characters as celebrities was designed to make the material hopefully more accessible. The second lesson plan guided the students into a collaborative writing activity modeled on fan fiction with the option of writing a fanon or canon article of their own as homework. For the canon writing option, a rubric was included which graded on the traditional elements of student writing – length, grammar, etc. – along with the degree to which the student included elements from the source text, so that students could demonstrate their knowledge of the play by borrowing important elements.

PARTICIPANTS AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

The most challenging aspect of this project turned out to be locating participants who were willing to look over the materials and provide feedback. I sought feedback from two expert groups that I thought most likely would use this approach, university professors teaching Shakespeare and high school English teachers. Professors Smith and

Roberts from a large research-oriented university provided invaluable suggestions and advice. I conducted an informal interview with the latter at a café on campus while I met with Roberts at his office. In order to contact high school teachers who could participate in this project, I posted requests on the discussion forum of numerous websites that were online communities for high school teachers. I did receive some interest in the project, but some teachers did not have time to participate or simply did not reply to further e-mails. Through the National Council of Teachers of English, I managed to secure two high school English teachers, Mr. Chavez and Ms. Libby, both of whom teach at public schools, who provided in-depth feedback. The former provided feedback through a telephone interview and the latter via an e-mailed reply to feedback questions. Mrs. Reilly, a legal consultant and expert in digital copyright with a large research-oriented university, and I had an interview via Skype.

Each of the six participants received the link to the *Stratford Tattler* and a copy of the “Laertes and Hamlet” article and the teacher’s guide as PDF files. The two professors and the two high school English teachers were given these questions to answer:

- 1) How could the tabloid article or website www.stratfordtattler.com be used as a credible tool for teaching literary analysis?
- 2) What criteria could be used to determine if a student's tabloid article portrays Shakespeare accurately?
- 3) The teacher's guide is written for a high school AP English class, but I would appreciate your thoughts on how you might use this approach in your own class?

These questions were designed to see how and if the participants would use the fan fiction articles to teach literary analysis in their respect classroom. I also sought ideas on how to further develop the grading rubric and teacher’s guide, which included literary analysis and creative writing activities to teach Shakespeare, so that the materials could be prepared for future use by other teachers.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Generally speaking, the six participants gave positive feedback about the approach of using fan fiction to teach Shakespeare. Three of them emphasized how high school teachers tasked with teaching Shakespeare are in need of new ways to reach students. Roberts explained that, “Every high school teaches Shakespeare and they are desperate to connect with kids... Anything you can use to hook their attention – music or video production – you don’t have any hesitation to use.” Chavez, who teaches high school freshmen and sophomore English concurred that, “Anything to get the students interested in Shakespeare is good.” Both university professors agreed that these types of activities are most likely better suited for high school students because it may not be challenging enough at the college level. Also, Libby provided specific recommendations in terms of clarity, wording, and grammar for the teacher’s guide.

The participants had varying, sometimes contrary, views about using a written article as the format in which the fan fiction was carried, but they generally agreed that the “tabloid” approach had a great deal of potential. All participants believed that the concept of taking Shakespeare’s world and transposing it into a scandalous tabloid was creative, even a “delightful” concept as Chavez pointed out. They saw countless possibilities of where students could go with creating tabloid articles, stories, and videos that mimicked celebrity gossip and entertainment TV shows, like TMZ (Thirty Mile

Zone), because Shakespeare's plays were full of scandal, sexual indiscretion, secrets, resentment, and revenge – plenty of fodder for a tabloid. One participant suggested even have students express their story ideas in tweets, which are short text-based messages of 140 characters or less. Transposing the plays to the contemporary world also had the advantage of recasting the text in a way that students could possibly relate to, in turn, motivating them to learn. Smith explained that, "This approach can be useful to a teacher because it's helpful to alternate between different modes of looking at the text in order to understand it. Students may feel less intimidated by the plays if they see it in a contemporary form."

However, in terms of using newspaper articles as the basis for generating student participation, Roberts and Chavez suggested allowing students to use other forms of expression. The former cautioned about imposing our model, a newspaper format, that "comes from us, the adult teacher" on students. Part of the appeal would be using technology and forms that students use in their everyday life, like Twitter, Facebook, rap, and video, which are forms that can be done quickly. Roberts explained that, "Social media, a short form that they would actually do [like] reduce a scene to tweets... brings in a poetic license. There are rules for what you can say and how much space you have to say it and you can use that to teach Shakespeare." In terms of gaining student participation, Roberts was not sure if the written article was the best form. Chavez sounded a similar note when he commented that "There probably needs to be more exciting things going on in the website than just clicking and getting an article," at which point he suggested having students creating a TMZ-style video instead of a written assignment.

Smith came down differently on the issue of using the article format for the activities in a classroom. He considered it "clever, creative, and funny." He was basing

his comments on the “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl” article which he considered a viable lead into discussing the important literary themes of the play. The article could “make students conscious of how their personal experience can be seen in the play, but also show how it is not our world.” He explained that the article could raise the issue of historical context of Shakespeare’s plays and how “We don’t live under a king or queen, the roles of women were completely different... wars were fought differently.” The article could be a jumping off point to explain either the historic context or how the play is relatable to a student’s life.

