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Mutual Meaning Making: Dramatic Staging and Student-Led Discussion in the Shakespeare Classroom

ERIN KATHERINE KELLY

The seminar “First-Generation Shakespeare” at the 2018 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America was filled with academics working at colleges and universities with heavy teaching loads and diverse student bodies. Some of us had been teaching for decades while others were in the first year of a tenure-track job; still others had left the classroom for administrative positions. The margins of the room were filled to capacity with auditors, often in similar academic positions. What emerged from our papers and our conversation was a collective desire to encourage the strengths and meet the needs of our first-generation students. In-class performance and student-led discussion are two ways to meet this goal. Using recent work in performance studies, I argue that an assignment that asks students to both perform and lead the class in discussion helps students feel cultural ownership over the course material through embodying characters and taking on the role of academic experts in the discussion that follows the performance. Students know the scenes they perform in a deeper and more significant way, and their fellow classmates gain new insights into the plays we study after watching the interpretive stagings. This assignment, which emphasizes the performative roots and nature of Shakespeare’s work, helps students who feel culturally estranged from Shakespeare make meaningful connections with his work, particularly first-generation students, who are a significant part of the student body at California State University, Chico, where I teach. Finally, the assignment helps me to know Shakespeare in a new way each semester as I watch fresh takes on scenes that I have read and watched many times before. The group performance and discussion assignment helps create a community of meaning-making in the classroom that is a benefit to all.

I teach a 400-level Shakespeare class every semester at California State University, Chico that is required for just about every major in my department. Many of my students are reluctant members of the class, and I aim to help students make meaningful connections with literature that is hundreds of years old yet still relevant today. About half of the student body of Chico State is first-generation, and slightly more than half of English majors, my captive audience for ENGL441, are first-generation.¹ Chico State is also a Hispanic Serving Institution.

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A regular assignment in my 400-level class is an in-class performance of a scene of the student group's choice, followed by a student-led discussion. Students also write a reflection about their individual and group experience. In addition to the performance, students in the course create a two-part commonplace book, write and revise an eight-to-ten-page term paper, and take two passage-identification exams. The performance and reflection are in addition to formal writing, rather than a replacement for it. In fact, the interpretive approach to performance should help my students develop the critical reading and thinking skills necessary for effective papers later in the semester.

My use of in-class performance and discussion relates to a number of the more specific goals and common themes that emerged from the SAA seminar. The pedagogical papers all explored alternatives (or additions) to the traditional term paper, but each author wanted to ensure that their students still engaged deeply and specifically with the text. The larger goal of this engagement, for most of us, was to help our students overcome their fear and demystify the text. For example, Cassie Miura and Kerry Cooke encouraged their students to analyze canon formation and Shakespeare's place within that canon to help them approach an author whom they might otherwise consider above critique.² Whitney Taylor's scene editing assignment was a clear example of the desire to leverage students' close engagement with the text into a sense of interpretive authority.³ Students in general, and first-generation students in particular, may feel that they have no grounds for claiming expertise, and our assignments and approaches were designed to foster the confidence necessary to do so. Stephanie Pietros designs her syllabus around problem plays, noting "the idea that the works of such a 'great' as Shakespeare have 'problems,' whether formal or otherwise, seemed to be liberating for students."⁴ When framed properly, students are empowered to grapple with the plays on their own terms.

Beyond textual connections, members of the seminar try to foster communities inside and outside the classroom. While working on this paper, I canvassed colleagues of mine who were themselves first-generation and who have worked closely with first-generation students on campus. They emphasized the importance of educational literacy and the need for a supportive community. My colleagues lacked these resources when they were going through the process; providing them is a key part of the work they do now. As William Dean Clement discovered, "relationships with fellow students can improve their education experience. Many of my FG students attributed their successes to strong connections with classmates."⁵ Catherine Thomas echoes Clement in her analysis of research on the importance of networks and communities for first-generation students.⁶ Clement also considers the world outside the university when he envisions students sharing their poetic recitation assignment with family members who hunger for positive news about life in college.⁷ In-class performance and discussion are effective ways of meeting all of the goals that emerged from the work of the seminar. Students gain a deeper knowledge of their chosen scene, take on authority as discussion leaders, and forge connections with their fellow group members.

