

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Increasing Reading Comprehension Through Adaptation and Performance

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this innovative teaching practice, students engage with Shakespearean tragedies in multiple ways, culminating in them performing selected scenes from the plays. The instructor knows that understanding Shakespearean English is a daunting task for many students. To help students understand the texts, the instructor uses a class set of *No Fear Shakespeare*, which are books translating Shakespearean English to modern English. The instructor also allows students to check out copies of *No Fear Shakespeare* for at-home use throughout the course.

As the class reads and discusses scenes from each play, the instructor shows videos from various adaptations modeling different interpretations of the texts. Examples of these include *West Side Story* reinterpreting the Capulets and the Montagues as Sharks and Jets, the *Lion King* recontextualizing *Hamlet* in the African savannah, and live recordings of Shakespeare's plays acted as originally intended.

After finishing a play, students work in small groups of three or four to construct a 10-minute performance. The instructor requires students to maintain the language and general events of their selected scenes, but encourages them to reinterpret the contexts, time periods, and dress. The instructor expects students to memorize lines, wear costumes, and create basic sets for their performances. To help with this, the instructor provides art supplies and a series of props and costume pieces collected over the years.

The instructor grades students as a group based on the quality of their performance using a rubric: that the performance lasts between 10 and 13 minutes, sets are neatly constructed and ready by the performance time, and all group members participate equally. The instructor also grades students individually for the quality of their contribution to the group. Example rubric components include that each group member is focused, refrains from distracting behavior during group work time, participates during group conversations, and is present for group meetings.

The instructor celebrates the conclusion of the activity with a simulated awards ceremony. Students take pictures and interview each other on a large piece of butcher paper cut to represent the red carpet. Students then vote on various categories like best actor, actress, supporting actor, supporting actress, adaptation, set design, etc. As the celebration closely mimics the Oscars, students are awarded a certificate and give a speech to the class.

### Notes from the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

The instructor noted that students are engaged throughout the activity—the student performers actively participate in reinterpreting and performing scenes from their plays, the student audience listens and appropriately responds to the performances, students ask questions of their peers, and everyone celebrates one another in the awards ceremony.