

INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE EARLY: WHY, WHEN, AND HOW TO
TEACH SHAKESPEARE TO ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

In America's education system where many students have below average reading levels and high-test scores have become the priority, teaching Shakespeare in schools is becoming more challenging. Studies show that a majority of high school students, despite creative teaching methods, see his works as irrelevant, difficult, and boring. This paper examines whether introducing Shakespeare early in small doses throughout elementary and middle schools, in his original language using performance-based methods, can be part of a larger scaffolding effort to improve student perception and long-term appreciation of Shakespeare. The paper considers why Shakespeare is relevant, when Shakespeare should be introduced, and how to effectively introduce him to young students.

Various qualitative methods are used in this paper. This includes informal interviews of teachers, a site visit to observe a third grade class, a review of current research on performance-based teaching, and a literature review on linguistic and reading

development among children. Practitioners who teach Shakespeare were interviewed to determine students' authentic experience of learning from a performance-based teaching approach and how best to teach Shakespeare at different grades. Scholars at the Folger Shakespeare Library who have conducted research on Shakespeare in American schools were consulted on their findings. Also, current and historical patterns of Shakespeare's place in the curriculum in the United Kingdom were used to offer a comparative analysis. Readers will note that the author, henceforth referred to as "I", will include observations from personal experience and statements of generally accepted practices.

Results obtained from the research provide compelling evidence of Shakespeare's relevance in our current curriculum based on his cultural and linguistic influence. Teaching Shakespeare early yields numerous advantages such as: increased student confidence, expanded literary abilities, lower levels of anxiety when more complex literature is introduced later, and a life-long appreciation of high quality literature. Research presented about children's language development support the claim that 3rd-8th graders not only have the capacity to understand Shakespeare at an introductory level, but that this early time in their development is actually ideal to expose them to Shakespeare's rich language and universal stories. Using drama in

the classroom with condensed versions of the plays and age appropriate activities are useful when introducing students to Shakespeare's original language. Performance-based teaching methods were proven as one of the most effective ways to capture the attention of young students.

DEDICATION

For my son, Liam,
May you always keep inquiring and finding joy in reading

To the teachers on the frontlines of American classrooms:
Your stories about teaching Shakespeare to young students inspired
this work and raised my expectations of what is possible as a teacher.
Your students all over the country are living proof that young people
can find great meaning and enjoyment in Shakespeare.

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CHAPTER 1

WHY SHAKESPEARE?

Shakespeare's Significance and Relevance in the Curriculum

In this chapter, I will argue that Shakespeare's works, in their original language, are essential and valuable to every young student's learning experience. I will consider Shakespeare's historical distinctiveness and his significant influence on modern day culture and the English language. Then I will explore Shakespeare's relevance and value in the curriculum both from the perspective of the student reader and the teacher seeking to persuade students and, in some cases, the school administration of his importance to the curriculum.

Shakespeare in Today's Schools

According to a 2010 survey organized by the Royal Shakespeare Company, 50% of the world's students study Shakespeare. The survey, based on responses from British Council offices in 43 countries, reported that 64 million students study Shakespeare every year. The survey also asked the important question of why students around the globe study a playwright and poet who is not from their country and has been dead for 400 years.

The top responses were:

70% believe it's because of the intrinsic value of the plays (the skillful telling of stories and universal human values). 50% also believe it's because Shakespeare is relevant and useful in helping young people reflect on contemporary issues and dilemmas. (RSC Education 2011, 2)

These are among the many reasons that have been used to both promote and defend Shakespeare for centuries. "The skillful telling of stories" is worth highlighting, especially when recent arguments have been made that Shakespeare's stories can be communicated to students without needing Shakespeare's works. Some argue that the story of Romeo and Juliet can be experienced through *West Side Story* or the many other stories of forbidden love on the market. Others assert that student comprehension might be fostered if students are given user-friendly summaries of Shakespeare's plots; in some cases it may be appropriate to do so as a supplemental resource. It is essential, however, that students are introduced to Shakespeare in his original language, even if in an abridged format.

Shakespeare's Original Language

One reason Shakespeare's original language should be the starting place for any age group is that it isn't so much what Shakespeare said, but how he said it. The story of the poem is only a part of the poem. Shakespeare's profundity as a poet is equally in his

message and his medium (Foster and Johnson 2000, 13).

Shakespeare's uniqueness is in *how* he crafts the stories in his sources through language (Sedgwick 1999, 5). The exposure of students to Shakespeare's idioms, style, and shrewdness requires study of his original wording. In the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Shakespeare Set Free* guidebook for teachers, Performance Editor Michael Tolaydo states, "We know Shakespeare's plays are not about the plot; many in his audience knew the stories before they saw the plays. They are really more about explorations into human nature, about language, and about the ambiguity that much of that language presents" (Tolaydo 1993, 27-28). Shakespeare writes vividly but with complexity at the same time. This leads to another important point regarding the transcendence of Shakespeare and his appeal to people of many language and cultures.

Shakespeare's Universality

Not only are Shakespeare's plays expertly written but they contain a high degree of complexity that has allowed them to be interpreted and reinterpreted for centuries. In "The Plays of William Shakespeare," a class taught by Georgetown University professor, Dr. Michael Collins, he notes that even though Shakespeare's plays have been used over and over again, every director has a unique interpretation on the script and every actor a distinct perspective of

the role performed. The theatrical questions the director asks about the meaning of each moment of the play become human questions we ask ourselves. For example, the choices made about Lady Macbeth's appearance (young and beautiful or homely and simply dressed) and the way she talks (soft spoken or overbearing) when she interacts with Macbeth sends a message about the range of perspectives of the actors and director. This creates a context for rich philosophical inquiry on human motivation and human values.

Collins also points out that Shakespeare should be appreciated both as art that refuses to give easy answers to difficult questions and as an aesthetic experience to be enjoyed: "Shakespeare puts on a good show and engages our language powerfully" (Collins, 2008). This approach is empowering for students as it demystifies Shakespeare. A student's authentic experience interacting with the play is just as meaningful as an academic analysis of the text. This is not to say that students should not be aware of scholarship regarding Shakespeare's text but that the emphasis of lessons should be placed on supporting personal engagement and meaningful interpretation rather than memorizing what the "experts" say the text means.

Many others have recognized this universality of Shakespeare, including the late Rex Gibson, who was hailed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in the U.K. as "our greatest Shakespearean

educationalist" (RSC Education 2008, 6). He asserts that Shakespeare's plays have endured the test of time because of the variety of interpretations possible: "One reason why Shakespeare's plays have proved so popular for so long is their infinite capacity for adaptation. As society changes, so do the meanings and significances found in the plays. For 400 years the plays have been interpreted and performed in an astonishing variety of ways" (Gibson 1998, xii).

Another side to Shakespeare's universality is the wide range of audiences who are able to find meaning and relevance in his works. His works have been used with both advanced and struggling students, and within both academic circles and prisoners' development classes. Shakespeare's original market audience was both kings and illiterate peasants. Shakespeare is "capable of speaking 'to the kitchen table and the edge of the universe'" (Donna 2012, x). Many educators use Shakespeare with students who speak English as their second language (Rodgers 2011). The magazine, *Teaching Shakespeare*, published by the British Shakespeare Association has documented Shakespeare being used with a wide range of students, most notably as a type of treatment for students with autism (Hunter 2013, 8-10) and to boost confidence with students who have disabilities. The special needs teacher noted,

“Fairly quickly as the week proceeded the lines between ability and disability would begin to blur” (Edgren 2012, 9).

Shakespeare has also been effective in prison with inmates who haven't finished high school, who are semi-literate, and for many whose original language is not English. Laura Raidonis Bates has been visiting prisons for many years. From minimum to maximum-security prisons, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* have been used with great success.

How does she introduce Shakespeare to this cross section of criminals? She takes her class through each step of the language to understand the meaning of each word, then she has the inmates collaborate to write and perform a modern day interpretation of the scene (Bates 2003, 152, 158). She uses *Romeo and Juliet* as a springboard to discuss gang violence. Those who attend her session are even willing to miss dinner to continue class (Bates 2003, 155). She uses *Macbeth* to discuss the inner workings of remorse (Bates 2003, 158). She has witnessed hardened solitary confinement inmates debate Richard II's soliloquy on the reality of guilt. Female prisoners, many who have never read Shakespeare before and who have very low writing skills, gravitated toward the material in *The Taming of the Shrew* and shared insights into the possible

motivations of characters that even the teacher hadn't considered (Bates 2003, 159).

The most interesting conclusion from Bates' experiences in American prisons takes her back to how Shakespeare is currently introduced in school. Before any of prisoners were in prison, some had been in a class where Shakespeare was taught but they never experienced his relevance. "Awaiting sentences in Cook County Jail, Deon agreed. He had been involved with a girl from a rival gang and was now facing attempted murder charges, 'If only I'd read this before,' he said, 'I'd a looked at what happened to Romeo and I'd a left that girl alone—and I wouldn't a ended up in here!'" (Bates 2003, 162). A teacher may never know what is at stake and what a student may gain from being empowered to engage positively with Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Distinctiveness in History

The unique achievements of Shakespeare during his time help support the current value of Shakespeare and reveal the beginnings of his distinctiveness, even in his own time. The theatre was a booming business for most of Shakespeare's life, spawning many playwrights. Shakespeare's theatre company was given the most prestigious title in theatre by the Queen Elizabeth and later by King

James (Wells 2006, 5). Those who worked most closely with Shakespeare during his lifetime recognized a certain grandeur about his works. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell regarded Shakespeare's plays highly enough that they compiled and published them as a collection called the First Folio (Hopkins 2005, 7). At that time, plays were usually viewed simply as entertainment and not as serious works of art. The Folger Shakespeare Library website states that "nothing quite like that had ever been published in folio before...The First Folio of 1623 was not only the first collected edition of Shakespeare—it was the first folio book ever published in England that was devoted exclusively to plays."

It is significant to note that his contemporaries, Hemings and Condell, saw a quality in Shakespeare's works as something worth capturing. Ben Jonson, "both a friend and rival to Shakespeare" (Wells 2006, 129), also seemed to recognize the enduring quality of Shakespeare's work, when he wrote that Shakespeare, "was not of an age, but for all time" (Wells 2006, 3). The dedication of those who knew his work endured as three more folios of Shakespeare's plays were published in the years to come, the last in 1685, 69 years after his death (Hopkins 2005, 7).

Many other works of literature with very similar plots to Shakespeare's were written during or before his time but have not endured the way his plays have. For example, Saxo Grammaticus writes a story very similar to *Hamlet* called *Amleth*. It is complete with Amleth's uncle (the King) marrying his widowed mother (the Queen). Amleth's love interest is used by the King and the King's friend to uncover the truth about Amleth's seemingly mad behavior; the King's friend is plunged through with a sword by Amleth. Though the Ghost and the Players are not mentioned, Amleth and Hamlet's plots are almost identical (Sedgwick 1999, 19). The fact that Shakespeare's stories have endured through centuries of readers and playgoers is a testament to his ability to transform the stories in his sources into enduring and authoritative plays.

