ENGLISH PEDAGOGY FOR INCARCERATED POPULATIONS

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to study Community-Engaged, Trauma-Informed, and Feminist pedagogical theories in order to discuss and design a potential two-semester course on Shakespeare and Creative Writing for incarcerated populations. I have developed a set of teaching strategies and recommendations that address the needs of a female incarcerated population in particular. I have combined research surrounding pedagogy, the history of Shakespeare and creative writing courses in jail and prison settings, scholarship on *As You Like It* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, as well as my own anecdotal experience to support my recommendations and analysis.

Throughout my thesis, I provide examples of assignments and activities and explain how they could be useful to this population. Additionally, I point to many different considerations for instructors to keep in mind as they are designing and planning for a course within a correctional facility. Some of these include trauma disclosure, access to materials, and logistics of the daily operations of the facility. Hopefully, potential instructors of educational programs in prisons and jails can find this thesis insightful. Moreover, I hope to one day make this theoretical course a reality as I continue my teaching career.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the justice-involved individuals that I have worked with along the way at both Western Virginia Regional Jail and New River Valley Regional Jail. I value your perspectives, your ambition, and your willingness to push beyond your comfort zone. You have each changed me and inspired me to continue to advocate for the value of innovative educational opportunities in local prisons and jails. This project would not exist without you.

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INTRODUCTION

Collaborative programs between English departments and correctional facilities are growing in popularity nationwide.[1] It has been proven time and time again that education and access to programing both play major roles in reducing recidivism. As Appleman explains, "If we choose to preserve the lives of human beings who commit serious crimes, we must have some interest in helping them preserve their humanity. And, if recent statistics can be believed, the more education they receive in prison, the less likely they are to reoffend" (29). It follows that through programming, English departments can provide a unique opportunity for the incarcerated individual. Through knowledge of pedagogical approaches, writing, and literature, instructors can encourage students to see varying perspectives, gain confidence, and enter into different discourse communities. Moreover, instructors have the opportunity to help students hone critical thinking, writing, and communication skills to better prepare them for life upon release.[2]

Collaborative programs can be designed in a variety of ways, including inside-out, inside-out style and traditional. Inside-out prison exchange courses are comprised of an equal number of inmates and university students as participants. Traditional inside-out courses tend to be led by criminal justice faculty and focus on specific and historical issues within the criminal justice system. Similarly, inside-out style courses are comprised of an equal number of university students and inmates, but they can have areas of focus beyond the innerworkings of the criminal justice system. Finally, there are more traditional courses in which an instructor works within a correctional facility to teach a college course to a classroom of justice-involved individuals. A

[1] "[A]cross the 50 states — about 32 states offer some type of college or post-secondary courses to adult inmates" (Westervelt).
[2] "When we think about the school to prison pipeline story — about the failure of the educational attainment for many of these individuals — when they get to prison it is a chance to address those deficits" (Westervelt).

traditional course could focus on any subject from literature, composition, and creative writing to geology, chemistry, economics, and beyond.

To expand on these previous definitions, throughout my academic career, I have had the opportunity to participate in various kinds of collaborative programs between universities and jails. As an undergraduate, I participated in an Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program directed by Dr. Bolin in the Radford University Criminal Justice Department. Radford University collaborated with New River Valley Regional Jail (NRVJ) to create a program with 10 Radford students and 10 incarcerated women at their facility. We covered a wide array of topics from the war on drugs to mandatory minimum sentencing and gained meaningful insight into the flaws within our system. Later, I took a similar course with Dr. Kellogg in the Radford University English Department: "Shakespeare and Justice." In this course, we read various Shakespeare plays that incorporated themes of justice. In the process of reading these plays, we unpacked current issues within our society that echoed the ideas in the plays. Finally, I helped to facilitate a book club at Western Virginia Regional Jail (WVRJ) with Dr. Kellogg in the summer of 2019. I used the experience as the basis for my Honors Academy capstone project. The women in the book club wrote responses to the various texts that we read together. Each week, I would with the help of Dr. Kellogg provide feedback on the responses. This experience helped me to develop a handbook that could be utilized by the students in order to make the reading and writing aspects of the courses less intimidating. It was through these collective experiences that I gained a true passion for educational programming in prisons and jails. I have seen the positive impact of collaborative programs first-hand as both an instructor and a student.

The collaborative programs facilitated by Radford University, WVRJ, and NRVJ changed the course of my education and eventually my career path. When I arrived at Radford University

in 2016 as an undergraduate, I knew that I had at least two passions in life: literature and criminal justice reform. I became an English major because I was advised it was a reasonable major to prepare students for law school, and I assumed it would be something I found enjoyable and fulfilling. However, through the experiences I previously described as well as my time as a Graduate Teaching Fellow, I also developed a love for teaching. I am not unique in the fact that my plans for the future changed. However, I never expected that I would be given the opportunity to find an area of study that so closely bound all of my personal and professional interests.

Thesis Goals

With this thesis, I hope to develop a curriculum that is rooted in the best pedagogical approaches focused on engaging a female incarcerated population. The goal of my thesis is to develop some recommendations and examples for teaching a two-semester course in which the first half focused on reading and responding to Shakespeare academically, and the second half focused more on creative writing (memoir and poetry writing in particular). By focusing on community-engaged and trauma-informed pedagogical theories that stipulate a social and societal responsibility that we as instructors have to "share a goal of actualizing social justice through teaching and learning methods" (Micciche 128), I will build on my previous capstone work using specific theoretical evidence.

Chapter one of my thesis will focus specifically on Shakespeare. I will justify my choice of the two plays *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It* by highlighting the various relevant themes throughout the works and referencing scholarship on the plays related to these themes. Although I would not use just two plays for a semester-long course, these are the ones I have chosen for my model. Additionally, I will explain my reasoning for choosing two comedies. By

using Trauma-Informed and Collaborative pedagogies, I will provide a framework for teaching these two texts to a female incarcerated population and offer explanations for how their use would be impactful. In chapter two of my thesis, I will demonstrate the benefits and challenges of facilitating Creative Writing courses in a jail setting. I will also propose some specific texts and activities for a course of this kind.

Female Incarcerated Populations History and Background

It is important that I emphasize my decision to design a course with a female incarcerated population in mind. As Belknap explains, "Like homeless and mentally ill women, women prisoners are among the most neglected, oppressed and misrepresented groups in society. And the overlap of women who fit into two or more of these three groups is not a coincidence" (Belknap 214). Although incarcerated individuals overall are some of the most vulnerable in society, there is a persistent systemic imbalance regarding the way the justice system treats female prisoners in particular. The female incarcerated population experiences violence and abuse at an alarming rate. McConnell states that nearly six in ten women in state prisons report experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (5). These statistics are overwhelming and point to a more poignant systemic problem:

> [T]he rise of female incarceration, and the subsequent lack of related policy reform, reflects the systemic prejudice against women, especially women who are impoverished, mentally ill, and facing addictions. Female offenders, who already reflect a lower socioeconomic caste prior to incarceration, are being released back into communities even less equipped to contribute to society. (McConnell 31)

To summarize, generally, facilities are not equipped to cater towards a female population. Although programming geared towards rehabilitation and reentry for incarcerated individuals is

not a primary focus in the criminal justice system, opportunities are even fewer for female offenders in particular. Belknap goes on to argue that "[h]istorically, women's prisons have had programs in cosmetology, office skills, typing, sewing, hairdressing, and homemaking, but few train women in skills to help them become financially independent upon release." While on the other hand, "men have access to programs in welding, electronics, construction, tailoring, computers, plumbing and college programs" (240). The disparity here is clear, and it becomes apparent that there needs to be a change in the way that programs are provided to offenders with such a striking gender bias attached. Additionally, as McConnell explains, "the female incarceration rate has grown nearly 20% between 2000 and 2013" (2). There are many factors that have contributed to this rise. However, it is true that the vast majority of these sentences are based on "crimes of survival" (McConnell 4). Crimes of survival are nonviolent offences that are financially motivated, most often driven by poor economic conditions. Denying female offenders the opportunity to learn skills to promote financial independence and educational growth has a direct correlation to recidivism. As it stands, women are set up to commit the same "crimes of survival" upon release because there is little effort done to promote any other options.

Moreover, the conditions for women inside the facilities reflect this systemic prejudice as well. Females who are incarcerated face sexual violence on the inside. As Belknap summarizes, *All Too Familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in the U.S State Prison*, a book published by the Human Rights Watch Women's Right Project in 1996, describes the nature of sexual violence that women face while incarcerated. The book describes instances of violent rapes committed by male guards/staff in correctional facilities. The book also sheds light on the coercion and manipulation that women can fall victim to out of intense loneliness. These victims are not always perceptive at first to the unethical and abusive nature of the "relationships" male guards

or staff members may tempt them to enter into (Belknap 256). To summarize, statistically, these women have potentially faced significant traumas in their lifetimes: sexual abuse, physical abuse, childhood abuse/neglect, foster care systems, juvenile detention centers, poverty, adult institutionalization, just to name a few. The statistics provided in this brief introduction provide justification for my choice to design a course with the needs of this specific population in mind. Additionally, this background information motivates the pedagogical considerations I describe in the proceeding chapters.