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During the first week of the semester, students sign up to work in groups of four to five on a play of their choice. Later, students choose a scene or a part of a scene from their play, notifying me in advance so that I do not cover their scene in class. We read one play every two weeks, and the performances generally occur on the third or fourth day of class discussion. The performance is meant to illustrate the group's interpretation of the scene through the dramatic choices made by the group. Students are required to memorize their lines and design an entertaining blocking plan more involved than standing in a line at the front of the room. Students are not required to add anything beyond these basic requirements, but groups often incorporate costumes, lighting, props, music, sound effects, scenery and backdrops.

After their performance, which happens right at the beginning of class to minimize nerves, students lead a discussion. The assignment prompt indicates that the discussion needs to accomplish three things: (1) answer any questions from the class; (2) lead a conversation about the group's interpretation and dramatic choices; and (3) guide the class in making connections between the group's scene and the rest of the play. One of the significant drawbacks of this assignment is the deep anxiety and stage fright that it can provoke in a small percentage of students; they are all nervous about doing it, but some are beyond nervous. To try and counter their anxiety, I make it clear to students that not everyone needs to act; a student who does not act can instead take a leading role in the discussion. Of course, the discussion also involves public speaking, but I emphasize the practical nature of this assignment; the vast majority of the students in this class intend to be teachers, and every student anticipates a public speaking or presentation component in their future jobs.

A week after the performance, students submit individual reflections, which consist of three parts. In the first part, students narrate and reflect on the group's interpretive choices. They are asked to explain how the group chose the scene they did and illustrate their interpretation through a discussion of two to three moments of the performance. This section of the reflection is always interesting because I can learn about the sometimes-tense group dynamics that led to an initial scene choice, and students sometimes bring aspects of the performance to my attention that I did not notice in the moment. (I have discovered that students get very nervous if I look too directly at them while they are performing, so I tend to look down at my assessment sheet and watch them over the top of my glasses or out of the corner of my eye.) Next, the students each reflect on their own new understanding of the scene having performed it, and they are encouraged to consider how both the performance and the discussion impacted this understanding. In my updated prompt for Fall 2018, students were particularly encouraged to consider the embodied nature of the performance, and I received some interesting answers to that prompt, to be considered later. Students are also asked to think about how they might stage the entire play, now that they have successfully staged one scene. Finally, I give students an opportunity to comment on the dynamics of their group, which generally results in praise for their fellow students but also allows for a private airing of any grievances. Students receive individual grades on the reflection and

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a group grade on the performance and discussion. I reserve the right to assign different grades for the performance and discussion on the rare occasions when it is clear that one member of the group did not pull their weight. I do not post grades for the performance and discussion until I have read the reflections, and I sometimes use a consensus of opinion about group dynamics to help me make those decisions.

Of course, I am not the first and certainly not the last teacher to bring performance into the Shakespeare classroom or to analyze its effectiveness. Joseph Haughey surveys the history of classroom performance in middle and high schools in the archives of the *English Journal*, a publication of the National Council of Teachers of English. Haughey found an issue from 1912 that contains several articles urging the use of performance in the classroom to teach Shakespeare.⁸ Miriam Gilbert, writing for the 1984 special issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* on teaching, cites Caldwell Cook's *The Play Way: An Essay in Educational Method* from 1919 as her earliest example.⁹ Esther Schupak echoes Haughey and Gilbert in noting the frequency of scholarship on performance pedagogy since the 1970s, but also shares my own personal experience in never encountering it in a classroom while a student.¹⁰ Gilbert wonders, "Why is the use of performance in the classroom something that seems constantly new and available for discovery?"¹¹ As a partial answer to her question, one might point out that most Shakespeare professors do not receive extensive training in pedagogy or performance; "new" techniques are discovered and invented the longer one teaches. Furthermore, new perspectives and slightly different approaches can reveal new affordances of this type of assignment.

