



A scene from Act I of the premiere production, with Olga Knipper as Yelena (with umbrella).
http://www.amrep.org/articles/1_1/first.html

Course: Creative Writing/ English

Unit: Dramatic Scriptwriting

Teacher: Ken Willard

Title: ‘Everyone has an Uncle Vanya’ Understanding Character through Mimic Writing.

Materials needed: Internet and library access, chart paper, markers, rulers, unlined paper, copies of David Mamet’s adaptation of Anton Chekhov’s ‘Uncle Vanya,’ enough for each student to have a copy.

Length: 10 Block periods (approximately two weeks)

Standards/Benchmarks Addressed:

English

Standard 1 Reading

- 12.1.1.1 Read whole pieces of narration, exposition, persuasion, and technical writing, proficiently and independently.
- 12.1.1.5.1 Analyze the text for such structures as cause and effect.
- 12.1.1.5.5 Analyze the text for such structures as problem and solution.

Standard 2 Writing

- 12.3.1 Apply knowledge of literary elements by using them in individual creative writing.
- 12.3.2 Evaluate their own and others’ writing, using the Six-Trait Model.

Humanities

Standard 2 Literature

- 12.2.1 Comprehend and analyze narrative and expository literature from various world cultures.
- 12.2.2 Demonstrate knowledge of literary elements and concepts to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the literature of various cultures.
- 12.2.3 Recognize the characteristics of a wide variety of literary genre.

Objective: Using a graphic organizer representing the relationships within their own families, students will draw up an analogous graphic organizer representing the characters within Anton Chekhov's play, 'Uncle Vanya' and by comparing the two, students will mimic write one scene from 'Uncle Vanya' as represented by their own family experience.

Assessment Criteria: Students will create two graphic organizers, one representing the relationships within their own family and the other representing the relationships within 'Uncle Vanya.' They will mimic-write a scene from 'Uncle Vanya' in the style of Anton Chekhov, as represented by characters within their own immediate culture. Finally they will write a short evaluation paper reflecting on how their personal insights helped them to understand the play and the milieu of its historical setting.

Strategic Approach: The methodology employed will center on scaffolding the students' exploration in the manner of a *cognitive apprenticeship*, whereby the author of the text (Anton Chekhov), through his art, will serve as a *detached* mentor. The students will assume that the classic text is a mutable and dynamic entity from which they can learn directly from it through imitation and manipulation. The teacher should encourage the students examine, interrogate and change the text as they desire and from these adaptations directly observe how its dynamics change.

Daily Learning Activities

Day One: Accessing Prior Knowledge

1.) Students will access prior knowledge by drawing a diagram of their extended family representing the following:

- Name and relationship of individual family members (i.e. Uncle Joe-Mother's side)
- A simple character description or set of adjectives expressing their most distinctive traits.
- Using lines, arrows, plus or minus signs, students will connect their relatives in relation to how they interact with other relatives (i.e. Joe gets along with Dad but not with Grandma)
- Teacher will model an organizer of their own

Closing- Students will present their diagrams and explain their particular family dynamic.

Day two: Building Schema

- 1.) Brainstorm what life might have been like for people living in the 19th century. Have student volunteers write down their fellow students' responses on chart paper or chalkboard. Emphasize elements of physical labor and isolation that someone of that era might experience.

- 2.) Divide up into groups and have students choose from the ideas generated four or five salient features of life in the 19th century Russia that they think best represents the average person's experience of that time. They will select the most prominent of these features that will serve as anchor points to their research. These anchor points will constitute the milieu in which the characters live and will and will effect their attitudes and situations. (This is a note on groups. Depending on how many students are in the class, the groups should number no more than five per group.)
- 3.) Utilizing the library and the Internet, have students research life in Russia during the 19th century. They are to find one instance for each of their previously established anchor points. (Suggested search words- Russia, pre-revolution, daily life, experience)

Closing- Students will write a short summary about the information they have discovered and create a short list of descriptive words or phrases that the feel best characterizes life in this time period.

Day three: Analysis and Synthesis of information

- 1.) In groups, students will create a small poster or graphic organizer indicating the correlation between the anchor points they selected on day two and the content of the information they have collected. They will express this in a graphic manner of their choosing, utilizing parallel tables, arrows, groups of symbols or linking lines indicating related exemplars.
- 2.) Discuss similarities and differences between group results. Students will write down any new information that was discovered by another group that they did not discover in theirs.