Shakespeare's Modern Day Relevance

In our modern world, Shakespeare is all around us. Whether a student likes his works or not, Shakespeare is part of the fabric of our daily society, and not just "high culture." His references are scattered throughout our culture in many forms. Shakespeare has influenced "plays, operas, ballets, movies, musicals, sculptures, songs, paintings, symphonies, storybooks, novels, comic books, and more" (Anderson 2011, 5). References to his works are vast in cultural

venues such as art museums and the opera but are also very present in mainstream life as well. A local coffee shop near my residence recently gave a discount to anyone who knew the name of the city where *Romeo and Juliet* was set. Shakespeare has been quoted on the *Simpsons*, *Scooby Doo* and numerous other TV shows (Hopkins 2005, 1; Dakin 2009, xiv).

Entire movies are based on his works, many of them geared toward teenage audiences. Many young students may be impacted to learn of the reverential place that Shakespeare has for the Hollywood actors that they adore. Many acclaimed actors have expressed their utmost respect for his plays and define Shakespeare roles to be the ultimate challenge and triumph. Ethan Hawke, Patrick Stewart, Denzel Washington, Emma Thompson, Claire Danes, Kate Winslet and many more have performed Shakespeare. Leonardo DiCaprio became well known from his role as Romeo in Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* (Marche 2011, x). In the documentary *The Comedies with Joely Richardson* (aired January 28, 2013) from the PBS series called *Shakespeare Uncovered*, actress Joely Richardson shares how influential Shakespeare is in the minds of actors today: "I personally feel that Shakespeare, in some ways for us, he is a bible; for all actors...male and female...if you think about it, within every

Shakespearian heroin role are the seeds for any performance of an actress that we've ever seen in any role."

Students may see Shakespeare's language as too intricate and distant from them, but they may not realize that they actually use his words on a daily basis. In his book, *How Shakespeare Changed Everything*, Stephen Marche makes a convincing case for anyone doubting Shakespeare's influence, even in today's everyday speech. Shakespeare coined at least 1,700 words (Marche 2011, 24). It seems that when Shakespeare couldn't find the right word to express his point, he made one up, sometimes by connecting existing ones. He is the reason we have words such as, "farmhouse and eyeball and softhearted and watchdog" (Marche 2011, 24). He also rewrote many of the rules of usage and grammar, "He nouned verbs and verbed nouns, that's how we have *to dawn* and *to elbow* out of the way. He made adjectives like *deafening*. He made adverbs like *tightly*." He also used words to create "special-effects" with words like "buzzer and *kickshaw* and *zany*" (Marche 2011, 25).

Many may think it is difficult to understand Shakespeare today, yet it is interesting to consider that 10% of the words he used had never been heard before by his audience (Marche 2011, 24). He invented many of the most-used idiomatic expressions in our language. In the following passage, English journalist Bernard Levin

skillfully presents Shakespeare's significant impact on our modern language:

If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise - why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then - to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I were dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare. (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 1986, 98-99)

Who's Doubting Shakespeare?

In more recent years with increased class sizes, students' below-average reading levels, low budgets, and high-stake

standardized tests looming at the end of each year, there seems to be even more reasons to wait until high school or college to teach Shakespeare or even to avoid Shakespeare altogether. Questioning Shakespeare's relevance seems to come from the difficulty students have when being introduced to Shakespeare, particularly Shakespeare's demanding language. The institutional response should not be to avoid teaching Shakespeare, but to use him as an opportunity to teach students how to overcome what initially may be challenging. There is value that goes beyond academics in teaching students to work at something that may not come easy to them. This is not to say that Shakespeare needs to remain difficult for our students, especially when using methods that get students out of their seats and engaging actively with Shakespeare. The study of Shakespeare invokes the valuable life lesson of learning to persist in the study of literature. Students will learn the pleasure of seeing beautiful language as a reward for a diligent process:

We should resist allowing what we teach to be dictated by our immediate interests - or by those of our students. Students need to be engaged, but they also need to be exposed to texts and ideas that are, to some degree, quite alien. They need to face concepts, and language, that they may find difficult - and to be given the chance to recognise that what is strange and difficult can also be thought-provoking, or arresting, or even beautiful. And they also need to be given the chance to challenge Shakespeare, or elements of what Shakespeare has come to represent (Atherton 2005, 7).

This doesn't mean that teachers are to demand that students struggle through Shakespeare on their own at first. It does, however, mean that just because something may be challenging doesn't mean it should be avoided. On the contrary, other methods for introducing Shakespeare need to be explored to in order to make his works as accessible and engaging as possible. This includes starting Shakespeare earlier in the curriculum and getting students out of their seats and performing Shakespeare. The problem teachers often face, however, isn't always with a lack of desire to teach Shakespeare or with the method of teaching, but with a lack of time and narrowed focus because of pressures from school administrators to only use methods that will produce test-based results (Holly Rodgers, March 4, 2013, email message to author).

The Pressures of Testing

Administrators who have to meet demands of standardized testing often voice doubts about Shakespeare's relevance. In the context of learning for test taking, students' interaction with Shakespeare's works is focused on developing their ability to demonstrate cognitive proficiency of Shakespeare based on pre-packaged ideas and conclusions delivered to them by teachers. Fred Sedgwick argues that this pedagogical culture of teaching

Shakespeare for the sole purpose of regurgitation on a test is akin to suffocating his works:

The power of what children learn when they play with Shakespeare's words derives from the fact that the play, being active, is bound up with choice: playing with words requires constant decisions. Decisions require thought, and thought causes a dangerous thing – learning – about Shakespeare, about words, about life and its glories and problems...In contrast, the dull business of reading and swotting for exams requires little more than a numbed, passive response...such activities seem to be utterly cut off from any recognizable aspects of real life. (Sedgwick 1999, 124)

In the British school system, the country with the strongest historical connection to Shakespeare's works, his inclusion in the school system has been debated. He has been pulled out of national curriculum and testing, reinstated, then pulled out again (RSC 2008, 8-13). This fluctuation reflects not so much Shakespeare's literary merit as it does the contention and doubt surrounding Shakespeare's relevance given the pressures of testing and workforce skill development. It is hard to contend with the facts regarding Shakespeare's influence in the world; however, effectively teaching Shakespeare may be more demanding when the goal is more about high test scores than about authentic learning and engagement.

Teaching for the test often requires teachers to put aside performance-based teaching methods for more traditional methods to adequately prepare students to give memorized answers to an exam.

When the ability to recall answers for a test becomes the ultimate goal of the classroom, the reflective experience with Shakespeare's text is diminished, and students and even teachers blame the literature instead of a faulty system. This cycle of frustration leads to questions regarding the relevance of Shakespeare and other quality literature.

Shakespeare as High Quality Literature

In his article "Why Literature Matters", teacher and writer Tim Gillespie recounts a story that has cycled through the American high school many times: the staff meeting where the relevance of high quality literature is debated. "Here is the pragmatists' argument: 'No one needs literature to be a productive worker, competitive in the global economy'" (Gillespie 1994, 16). The discussion turns toward Shakespeare and the question is asked, "Who really needs to know about Shakespeare these days? This is an enthusiasm, a leisure-time pursuit, but not a necessary skill for the twenty-first century" (Gillespie 1994, 16). The English teachers start to debate each other when the discussion turns towards what works constitute "good literature."

In an increasingly results-oriented education system with budget constraints, reading a story doesn't seem to equal better test results or better job opportunities and is sometimes seen as less

important. Gillespie makes the case that literature develops imagination that leads to greater understanding beyond our own circumstances and surroundings. This widened perspective produces human values such as empathy.

Literature does not teach morals in a didactic way; rather it gives us a chance to experience moral dilemmas. And quality literature does not oversimplify the dilemmas of the world. Unlike the glib, materialistic, quick-solution vision of life offered on much TV, literature portrays lives that have complicated problems and tough choices, and invites us to engage with them, to imagine living out life's vexing dilemmas along with the characters we meet. (Gillespie 1994, 18)

The vastness and quality of Shakespeare's works allow for a wide and deep exploration of "dilemmas" that go straight to the heart of such issues as ambition, love, and power for students to consider. Students should be empowered to find out for themselves what has made Shakespeare great through four centuries of an ever-changing world by exploring these themes. Rex Gibson most potently summarizes the argument for Shakespeare for all students:

Every student is entitled to make the acquaintance of genius. Shakespeare remains a genius of outstanding significance in the development of the English language, literature and drama. All students should have opportunities through practical experience, to make up their own minds about what Shakespeare might hold for them. (Gibson 1998, 6)

Given Shakespeare's unparalleled value in the arts, his influence on modern language, his universality, and his skilled poetry, students should be given the experience of engaging with his works.

Unfortunately, most students aren't given the tools or time to truly appreciate Shakespeare. Most American students are thrust into their first experience with Shakespeare in high school and seldom are able to perform his plays. Performance requires students to not only analyze but also make decisions about what the text means to them. This is an essential component of any literature class, allowing exposure for students to interact face to face with the material and to discover personal meaning. Without this "reader-response" (Cox 2008, 16-17) process, literature becomes irrelevant to many students and is relegated to reading comprehension, keeping the rich insights that Shakespeare explores untouched by many.

Shakespeare is such a foundational part of the English language and modern society, wouldn't students benefit more from being introduced to him earlier in their academic careers? As Rex Gibson writes: "An easy answer to the question 'Why teach Shakespeare?' is 'Why not?'" (Gibson 1998, 1). There are already many teachers taking this challenge and teaching students as young as grade 2nd or 3rd. Some may ask, can it be done? The simple answer is, it *is* being done with great success.

The pedagogical, linguistic, theoretical, and practical reasons for starting Shakespeare in elementary and middle school and the positive effects of early exposure will be discussed in the following

chapters. The final chapter will give examples from students and teachers who attest that experiencing Shakespeare early using performance-based methods empowers students throughout their academic careers and teaches them principles to use later in their lives and professional careers. When young students start to interact with Shakespeare using condensed scripts and age-appropriate activities, a seed is planted that will be cultivated over many years when their language and literary skills are developing rapidly. Younger students are far more open to Shakespeare because they have no presuppositions about him. "Scaffolding" (Cox 2008, 15) Shakespeare from elementary school to middle school to high school using performance-based techniques and activities will likely enable the best possible learning outcome for students, remove negative stigma surrounding Shakespeare, and foster a life-long appreciation for one of the most prolific writers in history.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN TO INTRODUCE SHAKESPEARE: WHY HIGH SCHOOL MAY BE TOO LATE

Chapter 1 examined the reasons Shakespeare is both authoritative and relevant and should hold a permanent place in the curriculum for every student. However, even those who are convinced that Shakespeare should be introduced in his original language may differ on *when* that introduction should take place.

The argument presented in this paper is that students should receive Shakespeare's works in small doses throughout their academic career starting at age eight or nine (3rd or 4th grade) and up through high school. Students' incremental exposure to Shakespeare prepares students for full-length plays and sonnets in high school and helps them fully appreciate Shakespeare without intimidation and culture shock. Students will be able to say "Shakespeare, I've been doing that since I was 9!" (Cobb 2011, Slide 1).

This chapter makes the case that not only is it beneficial to start Shakespeare early, but that starting Shakespeare in high school may be too late considering the negative perceptions older students typically have about Shakespeare, compounded by the increasing distractions and demands on them as they progress in school.

Conditions for Teaching Shakespeare Early

It is important to note that the argument for teaching Shakespeare starting in elementary school presupposes several things that will be discussed in detail throughout this paper. First, it is not necessary to introduce entire Shakespearian plays or sonnets. Small sections or major scenes are enough to get students familiar with the language and then increase exposure over time. It is reasonable to encourage young students to understand the overall meaning but not necessary to demand a thorough analysis of the entire play. The important thing is to get students on their feet to act out small portions of the play and to conduct creative writing exercises to teach them about Shakespeare's rhythm and language.

