Play to Learn: Shakespeare games as decolonial praxis in South African schools

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ABSTRACT

The place of Shakespeare in South African secondary education has become highly contested in light of calls to decolonise the English Home Language curriculum through intentional inclusion of indigenous authors and knowledge systems, and the removal of colonial impositions such as Shakespeare. Yet removing Shakespeare from the curriculum is not the only or even the best solution for countering the violent legacies of colonialism and apartheid. This article argues that a more effective decolonial approach would be to change the way Shakespeare is taught in schools by cultivating horizontal, instead of hierarchical, dialogue within classrooms and between secondary educators and Shakespeare scholars. The authors describe their own horizontal collaboration to produce "Blood will have Blood", a series of lesson plans and assignments centred on scenes of violence in the Shakespeare set works. Using the digital theatre game *Play the Knave*, the programme engages secondary school students in creative experimentation and embodied play with Shakespeare's texts. As learners access the curriculum from their own epistemological standpoints and through their own bodies, they come to understand gendered and racial forms of violence represented in the plays and manifested in their personal and historical contexts. The article contextualises the project in terms of Practice as Research (PAR) methodology while offering preliminary findings from the programme's implementation in Cape Town schools.

As debates about decolonising schools continue to rage in South Africa, Shakespeare's plays stand out for their centrality to the conversation and for their dogged persistence in the curriculum. To be sure, Shakespeare is an iconic symbol of oppression in South Africa. When the British colonised South Africa, and so many other places around the globe, they brought Shakespeare with them, using the plays as tools to spread English culture, language, religion and values. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes, reflecting sardonically on his schooling in Kenya, Shakespeare's "greatness was presented as one more English gift to the world alongside the bible and the needle. William Shakespeare and Jesus Christ had brought light to darkest Africa."[1] Even when the British left South Africa, Shakespeare remained a force of oppression, this time weaponised by the white supremacist apartheid government, which used Shakespeare to police morality and enforce conformity to conservative social norms, even going so far as to assign particular Shakespeare plays to schools for white students and other plays to schools for black and 'coloured' students.[2] This history has informed recent calls to eliminate Shakespeare from

1 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p.91.

2 See David Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Martin Orkin, *Shakespeare against Apartheid* (Craighall: Ad. Donker, 1987).

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South African schools so as to resist the oppressive traditionalism and colonial history he represents and to make room for indigenous African authors.[3] Yet despite the end of colonial administration and the end of apartheid, Shakespeare persists in the curriculum, especially at the secondary level. Indeed, a survey of South African high school teachers found that just about all of them believed Shakespeare's plays to be essential to the English Home Language curriculum, even if they also believed Shakespeare's plays are harder to teach than many of the other texts in that curriculum.[4] This paradox perpetuates Shakespeare's uncomfortable place in South African schools. Because Shakespeare's language and historical context are alienating to many students and teachers, teachers fall back on traditional and depoliticised interpretations of the plays – including appealing to abstract and often bardolotrous notions of Shakespeare's 'universality'[5] – as well as traditional and hierarchical methods of teaching the plays.[6] These approaches only alienate students further, underscoring Shakespeare as a strange British export that does not 'belong' to South Africans, and making it all the harder to imagine a place for Shakespeare in decolonised schools.

We maintain that the answer is not to take Shakespeare out of the curriculum entirely. Just as it is possible to teach indigenous African authors in traditional ways that uphold colonial hierarchies, so is it possible to challenge these power structures head on *through* Shakespeare. Indeed, Shakespeare's transformative possibilities in South Africa have been well documented by South African scholars such as Martin Orkin, Chris Thurman, Natasha Distiller and Sandra Young, as well as by scholar-practitioners of theatre, such as Ayanda Khala-Phiri, Tamar Meskin, and Nellie Ngcongo.[7] Scholars and performers of Shakespeare responded thoughtfully to the 2015 #RhodesMustFall and 2016 #FeesMustFall movements – which called on universities "to re-think, re-imagine, and revise outdated colonial systems of learning" – by exploring how "Shakespeare could be dislodged from the colonial canon, and renewed for a new stage, a new moment, in contemporary South Africa".[8] Given all of this groundbreaking work by university-based scholars and theatre scholar-practitioners, it is concerning that the re-envisioned, decolonial Shakespeare found in academic books and theatres tends not to be the Shakespeare found in high school classrooms and Grade 12 (exit-level) exams.

We contend that a major reason Shakespeare persists in secondary schools as not just a symbol of, but a material enabler of, the oppressive power structures of colonialism is a lack of what Marcelo

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3 For an overview of the issue (albeit from the perspective of a scholar arguing to keep Shakespeare in South African education), see Laurence Wright, "Aspects of Shakespeare in Post-Colonial Africa", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 4 (1990): 31–50. On the importance of bringing into the curriculum literature written in indigenous African languages, see wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*.

4 Natasha Distiller cites an interview in October 2003 with the curriculum advisor for English in the Western Cape, Phumla Satyo, who reported back to Distiller about a 1996 survey of teachers. When asked about no longer making Shakespeare compulsory on the English First Language syllabus, 99.9% of teachers insisted that "'English without Shakespeare would be no English'." Natasha Distiller, "Begging the Questions: Producing Shakespeare for Post-apartheid South African Schools", *Social Dynamics* 35.1 (2009): 179.

5 See Chris Thurman, "From Shakespearean Singularity to Singular Shakespeares: Finding New Names for Will-in-the-World", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 30 (2017): 1–13; on Shakespeare's entrenchment in the South African education system, see Wright, "Aspects of Shakespeare in Post-Colonial Africa."

6 This is an issue in schools across the world, including in the Global North. See Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

7 See Orkin's *Shakespeare against Apartheid* as well as *Local Shakespeares: Proximations and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) and "'I Am the Tusk of an Elephant': *Macbeth*, *Titus*, and *Caesar* in Johannesburg" in *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, ed. Ton Hoenselaars (London: Arden, 2004); Sandra Young, *Shakespeare in the Global South: Stories of Oceans Crossed in Contemporary Adaptation* (London: Arden, 2019); Thurman, "From Shakespearean Singularity to Singular Shakespeares" as well as "'Sher and Doran's *Titus Andronicus* (1995): Importing Shakespeare, Exporting South Africa", *Shakespeare in South Africa* 18 (2006): 29–36; Ayanda Khala-Phiri, "Transformation's *Tempest*: Miranda as a Student of Higher Education in South Africa", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 30 (2017): 86; Tamar Meskin, "To Play Is the Thing: (Re)Imagining Shakespeare on a Post-Colonial Stage", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 30 (2017): 76; and Nellie Ngcongo-James and Deirdre Pratt, "Decolonising Shakespeare in the Drama Education Curriculum" in *Curriculum Theory, Curriculum Theorising, and the Theoriser: The African Theorising Perspective*, ed. Kehdinga George Fomunyam and Simon Bheki Khoza (Leiden: Brill Sense, 2021), pp.177–98.

8 Lliane Loots, Sandra Young and Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "Editorial: 'Decolonising Shakespeare?' Contestations and Re-Imaginings for a Post-Liberation South Africa," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 30 (2017): i and v.