One of the principle affordances of using performance in the classroom is the opportunity it creates for students to meaningfully connect with the text and to make it their own, one of the key goals that emerged from the work of the seminar. At a basic level, students connect as they recite the dialogue and inhabit the point of view of their character. At a deeper level, Gilbert and Boecherer note that performance encourages students to know, "the text is not sacrosanct."¹² Student performers have to make decisions about what to cut and what to keep and how to say particular lines; this intimate contact with the text can help dislodge Shakespeare from his boring and inaccessible cultural pedestal. Such close contact and engagement is truly a form of active learning that leaves space for personal discovery and interpretation, as a number of critics indicate.¹³ J. L. Styan, in his interview with Derek Peat, claims, "the difference is between learning and being told."¹⁴ Boecherer highlights the active role of the audience, as well: "in order to unlock Shakespeare, undergraduates must be forced to actively engage the text by *listening* to it rather than simply *reading* it."¹⁵ Everyone in the room benefits from the performance, not just those (nervously) acting out the lines. Those who are acting, however, can receive the additional benefit of "the mantle of the expert approach."¹⁶ The student gains a sense of authority and expertise as she considers, decides, and then enacts her interpretation for the class.

A central goal for any literature teacher is to encourage their students to pay close attention to the language of the text. In-class performance requires this

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focus as a number of critics have noted, particularly if the student wants the performance to be at all entertaining or persuasive. Gilbert argues, “performance-oriented teaching might be called ‘the art of the specific.’”¹⁷ While it is not highly likely that Tony-worthy, fully-fledged performances are happening in classrooms around the country, students nonetheless have to decide how to say each word, what to do with their bodies, and how to react to their fellow actors, all of which requires really looking at what is on the page. In his reflections on the experience of taking an undergraduate acting course while a professor, Marshall W. Gregory coins an apt phrase as he marvels at how the actors in the class “eat the text” in preparation for performance.¹⁸

The digestive nature of Gregory’s image anticipates the work of critics who emphasize the embodied nature of performance. Stuckey and Wimmer contend, “the most crucial skill set students have the opportunity to discover is a way of embodied thinking that encourages self-reflection and critical distance as well as empathy, concern with cultural contexts, values, and issues, and confidence in their own opinions.”¹⁹ Pineau agrees, “when students engage their physical bodies they ‘come to know’ things in a uniquely personal and heuristic manner...performance enables an imaginative leap into other kinds of bodies, other ways of being in the world.”²⁰ Stuckey alone joins in on the epistemological potential of performance pedagogy, “the process of embodying an other, a text, a persona, or a character makes possible radical understanding.”²¹ These scholars’ emphasis on the advantages of embodiment has sharpened my own sense of its importance in this assignment. In Fall 2018, I made the embodied experience an explicit part of the reflection assignment and a central aspect of how I talk about the performance and reflection.

A number of critics also emphasize the importance of the embodied audience. Judith Hamera urges fellow scholars to attend to “the embodied consequences of looking and being looked at” and continues, “classroom performance restores the knowledge of what we, as bodies in classroom, are subject to: specifically, to constraint, construction, and situated spectatorship.”²² As a result, I am considering incorporating additional reflection on this aspect of the performance from members of the classroom audience in future versions of the assignment. My students do a fantastic job of engaging with their fellow classmates’ performances and discussion, and this additional component could deepen that participation.

In addition to discussing individual embodied experiences of each participant in a performance and the interactions between performers and audience, scholars also point out the collaborative nature of performance and the subsequent opportunity to form peer bonds and networks. Again, this emerged as a key strategy for helping first-generation students succeed in college. For Gilbert, one the primary goals of her use of performance pedagogy is the process—the work the group does together to decide on the details of their performance—and the emphasis on the community continues during the post-performance discussion, which she considers an essential element of in-class performance (I heartily agree).²³ Edmiston and McKibben analyze the “rich and complex imagined-and-real experiences” that occur during rehearsal and

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performance.²⁴ They note that students learn about “the abstract ideas in texts...as they are shared through embodied social interactions representing events that ordinarily must be imagined individually and usually without using much movement or social exchange.”²⁵ In Edmiston and McKibben’s analysis, students are not only able to make social connections with each other, but they are also able “to project into social situations that otherwise could remain inaccessible.”²⁶ Inhabiting a character’s point-of-view or participating in a social situation drastically different from one’s reality can give students the opportunity to see and feel what it is like to be other. Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi caution against over-enthusiastic and under-theorized claims about identity and connection that often rest on (unexamined) assumptions about Shakespeare’s “universal[ity]” and that overlook and exclude students’ “race, gender, ability and sexuality...an embodied Shakespeare course should integrate discussions about identity into every class.”²⁷ Thompson and Turchi’s work is an important reminder to take a contextual and intersectional approach to performance in the classroom; as comments will demonstrate later, my students often directly address the disconnect between their identity and the identity of their characters, but I also plan to ensure that this crucial part of the conversation is explicitly included in discussions and written reflections going forward.