Second, Shakespeare's works should be presented in their original language as much as possible, not only through modern adaptations. Adaptations and storybook versions, especially with young students, can be used in various contexts but not as a replacement for the artistic poetry of Shakespeare's words. As mentioned in chapter 1, it is not just Shakespeare's stories that are brilliant, but *how* he crafts them and the way he uses language. The poetry itself is the work of art. Students would not experience Shakespeare if they do not actually read Shakespeare's words (Foster and Johnson 2000, 13).

Third, the method used to present Shakespeare and the role of teacher expectations are both key elements to a successful introduction to Shakespeare. When students first read a line of Shakespeare, more often than not, they aren't as intimidated as the teacher thinks. If the teacher believes in his or her students' capacity to understand Shakespeare, the students will rise to the challenge (Gibson 2000, 2).

Also, teachers do not need to be experts in Shakespeare; they simply have to be comfortable modeling the learning process with the students. The teacher is a guide for students to discover Shakespeare. (Chapter 4 discusses in more detail the teacher's role in helping students have a positive first experience with Shakespeare.) In order to truly capture students of any age, one must be creative and allow students to engage with the text as much as possible.

The most effective techniques to use for elementary and middle school students are performance-based methods, as advocated by the Folger Shakespeare Library (Lucretia Anderson, December 3, 2012, e-mail message to author). This approach, also known as the active method (Gibson 1998, xii), gets students out of their seats and uses Shakespeare's language in various group exercises, dramatic

activities, and even full productions. (Chapter 4 provides a detailed explanation of this method with practical examples.)

Current Practice – 9th Grade Induction to Shakespeare

In response to the idea of introducing Shakespeare to students as young as 3rd grade, some may ask, isn't it too early? Based on numerous studies showing the negative attitude high school students have toward Shakespeare and the uphill journey many teachers face trying to debunk the "boring" and "too hard" myths before they even start with Shakespeare, an increasing number of teachers are asking, is high school too late? In the United States, the common age when students are introduced to Shakespeare varies by state and school; however, the average student will meet Shakespeare in 9th grade (freshman year of high school) when students are approximately fourteen years of age.

The Common Core Standards (CCS), released in June 2010, adopted by forty-five states and the District of Columbia, have published the English Language Arts standards list of exemplar texts. Shakespeare is first mentioned in the ninth and tenth grade bracket (from CCS website: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10>, accessed December 14, 2012). In an email exchange with Lucretia Anderson, the Elementary School Program

Coordinator at the Folger Shakespeare Library, she states that in her experience working with schools around the nation, 9th grade is traditionally when students read Shakespeare for the first time.

Reading Practices of High School Students

Ninth grade induction to Shakespeare has been the case for many years, and some educators may see no need to change this generally accepted practice. However, many (including this author) believe high school is too late to introduce students to Shakespeare for the first time for several reasons. First, high school is an already demanding time for students and teachers. Studies show students are more distracted with social and extracurricular activities. Second, studies have found the older the child, the less their desire to read for fun (Nippold, Duthie, Larsen 2005, 95). Studies have linked reading for fun to higher test scores.

In 2005, the University of Oregon conducted a survey of sixth grade and ninth grade public school students to determine how they spent their time outside of school. The study concluded that "...interest in reading as a free-time activity declines during these years (11-15), whereas interest in using e-mail increases, consistent with the trend for young people to spend more time socializing with peers as they transition into adolescence (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989)"

(Nippold, Duthie, Larsen 2005, 98). From a literacy standpoint, this is discouraging given the fact that “Nagy and Herman (1987) estimated that children encounter 15,000 to 30,000 unfamiliar words a year from reading only 25 min per day, and argued that up to one half of student vocabulary growth may result from reading” (Nippold, Duthie, Larsen 2005, 94). The written word then is an important aspect of students’ lexical expansion, and exposure to more difficult language in this stage allows students to develop their ability to gain new vocabulary using context clues (Nippold, 1998).

This is not to say that socializing and extracurricular activities are disruptions to learning; however, they do point to the reality that older students tend to be more preoccupied compared to younger students. Even with more complex personal and academic lives, it is possible for high school students to enjoy literature and gain an appreciation for Shakespeare; however, given the unique value of Shakespeare to language and literature, it makes greater pedagogical sense to start earlier to capture the student’s attention and ignite a lifelong love for Shakespeare when they are younger and more open to new language (Gibson 2000, iv).

What is the current “reading for pleasure” level among U.S. high school students? The *Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease offers some discouraging data regarding the average student’s view

on reading for pleasure. Trelease describes his visit to a kindergarten class where he asked students to raise their hand if they wanted to learn to read. Every hand went up. In comparison, he lists results from another NCES study about students' reading for fun daily: 54% of 4th graders read for fun, 30% of 8th graders read for fun and only 19% of 12th graders read for fun. The numbers are startling; "We have 100% interest in kindergarten but lose 78% of our potential lifetime readers by senior year. Any business that kept losing that much of its customer base would be in bankruptcy" (Trelease 2006, 1-2).

A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that when students develop a personal attachment to reading and interact genuinely with the reading material, they improve on standardized tests and are generally more successful in reading. According to the report, *The Nation's Report Card: 2011 Reading: National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grades 4 and 8* released by the NCES, 4th graders who read for fun attained higher scores in reading. "In 2011, fourth graders who reported reading for fun almost every day scored higher on average than those did so less frequently, and students who reported never or hardly ever reading for fun scored lowest" (NCES 2011, 19).

According to the *2011 Reading* report by NCES, 8th graders who reported having discussions in English class about assigned readings at least once a week scored higher than those who reported they never or hardly ever have such discussions (NCES 2011, 48). These results for both ages show that engaging students during the classroom learning process and capturing their interest in a way that spills into their life outside the classroom are not just what teachers should hope to do if time allows, but are actually essential to the improvement of basic reading performance.

By teaching Shakespeare early, using the performance-based method, teachers can achieve several goals at one time. They can expose their students to great literature, get them engaged in the imaginative world of well-written stories, and increase their confidence level in reading. All the activities in the performance-based teaching method of Shakespeare are discussion-based; this is another reason to expose student to Shakespeare and other high quality literature early in the curriculum.

As the NCES study shows, passion for reading and discussion-based English classes increase student test scores. These studies suggest the success of our students depends on not only academic performance but on their developing a passion for literature. In an age when high scores on standardized tests have become the mark of

success, these statistics help teachers make a more convincing case for teaching Shakespeare early. As Greek philosopher Heraclitus has been attributed to saying, "Education has nothing to do with the filling of a pail, rather it has everything to do with igniting a flame" (Peterson 2013, 1).

Attitudes Towards Shakespeare

Another difference between the older student compared to the younger student is that, quite often, younger students haven't heard of Shakespeare and therefore have no preconceived notions when approaching his works. Feeling intimidated or thinking that Shakespeare is boring or only for advanced students is something that can hinder a high school student's ability to learn Shakespeare (Gibson 2000, 2).

In March 2010, the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) from the University of Warwick published a report to the Royal Shakespeare Company's Learning and Performance Network. This report, among other things, presented results from a survey measuring year 10 (15-16 year olds) student attitudes toward Shakespeare in 2007 and 2009 in the United Kingdom. One encouraging trend is that more students agreed with the statement "Shakespeare is fun" in 2009 than in 2007. However,

only 18% agreed with the statement and 50% disagreed with the statement. Although higher than in 2007, 18% is still a very low number. Almost half agreed with the statements, "Studying Shakespeare is boring" (46%) and "I find Shakespeare's plays difficult to understand" (49%). Even more discouraging are the responses regarding Shakespeare's relevance to modern times. Thirty five percent agreed with the statement, "It is important to study Shakespeare's plays." Only 20% agreed that "Shakespeare's plays help us understand ourselves and others better." Only 17% said yes to the statement, "I have learnt something about myself by studying Shakespeare." This final statistic shows a clear indication of a gap between academic studies and personal application. One of the most important reasons, in my opinion, to teach Shakespeare to students is so they gain insight for life and develop a love for great literature.

The reason for introducing Shakespeare at a young age is not to gather academic accolades regarding how smart our students must be for studying Shakespeare early. As these statistics show, high school students have negative attitudes towards Shakespeare and see him as "boring"; therefore, starting early is the teacher's best chance at capturing the hearts and minds of this next generation to appreciate the beauty of Shakespeare.

When the desired outcome is to make Shakespeare accessible and relevant and to cultivate a life-long appreciation for great literature, starting early is essential. Not introducing Shakespeare until high school reduces the chance that students will respond positively; when the majority of high school students are unexcited and uninspired by their experience of Shakespeare, introducing Shakespeare early is both a preventative measure and an investment process.

Change in Methodology May Not Be Enough

Some may argue teaching methods need to change from lecture to performance-based teaching. The performance-based approach has been regarded widely as effective when introducing Shakespeare to students of any age in any context; however, the following example shows that it may not be enough when trying to reform a larger problem of student perception and reception of Shakespeare (Coles 2003, 5). The “starting early” part of the equation is not an optional add-on for those teachers and districts with more time and money but should be considered a foundational part of the curriculum. It may not have been the case in the past, but performance-based teaching of Shakespeare and introducing

Shakespeare early are both needed to capture the interests of the next generation.

In the United Kingdom (UK), in preparation for an exam called the SATs, which was required for all students at the end of year 9, Coles made several observations as Marie (the teacher whom Coles observed) taught Macbeth to a year nine classroom, 13-14 year old students (equivalent to 9th grade, in the U.S.). Marie is highly experienced and trained in her field; she is specifically trained in the active method, and she engages the students in activities that capture their attention and creativity. She believes students can understand and engage with Shakespeare, she teaches Shakespeare as a play, she get students up and out of their seats, and she has students collaborate to discover meaning. Coles notes that students are enjoying the performance activities, "My interview data indicate that most students really enjoyed the 'active Shakespeare' sessions; my classroom observations suggest that students responded in creative ways, producing and performing their own texts through improvisation and role play" (Coles 2009, 47).

However, in the exit survey done by the observer, students still did not have a favorable reaction to Shakespeare's relevance and most of the student's did not have the desire to read Shakespeare again, "The majority of the students I interviewed emphatically

declared that had no desire to study another Shakespeare play. Yet, Marie had employed a wide repertoire of active methods and the students had not only watched a film version, but had also been exposed to a live theatrical experience...(Coles 2009, 47).

Cole's article raises several issues of teachers both being pulled by what they consider the most effective way to teach Shakespeare (performance-based method), and at the same time being required to teach for "the test". Marie must use half the time teaching for the standardized test. Marie is doing everything she has been taught regarding the "active approach" (Gibson 1998, xii) but her efforts can only be so effective when she and her students are caught in the middle of a curricular tug of war.

Coles' conclusion is that the active method doesn't seem to be enough to counter the crippling demand testing has on the teacher. This is undoubtedly part of the problem. However, another factor to consider is that these students are grade nine, 13 or 14 years of age, and this is the first time they are being introduced to Shakespeare. Even when everything is done to involve the students, they are not able to experience Shakespeare as they should because there has been no scaffolding built in earlier years to assist them in digesting and experiencing Shakespeare without the stress surrounding the heightened demand for performing well on a test and the lack of time

to invest themselves more in Shakespeare through active, performance-based learning.

