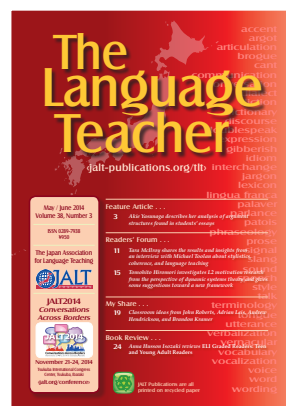


# The Language Teacher

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# Teaching ideas in Shakespeare

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This study notes that whilst there are some problematic factors that teachers need to consider when contemplating introducing the works of William Shakespeare into Japanese tertiary reading classes, this need not prevent them from doing so. Indeed, despite possessing antiquated language and idioms that our students may not be familiar with, Shakespeare's plays contain poetic ideas and themes that are universal to the human experience. This study recommends two approaches that have been utilized with sophomore university English students to teach key ideas in the plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. It argues that, when they are explicated, realizing these ideas can equip our students with insights additional to language or cultural acquisition, because such literature contains ideas that are part of the shared human condition.

本論では、ウィリアム・シェークスピアの作品を日本の大学でリーディング授業に導入する際、いくつか考慮すべき問題はあっても、それが彼の作品を教える妨げにはならないことについて述べる。シェークスピアの古典は古い言い回しや慣用語があるので生徒には馴染みがないかもしれないが、全ての人が共有する詩的な考えやテーマを含んでいる。本論では、「ロミオとジュリエット」と「ハムレット」の演劇の重要なテーマを大学2年生に教える際に使用した、2つのアプローチ方法を提唱する。文学には私達がいつの時代も共有してきた考え方が含まれているので、平易に教えさえすれば、学生は外国の文化や知識以上の洞察力を身につけられるということを論じる。

## Idealizing the real

Japanese students may encounter a number of cultural and lexical problems when studying authentic literary texts such as the works of William Shakespeare in tertiary English reading classes. Yet for learners hoping to attain fluency in English, Shakespeare's influence is difficult to wholly avoid, either linguistically or culturally. Shakespearean language has had a profound impact on the English lexicon, and Crystal (1996, p. 62) observes that the two most important influences on the development of the language during the final decades of the Renaissance are the works of Shakespeare and the King James Bible of 1611. Students may also encounter Shakespeare in university textbooks, as his continuing cultural caché has seen his image employed in ELT texts such as *English File* (Oxenden, 2001, p. 112) and *Headway* (Falla, Soars, & Soars, 2002,

## SIG Spotlight: LiLT SIG

The Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT) SIG was set up to encourage and promote the use of literature in the language classroom. Our diverse membership includes teachers at various levels teaching language through film, creative writing, poetry, the short story, classic literature, literature in translation and world literature. We also welcome interest from educators interested in cultural studies, politics through literature, language learning and applications of literary texts in different contexts. LiLT SIG activities include sponsoring literature/language experts to spread the good word of literature use across Japan, co-sponsoring conferences, working with other groups to promote effective pedagogical practice, publishing a bi-annual journal.



p. 51), juxtaposed alongside simplified, stereotypical examples of British culture such as pubs and tea. When used in this way, Shakespeare becomes exploited as a commercial symbol of Britain, and it is concerning that he is presented to students in such a fashion without necessarily being read; the specific reasons for Shakespeare's greatness, and the potential insights his works can offer students will remain unpacked and elusive unless students are led to engage critically with his works.

## Realizing the idea

Teaching Shakespeare in Japanese universities should entail leading students to realize some of the key ideas in his works, rather than simply idealizing his image.

Shakespeare's works chime just as well with our students' era as his own due to the ambiguity of his philosophy and his deep sensibility for what it is to be human. Shakespeare grappled with uncertainty without resorting to absolute solutions. This idea that literature should operate as a vehicle for contemplation, later defined by Keats as "negative capability" which "Shakespeare possessed so enormously" (1848/1996, p. 1015), added something almost completely new to literature. In an age where students face much

pressure to achieve good grades, obtain jobs, and fulfil lifestyle goals, studying literature which contains aesthetic and contemplative characteristics may yield benefits that, while difficult to quantify objectively or summatively, can help students place their goals and aspirations within a richer context.