Chavez and Libby both recommended having the *Stratford Tattler* article cover events at the beginning of the play because the play will be new to the students. Libby explained, “It’s logistically difficult to do toward the very end of the play. At this point, we’ve been living with *Hamlet* for some time. This kind of project might meet resistance if students are comfortable with existing structures in [earlier] acts.” She reasoned that a similar tabloid article could cover events surrounding Hamlet’s “crazy” [her quotes] behavior or the mystery as to whether Queen Gertrude knew about the murder of Hamlet’s father, because it is “a theory the kids always get into.” But as for choosing *Hamlet* itself, Chavez, Libby, and another high school teacher who was not able to participate in the project, pointed out that they teach *Hamlet* every year, and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Twelfth Night* were also Shakespeare plays regularly taught at the high school level.

Most of the participants believed that introducing any new learning experience into a public school setting inherently has obstacles regardless of the approach. They

explained that teachers typically do not have time to either learn about or try out new teaching methods due to the demands of high stakes tests. Chavez suggested “tailoring it specifically to the STAR test requirements because this high-stakes test is what teachers are having to prepare their students for and even retest their students [in Texas].” By adapting the fan fiction materials to learning outcomes covered in the exams, teachers would have an incentive to use them and not feel like they were taking a risk in terms of spending time away from test preparation.

PREFERENCE FOR CANON FAN FICTION

Through their remarks about staying true to the original text and the importance of the students connecting their produced work to the text, the participants indicated that they generally preferred to work with the canon-type of fan fiction. Their remarks indicated that the fanon type, which may follow the source text superficially and take the source text into a completely different creative direction, had less educational value in the classroom. Libby remarked that the downside of not following Shakespeare’s play closely could result in students creating something “completely outlandish... that [doesn’t] fit the characters...the tolerance threshold for that would vary from teacher to teacher.” She was not alone in this appreciation of fanon. Smith remarked that a “good” student produced article needed to be anchored to the source text and “To enjoy the humor [of the article], you have to connect it back to the text,” so it’s rewarding and fun for the reader. Roberts concurred that even if a student is using a form like a tweet or a rap video, the student still needs to connect it with the play in a meaningful way.

ADVICE FOR CREATING IMAGES

Examining the altered images that I had created for the articles in the *Stratford Tattler*, Reilly, the copyright expert, believed that the content was relatively safe in terms of copyright law, and she made suggestions on how to reduce the risk of violating such laws with the articles that might be considered infringing on the rights of others. The most significant protection for the *Stratford Tattler* was that, for most of the images used on the website, the original images were being used in a transformative way. Reilly explained that by taking an image, for example the pit-bull-in-armor image in Figure 10, and changing both the original intention and audience of the work, my version was considered transformative. The original image was designed as a commercial advertisement for people interested in custom armor for themselves, girlfriend, or their pets. On the other hand, my version's purpose was to educate and entertain students interested in fan fiction – different purpose, different audience.



Figure 10. Original image and transformed version of image with new audience and purpose. Adapted from Pitbull Armory, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pitbullarmory.com/>. Copyright 2013 by Pitbull Armory.

Because the *Stratford Tattler* version is transformative, it enjoys incredibly broad legal protection, Reilly explained, allowing me to use 100% of the original image and the right to use my version not only for educational but commercial purposes. One caveat to this protection, however, is that copyright law is still the law, which is open to interpretation. There is no ironclad immunity from litigation, though the transformative nature of the *Stratford Tattler* images put the current interpretation of existing copyright law firmly on the side of the *Stratford Tattler* in this case.

Another precaution that Reilly advised was to “intercept bad will and make it good will.” In other words, she suggested that I make efforts to preemptively address the concerns of the owners of the original works a number of ways. Each image should include attribution of the original author and source if known, including providing the image’s URL in the caption. When using Google to find images to use for the *Stratford Tattler*, I should set the advanced search options to only show results for Creative Commons images and avoid the images labeled as ND, or No Derivative, meaning that the author does not want their image altered from the original. And finally, I should include a disclaimer at the footer of the website stating essentially that we, the owners of the website, have done our best to attribute the original author, but if a visitor knows the owner of an unknown image and/or the visitor is not happy with how their work is being used, to contact us.



Figure 11. *Stratford Tattler* article with high legal risk, on the left, compared to low legal risk on the right. Adapted from www.stratfordtattler.com, by Mathew Evans, 2013.

Retrieved from <http://www.stratfordtattler.com/walsingham-denies-affair-with-mermaid/>.

Copyright 2013 by Mathew Evans.

One image that did pose some legal risk in Reilly's estimation used the actor Geoffrey Rush from the movie *Elizabeth*. Reilly cautioned that using such an image, see Figure 11, could infringe on Rush's right to publicity and the movie studio's right to copyright. The latter form of possible infringement is due to the fact that my version of the image was not very transformative. Taking a still image from the movie, my purpose was to portray the historic person of Walsingham which was the same purpose as the movie; therefore, not transformative. Moreover, high profile actors may be more sensitive to how their likeness is used in the media, including fan fiction websites, and studios actively protect their creative works through litigation. In Reilly's opinion, a person creating fan fiction should avoid using images of famous people altogether. A less risky approach might be to use the face of an unknown person who is not as recognizable, and so, pose a lower legal risk.