Unfortunately this is the reality that many teachers face, having to balance two goals simultaneously: (1) introducing material in the most engaging way in order to make it relevant for their students and (2) to whittle down complex subjects to generalized responses in order for students to memorize correct responses for standardized tests. The teacher does not lack training, interest, or skill. One element that complicates the teacher's approach is the need to prepare students for the Year 9 SATs (called Key Stage 3 exams). The students and the teacher have been thrown in a cauldron of desired outcomes: teach Shakespeare actively, cover the entire play, dissect one or two scenes for a standardized test, oh yes, and if you have time, instill a love of learning and valuing Shakespeare's works that will go with them the rest of their lives.

In this case, it required the teacher to do the "fun stuff" first (performance) and then to shift gears and make way for the requirements. This creates contradictory lessons in which the teacher goes from facilitator to lecturer to test prep driller. She needed to take time summarizing scenes and helping her students make charts in order to answer the questions for the SAT exam. The message students receive is mixed because of the shift in the teacher

approach and methodology. The school system is sending them a message that it's nice if you can be creative and personally engage with Shakespeare's words, but what really shows success is if you know the prescribed answers and can regurgitate them to get a high score on a test. Therefore at the end, they get the underlying message from the educational system about Shakespeare, that he is a set of taught, remote responses and that the most important thing is to be ready to respond to questions crafted from a small section of the play and offer a clearly expected interpretation.

Coles writes that "external imposition of such tests constructs a particular view of what is to be a successful reader and offers a distorted model of how a play should be read...Shakespeare is pinned down and dissected like a dead laboratory rat as part of a learnt procedure which tells us little about the rat as a living social being" (Coles 2003, 9). Since the writing of the article, testing policy in England has changed and Shakespeare is no longer tested in this manner. However, this case study of Shakespeare in England's standardized testing system and Coles' comparison of Shakespeare to a "dead laboratory rat" is a potent reminder of the ineffectiveness of teaching Shakespeare in a merely academic and prepackaged way.

This example is one I'm sure many teachers can relate to. It is also one of the "casualties" of a great drama surrounding

Shakespeare in English schools with the challenges faced by many school systems around the world. Fred Sedgwick writes about his experiences teaching English in the British school system and his observations seem applicable to the situation in the U.S. school system as well:

Children today have to work at any subject for two dominating reasons: to succeed in tests and to help hoist their schools higher up in the league tables...They [the children] are innocent foot soldiers in a war in which the enemy has changed the strategic objectives of education from helping children in their learning and feeling to the achievement of satisfactory statistics. (Sedgwick 1999, 3)

In order to give Shakespeare the time he deserves and for children to learn not to fear Shakespeare or simply before they get too constrained by tests and too busy to explore the nuances of interpretations, students need to be exposed to Shakespeare early. Seeds need to be planted early so an enjoyment of Shakespeare can be cultivated consistently throughout their schooling and complexity of analysis incrementally added to their literary experience.

CHAPTER 3

BENEFITS OF EARLY EXPOSURE TO SHAKESPEARE

The accounts from teachers, schools, and non-profit organizations that have made Shakespeare a part of the elementary and middle school students' experience show high levels of success and positive response. They have not only found that Shakespeare is accessible to young students, but that introducing Shakespeare early has benefited their students academically and personally.

In my research and interviews with the teachers who teach Shakespeare to elementary and middle school students, they all cite many of the same reasons for continuing their Shakespeare lessons year after year despite doubts from other teachers and administrators regarding their student's abilities. These reasons bring to light even more compelling reasons to introduce Shakespeare early and highlight the students benefits from the experience.

No Fear of Shakespeare

First, the teachers all find it refreshing that their young students are not afraid of Shakespeare. Compared to older students, younger students have little or no preconceived notions about Shakespeare being boring or difficult. He is brand new to them, just like most things are at this age, and so they are more receptive to earnestly engaging with the plays. Elizabeth Springs remembers her

experience of Shakespeare being completely new to her when participating in Carol Cox's "Shakespeare for Kids" summer program from 1991-1996,

I don't remember Shakespeare ever being difficult to understand. I had just turned seven when I performed my first Shakespeare play, and learning the script and the story was no different from mastering any other book I studied in school or at home. As a young child just learning to read, every piece of literature was new to me. What difference did it make if it was Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein or William Shakespeare? If I didn't know what a word meant, I asked. That is how one learns. (Cox 2010, xv)

Increased Confidence

Another common benefit teachers see from working on Shakespeare with young students is an increase in student confidence. Watching student confidence grow is very rewarding, and in case study after case study teachers attest to student development in this area, even for some of their most shy students. This confidence goes beyond their classroom context into other areas of their lives. In other words, the challenge of mastering Shakespeare in their classroom context changes them.

This has been documented by students who are involved in the Folger Shakespeare Library's Shakespeare Steps Out (SSO) program. The SSO conducts ten workshops in a school to assist teachers in introducing Shakespeare and to work with students to perform an abridged version of a Shakespearian play (Lucretia Anderson,

December 3, 2012, e-mail message to author). Throughout the workshops, performance techniques are used, enabling students to practice the language and to engage with the text in a creative and accessible way. After her experience with the SSO program, 5th grader Nekiyah wrote,

I myself love doing Shakespeare. I really enjoyed myself. It was a good opportunity and I took the main part. I felt dashing, stunning and like a superstar! I just had really had such a great time with Lady Lucretia, Lady Robin and also my teacher Mrs. Johnson. I really, really had fun and they taught me how to be my best I can be. (Lucretia Anderson, December 3, 2012, e-mail message to author)

Another story of increased self-confidence from the SSO program is from a 4th grade student in the special needs class who was usually very shy and decided to try out for a scene that would be presented at the annual Folger Shakespeare Library Children's Festival. Before his audition, his teacher said, "Don't expect a lot out of him." But when he started to talk, he was confident and clear and was able to get a large supporting role. His teacher and his fellow students never would have known he had this potential until an opportunity to perform Shakespeare came along (Streeter 2003).

Rex Gibson is one of the most well-known names in Shakespeare in the United Kingdom. In 1986 he started the "Shakespeare and Schools" program. He conducted this research project about how children respond to Shakespeare. His initiative

caused a widespread paradigm shift in how teachers taught Shakespeare. In 1989, the Cox Report was published in which Gibson's "experiment" clearly showed the advantage of getting students involved in Shakespeare's language by getting out of their seats and using it. He believed unflinchingly in the ability of elementary students to understand and engage with Shakespeare. He writes:

Never underestimate how intelligently and imaginatively your pupils can respond to Shakespeare. High teacher expectation is one of the keys to successful school Shakespeare, and younger pupils have the ability and potential to rise to the challenge. The difficulties of Shakespeare are *enabling* difficulties. Mastering those difficulties gives pupils a palpable sense of achievement and self-esteem. (Gibson 2000, 2)

Appetite for High Quality Literature

Many teachers share that after teaching Shakespeare, young students develop an insatiable desire for high quality literature and see a growth in literacy in general. In Rafe Esquith's school in Los Angeles, 78% of the Latino student population are not proficient in reading. He doesn't believe this trend is a matter of intellect, but a matter of bad policy, the lack of inspiring teaching methods, and uninspiring reading material. Esquith says, "I have never seen district reading objectives in which the words: joy, passion or excitement top the list" (Esquith 2007, 32). He adds, "I want my students to love to read. Reading is not a subject, Reading is a foundation of life, an

activity that people who are engaged with the world do all the time”
(Esquith 2007, 33).

Esquith also points out that an important factor is *what* is being read, and argues that not all materials are created equal. He believes that too much money is spent on specialized textbooks, for example, the scripted basal reader. Esquith mentions he has never seen one of his students develop a passion for a basal reader. Only quality literature will be able to capture the attention of students:

Children – even very bright ones- everywhere need guidance. It is through literature that young people first begin to look at the world differently, to open their minds to new ideas, to journey down an avenue of excellence. The complete the metaphor: Reading nothing but basal readers often leads to a dead end. (Esquith 2007, 35)

Esquith receives many letters from past students about the profound impact his Shakespeare class had on them. This is an excerpt from an essay written by one of his former students, Janet, she was now attending the University of Notre Dame,

Putting together those plays every year not only taught me about Shakespeare, but about teamwork, and humility, and that when one of my fellow classmates was on stage, it was his turn to be in the spotlight, not mine. I learned how to play many instruments because we incorporated pop songs into many of the scenes. I learned the value of responsibility and hard work, that if I did not have my lines memorized by a specific date, it not only hurt my self, but slowed down the rest of the production. Who would have thought that one could learn so much just by being in a play? (Esquith 2007, 226)

The benefits of learning Shakespeare for Janet went beyond academic development to life-long lessons she carried with her of collaboration, confidence and the value of hard work. This story is one told over and over by teachers who introduce Shakespeare early: it is an experience their students never forget.

Some teachers like Esquith put on an entire play with their students; other teachers take a scene or a sonnet for students to play out or draw pictures of the action. This is a good starting place for those who want to see Shakespeare's effectiveness in short lessons. Shakespeare doesn't need to be an overwhelming task for teachers or students, especially for their first introduction.

Another teacher who has seen incredible results from teaching Shakespeare early is Holly Rodgers, ESOL teacher of 3-6th graders in Fairfax County, Virginia, introduces her students (grades 3rd to 6th) to Shakespeare, Tolkien, and other great literature . After their experience with Shakespeare, her students have become more "picky" with their reading choices. "I try to only allow my students to read high-quality literature in my class, and as a result, they have become quite selective in their reading choices. My students are already used to challenging vocabulary and complex plots and characters as they are regularly fed a steady-diet of Shakespeare" (Rodgers blog, 2013). Rodgers' latest blog follows her 5th and 6th

grade class on their literary journey through the *Lord of the Rings*. She started the series after her students “began to hound me daily” to tackle the trilogy. What a wonderful problem she has created.

A significant study regarding Shakespeare in elementary schools that shows how Shakespeare is beneficial to young students is the *Shakespeare in Schools* project sponsored by the Royal Society of Arts Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) in conjunction with many other UK supporters including the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). The project took place from September 1992 to March 1993 and was based on a proposal from schools in the Leicester area, located north of London. There were thirteen elementary schools from around the Leicester area that participated in the project. The schools ranged from rural to urban and some had as few as 50 students and others as many as 550 students. One school had 75% bilingual students who spoke English as their second language. Four upper level schools also participated in the project. The project looked at effective methods for teaching Shakespeare to students ranging in age from 5-18. The goal of the project was:

...to show that Shakespeare offers a wealth of educational experiences for all pupils, given appropriate teaching methods, and charges that his plays are too difficult, boring, irrelevant, or inaccessible as a result of a method of teaching that satisfies only academic and analytical need. It was agreed that scholarship is to be nurtured, but that it also needs to be complemented by other teaching approaches. Teachers thought

strongly that Shakespeare ought not to be seen as a bogeyman to be faced on entering secondary school, but should be a familiar and welcome figure from a very early age. (Gilmour 1997, xv)

The project also brought insight to a key question, "If pupils enter secondary education having a favourable contact with Shakespeare's plays at a primary level, would it not help them and their teachers?" (Gilmour 1997, xvi). The results of the study revealed that students responded overwhelmingly positive to Shakespeare and this project is an example of the success of Shakespeare when integrated early in the curriculum:

Pupils of all ages began to access the meaning of Shakespearean language. . . by being given small sections to analyse like detectives, by speaking it aloud, after guidance on the beat and flow of the words, pupils began to feel that they could unlock the secrets of the text with confidence. (Stephensen and Walden 1997, 94)

In her book, *Shakespeare Kids*, Carole Cox discusses that Shakespeare's language is one of the reasons she introduces her 3rd and 4th grade students to his work: "Shakespeare is the perfect way to develop a child's taste for a gourmet vocabulary" (Cox 2012, xiv). The responses from her students many years later show that in wetting their appetite for quality literature, her students were enjoyed every minute of it. One student, looking back on the experience writes, "The summers participating in the Shakespeare classes are some of the clearest, and most enjoyable, recollections I

have of that time in my life. It was more memorable and formative than anything else I was doing at that age. To a large degree, the experience let me down the path of exploring literature in college” (Cox 2010, 36).

