

Literary Film Adaptations: Chaucer Extravaganza

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Unit Context

- Level: High School
 - Because of the Literature we picked, this would be for a British Literature Course. The literature used would all have a film adaptation or a film that parallels the storyline or characters of the movie. This would be an introduction to the idea of film adaptations. This could be modified in terms of the literature and films used to meet the needs of the course. It could also be expanded in order to take up a whole semester or it could be reduced so it would only take a short time.
- Grade: 10-12

Unit Objectives

- Inspire critical thinking about a written text and a media text
- Understand film techniques
- Develop an understanding of the nuances of turning literature into film
- Hone writing skills
- Work cooperatively in a respectful manner
- Improve close reading skills

Link to Relevant Graduation Standards

Note: I have highlighted (with bold type) the graduation standards that I think this unit addresses in some way.

II. WRITING

(Writing should be addressed across content areas and integrated into the curriculum.) Students will write clearly and coherently for a variety of audiences and purposes.

A. Type of Writing

Standard: The student will write in narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive and critical modes.

The student will: Plan, organize and compose narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive, critical and research writing to address a specific audience and purpose.

B. Elements of Composition

Standard: The student will engage in a writing process with attention to audience, organization, focus, quality of ideas, and a purpose.

The student will:

- 1. Generate, gather, and organize ideas for writing.**
2. Develop a thesis and clear purpose for writing.
3. Make generalizations and use supporting details.
4. Arrange paragraphs into a logical progression.
5. Revise writing for clarity, coherence, smooth transitions and unity.
- 6. Apply available technology to develop, revise and edit writing.**
7. Generate footnotes, endnotes and bibliographies in a consistent and widely accepted format.
8. Revise, edit and prepare final drafts for intended audiences and purposes.

C. Spelling, Grammar and Usage

Standard: The student will apply standard English conventions when writing.

(Use of standard English conventions is necessary to help a writer convey meaning to the reader. Spelling, grammar, and usage may be taught as a separate unit as well as integrated into teaching writing processes.)

The student will:

- 1. Understand the differences between formal and informal language styles and use each appropriately.**
2. Use an extensive variety of correctly punctuated sentences for meaning and stylistic effect.
- 3. Edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, verb tense, sentence structure, and paragraphing to enhance clarity and readability:**
 - a. Correctly use reflexive case pronouns and nominative and objective case pronouns, including *who* and *whom*.**
 - b. Correctly use punctuation such as the comma, semicolon, colon, hyphen, and dash.**
 - c. Correctly use *like/as if, any/any other, this kind/these kinds, who/that, and every/many* when they occur in a sentence.**
 - d. Correctly use verb forms with attention to subjunctive mood, subject/verb agreement, and active/passive voice.**
 - e. Correctly use the possessive pronoun before the gerund.**

D. Research

Standard: The student will locate and use information in reference materials.

The student will:

1. Use print, electronic databases and online resources to access information, organize ideas, and develop writing.
2. Identify key terms specific to research tools and processes.
3. Narrow the focus of a search by formulating a concise research question or thesis.
4. Develop a research plan

5. Evaluate and organize relevant information from a variety of sources, verifying the accuracy and usefulness of gathered information.
6. Produce a report with detailed evidence to support a thesis.
7. Distinguish between reliable and questionable Internet sources and apply responsible use of technology.
8. Understand plagiarism and its consequences, and identify ethical issues of research and documentation.
9. Organize and synthesize information from a variety of sources and present it in a logical manner.
10. Credit sources for both quoted and paraphrased ideas.
11. Cite sources of information using a standard method of documentation, such as a style sheet from the Modern Language Association (MLA) or from the American Psychological Association (APA).
12. Proofread the final copy, format correctly and prepare the document for publication or submission.

E. Handwriting and Word Processing

(Standards under this heading may be locally determined.)

III. SPEAKING, LISTENING AND VIEWING

The student will speak clearly and effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences and actively listen to, view and evaluate oral communication and media.

A. Speaking and Listening

Standard: The student will demonstrate understanding and communicate effectively through listening and speaking.

