



Language Arts Assessment Activity #4

The Play's the Thing

Introduction:

All the world's a stage

When Shakespeare's brooding Prince Hamlet wanted to find out if his uncle had murdered his father in order to get his crown and his wife, he decided to have actors put on a play before King Claudius. Hamlet called the play "The Mousetrap" because he expected that a play showing the act of murder would rouse the conscience of the king. Just as Hamlet expected, the king was greatly disturbed and ran from the room. Shakespeare said that drama had the capacity to "hold a mirror up to nature" to face us all with the truth of who we really are and what we do.

From the time of ancient Greece, China, and Egypt, societies have passed on their legends and preserved their stories for later generations by making them come alive again on the stage.

Drama—the portrayal of a culture's stories through action in front of an audience – is as important today (through plays, movies and television) as ever before in "holding the mirror up to nature" to help us laugh at our follies, sing praises of our heroes, and cry over our common sorrows.

In this assessment activity you will:

- Read a play with a group of students,
- Write a first person account in the form of a letter telling the story from the point of view of one of the characters (each person in the group will be assigned a different character),
- Select a dramatic monologue or dialogue of at least twenty lines to recite in character and present the monologues/dialogues as well as a group summary of the story,
- Listen to the groups present the summary and dramatic excerpts of the various assigned plays,
- Write a review of your favorite telling the public why they ought to see a production of the play.

Skills assessed in this activity:

- Oral delivery
- Listening, recall and response
- Writing a review
- Identifying elements of drama
- Writing from a point of view

Part I: Reading the play

Your teacher will provide a selection of plays or will have you search for a script within certain guidelines. You may have some class time to read the play aloud in your group, or you will be asked to read the play outside of class. Each person in the group will focus on the role of a particular character and will take some notes on the action of the play and the interaction of characters from that character's point of view.

Part II: A Letter from a Character

Assuming the point of view (first person) of any character in the play, retell the story as a letter to any other character in the play who is important to you (in your role). Such a narrative should be at least 500 words.

Part III: Dramatic Monologue/Dialogue and Play Summary

You are going to prepare, rehearse, and deliver a monologue or dialogue from your assigned play. You may work by yourself in preparing a monologue (in which the character speaks alone), or you may choose a dialogue with another character. You should be so familiar with your lines that you can make eye contact, use gestures, and be expressive just as the character would be in that situation.

Such oral presentations can be presented in Readers' Theater style or may be memorized and presented as a full dramatization. Choose the approach that will work most effectively for you. The monologue or dialogue should comprise at least twenty lines for each speaker. Be careful not to leave a thought fragmented by cutting off a vital line or two for the sake of brevity.



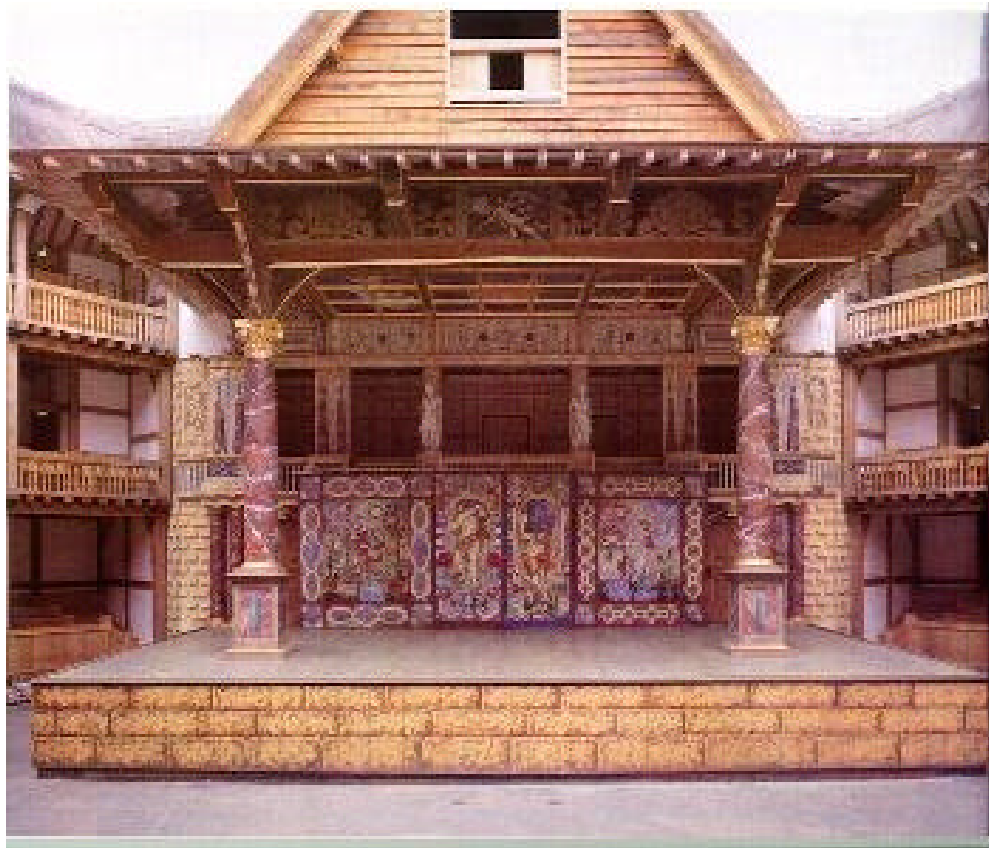
Group Summary

Every group will present a general overview of the play plus the monologues and dialogues prepared by individuals and pairs. Students will be evaluated for their individual performances. Your teacher may require that the summary be written through a group process or may assign an individual to the task. The written summary will be used as a script for the group. The written summary will not be evaluated for Body of Evidence purposes.

When other groups are presenting, students should listen carefully so that they are able to recall the basic story line. Names of characters and the name of the play and its author should be written on the board or on a poster.

Part IV: The Review

Every day newspaper writers and television commentators review plays, movies and concerts. They tell the public just enough of the story to get them interested, or just enough to urge them not to spend their money. After watching presentations of play excerpts, write a review to get the public interested in the story and its characters. (It is not necessary to comment on the skill of the performances of students. You are to focus your comments on the play itself.) Copy an early draft and submit with the final revision.



A view of the stage of the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London. Modeled on Shakespeare's original theater, the New Globe now presents Shakespeare's works in a setting much like the original building, open to London's light -- and weather.