Shakespeare and Language Development in Young Learners

One of the most compelling arguments for introducing Shakespeare to young students is based on research from language development experts and the observations from teachers regarding the linguistic benefits of early exposure. The book *Language Development: From Theory to Practice*, outlines that student in elementary and middle school (specifically between ages eight to fourteen) are at a prime linguistic stage to interact with more complex vocabulary and figurative language; both kinds of input can be found in Shakespeare’s works. The ability of elementary school students, at age seven or eight, to assimilate and integrate new vocabulary is heightened during these formative years. From ages nine to fourteen years, the written word, instead of just verbal language, becomes a more dominant influence; children are “no longer learning to read but reading to learn” (Pence-Turnball and Justice 2012, 274-277). The developmental theories from language experts point to the conclusion that young students do have the tools to engage with educational studies and that they benefit from age

appropriate exposure to high quality literature, like Shakespeare, at a young age. During the elementary and middle school years, children are learning language at every turn. They are constantly picking up new vocabulary and looking for patterns and poetic rhythm without specific instruction.

This lack of fear of the unknown when faced with new words and propensity for acquiring Shakespeare's language is something Janet Field-Pickering of the Folger Shakespeare Library observed in District of Columbia elementary and middle school students at the inception of the *Shakespeare Steps Out Program*. In an internal memo from the Folger Shakespeare Library (shared with this author in an e-mail message from Lucretia Anderson on December 3, 2012) Field-Pickering writes:

Shakespeare is most useful to children of this age level in terms of wordplay and fun with language. Children at this age taught us fairly quickly that they had none of the "Shakes-fear" of older students and adults. Children at this age were still in the process of language acquisition—and they had many tools for breaking down a word's meaning. These tools—discovering context, playing with the sound of the words, comparing one word to all or part of another word—proved particularly appropriate for Shakespeare's extensive word-play.

Introducing Shakespeare at this peak time of development can only bring about positive results. An early experience with Shakespeare provides them with confidence to approach great literature and allows them to develop advanced reading and writing

skills built on strong vocabulary and an understanding of literary devices. Exposure to Shakespeare at a young age serves to boost language development and writing skills in children, UK educator Fred Sedgwick calls it, "writing in the grip of Shakespeare's words" (Sedgwick 1999, 20). Children ages 7-10 are fertile ground for all kinds of language skills development. They are sponges to literary devices, imagery and creative writing. They are acquiring new language daily and are innate pattern seekers, looking for patterns in language to emulate (Cobb 2011).

Language theorists have extensive research and examples of language development in children from birth to preschool, but the markers of language development in children ages 5 and older are less distinct. However, two major milestones for elementary school students have been identified as: (1) the expansion of language input from oral to written and (2) the acquisition of "metalinguistic competence" (Pence-Turnbull and Justice 2012, 274).

The first marker starts between ages 8-10 when there is a shift toward increasing input from written as compared to oral input (Pence-Turnbull and Justice 2012, 274). In this stage, students experience a more dynamic relationship between oral and written language. Studies show that around fifth grade in particular students who are exposed to challenging vocabulary are able to learn difficult

words in context and increase their vocabulary at a high rate (Nippold, Duthie, Larsen 2005, 94).

Starting at age 7-8, students are also “ungluing from print” (Pence-Turnbull and Justice 2012, 277) in which they not only read more words and sentences, but take it a step further and consider what these words and sentences mean to them and the world around them. This window of discovering starts around 7 and 8 years of age and progresses into the “reading to learn” stage between 9-14 years of age in which “children develop the ability to read beyond egocentric purposes so that they can read about and learn conventional information about the world” (Pence-Turnbull and Justice 2012, 275). Shakespeare’s works allow students to maximize this developmental milestone through the introduction of new perspectives and engaging them in a world of new language.

The second developmental milestone is metalinguistic competence, defined as “the ability to think about and analyze language as an object of attention” (Pence-Turnbull and Justice 2012, 277) Under the umbrella of metalinguistic competence is figurative language: metaphors, similes, hyperbole, idioms, irony and sarcasm, and proverbs. Shakespeare’s works is one of the most capable teachers in this area and allows for time-tested and high quality written input. Shakespeare exposes students to many forms of

figurative language and enables the development of phonological awareness (rhythm and rhyme of language).

Kristen L. Olson, Program Coordinator in Language, Communication, and Early Childhood Literature at The English Nanny and Governess School in Chagrin, OH, has built her language arts program based on the clear connections between Shakespeare and language development in children: "...children are clearly sensitive to the play of patterns and symmetry available in Shakespearean language, and their own linguistic development can be enhanced by exposure to these experiences of pattern-rich literature" (Olson 2003, 221).

The book *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults* is a compilation of essays based on the American Shakespeare Association Conference in April 2000 called "Playing with the Bard: Shakespeare for Children at the Millennium." (Miller 2003, xii) Olson participated in this conference and in an essay entitled, "Your Play Needs No Excuse: Shakespeare and Language Development in Children," Olson writes about her pedagogical approach, her experience, and the positive outcomes of including Shakespeare early in her curriculum. One of her foundational concepts for the curriculum was to incorporate the dynamic role of literature, especially poems, in her program. She focused on developing strategies for her nannies to

introduce Shakespeare to young children and “asserted that literature functions by picking up on this instinctive capacity for language creation by building on the fundamental aspects of pattern recognition and the manipulation of pattern as part of literary structure” (Olson 2003, 218).

Olson goes back to the art of Shakespeare’s poetics: it isn’t just what Shakespeare says (the stories), but *how* he says it.

“Shakespeare is one of the most adept manipulators of linguistic pattern and resonance, so it is natural to expect children to be responsive to the resonance of the pattern available in Shakespearean poetry” (Olson 2003, 221). She also incorporates the belief that learning with narrative literature is part of language development (Huck, Hepler, Hickman 1979). We are more responsive when told a story than told just a set of linear facts that communicate the same information. She gives an example of tying shoes: children will find it easier to remember “the rabbit runs out of the hole, around the tree and back down the hole...rather than line A passes vertically up through loop A, behind line B..”(Olson 2003, 218).

Stories capture our attention and our memory.

The activity she uses with her students consists of taking the literature and allowing students to experience it or represent it in a physical form. Her goal focuses on “extending the reading experience

by helping to forge the connection between lived experience and read experience" (Olson 2003, 221). In one activity, she uses the witches chant from Macbeth to engage the students in the rhythm of the language. This passage is commonly used with many elementary students and is very effective in both modeling poetic rhythm and capturing attention. The passage has images such as "'toe of frog" and "scale of dragon" which grab the attention of imaginative minds. Students play a game called "Round the Cauldron Go" (Gibson and Field-Pickering 1998, 23), in which they march in a circle and chant to the beat. This allows the students to engage with the poetic rhythm on their own and actually feel the cauldron being stirred around and around.

Olson also has students engaging with Shakespeare's sonnets. One may think the sonnets are not plays and that students may not be able to get up and experience them the way they do when acting theatrical roles, but Olson has a creative method to get students into the action of the sonnet which she calls "enacting the image" (Olson 2003, 223). For example, she takes Sonnet 98 where personification of various seasons is vividly drawn out. The children are asked questions that help them to reenact the action taking place in the sonnet. This makes a connection between "the imaginative and the mimetic function of poetry" (Olson 2003, 223).

The foundations of her approach come from Noam Chomsky's and Steven Pinker's linguistic theories regarding the openness and innate ability children have for learning language, not only by parroting what they hear, but actually inventing and manipulating language as they respond to patterns (Olson 2003, 217-218). Pinker describes language as an innate biological function of being human, given to all equally without regards to education or intelligence. He writes that "...cognitive scientists have described language as a psychological faculty, a mental organ, a neural system and a computational module. But I prefer the admittedly quaint term 'instinct.' It conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs" (Pinker 1994, 18).

In reference to Chomsky's concept of Universal Grammar, Pinker argues that children can acquire language because they innately have the neurological tools and building blocks to grasp and modify it (Pinker 1994, 22). Pinker examines several examples of children's ability not just to imitate but to reinvent language. Children exposed to pidgin English are then able to create a more complex Creole (mixed) language on their own (Pinker 1994, 34-35). Children who learn sign language from their parents who haven't themselves perfected sign language and are nonetheless able to develop

language beyond direct instruction and beyond their parents' current language competence (Pinker 1994, 37).

The example used most often to show young children's propensity for language is the "wug" example in which children are shown a picture of a bird and told it is called a "wug." Then another picture of the bird is added and the children are told it is another "wug." There are two _____. Pinker says an average child will say, "wugs." This is asserting that children have grammatical rules inside that they have never been taught (Pinker 1994, 49). This is also observed in children when they apply the past tense rule for verbs. They automatically add "-ed" to make any verb past tense – "stick" becomes "sticked", and "draw" becomes "drawed" (Pinker 1994, 49-50).

Pinker's conclusions about language reveal the immense capacity children innately possess for language and language acquisition. He quotes the contributions of Chomsky from the 1950s and his belief that "virtually every sentence that a person utters or understands is a brand-new combination of words, appearing for the first time in the history of the universe" (Pinker 1994, 22). The argument for introducing Shakespeare early becomes even stronger when the task is simply to tap into the pool of resources and processes already working inside students. At young ages in

particular they have a proclivity for language and vocabulary, so it only makes sense to give them high quality literary experiences while they have such voracious appetites and ability to assimilate language.

There are many others who have been amazed by the ability of young students to read or hear Shakespeare, respond positively to his works, and then actually create new material based on Shakespeare's pattern. In a radio interview

(<http://wkms.org/post/shakespeare-schools-partnership>, accessed January 6, 2013) Dr. Barbara Cobb describes her experiences with 4th grade students and their ability to read Shakespeare and then write poetry that mirrors the devices, even without detailed instructions regarding Shakespeare's methods. One student wrote about his dog in response to Sonnet 130 where Shakespeare compares his mistress to natural things. It is amazing how the boy writes in the same way Shakespeare does.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 begins and ends as follows:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;. . .
And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare

In response to this poem, Garrett, a 4th grader from Murray Middle School, wrote:

My dog's behavior is nothing like a show dog
Velvet is far more soft than his claws
If snow be white, than his teeth are yellow

If fur be smooth then forest tree roots grow on his back
I've seen happy tails, wagging tails, and curly tails
But I see no happy, wagging or curly tails on him
And in some toys there are more delight than when you throw
a ball and tell him to chase it
I love to hear him bark,
yet well I know that music has a far more pleasing sound
I grant I never saw a show dog heel
My dog pulls on the leash, and yet, I love him.