The student will:

1. Distinguish between speaker's opinion and verifiable facts and analyze the credibility of the presentation.
2. Deliver a speech in a logical manner using grammatically correct language, including vocabulary appropriate to the topic, audience and purpose.
3. **Understand the relationship between nonverbal, interpersonal, and small group communication.**
4. **Describe the role of communication in everyday situations (e.g., advertising, informal, social, business, formal social, etc.)**
5. **Understand the effects of media on society and culture.**
6. **Identify and understand essential elements, skills and implications of persuasion, argumentation, and debate as essential oral skills.**
7. **Apply assessment criteria to self-evaluation of oral presentations.**

B. Media Literacy

(At the high school level, media literacy should be addressed across content areas and integrated into the curriculum at the discretion of the local district.)

Standard: The student will critically analyze information found in electronic and print media, and will use a variety of these sources to learn about a topic and represent ideas.

1. **Evaluate the accuracy and credibility of information found on Internet sites.**
2. **Evaluate the logic of reasoning in both print and non-print selections.**
3. **Evaluate the source's point of view, intended audience and authority.**
4. **Determine whether the evidence in a selection is appropriate, adequate and accurate.**

5. Evaluate the content and effect of persuasive techniques used in print and broadcast media.
6. Make informed evaluations about television, radio, film productions, newspapers and magazines with regard to quality of production, accuracy of information, bias, purpose, message and audience.
7. Critically analyze the messages and points of view employed in different media, including advertising, news programs, web sites, and documentaries.
8. Formulate critical, evaluative questions relevant to a print or non-print selection.
9. Critically analyze and evaluate the strategies employed in news broadcasts, documentaries, and web sites related to clarity, accuracy, effectiveness, bias and relevance of facts.

Unit Activities

1. Introduction

- Small teacher led discussion about the way we continuously adapt to our surroundings. Teacher poses questions like:
 - Do you ever feel that you change the way you react to things based on who you're around?
 - How do you interact differently with your parents, peers, co-workers, strangers, etc.? Teacher may give example.
 - How do you act differently in different situations such as a school setting, a get-together with friends, a concert, etc.?
- Students role-play a variety of different situations with a variety of different people.
 - Students would get into groups of three and draw a situation from the box that the teacher has prepared. Then, they would role-play their actions and interactions/ dialogue in front of the class after fifteen minutes of preparation time. Some sample situations that they may role-play are:
 - Pretend you're talking to your parents about the party you are going to go to at your friend's house on Friday night. Now, pretend that you're talking to some other friends who are going to the same party on Friday night. Finally, pretend you're talking to your boss about getting out of work for that party on Friday night.
 - Pretend that you've just received a grade report in English that says you're failing. Pretend you're talking to your teacher about improving that. Now, pretend you're telling your parents about your grade report. Then, pretend you're talking to your friends about it.
 - Pretend you're at the library talking about the drama that happened at prom. Now, pretend you're at a Friday night football game discussing the same prom perils. Finally, pretend you're talking about this with some friends who are all riding in the car with you and your parents.
 - Student groups present their role-play activities

- Whole-class discussion based off role-play
 - How do your interactions change when you're talking to people? How do you ADAPT what you are saying or doing based on your audience and purpose? Why do you think you adapt in different situations or when talking to different people? Are there any other areas where you have seen adaptations occur?

2. Mini-lecture

- One place that adaptations are found is in literature. For example, each of the books that we have read so far has had either a movie or a play adaptation that helped us deepen our understanding of the material presented. It is important to think about the audience and purpose of the film adaptation, just as you did in your role-plays. As we've discussed, the audience plays a major role in adaptation. You would never tell your parents that the parents wouldn't be home at your friend's party. However, you would really emphasize that point when talking to your friends. In the same way, when a movie director makes an adaptation of a film he/she makes decisions about what to highlight, what to change, or what to add based on who he's trying to sell the movie to.
- In upcoming weeks, we are going to read literature while also looking at film adaptations or parallels of that literature to enrich our understanding about both the text itself and its media counterpart.

3. Reading and Viewing

- Students will have to read scenes overnight and then those scenes from the original film will be viewed and discussed daily in class. Students will also journal about their reading. The journals on their reading would ask them to:
 - List plot lines chronologically
 - What/who they picture as the different characters
 - Pose questions about what's happening

4. Activity: Tableaux Scenes from play

- Students will direct each other into snapshots from the play. At this time, they might decide to take a different interpretation than the original film that they've seen. As a class, we would talk about why they think it should be represented differently.