Of course, there is one aspect of the *Stratford Tattler* that has absolutely zero risk of copyright infringement – all of Shakespeare’s works are fair game. They pre-date such laws and have been in the public domain for centuries. Reilly’s appraisal of the other aspects, i.e. images, indicated that the project was for the most part on solid legal ground, with some exceptions. Yet there was still work to be done and plenty of advice from her and the other participants to incorporate in the website and teacher’s guide before students and teachers could experience it for themselves.

Chapter 7: Final Iteration and Reflection

The five participants who provided feedback for the *Stratford Tattler* project made a wide range of suggestions and brought up numerous issues. When I consider them along with my own experiences writing fan fiction articles and creating the website, I have arrived at strategies and considerations that I would recommend for teachers who want to create fan fiction activities for their class.

First of all, the *Stratford Tattler* approach of transposing a literary work into a tabloid context with fan fiction can be used to engage students with any type of literature. Lawver's example with Harry Potter and my example with Shakespeare spans a wide breadth of form, genre, time period, and style, making anything from Alcott to Xenophon possible. Jenkins and Kelley highlight a similar experiment with fan fiction in their book *Reading in a Participatory Culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English Classroom* (2013) where theater director Ricardo Pitts-Wiley worked with incarcerated youth to produce modern adaptations of Melville's *Moby Dick*. Students were asked to reimagine the novel's characters into gangland and other contemporary landscapes familiar to them and write stories and sketches. This use of fan fiction allowed student to engage with classic literature because the students could see the characters in a new context so that "creative reading worked hand in hand with critical and close reading" (p. 6), which is not very different than the approach suggested with *Stratford Tattler*.

All of the classics are in the public domain so student work would in no way pose a risk of copyright infringement, but works by contemporary authors and works still protected under copyright, should be considered carefully. One exciting aspect of fan fiction for the writer is being able to share it with a wider audience, but even if a teacher only circulates the student work within the class or behind a firewall or within a school's intranet, using an author's characters or worlds without permission is fraught with risk.

The popular writer of *The Vampire Chronicles*, Anne Rice, has gone on the record as not allowing fan fiction writers and websites to use her works. Even if the intention is merely educational and not commercial, that does not legally give another person the right to use protected works. It would be the same as a teacher putting an image of Disney's Mickey Mouse in the corner of his handout or a student posting drawings of the ubiquitous cartoon character online – these uses of the original work are not transformative. The audience and purpose has not changed. Therefore, they infringe copyright.

The possibility of violating the intellectual property rights of others caused me my own troubles and some frantic Googling and altering of articles on *Stratford Tattler*. Realizing that Geoffrey Rush's face from the movie *Elizabeth* posed a legal risk in terms of copyright and right to publicity, I found a substitute image on Google – a bearded man in Elizabethan garb that was labeled as Creative Commons. Using Photoshop, I replaced the Rush image for the new one (Figure 11), however, when it came time to see if the mermaid picture in the lower right hand corner of the image was under Creative Commons or Share-alike, I could not remember where I found it online. Even after hours of searching, I could not find it again and resigned myself to replacing it since I could not attribute it properly or determine its license.

My concerns about copyright may seem overblown, but recent history proves otherwise. In the case of Lawver's use of *Harry Potter*, Warner Bros sued her and other children for publishing fan-inspired works in 2001 (Weise, 2001). The legal dispute riled Lawver enough to drive this once hardcore fan to call for a nation-wide boycott of Harry Potter merchandise. What teacher would invite this type of catastrophe for a student or a school? Perhaps in my case, if I had left Rush's face in the image, bad luck would have

resulted in a movie studio and/or a representative of Rush sending me a cease and desist letter and I would had to have removed the image from the website. While this might have been an acceptable risk to me as an individual, Lawver's experience shows how it can be disruptive and more legally complicated than imaginable.

The next step to reforming my miscreant use of images was to spend a considerable amount of time going through every article in *Stratford Tattler* and adding attribution and a disclaimer. The latter amounted to putting a blanket statement in the footer of the website to appear on every webpage stating that all of the images are attributed if the source is known, but if I am using a person's image improperly or he or she knows the owner of the image, he or she can contact me. This way I have shown that I have done my due diligence to properly give credit for the original creators of the images and leave open the option for them to contact me if they are unhappy with the changes I made. In the case of the picture of the older gentleman in Elizabethan clothes in Figure 11 that replaced the potential legal time bomb of Rush's face, the older gentleman or the photographer could contact me if they wanted it removed. Now, I have to admit that there is a certain delight in playing with a famous actor's face and having fun with a piece of a movie that I loved. Also, this little subversive image might have drawn more traffic to my site if it had been tagged as "Elizabeth" and "Geoffrey Rush" by search engines, but I think the new version is better, visually speaking (However, it would not infringe on any rights to keep the tags included in the webpage). The older gentleman appears to be sighing or grief stricken with his head bowed, which ties in to the headline for the article that declares that he is involved in an embarrassing scandal with a

mermaid. Rush's portrayal of Walsingham is devious and powerful in the movie, but he didn't pull off this scandal with the mermaid.