The following sections will detail how Shakespearean speeches were taught to sophomore students majoring in English at a Japanese university for the purpose of achieving these ends. As the students were not familiar with reading Shakespeare, this meant that textual selections had to be tailored to students' language abilities and also, if possible, thematically connected to their specific experiences and interests. Although, due to time constraints, attempting complete coverage of Shakespeare's plays was impossible, short sections of speeches and soliloquies from Romeo and Juliet, and Hamlet were used in reading classes to attempt to illustrate Shakespearean themes.

## Using graded readers

When reading Shakespeare, short comparison extracts from graded readers can greatly aid students' appreciation of key lines, and can also clarify the meaning of scenes. Graded readers have been advocated by scholars (e.g., Krashen, 1993) for extensive reading purposes, but short sentences from graded readers can also be used in class alongside truncated sections of authentic texts for comparative micro-reading exercises. Such micro-reading examples were used when teaching the balcony speech from Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene II. The students were first shown the authentic text and were invited to discuss what was happening in the scene and what point was being made in Juliet's soliloquy. Many students were visually familiar with this balcony scene through imagery they had encountered in films and animation, and most answered that Juliet appeared to be searching for Romeo from her balcony. This perception was further enforced by Juliet's famous line "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" (Shakespeare, 1623/1966, p. 772). However, the students were then shown the graded reader version, in which the language had been rendered into simplified, modern English. Reading this, the students realized that the original meaning of 'wherefore' was 'why', and this in turn led them

to understand that Juliet's speech focuses on the arbitrary nature of language, names and titles, as she asks, apropos of no-one, "Why are you called Romeo?" (Collins, 2002, p. 12). The students were then required to discuss various flowers they liked and, upon being given a selection of alternative words, were asked whether they would look as beautiful or smell as fresh with these different names. Having undertaken this discussion, the focus then once again returned to the authentic text of Juliet's speech and the students debated the relevance of the succeeding lines "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet" (Shakespeare, 1623/1966, p. 772). The students were able to perceive that the rose, a symbol of beauty, passion, and romance, is subverted by Shakespeare and is instead used symbolically to illustrate that language is not nomenclatural. Whilst most students seem to be familiar with the story of Romeo and Juliet, and are aware that it ends tragically, an understanding of the ideas expressed in Juliet's speech allows students to understand this tragedy more profoundly; as members of opposing families, the love between Romeo and Juliet is ultimately thwarted by the imposition of arbitrary names and titles. Having considered such an idea, the class discussion then concluded by focusing on how the influence of language, names, titles and status influenced the students' lives in Japan in subtle but profound ways.

## Using audio-visuals

Audio and visual media can further scaffold student comprehension of textual content (Lonergan, 1984, p. 80). Images from Western art and carefully selected video clips were used to explicate one of the key ideas in Hamlet: the reductive circle of life speech recited by Hamlet in the churchyard in Act V, Scene I. To aid students' understanding of the ideas encapsulated in this monologue, it was necessary to compare and contrast Hamlet with a number of figures from Western culture who preceded him. The class began by exploring the heroic tradition in Western art, by showing the students the Mosaic of the Battle of Issus (100 BC), which depicts Alexander of Macedonia heroically, followed by examples of Western paintings from the Renaissance. Having viewed these heroic depictions of historical figures, the students discussed what, in their opinion, constituted heroism, and debated

the potential good and bad points of such emphasis on heroic depiction and fantasy in art, literature, comics, and movies.

