

Lesson Plan

DECODING COMPLEX TEXTS

David Stoler—filmmaker, journalist, and T&W teaching artist—demonstrates how to handle unfamiliar complex texts in this lesson plan on Shakespeare’s “[Sonnet 138](#). ” In addition to strategies for breaking down new texts, Stoler opens the lesson up to begin analyzing Shakespeare and the implications of his sonnet. This well-rounded lesson provides middle school students with tools that will prove invaluable during their upcoming high school years.

Grade(s) Taught: 7th–8th

Genre(s) Taught: Poetry

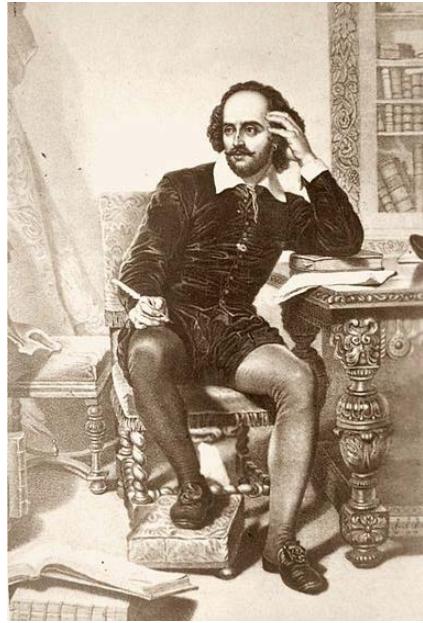
Common Core State Standards:

(Refer to [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 7](#) and [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 8](#))

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7/8.9
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Guiding Questions:

- Practical: How do we approach texts that, because of grammar/structure/style, are nearly impossible to read?
- Thematic: When is it OK to lie? When do we lie to ourselves? Is lying ever OK? What makes some lies OK?



LESSON

Introduction:

Hand out William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 138." Before the poem is read, just by looking at it, what can the students tell you about the poem?

Go over structure, rhyme, rhythm, etc. (See [notes on sonnet structure.](#))

Main Activity:

Have a student read the poem cold. Acknowledge that reading it all the way through for the first time, one can barely grasp the meaning.

Go back to the beginning and, with the students, translate the poem's archaic language into modern language, one line at a time. Tell them that only with this process can we really discuss the meaning of the poem.

What does it often mean when one swears they are telling the truth? In what cases do we say one thing but mean another? Is it always mean-spirited to lie? What about the question, "Do these jeans make me look fat?" Can the students think of times they lied to people to spare their feelings? Or out of love?

Have the students write poems in which they talk about a time they lied for love or even just for a good reason, such as to protect someone's feelings. Have advanced classes try writing a full-

fledged sonnet. For younger or less advanced classes, just a poem describing the event, the why, etc., is enough.

Closing:

Have the students share their poems with each other.

Materials:

“Sonnet 138” handout

Vocabulary:

Sonnet, Shakespeare, quatrain, couplet, rhythm, rhyme scheme

Multi-Modal Approaches to Learning:

This lesson plan engages **aural** learners (listening to the poem read aloud); **linguistic** learners (reading the poem aloud, considering the meanings of a language that has changed, finding new words to equate with Shakespeare’s words); **logical** learners (discussing rhyme scheme, sonnet structure); **interpersonal** learners (translating the poem as a group, class discussion); and **intrapersonal** learners (considering the second guiding question, independent writing).