Beyond these more abstract goals, critics have argued for a range of potential outcomes from classroom performance. Analyzing the impact of performance at the high school level, Gorlewski and Shoemaker highlight its benefits to better comprehension.²⁸ Again at the high school level, Edmiston and McKibben are interested in how performance helps students “discover the plot, investigate the relationships among character in settings, and connect with themes.”²⁹ Esposito moves beyond these more basic goals and argues, “performance-based methods support student writing by tapping into multiple modes of communication at once.”³⁰ Because of the comparative nature of the performances Ellen J. O’Brien assigns, she uses it as a method to teach “such traditional concerns as source and textual studies.”³¹ Last but not least in this survey, Haughey and Gorlewski and Shoemaker remind us of the pleasure of performance.³² The latter found in their study that performance was an effective teaching method, compared to four other methods, because students enjoyed doing it. Yes, classroom performance results in all kinds of serious and intellectual benefits for performers and spectators, but it never hurts to counter the boredom and fear at the same time.

While nearly all of the scholarship on performance pedagogy, including this article, focus on the positive benefits of the practice, Thompson and Turchi do call our attention to the danger of sloppy and inattentive versions of the assignment, and Esther B. Schupak surveys what she identifies as three main drawbacks to the approach: time, bad acting, and unprepared teachers.³³ Despite her argument that in-class performances can be a shallow waste of time at the expense of more efficient and meaningful engagement with the text, Schupak ultimately claims that all disadvantages can be overcome; she offers suggestions for less time-intensive kinds of performance, urges the use of Cicely Berry’s work to counter bad student acting, and reminds instructors to take courses and

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consult resources in the library to overcome an inadequate theater background.³⁴ Thus, even the detractor ultimately decides that the practice can be effective.

Using in-class performance is certainly not a novel pedagogical approach, and many of the benefits that I have identified for my students mirror those covered by critics above. My approach encourages thinking about the affordances of this technique for first-generation students. Students come away with a deeper knowledge of their chosen scene, with the valuable experience of being an expert in the classroom, and often with meaningful connections created in their group that may serve them long after they finish my course. A crucial question is how to evaluate the success of this approach. Beyond my own analysis based on my observations from the past seven semesters, my students attest to the success through their own written reflections.

The increasing quality and intricacy of the performances are a good barometer for gauging the success and efficacy of this assignment. The English majors are a tight knit, gossipy group; I am now a known quantity and students have friends who have already done the assignments. Students are less nervous than they were when I arrived, and they are more eager to top previous performances. The performances have pretty much always been good, though. In my first semester at Chico State, a group of students chose to perform the gravediggers' scene from *Hamlet*. They turned the table at the front of the classroom on its side so that they could be "underground," digging Ophelia's grave, and beyond this cleverness, what I really remember from this performance is how well they conveyed the black humor of the scene. They knew their lines cold, and their discussion helped their fellow classmates explore the significance of this scene and its connection to the rest of the play. One of the actors in that performance, the student who played Hamlet, is now one of the strongest students in our M.A. program, working with me on an early modern thesis and planning to start a Ph.D. program in the fall.

In another performance from a year ago, a group decided to stage the moment in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when the four lovers all confront each other, run away chased by Puck, and ultimately fall asleep until things are magically restored in the morning. One of the students in this group was really bright, but troubled with deep anxiety. The student is trans, but had unfortunately experienced public ridicule when she lived as her true self in Chico; she had not experienced such overt and aggressive bigotry while living in the Bay Area, and decided that she could no longer continue to live as a woman while at school. She decided to play Helena in her group's performance of *Midsummer* and was able to wear clothes that she had felt unsafe wearing during her normal life. This student was not only able to embody the character but also to embody a truer version of herself than she was normally able to do in our small college town surrounded by mostly conservative ranchers and farmers.

