John Wilson Swope.

*Ready-To-Use Activities for Teaching Romeo and Juliet* (1993);
*Ready-To-Use Activities for Teaching Julius Caesar* (1993);
*Ready-To-Use Activities for Teaching Hamlet* (1994);
*Ready-To-Use Activities for Teaching Macbeth* (1994);
*Ready-To-Use Activities for Teaching Much Ado About Nothing* (1997);

(Shakespeare Teacher's Activities Library)


 Reviewed by Richard J. Utz

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Swope's recent volumes will be a pleasant surprise for many an instructor at the "Sekundarstufe II" level who has been searching for a student-centered companion volume to one of the numerous editions of Shakespeare's plays. The author is a convinced and experienced practitioner of the Whole-Language Approach as proposed by Hazel Brown's and Brian Cambourne's *Read and Retell: A Strategy for the Whole Language Classroom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990). Brown/Cambourne reject educational methods which fragment language into the subdivisions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They define language as "a single, unitary process, manifesting itself through a range of different but essential parallel forms" (p. 33) and hold that it is the combination of these activities ("viewing" is included as a fifth activity) which fosters language growth in the learner. Thus, this method promises students a richer experience with literary texts, more active involvement in the plays, and even co-responsibility for the learning process.

Swope has integrated all five skills in his "Pre-Reading", "During Reading", "Post-Reading", and "Extending" Activities. These stages are designed to empower students "to assimilate difficult texts systematically, enhancing the students' comprehension, understanding, and appreciation. As a linguistic process, effective reading involves the reader: the reader anticipates what the text may reveal, reads to confirm or contradict those goals, and then thinks about what has been read" (*Teaching Hamlet*, p. 3). About 20 activities are presented for each act of the six plays, thus providing the instructor with a large variety of choices. In addition, concise introductory remarks about Shakespeare's language, the staging conventions, biographical
notes, genre definitions, and maps situating, e.g., the historical kingdom of Aragon (*Teaching Much Ado*, p. 20) add to the inclusive usability of the volume.

Swope has developed brief "Pre-Reading Activities" designed to render the effort of reading the historical text as purposeful as possible. By playing through a scenario for improvisation, asking anticipatory questions, having students speculate on future events in a "Personal Journal", or providing a video version of the play to give students an idea of the setting and overall action, a first-time readership of Shakespeare plays will become involved with the play. Vocabulary activities and matter-of-fact plot summaries finalize these preparatory sections.

"During Reading Activities" include a "Response Journal" which assists students in organizing their reactions while moving through the play. Moreover, this activity encourages them to record questions which can be addressed during general discussion periods. The "Character Diary", an alternative to the "Journal", obliges student readers to paraphrase the action of the play from the point of view of a 'minor' character. Furthermore, Swope suggests the viewing of central scenes and provides useful "Guides to Character Development", charts added to the "During Reading" materials for each act in which the character appears to focus attention on the techniques Shakespeare employs for character description.

"Post-Reading Activities" allow students to arrive at an overall understanding of the play. Short quizzes and small-group discussion questions are suggested to reveal the degree to which essential problems have been comprehended. Particularly helpful are those sections exploring the manifold examples of figurative language (see, e.g., *Teaching Macbeth*, pp. 88-92). "Critical Thinking Questions" extend the students' understanding of an individual scene or act to a reading of the whole play or previous literary experiences. "Language Exploration" concentrates on the interpretation of passages based on such features as figurative language, symbolism, and irony. Similarly, "Vocabulary Exercises" enable students to apply lexical entries from the pre-reading activities to a specific Shakespearean usage and to develop informed readings. These latter activities certainly strengthen students' sense of the alterity of Shakespeare's language, so that they will compare Theseus' mention of 'antic' fables (*Teaching Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 187) or Lucilius' notion that Cassius greets him with less familiar 'instance' than he used to (*Teaching Julius Caesar*, p. 153) with the respective contemporary semantic shadings.

Finally, Swope has included "Extending Activities" such as the improvised "Acting Out" of scenes, prepared readings of an individual character's speech, the production of a video, or a puppet theater. It is with some of these activities that German students and their instructors might experience the cultural alterity of a teaching device prepared for a North American classroom of native speakers. While Shakespearean plays will rarely be taught until the final two years of Gymnasium or Gesamtschule, U.S. students encounter plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* as early as in seventh grade; thus, some of the activities in these books are bound to be rejected as "too child-oriented". In addition, teachers will be confronted with some challenges due to differences in basic cultural literacy. Although many German students will be cognizant of "Garfield"
(Teaching Hamlet, p. 186) or "Halloween" (Teaching Hamlet, p. 23), the references to talk shows such as "Phil Donahue" (the entertainer who made talk shows famous and successful in the USA) and "Geraldo" (one of the first talk-show hosts to give the genre a bad reputation) or the personal pronoun in phrases such as "the American flag is a symbol or 'our' country" (Teaching Hamlet, p. 131) may puzzle readers from other nations. However, these few examples of cultural otherness can easily be remedied; in fact, they may even provide challenging moments for introducing different horizons of expectation to non-native speaking Shakespeare classrooms.

Most of the activities adopted to assist first-time readers in making sense of a challenging Renaissance play should even prove especially helpful to non-Anglophone students as Swope's Whole-Language-Approach facilitates a rare combination of usually isolated skills. The volumes, which even include short appendices on evaluation processes, tips for small-group discussions, answer keys, a short bibliography, and a list of available video versions of the plays, deserve high praise for their professional layout and editorial exactitude. Thus, there is no doubt that they will appeal to numerous teachers of English in secondary education. One wonders if not even American critic Gerald Graff could have escaped his now proverbial 'dislike for books at an early age' if he had encountered Shakespearean (and other literary) texts via Swope's reader-friendly publications.

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