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The Bard Blitz: the Complete Guide

About the Bard Blitz

The Bard Blitz is a learning exercise designed for English teachers to use in the classroom. There is nothing more important to the study of English than teaching students how to read texts closely and how to create an original argument in response to what they read. These two skills are fundamental to secondary and tertiary English Studies and of immense value to all young adults as they leave school for university or the workforce.

The Bard Blitz aims to help students develop confidence, knowledge and skill in the detailed, close reading of Shakespearean or other literary and poetic texts. It is useful for historical, especially poetic, texts in which unfamiliar and complicated vocabulary, syntax and context present challenges to students.

This exercise foregrounds close reading as an active, detailed and goal-oriented process. Students explore the meaning of the text with their peers and teacher while simultaneously developing their own original thesis or argument. The argument could ultimately be expressed in any range of forms (for example, a speech, a short paragraph, an essay, or a creative work). The Bard Blitz does not determine the form of the final product, but offers a guide to teaching the reading of a text and the development of a personal argument in response to that text.

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Run your own Bard Blitz

If you are interested in running a Bard Blitz at your school, university or elsewhere, you'll find everything you need here. This includes:

- Aims
- Theory
- Preparation
- Five *Hamlet* extracts to work with
- A discussion ideas Table for teachers based on the *Hamlet* extracts
- Student Worksheets

Feel free to modify the Blitz to suit your context and varied student groups.

We have selected five extracts from *Hamlet* and provided accompanying material on these. However, you may prefer to select your own extracts from the play or whichever text you are teaching. This exercise is easily adaptable to other texts – try it with the poetry of Chaucer, Coleridge, Keats or Wordsworth.

If you do run a Bard Blitz, we'd be delighted to receive feedback on the activity and how it was used or modified.

More information:

If you would like more information on the Bard Blitz, you can read more about it in Liam Semler's article, 'The Shakespeare Reloaded Bard Blitz', and his book, *Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe* (pp. 66-78).

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Aims

What is the value of using the Bard Blitz in class? The Bard Blitz is important and beneficial because it:

- Shows students through practical experience that texts by literary artists deserve and repay unhurried, detailed attention by any reader;
- Gives students authority as readers and interpreters of texts as they explore the words and ideas and develop an original thesis about what they read;
- Trains students in connecting close reading with thesis building or evidence gathering;
- Equips students to conduct, open-ended, exploratory and reflective learning, and affirms the value of this kind of learning;
- Rejects the spoon-feeding of students with an instant explanation of a text and with an approved or predetermined interpretation.

The Bard Blitz is primarily about the process of learning rather than the development of an assessable 'product'. Students and teachers should enjoy collaborative and individual learning that is explorative and experiential. Success is judged not on the production of a final work; instead, success depends on encouraging and affirming the value of each student's thoughtful engagement in each stage. The students' experience of the Bard Blitz should equip them with a simple and repeatable method for getting to know a text, clarifying its meaning precisely, developing ideas in response to it, and arranging one's concepts into a line of argument backed up by textual evidence. However, one never knows exactly what students learn from the tasks educators set them. It may be that one student learns only to have confidence in her interpretive authority, while another learns only how to examine a text closely and translate it into meaningful sentences, and a third learns only that he need not be anxious in initially approaching a strange text because playing with weird words is fun. These are fine outcomes.

Students should come away from the Bard Blitz with a sense that:

- literary art is beautiful, meaningful and complex;
- they are able to explore, comprehend and interpret literary art;
- their interpretation is personal, evidence-based and valuable.

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Theory

The Bard Blitz is made up of four progressive stages that move from close reading to the development of an original argument. These stages follow David A. Kolb’s experiential learning cycle.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Kolb	concrete experience	reflective observation	abstract conceptualization	active experimentation
Bard Blitz	experiencing the text (Students work in small groups to familiarise themselves with the extract)	comprehending the text (Students work in pairs to consolidate their understanding of the precise meaning of the extract by translating it)	developing a concept hoard (Students brainstorm as a small group to come up with concepts that they feel are exemplified in the extract)	constructing an argument (Students work individually with their concept hoard to build an evidence-based argument about the extract and text)

As the student is guided through the Bard Blitz she or he will be engaging in intellectual activity that exemplifies all levels of John B. Biggs and Kevin F. Collis’ SOLO (‘Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome’) taxonomy. The SOLO taxonomy describes levels of learner understanding detectable in learning task responses ranging upwards through these categories:

- prestructural (student ‘misses the point’);
- unistructural (does simple procedures);
- multistructural (describes, lists and combines);
- relational (analyzes, relates and applies);

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- extended abstract (theorizes, hypothesizes and reflects).