CHAPTER 1: SHAKESPEARE AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PEDAGOGY

Using the works of Shakespeare in jail and prison programming is not unprecedented. In the following section, I will provide some background and history of this type of program. I would like to begin this chapter with a brief explanation of my own experiences with Shakespeare in a jail setting. I had the opportunity to participate in a course called "Shakespeare and Justice" taught by Dr. Amanda Kellogg at Western Virginia Regional Jail in Salem, Virginia. This course was an inside-out style program, meaning it was a collaborative program where an even number of Radford University students and inmates at the jail participated in the weekly course at WVRJ. This was not my first Shakespeare course, but it was certainly the most impactful for a variety of reasons. I witnessed a room full of male inmates learn to appreciate, and in a few cases love, *The Taming of the Shrew.* The perspectives that the men in this class offered often surpassed the observations of my classmates at Radford University. They were able to apply their lived experience to the plays and draw conclusions that permanently shaped the way that I view the texts. This experience also molded the way that I think about the importance of studying or teaching Shakespeare in any context. It emphasized the relatability of the texts and the value of using them to discuss contemporary issues.

Chapter one of my thesis details my plans and pedagogical approaches to teaching Shakespeare to an incarcerated female population. I will begin with an explanation of community-engaged pedagogy. Then, I will present a brief literature review to demonstrate how my thesis exists in a body of existing scholarship that explores the benefits of teaching Shakespeare in a correctional facility. In this chapter, I will further explain my methods, provide examples of assignments and activities, and ultimately answer the question "Why Shakespeare?"

To most readers outside of academia, Shakespeare seems inaccessible. There is a perceived language barrier between Modern English and Early Modern English. Smith attributes the language barrier to the fact that "going to the theatre is largely a middle class activity, so many will not immediately understand the form and purpose of drama. The language is perceived as inaccessible and strongly linked to middle-class cultural forms" (Smith et al. 150). However, giving students the necessary tools to delve into these difficult texts gives them the confidence to participate in a new and productive kind of discourse. Some may question the value of asking students to engage with Early Modern English texts. I argue that the works of Shakespeare are situated within the zone of proximal development.[3] Essentially, in many cases, these texts challenge students just enough to develop more adept reading skills without being totally impossible and discouraging. When language is less familiar to students, they must analyze literary tools such as diction and syntax more closely. They may have to consult footnotes and dictionaries. Engaging with difficult texts makes for better and more attentive readers overall. Furthermore, in the context of this two-semester project, having students hone critical and active reading skills using Shakespeare serves as a kind of reading boot camp to prepare them to explore more contemporary texts in the second semester. For example, asking students to read a challenging play and then summarizing the play as a class scene by scene is a way to coach students to engage with Early Modern English, comprehend plot, and extract thematic significance. This is just one way of engaging students and giving them the confidence to interact with these difficult texts in meaningful ways.

As discussed in the introduction, the goal of my thesis is to present a model for a two-semester English course for incarcerated women. The first semester of this course is focused on

[3] "Vygotsky believed that when a student is in the zone of proximal development for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a 'boost' to achieve the task" (McLeod).

Shakespeare. Although, ideally, this half of the course would be comprised of more than two plays, I have selected *As You Like It* and *The Taming of the Shrew* to serve as my examples for the purposes of this chapter. Although, each class has specific goals and objectives. The major goals of this Shakespeare-focused unit are:

1- Students should see varying perspectives and gain confidence in an academic setting.

2- Students should become more comfortable participating in academic conversations; to extract meaning from, respond to, and write about literature.

3- Students should hone critical thinking, writing, and communication skills to better prepare them for life upon release.

4- Students should learn techniques for putting academic texts in conversation with one another.

The suggested major assignments for this unit are:[4]

1- Short reflections on readings for the day (due each class)

2- Thematic Paper

3- Academic Conversation Essay

. I have developed my recommendations for content, assignments, and activities with various pedagogical considerations in mind. Due to my own experiences with using Shakespeare in a jail setting, I have paid special attention to the ways that the works of Shakespeare lend themselves to service-learning courses. The following section details the qualities of Community-Engaged pedagogy that I found particularly useful when designing this course.

[4] The detailed assignment sheets for these assignments can be found in the appendix.

Community-Engaged Pedagogy

Community-engaged (sometimes referred to as service-learning) courses provide a context for learning that extends past the classroom and into the real world. As Julier explains, "The spirit of hands-on learning premeditates the work of John Dewey and connects with the liberating attitudes towards student-centered instruction of Paulo Freire and bell hooks and has long been influential in the field of Writing Studies" (56). Dewy and Freire see literacy as a tool for learners to become "active, critical, responsible participants in democratic processes" (Julier 58). This pedagogical theory clearly lends itself well to a classroom of incarcerated students. If the goal of incarceration is focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment, then a course allowing students to be better prepared to participate in societal processes is the first step. Community-engaged courses all look very different; some examples are the inside-out prison exchange program, or a writing course that works alongside a nonprofit to develop pamphlets advocating for a particular issue. At the basic level, community-engaged courses facilitate partnerships between universities and local organizations, in this case, local jails. Community-engaged courses ground writing as a "situated social act." Julier goes on to say that "in any of these arrangements when students engaged with audiences, projects, and purposes outside of the classroom, they are able to wrestle with, analyze, revise and produce variations of discourse in ways sometimes presumed not possible in a classroom" (57).

Instructors should be aware that "when working with historically marginalized communities, relationships among students, instructors, and community members require prior education and training" (Julier 63). Local prisons and jails will require training sessions where instructors will be informed of the particular rules and regulations of the facility that may impact how they design their courses.

Additionally, it is critical to understand the partnerships between the universities and the community organizations as collaborative. In the case of an inside-out style course, for example, it is not that the universities are jumping in to "save" any particular organization or facility. Rather, universities are giving their students the opportunity to participate in real work within their communities that benefits both parties. The implication of community-engaged courses is that they force students and instructors alike to "reflect on our own goals as citizens and humans on the planet" (Julier 55). Julier goes on to argue that "community-engagement encourages critical thinking by asking students to examine and reflect upon experiences in which they're currently engaged." Furthermore, as students interact with issues outside the conventional classroom, such as social justice, economic disparity, or identity, for instance, they are building a knowledge base that allows them to "join the conversations from a position of authority" (Julier 59). Essentially, developing critical thinking skills that all students can then apply to their lives gives them a sense of power in a situation where they lack agency.

To apply community-engaged strategies to my own course design, I argue that in the process of reading Shakespeare, students and instructors have the opportunity to unpack current issues within their society that echo the ideas in the plays. This is one of the most powerful answers to the question "why Shakespeare?": Shakespeare's works provide a framework for meaningful discussion about issues that transcend time despite the time elapsed since they were written. As Eklund emphasizes, the aim of service-learning courses is:

> To engage students in intellectual formation through action and contemplation: exploring and interrupting the dynamics that create social problems, then reflecting on their evolving understanding of those problems. As students construct intellectual

> frameworks for the study of Shakespeare through reading and analyzing Shakespeare's works, they hone their ability to address social problems through service. (188)

One major goal of the community-engaged classroom is to bridge the gap between literature and society. In other words, this course should give students the tools necessary to apply themes in Shakespeare to modern society. As one of Eklund's students reflects, "we will never tie Shakespeare up nicely with a bow and say we understand it all now. My service learning experience is the same way . . . I will be left with the question "What is the state of my community, and where do I fit in it? (194). It is my goal in this course to make Shakespeare more accessible to students by using themes such as female agency and justice to bring students from the plays themselves to contemplations regarding the ways that these issues manifest in today's society. This goal can be best achieved by building off of community-engaged pedagogical considerations.

Background

As I mentioned previously, my thesis is not unique in its approach to studying Shakespeare with an incarcerated population. In this section, I will present a brief review of the literature, which will help to situate my thesis within a larger conversation in the discipline. There are many ways that Shakespeare is used in jail programming. There are literary critical courses (such as the one this thesis describes) where students will be asked to read, discuss, and write about various plays. There are also programs that are focused on the performance of plays (such as Shakespeare Behind Bars). Shakespeare Behind Bars is an organization that caters towards both juvenile and adult incarcerated populations in Kentucky, Michigan, and Illinois. The Shakespeare Behind Bars mission statement cites "encounters with personal and social issues, building life skills, emotional intelligence and coping strategies" all as potential benefits

of Shakespeare-focused programs. Moreover, they state that according to the National Institute of Justice, the national recidivism rate is 60%, while the recidivism rate of participants in their programs is 6% (Shakespeare Behind Bars). The program mission and vision statements suggest that this overwhelming statistic reinforces that the emotional and educational value of their programs contribute positively to students' ability to respond to challenges they face upon release.