Lopes de Souza in his work on decoloniality calls "horizontal" dialogue, in this case between academics and high school educators.[9] As Natasha Distiller observes, there is a chasm between scholarly work on Shakespeare and the teaching of Shakespeare in secondary schools.[10] University-based scholars are wrestling with Shakespeare's post-colonial and post-apartheid legacy by producing complex political, historical and theoretical work, but they are largely out of touch with high school teachers. In this article, we – a Shakespeare academic based in the Global North (Bloom) and a high school educator based in the Global South (Bates) – present our project "Blood will have Blood" as an example of the kind of horizontal dialogue and decolonial praxis advocated by de Souza.

"Blood will have Blood" is a set of lesson plans, along with writing, listening and oral competency assignments, that we co-created for use in South African high schools and have begun to make available to teachers. It is not just our (Bates and Bloom's) different training and our positionality across the Global North and South, or even the particular ways we work together, that exemplifies the project's decolonial ethos. Like South African theatre practitioner Tamar Meskin, we maintain that games and creative, embodied play – what Bloom has elsewhere described as "playful pedagogy" – are critical tools of decoloniality.[11] The lesson plans for "Blood will have Blood" apply the possibilities of the digital theatre game *Play the Knave*, which Bloom co-developed with colleagues at the University of California-Davis, to the Shakespeare dramas most often taught in South African high schools. Using digitally mediated theatrical performance, our lessons offer students an opportunity to playfully embody moments in these dramas, inviting them to make sense of what they read by drawing on their own histories and personal experiences, and literally through use of their own voices and bodies. As such, in much the way we (Bates and Bloom) have engaged in horizontal dialogue to create the project, so the project gives students a chance to enter into playful dialogue with Shakespeare, speaking back to dramas that symbolise and, if left unexamined, perpetuate legacies of colonial violence.

Decoloniality, horizontal dialogue and PAR

Recent academic work by scholars within and beyond South Africa has pointed to the limits of the decolonisation process, particularly for educational institutions. In foundational work on decoloniality, Ramón Grosfoguel explains that when colonial administrators departed places like South Africa, they left behind a range of "entangled global hierarchies": "sexual, gender, spiritual epistemic, economic, political, linguistic, and racial".[12] Drawing on Aníbal Quijano's concept of the "colonial power matrix", Grosfoguel reminds us that these hierarchies were not and cannot be dismantled simply through decolonisation. As Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo further point out, the colonial matrix of power materialises through particular ways of "thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living".[13] Applying these ideas to higher education in South Africa, Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu writes:

> When colonialism ended, Africa's education systems were not revised to draw from local philosophies of education and knowledge generation. Post-colonial policies were not designed with an emphasis on restoring pride, confidence and dignity back to local traditional lifestyles, identities and knowledge systems. Their greatest aim was to increase the number of indigenous populations who received colonial education.[14]

9 Marcelo Lopes de Souza, "Decolonising Postcolonial Thinking: Ethnocentrism and Sociocentrism as Transideological and Multiscalar Phenomena", *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18.1 (2019): 21.

10 Distiller, "Begging the Questions".

11 Meskin, "To Play Is the Thing"; Gina Bloom, Nicholas Toothman and Evan Buswell, "Playful Pedagogy and Social Justice: Digital Embodiment in the Shakespeare Classroom", *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 74 (2021): 30–50.

12 Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms", *Cultural Studies* 21.2–3 (March 2007): 216, 219.

13 Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018), p.4.

14 Emmanuel Mgqwashu, "Education can't be for 'the public good' if universities ignore rural life", *The Conversation*, 16 March 2016. Online: https://theconversation.com/education-cant-be-for-the-public-good-if-universities-ignore-rural-life-56214.%5D

Mgqwashu argues that South Africa's education system continues to marginalise the forms of knowledge that the country's diverse student populations bring to the classroom, including not only language but also traditional lifestyles and identities. Although his focus is tertiary educational institutions, his points apply – perhaps even more so – to secondary schools, where one certainly finds "colonial vestiges in knowledge generation traditions and knowledge itself, psychological enslavement and a sense of unworthiness" on the part of students, not to mention their teachers.[15]

Shakespeare's presence in South Africa's secondary school curriculum undoubtedly contributes to students' feelings of unworthiness (which may be as true in the Global North as it is in the Global South, as Shakespeare intimidates most students)[16] but work by scholars on decoloniality helps us to see how Shakespeare's plays are not in and of themselves the root of the problem. The vestiges of colonialism do not disappear when the colonial apparatus of Shakespeare is taken away. For a pedagogy of decoloniality is defined less – or at least, not only – by *what* you teach, than *how* you teach. Undoing the colonial matrix of power requires opening up classrooms to the local knowledge and practices that students bring to whatever literary text they are studying. Education scholars in the United States and elsewhere in the Global North have touted related ideas, discussing the benefits of multimodal and experiential learning.[17] However, theorists of decoloniality can help us see how embodied and experiential learning also challenges hierarchies of knowledge production in classrooms as it invites students to access the curriculum from their own epistemological standpoints. As such, this learning method helps to unravel the colonial matrix of power that structures the lives of students throughout the Global South.

Indeed, the perspective of decoloniality helps explain the persistence of the chasm between Shakespeare scholarship created at universities and the teaching of Shakespeare at secondary schools. One might consider this chasm in terms of the two-world problem identified by De Souza. He lays out two types of knowledge: "*the world of formal, supposedly scientific knowledge*" that is the domain of academics and "*the locally and regionally rooted world of common sense* ... which comprises a diversified set of beliefs, technical skills, empirically accumulated experiences and lifeworld immanent generalisations", the domain of social movements and activists.[18] Applying these ideas to the realm of education, we might expand the latter category to include secondary school teachers. As is true in the relationships De Souza describes between academics and activists, academics and secondary school teachers also struggle to find 'synergy' due to the different kinds of knowledge they bring from their training and experience. Expressing a similar frustration and impasse in Shakespeare education, Distiller describes the need for a "sustained engagement between the national Education Department, trainers of teachers, and tertiary Shakespeare scholars" but notes that "[h]owever well-intentioned any of these institutions might be, very few of us have the time to talk to each other or do what we do differently."[19]

Distiller, in essence, calls for practitioner-researcher partnerships between university-based scholars of Shakespeare and secondary school teachers. Such partnerships are rare among scholars and teachers of English Literature, though they are fairly common among scholars and practitioners of theatre, where they often fall under the umbrella term "Practice as Research" (PAR). It is helpful to know more about the challenges that face PAR projects in theatre, as this sheds light on why collaborations between university scholars of literature and secondary school English teachers often fail to develop

15 Sue Timmis et al., "Encounters with Coloniality: Students' Experiences of Transition from Rural Contexts into Higher Education in South Africa", *CriSTaL: Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* 7 (2019): 79.

16 See Ralph Alan Cohen, *ShakesFear and How to Cure It: The Complete Handbook for Teaching Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) and Martin Blocksidge, *Shakespeare in Education* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003).

17 An emphasis on these concepts grows out of work by the New London Group on multiliteracies. See the New London Group, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures", *Harvard Educational Review* 66.1 (1996): 60-92. These ideas are central to work in education on drama-based pedagogy. A helpful overview of the history of this approach can be found in Gavin Bolton, "Changes in Thinking About Drama in Education", *Theory Into Practice* 24.3 (Summer 1985): 151-57. For an application of these ideas to the teaching of Shakespeare in particular, see Steven Z. Athanases and Sergio L. Sanchez, "'A *Caesar* for Our Time': Toward Empathy and Perspective-Taking in New Teachers' Drama Practices in Diverse Classrooms", *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 25.2 (2020): 236–55.

