

## Teacher Work Sample

Name:	Nathaniel Bellin
Dates Performed:	9/22/11 - 10/07/11
School:	Seward High School
Co-Operating Teacher:	Mr. Clark Kolterman

## **Context of Teaching**

The classroom taught was Seward High School's only section of English 12. The class was composed of twenty-two senior and fifth-year students, all of whom were in the lower quartile of the class by GPA. The unit taught was the entirety of the play Hamlet.

My co-op advised me against using this unit for my teacher work sample, as the students lacked both intrinsic motivation to perform in the classroom and the ability to easily grasp the language and difficult themes presented in a Shakespeare play. In addition, few of the students displayed any desire or interest in reading whatsoever, and several had a negative pre-concieved disposition to the work, seeing Hamlet as both too boring and too difficult for them to get through.

Eight of the twenty-two students had IEPs, two of which required that they not be called on for reading in front of the class. The class as a whole displayed a lack of respect for the teacher and the lessons being taught, as well as a tendency towards noise, disruptiveness, and a lack of focus to assigned tasks.

The Unit was book-ended by units on other books. Because the previous lesson ran late, and the unit must be completed with enough time for Mr. Kolterman to complete the final lesson, the entirety of Hamlet was to be taught in ten school days. In addition, Mr. Kolterman insisted that the book be read in its entirety in-class, as theft and damage of books, as well as a classroom unused to assigned homework would make the assignment of out-of-class reading impossible.

## **Pre-Assessment Instrument**

The initial pre-assessment was a selection from the beginning of Hamlet - the first ten lines – in its original wording. The goal of this assessment was to target the percentage of words and phrases with which the students were unfamiliar and then, at the final test, re-assess a similar passage to determine the amount of improved proficiency the students displayed in understanding the Shakespearean language.

This proved to be impossible. The pre-assessment showed limited to no understanding of the text's language, including the most basic of phrases. In addition, informal verbal assessment indicated

that no student had previously read the play, and few knew any of the basic plot elements.

The pre-assessment was then revised, as well as the planning of the unit. The class was switched from reading the original script to a modernized version of the play. In addition, new assessments would be given immediately following instruction, at the completion of each act, one through four. These would then be compared to similar questions on the end of unit test. Each assessment quiz took the form of five questions in the form of true/false, multiple choice, or short answer questions. The results of these quizzes can be found on Chart 1, below.

### **Lesson Plans**

Copies of the lesson plans are included at the end of this packet.

### **Post-Assessment Instrument**

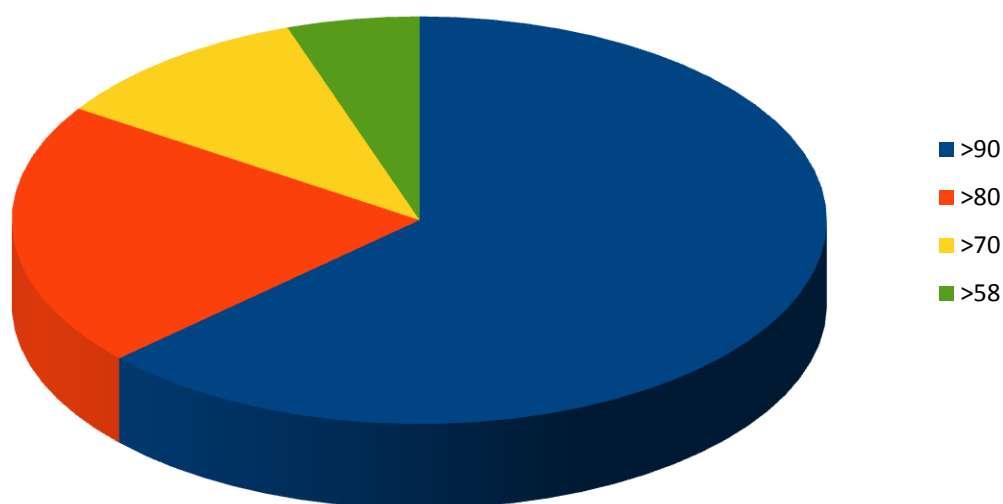
The post-assessment was accomplished via an end-of-unit test on the entirety of Hamlet. Given the condensed nature of the unit, the test focused on primarily plot-based elements of the play, as well as recognition of a few key phrases, quotations, and icons from the play itself.

The test consisted of fifty-two problems arranged in six different methods of answer. The test included true/false, multiple-choice, matching, identification, short answer, as well as essay questions to allow students a multitude of different ways to succeed at demonstrating their knowledge. As was expected in the classroom environment, they were allowed to utilize a note card for the test. Unlike previous tests in the classroom, the test was not explained question by question before being given.

The test in its entirety can be found attached at the end of this packet.

The post assessment scored surprisingly well, both for the students, my co-operating teacher, and myself. The test was markedly more difficult than Mr. Kolterman's typical test, and had a fewer number of questions; each question was therefore worth more, and every incorrect answer impacted the student's grades more profoundly.