This simple yet profound poem shows not only that Garrett could not only create a poem about his dog, but a very specific type of poem that reflects the same message Shakespeare was trying to convey about his mistress not being the most physically ideal in every way, but perfect to him. Dr. Cobb finds this ability to model Shakespeare and learn to incorporate his techniques in classrooms wherever she goes, and it serves as yet another proof that children can benefit from Shakespeare. She finishes the radio interview with this conclusion, "It is clear from this poem that Garrett understands Shakespeare's sonnet and what I see over and over again with this unit is that 4th graders can read Shakespeare."

Fred Sedgwick, author of *Shakespeare and the Young Writer*, has witnessed similar outcomes over his many years of teaching Shakespeare to children in the UK. He writes:

Here we are concerned with children writing in the light of Shakespeare's model and we need to believe that model is accessible and relevant to the child's needs. We need to have faith in Shakespeare's words rather than merely the stories he uses. I am always impressed when reading, acting or hamming

up Shakespeare's lines to children by how much, first, children know and understand ideas that I did not dream they would know and understand; and second, by how much they can infer of what they don't know from what they do already know; and, third, by how much effort they are able and willing to put into new understanding of words that are conventionally thought of as difficult. (Sedgwick 1999, 139)

In his project in British schools with nine to eleven year olds, Fred Sedgwick has great success even using one or two lines from Shakespeare and asking students to reproduce a similar literary structure. For example, he writes lines from *As You Like It* on the board where Rosalind and Celia have several exchanges about the Duke coming 'with his eyes full of anger' and with Monsieur La Beau coming "with his mouth full of news" (Sedgwick 1999, 22). The students then come up with their own "with ____ full of ____" statements, such as: "with his mouth full of songs, with his knuckles red with anger, with her eyes full of night..." (Sedgwick 1999, 23).

He does the same exercise with *Anthony and Cleopatra's* "He wears the rose/Of youth upon him," which his students then turn into: "he wipes the dust of innocence off his shirt" and "she lets out the glow of human sunshine around her" (Sedgwick 1999, 25). In each instance he is always surprised how students are able to out-do his own examples and construct very profound statements:

I suspect that our insultingly low expectations of what children can achieve...are really expectations of our own potential. We are subconsciously envious of what children can do, and

therefore in our minds, we drag them down to our own level, the level of those who are no longer trailing clouds of glory, and certain of nothing except the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of the imagination, but numbed into cliché and predictability." (Sedgwick 1999, 26)

Sedgwick witnesses firsthand the impact Shakespeare's words have on the children he teaches as he travels from school to school. He has seen how Shakespeare's original language enriches the educational experience of children "who will learn through their enjoyment of Shakespeare, and their responding to his work...through their own writing; who will look into the glass he has set up for them, and therein see their inmost parts, and the inmost parts of the world they live in" (Sedgwick 1999, 19).

Lois Burdett, a teacher in Stratford, Ontario, introduces Shakespeare to her second grade students. She has seen exceptional progress, especially in the writing level of her students, before and after exposing them to Shakespeare's language. The difference from the beginning of class to the end of the year is stark. She actually sees her students able to mimic the literary devices used in Shakespeare's writing and use complex comparisons of physical and non-physical elements (Burdett 2003, 48-49).

From these examples, doubts regarding young students' ability to understand Shakespeare can be put to rest. Not only can they understand the language, but Shakespeare actually enhances

students' educational experience and language development process.

Teachers who believe in this capacity have observed over and over again that students are able to rise to a challenge when given the chance. The teachers who are willing to give Shakespeare to their students and the young students who grab hold of him so quickly inspire us all and send a message that, yes, children can grasp Shakespeare and that once they experience him, they will never let him go.

CHAPTER 4

HOW TO INTRODUCE SHAKESPEARE TO STUDENTS: THE PERFORMANCE-BASED METHOD AND CASE STUDIES

This chapter examines the “who and the how” of introducing Shakespeare to young students. The role of teachers (the “who”) and the impact of their expectations, pedagogical approach, and practical methods of teaching Shakespeare will be discussed. The practicality of implementing Shakespeare in an already packed curriculum will also be addressed, in addition to how Shakespeare is being used by elementary teachers to meet standards. The principles and methods discussed in this chapter can also be applied to introducing Shakespeare at any level.

Many teachers are empowering young students to enjoy Shakespeare with great success. Understanding the value of introducing Shakespeare early and determining to do so must be coupled with effective methodology and clear expectations. Research has indicated that the performance-based methodology of teaching has been the most successful approach to introducing Shakespeare and making him more accessible to young students from all backgrounds. We will examine case studies and creative ideas from teachers and organizations that are already using Shakespeare in

elementary and middle school classrooms in the U.S. and the U.K.

The Importance of Teacher Expectations and Approach

Before examining the performance-based method in detail, it is useful to examine the underlying principles that inform how a teacher teaches Shakespeare. It is often said that first impressions are most important and, as with any subject in school, a student's first experience of "meeting" Shakespeare significantly shapes his or her response to his works.

In most cases, the person who introduces students to Shakespeare is a teacher. Whether they are aware of it or not, teachers are always sending unspoken messages about what they think their students can and cannot achieve. As with most subjects, the teachers' passion for their subject, their ability to engage the students with creative methods, and their expectation for student comprehension are important factors that influence how well the students understand the subject. Dr. Rex Gibson, world-renowned Shakespearian teacher, author, scholar, and early advocate of teaching Shakespeare using active methods (Bridges 2006, 3) emphasized the importance of approach and expectations:

Many teachers have successfully challenged the depressing claim that the [Shakespeare's] language is far beyond the reading levels of these younger students. Those teachers have shown that the freshness of approach and eagerness of engagement of their young students results in quite startling

levels of achievement, motivation and expression. High expectations produce high standards. (Gibson 1998, 224)

The power of expectations is a powerful value every teacher needs to be aware of. The approach one has when teaching Shakespeare sets the tone for student responses and communicates teacher expectations for his or her student's ability or inability to engage with his works (Gibson 2000, 2).

Another teacher who writes about the topic of teacher expectations and student potential is Rafe Esquith, a 5th grade teacher from Hobart Elementary School in Los Angeles, CA. He is passionate about Shakespeare and started a tradition of producing one unabridged Shakespeare play every year performed by his students. He argues that passion for subjects is the starting place. Esquith has a love for great literature and rock and roll music, so these are included in his curriculum. One of the most powerful messages from Esquith is that the classroom is to be full of trust and free of fear. This allows students to feel safe to take risks and try new things. The success stories from his classes are truly inspiring.

Other teachers such as Rex Gibson teach Shakespeare for the purpose of making his works accessible to all students by breaking down the language collaboratively, getting students out of their seats to act the parts, and guiding students toward an appreciation of

beautifully crafted language and complex characters. This approach is backed by the belief that every student can understand Shakespeare (O'Brien 1993, xii; Gibson 1998, 6). Cicely Berry, a contemporary of Gibson, has said, "Everyone has a right to Shakespeare" (Stredder 2012, 14).

In many schools, only the Advanced Placement (AP) classes are exposed to Shakespeare's works. Our students do not benefit by putting Shakespeare on an AP pedestal to the exclusion of other students. Shakespeare takes time and effort to teach, but Shakespeare should not be reserved for an elite group of students or university professors.

Approaching Shakespeare as an aspect of "high culture" is especially common in high school and has played out in many classrooms around the country. Students are not taught Shakespeare's relevance by connecting his themes to modern day issues or by discussing what Shakespeare means to them. One teacher shares her frustration at the irrelevant question on a comprehension exam where students are asked to identify the name of Juliet's nurse, "This incident reminds me how often our practices are more about our need to feel knowledgeable about classics than about our helping students to understand and appreciate them" (Spangler 2009, 130).

As mentioned previously, only 17% of U.K. students agreed that they learned something about their own lives from Shakespeare (CEDAR 2010, 48). A misguided respect that alienates students from Shakespeare does nothing to help develop appreciation for his works. When Shakespeare is exalted as a cultural icon and it is assumed that most students will struggle with the language and layered meanings, so with looming standardized tests and packed curriculum, some don't even try. Some teachers may feel plowing through the material is the only option because of large class sizes and limited time, but there has to be a better way.

Certainly, no matter what the approach, students may struggle with Shakespeare at first, as they do with many new concepts and ideas. However, students adjust quickly to the challenge when empowered to do so and when given appropriately selected sections of his plays (Tolaydo 1993, 28). Again, the way a teacher approaches Shakespeare and the way he or she prepares for (or even pre-empts) student frustration with Shakespeare's language is significant.

If a teacher plans an entire Shakespeare unit with the expectation that his or her students will most likely not be able to understand Shakespeare and presents the material with a disclaimer that "this is hard" before students have even engaged with the text, the students will indeed find Shakespeare to be hard (Gibson 2000,

2). All the effort to plan and implement a Shakespearean unit should focus on empowering students to personally engage with the text and to assist in eliminating any barriers that prevent them from doing so.

Some teachers may be putting Shakespeare out of reach because of their own lack of exposure to Shakespeare. Many universities are not requiring Shakespeare even for their English majors (NAF 1996, 3). In the past, many experienced Shakespeare (good or bad), but this is not the case today. This cycle of mediocrity starts when one teacher or school decides that Shakespeare is too hard for their students or too time-consuming for them to teach.

In Dr. Barbara Cobb's attempts to partner with local elementary and middle schools to integrate Shakespeare early in the curriculum in Murray, Kentucky, she more often finds resistance than enthusiasm. She notes, "Too often teachers tend to groan and say that Shakespeare is 'too hard,' that they 'hate Shakespeare,' that they can't begin to see how they could do it." (Dr. Barbara Cobb, January 22, 2013, e-mail message to author).

I know firsthand that some teachers are affected by on their own insecurities that they do not have all the answers when it comes to Shakespeare. In the final evaluation of a "Shakespeare in Schools" Project in elementary schools in the U.K., under the section entitled "Difficulties", there were no student difficulties listed, only teacher-

based challenges. One of the difficulties that was observed was “the teacher’s fear of the language; not being able to give an expert translation of every phrase. This can make teachers vulnerable if they perceive their role to be one of expert and knowledge-giver” (Stephenson 1997, 96).

Teachers don’t need to be experts to be good at teaching Shakespeare. Rex Gibson lists what he considers as “qualifications” needed to teach Shakespeare to young children: “...a love of language, the desire to help your pupils achieve their full potential in reading, speaking and writing; the ability to achieve that ambition in the classroom, presenting yourself and what you teach with integrity, truthfulness and enjoyment” (Gibson 2000, 1). Teaching Shakespeare through performance effectively challenges the age-old teacher/student dynamic of I (the teacher) talk and you (the student) sit and listen. It calls for new teacher approaches, not so students can question teacher authority, but to facilitate students taking more ownership of their learning. If teachers feel intimidated by not having the precise meaning of the text, they are forgetting one of the things that has made Shakespeare timeless: every time you read Shakespeare, you can find continually find meaning based on interpretative frameworks and a collaborative environment. It may be uncomfortable to teach something without knowing the meaning of

every phrase and every word before teaching it. This uneasiness can be replaced with a desire to discover Shakespeare together as a class. Gibson also notes this potential each class has for discovering Shakespeare in a new way in his book *Teaching Shakespeare*:

Just as the same play can be performed very differently, so it can be taught and experienced in very different forms. A Shakespeare script is a blueprint from which actors and directors construct their vision of the play. Similarly, teachers and students respond to its multiple possibilities. (Gibson 1998, xii)

Of course, teachers should invest in doing research, preparation, and may even participate in a seminar or training in order to provide the best possible experience for their students. It is not, however, a requirement that a teacher become a “Shakespearean scholar” to teach Shakespeare’s plays. Vast resources are available for elementary and middle teachers to assist them in introducing Shakespeare and to help them see that the benefits are worth the effort. On-line resources provide good places to start and specific lesson plans for each age group.

