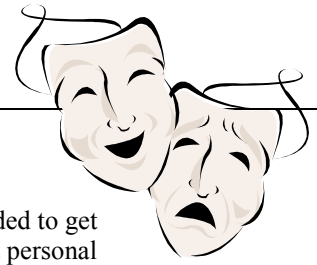


Connecting to Literature through Creative Dramatics



The Rationale

Work with literature can come in many different forms. Sometimes we read and then sit around and simply discuss what we read. This certainly has its value for some, but for others it lacks what is needed to get them truly engaged with the literature—truly thinking about it, working hard to interpret it, making it personal and meaningful. Good literature touches on what it means to be human on many levels. It is rich in meaning and has significance beyond the moment.

The following exercises will help us make some interesting connections with the literature we are reading for this week. They will force us to go beyond just reading and talking about the work casually; we will, instead, work to interpret the major ideas or themes of the work in three creative ways. With hope, these acts of active interpretation will lead to greater appreciation as well as understanding of this literature on both intellectual and emotional levels.

The Three Activities

This handout covers three separate activities. You will complete one as assigned by the instructor. All of the activities will be completed collaboratively with your peer groups.

ACTIVITY #1: From Poetry to Play—Considering Plath’s “Daddy”

This activity asks you to work closely with Sylvia Plath’s darkly disturbing poem, “Daddy.” To work through this poem very closely and arrive at your interpretation of it, you will be transforming part of the poem into a short dramatic skit. Your group will be assigned only part of the poem—four stanzas to be exact. As a group, you will spend time discussing your assigned stanzas very carefully. Discuss what they mean. If you don’t understand some words or references, you may need to look them up. While preparing, your group should work to negotiate the meaning and then decide what you feel the dominant idea or theme is of the given stanzas. Once you can agree on the major idea of this part of the poem, you will need to prepare a short 3-minute skit that communicates the idea or theme present in the part of the poem. Then, you will perform your skit for the class. Each member of the group must play a part in the skit. Be creative and have fun as you reinterpret Plath’s work into a skit, but do your best to be true to the *idea* that you believe Plath was trying to communicate in the poem.

ACTIVITY #2: From Page to Performance—Considering McNally’s *Andre’s Mother*

When we read a play, one might say we are not quite getting the full experience as it was meant to be experienced. Most plays are written to be performed on the stage—not merely read. Something comes across in a live performance that is quite different from a quiet reading of the text. The meaning of a play is not resident just in the written word but comes to be through the performance itself. The way an actor plays a role actually plays a large part in bringing meaning to a dramatic text. Acting is interpretation. This accounts for why you may have had two very different experiences of a the same play if you’ve seen it performed by two different theater groups.

For this activity, I want your group to breath life into McNally’s text by performing it for the class. It is short enough for us to do this during class time. Now, while you do not need to memorize the text (as there is probably not time for that), I am asking you to do more than merely read the play aloud: perform it. Decide which character each member of your group will play. Then as players, you each will need to get into character. You will need to truly understand your character. Think very carefully about this. To bring real life to this performance, you will need to think and feel like the character you are playing while you are performing. Consider what your character is like. What does he or she think and feel? How do these thoughts and emotions influence behavior, movement, attitude, tone of voice, facial expression, mannerisms, and so on. Get into the part. Be convincing. Be believable. Relax, have fun, and do your best.

ACTIVITY #3: From the Dramatic to the Poetic—Considering Wilson’s *Fences*

This activity asks you to play with form. August Wilson’s play touches on many ideas. Many of the characters are multi-dimensional and richly developed. The work is full of significant detail and imagery. The dialogue reveals the complexity of family relationships. As a way to work towards a fuller understanding of this play, your group must identify its major themes. From the list you come up with select the one your group would most like to explore. To work through this idea and to further interpret it, your group must write a poem of no less than three stanzas (each stanza should be no less than four lines) to communicate your interpretation of the major theme you selected from *Fences*. You will be performing (i.e. reading) your poem aloud for the class. Every member of the group must participate in the reading. Now, you don’t have to be a prize-winning poet to do this activity. Just do your best. Be creative and have fun. Remember, though to connect to and be true to the major idea you see coming across in Wilson’s work.