LESSON PLANNING IDEAS FOR TEACHING *AS YOU LIKE IT* TO ESL AND EFL STUDENTS

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“Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?”

Try teaching *As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare, to your ESL or EFL students if you want to give them something they are likely to remember. The play, like others from Shakespeare, can be difficult. But don’t be surprised when once students get a handle on Jaques’ famous monologue from Act 11, they spout, “All the world’s a stage…” and other well-known lines from the play even when they are not required to speak English (scene 7, line143).

The fame of this speech is but one reason to consider teaching *As You Like It*. Another is the comedy’s appeal to young students because of its romantic themes and youthful characters. Moreover, from a teaching perspective the play’s action scenes of fighting, flirting and hunting help students grasp the plot. In addition, a good portion of this play is written in prose, which is easier for students to understand than verse.

Learners’ English language proficiency, course type, time available and teaching goals will determine whether to do a small excerpt, such as the speech, “All the world’s a stage,” a single scene or the complete play. Regardless of how much is taught, the play can be used as a “starting point [for them] to learn language skills” such as pronunciation, conversation and writing (Heyden, 2005). The following are some lesson ideas for intermediate and advanced level students. The components of each section are generally listed in chronological order. These lesson suggestions are designed to help ESL and EFL students explore *As You Like It* while developing their English.

An Excerpt

When choosing to only teach an excerpt, the melancholy ode, “All the World’s a Stage,” in Act 2, scene 7, is ideal. Not only is it very famous, when read aloud its metre can help students develop the natural speech rhythm of English (Adams, 1979).

- Present a very short introduction of Shakespeare, his work, and Elizabethan theatre.
- Give a brief explanation of the play’s plot to set the context of the speech.
- Distribute copies of the speech. Read it aloud for the class and explain vocabulary.
- Repeatedly read aloud the speech as a class. Separate students into pairs and take turns reading aloud.
- Discuss as a group or in pairs these topics:
  i) Share a time when you acted as though you liked or disliked something when you really felt the opposite.
  ii) Share a time when you had to do something but your heart was not in it.
  iii) Is there purpose or meaning in life or is life futile? Why or why not?
- Watch excerpts of the speech in film versions such as Christine Edzard’s from 1992, or Basil Coleman’s from 1978 which stars Helen Mirren (1). After each preliminary viewing have students watch the excerpts again, the second time standing, speaking along with the actors and imitating their movements.
- Break down the lines by theme: introduction, infant, school boy, lover, soldier, judge, retirement, old age. Put students in groups of eight. In each group the first student will silently act out the lines while the next student reads them aloud. Then the student who read will act next while another student reads and so on until the entire speech is given. Have each group present their rendition to the class.

A Scene

Teach the fight and flirt portion of Act 1, scene 2. Here Rosalind meets Orlando, who is competing in a wrestling match and they fall in love (2). Divide students divided into groups of six characters. Begin with the entrance of Duke Fredrick, Orlando and Charles. Finish just before Le Beau’s reentry. Increase the students’ understanding of the lines by using a parallel version of the play such as No Fear Shakespeare, published by SparkNotes. As a parallel version, the book lies open, on the left pages the passages are in Shakespearean language, while on the right pages are the same passages in today’s English.

- Present a very short introduction to Shakespeare, his work and Elizabethan theatre.
- Give students a summary of the play to read. Draw stick figures on the board to identify characters and help explain the plot (Jones, 2005).
- Have students read the portion of the scene from a parallel version in both Shakespearean and modernized language. Explain vocabulary.
- Point out the flirtatious lines and discuss these questions as a group or in pairs: i) Is flirting common in your native culture? Why or why not? ii) If it is common, what are typical ways that it is done?
- Set a writing assignment on this question: Do you think flirting is acceptable? Why or why not?
- Get students up on their feet to role-play the scene in groups of six in different parts of the room. Then have each group present to the class.
- Distribute Shakespearean language scripts and allow the groups to work on performing the scene. They may read from scripts rather than memorizing lines. Again, have each group present to the class.
- Finally, show the scene from both of the film versions listed, above. Have students discuss or write their opinions on which version they prefer and why.

Complete Play

Use the Shakespearean language part of a parallel text to teach selected scenes, but use the modernized counterpart to fill in between. To help students keep track of who is who when they are reading aloud or performing, designate a particular hat or other costume piece, such as a scarf, for each character to wear (O’Brien, 1993). A scene to focus on from each act is listed below. For Acts 1 and 2 please refer to their earlier discussion. Follow the general teaching pattern of giving scene summaries, reading aloud together, explaining difficult vocabulary, and having students perform the text while reading from scripts.
The verse tree, Act 3, scene 2.

- Begin where Orlando hangs his verse on a tree. When he exits skip to where Rosalind enters reading a paper, continuing to where Celia finishes reading her paper. From this point divide students into groups and divide the number of lines left in the scene by the number of groups. Assign each group a section of lines to trim from the scene while preserving the storyline. In accordance with the language level of the class, have them work from either Shakespearean or modernized language in a parallel text. Each group should perform their section for the class, reading from scripts.

- Topics for discussion or writing assignments:
  i) Explain the custom of carving messages or names of sweethearts on trees or painting them on boulders. Ask students to share similar customs from their native cultures.
  ii) Explain the custom of writing love poems to one’s beloved, especially on Valentine’s Day or other romantic occasions. Ask students to write silly or serious love poems.
  iii) Explain the concept of “love at first sight” as mentioned in scene 5. Ask students if they believe in it, why or why not?

The deer hunt, Act 4, scene 2.

- Have students add to this short scene a pantomime of the hunt to precede the dialogue.

- Topics for discussion or writing assignments:
  i) Is hunting popular in your country? Why or why not?
  ii) Do women hunt? Why or why not?
  iii) Do you think hunting is ethical? Why or why not?

Bequeathing the crown, Act 5, scene 4.

- Begin with Jaques De Bois’ entry and end with the dance after Duke Senior’s last line.

- Topics for discussion or writing assignments:
  After explaining inheritance customs in English speaking countries, ask students to explain the inheritance customs of their native countries.
  i) What are the benefits and drawbacks of having a monarchy?
  ii) What role should birth order and gender play in the right of succession?
  iii) Will Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, Phebe and Silvius, and Audrey and Touchstone live happily ever after? Why or why not?
  iv) Who is your favorite character in the play and why?

Conclusion

As You Like It may not be the Shakespearean play most frequently taught by ESL and EFL instructors. Mediocre film versions and the confusion caused by characters’ dual identities make this play a second choice when Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet are available to teach. However, some ESL and EFL instructors do teach As You Like It if their students have previously read the giants of Shakespeare’s works. Like any other of the bard’s plays, teaching
this play to ESL or EFL students is not easy. Nonetheless, acquainting students with one of the most famous speeches in English, “All the World’s a Stage,” makes all the effort a joy.

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Notes

1. Christine Edzard’s 1992 film version of the play features Shakespearean language but is set in modern London. Basil Coleman’s version from 1978 has both traditional Shakespearean language and setting. These film versions are available on DVD or video. They may be found at some movie rental shops. They and other film versions on DVD or video are available for purchase online.
2. Rosalind meets Orlando, who is competing in a wrestling match, and they fall in love. Later Rosalind is banished and runs away with her cousin Celia to the nearby forest, as does Orlando who flees to escape his brother’s jealousy.
3. The author conducted an online survey in 2005 on the use of Shakespeare with ESL and EFL.

Bibliography