Instructors for justice-involved courses have had great success when using the works of Shakespeare as their reading material. Nigeire summarizes Pensalfini's claims of success made by current prison Shakespeare programs such as Shakespeare Behind Bars and Prison Performing Arts. Pensalfini writes, "These claims fall into several key groups: benefit to individual prisoners, benefit to artists, impact on prison culture, impact on the broader community" (130). He describes how evidence was gathered to assert these claims:

> The evidence in each sub-section is drawn from a variety of sources such as: published accounts by practitioners, participants and observers; evaluations, both internal and external; interviews and discussions with practitioners, participants and audience members; and personal experience and observation (Pensalfini 131-132). (Nigeire 20)

Pensalfini's findings show the positive impact and experience of teaching Shakespeare to incarcerated populations across the various perspectives in the classroom. To summarize, Pensalfini's findings demonstrate the various kinds of positive anecdotal experiences across the board. Shakespeare-focused courses benefit individual prisoners by providing them with necessary tools and strategies valuable to their life upon release. They are beneficial to artists and teachers by challenging them to expand their comfort zones and areas of influence. Additionally, Shakespeare-focused programs have been shown to have a positive impact on prison culture by

giving inmates a positive focus, a sense of purpose, and a sense of community, and reinforcing that the facility is making an effort to provide them with opportunities for development. Finally, these programs engage with the community at large by potentially bringing in instructors, artists, coaches, university students, and audiences. Historically, jails and prisons have served as a space for societies to cast out their most vulnerable. They are hidden spaces that the general public does not have access to. By changing this narrative, Shakespeare-focused programs are offering an opportunity for community members to experience the benefits of a justice system that is structured to focus on rehabilitation and reentry rather than punishment.

Additionally, Shakespeare's plays contain valuable and relevant themes such as justice, gender, and equity, as well as power and who holds it in society. Not only are these works successful because of their thematic relevance and potential for class discussion, but also because of their cultural capital. The works of Shakespeare are deeply engrained in society and popular culture. Shakespeare's work is quoted, referenced and alluded to in movies, TV shows, other texts, and even political speeches. This demonstrates the fact that Shakespeare signals power and belonging. Being able to identify these references allows individuals to participate in not only scholarly, but cultural conversations from a position of authority.

Text Rationale

A semester-long course will focus on more than two plays. However, I will be using *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It* to demonstrate how I would go about teaching Shakespeare to a female incarcerated population with community-engaged and feminist pedagogies in mind. First of all, it is a statistical fact that the women in Shakespearian comedies simply speak more.[5] This fact signifies a special attention placed on the thoughts and ideas of

[5] Nearly 40% of the lines in *As You Like It* are spoken by women (OUP Blog).

the female characters. Both of these plays contain themes relevant to a feminist classroom. One of the main ideas I want my students to explore is the way that a patriarchal society functions, and how this system seeps into our daily lives as women. Jajja explains:

> Patriarchy is the ideology of the superiority of men. It presents men as strong, decisive, rational, capable and competent beings (Tyson, 2007). It works for the subordination of women as the lesser other. It presents women as emotional, weak and irrational. Ultimately it relegates women to a cultural wasteland, where they can't make any meaningful contribution to society (Ray, 1997). Feminist Criticism, among other things, examines the ways in which literature undermines or reinforces the social, political and economic status of women. (113)

Both of these plays bring issues such as gender stereotypes, societal attitudes towards women, sexuality, and power (just to name a few) to the forefront. These plays allow students to explore these themes and apply them to analyze how they manifest in society today.

Moreover, it is generally understood that the women in Shakespearian comedies are among the most empowered and strong of his female characters.[6] As Avedano argues, "Shakespeare's heroines support a theoretical antiestablishment motive" (1). The two comedies both enforce and challenge patriarchal society and its conventions, allowing for meaningful analysis and conversation.

General Teaching Strategies and Activities

It is clear that instructors find themselves in a very unique position when teaching inside of a secure correctional facility. There are certain logistical obstacles that may force instructors

[6] Avedano explains, "Beatrice, a woman of her own mind in Much Ado About Nothing establishes herself and an equal in wit to Benedick…Another mutual-taming occurs in As You Like It as gender-bending Rosalind exhibits crafty intelligence and insight into human behavior while covertly instructing Orlando how to be a better lover" (1).

to modify some activities they choose to do in their more traditional classrooms. Technology such as computers, speakers, and projectors is likely not available for use within the classroom. Even in the case where technology is provided, it may still not meet the standards of the technology in a traditional classroom. For example, an instructor may be given access to a TV, but it is a box TV with quiet speakers than no one in the large classroom can hear. It is not a good practice for instructors in this context to rely heavily on technology, because often modifications will have to be made. The limitations regarding technology knock out tools such as Padlet, Google Forms, digital polls, and Kahoot that instructors may ordinarily use to engage their students. This obstacle can be overcome with carefully curated activities and techniques to lead engaging and effective classroom discussions. In the following sections, I will provide some examples of effective teaching strategies catered towards a female incarcerated population in particular.

Before beginning the first play, it is important for instructors to provide students with the tools necessary to engage with difficult texts. The main two things that instructors should model for their students at the start are active reading and annotating. Often, students struggle with comprehension when navigating Early Modern texts. Because of the perceived language barrier, paired with the fact that plays are written to be staged, there are often retention gaps for students. Instructors could begin by giving students an idea of what an annotation is, and how they can be helpful. It may be beneficial to provide students with some tips for annotating that they can look back on such as:

- Summarize scenes or moments in the play that seem important.
- Circle or underline unknown words or phrases in the text.
- Write down first reactions or comments as you read.

- Make note of questions that arise, or particular sections you find yourself lost in.

Additionally, once students understand what an annotation is, and how this tool helps with comprehension and analysis, instructors could model annotating for their students with a sample text. This can be done by passing out a short sample text to the class and giving them the opportunity to annotate. Students could be encouraged to share what they underlined or wrote down. Finally, instructors should model their own thought process while annotating the same short sample text.

Similarly, students who may be out of practice with note-taking could benefit from some form of guided note-taking. One example of this is the two-column note-taking strategy: Ask the student to draw a vertical line through the middle of their paper. One side labeled "the text" and another "reflection." Have students identify important areas in the text on one side, and respond to them on the other. Another example of this is the four-square note-taking method: Have students divide their paper into four squares labeled summary, character list, reflection, and questions. The four-square method ensures that students both understand the text on a surface level as well as address it at a deeper, more critical level. Both of these techniques can be used to guide students as they are reading, annotating, and taking notes. They can begin to identify what is important within the text and hopefully boost their comprehension.

Another potential obstacle in the classroom is participation. Instructors have an obligation to facilitate meaningful discussions. Oftentimes, students are hesitant to speak up in class for fear of being judged or saying something "wrong." It can be intimidating for students who are not accustomed to the classroom environment to engage in academic conversations about difficult texts. Reynolds and Townsend provide some helpful tips for effectively facilitating discussions and boosting participation in English classrooms. Their findings argue that instructors must

strike a balance between monologic and dialogic conversations. There are times where instructors must take control of the discussion, but it should rarely be primarily the instructor speaking (Reynolds and Townsend 201). Moreover, students should be given the opportunity to engage with each other—ideally, comments should not be totally directed towards the instructor. It is easy to fall into the habit of having students bounce comments off of the instructor, that the instructor simply responds to. However, it may be more effective to pose questions and comments to the rest of the class to engage them as well. It is the role of the facilitator to mirror, guide, scaffold, and interpret during classroom discussions. To summarize, instructors should model for the students what kinds of comments are valuable (Reynolds and Townsend). Instructors should explain the difference between point-driven and story-driven comments (while allowing space for both) and step in to guide the discussion if needed. Moreover, if a student is having issues articulating a point, the instructors are there to interpret for the rest of the class by saying things such as "so I am hearing you suggest this, am I understanding correctly? What does everyone else think?"

Additionally, it is important to recognize that a lack of participation is not always indicative of a lack of effort. There are many barriers students may have to actively participating in class.[7] Therefore, instructors should offer various opportunities for participation. For example, instructors may have assignments that allow for reflection before class discussion takes place. This way, students are able to better gather their thoughts and prepare for discussion. This could be done through short reflection essays that accompany readings due, or by allowing time for students to free write at the start of class.[8]

[7] Alshoraty's study cites student's boredom, preference of listening, instructor's changing mood, student's fear of making mistakes, absence of student's prior participation, instructor's fanaticism, student's shyness, and instructor's lack of dialogue instruction practice all as potential barriers to class participation.

[8] I provide a sample assignment sheet for informal reflections as well as prompts for free writes in the appendix.

Similarly, there are students who will feel more comfortable talking in smaller groups of their peers rather than out loud to the entire class. The "think-pair-share" technique is a reliable way to support these students. Asking specific questions to students (or just asking them to free write) allows them to jot down their ideas, then discuss them with a partner or a small group before coming back as a class to answer. These activities take some of the pressure off because students are able to receive insight from their peers and validation for their ideas, giving them more confidence to speak up in the discussion. In my experience, small group time in the classroom is an effective way to boost participation.

Another general teaching strategy that instructors should consider is time management. Generally, courses within the facility are 3 hours long. It is critical that instructors are conscious of time management especially in this context. The facility is on a very strict schedule, meaning that no one will be there to get the students early if the class runs short and they will not be permitted to stay longer if class is not finished. Usually, instructors would spend the first day reviewing the syllabus, explaining major assignments and classroom rules. Beyond class participation, reading comprehension, and note-taking, there is a certain amount of background knowledge that students should be prepared with before they are asked to begin reading. Given that the first day will run the full 3 hours, instructors will have more time to set expectations and provide helpful background information. This would be a great time to discuss things such as Shakespeare's biographical information and the conventions of Early Modern theatre. Context informs students' readings, and providing this contextual information can add new layers of meaning to their understanding of the play. For instance, if students are aware that the actors in Early Modern theatres were predominantly male, then they would know that Rosalind dressed as Ganymede in *As You Like It* would have actually been a man, dressed as a woman, dressed as a

man. This allows them to experience the full comedic impact of the play that they would have missed had they been lacking that context.