Depending on the character of a particular class, the discussions have also gotten more intricate and better prepared the longer I have been at Chico State. Last fall, for example, the students who performed a scene from *Henry V* designed an entire Jeopardy game for their discussion, dividing the class into two teams: France and England. Even though the French team won the battle, the

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students awarded the prize to the English by awarding them bonus points at the last minute. Less obviously exciting discussions also do a great job through PowerPoint presentations that link assertions about interpretive choices to specific quotes from the play; if I am able, I try to jump in and highlight such moments during discussions, connecting these effective moments to the kinds of moves students should think about making in their formal written assignments.

My students' reflections are another place to evaluate the assignment. I have gone back through previous performance reflections and pulled some representative quotations. I do not know for certain if (all) my pull quotes come from the work of first-generation students or from those students who indicated their reluctance to take the class in their first week writing, but some of them certainly must, and I am also guided by the work of seminar members like Loreen Giese, who notes that the insecurity and unfamiliarity that can characterize the experience of first-generation students with the cultural norms of college can be more broadly applied to nearly all students' experiences with Shakespeare in particular.³⁵ At Chico State, it is rare for any student to have much or any experience with Renaissance drama outside of a couple plays in high school.³⁶

One of the most common type of comment written in the reflections is that the student learned something new and understood something at deeper level about the scene than they had before doing the assignment. For example, a student from my first semester who performed a scene from *Twelfth Night* explains,

After performing 2.4, the scene feels more direct. Before staging it, the scene felt veiled and convoluted, like the characters were being incredibly subtle with their actions and exchanges. After performing, it feels like I have a new insight and could explain exactly how obvious and transparent the characters are being [*sic*]. As a mere reader, some of the exchanges did not seem significant, but actually understanding some of the possible physical cues – body language – of the characters, it became more clear [*sic*].

After acting in the scene and leading a discussion, the student gained new insight into the motivations of characters and the larger meaning of the scene. This particular student was a strong and insightful participant in class discussions; the experience of the performance added a new dimension for her nonetheless.

A number of students comment on how their experience acting and leading a discussion not only gives them greater insight into their chosen scene, but can also reveal unexpected or contradictory insights. One student says, “while we were practicing our performance, I hadn’t anticipated the effect that Hamlet’s emotional polarity would have on the audience. [My group member] stepped up the intensity of her acting in our final performance in front of the class, which helped me see Hamlet’s character from a new perspective.” While students often mention the impact of repeatedly saying their lines alone and in rehearsal, it is when performing in front of an audience that they gain much of

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their insight. Sometimes the new take on the play is significant: “Now that we’ve staged *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, my entire perspective on both the scene and the play in its entirety has been turned on its head. While *Midsummer* does have comedic elements, the comedy feels overshadowed by the darker tones that are now evident to me after analyzing and performing this scene.”

The embodied nature of performance encourages students to reflect on the experience of playing someone different than they are, and this happens both during post-performance discussions and in reflections; Thompson and Turchi’s call to consider identity is often taken up by my students. In Fall 2018, I added a question to the reflection assignment about the embodied nature of the performance, so students are more inclined than before to comment on it. One student notes that playing the characters in *Midsummer* opened up her sense of potential meanings for the relationship between Hermia and Helena, “I felt that by playing Oberon, Robin, and especially Demetrius (since I had more lines from him) I was able to see their personality and thought process easier. It was helpful to see the other group members be their character as well and get a sense for what that character might or might not do. Hearing [my group member] as Helena talk to [my other group member] as Hermia really opened our eyes to the possible interpretation that Helena loves Hermia; we needed to backtrack and make sure this worked.” Another student in the same performance noticed the lack of connection between herself and her character:

Becoming Lysander was a different experience for me, though, as I’ve never had to act or really try to get into a character’s head that I wasn’t already attached to and running a meta-analysis on. For me, Lysander was just another guy trying to puff himself up and “woo” a woman he truly had no interest in. If anything, Lysander reminded me of a frat guy in front of his friends.

