

## Review of “Scenes from a Crowded Classroom”

RECOMMENDATION: Accept with stipulated revisions.

STRENGTHS: I really like this article and this strategy. The author provides an excellent suggestion regarding how to help students visualize drama and how to enhance students’ engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare in particular. With just a bit of revision, the piece will be of interest to a wide variety of readers (middle school, high school, college). Although I list quite a few suggestions for revision—which, of course, will be up to the author and the editor(s) to hash out—I want to say again that I think the article is really good and well worthy of publication in *LAJM*.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR REVISION:

- On p. 1, the author writes, “These lessons are especially important in introductory courses that meet general education requirements. . . .” I would recommend that the author keep in mind the wide-ranging audience of *LAJM*: perhaps the majority of readers will be middle and high school teachers. Such language (focusing on general education requirements) might put them off, which would be a shame: they’ll be able to use the strategy to good effect with their students. Changing the sentence and, perhaps, the overall tone of the piece to attract and retain secondary teachers as readers would be a good idea.
- One way to change the tone of the piece to draw in a wider audience might be to tell some stories. In other words, although the author does a good job of explaining the strategy to fellow teachers, the author doesn’t yet draw the reader into the classroom and let the “audience” watch. Telling a story or two might help your audience feel more part of your classroom and give the piece an even more collegial feel. Can you tell a story (or quote a student) with regard to some important learning that happened as a result of the blocking? For example, you might simply rewrite your treatment of *Othello* 1.1 in story form. Instead of saying, “Here’s what we do,” tell the story. Take us along. Draw us in. Help us see it. If you’d rather not mess with your retelling of how you approach 1.1, perhaps you could add a brief story about what happened the last time you used the strategy you’re recommending.
- Another way to reach out to a wider audience might be to reference the Common Core State Standards. Help the audience to see that your strategy is not only defensible but advantageous for those who must support all of their pedagogical decisions by referring to standards.
- On p. 2, the author writes, “The lessons work best when they focus on scenes from the play in which attention to blocking helps to illuminate the characters’ actions and motives.” Many teachers will want some principles to follow here and perhaps a clear example (if not from *Othello*, then perhaps from *Romeo and Juliet* or another famous

play). Help the teachers think about how to choose which scenes to focus on. Presenting a scene that DOESN'T need blocking, followed by a scene in which blocking is crucial, could be helpful.

- On p. 5, the author writes, “Drawing out ideas from students who are familiar with theatre, I lead a brief discussion of conventions for blocking and lighting that can be used to draw extra attention to actors during their delivery of especially significant lines.” This is an important move, but many teachers might need some direction and a few examples. What kinds of questions might they ask to draw those ideas out of their more theatrically minded students?
- I love Figure 1 and the activity surrounding it—but help the readers to see why you’ve chosen this scene to focus on (see bullet #2 above).
- On p. 8, the author writes, “Students work through the remainder of the passage with a partner so that they need to voice to the inferences they are making.” Something’s missing there, I think.
- On p. 8, the author writes, “They also realize that the staging must occur in such a way that the audience understand that Othello is hidden from the other characters—and yet can clearly hear (and perhaps see) Othello’s reaction to the unfolding drama.” The problem here is ambiguity: what is the subject of the verb phrase “can clearly hear?” The author intends “audience” to be the subject, but the reader might, at least initially, think that “Othello” is the subject. (I did).
- On p. 9, I’d like to recommend a small revision to the homework assignment. The author writes, “On the back of your photocopy, write a short paragraph about why you picked this scene.” I would suggest asking the students to “write a short paragraph in which you explain both why this particular scene needs blocking in the first place, and what you believe to be the most important blocking move you made (and why you made it).” I’m not suggesting that you change your assignment, necessarily—just that you present some alternatives for your audience to consider when they ask themselves, “How could I use this in my own classroom?”
- On p. 9, you suggest that teachers locate and reserve additional rooms near their own classrooms (n.b. that the word “rooms” is missing from the sentence in the draft). I’m afraid that this would be impossible in most middle and high school settings. What other suggestions could we make for teachers who have no access to conveniently located, empty classrooms? How could we adapt the strategy and keep everybody in the same room (a couple of groups in the hallway? move everybody to the cafeteria or to the auditorium?)

Again, great job. I hope *LAJM* will take this piece.