(For more on this taxonomy see Biggs and Tang's *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*.)

While activities located within the first two stages of the Bard Blitz call for unistructural and multistructural thinking (determining word meanings, identifying linguistic features, describing what is being said), activities located in the latter two stages provoke relational and extended abstract thinking (analysing and explaining features of the text, comparing and contrasting, relating to larger contexts, deriving general ideas and hypotheses, building abstract and complex theories). Each stage in the SOLO taxonomy benefits from the preceding stages and the same is true of the Bard Blitz.

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Preparation

The Bard Blitz will work best if students have already read or seen the play and spent some time in class on it. You will need to decide where the Bard Blitz might fit most valuably within the time period assigned to studying the play. This placement will determine how much introductory explanation the teacher might have to do.

For the Bard Blitz to work properly each stage must be given adequate time and not skimmed over (especially Stages 1-2). Since each stage builds on the previous, it's important to ensure adequate time for each stage. One hour is not really enough to cover the four stages properly; however, if one hour is all you've got, then Stages 1-3 can be proceeded through workably enough and Stage 4 dealt with as homework or, better, in a later class. Another scenario would be two one-hour lessons, the first covering Stages 1-2 and the second Stages 3-4. Such intensive learning is a luxury in today's crowded curricula, but is worth it pedagogically because it develops core, reusable skills.

Before holding the Bard Blitz, the teacher should either select from the *Hamlet* passages offered here or select short extracts of their choosing. We recommend extracts of around fifteen lines that are poetically rich but not too obscure. Extracts should be chosen so that students can:

- respond relatively immediately to them;
- decode/translate them accurately with some effort;
- find diverse ways into relational and extended abstract thought about them and the play.

Since an accurate understanding of vocabulary and meaning is essential for Stages 1-2 there is much to be gained by teachers going through their chosen extract/s word by word with the glosses and explanatory notes of a good critical edition (Arden, New Cambridge, Oxford). In developing the Bard Blitz, we did just this, and discovered some long-held misunderstandings of our own. The Bard Blitz benefits the teacher as much as the student if its challenges are taken seriously and in depth at each stage.

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***Hamlet* Extracts**

We have selected five short extracts from *Hamlet* which are suitable for the Bard Blitz exercise. As mentioned, teachers may choose to use one or more of these extracts, or they may prefer to select their own passage from *Hamlet* (or another text altogether).

1. Hamlet: 'O that this too too solid flesh...Must I remember?'

(1.2.129-143; the wider text for context purposes includes 1.2.76-159).

2. Hamlet: 'I will tell you why...by your smiling you seem to say so'

(2.2.278-292; the wider text for context purposes includes 2.2.253-303).

3. Polonius: 'It shall do well...Your wisdom best shall think.'

(3.1.170-181; the wider text for context purposes includes 3.1.144-182)

4. Claudius: 'Oh my offence is rank...To wash it white as snow' and 'Oh wretched state!...All may be well.'

(3.3.36-46, 67-72; the wider text for context purposes includes 3.3.27-98).

5. Gertrude: 'There is a willow grows askant...To muddy death.'

(4.7.166-183; the wider text for context purposes includes 4.7.138-194).

(Line references and quotations are from the revised New Cambridge edition.)

For suggestions on how to explore these extracts during the Bard Blitz, please refer to the Discussion Table below. The table is designed to help teachers think about characterisation, language, stagecraft and concepts in these parts of the play. Even if you don't use these extracts, the table is a helpful guide for how to approach this exercise.

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The table below is provided to help you prepare to run the Bard Blitz. It is meant as an aid to provoke thinking about the selected *Hamlet* extracts. The ideas here should not be considered either exhaustive or definitive; this would go against the creative principle of the Bard Blitz. Ideally, you and your students should generate a wide range of original questions, observations and ideas, many of which are not in the table and could lie beyond the four categories implied in the column headings.