From my experience, there is something to be said for the argument that not being able to use copyrighted materials forces us to be more creative and spurs on innovation, which is perhaps something that students should learn instead of always appropriating anything and everything they find on the internet. It may be more convenient for students to take the first image they find, but I believe they will appreciate the creative rights of others when they make something of their own, like an article and image, and see it in a public space. Perhaps they would not approve of another person tampering with their creation. How this translates into the classroom in practical terms, as I suggest in the Teacher's Guide (see Appendix A), is students can follow a few words of advice about internet searches.

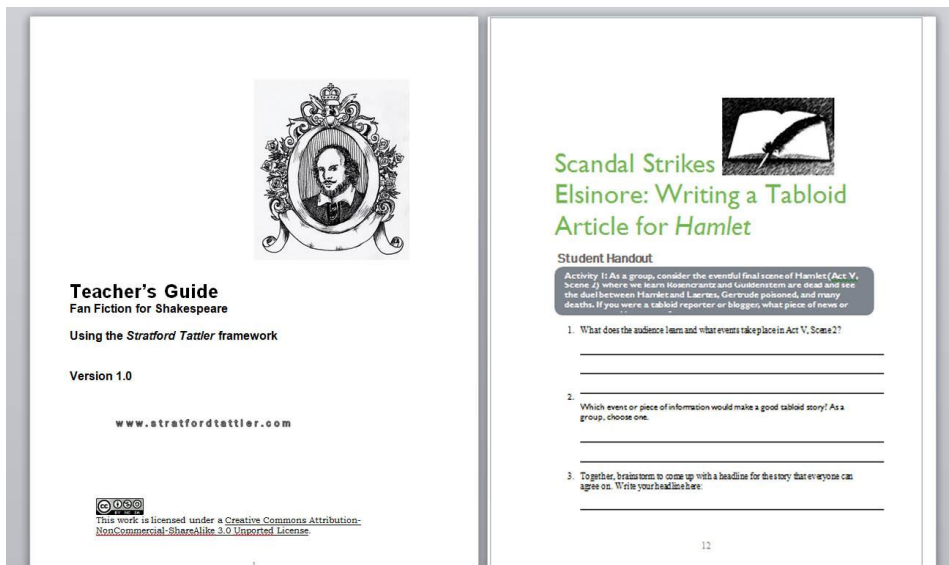


Figure 12. Front page and student handout of the *Stratford Tattler* Teacher's Guide. (Appendix A).

Besides avoiding images of famous people or from movies, they can branch out into the lesser known reaches of the internet by using Advanced Settings in Google search to only show results that have the Creative Commons or some form of Share-alike license. When students do appropriate images, a teacher should explain the concept of transformation, changing the original work's purpose and audience. There is also the Copyright Crash Course at <http://copyright.lib.utexas.edu/> with a more detailed discussion and explanation of copyright law with an interactive activity that can help determine the level of legal risk a work involves.

While Jenkins and others have already made a strong case for how fan fiction can engage students, guaranteeing that such activities are relevant in terms of state required learning objectives will take some forethought. Teachers can approach this question either by considering what fan fiction can offer a student, for example in an English Language Arts (ELA) setting, or work the opposite direction taking the learning objectives first and seeing how they can be accomplished through fan fiction activities. In choosing the former approach, I discovered that the activities I developed for the Teacher's Guide correspond to a number of objectives in the Common Core State Standards available at www.corestandards.org. Standards such as Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity; Writing: Text Types and Purposes; and other standards under Reading and Writing for 9th to 10th and 11th to 12th grade ELA aligned well with the activities. Taking the time beforehand to make sure each activity fits into your and your district's agenda can possibly ameliorate concerns that there isn't enough time to do such alternative lessons as fan fiction.

Fan fiction has applications outside of a strictly high school language arts setting as well. Kell's article "Using Fan Fiction to Teach Critical Reading and Writing," (2009) was a small case study where fan fiction was taught as a creative writing and technology

unit to middle school students who had an opportunity to comment on the works and write their own fan fiction stories based on popular genres such as video games and anime. Students indicated that they preferred writing this type of work rather than a generic fiction piece. One important philosophical perspective Kell shares with fan fiction researchers Black and Chandler-Olcott (2007) and Mahar (2003) is that youth culture wants to “protect what they enjoy outside of school and do not want it to be institutionalized” (p. 5). How this applies to *Stratford Tattler* and other tabloid-style fan fiction website is perhaps limited. Students, generally speaking, do not write fan fiction about Shakespeare in their free time, so their “fun” is not being appropriated and fed back to them with guidelines and rubrics. What is being appropriated is the digital forms of media that they are familiar with – celebrity news and gossip – and it is being used as a way for students to relate to Shakespeare’s stories and characters.

For enterprising teachers interested in creating their own tabloid fan fiction website, there are many questions to consider before setting out. Even before thinking about investing endless hours on learning coding skills like HTML, PHP, and Java or the relatively less painful choice of learning how to use a platform, like WordPress, teachers should ask themselves the following:

Student Access – What firewalls exist for campus networks and what websites are blocked? If Youtube or a particular blogging or social networking website is blocked, then that may limit what creative products students will be able to create and share.

Product – What form do you want the student’ creative products to take? Do you want students creating videos, articles, images, or short messages? This will also guide you in choosing a platform, such as WordPress, that has this capability.

Content – Does the work of literature you wish to use contain enough events, characters, and subplots to support a “celebrity” world and is the work so foreign to students’ understanding that a transposition would have an enlightening effect?