The following sections provide descriptions of potential activities and assignments, as well as close readings of the two plays I have chosen for my model.

As You Like It

I will spend the following two sections demonstrating how I would go about teaching these two plays to an incarcerated female population. As I mentioned in the introduction, students will be asked to have short reflections prepared on the assigned readings for the day. Asking students to reflect before class prepares them for class discussion. In addition to these short reflections, students will be asked upon the completion of the play to write a more formal reading analysis essay that encourages their use of textual evidence to support claims. In this section, I will describe some helpful activities to scaffold them towards the completion of this essay and provide some close-reading of sections that I find important to bring to the student's attention. The detailed assignment sheets for the major assignments in this unit can be found in the appendix.

Given that *As You Like It* is the first play of the semester, it would be appropriate to anticipate some issues and potential frustrations with reading comprehension that I described in the previous section. To help mitigate student resistance, the activities I provide in this section will be focused on reading comprehension and using information from the text to support claims. For example, it can be useful to begin class by doing a quick summary together. It is likely that some students have gaps in their understanding of the plot. Therefore, it will be difficult for them to participate in a meaningful discussion of the text. A nice way to do this is to simply take the

reading an act at a time and ask students to summarize while writing the major plot points on the board. This ensures that the students begin on a more equal playing field for discussion.

Once students have a general understanding of the plot, instructors can model techniques to help them achieve understandings independently. An example of an activity to develop reading comprehension skills is to identify a particularly dense or difficult passage and ask students to rewrite it in their own words. Instructors can begin by identifying a passage and doing this activity as a class. The criteria for identifying what is dense or difficult is subjective, but depending on the play, there are certain scenes that instructors could anticipate students struggling with. After they have modeled the activity, instructors could ask students to identify a passage they personally struggled with and do the same activity. Having students put difficult passages into their own words not only clarifies these dense passages, but reemphasizes the importance of taking the time to grapple with difficult texts.

Furthermore, students should be challenged to move beyond plot summary and towards using information from the text to support their claims regarding the content and thematic significance. An activity to reinforce this skill is to ask students to create titles for each act and scene using textual evidence to justify their choice. This is an activity that can be done in small groups by assigning each group a particular act. To title something is to prioritize aspects of a body of work. Giving students a space to title the acts and scenes forces them to evaluate the most important aspects of the plot, and asking them to defend their choices with evidence from the text encourages the development of their argumentation skills.

Building off my previous recommendations regarding facilitating discussion and creating familiarity with Shakespeare, I will provide some close-reading and textual analysis of *As You Like It.* My analysis will serve to further justify my choice of plays and highlight sections I feel

are critical to bring to the student's attention as they provide avenues for discussion regarding the issues pertinent to a feminist classroom. As I discussed previously, it is not the role of the instructor to completely take over discussion. However, these are sections that as a facilitator, I would be sure to lead my students to at some point throughout discussions. I have chosen to analyze sections that demonstrate the key concepts I want students to learn through the plays. These sections illustrate themes of feminism, challenging societal conventions, hierarchy, community, and sisterhood.

To reiterate, one of the things that I would want students to understand about Shakespeare's comedies are the homosocial bonds and marriages that categorize them. The relationship between Celia and Rosalind is an exceptional model of sisterhood and feminism. Stirm poses a useful consideration: "[T]he term sisterhood has come under attack from feminists who argue that overreliance on this trope precludes recognition of important differences in women's life experience, especially of differences deeply affected by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status" (374). Her point is even more relevant to emphasize in the context of teaching a female incarcerated population due to the heightened degrees that these differences apply to them. To help enter into this conversation, instructors could point to the class barriers experienced by Phebe and Audrey: "[W]hen we discuss Phebe students also consider Audrey and recognize that her social mobility too, is restricted by class" (Stirm 385). The class distinctions and the implications of them are not something to be ignored.

Nonetheless, Celia and Rosalind's relationship demonstrates the value of a female community when navigating hardship. They show each other the upmost loyalty throughout all the obstacles that are presented to them. From the beginning of the play, the audience learns that Rosalind's father is no longer present in court. He has left with a group and now lives in the

forest. Court remains under the control of Celia's father, Duke Frederick. Duke Frederick begins to accuse Rosalind and her father of being traitors:

> ROSALIND: "Yet your mistrust cannot make me a traitor. Tell me whereon the likelihood depends."
>
> DUKE FREDERICK: "Thou art thy father's daughter. There's enough."
>
> ROSALIND: "So was I when your Highness took his dukedom. So was I when your Highness banished him. Treason is not inherited my lord, or if we did derive it from our friends, What's that to me? My father was no traitor." (1.3.51-58)

This passage illustrates Rosalind's ability to defend her own honor, and the honor of those that she loves. She argues that just because a person is around someone with a particular character, it does not mean that they share in their values. Here, she presents a compelling case for herself, and shows courage to challenge the opinions of those in power.

Celia's love for Rosalind is demonstrated by her loyalty to her. Unconvinced by Rosalind's arguments, Duke Frederick banishes her. Not only does he banish her, but he also attempts to shake Celia's loyalty to her by suggesting: "Thou art a fool. She robs thee of thy name, and thou wilt shine more bright and seem more virtuous when she is gone" (1.3.75-77). The duke is demonstrating a practice of placing women in competition with each other. This is a practice that Celia rejects completely, asserting that she cannot live without her cousin and closest friend. From here, the two women devise a plan to venture beyond the constraints of court, and into the forest: "now we go in content to liberty and not to banishment" (1.3.135-136). Their choice to view their banishment as a chance to achieve freedom reinforces the rigid constraints of living a life in their society. Moreover, Celia's commitment to standing by Rosalind's side reiterates that they find in each other all that they need: "Celia's love for

Rosalind thus functions as a guarantor even more powerful than their consanguinity, a promissory note of security and succession: what her own father 'hath taken away' from Rosalind's father 'perforce,' Celia vows to return in affection" (Crawford 107). Celia emphasizes that they can provide for each other in places that they lack.

Additionally, I aim to encourage students to identify themes regarding community, hierarchy, and the distinction between life in the Forest of Arden and life at Court. Zajac explains, "Authors like Shakespeare turned to pastoral as their primary means of fathoming and fashioning the contented self" (309). Act Two opens with a powerful monologue from Rosalind's father, Duke Senior. Here, he addresses his "co-mates and brothers in exile" (2.1.1). From this opening line, there is a clear shift in the way that Duke Senior views community. Rather than the hierarchical conventions at work in court, here in the forest, they are equals. In the same way, Zajac claims, "The state of collective contentment enables subjects to withstand outside forces, including political oppression, and it proves an affective foundation for sustainable communities, as in Duke Senior's pastoral society" (310). The entire monologue is categorized by language of positivity and hope. Similarly, the Duke suggests "and this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything" (2.1.15-17). Essentially, the Duke Senior is suggesting that they will be able to be self-sufficient, rely on each other, and find all of the wisdom they need through nature. This passage serves to further reinforce the distinction between life at court and life in the forest, and the implications of each.

In the same way, the exchange between Corin and Touchstone in Act Three further explores the differences between life in the Forest of Arden and life at court. Touchstone provides a flawed argument regarding his opinions of life in the forest: "in respect of itself it is a

good life, but in respect that it is a shepherd's life it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious" (3.2.12-16). Clearly, this argument turns in on itself, the implication being that although Touchstone enjoys life in the forest, he still holds life at court to a higher regard because of societal standards and judgement. Touchstone goes on to suggest that despite Corin's adept arguments in favor of his life as a Shepard, and his ability to keep up with Touchstone in an exchange of wit, he is still dammed because never received an education in court. Corin rejects this notion and "identifies contentment as the ideal reaction to adversity—one that stabilizes and improves the emotional life of the subject without barring the possibilities for gladness or pride" (Zajac 319). Corin states, "Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court. You told me you salute not at the court but you kiss your hands. That courtesy would be uncleanly if courtiers were shepherds" (3.2.39-43). Corin holds the ability to value both ways of life for what they are, and acknowledge their differences not as hierarchical but practical. Touchstone cannot extend the same mutual understanding. As Zajac argues, "By staging this confrontation between a stereotypical shepherd of pastoral and a urbane, skeptical clown, Shakespeare encourages his audience to think critically about different characters' constructions of contentment as they examine the concept to both comic and serious effect" (320). This scene offers the potential for a fruitful discussion about social and economic status, who holds power, and why.