Extract	Discussion Ideas			
	Characterisation	Language	Stagecraft	Concepts
1. 1.2.129-143	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Hamlet feeling here? • What triggers this outburst? • Is he overreacting? • What does he want? • What does this speech contribute to our view of Hamlet's character? • How would the play change without Hamlet's soliloquies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are emotion and state of mind expressed? (repetition, exclamation, oaths, apostrophes, rhetorical self-questioning, hyperbole) • Natural images of excessive growth, decay, illness, corruption; • Myths ('Hyperion to a satyr'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you stage this? • Is this a predominantly active rhetorical display or introspectively passive, or both? • Is Hamlet talking to the audience or to himself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral illness and corruption; • Roleplaying, doing one's duty, and mythologising; • Grief and memory; • The burden of revenge and Shakespeare's problematising of the (Senecan) revenge story model; • Simple story with profound implications; • The function and reliability of soliloquy.

<p>2. 2.2.278-292</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Hamlet's view of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? • What is revealed about Hamlet's character here? • What is Hamlet's main point in this passage? • To what degree is this passage a genuine expression of Hamlet's thoughts? • Does Hamlet really 'know not'? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confessional tone and truth telling; • Contrasts, antitheses; • Images and comparisons; • How does the language talk about the human and the cosmic? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How emotionally intense or intellectually distanced is Hamlet in speaking these lines? • What are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern doing while Hamlet speaks? • How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern react to key remarks by Hamlet ('your secrecy,' 'I know not,' 'my disposition,' 'what is this quintessence of dust?,' 'Man delights not me—nor woman neither'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective perception and external reality; • Knowledge and lack of knowledge about truth and human purpose; • Spying and plotting to find the truth; • Hamlet's sense of isolation and aloneness; • Disruption of the revenge genre.
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<p>3. 3.1.170-181</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Polonius doing here and how important is it to the play? • How does Polonius treat Ophelia, the King, the Queen, and Hamlet? • What does he think is wrong with Hamlet? • What words would you use to sum up Polonius' key character traits? • How would he describe himself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hendiadys ('origin and commencement') • Voice of respectful counsel using minimal imagery; • Variation of voice towards Ophelia, Claudius, and Hamlet; • Words relating to truth v appearance: 'believe,' 'show,' 'be round,' 'in the ear,' 'find him'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is Ophelia and how do Polonius and the King encounter her? • How does Ophelia behave while Polonius addresses her? • How does Ophelia behave while Polonius and the King confer? • How much does she hear of the conversation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrecy, spying, plotting and counterplotting; • Seeking and knowing the truth about things; • Politics, counsel and politicking; • Control over knowledge, people, situations; • What is grief in the play? How is it expressed by different characters? • How do grief, love and madness relate to one another in the play?
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<p>4. 3.3.36-46, 67-72</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Claudius' problem? • In what ways is he morally good and in what ways is he morally bad? • How does this passage affect or change the audience's understanding of and emotive response to Claudius? • Is he praying or not praying: does he actually commence praying after his speech? • How is he like Hamlet? • Considering this passage and others in the play, what is Shakespeare's overall portrait of Claudius? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What natural metaphors does he use and what effect do they have? (rank smell, rain, birdlime, heart, new-born babe) • What biblical allusions, parallels, and imagery does he use and what are their effects? (Cain and Abel, 'curse,' 'mercy,' 'white as snow,' 'O wretched state' alludes to Paul in Romans 7). • Language of guilt and entrapment but also of rationalisation and self-justification. • Logical processing. • Insoluble questions. • Emotive apostrophes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Claudius positioned throughout? • How active, submissive, emotive or rationally distanced is his body language? • At what point does Hamlet enter and how much has he heard or seen? • Does Claudius see Hamlet? • How would you stage the similarities and the differences between Claudius and Hamlet in this scene? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claudius and Hamlet as similar and yet different; • Fate versus free will; • The role and purpose of the king in Renaissance society; • Inactivity and disempowerment (of Claudius and Hamlet); • Misunderstanding and misrecognition (by Claudius and Hamlet); • Human weakness and sin and the moral imperative.
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<p>5. 4.7.166-183</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what state of mind does Gertrude deliver her account? • How is her voice her own and yet also chorus-like? • What representation do we get of Ophelia? (natural, maidenly, insane, victim); • What is the effect of this description on our view of Ophelia and Hamlet? • How important is this moment to Laertes and his later actions? • Compare this account with the conversation between Laertes and the Priest in 5.1.219-34 ('Her death was doubtful')? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the naturalistic imagery and its function; • Note the affective representation of nature; • Consider the tone, pace and lyricism of the passage. • How do the words convey moral judgments? • What is the special effect of this as 'reportage' of an off stage event? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would Gertrude deliver this speech in terms of movement, posture, gesture and voice? • How would Laertes and also Claudius respond during and after the speech? • What effect would you seek to have on the audience in staging this scene? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterisation and disempowerment of Ophelia, and female characters, and all the characters; • The playwright's blend of characters' points of view and more omniscient knowledge; • The relationship of the natural imagery here and the play's imagery of natural corruption, illness and decay; • The scope and detail of Hamlet's guiltiness in the play; • The overall tragic (or emotive or affective) impact of the play on the audience; • The moral and intellectual issue and value of horrible things being depicted beautifully or artistically.
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Four-Stage Learning Task