There is no dispute that teaching Shakespeare takes time and investment, especially in an age when students’ attention spans are much shorter due to the flurry of technology. In the end, the teacher is the one who leads and sets the tone for a classroom. Once expectations for student learning are high, then the first step has

been made to help students on a journey of discovering their full capacity.

As argued in this paper, the earlier students engage with Shakespeare the more confident they will become each time they read him. In her exceptional book for university students training to be teachers, *Teaching Language Arts*, Carole Cox shares a section on effectively introducing Shakespeare to elementary students. Based on her teaching experience of over 40 years, her practical advice is that teaching Shakespeare to young students isn't about having the right answers as much as providing them with a doorway to a lifetime of discovering meaning in Shakespeare, "No one will ever grasp all of Shakespeare at one time; his plays are too rich in thought and emotion to be understood quickly and easily. But we can return to him at different times in our lives and always find new meaning. Children are able to find this meaning, as well" (Cox 2008, 173).

The Play's the Thing Wherin I'll Catch...STUDENTS! (Hamlet Act II, Scene II)

In order to have a positive experience with Shakespeare at any grade level, teacher expectations must be high yet reasonable, and methodology must be well researched. Even when expectations are high, effective methodology is critical to bridge the gap between

challenging material and misconceptions the students may have about their ability to tackle it.

If a teacher were to give Macbeth to a 5th grade class and expect them to read it and come ready to discuss it the next week, an impression would surely be made, the kind of impression that will scare away any student from Shakespeare for the rest of his or her life. Fortunately, there are many who have struggled, experimented, and have found success in one particular method of introducing Shakespeare: the performance-based method. It is argued that this method is the most successful way to break down barriers, get students engaged, and develop a lifetime love of Shakespeare.

When I was first introduced to Shakespeare, I was a freshman in high school and I was handed a book. My teacher was young and inexperienced but passionate. It was made clear to me that Shakespeare was one of the greatest authors in the English language and that I should appreciate his books. Once I started seeing words like "nought," "thou" and "thee," I wasn't sure if he was the writer for me. My teacher went through the most difficult passages with us in class, and I recall a few students being asked to read some passages out loud. I did enjoy some of the language, but I felt completely reliant on my teacher to be able to understand Shakespeare and never even considered reading him on my own time. I studied the

comprehension questions, passed the test, and moved on with my life.

A few years later in my junior year, an acting group came to our school to put on Hamlet. It was a small production, but I was captivated. I can still vividly remember scenes from the play. The set was simple, but the use of lighting and shadows created eerie effects. Soon after, my English teacher decided to organize a Shakespeare festival for our school. There was a monologue competition. I entered as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and was voted by my class to compete in the festival. I did not win the competition, but to this day I remember my Act 4, Scene 1 speech, "Oh that I were a man!" and *Much Ado About Nothing* has become one of my favorite plays.

I realize that this experience ignited my passion for Shakespeare. I couldn't sit passively and watch my teacher unravel the language for me; I had to do it myself. I had to find my own meaning in order to stage my own performance. It wasn't until graduate school in my Shakespeare class with Dr. Michael Collins that I learned Shakespeare did not write books; he wrote and directed plays. We have the plays because two of Shakespeare's contemporaries compiled Shakespeare's scripts and published them after his death. This fact offers teachers a great insight into how Shakespeare would approach introducing his plays to young

audiences, the way he introduced his work to the people of his day: on the stage (or in front of the classroom if this is more practical). Shakespeare's plays are also worth reading and most certainly deserve their place on the shelves next to the greatest literature of all time, but for younger students, the most effective way to cultivate an appreciation for Shakespeare is to introduce his plays as plays (Gibson 1998, 7-8).

Performance-Based Teaching

All students can understand Shakespeare when the teacher introduces Shakespeare in an accessible manner and with an engaging performance-based methodology. Many teachers are already teaching Shakespeare by "doing" Shakespeare with elementary students from all different backgrounds and circumstances. After many years of working with teachers and observing students from all backgrounds, Naomi Miller, English Professor at the University of Arizona, states, ". . . I have come to understand that anything is possible where Shakespeare is concerned: no audience is too young, no student too unprepared, to appreciate the magic of Shakespeare's words and worlds" (Miller 2003, xiii).

When using performance-based techniques, teachers empower their students and surround them with Shakespeare's language. This

method, advocated by the Folger Shakespeare Library and many others, allows students to interact more closely with the language by getting on their feet and acting or playing a game with the words. The more general definition according to the Folger Shakespeare Library website is, "[p]erformance-based teaching is an interactive approach to the study of literature, particularly Shakespeare's plays and poems, in which students participate in a close reading of text through intellectual, physical, and vocal engagement." Rex Gibson's "active methods" or "active approaches" (Gibson 1998, xii) are also terms that refer to the same philosophy and can be used interchangeably with "performance-based teaching" (Lucretia Anderson, February 27, 2013, e-mail message to author).

The goal is to get students out of their seats and using Shakespeare for themselves. This method works with anyone, from the most experienced actors to third graders who don't speak English as their first language. Cicily Berry, who played a foundational role in developing active approaches with the late Rex Gibson, can attest to the fact that everyone can learn Shakespeare. Now 86 years old, she is still traveling around the world using performance to introduce people of all ages to the beauty of Shakespeare. Her experiences embody the variety and universality that is Shakespeare. She has coached Judi Dench and worked in drug infested, gang-ridden

neighborhoods in Brazil and U.K to put on a Shakespeare play on the street. She also developed the material in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Stand Up For Shakespeare* series (Stredder 2012, 4).

Case Studies and Sample Lessons

The following are many other examples about teachers, schools and organizations around the world who have pioneered or are pioneering the performance method with elementary and middle school age students using Shakespeare's original language. Some case studies also include specific lessons that have been used with great success with young students.

Albert Cullum

Some of the most enduring and inspirational methods from an American teacher come from Albert Cullum. He started teaching in the 1940s and was still teaching until the year he died in 2003. He taught elementary school in Rye, New York, outside of New York City, from 1956 to 1966. In his fifth grade classroom he taught Shakespeare, Sophocles and Shaw (Sullivan 2004). His methods are inspirational and elementary school teachers are still using his adapted scripts today (Cox 2010, xiii).

In 1968 Cullum wrote the book, *Shake Hands with Shakespeare*. It includes a description of his methods to get the

students out of their desks, and outlines his approach to teaching Shakespeare. He writes, "(d)on't teach Shakespeare...share it! Share it, and the magic of this literary giant will unite students and teacher in creative thinking and creative play and produce a sense of accomplishment for everyone" (Cullum 1968, 12).

The book includes eight adapted scripts that Cullum used with his classes for festivals and school productions. He gives advice to teachers who are directing students either in an informal classroom activities or for a full-fledged play:

1. Give the children time to become comfortable on the stage.
2. Don't impost your interpretation upon them
3. Let them use any kind of arm and hand gestures. . . or none at all.
4. Don't feel they can't act Hamlet, Romeo, or Caesar just because you can't!
5. If you feel you have to comment on an interpretation, feel free to say, 'I don't quite believe you, Sally.' Sally and the rest of the cast will understand this kind of direction best of all. (Cullum 1968, 17)

He recommends that teachers capture their students by first telling them some of Shakespeare's stories, then polling student for what play they want to start with, and then allowing them to do it.

Robert Downey Sr. filmed his unconventional methods of clearing out desks, putting on plays, and getting his students outside and moving during an age of rigidity and strictness. This footage was made into a documentary called, "A Touch of Greatness", released in

2004. It includes an interview with Cullum and interviews from many former students who describe how the process of producing Shakespearian plays in class was one of the most memorable experiences of their lives. This is a must see for any teacher who wants to inspire and truly touch the lives of students through Shakespeare. In an interview in the documentary, Cullum discusses his response to people who ask why he brings classics into the classroom of such young students, he would reply:

Children who get early exposure to great art, great literature, great music, don't run away from it, ever, in their lifetime. It's like a friend. Most people you say "Shakespeare" and they say, 'oh ew,' they've had a bad introduction to him. It's what you feed on as a child that stays with you, forever" (Sullivan 2004).

According to his former students he allowed them to feed on "greatness instead of mediocrity" (Sullivan 2004). Many students in the film are talking 50 years after having Cullum as a teacher. They recall their roles in several Shakespearian productions and still carry with them the confidence that came with putting on his plays. The empowerment to engage with Shakespeare at ages ten and eleven have never left them.

Lois Burdett – Stratford, Ontario

Lois Burdett is a teacher in Stratford, Ontario in Canada who has introduced Shakespeare to some of the youngest elementary

school students. She teaches 2nd and 3rd graders at Hamlet Public School in Stratford, Ontario (Burdett 2003, 45). She has also published a series of books called, *Shakespeare Can Be Fun*. Shakespeare is the cornerstone of her curriculum, and she has seen incredible academic development in her students as a result of their studying his works. She tracks her students writing before and after their performance with Shakespeare and the results are astonishing. The level of improvement from the beginning to the end of the school year clearly links Shakespeare to their maturing. Reading and acting parts of his plays teaches the children to think in bold images and this finds its way into their writing. The impact Shakespeare can have on the mind of a seven year old is best shown in a letter (presented as written) from one of her students, Anika Johnson:

I will never be able to thank you enough for bringing Shakespeare into my world. I shall forever keep him in my memory to treasure for the rest of my days. It shall be as preshus as a new born baby, and as beutiful as a rose. He shall always be there, to comfort me in sadness, and to make me happyer in happyness. He is part of me now, and will never be removed. (Burdett 2003, 53)

Murray State University

Dr. Barbara Cobb is the Associate Director and Education Coordinator for the Murray Shakespeare Festival and an Associate Professor of English at Murray State University in Kentucky. She works with teachers and local schools in her district to develop

curricula to include a Shakespearian play each year from 3rd grade through 8th grade. In an email to the author on She says the earlier a student is exposed to Shakespeare the better. When asked why she focuses on elementary school students although she is a Professor at a University, she said it makes her job easier when students already have a foundation in Shakespeare before they get to her class. It makes the high school teacher's job easier when students have exposure in middle school and it makes the middle school teacher's job easier when student start in elementary school. She started her career as a high school teacher, so she understands the difference when a student does or does not have Shakespeare early on (Cobb 2011).

Two aspects of the Murray State University educational program are: to train teachers and give students in Kentucky as much exposure to Shakespeare as possible. The recent passage of Senate Bill 1 standards is changing academic core requirements in Kentucky schools, including a requirement for Shakespeare and to expose students to books with an increasing level of complexity, as stated in the Common Core Standards. The Murray Shakespeare Festival is one way the university provides resources for teachers to meet the standards and give students access to Shakespeare by

bringing in players to perform Shakespeare for as many students as possible.