Similarly, Phoebe embodies the theme of class mobility, a theme that is both relevant and relatable to a female incarcerated population particularly. Stirm argues that in both 3.5 and 5.7, "potential exists for a larger female community to form. Yet, the play rejects that potential

because of class barriers, just as it sets up Phoebe's attraction to Ganymede as both a class and a gender issue" (384). When Rosalind (as Ganymede) becomes aware of Phoebe and Silvius' situation, she aligns with Sylvius and urges Phoebe to be grateful for Sylvius' affections despite the fact that they are unwanted. Rosalind advises Phoebe, "Sell when you can; you are not for all markets" (3.5.63). In other words, she urges Phoebe to settle for the first man to show interest in her, because she could not possibly have better prospects. Not only does Rosalind not show support for another woman in this scene, but she degrades her based on appearance as well as social class. Stirm goes on to argue that "[w]hen we discuss Phoebe, students also consider Audrey and recognize that her social mobility too is restricted by class only as the students begin to see the importance of socioeconomic position do they realize the impossibility of a marriage between Celia or Rosalind and Touchstone or one of the shepherds" (385). The treatment of both Phoebe as well as Audrey illustrates the complexities of social and class mobility, even in the forest of Arden.

Additionally, Melancholy Jaques' "all the world's a stage" speech reiterates the value of community. Here, Jaques is offering a perspective regarding the stages of life, and how they eventually loop back to an undignified end. Although this is not a particularly hopeful speech, it provides insight into the philosophical and ubiquitous nature of Shakespeare's work. Hennessy explains, "Jaques perceives the world in terms of moral lessons which teach man the hopelessness of his condition. For him no place can offer a satisfactory sphere in which to live…and thus, Jaques sees himself as a perpetual traveler whose never-ending cycle of exile generates a unique sort of melancholy" (149). It is likely that students have heard bits of this monologue out of context. According to Witter, this particular quote ranks in the top ten most popular and recited Shakespeare quotes. Simply taking it line by line and extracting Jaques'

meaning is valuable and often surprising to students. This monologue reinforces the importance of community and a sense of place.

These are just a few sections that could be used to provide useful areas for discussion. Each of these passages reinforces the major impacts that I want students to gain from their study of the play, such as the value of sisterhood, challenging societal hierarchy and community. The following section similarly details my recommendations for assignments and activities as well as provides analysis for the second play I have chosen, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The Taming of the Shrew

The *Taming of the Shrew* is a play that incites strong reactions in readers and audience members. Although it is considered a comedy in various anthologies, and it adheres to certain conventions of the genre, it explores some very heavy themes such as misogyny and spousal abuse. For some readers, this play can be triggering and frustrating. Often, individuals may critique Shakespeare by thinking he supports the behaviors displayed in the plays. However, it is my goal when teaching this play to ensure that students understand that Shakespeare is often subversive, and this play provides an opportunity for readers to evaluate the ways that these themes manifest in contemporary society and the implications of that in their own lives.

This section also provides some recommendations for activities and assignments to supplement the reading of the play. Just as students did with *As You Like It*, they will be asked to come to class prepared with short reflections, and encouraged to take active notes. The major essay for this play will be a more formal essay in which they use evidence from the play as well as a secondary source to support the claims they make about the text. With this unit, I am concerned that they understand how to put academic texts in conversation with each other.

Additionally, in this section I will provide analysis of key scenes that I find best reinforce the themes I want students to explore through their reading of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Given the emphasis placed on reading comprehension in the previous unit, the activities in this section are catered more towards theme, and making/supporting claims about the text. Still yet, a short time should be allotted to discuss the plot as a class. Given that *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play that can provoke frustration and even anger (especially from a female audience), it is important to give students an opportunity to voice these frustrations. The stopwatch activity can be useful in this instance. To set up this activity, instructors should give students a couple of minutes to prepare their initial thoughts on the text. Then, the instructor should stand by the board with a stopwatch and give every student a set amount of time (maybe 45 seconds, maybe a minute) to voice their initial reactions to the reading. Instructors should jot down key points on the board to address once everyone has had a chance to speak. This is an opportunity for students to release their animosity towards the text. Doing so is useful for a couple of reasons. First of all, it gets all of the frustrations out so that they can be addressed without dominating the entire discussion. Additionally, it provides a space for instructors to translate frustrations surrounding the text towards more productive discussions of theme. For instance, if a student is frustrated that Petruchio forces Kate to say it is nighttime when it is not, instructors can guide the conversation towards a larger discussion on gaslighting and how it is abusive.

A similar activity that can be used to explore theme is a theme visual activity. This activity is a nice way to set up discussion and model how students can move from plot towards a larger commentary on theme. Instructors can begin by drawing a four-square on the board and asking the general question to students: “What stood out to you from the reading?” Students may

choose specific lines, moments, or scenes that had an impact on them. The instructor should be writing these points down and grouping them together on the chart in terms of theme. Once each student has shared, and the instructor has grouped points accordingly, the instructor can go in and label each section they have created. The reasoning behind the organization of points may not be readily apparent to students until the instructor reveals the labels on the four-square. This provides a visual to students so they can see how plot points work together to articulate various overarching themes and ideas.

There are a few sections that I would draw students' attention to during discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew*. These scenes reinforce themes such as power dynamics, love, social constructs, and feminism. My goal is to demonstrate the subjectivity and complexity of the play and present students with a variety of interpretations. Bennett argues that this is one key reason for the classroom study of plays: "In an effectively produced play, the director, scenic artists, and actors have all agreed on the one interpretation they wish to give to the dramatist's work…different production companies can create widely varying interpretations of a single play. Each may be valid in its own way" (248). The beauty of studying Shakespeare in the classroom is that there is space for the exploration of all the possible interpretations.

Contrary to some interpretations of *Shrew*, I argue that Kate embodies a woman who navigates the constraints of a patriarchal society and does not lose herself. Instead, she uses tactics of self-preservation to survive in this society. Hopefully, the passages I select complicate their understandings of the play and encourage them to see a version of *Shrew* in which Kate's resilience and wit allow her to outsmart the men who attempt to overpower her. Eschenbaum suggests "when students define Petruchio's treatment of Kate as 'domestic abuse' they are not just doing literary criticism, but they are doing political work and contributing to social justice

activism" (32). This alternative understanding of the play could have a powerful impact on a female incarcerated population who, as I described in my introduction, have statistically experienced a high rate of abuse.[9]

The first scene I would like to use to demonstrate Kate and Petruchio's evenly matched wit is the moment they meet in Act 2 Scene 1:

KATHERINE: If I be waspish best beware my sting.

PETRUCHIO: My remedy is then to pluck it out.

KATHERINE: Ay if the fool could find it where it lies.

PETRUCHIO: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail.

KATHERINE: In his tongue

PETRUCHIO: Whose tongue?

KATHERINE: Yours if you talk of tales, and so farewell.

PETRUCHIO: What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again good Kate.

I am a gentleman-

KATHERINE: That I'll try. *(She strikes him).* (2.1.223-233)

This is just one example that highlights the fact that Kate consistently keeps up with Petruchio in games of wit. The equality is evident from the fact that the lines are almost totally even in length. This scene further categorizes Kate not as a hysterical shrew, but an empowered woman capable of articulately speaking for herself. Moreover, Kate also physically strikes Petruchio, which subverts typical gender constructs of the time by making her the first aggressor. This is not to say that her physical assault of Petruchio is right or justified, but it serves to foreshadow more subversions to come.

[9] McConnell states that nearly six in ten women in state prisons report experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (5).

The wedding ceremony between Kate and Petruchio is categorized by Petruchio's attempts to publicly embarrass Kate through his behavior and attire. In the days that follow the ceremony, Petruchio attempts to "tame" Kate through various methods of abuse such as starvation and sleep-deprivation. Petruchio dramatically rejects the food the servants bring to Kate and she attempts to calm him down:

> KATHERINE: I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet. The meat was well, if you were so contented.
>
> PETRUCHIO: I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away, and I expressly am forbid to touch it, for it engenders choler, planteth anger, and better 'twere that both of us did fast than feed it with such over-roasted flesh. Be patient. Tomorrow't shall be mended and for this night we'll fast for company. (4.3.168-177)

Petruchio gaslights Kate by denying her basic needs under the vail that nothing is good enough for her. He insists that the food, the clothing, and the bed are not up to the standards that she deserves. Eschenbaum explains that "in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, cultural laws were discouraging husbands from using physical violence as a means of controlling wayward wives, and thus, *Shrew* may be, in part, an exploration of how men can gain control over their wives using forms of non-physical violence" (32). It is not that *Shrew* should be used as a manual for how to dominate women without leaving a mark, it is that *Shrew* allows the audience to conceptualize the reality that there are other kinds of abuse beyond the physical.

Another example of Petruchio's gaslighting occurs in a later scene. Petruchio convinces Kate to say it is nighttime at midday. Kate gives in and says, "Then God be blest, it is the blessed sun. But sun it is not when you say it is not, and the moon changes even as tour mind. What will have it named, even that it is and so it shall be so for Katherine" (4.5.20-25). One interpretation

supports that this is a heartbreaking moment where Kate gives up and succumbs to the domination. However, Eschenbaum provides a unique perspective: “She obeys, yes, but she explains that obedience is a performance. When Petruchio says the sun is now the sun again, she repeats him verbatim, but not without saying that she will also immediately agree it is the moon if she changed his mind again” (37). In this event, Kate is still in control, and is learning to navigate the reality of her situation, and deal with her husband without being completely broken down. This extends further when Kate is asked to address Vincentio as if he were a woman. Eschenbaum describes this as a kind of “playful empowerment” as she pretends to adhere to Petruchio’s wishes (37). In this interpretation, there seems to be a kind of mutual understanding between Petruchio and Kate, one that signifies an alliance between the two.