5. Film Adaptation Time: Baz Lurman's *Romeo and Juliet*

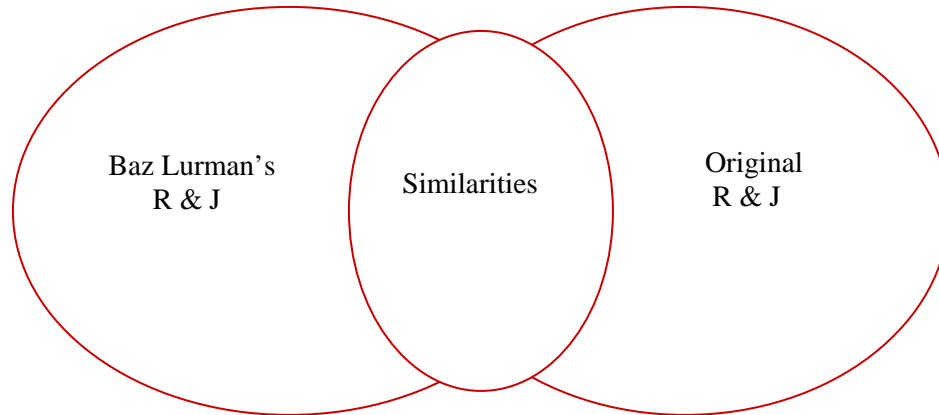
- Class watches scenes of the film adaptation at this point, when they all have a good understanding of the play.
- After watching significant scenes, students will think-pair-share based on the following questions:
 - How are the characters portrayed differently between the various versions?
 - Which version did you find more effective? Why?
 - Are there things that you would combine from each version?
 - What would you change about a particular version?

6. Reading and Viewing

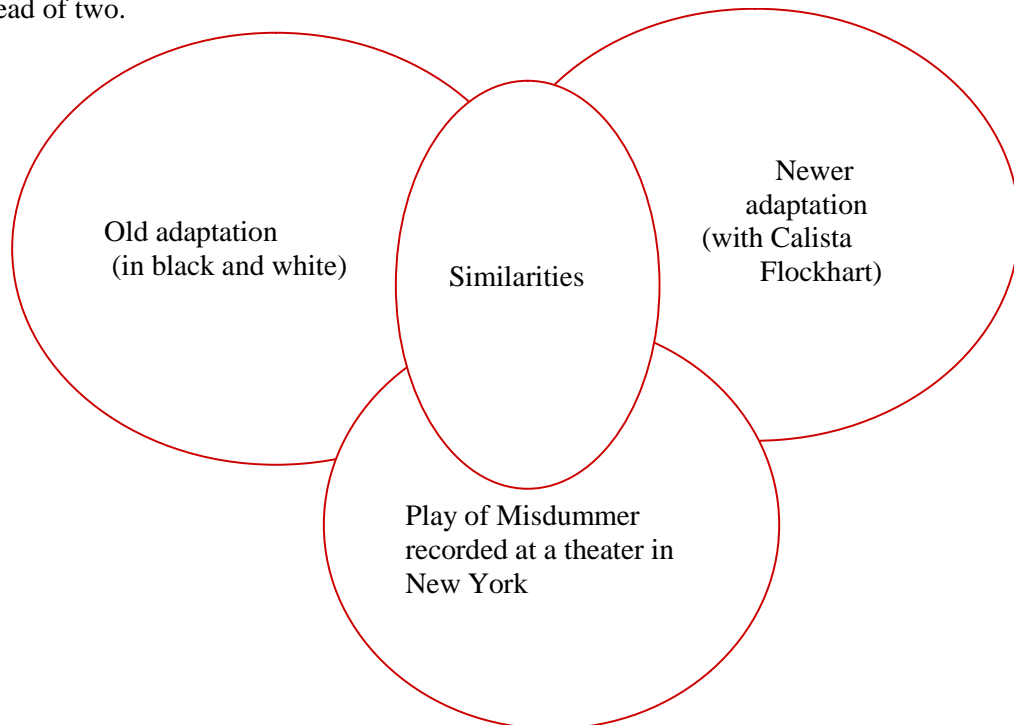
- Upon the completion of *Romeo and Juliet*, the students will begin reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We will follow along the same path as described above. The only difference between the Romeo and Juliet section and the Midsummer section is the fact that during this unit we will be watching more versions of the play so that the students can compare one scene in several different adaptations.