Introduction

The teacher introduces the Bard Blitz by outlining the aims of the exercise, explaining its four stages and emphasising the importance of close reading and original argument building to literary studies. Students should be told the one-line aim of each stage of the Bard Blitz (see below and on the Student Worksheet) to help them orient themselves to the task.

The teacher divides the class into groups of about six students. Students remain in groups throughout the exercise, and within those groups will work both in pairs and individually. Each student will need a copy of the Student Worksheet and the relevant *Hamlet* extract.

Each group works on a single extract (in a class of four groups, two groups might deal with one extract and the other two with another so that the teacher doesn't have too many extracts to juggle).

At each stage of the Bard Blitz students have the guidance and involvement of the teacher who circulates between the small groups.

Stage 1: Concrete experience.

Aim: Personal and collective *experience* of extract.

Activity: Introduce the extract very briefly so the students know enough of its basic context to be able to launch into experiencing it (for example, regarding Extract 5, 'This is Queen Gertrude announcing and describing the death of Ophelia'). Get the group reading the passage aloud a number of times, varying the way it is read by them and by you (encourage variation in voice, gesture, intensity, volume and pace; play with the sounds of words, images stretching over a few lines, and sets of evocative words). Make sure the students can verbalize the basic meaning of the extract. Probe them about how they would feel if they were the character speaking thus or another character listening. Find out what bits of the extract they particularly like, dislike or relate to and why (let them feel free to express reasons that might be idiosyncratic, trivial, obvious or serious). Get them to sort out difficult words, clauses, sentences, metaphors and similes via group discussion (including teacher guidance). The objective is to establish a basic familiarity and connection with the text so as to remove its scariness and solve

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tricky bits. It should be a fun, diverse, learning experience around and within the text that will equip students to try a translation in Stage 2.

Using the Table: The 'Language' and 'Stagecraft' columns of the Table will be useful here. To a lesser degree, some of the questions raised in the 'Characterisation' column may help.

Extension:

(1) divide the extract up into smaller sections (that are coherent in terms of sense, sound or image) with different students speaking different sections and consider how this illuminates the text further;

(2) stand up and act out the extract to concretise some staging and characterisation possibilities;

(3) explore the historical meanings of words or the rhetorical figures used via the notes in an edition or an historical dictionary like the *Oxford English Dictionary*;

(4) get students discussing their sense of the value (or not!) of studying Shakespearean language.

Stage 2: Reflective observation.

Aim: Personal *comprehension* of the extract via translation.

Activity: This stage achieves its aim by a text translation exercise and group reflection on it. For Stage 2 to work well, Stage 1 needs to have been experienced solidly. Students organize themselves into pairs, and then write out the extract in their own words as accurately as possible. Teachers should guide the students where required as they do this. The point is to get them focusing as intensely as possible on deriving the exact meaning of each line, phrase and word of the passage. Attention to detail and clarity of thought and expression are crucial here. After giving them time to do this, each pair can read out their translations and comment on them within their group. In the pilot run of the Bard Blitz we discovered that student translations are often far more general and semantically casual than the original text. There's lots of room here for the teacher to guide them to greater precision. Discuss what is lost (eg. poetic beauty) and gained (eg. clarity of meaning) in such an exercise and affirm how important this close reading is for the development of any argument about a text because the writer chose specific words for specific reasons. Successful essays rely on the accuracy and depth of such close reading.