This performance and alliance carries over into the final scene in which Kate delivers her famous speech, which shows everyone how well Petruchio has been able to tame her. Kate convincingly explains to the wives, “Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper” (5.2.162). She goes on to say, “I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace, or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway when they are bound to serve, love and obey” (5.2.177-180). This speech is saturated with irony because everything that Kate is suggesting goes against the characterization we have of her. It is not suddenly that she is tamed, but “Kate is humanized by her husband and discovers love through the discovery of her own identity. She is therefore able to ‘submit herself to Petruchio because she trusts him not to dominate her’ (Avedano 2). This speech can be interpreted as ironic and sarcastic because to this point, there has been no evidence to support the claim that Petruchio has been successful in taming Kate; she has never lost control. However, she now knows how to perform and navigate the patriarchal society using Petruchio as her teammate. Eschenbaum argues that “the extreme nature of

Petruchio's actions indicates its artificiality" (32). In the same way, the over-the-top speech that Kate gives indicates its artificiality.

Both *As You Like It* and *The Taming of the Shrew* provide insight into issues still relevant to today's society. By reading these plays, students learn how to discuss important issues that directly affect them (such as gender, class, and community). Not only do these plays allow students to practice navigating these conversations, but as I discussed previously, the act of reading Shakespeare hones critical reading and thinking skills that will serve students in the second semester, and in life beyond the classroom. Further, it reinforces emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms by triggering empathy. These are just a few of the benefits of reading Shakespeare for a female incarcerated population. This chapter has discussed activities and pedagogical considerations for this particular course design. The following chapter builds off of these considerations and outlines in a similar way approaches for teaching creative writing in the same context.

CHAPTER 2: CREATIVE WRITING AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

The previous chapter discussed my plans and pedagogy for the first semester of a two-semester course with female justice-involved individuals within a correctional facility. Chapter one is mostly concerned with getting students to read and respond to texts critically. Instructors should also facilitate students' ability to join into productive academic conversation. Students join into academic conversation by learning how to respond to literature in their writing as well as in the classroom setting.

While the first semester is exclusively focused on Shakespeare, I provide a more diverse and contemporary reading list for my students in the second semester. In any context, representation is important. Students are able to relate to texts and authors differently. Exposure to a variety of voices, styles, and genres promotes the growth of students' own voices. Moreover, this exposure fosters opportunity for students to develop empathy for others who may be different from them, as well as gain confidence to enter into a community of writers with similar backgrounds and experiences. I developed this portion of the course under the assumption that to be a good writer is to be a good reader.[10]

To break down my goals further, the second semester will be composed of two major units: memoir writing/creative nonfiction and poetry writing. I chose to begin with memoir/creative nonfiction because an essay format is likely the form that students are most familiar with. Moreover, having students write directly about their own lives gives them a lifetime of experiences to pull from. Writing about their own experiences may be less overwhelming than beginning with fiction writing, for instance, and asking them to make up

[10] "Good writers are good readers. And they're readers of more than just internet posts; good writers read a variety of books, from fiction to nonfiction and from classics to contemporaries. It is through all of this reading that we can see what words other writers use and, importantly, how they use them" (Mazzie).

their own story, and develop their own characters right from the start. The transition from memoir to poetry seems most natural because poetry tends to be more personal, also pulling more directly from past/current experiences. For each unit, I will provide various readings as examples to demonstrate the genre. We will discuss the qualities that make each unique, as well as the ways they may overlap.

Pedagogical Considerations

Chapter two of my thesis describes the second semester in this year-long course. This chapter focuses on creative writing and exposing students to more diverse writers and styles. I have built this course upon my own experiences as an instructor and participant within educational programs in local jails, as well as the body of literature of instructors who have held similar courses in correctional facilities. The measures for defining success in this context are largely anecdotal and the benefits of these kinds of courses will vary from student to student. However, as Sparks explains:

> [A]n individual can begin, while still in prison, to use a creative arts activity to better understand who she is and also protect her sense of an independent self from the surveillance of the prison system (which can continue through parole or probation periods after release) as well as the rejection of those in society who cannot conceptualize a former inmate as being a person apart from her criminal record. (186)

Creative writing activities not only offer students an opportunity to explore themselves within their given situation, but also provide a space for students to explore who they are apart from this specific moment in their lives. Gouthro summarizes the value of these low-stakes opportunities for reflection: “Informal community-based opportunities for arts-based learning, which may include activities such as writing fiction or poetry, may foster critical reflection and lead to

greater social and civic engagement" (144). Creative writing courses give students the ability to express themselves in productive ways. However, it is necessary to make a conscious effort to create a learning community where individuals are comfortable sharing stories, whether they be personal or creative, and gain confidence in their work. These spaces offer a unique opportunity for students and instructors alike to gain insight and learn from each other.

In this chapter, I will discuss pedagogical approaches to teaching creative writing generally, and then apply those ideas to a classroom of incarcerated women. In doing so, it is important to consider Cheliotis' unique stance on the scholarship on arts-in-justice. She suggests that a vast majority of the scholarship focuses "disproportionally on the development and effectiveness of formalized, practitioner-run prison programs which claim to 'empower' and 'rehabilitate' prisoners by introducing them to the arts" (Cheliotis 16). The tone of some of these approaches can be distasteful in the way that they somewhat dilute the overall value of the programs. Of course, empowerment and rehabilitation are goals of the programs. However, there are many other goals and functions of justice-involved courses. Cheliotis points out the harmful tendency for these programs to be seen as a method of "decorative justice" that serves to mask the severity and injustices in the justice system (17). I want it to be clear that although I will use language that does encourage empowering students, and does suggest the value of creative writing as a rehabilitative tool, I do not suggest that there is not major reformative work to be done within our criminal justice system just because creative courses such as this one exist.

Another important element to consider is that while teaching creative writing, oftentimes students may share stories that instructors are not fully prepared for, or equipped to respond to. Students may begin to reflect on past traumas, disclose information on their crimes, or discuss mental health issues, just to name a few potential scenarios. In these situations, it can be difficult

for instructors to maintain professional and personal boundaries without becoming overly sentimental. Similarly, Jane Maher, a creative-writing instructor in a maximum-security women's prison, warns against sentimentality. She argues that although it can be difficult to remain impartial, instructors must remember their roles as an instructor and focus on where they can do the most good. Instructors can do the most good by providing an educational opportunity to help offset the predicament, described in detail in my introduction, that people find themselves in upon release. I can see how this could be difficult, especially when students are disclosing heartbreaking and difficult stories about themselves.

On the other hand, instructors must consider the potential discomfort that could arise from personal disclosure. As I described in my introduction, the female incarcerated population is statistically comprised of individuals who carry significant trauma. Given this harsh reality, instructors must understand the potential barriers to asking students to disclose pieces of their past. The statistics surrounding the growing rate of incarcerated women in the United States also demonstrate that these women have faced significant traumas that lead to their eventual incarceration.

Given the necessary considerations surrounding personal disclosure and trauma, it is important for instructors to be transparent with program coordinators and disclose that there is a chance that at some point in the course, students may become triggered. This is not inherently a bad thing, but it should be ensured that students are provided with the support they need, such as access to counselors and mental healthcare. I have done some background research on trauma-informed pedagogy to be more aware when navigating situations where these issues may arise. Trauma-informed pedagogy "keeps trauma, its prevalence, and how it affects an individual, in mind. These practices are very similar to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)" (UCI). As per

Universal Design, pedagogical practice that benefits a student who has experienced trauma will also benefit their classmates who do not share those traumas. Mays Imad provides a helpful framework for encapsulating this pedagogical approach. She suggests four key components: inform, connect, redirect, and protect. To inform students is to be transparent about trauma. Express that there are ways that their own experiences could be triggered in the course and provide them ways to mitigate that anxiety. She defines connecting as being hospitable in the classroom and developing a comfortable learning community. She encourages instructors to open their courses by explaining to the students why they are teaching, and the ways that they value them as students. She suggests that instructors should be patient with students and redirect them when they are off course, and not be frustrated when previously learned topics must be reinforced. Finally, instructors can protect students by offering empathy and fostering a hopeful tone for the future when talking in class (Imad). In the context of a jail or prison, all of these considerations become even more critical. Obviously, being open and honest with a population that is generally (and often rightfully) distrustful of authority is the first step to establishing a positive relationship with students. Furthermore, patience is essential when having to reinforce topics and redirect conversations during class because, for many of the students, it may have been a long time since they were in a classroom setting. Finally, offering empathy and a hopeful tone for their future can encourage students, reinforcing the belief that they can extend skills they hone in the course to their life upon release.