18 De Souza, "Decolonising Postcolonial Thinking": 15.

19 Distiller, "Begging the Questions": 188.

or work effectively. Stephen Purcell, looking specifically at PAR collaborations between Shakespeare researchers and theatre practitioners at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, identifies three common models of partnership, pointing to some serious limitations of two of these models. In one model, which he calls "The Expert and the Craftsperson", the academic partner is seen as the authority on a performance, contributing knowledge that the theatre practitioner puts into practice, effectively working as a craftsperson who tests academic ideas in the theatrical space.[20] One problem with this model, Purcell notes, is that the practitioner is undervalued as a thinker, their role simply being to translate the scholar's abstract research ideas into real-world experiences. In the sphere of Shakespeare education, this is essentially the model operating in teaching editions.[21] The scholar who publishes the edition is considered the expert on the play, while the teacher is the craftsperson who, after assigning the edition to students, translates the scholar's research and knowledge into classroom practice.

Purcell's second model of PAR, "The Witness and the Source", inverts this dynamic. Here the theatre practitioner is treated as the source of creative ideas and new knowledge, while the scholar bears witness to these ideas by observing and then writing about the theatrical experiment. This model also has parallels in education, with scholars observing secondary school teaching practices and then sharing their conclusions with wider academic audiences. In this model, teachers are treated as experts on education because of their on-the-ground experience, and the scholar's research involves observing what a teacher does to learn from or critique it. Though the inverse of the "Expert and Craftsperson" model, the "Witness and Source" model shares the former's troubling assumption that there is a hard line between the expertise of each member of the partnership and that knowledge flows in one direction.

But there is a third way, what Purcell calls the "Co-investigators" model. In this case, "the academic and the practitioner are equally expert in different forms of knowledge."[22] Academic and practitioner come together "to explore questions of shared value to both parties, to which neither should imagine they already know the answers". Evidence of this more productive and enticing vision of horizontal collaboration is hard to come by in academic collaborations with secondary school English classrooms, but it is, we argue, key to undoing the colonial power matrix that Shakespeare, as conventionally taught, helps to sustain in South Africa. As is true in co-investigator projects in theatre and performance, in Shakespeare education this model works best if the emphasis is not a finished product created by either one of the collaborators, but an open-ended project around which both parties can experiment and play.[23] Such is the case with "Blood will have Blood".

Playing with Shakespeare's violent tragedies

The lessons we co-developed for "Blood will have Blood" focus on the plays South African teachers are most frequently required to assign – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* – which turn out to be ideal texts for critically examining the colonial power matrix.[24] One reason for this is that these particular plays dramatise gendered and racial violence, engaging youth directly with an issue of critical importance in South Africa today. Over the past several decades, as South Africa has worked to address social injustice in a post-apartheid era, the country has been plagued by violence, including domestic, racial, gang-related, self-inflicted, political and accidental violence. "Blood will have Blood" selects from each Shakespeare play two moments that explicitly dramatise these various forms of violence. We

20 Stephen Purcell, "Whose Experiment Is It, Anyway? Some Models for Practice-as-Research in Shakespeare Studies," in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies, and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, ed. Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight (Vancouver: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), pp.15-34.

21 See the critique of various South African teaching editions in Distiller, "Begging the Questions."

22 Purcell, "Whose Experiment Is It, Anyway?", p.27.

23 For discussion of one notable example of a PAR theatre project targeted toward secondary education, see Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt, "Approaching *Macbeth* through Representation, Participation and Facilitation: A Theatre-in-Education 'Adventure'", *South African Theatre Journal* 21.1 (2007): 75–91. We would maintain that the techniques advocated by Meskin and van der Walt are by no means limited to the drama classroom and have an important place in the English Home Language curriculum as well.

24 The full curriculum, including the lesson plans and tasks, is currently available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vRYQTPk_zv9EKf48QCi527fYu_JzEd4t?usp=sharing. Further materials, including student handouts, will be added in due time.

then provide teachers with a comprehensive set of resources for students' in-class analysis and post-class reflection on how violence functions in Shakespeare, and what this violence means in the context of South Africa's history and present. Central to these lessons is playful and creative experimentation with Shakespeare's text, facilitated in part by digitally-mediated performance, or digital theatre.

Scholars have argued convincingly for the usefulness of performance for decolonising Shakespeare in South Africa, and have begun to show how digital theatre resources can facilitate wider access to performance in classrooms.[25] But there are limitations to engaging with performance solely through film and video, which are the predominant digital resources used in the English Home Language classroom. When students are exposed to film and video productions of the plays or scenes from the plays, they occupy the role of receivers/consumers of performance work produced by others (whether professionals or amateurs). As such the integration of film and video clips in the classroom risks leaving in place many of the same hierarchies of learning that pervade conventional classroom study of Shakespeare. By contrast, our project emphasises students' physical engagement in performance work – or rather, performance play. Bloom has discussed elsewhere how digitally-mediated performance supports student understanding of embodied difference and discussion of social justice issues in Shakespeare's plays and in the classrooms where these plays are taught.[26] In this article, we consider the stakes of this "playful pedagogy" for South Africa in particular. We maintain that shifting away from screening film and video productions and toward engaging students in physical experimentation with Shakespeare's texts can help undo the hierarchical pedagogy so often associated with colonial education.[27] In turning students into the primary creative performers of Shakespeare, our lessons attempt to alter the power dynamic of the classroom, rethinking who has the authority to produce and interpret the plays. Significantly, the aim of creating performance in our lessons is not to make works for public consumption or to train students to act – important goals for the Drama and Theatre curriculum but of little use to the English Home Language Curriculum. Rather, and in the true spirit of PAR, we are using embodied and digital performance to enable students to explore, understand and make claims about the plays. That is, PAR is not only central to how we, the authors of this paper, work with each other and with South African teachers, but also central to the way performance functions in the classrooms that use our lessons: students do not learn in order to perform plays, but play with performance in order to learn.[28]

Each of our lessons invites students to analyse closely a scene of violence in the assigned play through engagement with *Play the Knave*.[29] *Knave*'s platform allows users to stage dramatic scenes karaoke-style, animating a digital avatar on screen through their own body movements and voices, both of which are captured by a Kinect motion-sensing camera and then mapped onto the digital avatar.[30] Thus, the game's players perform physically and virtually at the same time. Although the game allows users to create a short animated video as they perform – the software automatically records their avatars and voices, saving the video to the game computer – neither this virtual nor the physical performances of the actors are an end in themselves. Indeed, the animated films players produce are not all that aesthetically satisfying, since the Kinect camera is a cheap motion capture system, worlds apart from the mocap performance technology used in film animation and by professional theatre companies like the Royal

25 See Chris Thurman, "Shakespeare.ZA: Digital Shakespeares and Education in South Africa", *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 25.1 (2020): 49–67.

