



ROMEO AND JULIET – Choral Speaking

Lesson Overview:

Students will analyse a text and work collaboratively to create tableaux images and dramatic choral speaking works to enhance their understanding of a segment of Shakespeare's play.

Grade Level(s)	5–12
Subject Area(s)	English, Language, Drama
Curriculum Expectations & Learning Outcomes	By the end of the lesson students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyse texts and explain how various elements in them contribute to meaning;• Identify a variety of vocal strategies, including tone, pace, pitch and volume, and use them appropriately;• Select and combine the elements of drama to achieve a variety of purposes in ensemble presentations.
Skills	Critical thinking, teamwork, self-awareness, creative and skills
Time Needed	One class period
Space	Desks in groups, then open spaces for activity
Materials	Handout: Romeo's soliloquy: Act 2, scene 2

Setting up the activity:

- This exercise turns a monologue or speech into an ensemble activity that can involve an entire class. The teacher may act as “director” while soliciting input from the students or may divide the class into small groups and have the students be self-directed. If the students are self-directed, they will decide how to divide up the lines; which to speak chorally; where and what sound effects and movements to add, and so on. Then the groups will present their work to each other. This can lead to lively discussion of the similarities and differences in treatment. This approach is probably best tried after the class has worked together under teacher “direction.”

The exercise (These instructions are intended only as an example or a guide and need not be followed precisely):

- Start with the entire class standing in a circle. Start by going through the speech in call-and-response fashion with you reading a line, or part of a line, and the students repeating it after you. Break up long or difficult lines so that students can easily follow you, and deliver the lines with energy, physicality, generosity and commitment.
- Hand out copies of the text. Get the students to circle any words that are unfamiliar and figure them out together.
- Go through the speech with the students line by line, checking to see that they understand everything that is being said.
- Go through the speech again in call-and-response fashion now that everyone knows what is being said.

- Go through the speech with the students in order to decide who will say which lines. Ask the students to find opportunities for individual speech, choral speaking and groups. Ask them which lines they think they should say all together; ask if anyone has a line or phrase that they'd really like to say etc. Note that this is just a preliminary assignment; you and the students may decide on changes as you play with the speech. Make notes of all the decisions on your text.
- Go through the speech, with the students saying their lines. Review the results with them, soliciting ideas for improvements. Try out each of these new ideas and go through the whole speech again.
- Work with the students to add (a) staging, (b) gestures and (c) sound effects.
- Rehearse and perform the speech.

Reflection questions:

1. What thoughts and feelings came up?
2. What surprised you?
3. What's happening in the play at this point? What might happen next?

Romeo and Juliet – Act 2, scene 2 (excerpt) – CHORAL READING

ROMEO

[GROUP 1]

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she.

Be not her maid, since she is envious;

Her vestal livery¹ is but sick and green²

And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off.

[Juliet appears above at a window]

[GROUP 2]

It is my lady. O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

Her eye discourses – I will answer it.

I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks.

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres³ till they return.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

[GROUP 3]

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,

As daylight doth a lamp, her eyes in heaven

Would through the airy region stream so bright

That birds would sing and think it were not night.

See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

Glossary
1. vestal livery – virginal uniform (The moon was seen as Diana, goddess of virginity)
2. sick and green – Greensickness was thought to be an illness of virgins
3. spheres – orbits (The Ptolemaic system of astronomy held that the planets circled the earth. Their orbits (paths) were believed to be crystal spheres enclosing the earth.)