Closing- Students will hang up their posters around the classroom and conduct a "gallery walk," viewing each poster/graphic organizer and providing comments on post-its.

Day four: Building Schema

- 1.) Access prior knowledge: Have students revisit their family graphic organizer and apply the following questions to their family members as represented on their graphic organizer.
 - What does he/she want (desire)?
 - What does he/she do as a result of that want?
 - What happens as a result of that action?
- 2.) Have students share-out their examples, emphasizing the relationship between actions and outcomes.

- 3.) Introducing new information: Using a brief scene from David Mamet's adaptation of Anton Chekhov's 'Uncle Vanya,' have student volunteers act out the play as a "readers theatre." This involves reading the play in a dramatic manner, while remaining seated.
- 4.) Using an overhead projector, chart paper or chalkboard, diagram out for each character:
 - What does he/she want (desire)?
 - What does he/she do as a result of that want?
 - What happens as a result of the action?

Closing- Discuss with students how this scene corresponds with experiences they have

observed of how human beings act and based on their research, if this scene is an adequate example of how they imagine people in 19th century Russia would act.

Day Five: Building Schema

- 1.) Begin a dramatic reading of 'Uncle Vanya,' stopping at every scene break (the natural lull in the forward progress of the play, where the focus moves to another subject, arrival or departure of a major character or change of location as scripted by the playwright), for students to chart the desires, actions and outcomes exemplified by each character.

Day Six: Continue dramatic reading

Day Seven: Continue dramatic reading

Day Eight: Evaluation of Instruction

- 1.) Conduct an open discussion to gather student reaction to the play. Solicit responses around the following topics:
 - What were the desires of the major characters?
 - What actions did these desires precipitate?
 - What were the outcomes and what were the ramifications for the characters at the end of the play, both individually and collectively?
- 2.) Drawing from the answers students derive from these questions, have student summarize what they believe the message (theme) the author was trying to convey with the play. Students will support their summaries by citing at least three instances from the play. They must provide quotes to support their citations.

- 3.) Generate a rating system ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 being “Strongly Agree” and 1 being “Do not Agree.”
- 4.) Summaries will be distributed randomly. Students will rate their peers’ assessments as well as providing a brief note explaining their reasons for making that judgment. It is important that students give reasons for their assessments as it provides an opportunity for self-evaluation by returning their thinking to the text and the possibilities discovered by reexamining it.

Closing- Have students write a single, compound sentence that sums up, in their words, the theme of the play ‘Uncle Vanya.’

Day Nine: Guided and Independent Practice

- 1.) The teacher will use an overhead projector to model the process of writing a dramatic scene. Emphasize the standard format of a written script that should include parentheses around scene directions and character names followed by their speeches (lines). Include proper spacing separating character and scene directions. Examine various play scripts for examples of proper formatting.
- 2.) Students will select a scene from the play, study the dynamics of the characters’ relations (from notes taken during “Dramatic Reading”) and using members of their own family, write a scene that is similar to the one they have selected from ‘Uncle Vanya.’

Closing- Students will describe the content of their scenes and explain how theirs’ depart from those that Chekhov created.

Day Ten: Unit Conclusion-Independent Practice

- 1.) Students will return to their previously established groups from day two. They will read each member’s script aloud in a “dramatic reading” manner. All scripts will be read aloud.
- 2.) Groups will select the one script they would like to perform before the class either as a “dramatic reading” or offer them the option of performing it script in hand with actual acting. Extra credit will not be offered for an acted scene. This is a positive exercise that keeps students engaged and is conducive to team building and development of a group identity.
- 3.) Perform scripts.

Closing- To conclude this unit, students collect their work, dividing it into researched/background information, dramatic script and summation. They will organize their work as a comprehensive portfolio. Since this is their own work students will be tasked to develop their own concept for this portfolio. The '6 Trait' writing model will be used to assess the three major components.

The final section, "summation" will take the form of a letter to Anton Chekhov, with the student assuming the role of his apprentice. They will use a familiar tone and write as if they know him personally. They are to describe their feelings toward his play and explain how his work has influenced theirs. Finally they will ask of him any questions they might have about either his work or for any advice he could give them as writers. Students will type up the summation of their work and save it as a reference resource for subsequent literature classes.