Although it is likely that students will write about their traumas to some degree, at some point during the semester, it is important to express that those are not the only experiences worth writing about. Even though a traumatic event may lead to a larger lesson or commentary on life, so, too, might a contemplative walk down a trail. A large portion of class time will be dedicated

to excavating metaphor and meaning. Ideally, through some of these activities, students will feel encouraged to write and explore some of their smaller experiences and what society could learn from those moments as well. A major goal of this course is to help students explore their identity beyond their crimes, and the traumas that lead them to commit these crimes.

All of this considered, the benefits of creative writing to this population are apparent, despite the challenges it may present. While one of the goals of this course is to help students develop their voice and identity beyond their current situation and past traumas, research suggests that writing about trauma is beneficial, and writing about it in a narrative format can be even more helpful: "It helps the individual reorganize the memories involving the traumatic event. Focused expressive writing may promote alterations in memory structure, making the memory more coherent and organized" (Smyth et al. 230). Obviously, instructors for these courses are not necessarily therapists and creative writing cannot take the place of the mental health support that these individuals need. However, it can serve as a therapeutic experience, a way that they can contextualize their experiences and extract meaning from them.

One final consideration when designing courses within a correctional facility is the student's access to materials. Classes held in these secure facilities face logistical obstacles that instructors do not have to consider in the traditional classroom. For example, activities that require highlighters, technology, or even handouts may have to be modified to accommodate the rules of the facility. Some facilities may be more flexible than others, but instructors should expect rules regarding what they are and are not allowed to give out to the students. This extends further when instructors expect students to complete homework outside of the given class time each week. It is possible that students will not be permitted to take writing instruments, notebooks, or folders back into their living quarters. Moreover, there is always the risk of these

materials being confiscated or damaged. This risk is just one reason that instructors should advocate for a study hall for their students. Being given the opportunity for a study hall will allow students to be removed from the general population and have a quiet environment to read, write, and reflect. Study halls also give students the opportunity to expand their learning community, and explore ideas with their classmates without the pressure of the instructor in the room, although there will still be a guard or supervisor of some kind present in the room.

Given the considerations surrounding trauma, personal disclosure, and the general limitations of teaching within a secure correctional facility, instructors are tasked with anticipating various scenarios. Even more so than in a traditional teaching environment, each day can be very unpredictable. Instructors can expect that even the daily operations of the facility and/or court system may interfere with their class and their students. Therefore, there is even more planning and flexibility required for justice-involved courses. The proceeding section describes my plans for the first major unit of the course, which focuses on memoir writing and creative nonfiction.

Unit One: Memoir Writing and Creative Nonfiction

I will begin this semester with a unit focused on memoir writing. The goals of this unit are primarily surrounding metaphor and meaning. I will begin this unit by providing students with examples of the genre, and allow them time to write about, reflect on, and discuss them informally. Students will be provided with different activities that will serve as invention strategies for creating their own memoir essay. Finally, students will be taken through the full drafting process of their memoir, including peer review, to emphasize writing as a process rather than a product.

To summarize, the goals of this unit are as follows:

- Students should be expected to gain an understanding of the role metaphor plays in relating information to an audience.
- Another key area of focus during this unit is autobiographical significance, or being able to present individual stories in a way that they are relatable and meaningful to a wider audience.
- This unit also focuses on the logistics of character development, and how to balance the three major components of the memoir: autobiographical significance, dialogue, and description.
- This unit emphasizes writing as a process by using scaffolding techniques.

The primary source for developing this unit is *Writing Life Stories: How to Make Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature,* by Bill Roorbach. Roorbach defines memoir as "a true story, a work of narrative built directly from the memory of the writer, with an added element of creative research" (13). Students may carry a belief that their lives are too "ordinary" for them to write a memoir—even students within a correctional facility who likely have very complex stories. However, my goal is to demonstrate that each person may have experiences, perspectives, and interactions with the world that are unique. Yet, some experiences are universal, or can be universalized to create important commentary or reflections on life: "of course, your life is only a starting point, a cliff from which to leap onto the great sea of human experience, or fly over it with new wings" (Roorbach 17). There is something in everyone's story that could resonate with others in meaningful ways; this meaning that can be excavated can be called autobiographical significance, or high exposition. Once students understand that they can translate their experiences into something meaningful for others, it is a matter of honing students' experiences. The instructor can give them support by helping them to explore through

writing how those experiences made them feel, what they learned, what the autobiographical significance is, and what they want the reader or society at large to gain from their stories. Throughout the unit, there are various activities that will serve as scaffolding and invention strategies to help students write a short memoir essay of their own, identifying and communicating its autobiographical significance. One such scaffolding activity, which is crucial for the development of the student's understanding of the genre, is reading and discussing models of memoir essays. A few of these include "Bad Feminist" by Roxane Gay, "A Few Words About Breasts" by Nora Ephron, and "An American Childhood" by Annie Dillard.

In addition to identifying the autobiographical significance of their story, students should practice making their story literary. Literary in the context of memoir writing is making the piece engaging for the reader. A major key to develop the skill of making their writing engaging is helping students understand the difference between *telling* readers their story and *showing* readers their story. in other words, teaching students to write descriptively. Rather than telling readers their teacher was mean, they should be able to detail situations and conversations that develop this characterization of their teacher and trust that their reader will make that connection. One activity designed to help students make this distinction is to practice revising "telling" statements to "showing" statements. Begin by writing a couple of these on the board, such as "I was afraid to cross the street" or "the interview made me nervous." Then, model how students could show the reader these things in a more engaging, descriptive way. Once students have had some practice as a large group, break them up into smaller ones with different statements to revise. Finally, ask each group to read their original and revised statements.

Of equal importance, when introducing a new genre (especially one students will write within), it is critical to provide students with examples to build off of. One way I have had

success with introducing memoir is by reading the Prologue to *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. This short prologue models how a single, small experience could lead to an overall commentary on life and society. To get students engaged with the text, pass out copies of the prologue. Have students underline images and places Angelou *shows* the reader something. Have students circle the pieces of autobiographical significance. Finally, have students draw a squiggly line under dialogue. This activity can show students a model of how to balance these three elements to produce a memoir. This activity or a similar one could be done with just about any creative nonfiction essay.

In this section, I will be using scaffolding techniques and activities over seven weeks to work students up to the completion of a short memoir essay. These activities are for the student; they do not need to be evaluated. Ideally, if students are allowed to keep a notebook in their possession, they can be kept there as a kind of journal. Each class period of this unit will focus on the reading that they had for the day, and an invention strategy to prepare them for their own essay. In his book, Roorbach has various activities that build a foundation and offer opportunities for invention and brainstorming. One of the first things that Roorbach focuses on is memory. With creative nonfiction, there is a balance between memory and details we include; sometimes memory is faulty and there are times where the writer must take some creative liberties. However, there is a certain obligation to make sure that the overarching story is true and lived by the writer. It is also true that detail and description are a great way to keep readers engaged. However, the color of the curtains in our grandma's home may escape us. Even if every detail of a scene or memory is not completely accurate, past experiences still resonate into powerful stories—the heart of the story will still come out, even if the true color of the curtains does not. It is not the small specific details that bring about the significance and relatability of the essay.

As I explained previously, it is important to provide students with various invention strategies to help them organize their ideas. Roorbach suggests a map-making activity as a jumping-off point for students to begin to explore where and when some significant moments in their lives have taken place. This activity begins by having students create a map of a significant place to them. Maybe it is a childhood neighborhood; maybe it is the first place they lived when they moved out of their childhood home. Their map should be of any place that they deem important, a place where their story lives. Have them map it out in detail—"who lived there? Where were the secret places? Where were their friends? Where did the weird people live? Where were the off-limits places? Where did good things happen?" (Roorbach 28). Instructors could pose all of these questions at once on the board or take a more guided approach and ask them one at a time and give students time after each question to work.

After students were finished with their maps, encourage them to share. One of the major goals of feminist pedagogy is to "help students discover their voices while paying attention to how women's voices have been historically muted by inequitable cultural conditions" (Micciche 130). When instructors ask the students to share low-stakes activities or ask groups to report out, hopefully, students will begin to get more comfortable with talking to the class as a whole, helping them to develop their voice. Once students have shared their maps, ask that they spend some time reflecting on them. One way to do this is to encourage students to write their ideas as bullet points in two columns: potential stories and autobiographical significance. Their columns do not have to be detailed to anyone but the student. For example, they may write "bike ride" in the story column and "friendship" in the autobiographical significance column. It may not be clear to us how the two tie together at this stage.

Similar to the autobiographical significance, students must explore metaphor and meaning. As Roorbach explains, “A deeper and more complex understanding of metaphor than you now enjoy will enrich your relationship with language, put you in greater control of its use” (16). Being able to use metaphor to achieve some kind of high exposition is the way that writers can enhance autobiographical significance to their readers. Just like any rhetorical tool, learning to develop a strong metaphor is a skill that needs to be honed. One powerful exercise recommended by Roorbach is “the old Chinese restaurant menu exercise” described below:

ACTIVITY: (Roorbach 169-170). Pass out a sheet with two columns that look something like this:

Column A	Column B
• Divorce	Pitchfork
• Health	Leaf
• Childhood	Danish
• Truth	Pond
• Science	Balloon
• Desire	Shampoo
• Music	Cleat
• Jealousy	Mailbox
• Madness	Perfume
• Victory	Air
• Inspiration	Kiss

Ask students to choose one thing from each column and write a comparison. Begin with the general statement “Column A is a Column B” (ex: jealousy is a pitchfork) and then examine the

more complex or elaborate points of the comparison—trying to achieve some kind of high exposition/autobiographical significance. By now, students have been exposed to three different types of memoir invention strategies designed to help them explore their own experiences while also beginning to understand how to extract a meaning from those experiences that could be relatable to their audience.