Students then engaged with a short extract from Hamlet, and, by comparing the aforementioned examples of heroic art with Kenneth Branagh's (2007) film version of Hamlet, it was possible to illustrate how Shakespeare's protagonist differs from the Renaissance heroic tradition. Students first viewed the movie graveyard scene, where Hamlet encounters Yorick's skull, and subsequently discussed their opinions regarding the meaning of Hamlet's soliloquy. While students could identify that Hamlet was mourning Yorick's death, the meaning of his speech was deepened through distributing reading handouts of the text which contained an accompanying sequence of numbered pictures corresponding to each poetic line. Whilst artists within the heroic tradition had idealized the real, Shakespeare uses Hamlet's graveyard speech to realize a powerful idea: the reductive cycle of life returns all, including even the most glamorous, beautiful, and heroically depicted, to the ignominy of base matter. In specific relation to Alexander the Great, Hamlet notes that "Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust" (Shakespeare, 1623/1966, p. 902). To emphasize this point, the Alexander mosaic picture was placed at the start of the sequence of handout images, followed by a picture of a dusty grave. To explain Hamlet's observation that "the dust is earth; of earth we make loam" (Shakespeare, 1623/1966, p. 902), the next picture in the handout sequence was a photograph of a clay ball, while the lines "and why of that loam, whereto he was converted, might they not stop a beer barrel?" were scaffolded by inserting a picture of a barrel bunghole as the last image in the sequence. Having read the speech in tandem with viewing these sequential images, the students discussed what differentiated Hamlet from classic artistic works or contemporary literary or visual characters, and finally debated the merits and demerits of society's obsession with appearance, imagery and fantasy versus holding a more realistic approach to life.

### Conclusion

Through scaffolding ideas in Shakespeare students can learn to consider and place in perspective various cultural values that sublimi-

nally shape the direction of their lives, but yet create many explicitly social and unconscious personal problems. Such literature can yield up to our students profound new insights, gifting them with new methods for developing fortitude when dealing with life's problems and stresses as they move forward from university examinations to job interviews, from graduation to the grave. If one focuses on Shakespeare's relevance to students' contemporary life experiences, rather than emphasizing his perceived historical worth, obstacles to classroom understanding can often be overcome. Shakespeare's literature needs only to be unpacked and explicated so that students can access and realize these ideas.

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## Disclaimer

This article was first published in extended form in the journal below. The length of the original article was 3,614 words (without references). The modified length is now 1,498 words (without references). The original article focused on the teaching of ideas in three Shakespeare speeches, while this version now focuses in more detail on two speeches with less literary references. There is a new introduction and a modified conclusion.

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# Critical media literacy for learner-empowering news media courses

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News media literacy is challenging but essential for English learners participating fully in the global community. Gaining news-comprehension skills is complicated by information overload; students need critical strategies to sort through sources and get a reliable grasp on current events. Critical thinking skills are crucial too, for engaging with news: from access, to discussion and participation. Building these skills is actually quite manageable, and a consistent focus on critical strategies can provide a solid base for learner-empowering news media courses. This condensed article introduces some resources and methods for helping learners develop skills and enjoy more critical, confident understanding and autonomy in engaging with and responding to news in L2 English.

ニュースメディアリテラシーは、グローバル社会の一員である英語学習者には難しいが欠かせない能力である。しかし、英語のニュースを理解するスキルは情報過多により複雑になっている。つまり、情報源を整理し最新の出来事を信頼して把握するには、学生は効率的な戦略が必要である。批判的思考(クリティカル・シンキング)も、多すぎる情報の中からニュースを理解するために役に立つ。クリティカル・シンキングとは、読んだり、聞いたりしたことをそのまま受け取ったり、否定したりせずに、自分で他の情報を得て、自分自身で決めることである。クリティカル・シンキングは、ニュースに触れる時や、ニュースについてディスカッションをする時、ニュースに関して積極的に問題に取り組む時にも大切である。このスキルを築くことはそれほど難しいことではなく、常にクリティカル・シンキングの方法に焦点を置くことで、ニュースメディア学習のための講座に

## SIG Spotlight: CT SIG

Critical thinking in language education involves the creation and assessment of ideas, opinions, and beliefs among language learners. Just as important as the teaching of what language to use and how to use it, the teaching of critical thinking reinforces how to think and how to produce such thoughts in a second language. The Critical Thinking (CT) SIG was established for the purpose of providing a clear but ever-reforming definition of critical thinking to provide a forum for the discussion of critical thinking and praxis; to provide research opportunities to language educators interested in promoting critical thinking; and to provide an area where language teachers can enjoy friendly, professional, and engaging examination of the rationale, validity, and the critical importance of its instruction in various environments.



確かな基礎を作ることができる。本論では、学習者がインターネット上の英語のニュースの理解と使い方を、自信を持って高めることができる情報源(ニュースメディアの参考ウェブサイトなど)を紹介する。

## Critical media literacy for learner-empowering news media courses

Making sense of news media English is challenging but essential for university and adult