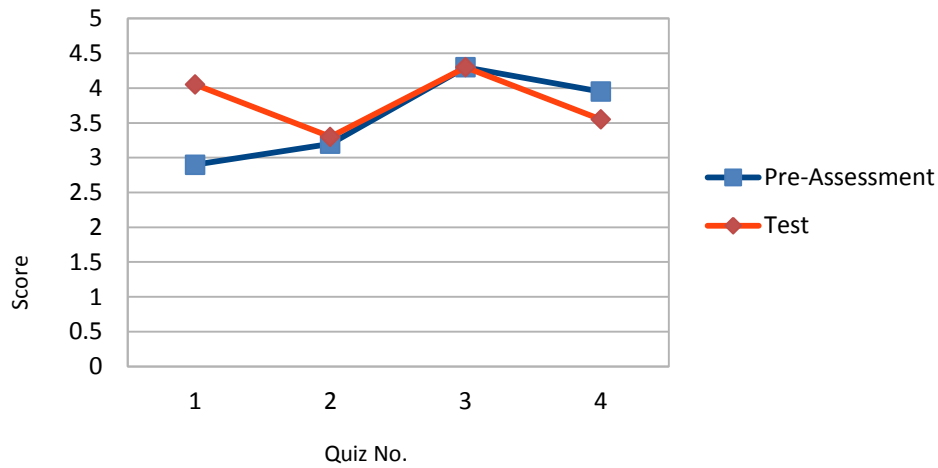
Test Scores



The averages score for the class on the post-assessment was an 87.86 percent. This is 6.18 percentage points better than the class' average score of 81.68% for the entire quarter, while two percentage points lower than the class average on their previous test (a drop easily explained by the more modern text, easier test type, and more thorough and guided explanation of the test prior to its distribution).

The median of the scores was, however, a 91.5%, meaning that half of the class scored better than both the previous test average as well as a full ten percent better than their then-current class average. In addition, over three-quarters of the class score higher than an 80%, and with the one exception of an anomalous 58%, every student passed this test.

Chart 1



The blue line represents the class average per quiz scored. For the first quiz, the average score was 2.9, with the highest score achieved being a 4 and the lowest a 1.

The second quiz averaged a 3.2, with the highest score achieved a 5 and the lowest a 1.

The third quiz averaged a 4.3, with the highest score achieved a 5 and the lowest a 1.

The fourth quiz averaged a 3.95, with the highest score achieved a 4 and the lowest a 3.

The assessments in this manner show a progressive increase in score. This is either a measure of my own adaptation to their method of learning, their adaptation to my method of teaching, or, more likely, a combination of both factors. Regardless, the numbers indicate a 1.05 point increase in scores across the unit, or a 21 percent increase in scoring.

The red line represents the scoring on the same or similar questions on the post-assessment. Strangely, retention and learning seemed to be greater the farther back the assessment was made, with the only drop being on the final assessment, done two days before the post-assessment test. I have no explanation for this, but suspect it may be the fact that the previous questions were able to be built-upon more often and over a longer period of time than the more recent questions.

When asked, the students felt that they had learned Hamlet. Informal assessment during the days following the test confirmed that their recognition of passages from the book, identification of the characters, and recognition of similarities between the book and their own lives remained.

## **Experience Reflection**

Overall, the unit went surprisingly well. The main difficulties in teaching the unit had to deal with classroom management (a difficulty in this class even with my co-op). Once those were settled, or during the brief periods where this was not an issue, teaching was relatively easy.

What I learned most profoundly from this lesson was about myself. I have a very strong, deep vocabulary, and that students could not grasp the Shakespearean language came as somewhat of a surprise to me. It was difficult having to admit that the switch to the modernized version was required, but it did help tremendously in the progression through the book.

I also learned how much confidence in the students breeds confidence in themselves. Throughout the unit I displayed no doubts that these students could make it through and not only persevere, but succeed. That they exceeded both my co-op's and their own expectations surprised me, but it should not have. In addition, due to an unfortunate encounter between the school's guidance counselor and the classroom, I also discovered just how crushing a lack of confidence can be, especially one publicly displayed and announced. Though it was difficult to listen to at the time, I would not change that encounter; it happened the day before the test, and I sincerely believe the students' success on the test was due in no small part to a desire to see that counselor proven wrong.

That said, I would not seek such an encounter out.

I would change a number of things when next I teach this unit. I was constrained by the needs of the students to do all work in-class, limiting my teaching time both by having to read the entire text in class and devote large sections of the class time to work in the computer lab on ongoing assignments. In a classroom of my own, homework policies will be established that make out-of-class homework, especially reading, a possibility, freeing up more time for instruction and exploration while in the classroom.

I would add more exploratory elements to the lessons. I missed opportunities to tie characters and plot elements into a modern or even historical context. Parallels could be drawn in to American History, other, modern works of literature, and even current events. This would be coordinated with the

History teacher, ideally, and work with the other class to strengthen learning in both subjects.

I would add more hands-on, movement based activities for the kinesthetic learners in the classroom. Given the nature of the classroom, this proved impossible logistically (the attempt in the first lesson was an unmitigated disaster), but I hope to add elements of performance or blocking into the play the next time I teach it.

Realizing that these additions take time, I would probably increase the time given for this book from ten days into fifteen, allowing an additional week to explore the text. However, not knowing how much time could be saved by giving back to teaching the time spent reading the book and doing outside assignments, this may work as a ten-day lesson with the modifications.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

**pg. 1-10: Lesson Plans**