Time – Do you have enough time to learn how to work with a platform like WordPress? Is there a school website you could adopt for the purposes of this project? Will students be learning any new productivity tools like Paint or Adobe Photoshop?

Sharing – How will the students comment on each other’s work and form an ad hoc learning community? Be sure whatever platform you choose has comment functions already built in.

Gatekeeper – How will you control and by what mechanism will students add their work to the website? The safest route is to act as the editor where students can submit their work to you first and then you place it online if it’s acceptable.

Policy – What is your school’s policy about putting student work in the public eye? Most require that student work can only be accessed by a login or by a unique URL link that is not made public.

Look and Feel – What images and artistic touches can you add to the website so that it looks like a tabloid for that specific genre or work of literature? Simply by adding an image with, for example, outer space or aliens to the website’s header can be enough to set the tone for a science fiction fan fiction website.

Implementation – When do you want to use the fan fiction activities in the course of covering a specific literary work or semester? The activities could be a unit used at the beginning when students are first exposed to a work, or they could be a culminating activity that involves cross-disciplinary learning outcomes.

Also, consider what skills from the common core do you want the activities to address?

Effect – How can you help your students understand that they are to reimagine the work into the context of a modern day tabloid with celebrities?

Support – What technological and human infrastructure exists at your school that may support your project?

While these considerations are based on my experience and are not the definitive guide to teachers creating technology artifacts for the classroom, I wanted to make a final recommendation for WordPress as a platform of choice. As it stands today, WordPress is a relatively easy platform to learn and operate. Tutorials are available free online through such websites as Youtube and the development community is very active on forums such as www.wordpress.org. Teachers can customize the website to add video and audio capability with widgets and easily upload content to the site, even granting permission for students to comment on each other's work and upload it themselves, although the latter option should be carefully considered. A theme can be purchased and hosted as I did with the Stratford Tattler or teachers can use the default theme that comes with WordPress and have it hosted on the WordPress website for free, though this option has limitations in terms of storage capacity, number and type of widgets, and pages. However, this option for theme has the added benefit of being constantly updated by developers so it is typically safe, stable, and overall reliable. In the event that teachers choose to purchase a WordPress theme, I do recommend playing with the free default theme, as I did, to become familiar with the platform and understand what they are looking for in terms of capability and look and feel before making a purchase.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Evolving over the course of two semesters, this project started out almost as a solution looking for a problem. The concept of reimagining Shakespeare in the context of a modern day tabloid website was intriguing, but what to do with it and who could benefit from such an endeavor? I let the development follow where it seemed to have the most potential while abandoning plans that generated little internet traffic and/or interest. While it was disappointing to not see *Stratford Tattler* grow into a fan fiction community, the experience of writing canon and fanon fan fiction articles gave me insight into the creative process and the potential educational applications of this type of engagement with serious literature. This led me to develop teaching materials that could be available online for free so that any teacher interested in using the concept could share it with their class with minimal prep time and technology-know-how.

By involving Shakespeare scholars, high school English Language Arts teachers, and an intellectual property expert in the iterative design as a form of feedback, I gained a variety of perspectives that helped me fine tune the teaching materials. I learned about what grade level is appropriate for the activities, what types of fan fiction articles are most useful from a teacher's point of view, the viability of the concept, and a much deeper understanding of intellectual property rights for digital media.

My future plans for *Stratford Tattler* is to find a teacher interested in collaborating with me by using the concept in his or her classroom and at some point I would like to reach out to educational institutions, such as the Folger Shakespeare Library, to offer to add the materials and website to their online teacher materials and educational outreach. The sustainability of *Stratford Tattler* as a learning experience that can be used by any teacher rests with adding a registration system. Current add-ons within WordPress allow me to grant publishing permissions to individuals, teachers in this case, who could then

be permitted to upload student work to a specified page on the website. This process would leave the homepage content unchanged while teachers could upload articles for their class section. Students could perform another type of simple registration to allow them to post comments on each other's work. In this case, the teachers and students would be engaged in the sharing and participating of content without the necessity of my involvement.

Lastly, I hope the research component of this project can shed light on the various strategies and pitfalls of creating a fan fiction website. Teachers should feel confident that with a relatively small amount of time invested in such an endeavor and by taking into consideration what types of creative products they want students to create and share, how the participation can occur, and what are the educational goals of the activities, they can use fan fiction to engage students with classic literature. Better yet, a group of teachers could pool their resources together to create a single fan fiction website which they could share, since one of the remarkable advantages of technology is its ability to scale up to serve untold numbers of fans.

Appendix A



Teacher's Guide

Fan Fiction for Shakespeare

Using the *Stratford Tattler* framework
By Mathew Evans

Version 1.0

www.stratfordtattler.com



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INTRODUCTION

By bringing *Stratford Tattler* into the classroom, teachers provide students a way to engage with Shakespeare and the early modern period as never before. We begin with the premise that all of his characters – Romeo, Lady Macbeth, King Lear, and the lot – are celebrities hounded by the paparazzi, playing out their often tragic and sometimes comic lives for the public to see in the tabloid website, www.stratfordtattler.com. The sensationalism of today’s media, which students are quite familiar with, is turned into a hook to bring students into the plots and characters and literary devices of Shakespeare, as they have a chance to see them in a humorous, contemporary context.