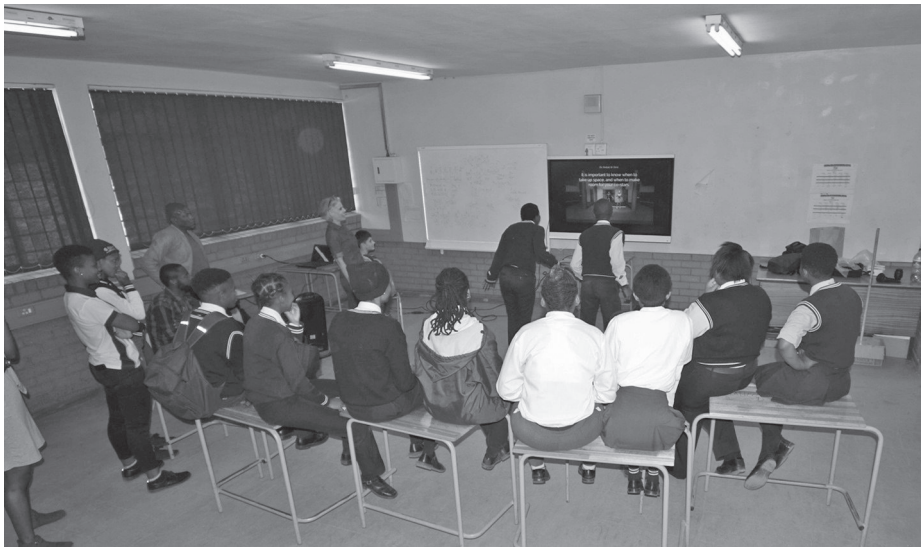
26 See Bloom, Toothman and Buswell, "Playful Pedagogy and Social Justice".

27 Our thanks to Sandra Young for helping us draw attention to this aspect of the project.

28 This kind of playful pedagogy is a staple for many teachers of Shakespeare in the US and the UK and, indeed, is central to the education initiatives of major Shakespeare theatres such as the RSC, the Globe, and the American Shakespeare Center. Playful pedagogy is also being used in South Africa through initiatives like the Shakespeare Schools Festival, which has been operating in South Africa for about a decade, though the programme as a whole is geared toward finished dramatic productions. See https://www.ssfsa.co.za

29 Gina Bloom, Evan Buswell, Colin Milburn, Michael Neff and Nicholas Toothman, *Play the Knave* (Davis, CA: ModLab, 2020). Online: http://playtheknave.org

30 A brief video of a gameplay session can be viewed at https://youtu.be/8z819UbKHfQ. For more on how the game works, see https://www.playtheknave.org/how-it-works.html



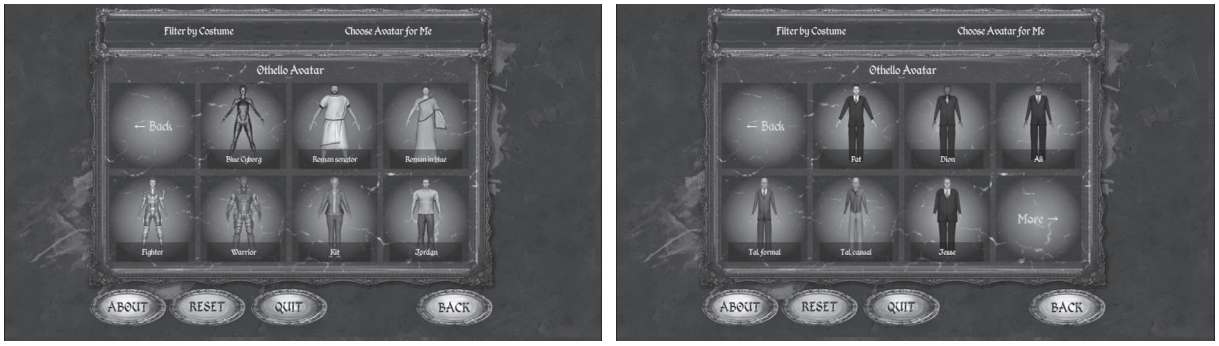
Students performing a scene from Shakespeare via *Play the Knave* in Sharpeville, South Africa. (Photo: Flagg Miller)

Shakespeare Company.[31] Rather, the performances are part of a process of embodied, playful discovery that is meant to provoke class discussion about violence and its relationship to identity (especially race and gender), family dynamics, politics and power structures both in Shakespeare's plays and in students' own lives.

For instance, a lesson for *Othello* has students perform Othello's murder of Desdemona four different ways, changing out the race and gender of the various avatars each time so as to think about the intersection of race and gender in domestic violence. Although the murder is the climactic scene of the play, we recommend that teachers use the lesson as an introduction to the play, to be taught before students have read *Othello* and know anything about the racial dynamics at stake. *Play the Knave* has around forty different avatar options, and any of these can be selected to play a particular character – a flexibility that is critical to many of our lessons and particularly to this one. In the first performance of the scene, we have students play using science fiction avatars who have no identifiable gender identity, which prompts students to think about each character's visible features of bodily difference and consider how these might inform the power dynamic in the scene, where one character clearly dominates the other. In the second performance, we gently open into a conversation about gender difference and power by having the characters played by a black male and a black female avatar. In the third play-through, we keep the black female avatar but change out the black male avatar for a white male avatar. This immediately prompts conversations about how gender and race intersect, as students discuss the ways these factors may have an impact on intimate relationships, and thus on domestic violence. Only for the fourth performance, when students have a solid foundation for discussing gender, race, sexuality and power through the lens of intersectionality do we inform students of the historical setting of Shakespeare's play and tell them about the two main characters. Students then perform the scene using avatars in Elizabethan dress, with Desdemona played by a white female avatar and Othello a black male one.

We have yet to teach this lesson to South African high school students, but Bloom taught the lesson to college students at the University of California, Davis, and found the lesson to be very effective in prompting critical thought about implicit bias. One student reports "learning how race and gender interact in society, and how even if you do not feel racist, there are a variety of pervasive stereotypes and ways of thinking that change our perceptions of the world and interactions between people." Repeated performances with changed-out avatars was key to this discovery. As one student puts it, "the set-up of acting out the scene multiple times with different sets of avatars, ending with the actual context from the

31 See Gina Bloom, "Rough Magic: Performing Shakespeare with Gaming Technology" (Shakespeare Birthday Lecture. Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., April 23, 2019). Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6egGB5EayA



Screenshots from *Play the Knave*'s menu options for avatars, showing some of the options available for Othello's avatar.

play, was an amazing entry point into discussing race and gender, both in the play and the real world." Another student goes further to explain the depth of critical thinking that resulted:

> Usually I think that repetition in lessons can get boring, but the repeated performance ... allowed the themes to truly sink into my brain ... [It] gave us the opportunity to ground ourselves in the physical details before getting into the more cerebral conclusions we made about the characters. I found that I was thinking more critically about the topics we were discussing than I thought I would.

Students appreciated that the lesson "clearly pushed students out of their comfort zone to consider biases that their own families held (the personal anecdote about colorism and fetishisation of mixed babies is an excellent example) and allowed both white and POC students to reflect on their own experiences or interpretations of interracial romance." Indeed the lesson prompted a fascinating conversation about the extra social pressure people in interracial relationships may feel to "prove themselves functional", which students felt was highly clarifying for understanding Desdemona's defence of her marriage even as she lies dying. Although a college classroom in the United States differs significantly from a high school classroom in South Africa, we are hopeful that the latter context will prompt equally thoughtful engagement on the part of students. To be sure, such a lesson should resonate profoundly with students in South Africa, given the particular ways race and gender intersect in a post-apartheid but still highly segregated country.