Now that the students have their map, some understanding of metaphor, and some ideas for potential stories, they need to develop characters. Roorbach explains:

> [W]hen you are writing nonfiction, much of the work of characterization is done for you. The character has been made, characterization is complete, the family history is in place, the physical description is a given….the chore is merely different: doing justice to a person that you and many others have known, while also doing justice to the fact that you know that person in your way. (91)

Instructors could ask that students write out a character list of all the people involved in their story. What do they look like? What is their role? Once students have thought about the characters in their story, they should give their characters a voice. Dialogue is a great way to add depth to stories and develop characterization. However, for a lot of people writing, authentic dialogue can be very difficult. In this class, I will go over things to avoid when creating dialogue—Roorbach gives a great list of things to consider, such as characters talking too formally in ways that people do not speak, small talk that does not show readers much about the characters, including too much dialect, over-the-top tag lines, and information dumping (when writers try to give readers too much important information through dialogue). Once we have carefully explained and considered all of these things regarding dialogue, it is time for students

to get their characters talking to each other on the page. For this activity, students will be asked to write about one to two pages of back-and-forth dialogue between their characters.

All of these exercises and readings serve to scaffold and model the memoir writing process for students. Through these activities, students should have their story, characters, and setting conceptualized and the drafting process can begin. Students will do most of their drafting outside of the classroom, and they will submit a first draft that instructors should provide comments on. From there, they will be given the opportunity to continue to revise as we move on to poetry. At the end of the semester, it could be useful to have an in-class revision day where students choose their best work from the semester and work on further revisions, workshop with instructors and in groups before we share at our final celebration. Once students have completed their memoirs, instructors can begin to shift to unit two. The following section provides some activities and strategies for teaching poetry writing in a jail setting.

Unit Two: Poetry

Instructors should spend the first day of this unit introducing students to the terminology and tools necessary to read, write, and discuss poetry. The previous semester will have covered basic literary terminology and how to write about literature broadly—things such as theme, symbol, and motif. Instructors should have gone over terms such as stanza, couplet, and meter, and how to identify and discuss those as well as the different poetic forms using Shakespeare's sonnets. However, it would be important to spend a bit of time reintroducing students to these terms in order to lay the groundwork for meaningful conversations and writing. One of my goals during this half of the semester is again to provide students with examples of the genre to serve as a framework for their own writing. The product of this unit will be a chapbook of poetry that

they develop over the course of the seven weeks, as well as many short reading analysis exercises.

In my experience, students will have their preferences regarding what genre they are most comfortable writing in. For students who are not as comfortable writing poetry, having students write about their own experiences first could seem a bit less daunting, and a lot of the lessons from unit one, such as autobiographical significance, will carry over to unit two. The first few weeks of this unit will function as a kind of poetry-reading book club. I have developed a reading list (which can be found in the appendix) where students will read a couple of poems and provide a short response, being sure that students practiced responding to poetry meaningfully before they respond to each other's work later in the semester.

Once students were more comfortable identifying qualities of and discussing poetry in general, instructors should have certain specific activities and prompts for students to write towards. To make the transition from prose to poetry a bit more seamless, a good way to begin the poetry unit with the six-word memoir activity. Using Hemmingway's famous six-word story, "For sale, baby shoes, never worn," as a framework, I would ask students to write their own short, six-word memoir. Again, I would encourage volunteers to share their work and talk about the meaning behind them. This activity shows students that a lot can be said, and a great impact can be made, using fewer, more carefully selected words.

I have found that the best way to learn poetry is to read it and model it. One of the most helpful exercises I have found is for students to take the concept of another poem and write it from their perspective, as a kind of prompt. For instance, instructors could demonstrate the importance of word choice by using "Where I'm From," a list poem by George Ella Lyon. In the second stanza, she states:

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,

from Imogene and Alafair.

I'm from the know-it-alls

and the pass-it-ons,

from Perk up! and Pipe down! (Lyon)

Each word that Lyon uses brings back a certain tone, an image that encompasses the feeling of her home, Harlan Kentucky. Fudge and eyeglasses are two contrasting yet related images; fudge being a pleasure in life while eyeglasses are more of a necessity. However, where she is from the two things are *both* necessary and comforting staples. By explaining that she is from the "know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons," she is showing the reader that the people in her life are a strong-willed kind of people, who believe in themselves and value their traditions. Not only does a list poem require that students choose their words carefully, but it is also less overwhelming because it is, in fact, just a carefully constructed list.

Similarly, instructors could use the poem "I Go Back to May 1937" by Sharon Olds. After reading this poem, ask students to brainstorm about a time before they were born. This could be an old family story they have heard about, it could be a re-envisioning of when their parents, grandparents, or guardians met, it could be about their neighborhood in the past, or anything in this vain. This prompt is loose enough to foster creativity but also gives students a concept to ease into.

This unit will provide scaffolded learning opportunities for students to read a diverse poetry selection, and write short reflections on the chosen poems while beginning to write poems of their own. The guided activities will be supplemented by poetry prompts so that students can have a bit more freedom to begin writing outside the classroom. By the end of the unit, students

will know not only how to respond to professional poetry, but also how to function in a writing workshop with their peers. I would ask that each week students bring in a poem they have been working on alongside their readings and reflections. Students will be broken up into smaller workshop groups where they will read their work to each other, and comment. This way, students will get the opportunity to share their work with each other in a low-stakes setting rather than be expected to read aloud one by one to the class.

Conclusion

My experience participating in English classes at local jails, and my research into community-engaged and trauma-informed pedagogies, helped to inform my decisions when designing this course. Collaborative educational programming in prisons and jails is just one way that the criminal justice system can move towards a focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment. English departments are in a unique position to participate in these kinds of programs. Although reading difficult texts and writing well are practical life skills, the English instructor can take things even further. In the classroom, students have the opportunity to hone valuable interpersonal skills such as working in a group, meeting deadlines, coping with frustration, and articulating thoughts and feelings, just to name a few. Through literature, students may be able to conceptualize and analyze complex societal and personal issues. Through writing (both academically and creatively), students are able to find their voice and enter into conversations about these larger issues from a position of authority.

APPENDIX

Assignment Sheet: Reflections

To encourage thoughtful and active reading we will be writing short reflections on the plays. I will ask that you respond analytically to the play—your response should move well beyond plot summary. I ask that you use specific examples from the text to support any claims that you make in your response. I am leaving the assignment fairly open ended. Feel free to incorporate the current events to support your claims as well.

Some guided questions are listed below:

- Discuss a particular literary element (character, setting, narrator) and explain how and why it figures strongly in that section.
- Evaluate the voice of the author. How does he play with language and to what effect?
- Explore a connection between the selection and your experiences or experiences of those you know.
- Discuss a part of the text you find difficult to understand or to connect with, explaining why you chose this section.
- Connect a section with what you have learned about the cultural context of the novel.
- Focus on a universal theme or controlling idea of the work. What does this novel have to teach the reader outside of the world of the narrative?
- How well does the writer appeal to reader' emotions, sympathies, and values?
- What questions, dilemmas, or problems does this text raise for you? What new insights, ideas, or thoughts of your own have been stimulated by this text?
- What personal memories or experiences does this text trigger for you?

Assignment Sheet: Thematic Paper

This paper will be longer and more formal than the previous reflection assignment. Although you may pull ideas from things you touched on in your reflections, this should be much more specific and in-depth. You should chose a particular theme, or argument you want to make about the text and convince your reader by using specific evidence from the text to support your claims.

Potential Topic Ideas for *As You Like It:*

- Sisterhood
- Community
- Gender roles
- Court vs. Forest
- The influence of social class
- Relationships

Assignment Sheet: Academic Conversation Essay

This essay should be longer and more formal than your reflection assignment. The goal of this assignment is to help you learn to put academic texts in conversation with one another. You clearly have your own thoughts, feelings and arguments regarding the play. With the previous essay, you practiced rooting these thoughts and arguments in the text by pulling specific evidence from the play to support your claims.

With this essay, we will push our argumentative skills one step further by adding an academic article to our arguments. You should carefully read the article and decide if it supports (or goes against) your own arguments about the play. Use this article to strengthen your argument. For example, if the writer supports your own argument, use their claims as support. On the other hand, if you disagree you should explain what you disagree with and use specific evidence from the text to refute their claims.

Reading List for Creative Writing Unit

Memoir:

- The prologue to *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- "Bad Feminist" by Roxane Gay,
- "A Few Words About Breasts" by Nora Ephron, and
- "An American Childhood" by Annie Dillard.

Poetry:

"I Go Back to May 1937" by Sharon Olds

"Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon

"Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou

"Still I Rise" Maya Angelou

"Homage to My Hips" by Lucille Clifton

"Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath

"Half-Hanged Mary" by Margaret Atwood

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