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Using examples that arise in the groups, note that varied interpretations or translations are possible because of the richness of language and contradictory readings may be equally credible. Ask students to explain why this translation exercise is important.

Using the Table: The translation exercise should be completed without use of the Table. The *Extension* exercises could benefit from the 'Characterisation' and 'Stagecraft' columns. The 'Language' column may help when reflecting on the loss of poetic language in the translations.

Extension:

(1) see if students can individually produce two differing translations of the one part of the extract and discuss how large interpretive ramifications follow from differences in word translation choices;

(2) discuss the way the extract and its poetic language contribute to the characterisation of its speaker and other relevant characters (bear in mind the style of other speeches by the speaker; pick one such speech for comparison);

(3) explore the significance of the extract in its local context of the wider passage and explore its staging;

(4) see if students can come up with analogous modern situations and speech genres to match the Shakespearean ones (eg. Claudius and modern moral dilemmas; Gertrude and daydreaming or lamenting the dead in elegy; Hamlet and depression or processing family problems).

Stage 3. Abstract conceptualisation.

Aim: Development of *abstract concepts and theories* from the extract.

Activity: Students brainstorm as a group to draw out as many concepts as they can from the extract. Each student compiles his or her own list of concepts from this brainstorming session. There will be many shared concepts, but also a range of differences around the group. The students should be encouraged to think big and to consider how the extract might suggest concepts that the play as a whole explores. Their concepts could relate to characterisation, language use, staging, cultural context or any other areas of interest that the extract foregrounds. They should feel comfortable to list concepts that seem clichéd or obvious, trivial,

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idiosyncratic or weird. Importantly, they should be able to say how the concept arises from or appears in the extract.

The teacher can ask individual students to explain the connection they see between selected concepts and the extract to help them make more robust, evidential links. For example, in the pilot run of the Bard Blitz one student wrote 'The Renaissance' as a concept relating to Extract 2 (Hamlet: 'I will tell you why...by your smiling you seem to say so'; 2.2.278-292): this was good, but got a lot better when the teacher guided the student in unpacking the concept and demonstrating how it emerged from the extract. The result was it turned into a useful cluster of concepts to do with human aspiration and possibility that linked directly to the extract: this was much better than the vague idea of 'The Renaissance'. The pilot run revealed that students are likely to write down concepts that they have been told are relevant to the play without considering what a concept might mean or how it might be evidenced in the extract. They must be urged to avoid this relatively lazy and top-down approach which simply parrots what the student thinks the teacher wants to hear. Instead, they should work upwards from the words and ideas they see in the extract and in their translation of it to produce more abstract or general concepts. Students should be kept alert to where this task is headed: they are gathering a page of miscellaneous concepts that arise from or are evidenced in the extract and which ideally connect to the play as a whole. This concept hoard will become the seedbed of their original argument to be developed in Stage 4.

Using the Table: The 'Concepts' column is most relevant here, but the other columns may also be useful.

Extension:

- (1) once students have accrued their concept hoard, the teacher could demonstrate how they could do some concept mapping to help them give some order to their hoard by visual clustering of related ideas, balancing of opposing ideas, and dismantling of general concepts into constituent concepts;
- (2) the teacher could offer students evocative pieces of historical context to consider;
- (3) the teacher could present accessible and thought-provoking examples of theses developed by scholars in published work on *Hamlet* or information about specific interpretive methodologies or academic schools of approach;
- (4) consider what concepts arise from viewing a specific adaptation of the text.

Stage 4. Active experimentation.

Aim: Concrete experimentation and actualisation of knowledge via argument building.

Activity: There are numerous ways to approach this final stage depending on available time, capability of the class, and the balance of in-class work to homework. It is a challenging, hands-on stage that requires close guidance and a breaking down into sub-stages. In the pilot run teachers noted how difficult this stage was because students had to come up with their own line of argument in the absence of a specific question. Teacher guidance is crucial to enable students to pursue their own interests in the extract and shape these into unique and credible theses.

Stage 4 requires students to cluster ideas into meaningful groups, hierarchies, stages or lines of argument evidenced by words and phrases in the extract—and all in the absence of any specific essay question. The key point here is that any argument is valid (no matter how embryonic, limited or unusual) so long as it is personally constructed and relies on textual evidence. This is because the aim is to give students authority as interpreters and to value their personal angle on the extract.