All of the "Blood will have Blood" lessons provide students opportunities to use their own experiences – whether lived or witnessed in the media they consume – to inform their understanding of key conflicts in the plays. When studying the scene in *Hamlet* when Hamlet confronts Gertrude and murders Polonius, students use the platform to explore how Hamlet's rash violence might signify differently depending on whether his mother seems supportive or condemning. Students, all of whom have some life experience dealing with a disapproving parent or guardian, are well-equipped to comment on Hamlet's response. Using *Play the Knave*'s new "Continue a Performance in Progress" feature (still in beta), a student performs Hamlet's avatar alongside two different versions of Gertrude's character, her avatar having been pre-recorded and thus functioning for players as an NPC (non-playing character). In one version, Gertrude collaborates agreeably with Polonius and rebukes Hamlet harshly for his behavior; in the second, Gertrude expresses annoyance with Polonius and concern for Hamlet's well-being. But before layering on Hamlet's part, students watch videos that show the Gertrude NPC's performance, and they spend time analysing the animated figure's voice and body movements in order to discuss her character's 'intention' – and what sort of reaction each Gertrude would provoke in Hamlet.[32] Through this conversation, students come to think more deeply about how Hamlet's culpability for the murder of Polonius is partly determined by how Gertrude's character is presented.

This sort of playful and embodied experimentation with the text has multiple advantages over the traditional teaching methods that have led to so much discomfort with Shakespeare's place in South

32 The videos of the Gertrude NPC can be viewed at https://youtu.be/WuwlQqYOktM (Gertrude 1) and https://youtu.be/Q1R2pgZudCY (Gertrude 2).

Students perform statues that embody "public" or "private" phrases from a passage in *Macbeth*.

African education. During the apartheid era, black students were discouraged from exercising any critical thought at all about Shakespeare's plays. As David Johnson notes, black students experienced "less freedom to speculate about character and theme, less need to demonstrate close-reading techniques, and a strong emphasis on being able to summarise the details of the plot".[33] In fact, in the official guidelines for teachers at so-called Bantu schools, lessons focused primarily on having students translate portions of the text into their own words and then comparing their translations to the teacher's authoritative translation on the board to ensure the student answer was 'correct'. The openly racist pedagogy of the apartheid era is a thing of the past, but not of the distant past. The stakes of authoritarian uses of Shakespeare in the classroom are as high as ever. For teachers to counteract most effectively this kind of authoritarianism, their classrooms must *explicitly* stage debates about the meaning of the plays. Screening different video and film versions of scenes can stimulate such debate, to be sure, but there's nothing quite like having students enact these debates with their own bodies and voices. Physical engagement with the game offers students a visceral entry point into difficult subject matters like domestic violence, whilst simultaneously protecting them: it is only a game, after all, and the platform's glitchy avatars inevitably lead to laughter.[34] Shakespeare gets knocked off his venerable pedestal as students are invited to look through Shakespeare towards important issues that the plays raise.

Our preliminary research involving several high schools in Cape Town has shown that the game, in tandem with creative play activities that build towards students' digital theatre performance, gives students a safe space to examine the violence they encounter in their daily lives. For example, Bates delivered one of our *Macbeth* lessons to Grade 11 students, all of whom were coloured, in a small Cape Town school located on the Cape Flats in an area previously designated for coloured people under the Group Areas Act.[35] As a consequence of economic inequities perpetuated by the Group Areas Act and other apartheid legislation, the area has a history of violence, particularly gang violence. Thus the lesson's exploration of how Macduff responds to news of his family's slaughter resonated especially deeply with students in this school. In our lessons students explore Macduff's response to the traumatic news about his family and the ways he is pulled between the option to "dispute" his grief or to "feel" it – gender-coded responses to grief that map onto his public and private roles, respectively. We first ask students to create statues with their bodies to represent physically the various antitheses the scene sets up between public and private roles. They then perform their statues within the game, selecting avatars they believe best embody the concepts of 'private' and 'public', and the student playing the part of Macduff is asked to move between the avatar statues to illustrate the dilemma Macduff faces in terms of how to express and process his emotions. So that they can better understand why Macduff, living in a

33 Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa*, p.171.

34 See Gina Bloom, Sawyer Kemp, Nicholas Toothman and Evan Buswell, "'A Whole Theatre of Others': Amateur Acting and Immersive Spectatorship in the Digital Shakespeare Game *Play the Knave*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.4 (2016): 408-30.

35 'Coloured' in South African usage is distinct from the use of the word in other national contexts. It remains a somewhat contested term, as an apartheid-era racial category for those of mixed race; it is applied to people of so-called Malay or slave heritage in the Western Cape, but many coloured people also claim descent from the Khoekhoe, San, Bushman and Griqua.

Avatars from *Play the Knave* that the students in a Cape Town school selected to represent "public" (top left and right—Roman Senator and Warrior) and "private" (bottom left and right—Alien and Servant).

militaristic society that is engaged in civil war, struggles with his emotions, we encourage students to think about their own ways of dealing with grief.

In this particular class visit the result was lively discussions of gendered ideas around grief. The male students in the class stated emphatically that they are not allowed to show emotion, linking with Macduff's statement that to cry is to "play the woman". Even some of the female students opened up about how they, too, feel pressure to hide their emotions if they want to be taken seriously as adults. Pertinently, the avatars students chose to represent the public sphere were hyper-masculine – a Roman Senator and an armour-clad Warrior – whereas the avatars students chose to represent the private sphere were described by students as feminine in nature: an Alien, with fragile limbs and fingers, and a female Servant. The choice of the Servant is particularly suggestive in a South African context as the practice of female domestic workers in homes persists, inviting associations with femininity and the witnessed secrets of private places.

The local meanings of the avatar are particularly noticeable when we compare the South African students' responses to this lesson to those of the California-based university students to whom Bloom taught the same lesson. For the public sphere, the American students also favored the Roman Senator and the Warrior, as well as other figures who, in their words, seemed dressed up for important, powerful jobs, such as men in business suits. Like the South African students, the American students said that these avatars took up space because of their size and had political or economic power, which could be wielded to deal publicly with whatever issues they were facing. Interestingly, also, when Bloom noted that all of the humanoid avatars for public were white men, students explained that public action was most easily done by those who were privileged on the basis of gender and race. But when selecting avatars for the private sphere, the American students went in a very different direction than the South African students. In two different American classes where the lesson was taught, the class favorite was the Youth, who, students said, showed a vulnerability and dependency that they associated with private responses. Bloom, curious as to why none of them selected a female avatar, posed this question, and the students explained that the female avatar options were too formal in their dress, and too imposing, and they wanted a character who seemed more hidden and vulnerable. Bloom turned their attention to the Servant, noting that this avatar didn't have formal dress, and asked why no one had selected her to represent private responses and the private sphere. It seemed clear from the halted conversation that these predominantly white, middle-class students didn't have a strong sense of what it means to be a female servant, an occupation that is far less prevalent in the US than in South Africa.

