

EDB Workshop Outline – Shakespeare

In this workshop we will be examining the *sound* of words in Shakespeare. Participants will be asked to examine specific passages from *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello* in order to develop teaching strategies to help analyse how sound connects to meaning and character.

(1) Verse (and Iambic Pentameter)

An obvious – but difficult – feature of Shakespearean sound is the metre. We will begin with an introduction to Shakespearean verse and its rhythm – iambic pentameter.

We will go through some basic exercises to help students become familiar with stressed and unstressed syllables. However, I will then stress that how Shakespeare *varies* his sound and how and why he departs from blank verse

15 minutes on iambic pentameter.

(2) Verse v Prose

In this section we will examine the balance between blank verse and prose in Shakespeare's drama. We will look at specific instances in *Othello* and *Taming of the Shrew* where there is a *shift* from verse to prose (or prose to verse) and think about *why* Shakespeare might include such a shift.

Some exercises will focus on: How does it help distinguish between different types of characters? Does it help produce a shift in attitude or tone in the scene? What might it say about a particular character's emotions or psychological development? The shift between verse and prose may mark a shift in power relations or psychological development.

15 minutes (with group work) on the shift between verse and prose.

(3) Blank Verse v Rhyme

Another way that Shakespeare shifts the sound of blank verse is through the introduction of rhyme. We will discuss why rhyme might be introduced into otherwise unrhymed (blank) verse. Examples from *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew* will show how rhyme can be used in both soothing and disturbing ways.

10 Minutes on the movement from blank verse to rhyme.

(4) Midline Shifts

A subtle way in which Shakespeare modifies sound within blank verse is through the "midline shift". This is where a character's speech is interrupted in the middle of a line and then shifts in tone, direction, or thought. We will explore how midlines shifts open a space for *thinking* – showing how a character is attempting (or struggling) to understand his or her place in the world. Midline shifts highlight points of breakdown, realisation, or decision.

10 minutes.

(5) Repeated Sounds – Puns

Repetition is a key way that Shakespeare structures and patterns his writing. This workshop cannot tackle all of the ways that Shakespeare repeats sounds, words, or clauses, but we will look at how puns work as a repetition of sound that produces various effects on the audience. A distinction will be made between public and playful comic puns, on the one hand, and private and subtle puns on the other. We will examine passages from *The Taming of the Shrew* to show how puns can be at once a form of erotic connection and a power game in which characters struggle over who has the power of interpretation.

15 minutes including group work on The Taming of the Shrew.

(6) The Sound of Silence

One of the greatest contrasts that a dramatist can call upon is that between noise and silence. We will conclude the workshop by briefly thinking about the absence of sound. How does Shakespeare use silence in powerful ways? Here we will think about what silence can mean for characters, their inwardness, their desires, and their struggles.

10 minutes as a concluding discussion.

Part 1

How to do a Comparative Analysis of Sound-based Poetic Devices

In this part of the workshop, we will focus on some of the practicalities of essay writing: which words, phrases and structures should students know before they begin writing? What 'poetry life-hacks' can help them feel confident in their analysis and writing?

The technical skills of analysis and writing that are required to produce a high-level comparative analysis essay can be daunting. Working with students to talk about the sound effects of poems from the DSE syllabus involves building their confidence in linking an effect ("alliteration", "rhythm", etc.) to a clear, thoughtful and insightful effect. For students, this can be one of the most challenging aspects of poetry analysis – it requires a real leap of imagination and considerable insight into the apparent purpose or message of the poem.

All of this becomes more difficult when students are asked to analyse two different poems within a single coherent response.

As we read through and discuss the two focus poems below (William Carlos Williams "Flowers by the Sea" and John Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci") we will work to develop strategies for helping our students to

- identify sound-based techniques with confidence and accuracy
- label the devices – useful words to describe the poet's art
- explain the significance of sound – answering the question 'why did the poet use *this* device?'
- linking different poems coherently in a single essay

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Flowers by the Sea

When over the flowery, sharp pasture's
edge, unseen, the salt ocean

lifts its form—chicory and daisies
tied, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and the movement—or the shape
perhaps—of restlessness, whereas

the sea is circled and sways
peacefully upon its plantlike stem

JOHN KEATS

La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
'I love thee true'.

She took me to her Elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Part 2

Working with Students on Confident Analysis of Poetic Techniques

In this part of the workshop, we will use an ‘unseen’ poem taken from the DSE list. For this exercise, we will model a lesson plan geared toward non-native speakers of English who have been tasked with identifying significant patterns in sound, rhythm, and form.

As we read the poem (handed out separately) we will work on the skills of quickly identifying a rich array of elements for analysis—and how to say something sophisticated about the function of these elements in building the emotion, mood, tone and meaning of the poem.

Our discussion will focus on these questions:

- When is a sound effect worth talking about? (always)
- Is this sound effect intentional/meaningful? (yes)
- Does every sound effect have an effect on the meaning? (absolutely)

How do we help students move from a poem on a page to a clear and confident opinion about what the poet was doing with words—and why?

Using some of the hacks and formulas developed in part one, we’ll play out and practice the classroom experience of leading students through what can be the most challenging and scary part of poetry analysis.