According to a report by Murray State University news program called "Roundabout U," the American Shakespeare Center (ASC) performers come each year from Staunton, Virginia, to put on a play several times throughout the week at Murray State University. Teachers and schools can request scholarships to get travel money and free tickets for their students. After the performances, the ASC actors visit the area high schools and middle schools to do a workshop with students. In the workshops, they work to get students up and moving from the very beginning, stepping and skipping around the room. In order to introduce iambic pentameter, they ask ten students to come to the front of the room and get them all involved in the process by clapping out the beat as a group. In an interview about the value of the festival for her class, Lisa Polivick from Murray High School states:

These plays were meant to be seen, they weren't made to be read silently to ourselves or in a classroom drawing it out for four or five weeks...It was popular entertainment and the kids really get a feel for that when they go and see it...I've taught for 22 years and many of my students would graduate from high school and never saw a Shakespearian production until Murray State started bringing it here. (Crowley 2012)

Rusty Jones, Assistant Professor of English at Murray State University and the Chair of the Murray Shakespeare Festival gives

credit to the Kentucky Office of Regional Stewardship for financing the festival and making it possible for at least 1,500 students from around the region to see the plays each year (Crowley 2012).

The Folger Shakespeare Library

The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. is one of the leading proponents of the performance-based method of teaching Shakespeare. Its website is full of resources for teachers, students, and parents. Once again, The Folger's definition of this method from their website is useful to repeat: "*Performance-based teaching is an interactive approach to the study of literature, particularly Shakespeare's plays and poems, in which students participate in a close reading of text through intellectual, physical, and vocal engagement.*"

The *Shakespeare Steps Out* (SSO) program, started by the Folger Shakespeare Library, operates in many classrooms in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County Schools in order to ignite a passion for Shakespeare using performance. "Teaching artists" (Folger 2011) come alongside 3rd to 6th grade students and their teachers to guide them through the process of first tackling Shakespeare's unfamiliar words to ultimately putting on an abridged version of a play in Shakespeare's original language.

In an interview about SSO on the Folger Shakespeare Library Channel on youtube.com, Mallory Shear, a Teaching Artist, states, "The number one thing that every student should know about Shakespeare is: it's not as scary as they think it is" (Folger 2011). Students become thoroughly convinced of this reality as they shout, sing, and play games with Shakespeare's language, attend workshops at the library, and perform their finished product at the annual Children's Shakespeare Festival hosted by the Folger. The SSO also conducts professional development workshops for teachers, (<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=607> accessed 11/24/12).

The Folger Shakespeare Library has an Education Department fully dedicated to Shakespeare in schools and in elementary schools in particular. In a 2011 webinar entitled, "Teaching Shakespeare in the Elementary Classroom," presenters highlighted the fact that the performance-based method is the most effective, especially when working with younger students. In her presentation, Lucretia Anderson, the Elementary School Program Coordinator with Folger Education, stated, "Students can engage Shakespeare's text most effectively when they are on their feet, working with their peers, and speaking some of the greatest lines in the English language." Those who have had difficulty with teaching Shakespeare in the past will find that performance forces students (and teachers) to grapple with

the language and its meaning: students cannot perform what they do not understand. Ms. Anderson adds that, "performance often makes a connection that traditional teaching methods may not" (Anderson 2011).

The SSO visits the schools typically ten times during the year to prepare students to perform in the Children's Shakespeare Festival in March (Lucretia Anderson, December 3, 2012, e-mail message to author). One of the introductory lessons used by SSO is called "Shakespearian Insults." For many students, this is the first time they have ever come into contact with words from Shakespeare. They are given a handout with three columns of words. The first two are adjectives and the last one is a noun, all taken from Shakespeare's plays. For example:

peevish	clay-brained	canker blossom
greasy	dog-hearted	nut-hook
saucy	evil-eyed	dogfish

The handout has about ten words in each column. The students then pair up and are told to pick one word from each column and add the word "thou" to the beginning of the sentence to create an insult such as, "Thou bawdy dog-hearted nut-hook" or "Thou saucy clay-brained dogfish." This exercise works well to get the students laughing and using the language in a nonthreatening way. Of course this does need to be used with a certain level of discretion and it

should be made clear that no one should take the insults seriously. The same exercise can be done using compliments (Anderson 2011).

Another exercise in the SSO program incorporates collaboration and context clues to introduce Shakespeare's more difficult words. The students are broken into groups and are given a word on a card. They are to work together to find the meaning and then present it to the class first using an image and then performing a skit so that the class can guess the meaning.

This method is similar to the way an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher may introduce a word to students learning English. Students learning new vocabulary will remember the word better when the teacher allows them to guess the meaning collaboratively and when the word is put in context of usage as opposed to simply giving them the meaning (Nippold 1998). This hands-on experience is not only more engaging for the students, but it also teaches them how to use context clues to find the meaning of words, as valuable skill for standardized tests . Students are not only learning Shakespeare, but are building skills to help them discover how to learn on their own.

The next step on a subsequent visit is to read a passage to the class and have each student draw a picture of what they see in their mind from the vivid description. Students again are taking the

abstract language and making it concrete by creating and responding to the text. The students are also given a workbook full of activities such as a scavenger hunt, crossword puzzles, and a journal section to write down thoughts from each visit. After these foundational visits, the teaching artist and the teacher conduct rehearsals. Finally the students perform in front of their peers at the Children's Festival in May (Lucretia Anderson, December 3, 2012, e-mail message to author)

Royal Shakespeare Company - St. Mark's School Case Study

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in London conducts a variety of festivals and workshops for the community. A more recent development is their work in elementary schools. A specific example of this work is available to view on a video by posted on the Teaching Channel website by Patrick Flavelle entitled "Inspirations: Primary Shakespeare: an Active Approach." It highlights a series of workshops conducted at St. Mark Primary School outside of London by a group of actors from the RSC. Their visits start with group of traveling actors and musicians from the Royal Shakespeare Company performing a shorter version of *The Comedy of Errors*, using Shakespeare's language, but modifying it for an elementary school audience.

After the performance, students get to interact with the actors in workshops where they are able to play games with the language and get on their feet to act. The actors use some of the insults from *The Comedy of Errors* to introduce students to the language and rehearse them together as a large group. Instead of practicing the insults with another student as the SSO exercise does, students make a big circle and hurl them at the actors. The children throw the insults at the actors and the actors respond by throwing themselves around in overdramatic cries and fake boohooing. Everyone is laughing by the end and putting their whole bodies into it...and learning Shakespeare (Flavelle n.d., 3:43)

Other workshops consist of performing passages with the help of the actors or using rhythm and music to explain iambic pentameter to the students. This program has been used successfully to help students who struggle with their writing. Joy Cherry, the 5th and 6th grade teacher, says:

It certainly helps children that aren't as academic as some of us, and we have some children here who find it very hard to put pen to paper, but who've actually glowed in the workshops that we've done. It doesn't matter that they can't write it down, if they can do it and they understand it, then we've taught them something for life. (Flavelle n.d., 5:56)

According to Jacqui O'Hanlon, the RSC Director of Education,

“In order for young people to be engaged and inspired by Shakespeare, they just need to do three things: (1) Start Shakespeare earlier, (2) see Shakespeare live, and (3) explore Shakespeare actively and on your feet” (Flavelle n.d., 6:78).

These three points sum up the main aspects of the performance-based method that each example described in this chapter have sought to implement. The possibilities for creative activities in the performance-based method are endless.

Holly Rodgers, ESOL Teacher, 3rd Grade Case Study

Teachers may see the value in introducing Shakespeare, but may be overwhelmed at the task of adding him to an already packed curriculum. Others may question if their students are ready for Shakespeare and the complexity of his language. In response to both concerns, Holly Rodgers, an elementary school teacher in Fairfax County, Virginia, shows that Shakespeare can be used to meet many standards and can be done with students of any level.

Upon entering her classroom where students are acting Shakespeare with great enthusiasm, one may assume that Rodgers is teaching an advanced English class, but in fact she teaches ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students. In many schools, ESOL students are grouped together because they need

additional assistance as English is their second language. Many are immigrants, and English is not spoken in their homes.

When I came to visit on March 21, 2013, her 3rd graders were being introduced to Shakespeare for the first time. They had voted earlier in the week about what play they wanted to start with and the winner was: Romeo and Juliet. There was an expectant atmosphere in the room as Rodgers passed out a copy of the prologue and an abridged version of the balcony scene. Each student read a line, which contained many words they could hardly pronounce, much less understand, but this didn't discourage them.

When asked what they thought the prologue meant, responses were general, but on point. They recognized words like, "blood," "unclean," "lovers take their life," "love" and "death," and they understood this story wasn't going to end well and there were two people in love. With guidance from their teacher, they got the general idea of the story and learned some exciting new vocabulary words to throw around like "foes" and "rage." The point of the reading wasn't for the students to understand every word, but to focus on key terms and more specifically on the phrase "star-crossed lovers."

Rodgers led the class in a discussion about what they thought the phrase "star-crossed" meant, some children had good ideas, others had no clue, but they all threw out answers without

reservation and no one cared if they didn't get it right. It was clear a class atmosphere had been properly built and the children felt safe to be wrong, while at the same time seeking truth. Rodgers continued to guide the discussion by brainstorming with the class about anything in the natural world that is not meant to be together and connecting this idea to "star-crossed." One of the girls volunteered to write the ideas on the board and everyone got involved to make a list of "star-crossed" opposites, it included: sun/snowman, shark/fish, dog/cat, mouse/cat, vampire/werewolf, etc.. The students were all shouting out creative and some downright silly ideas and there was laughter all around. The students were having fun, learning an important concept from Romeo and Juliet, and brainstorming about the concept of opposites.

The lesson was then extended to have students role play as the opposite pairs (for example, one student played the shark and another played the fish) using an abridged version of the balcony scene. They were given a handout with the shortened script that had blanks for the students to fill in based on their characters. For the shark and fish scenario, the students changed the line "see how she leans her cheek upon her hand" to "see how she leans her fin upon her gills," and so on throughout the scene. Students got together with their pairs, filled in the blanks, and prepared to play their star-

crossed characters in front of the class. This allowed the students to start speaking Shakespeare's language in small doses and to hear it repeated as each pair acted the same scene, but there was also an element of fun, which got everyone laughing by the end. This lesson is called "Star-Crossed Scramble" and is available on the Folger Shakespeare Library's website at:

<http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanDtl.cfm?lpid=893>

When Rodgers speaks about teaching Shakespeare, she uses the term "sharing Shakespeare" because "introducing your students to Shakespeare really is a gift" (Rodgers 2011, Slide 1). In 2010, her students performed their own version of a scene from Richard III at the Children's Shakespeare Festival at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Rodgers' students and the passion they gain for Shakespeare shows that his works can be successfully introduced to students at any skill level.

The idea of introducing Shakespeare early is not just for advanced students, but a valuable learning experience available to all students. From the many accounts presented, it is clear that studying Shakespeare doesn't require above average intelligence. Second graders, prisoners, special needs students, students with English as their second language, and many others have had meaningful experiences with Shakespeare. Yes, it can be challenging, but part of

teaching Shakespeare is teaching students to believe they can learn anything with some guidance, effort, and collaboration.

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