The tabloid articles provide a contemporary context to help facilitate literary analysis and students have the opportunity to write their own article for a classroom collection or publication on *Stratford Tattler*. In this way, students can faithfully “cover” an event or character from a play. Depending on your preference, students can base their article on the play closely or loosely, both ways putting their own spin on Shakespeare. Students can also give the same treatment to historical personalities, events, locations, etc. for the late-16th century to early 17th century.

I hope that you find the lesson plans and sample *Stratford Tattler* article useful, along with the handouts, information in this guide about how these activities align with the common core curriculum for 9-12th grade English Language Arts, and other resources to enable you to easily incorporate this exciting learning environment in your classroom. These lessons can be used as a way to introduce the play, check for learning, creative and/or collaborative writing, and literary analysis. Please note that these materials were developed for *Hamlet*, but they can be adapted to any of his plays or any creative work, Shakespeare’s or otherwise.

The materials included in this guide are by no means the only applications of *Stratford Tattler* or fan fiction, and you should feel free to adapt them as you see fit. If you have a great idea, I hope that you share it with us at www.stratfordtattler.com.

Best regards,
Mathew Evans

A BRIEF WORD ABOUT FAN FICTION

From fans of *Star Trek* to fans of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, people around the world have been expressing their fascination and admiration for a work by making their own stories, poems, movies, scripts, and images based off of the original work. What these fans are creating is called **fan fiction**. With the dynamic power of the internet to easily produce and share such media, fan fiction is becoming more common in main stream society. Sometimes their works stick closely to the original text while at other times it hardly resembles the original and merely used the latter as a jumping off point. Either way, creating fan fiction allows you to engage with a text in an interesting way, express your own creativity, and possibly share it with a wider audience.

For more information about fan fiction, please consider the following publications:

Burns, K. S. (2011). Movie and TV Series Communities. In G. A. Barnett (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social Networks* (Vol. 2, pp. 553-556). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Reference.

Driscoll, C. (2008). Fan Fiction. In C. A. Mitchell & J. Reid-Walsh (Eds.), *Girl Culture* (Vol. 1, pp. 285-288). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans & participatory culture*. New York: Routledge.

Mazzarella, S. R. (2008). Fan Culture. In C. A. Mitchell & J. Reid-Walsh (Eds.), *Girl Culture* (Vol. 1, pp. 283-285). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR REPURPOSING IMAGES

When we take an existing work, like a digital image off of the internet, and start making changes and putting our own touches on it, we are potentially entering a mine field of copyright issues, especially when we share it online or want to sell it. Fortunately with Shakespeare, all of his works are in the public domain and everyone is free to borrow his works without any legal trouble. So Shakespeare is fair game in the world of fan fiction, but what about taking digital images that others have created and using them to make a picture for a *Stratford Tattler* article?

Here are some considerations and suggestions to avoid infringing on the rights of others:

- Use copyright-free images and those available under Creative Commons (cc). The most open type is Share-alike (sa) which means anyone can share or alter the image, while Attribution (by) requires you to give credit to the original creator. In either case, we advise students to always Attribute the original work by stating the author and place the image was found in the caption.
- Do not use pictures of famous people, such as a screenshot from a movie or an image of, say Johnny Depp, found with Google. Doing so may infringe on their right to publicity and/or the movie studio's copyright.
- For Google searches, set the Advanced Setting to filter results under the "usage rights" tab and use "free to use or share" or the "free to use share or modify" options. The latter will show results of images where the creator has already given permission for others to not only publish the image, but make changes to it as well.
- In most cases, if you take an image and change the original purpose and audience of the image, this is considered transformative and means that you have the right to do so. For example, if you take the image of a building from a car commercial and place that image into a *Stratford Tattler* image about *Romeo and Juliet*, then you have changed both the purpose and the audience. From the original to your version, its purpose went from selling a car to entertaining/educating and the audience went from a customer to a person interested in Shakespeare. For a more detailed discussion, see <http://copyright.lib.utexas.edu/>

ALIGNMENT WITH THE COMMON CORE

The two lesson plans included in this guide can facilitate learning objectives that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

| Lesson | Common Core |
|---|--|
| <p>Lesson 1: Rumble at the Funeral - Literary Analysis</p> <p>Review or check for learning for the literary elements in Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i>. Students will engage with an authentic learning environment in which they can appreciate the relevance and timelessness of Shakespeare.</p> | <p>9th and 10th Grade</p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7</u> Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment• <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9</u> Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work <p>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10</u> 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. |

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1
Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3
Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

11th and 12th Grade**Reading:****Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7
Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9
Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Range of Reading and Level of

Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.10

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1
Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2
Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3
Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>interact and develop over the course of the text.</p> |
| <p>Lesson 2: Writing and Application of Literary Elements - Creative Writing Write an article for www.stratfordtattler.com either individually or collaboratively. While writing creatively, they will also demonstrate their understanding of the characters, conflict, or theme of <i>Hamlet</i> or any play by Shakespeare.</p> | <p>9th to 10th Grade Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4</u> Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. • <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5</u> 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. • <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6</u> Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically. <p>Range of Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10</u> 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.

Text Types and Purposes

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3a
Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3b
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3c
Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3d
Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3e
Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on

what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

11th to 12th Grade

Writing:

Production and Distribution of Writing

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5
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. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 [here](#).)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

Range of Writing

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10 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.