7. Small Group to Large Group Discussion

- Here we would expand our previous discussion about the similarities and differences between the Romeo and Juliet adaptations and the A Midsummer Night's Dream adaptations.
- In small groups the students would brainstorm the qualities (such as plot lines, characters, costumes, etc.) for each of the movie adaptations they watched. They would then highlight the similarities between each adaptation by filing in the Venn Diagram pictured below.



- The students would contribute their ideas from their Venn Diagrams and as a class we would synthesize the information to talk about the film adaptations alone:
 - Who do you think the directors had in mind for their audience? Why did they both keep the language while Baz Lurman changed the costumes and setting? Were they trying to stay true to the book or were they trying to appeal to their specified audiences? Which adaptation do you feel was the best and why? What characteristics made this adaptation better in your mind?
- We would again move from small group to large group discussion answering the same questions as listed above. This time, however, we would expect the students to find many more similarities and differences between versions since we watched three adaptations instead of two.



8. Reading and Project Introduction

- As a class we would read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. There would be discussion and in class activities to make sure that the student's understanding of the text is adequate. Upon completion of *Canterbury Tales*, we would begin introducing their final project.
- The students will be required to complete a film adaptation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. There will be at least two groups creating an adaptation of each scene so that the different adaptations can be compared.
 - The students will break up into groups based upon which scene they chose to create an adaptation of.
 - They will, as a group, have to come up with a list of characteristics from their scene that they feel need be showcased.

9. Activity: Story Board

- After a discussion of what characteristics need to be involved or showcased in their film adaptation, each group will begin to make editing choices that depict what they will emphasize or leave out, whether they will leave the language the way it is, whether or not they will modernize the story, etc.
- This Story Board will propel students on to their script writing.
- Students will turn in their story board and teacher will provide feedback to assure the students that they are on the right track so far.

10. Activity: Scripts

- Students will have time in class to work on their scripts. Scripts will be available to them so they can see how they should construct the script.
- Things that they have to address are: (Note: As they address these elements, they have to think in terms of the text as a base. Even if they are deciding to do a modern day interpretation, the text should still be the source of their inspiration. They should be able to link their interpretation to the text somehow.)
 - Characters? Who are they? Why are they significant? How should they interact? How should they look? How should they sound?
 - Setting? Where should this take place? Could this be set in a different genre? Would it be more or less effective in that setting? How would changing the setting change the action and characters of the text?
- Students will turn in their script and receive feedback so that they know they are working successfully towards their goal.

11. Film Technique Overview

- Before students start filming, there will be an overview of basic editing, camera work, sound work, and special effects work.
- Students will view clips and, with the guidance of the teacher, discuss the effects of these basic film techniques so that they are equipped to produce something fabulous for their Chaucer scenes. iMovie will be used for their final product. That will also be covered in class (although, inevitably, some of the students will already be pros!)

12. Filming

- Students begin filming as much as possible in school. They may take time to revise their script or make props.

13. Chaucer Adaptation Extravaganza

- As this unit comes to a close, students will watch each other's films. Since at least two groups will do each scene or story, the class will then compare the two interpretations in terms of effectiveness, similarities, and differences—just as they did earlier with Shakespeare's plays.
- Students will have an opportunity to talk about the stylistic choices they made in terms of their film technique and in terms of their script. They will also be expected to write a two page summary that explains exactly what they present to the class—what were the stylistic choices they made and how did they come to their script?

14. Final Hurrah/Discussion and Conclusion of Unit

- As a class we will discuss what we've learned while completing this project:
 - What have you learned about how to read literary texts?
 - What have you learned about how to read media texts?
 - What have you learned about critically comparing literary texts and media texts?
 - What have you learned about writing as a process?
 - What have you learned about the production of a film?
 - What have you learned about the audience and purpose of an adaptation?
 - What did you enjoy most about the activities we have done?
 - What is the most memorable thing you'll carry with you from this unit?

15. Class Reflection and Suggestions

- To help as we go on to teach more classes, we will ask the students to get together in groups of three and come up with some strengths of the unit and some weaknesses. Then, as a class, the groups will present their constructive criticisms as we take note.

Unit Grading Criteria

Students will be graded based upon the following work:

- Participation (Group Work/Class Discussion)
- Journals based on their reading
- Storyboard
- Script
- Film and Written Explanation of Film
- Presentation of Film to Class