In our experience thus far with "Blood will have Blood" in classrooms, the avatars cue students to think about how various aspects of familiar identities – gender, race, age, social status and economic position – map onto abstract ideas. In the case of the Macduff lesson, the avatars helped students think about how the public and the private are expressed in very local circumstances. We have found that once students feel some sort of personal connection to the concepts, they are better able to think about how the concepts operate in *Macbeth*, and particularly how grief is expressed in gendered terms in the militaristic world of the play.

In addition to comprehending more fully Macduff's choice to pursue violent action against Macbeth, students also walk away from the lesson thinking about how they experience and respond to grief in their own lives. Indeed, in an anonymous survey that asked what they learned from the lesson, one South African student responded: "Dealing with our emotions, should we hide or show it? Being public and private?" Students in the classes were surprisingly comfortable engaging in discussions of emotionally triggering material because the game helped to mediate this difficult subject matter. Indeed,

all students in one high school class Bates visited reported in an anonymous survey that they had fun in the class, notable since only one student had substantial experience with acting. Students could take up issues around grief and violence in a fun and embodied way, instead of directly digging into their own trauma. And students' insights, or what several referred to in their surveys as greater "understanding" of the scene, were gained through a process of play and discovery, rather than a top down dictation of knowledge. Our lessons purposefully engage students in reflection on their social and emotional lives as part of an effort to reorient the classroom toward forms of knowledge students bring into their academic studies, a key strategy of decoloniality.

If embodied action, helpfully mediated by the digital game, is an entry point into discussions of violence in Shakespeare, another entry point is each student's own personal history or cultural perspective. This is not to suggest that students walk away from our lessons believing that Shakespeare's themes and characters are 'universal', if 'universal' signals that these characters and themes mean the same thing for everyone, everywhere. Quite to the contrary, we offer students a chance to approach Shakespeare's plays in hyper-localised ways, speaking back to the texts through their own voices, bodies and experiences. Those voices, bodies and experiences are made to matter – they are valued as forms of knowledge that can be part of a horizontal dialogue with the forms of knowledge presented in textbooks and by teachers. Students find connections to the material in surprising places. For instance, when Bates delivered another lesson on *Macbeth* to ninety Grade 11 students at another Cape Flats school that has a linguistically and racially diverse student body, one black student, while performing a scene from *Macbeth*, deliberately pronounced the name "Banquo" with the isiXhosa "Q" click sound, thus appropriating the name into his language and eliciting laughter from his classmates. Not only evincing the ways our lessons destabilise Shakespearean authority, this moment also epitomised the hyper-localisation of Shakespeare's texts, allowing even the names of the characters to be absorbed into the vernacular.

Students' local associations and knowledge enriched the conversation in other ways. For instance, to help students understand Macbeth's use of animal imagery to describe his fears of his enemies and to embolden himself to use violence against them, students impersonate the animals through *Play the Knave*'s platform. When Macbeth says, "we have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it", leaving Lady Macbeth and him "in danger of her former tooth", a student acts the part of a snake, which is represented on the screen by a humanoid avatar that students believe best represents the qualities of snakes. To give texture to this analysis of the imagery, we encourage students to research attitudes towards the animals – snake, scorpion and bat – mentioned in the speech, exploring how they signified in Shakespeare's time. But we also ask them to think about their own knowledge of and experience with these animals. When Bloom has taught this lesson to university students in California, they tend to think of snakes within a Judeo-Christian context, their primary reference point being the Biblical story of Eden, and thus they focus primarily on snakes as dangerous because sneaky. The students in the Cape Flats school where Bates presented the lesson not only mentioned this sneakiness but also drew on their local experience with snakes – which are a frequent occurrence in Cape Town – to think about Macbeth's charisma. One group noted that snakes come in a great variety of colours, and this attribute helped them explore how Macbeth's "bright personality" was key to his covered-up evil intentions, as "no one expected him to do bad". Another group discussed how snakes are constantly changing their form, thus pointing to Macbeth's shifting loyalties and unpredictability. Students thus deepened their understanding of Macbeth's character, and the particular forms of violence in which he engages, by drawing on knowledge about the animal world that they gained through their lived experiences.

Horizontal collaboration with teachers

Fulfilling the decolonial aims of "Blood will have Blood" lessons will depend, ultimately, on our (Bates and Bloom's) ability to step back from the project, putting the lessons directly into the hands of teachers, where they can be adapted to suit different classroom contexts. Currently, as we test out the lessons to make sure they work effectively, Bates and some of the actors from her educational theatre company deliver the lessons in person to interested South African schools. But our next step is to make the programme's materials available to teachers via the Western Cape Education Department, which has a teacher's lending library. The library would house not only all the lesson planning documents, but also Knave Kits, which contain the hardware needed to run *Play the Knave*. Since it is not an online

Students in a Cape Town area high school performing via *Play the Knave* a scene that is part of our "Full of Scorpions is my Mind" lesson plan. Pictured are students impersonating (from left to right) a bat, a scorpion, Macbeth and a snake.

game that requires an internet connection, the only other equipment required to run it is a television or projector. Although most schools have at least a projector on hand, we will include a lendable projector for those who do not. Should we scale up the project to other regions of South Africa, we would hope to implement a similar set-up, or collaborate with a local university that could operate as a lending library. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that the programme could be implemented by even the poorest of schools, as we suspect these are precisely the schools that would benefit most from it.

While we want to challenge the way Shakespeare is taught in schools, we also recognise that most teachers do not have the space or time to be revolutionaries, especially in South Africa's overcrowded and under-resourced secondary school system. In order to meet the needs of teachers, our programme is built to mesh easily with the English Home Language Curriculum. Our main tool for doing so is a series of 'tasks' – reading, writing, and speaking assignments – that accompany each lesson and that correlate with the English Home Language curriculum assessment standards. Like many public schools around the world, the schools in South Africa exercise significant oversight of teachers through both assessments and a fairly tightly structured set of requirements that isolate Shakespeare study from most other components of the curriculum. The South African English Home Language curriculum, for the final three years of high school, is divided into four main sections: Language, Literature, Creative and Transactional Writing, and Oral Work. Each of these sections is assessed through an exam in the middle and end of the year, with a standardised national exam taking place at the end of the final year. "Continuous Assessment Tasks" are expected to be completed throughout the year to add to the final result. The tasks count 25% and the exams count 75%, but because the teacher can assist the students with some of the tasks through the process of draft writing for written and oral work and the retaking of tests, the tasks are intended to boost the exam marks and help students pass. Tasks include short tests of the language and literature content; essays and transactional writing; and reading, listening and speaking assignments. These tasks are all gathered into portfolios, a sample of which are moderated by subject advisors and other teachers to ensure some kind of national standard.

Shakespeare tends to be confined to the literature strand of the curriculum and tested through contextual questions and literature essays, in both the exams and the Continual Assessment Tasks. As a consequence, students do not have enough time to gain anything close to mastery of these challenging texts, leaving many students under-prepared or lacking confidence to deal with Shakespeare in their Grade 12 (Matric) exams. The pressures on students and teachers have only worsened during the pandemic, as school closures have forced teachers to condense lessons, cut out texts, and move more quickly through their curriculum. Through creative prompts that correlate with the tasks teachers need to cover, our project expands the scope of the Shakespeare texts into the other three branches of the curriculum, providing multiple sites for student engagement with the plays and maximising the value that Shakespeare can add.

