

Q&A

with Jewel Weekes, student and Jason Nash, teacher
St Peter Claver College

Drama, Internal assessment 3: Project — practice-led project

Jewel Weekes, student

Q: What did you enjoy most about Drama?

A: *I enjoyed the ability to perform, express, create and experiment in Drama.*

Q: How did you prepare for this assessment task?

A: *In class and individually, I watched many different versions of Hamlet and analysed many different depictions and portrayals of the characters. I worked with something that resonated with me and used this assessment as an opportunity to put my emotions into an assessment.*

Q: How did your teacher prepare you for this assessment?

A: *My teacher ensured we had seen and analysed many different versions of Hamlet and we did a lot of monologue-based activities to assist with portrayal, understanding, and fluency in the script.*

Q: What made you choose the topic or method of presentation?

A: *I wanted to take how little Ophelia's madness was explored and turn it into something so that we could understand her a little bit more. There were parts of me and my experiences that resonated with the concept of Ophelia being lost in her own mind, being pulled in between these different voices and perspectives of men in her life, that ultimately drove her to her breaking point where she felt 'lost'.*

Q: What is most important to you when you are preparing a response to an assessment task?

A: *I want to ensure that I am passionate about what I am attempting to express but I also want to make sure I am hitting the criteria to achieve the best possible mark I can for my efforts.*

Q: What are your thoughts about this assessment and the approach you took when responding to the task?

A: *I'm really quite satisfied with what I created with the mirrors being able to reflect the characters of Hamlet and Polonius portrayed by Ophelia directly to the audience; it is a little bit of a shame that this doesn't translate as well onto camera. One of the challenges was definitely getting the mirror to reflect in the right way and finding the right positions to be in. I like the way I used the concept of reflection to portray the different aspects of Ophelia's mind because no matter what Hamlet or her father said to her, she was amplifying the pressure and grief that threw her into such a mad state where she gets to the point where she can no longer see herself in her reflection. The symbol of fire was another layer of depth to it that I enjoyed being able to explore. It has so much potential to be beautiful and essential, and comforting but also just as short-lived, destructive, unpredictable and reliant on other sources for its existence.*

Q: How will you use what you have learnt in this subject?

A: *As I am taking a Communications and Business pathway focusing on marketing, I intend to take what I have learnt from Drama and apply it to be able to convey messages and pitches with engagement and persuasion, but also potentially to have a greater understanding of the entertainment industry if I take a business pathway through that industry as it is something I have always loved.*

James Nash, teacher

Q: What was the purpose of this assessment and what key decisions were made in the design of the task?

A: Working as a director, delivering a vision for the transformation of an inherited text into a contemporary performance, students are required to deliver their vision as a multimodal pitch, before working as either individuals or groups to bring their (or someone else's) vision to the stage. Shakespeare's Hamlet was chosen as the characters offered opportunities and potential themes of interest to this particular cohort. Hamlet's soliloquys cover a lot of moods and topics, offering additional opportunities for interpretation. The context — presenting a vision to Backbone Youth Arts — enabled a brief investigation of this real-world group and an opportunity to see some of their work. Connecting classroom practice to industry practice helps add a dimension of engagement to the task, which aids immeasurably.

Q: How did your teaching and the student learning experiences prepare the students to complete this assessment?

A: We deconstructed Shakespeare's Hamlet for thematic material, and analysed how a range of performers across many film productions have interpreted subtext and meaning in delivering the text. We explored ways that heritage texts can work as allegories for contemporary experiences, and how we can re-read characters differently in a new time and zeitgeist, and what that recontextualisation does for our understanding. We delivered parts of the play in different contexts to look at the impact on meaning and we reviewed new, postmodern performances that had appropriated Shakespeare's words.

Fragmentation exercises with more familiar texts (newspaper blackout, cut-up method) prepared students to be able to perform similar work on Shakespeare's text. Students identified characters and themes of particular interest, completed simple exercises like keyword searches, compiled speeches and dialogue and then reordered and rearranged the text to find a relevant meaning. Ophelia became a central point of focus for our largely female identifying class, and we examined how her character (and the silencing she experiences) could be representative of themes of mental illness, oppression of women, and others.

Peer feedback sessions and opportunities for students to 'pitch' their ideas were a fundamental part of the process for both the pitch and the performance.

Q: How does this assessment reflect the unique characteristics of your school and your students?

A: St Peter Claver College has always fostered a strong sense of social justice and interconnectedness to the world around us. Our students have strong instincts regarding what is right, and their willingness to express that is a perfect representation of our values. This assessment is somehow both deeply personal and deeply political and uses something that is timeless to make a point about our contemporary lives today. This, in many ways, is a perfect representation of what makes our school unique.

Q: Can you explain the exemplary aspects of Jewel's response?

A: In her response, Jewel has perfectly captured the essence of Ophelia's vulnerability by making astute choices regarding the text and its thematic opportunities. She has very successfully transformed the text in her application and structuring of dramatic conventions such as fragmentation, appropriation and intermediality; and minor incorporation of aspects of visual theatre and symbolist theatre. Her directorial concept was well presented and conceived, communicating her ideas with clarity and insight. Her ability to interpret purpose and context was also outstanding in her transformation of an inherited text to a contemporary performance. The performance itself was outstanding — a synthesis of skills of performance and use of the conventions and elements of drama that was sustained through the whole duration. Jewel was committed, focused and engaging on the stage — she took the resources at hand and made the performance space ritualistic and symbolic, but also highly functional.