

Handout

Adapting Shakespeare

Students will create a short film (5 minutes max) in which they adapt a well-known fairy tale for a contemporary audience. This activity is designed to help students get beyond the "What's the story about?" level and on to the "Why did the characters do what they did?" level.

1. Break students into groups of three. I usually let kids pick their own groups because they tend to feel more comfortable performing on camera that way, and they can coordinate outside-of-school meetings better. But, any more than four in a group means less individual involvement, so keep groups small.
2. Because this discussion tends to have a high rate of student participation, they are usually jazzed, and have lots of ideas popping into their heads. The groups, therefore, should be allowed ten or fifteen minutes right away to decide on a fairy tale and brainstorm film ideas. Also, the final due date should be in not much more than a week, so the ideas don't get stale.
3. Encourage students to keep it simple, and keep it focused on character motivation. Some groups will get so into a lavish production that they lose sight of the point. One of the most successful films my students have done simply had a documentary-style interview with one of the wicked step-sisters, who explained how Cinderella's long history of passive-aggressive behavior built up understandable resentment. Another group did a "MTV Cribs" episode in which they toured one of the three little pigs' houses, and discussed the wolf as an obsessive groupie.
4. All work should be done outside of class. The kids love this project, and are usually self-motivated, and I always feel the pressing need to get back to *As You Like It* and make sure the students see how all this connects to Shakespeare's story and characters.
5. Students can get as deeply into this project as they want (or have the resources for). While some get to the end of their technological comfort zone just by aiming a camera, others have their own digital camera, their own laptop with editing software, and this is what they do at home for fun. The important thing to emphasize is that their video, like their plot, is just a vehicle.
6. When we have Fairy Film Day a week later, we watch and discuss the films as a class. I always make sure to guide the discussion back to character development and motivation, and I've told them all along that that is what their projects will be graded on as well.
7. Later in the course, when we look at and compare film versions of Shakespeare plays, students find they can identify with the choices the director made, and the process of making those choices.