The tasks not only make Shakespeare relevant to the practical needs of teachers but continue our efforts in the lessons to make the plays relevant to lives of students, in this case by directly connecting the violence in Shakespeare's plays to issues in South African history and current affairs. For example,

when teaching *Othello,* the class explores the scene in which Iago pressures Cassio to drink, which causes him to become belligerent and violent. After performing the scene via *Play The Knave* – where we exploit the glitchiness of the avatars to visualise Cassio's drunken state – students complete a listening task that looks at the violent outcomes of drunk driving in South Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the government lifted an alcohol ban and saw a serious increase in car accidents due to drunk driving. This task sheds light on students' own context, where alcohol abuse often leads to injury and death. It also deepens their grasp of the harm that Iago inflicts on Cassio through urging Cassio to drink. Juxtaposing their understanding of the world of the play with their own world empowers students to see the outcomes of various choices they make every day, and how making different choices could shift the current narrative of violence.

Some tasks encourage reflection on the role digital culture plays in perpetuating violence. We offer a task on cyberbullying that follows the lesson on *Hamlet* mentioned earlier, in which students perform Hamlet's role against a pre-recorded Gertrude avatar. During that lesson, as the student playing Hamlet's avatar assaults the Gertrude non-playing character (NPC), students witness first-hand how much easier it is to harm someone when acting via digital avatars, where the real person is hidden behind a digital façade. As our lesson makes strategic use of *Play the Knave*'s mixed reality interface to explore digitally-mediated violence, the task that follows reinforces these concepts, asking students to connect their experience of the game to their experience of cyberbulling. The task leverages Shakespeare to introduce topics obviously relevant to students' everyday lives; at the same time, the task cues deeper study of Hamlet's violent actions. Like cyberbullies, Hamlet refrains from violence when he sees Claudius in real life but does not hesitate to stab his foe when he thinks he is the person hidden behind a curtain.

In addition to engaging students in contemplating the violence they experience in their lives today, our tasks also connect Shakespeare's plays to the history of violence in South Africa, and especially the violence of apartheid. For instance, after exploring through *Play the Knave* the scene in *Macbeth* in which Macduff hears the news of his children's murders, students can complete an essay assignment that connects this scene to the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The task shows students the famous picture


A RASH AND BLOODY DEED

NARRATIVE ESSAY

In the scene we studied in class, Hamlet thinks he is killing Claudius when he stabs Polonius, because he can't see the physical body of his victim. Notably, in the scene just before this one, Hamlet has an opportunity to kill Claudius in the flesh, but hesitates and doesn't go through with it. Arguably, it is easier for Hamlet to hurt someone he can't see. The same logic applies to cyberbullying: it's easier to torment someone with harmful messages and embarrassing photographs when you're using the internet. In social media, we act through avatars, and it's easy to forget that there is a real person behind the digital curtain.

Read the adjoining article about cyberbullying and then, using Act 3, scene 4 from *Hamlet* and your experience with *Play the Knave's* avatars as inspiration, write a narrative essay of 400-450 words targeting teens (13-16 years) in which you help them understand the dangers and effects of cyberbullying and how to prevent these. Feel free to draw also on any other knowledge you have about cyberbullying.

You can include graphics and design to make it appealing to your target market.


A RASH AND BLOODY DEED

CYBERBULLYING

Friday 18 February marks International Stand Up to Bullying Day, where we are encouraged to take a stand against bullying in all its forms. There's no doubt that the world our children need to traverse is infinitely more complex than what we had to deal with when in school. Today's children have to deal with all the traditional social complexities of school life in addition to the constant dangers posed by near-unlimited access to the internet.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CYBERBULLYING

Unfortunately, the lack of knowledge about the dangers of social media and cyberbullying is a cause for great concern. Our schools are becoming combat zones as we read daily reports of bullying and violent attacks. According to an IPSOS report, South Africa currently has [a high] prevalence of cyberbullying, with 54% of parents replying that they were aware of a child in their community who had been a victim of cyberbullying.

DANGERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

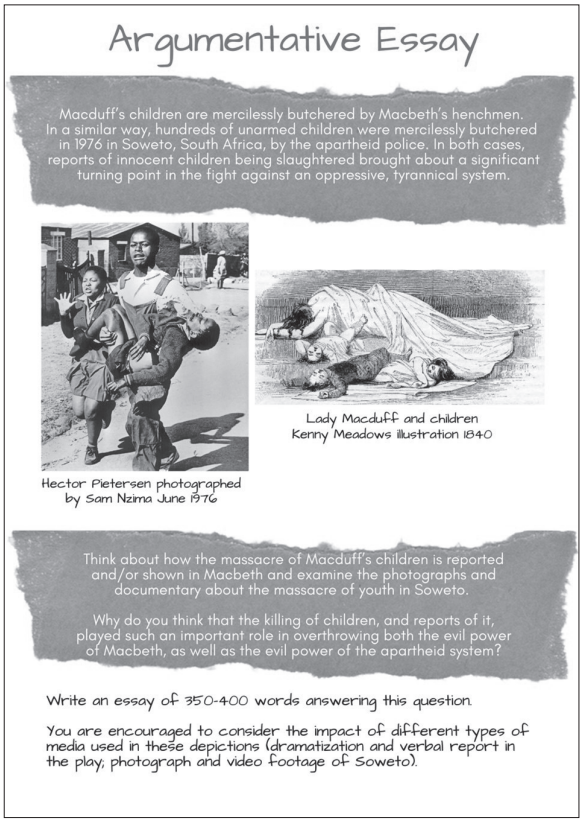
Parents are beginning to realise that it's probably not good enough to expect social media sites to police the spaces ... children are spending their time in. Parents who wouldn't allow their children to physically leave home and spend time with strangers without any idea where they are and what they're doing probably shouldn't be allowing their children to do the digital equivalent. It is critical that parents take an interest in what platforms their children are using [and] what the risks could be.

EDUCATION IS KEY

TikTok and the way it has allowed dangerous behaviour like the well-reported skull-crasher challenge was an early warning of why parents need to be vigilant about their children's online time. The most crucial intervention parents can make, however, is the same online as it is for offline behaviour. Children need to educated about the dangers of cyberbullying, acceptable online behaviour and cybersecurity. With sufficient information, children can be trusted to make better decisions about their online behaviour and how they react to cyberbullying.

https://www.thesouthafrican.com/technology/social-media-stand-against-cyberbullying/18 February 2020

Narrative Essay task for *Hamlet* from "Blood will have Blood". (Design: Lauren Bates)



Argumentative Essay task for *Macbeth* from "Blood will have Blood". (Design: Lauren Bates)

of Hector Peterson, who, along with hundreds of other school children, was killed by the apartheid police during a peaceful protest. Students are asked to write about why the image of butchered children in Soweto, as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, galvanises resistance against unjust governments, helping to topple them. Students engage with this watershed historical event in tandem with the image of a robust, yet weeping Macduff, motivated to fight for justice by grief for his dead children. The parallel inflects both South African history and Shakespeare's play with sharper clarity, as students come to understand how and why pathos compels political activism.

