

**Barbara Prillaman**  
**Shakespeare and Human Character Prospectus**  
***How Do I Know Thee? Let Me Count The Ways:***  
***A Step-By-Step Analysis of Shakespeare's Characters***  
**June, 2009**

**Introduction**

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a school in transition, changing into a science and mathematics magnet school serving students in grades 6 – 12. Currently it has grades 6 – 10 and will add the remaining grades over the next two years. It is considered an urban school situated on the outskirts of the largest city in the state of Delaware. This school houses one of the two middle level transitional bilingual programs (Spanish/English) in our district. At CSS, this special program is indeed a “school within a school” serving approximately 85 students in the sixth – eighth grades. These students are English Language Learners (ELLs) who share Hispanic ethnicity. As recent immigrants or migrants, they are simultaneously acclimating themselves to a new school system, country, culture, and way of life. These students have all of their content area classes (English Language Arts, social studies, mathematics, and science) with the program’s three teachers. I am one of these three teachers.

These native Spanish speaking ELLs face many challenges as they enter middle school: reading pressures escalate due to more demanding texts and they must learn the English language in addition to content area information.

**Rationale**

Since my students stay within our program for more than one year, two-thirds of the students in my 08 – 09 English Language Arts (ELA) class will remain with me in the upcoming academic year. These students had the benefit of being introduced to Shakespeare and his work this past school year. Together, we followed the unit I had created in last year’s Yale National Initiative’s Seminar, Shakespeare and Gender. This unit, *English Language Learners (ELLs) Investigate the Identity of Shakespeare and His Characters*, exposed students to an author study of Shakespeare and an in-depth analysis of a few of his plays including Romeo and Juliet. As a whole class, we read the comic strip, children’s version of the story, and then portions of the actual play. This process was important as it scaffolded the English language for these students who are currently reading between a second to fifth grade levels in English. Students will be able to take what we learned and apply it to the new information that we will learn in the proposed unit.

This year *our focus will be on how students must be able to analyze characters in literature*. Students must be able to demonstrate an overall understanding of a story’s elements including: plot, setting, and characters. In this proposed unit, students will be required to analyze some of the most famous and complex characters in Shakespeare’s plays. Analyzing characters and the role they play in developing a story’s plot helps to

provide insight to and better understand the stories one reads. An analysis should involve a detailed examination of all aspects of the character: traits, features, and, motivation.

Students will learn the process of how to analyze a character in a Shakespearean text. Using the scaffolding method of introducing students to Shakespeare, they will first look at a comic strip representation, then a children's version by Charles and Mary Lamb or E. Nesbit, afterwards a graphic novel and finally, students will look at excerpts of the original play. Armed with this understanding of Hamlet's plot and characters, students will be taught how to follow a ten-step process on how to write a character analysis of Hamlet. Emphasis will be on:

1. Ethics – making just or unjust choices
2. Actions – wise or unwise
3. Motivation – pros/cons of characters' internal thoughts and external actions
4. The effects of the character's behavior on other characters
5. Repeated words that describe the character
6. Items/props associated with the character
7. read between the lines – what a character does not say is just as important as what he does
8. Is the character “flat” or “round”?
9. Historical period
10. What does the author think about the character?

## **Overarching Understandings and Questions to Keep in Mind for the Development of the Unit**

### ***Enduring Understandings***

*Students will understand that:*

- authors use a variety of means to develop the characters in their stories.
- authors use characters to reveals aspects of human nature and/or life.
- analyzing characters help to better understand the author's story.
- Shakespeare was a “master” at developing his characters which makes his plays all the more interesting.

### ***Essential Questions***

How does analyzing a character help a reader to better understand the story?

How am I like one or more of the characters?

How are the character's characteristics revealed?

What aspects of human nature and/or life is Shakespeare trying to reveal through his characters?

## Resource List

The following books are a variety of adult and children texts that will be part of the annotated bibliography. In addition, there are a variety of websites that may prove beneficial for teachers and students alike.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Children/Adult Reading</b>
Hamlet	William Shakespeare	Adult
Henry IV Part I	William Shakespeare	Adult
Henry V	William Shakespeare	Adult
Julius Caesar	William Shakespeare	Adult
Antony and Cleopatra	William Shakespeare	Adult
King Lear	William Shakespeare	Adult
Aspects of the Novel	E.M. Forester	Adult
Shakespeare After All	Marjorie Garber	Adult
Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies	Piotr Sadowski	Adult
Shakespearean Characterization: A guide to Actors and Students	Leslie O'Dell	Adult
DK Essential Shakespeare Handbook	Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding	Reference
Bravo, Mr. William Shakespeare!	Marcia Williams	Children's Literature
More Tales from Shakespeare	Marcia Williams	Children's Literature
The Children's Shakespeare	E. Nesbit	Children's Literature
Tales from Shakespeare	Charles and Mary Lamb	Children's Literature
King Lear/Graphic Shakespeare	Adapted by Brian Farrens	Children's Literature
Hamlet/No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels	Sparknotes	Children's Literature
Hamlet/Picture This!	William Shakespeare	Children's Literature
Julius Caesar	Barron's Graphic Classics	Children's Literature
<a href="http://www.teach-shakespeare.com/">http://www.teach-shakespeare.com/</a>		Website
<a href="http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/educational.htm">http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/educational.htm</a>		Website
<a href="http://fteague.myweb.uga.edu/wordcrun.html">http://fteague.myweb.uga.edu/wordcrun.html</a>		Website
<a href="http://www.associatedcontent.com/">http://www.associatedcontent.com/</a>		website