The students in Spring and Fall 2018 who portrayed scenes with Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo during performances of *The Tempest* were particularly affected by the experience; “embodying the character of Caliban made me gain a tremendous amount of respect for any human being that has ever played the role because there is so much emotion and rawness that you feel inside while performing some of his lines,” one student writes. Another says, “this [blocking a scene with Caliban] was huge in developing ideas surrounding disability studies for Caliban’s character and in this idea of slavery for the setting of this play.” Students also consider what may or may not feel appropriate when making casting decisions: “finally, as a group we decided that I, being the only male in the group, should not play Stephano as to avoid any awkward scene where I have to pretend to beat up a female [*sic*].” In his work for the seminar, Kyle Grady urged us to analyze the potential for student identification with the text to both encourage and frustrate that impulse: the embodied nature of in-class performances affords my students with just those opportunities.

The discussion is a key part of the assignment because it enables students to take a turn being the teacher at the front of the room; “I thought

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getting to lead a class discussion on our scene was great practice for teaching in the future.” Most of my students are in our English Education option and plan to teach high school after graduation. I really enjoy seeing quieter students take the lead during discussions, presenting their interpretations and responding thoughtfully to their classmates’ comments. Interestingly, students do not tend to reflect on the experience of being an authority figure in their reflections, and I may revise the assignment prompt to see if I can gain more insight on this issue. The most common comment about leading a discussion is how much the leader learns from listening to the ideas of the spectators; “When we had the discussion, I felt validated when people noticed the same things I did. On the other hand, it was also very interesting when they pointed out things I hadn’t noticed or questions I hadn’t considered.” Another benefit of including a discussion component is that it can rescue bad performances. On rare occasions, students have failed to meet the basic requirements of the assignment: line memorization and a blocking plan. Sometimes, I have to quietly allow the students to use their notes to finish the scene, but groups with stage fright always recover during the discussion portion and lead their classmates to nuanced analysis of what they have just watched and how the scene is connected to the rest of the play. In general, students who have taken on the task of memorizing the most lines take a lesser role during discussions, so a performer can take a moment to recover before jumping in to the conversation.

A crucial part of this assignment is that it is a group project. Many students have a good experience working with their fellow classmates, even though they love to tell me in their reflections that they generally hate group projects and/or have had bad experiences in the past. As my first-generation colleagues have taught me, a sense of community is crucial to the success of first-generation students, so that is another way in which I hope and believe this assignment serves the needs of those students. A student from Fall 2017 provides some supporting evidence when she describes her experience of staging a scene from *Julius Caesar* with her group,

After completing this project, I felt not only relieved, but also satisfied; because it played out smoother than I had expected. We all had unsettled nerves about the pressure of performing in front of the class, and at our final morning rehearsal we started using humor in the scene to lighten the mood. This surprised us because our scene is very intense, yet somehow, we found a comedic edge in the dialogue. I chose to share this tidbit with you because this was one of the most important things I took away from this project. This assignment provided a wonderful bonding experience for a group of students who all enjoyed working hard together to put forth a performance of our best work.

Another student from the next semester also mentions the “bond” formed by her group: “it was a great way to bond to classmates I might not have really talked to otherwise.”

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One of the main reasons that this assignment works semester to semester is that students know that they will be performing at some point. As a result, they are inclined to be kind when their classmates forget a line, or two, or many, and they eagerly volunteer to answer questions during discussion in a way that they do not always do so for me, although Chico State students are quite the smart, chatty bunch. Students do bond the most strongly with their performance group, but I have observed that the collective experience of all the performances results in the creation of a community of mutual meaning making that benefits not only my first-generation students, but also students who are the most recent in a long line of family members to go to college. As a teacher, it is important to me to create and sustain a student-centered classroom where each new group is encouraged to make the class and the texts their own, and in-class performance is a crucial way to do so in my Shakespeare class. I have included the assignment drafts below for anyone to use or modify as they wish.