Text Types and Purposes

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3a Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3b Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3c Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3d Use precise words and

phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3e Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Lesson Plan 1: Rumble at the Funeral – Literary Analysis

Grade Level: high school

Subject: English Language Arts/ Shakespeare Studies

Prepared by: Mathew Evans

Time Required: 50 minutes

Overview and Purpose:

Using the article, “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely,” from the fan fiction website www.stratfordtattler.com, the teacher can either review or check for learning for the literary elements in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Students will engage with an authentic learning environment in which they can appreciate the relevance and timelessness of Shakespeare.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain the themes and conflict related to the characters of Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Laertes in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*.
 - Support their argument with examples from the text
 - Work in groups productively
-

Students Need:

- A copy of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*
 - Printout of “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely” or internet access to www.stratfordtattler.com where the article is located.
 - Comparison worksheet
-

Other Resources:

- Computer, digital projector, internet access (not required, but recommended)
-

Procedure:

1. Before class, students will have already read *Hamlet* or at least up to Ophelia’s funeral (Act V, Scene 1).
2. Introduce the website, www.stratfordtattler.com, to the class and explain that this is a tabloid that covers the world of Shakespeare as if the paparazzi reported on the characters and events of the plays. Share the article “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely.”

3. In small groups, give students the Rumble at the Funeral Student Handout. Allow groups enough time to find specific passages from the play in order to support their argument for question number 4.
4. Each group presents their findings. Teacher will ask for feedback from other groups.
5. Teacher will review any trouble areas and expand on the important themes or literary elements brought up during discussion.

Notes



Rumble at the Funeral: Digging Deeper into *Hamlet*

Student Handout

Activity 1: Read and answer questions about the article “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely”

1. Which details in the article give *Hamlet* a modern twist?

2. Why does the author think that Ophelia’s life was tragic?

3. What is the author of the article saying about Ophelia as a person? What about Hamlet and Gertrude?

Activity 2: Analyze Shakespeare's version of *Hamlet*. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

4. Think about the point of view of Hamlet or Gertrude. Choose one passage from the play to support your opinion of who he/she is as a person to support your opinion. Explain your answer.

5. Take 5 to 7 lines from one of the passages you chose in question number 4. How does Shakespeare say what he means using literary techniques (metaphor, simile, imagery, allusion, etc.)? What do these lines say about the play's conflicts or themes? Use a separate piece of paper.

Lesson Plan 2: – Writing and Application of Literary Elements

Grade Level: high school

Subject: English Language Arts/ Shakespeare Studies

Prepared by: Mathew Evans

Overview and Purpose:

Students write an article for www.stratfordtattler.com either individually or collaboratively. While writing creatively, they will also demonstrate their understanding of the characters, conflict, or theme of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. See “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely” for an example. Note: Feel free to use this writing activity for any of Shakespeare’s plays and not just *Hamlet*. Also, it is at your discretion how closely students follow the original text and how much license they have to depart from the original. Make appropriate changes to the rubric on page 14.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Apply important literary elements of *Hamlet* to a piece of creative writing
 - Practice collaborative writing in a group
 - Practice following standard grammar and mechanical rules writing for a public audience
-

Materials Needed:

- Student Handout: Scandal Strikes Elsinore
- *Hamlet* by Shakespeare (Act V, Scene 2)

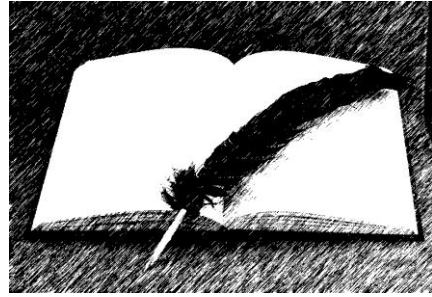
Other Resources:

- Computer, digital projector, internet access (not required, but recommended)
-

1. Before class, students will have already read *Hamlet*. If they did not do the first lesson for this unit, Rumble at the Funeral: Literary Analysis, introduce the website, www.stratfordtattler.com, to the class and explain that this is a tabloid that covers the world of Shakespeare as if the paparazzi reported on the characters and events of the plays. Share the article “Laertes and Hamlet Brawl at Funeral – Ophelia in Heaven, Just Barely.”

2. Give students the Scandal at Elsinore handout. Review what were the specific events in the final scene of Hamlet.
3. Form small groups. Students can choose an event or aspect of the scene to write a headline for. Students may need to be encouraged to brainstorm together.
4. Once a headline is agreed upon, each member of the group should write the first three sentences of the tabloid article individually. Then they each share their work and they discuss the different possibilities and merge their writing into a single beginning for an article that they all can agree upon.
5. If time permits, each group can share their work with the class.
6. Teacher will assign activity 2 as homework. Students may work as a team on a single article or collaboratively.

Notes



Scandal Strikes Elsinore: Writing a Tabloid Article for *Hamlet*

Student Handout

Activity 1: As a group, consider the eventful final scene of *Hamlet* (Act V, Scene 2) where we learn Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead and see the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, Gertrude poisoned, and many deaths. If you were a tabloid reporter or blogger, what piece of news or moment would you cover?