We examine political activism and the fight against apartheid through another task linked to *Hamlet*. After exploring in class the rhetorical techniques the Ghost uses in Act 1 Scene 5 to convince Hamlet to avenge his father's murder, students are given an article about Dimitri Tsafendas's 1966 assassination of South Africa's Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, who was a key architect of the oppressive apartheid system. The essay prompts students to compare Hamlet's calling to kill Claudius with Tsafendas's calling to kill Verwoerd. What, we ask, are the complexities of killing a corrupt political leader who is guilty of heinous crimes but is beyond the reach of official systems of punishment? How do Tsafendas and Hamlet justify their criminal acts, and how does each use mental illness to deflect from their motives? Regardless of topic, all the tasks require students to enter into an engagement with broader societal issues depicted in the Shakespeare plays, applying them either to their own personal lives, South African history, or the current communities in which they find themselves.

Decolonial praxis

As "Blood will have Blood" makes Shakespeare relevant to the lives of students, it is just as invested in making students' lives relevant to Shakespeare. By localising the meaning of Shakespeare, we sidestep the tendency so many teachers have to make Shakespeare relevant through appeals to the plays' universality, a concept that tends only to reinforce the conservative social ideologies that brought Shakespeare into the curriculum in the first place.[36] If Shakespeare is to remain in the curriculum, and we believe there are some good reasons for the plays to stay there, teachers need ways to *use* the plays, lest the dramas stagnate into relics of colonial education whose purpose is to teach 'universal' values. To echo Chris Thurman, when Shakespeare is taught in South Africa, "Shakespeare should be the means and not the end."[37]

South African theatre practitioners and scholars have actively taken up this mantle. As theatre practitioners have developed a rich body of work that resituates and re-envisions Shakespeare, scholars have explored the decolonial impact of this performance work, drawing out its historical, political, and

36 See Orkin, *Shakespeare against Apartheid*, and Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa*.

37 Thurman, "From Shakespearean Singularity to Singular Shakespeares": 9–10.

cultural significance.[38] Not surprisingly, PAR, with its deep roots in political and social activism, has been at the centre of some of these projects. However, PAR has not been used in the same ways or to the same degree in the field of English Literature education. Perhaps this is not surprising. PAR is a recognised method in the field of theatre and performance studies. Indeed, major Shakespeare institutions, both theatrical and scholarly, offer many opportunities for theatre artists and scholars to meet and exchange ideas. By contrast, in both the Global North and the Global South, secondary school teachers remain largely peripheral in scholarly Shakespeare organisations and, by the same token, Shakespeare scholars are peripheral to secondary school education departments and even teacher training programs at universities. When these worlds meet, it is usually theatre practitioner-researchers who make the connections between them, operating as education artists who visit schools to run workshops and the like. Traditionally-trained Shakespeare scholars are generally seen to offer schools 'expertise'; they are perceived to (and most often do) lack understanding of the on-the-ground problems secondary teachers face.

If university-based Shakespeare scholars want to tackle the colonial power matrix in schools, they need secondary school educators as their equal partners. This is particularly important given the degree to which universities are and have always been colonial structures. Speaking from the perspective of an academic theatre practitioner who used PAR to decolonise Shakespeare in South Africa during the 2015 #FeesMustFall protests, Ayanda Khala-Phiri warns against taking "for granted the physical danger and pain of those for whom decolonisation was more than an academic project".[39] She points to the specific context of staging her appropriation of *The Tempest* while, just beyond the walls of the university theatre in which she worked, police were firing rubber bullets and tear gas at protestors who were demanding transformation in the education system. Her larger point rings true in secondary schools plagued by gang warfare and even in less visibly violent school contexts. Academics can theorise until the end of time about how Shakespeare ought to be taught in South Africa, but these theories ultimately have to be taken up in schools where physical danger and other violences of inequality are a regular feature of daily life – inequalities that the pandemic has only aggravated.[40] Secondary school teachers carry an extraordinary burden in their efforts to teach Shakespeare in these conditions. In South Africa, as in the US and the UK, teachers remain frustrated by an education system that privileges the test over the content, the end-point over the process of learning. But most teachers don't have the time, training, resources or energy to be activists in upending that system. What they can use today and need now are material resources that invigorate student learning while still conforming to the system that, however insufficient and problematic, is the system in which they live and work. Digital resources can be an important part of the solution provided they are not presented as yet another authoritative source of Shakespeare knowledge for students and teachers to consume. Decolonial praxis means finding ways for academics to work alongside and in true partnership with secondary school teachers.

Horizontal partnerships of this sort ask a lot from coinvestigators, putting pressure on the expertise and the forms of knowledge they bring to the collaboration. The success of our (Bates and Bloom's) working relationship is partly a function of the somewhat unconventional paths each of us was pursuing even before we started "Blood will have Blood". Bates, who runs a Shakespeare education theatre company in Cape Town and who has taught for many years in secondary schools, is a seasoned practitioner of theatre and of secondary school teaching, but having obtained two MA degrees in Shakespeare (including one at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon) and currently looking toward a PhD, she is also

38 See, for instance, Young, *Shakespeare in the Global South*; David Schalkwyk, "*Kunene and the King* and *The Fall* in the Age of #MeToo, #FeesMustFall and Black Lives Matter", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 33 (2020): 64; Sarah Roberts, "Departing from Shakespeare: Reflections Triggered by Re-Staging Manhattan's West Side on KwaZulu-Natal's East Coast (2013)", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 30.1 (2017): 14–29; Meskin, "To Play Is the Thing: (Re)Imagining Shakespeare on a Post-Colonial Stage"; Thurman, "'Sher and Doran's *Titus Andronicus* (1995): Importing Shakespeare, Exporting South Africa"; Orkin, *Local Shakespeares: Proximations and Power*; Orkin, "'I Am the Tusk of an Elephant': *Macbeth*, *Titus*, and *Caesar* in Johannesburg".

39 Khala-Phiri, "Transformation's *Tempest*": 90.

40 On game-based pedagogy in literature classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic, with some discussion of *Play the Knave* in South Africa in particular, see Wai Chee Dimock, "Gaming the Pandemic [Editor's Column]", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 136.2 (2021): 163–70.

invested in academia. Bloom is a traditionally-trained Shakespeare scholar with the typical PhD in English possessed by an English department professor, but she also does creative and public-facing work in developing and distributing *Play the Knave* to schools, theatres and other institutions. Perhaps it is because we both have some experience crossing typical academic and practitioner boundaries that we are always ready to admit what we don't know, and to respect what the other can teach us. We play well together because we have both devoted our careers not only to understanding other people's rules but also to looking for ways to work – and play – creatively around their rules. And that is precisely what we hope "Blood will have Blood" can offer South African teachers and their students.

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Lauren Bates (educasions@gmail.com) has worked extensively in Cape Town schools and community groups as an English teacher and theatre maker, with a long-standing involvement with the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa. She runs an educational theatre initiative called Educasions that presents the Shakespeare set work plays and other theatrical curriculum support to schools. She holds two MA degrees, both with distinction, specialising in the spiritual dynamics within Shakespeare, exploring topics such as the role of prayer in Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's "Incarnations of the Soul". Bates also lectures in English Literature at Varsity College and writes poetry. She is deeply invested in the transformative power of literature for individuals and society.