Notes

1. The university defines first-generation this way: “College students are considered first-generation if neither of their parents completed a four-year university degree.”
2. Cassie M. Miura, “Empowering First-Generation Students: Bardolatry and the Shakespeare Survey,” in this volume; Kerry Cooke, “Peripatetic Pedagogy: Teaching Shakespeare at a First-Generation University,” in this volume.
3. Whitney Taylor, “The Pedagogical Possibilities of Editing a Digital Text in the Shakespeare Classroom,” in this volume.
4. Stephanie Pietros, “‘If we shadows have offended’: Shakespeare’s ‘Problems’ and First-Generation Students,” in this volume.
5. William Dean Clement, “L(E)arned Empowerment: Memorizing Shakespeare for First Generation Students,” in this volume.
6. Catherine E. Thomas, “Fostering Academic Self-Efficacy in First-Generation Students Through Shakespeare Reading Groups,” in this volume.
7. Clement, “L(E)arned Empowerment,” in this volume.
8. Joseph Haughey, “‘What’s Past is Prologue’: *English Journal* Roots of a Performance-Based Approach to Teaching Shakespeare,” *English Journal* 101.3 (2012): 61.
9. Miriam Gilbert, “Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.5 (1984): 601.
10. Esther B. Schupak, “Shakespeare and Performance Pedagogy: Overcoming the Challenges,” *Changing English* 25.2 (2018): 163.
11. Gilbert, “Teaching Shakespeare,” 601.
12. Gilbert, “Teaching Shakespeare,” 606; Michael Boecherer, “Lessons Learned from Killing Caesar’ or How to Involve Your Students, and Slay Your Audience, While They Slay You,” *This Rough Magic* 1.2 (2010): 83.
13. Derek Peat, “Teaching Through Performance: An Interview with J. L. Styan,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31.2 (1980): 144, 146, 148; Boecherer, “Lessons Learned,”

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- 76; Brian Edmiston and Amy McKibben, "Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches, and Dramatic Inquiry: Literacy Education for Life," *English in Education* 45.1 (2011): 96; Lauren Esposito, "Performing to Learn: Rethinking Theater Techniques to Interpret, Explore, and Write about Shakespeare's Plays," *CEA Critic* 78.2 (2016): 196.
14. Peat, "Teaching Through Performance," 146.
 15. Boecherer, "Lessons Learned," 76, emphasis original.
 16. Edmiston and McKibben, "Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches," quoting Heathcoate and Bolton, 96.
 17. Gilbert, "Teaching Shakespeare," 602. See Gilbert's later thoughts in "Embodying Shakespeare in the Classroom," in *Shakespeare Expressed: Page, Stage, and Classroom*, ed. Kathryn M. Moncrief, Kathryn R. McPherson, and Sarah Enloe (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2013): 55 - 60.
 18. Marshall W. Gregory, "From Shakespeare on the Page to Shakespeare on the Stage: What I Learned about Teaching in Acting Class," *Pedagogy* 6.2 (2006): 320-321.
 19. Nathan Stuckey and Cynthia Wimmer, "The Power of Transformation in Performance Studies Pedagogy," in *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 10.
 20. Elyse Lamm Pineau, "Critical Performance Pedagogy," in *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 50-51.
 21. Nathan Stuckey, "Deep Embodiment: The Epistemology of Natural Performance," in *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 138.
 22. Judith Hamera, "Performance Studies, Pedagogy, and Bodies in/as the Classroom," in *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 127, 129-130. See Boecherer ("Lessons Learned," 76) and Esposito, ("Performing to Learn," 184) on the importance of the audience with regard to embodiment.
 23. Gilbert, "Teaching Shakespeare," 605. See also Gregory ("From Shakespeare," 313-315) on the impact of robust learning community he encountered in an acting class.
 24. Edmiston and McKibben, "Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches," 91.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Ibid., 90. Esposito ("Performing to Learn," 195) makes a similar point.
 27. Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, "Embodiment and the Classroom Performance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 724, 732. Also see page 729 about the need to avoid creating conditions that result in stereotype threats.
 28. Julie Gorlewski and Brandon Shoemaker, "To Read or Not to Read: Five Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare," *English Journal* 102.4 (2013): 113.
 29. Edmiston and McKibben, "Shakespeare, Rehearsal Approaches," 98.
 30. Esposito, "Performing to Learn," 195.
 31. Ellen J. O'Brien, "Inside Shakespeare: Using Performance Techniques to Achieve Traditional Goals," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.5 (1984): 621.
 32. Haughey, "What's Past is Prologue," 63; Gorlewski and Shoemaker, "To Read," 113.
 33. Schupak, "Shakespeare and Performance Pedagogy," 171 - 175.
 34. Ibid., 173 - 176.

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35. Loreen Giese, "Teaching First-Generation Shakespeareans: Lessons from the Classroom," Shakespeare Association of American Conference seminar paper (Los Angeles, California, March 2018).