1. What does the audience learn and what events take place in Act V, Scene 2?

2. Which event or piece of information would make a good tabloid story? As a group, choose one.

3. Together, brainstorm to come up with a headline for the story that everyone can agree on. Write your headline here:

4. What could be the first three sentences of your article? On your own, write the beginning of the article.

5. When everyone is ready, share what you've written with the group. Together discuss what you like from each one and merge them together into three lines that everyone can agree on. Write it below. Be prepared to share your work with the class.

Activity 2: Since you know so much about *Hamlet*, why not share some of the gossip? Write a tabloid article in the style of the www.stratfordtattler.com. (300 to 700 words)

6. **Stay True to the Play**
Write an article based on any scene that takes place in *Hamlet* from the point of view of a celebrity news reporter. Keep in mind the personalities, conflicts, and themes of the play that you want to get across. Remember to stay true to the play. Keep in mind whether or not your teacher It is important to stay true to the play as much as possible. See attached rubric. You may continue the article you started in Activity 1.

OPTIONAL

Write one paragraph explaining similarities and differences between your article and the play and the reasons for your decisions.

Scandal Strikes Elsinore: Writing Rubric

| | Points | | | | Comments |
|--|--------|---|---|---|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| grammar/ mechanics | | | | | |
| accurately reflects character, theme, etc | | | | | |
| references <i>Hamlet</i> plot, characters, etc. | | | | | |
| Article includes who, what, where, why, when | | | | | |
| length (300 to 700 words) | | | | | |
| | | | | | total: /20 |

Appendix B



With Denmark abuzz over Laertes and Hamlet brawling at Ophelia's funeral, let's not forget: the funeral was for Ophelia. Did she make it into heaven? Well, considering how the funeral service went, a ride from a catapult would have been smoother.

Overshadowed to the End

How quickly we forget Ophelia's remarkable, yet tragic life – homeschooled nerd becomes instant celebrity, only to die suddenly. As a teen, she stayed hidden from the media frenzy behind her father, Polonius, a Danish Lord, until she made front page news dating Prince Hamlet before he went goth and became the royal family's bad boy. Their on again, off again relationship ended around the same

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time of her father's mysterious murder at Elsinore castle, which seemed to be too much for the sheltered girl. She was in and out of rehab and placed on several medications. The most cringe-worthy part of her downward spiral came with her self-released hip-hop single, "Love me whenever, wherever." Critics didn't know what to make of the sexually explicit song, while her fans were left equally confused.

Not long after, the police were pulling her drowned body from the river. Was it a suicide?

"The poor girl didn't even realize she was in danger," said Queen Gertrude at the police inquest. "She just kept singing and singing that awful song. I don't even think she tried to swim. But to be fair, she was heavily medicated. It was nobody's fault."

Church fathers were far less understanding. Citing the passive way Ophelia "let herself drown," they ruled her death a suicide. Ophelia's fans protested vehemently in social media, saying that she had the right to be buried in a

church and given her rites, so that she doesn't spend eternity in purgatory.

The controversy raged for weeks until her brother's lawyers announced that a compromise had been reached with the church. The family had been granted permission to have a funeral in the churchyard and begged for the media to respect their privacy during this emotionally difficult time.

Funeral Turns Ugly

As Elsinore's famous and powerful arrived in a long procession at the small churchyard, heart-broken fans and the paparazzi gathered outside the front gate. The lucky few who managed to get a glimpse of the funeral say it was well worth the bruises.

Queen Gertrude sported a dazzling Oliver De La Rodgers original gown, in spite of the gray and chilly day. The beautiful dress with diving neckline went to waste because the priest was finished with the ceremony after only a minute.

Details are sketchy, but a friend of the family at the funeral says that Laertes argued with the priest at the end of the service, demanding at least a requiem mass be sung for his sister.

The priest put up his hands, saying, "I've done enough already. Ophelia shouldn't even be buried here to begin with."

"She's an angel!" cried Laertes. "You

can go to hell."

He was so upset he jumped into the grave to say good-bye one last time to his sister. Was this just a stunt to win favor with the public who largely blamed him for interfering with

Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet? Our source says that Laertes was not putting on an act, even if he had been an overly-protective and meddlesome brother.



Queen Gertrude rocked the funeral with an original backless dress that left the crowd in awe.

A happy surprise turned into a scandal when Hamlet made a fashionably late appearance at the funeral (apparently taking a break from his stint in rehab in England). Onlookers remarked at how the Prince looked more mature and down to earth compared to his former moody self. The death-obsessed college student

who was unable to follow through on anything seemed a changed man; changed more than anyone could have guessed.

Without warning, Hamlet jumped into the grave. He proclaimed for the first time in public that he loved Ophelia, even more than Laertes could love her. Whatever goodwill Laertes had earned that day was quickly dashed. He choked Hamlet, arguing that he loved Ophelia more. Queen Gertrude and King Claudius, our source says, were horrified.

Ophelia must have felt crowded in her grave with two of Denmark's hottest stars standing on her coffin fighting

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over her.

Ophelia's End

So what about Ophelia? Overlooked and babied in life, literally stepped on in death. She met a tragic end because the men in her life gave too little, too late while her hasty funeral turned into fodder for tabloids.

Poor Ophelia. If she made it to Heaven, it was a bumpy, fast ride.
-Mathew Evans

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