Students need to:

- (1) select some concepts from their hoard that they find interesting and want to pursue;
- (2) arrange their selected concepts in some sort of coherent cluster (potentially with sub-concepts illustrating a main concept) or in a logical series that leads smoothly from one concept to another; and
- (3) consider specific elements of the extract as evidence for specific concepts and note other parts of the play that might also be relevant.

If students are having trouble shaping a response in the absence of a question, they could be asked to begin a paragraph with a phrase like, '*Hamlet* is about...' or 'This extract reveals...'

At this point students can produce some coherent outcomes. For example, relying on and demonstrating all three of the sub-stages above, they could write a paragraph explaining their conceptual series or cluster. This might amount to an explanation of what the play is about or an exploration of a particular aspect of the play that interests them. Purely for illustrative purposes (because the possibilities are infinite), here are five topics that could be presented as mini-theses or paragraphs detailing a response to the extracts:

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- (Extract 1) an exploration of the way Hamlet uses mythic characters to interpret his family and himself;
- (Extract 2) a discussion of what it means to be human or of the role of natural imagery in describing the human;
- (Extract 3) an account of how important Polonius is for the plot;
- (Extract 4) an exploration of the similarities and differences between Claudius and Hamlet; and
- (Extract 5) a discussion of how women are treated in the play.

Stage 4 of the Bard Blitz arrives at its conclusion with each student having created a personal response to the extract in the form of an argument based on evidence from the extract. Stage 4 is a very important part of the Bard Blitz and should result in the production of a thesis that the student has genuinely invested in from the ground up and can be truly proud of.

Using the Table: This final stage should be able to be completed without reference to the Table because the students should already have amassed their concept hoard.

Extension:

- (1) students could share with each other the concept clusters that they have chosen to pursue and the group could spend a little time helping each of its members (one after another) by brainstorming their chosen concept and offering examples from elsewhere in the play to help support it;
- (2) a mini-debate could be held where students with very little preparation argue both sides of a concept to help clarify its possibilities and evidence;
- (3) a group discussion of what students think an essay is meant to do and what makes a good or bad essay;
- (4) group reflection on what students think the value of the entire Bard Blitz, and each of its stages, is for them.

Conclusion

It is important that the students' arguments (in their final form) are heard and commented on by their peers and the teacher. This is to make sure that each student knows that his or her idiosyncratic approach is valid and valued, and for the entire class to affirm and enjoy the diversity of outcomes. Once students have successfully completed the Bard Blitz they could experience it again at another time with more confidence (perhaps even selecting their own extracts to explore). The teacher could follow the Bard Blitz with a module on creating a good essay, or speech, or PowerPoint presentation.

References

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- Kolb, David A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Ed. Philip Edwards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Stage 1. Concrete Experience.

Aim: Personal and collective *experience* of extract.

Activity: Read this extract aloud and get to know it in detail. Discuss its language, imagery, sounds and meaning. What is it saying? How would it be spoken by the actor? What do you like or dislike about it? What words or phrases are hard to understand?

Stage 2. Reflective observation.

Aim: Personal *comprehension* of the extract via translation.

Activity: Working in pairs, write out a translation of the extract in your own words to demonstrate that you know what it is saying. Be as accurate as you can so that your words capture the exact meaning of Shakespeare's words. You might want to do it line by line. Afterwards your group will discuss and evaluate some of the translations.

Stage 3. Abstract conceptualisation.

Aim: Development of *abstract concepts and theories* from the extract.

Activity: Via brainstorming with your group, write a list of all the concepts and ideas that you think the extract contains or suggests: these might relate to character, language, staging or context. Make the list as big as you can and include ideas about what the whole play is about if these ideas also appear in the extract. This list is your personal collection of concepts that you will draw on to compose your own approach to the play in Stage 4.

Stage 4. Active experimentation.

Aim: Concrete experimentation and actualisation of knowledge via thesis building.

Activity: Select a group of related ideas that interest you from your list in Stage 3: this will form the basis of your argument that explores a particular topic or makes a particular case about the meaning of the play. Make a note of textual evidence from the extract and elsewhere in the play that supports your argument or the topic you are exploring. Compose a paragraph that outlines your approach to the play or your exploration of a topic. In your paragraph make sure you prove your claims by referring to evidence from the play. You could begin your paragraph with 'This text is about....' or 'Such and such a concept [insert your main concept] is important in this text because....'