36. I learn this information during informal writing activities during the first week of the semester.

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Appendix: English 441 Interpretive Staging Prompt

- Once you've signed up for a particular play, your group needs to pick any scene from the play to stage for class. **Be sure to tell me by email which scene you've picked by the Sunday before our first day of discussion so that I can lesson plan accordingly.**
 - Pro tip: successful and happy groups start planning well in advance. Read your play early and organize meetings as soon as you can.
 - **Scene choice:** your group may want to stage part of a significant, long scene rather than simply choosing the shortest scene in the play. If this is the case, your group needs to get approval from me for the portion of the scene you'd like to perform.
- The goals of this assignment are to embody the kinds of dramatic choices that we will discuss throughout the semester and to hone your public speaking and teaching skills. Less seriously, the goal of the assignment is to have some fun and break out of the traditional classroom format a bit.

PART I:

- Each group should discuss and decide upon an interpretation of their chosen scene. **The classroom performance should illustrate this interpretation in some way.**
 - For example, your group might perform a scene from the beginning of *Henry V* and choose to highlight what you consider to be the undue influence of Church officials over Henry's decision to go to war with France. In order to convey this interpretation, your group blocks the scene (*blocking=the physical arrangements and movements of the actors and props on the stage*) with the two bishops on either side of Henry, whispering into his ear (see Branagh's *Henry V*).
- **Technical requirements: line memorization and blocking.**

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- All lines must be memorized. No performing with the book or notes in your hand.
- Have a blocking plan of some kind (doesn't need to be fancy, but needs to go beyond standing in a line at the front of the room. Entertain us!).
- Beyond the above technical requirements, feel free to bring in whatever you think adds to the performance. The more you commit, the more interesting and fun it will be. Will music add to your performance? Costumes? Props? *Our classroom is quite well equipped with audiovisual equipment, but please contact me in advance if you have any questions about resources you need.*

PART II:

- After the performance, each group needs to lead the class in a 10-15 minute discussion. Your discussion goals include: (1) answering any questions from the class; (2) leading a conversation about your group's interpretation and dramatic choices with the class; and (3) guiding the class in making connections between your scene and the rest of the play.
- Everyone in the group must be an integral part of planning and performing the scene. Depending on the scene your group chooses, not every member of the group may end up acting in the scene. Ideally, every member of the group would act in your chosen scene. If group member(s) do not contribute by acting, then those member(s) need to take a significant role in leading class discussion after the performance.

English 441 Production Reflection Prompt

- **This assignment is due to the drop box on Blackboard one week after your group stages their scene.**
- **This is an individual assignment. Each group member should write his/her own reflection.**
- The goals of this assignment are to increase your critical writing skills and to provide the opportunity for reflection on your group work. Now that you have presented your interpretation of a scene through performance and discussion, you have a chance to refine and deepen that interpretation through writing.
- **The entire assignment should be 800-1100 words, with 3 distinct sections (see below). The paper needs to be submitted as a Microsoft Word**

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document in MLA format, double-spaced, 12-point font, and set to 1" margins.

• Your use of proper spelling and grammar will be considered when determining your grade.

• **Section I: Group Choices (300-400 words)**

• In this section, you should explain how your group chose its scene, the range of possible interpretations you discussed, and how the group chose the approach that it did. To help illustrate your interpretation, focus on 2-3 choices your group made when staging the scene (i.e. blocking, costumes, line readings, etc.), explaining how those choices contributed to your overall interpretation.

• **Section II: Making Connections (300-400 words)**

• In this section, (1) please explain your own, new understanding of the scene now that you've staged it and lead a classroom discussion on it. Are there things that you didn't notice until you had an audience for your performance? Did comments from your classmates during the discussion show you things that you hadn't noticed before? How did the experience of embodying a character change your understanding of the scene? (2) Then, expand beyond the scene to explain how you think your scene is connected to other parts of the play. How did staging the scene help you see those connections? Do you have a sense of how you might stage other scenes in the play now that you've staged one? Or how you'd approach directing/producing/acting in the whole play??

• **Section III: Group Work Reflection (200-300 words)**

• In this section, please discuss any challenges and/or opportunities that you encountered while working with your fellow classmates. How did you function as a group? What was your role in the process?