Media Project #1 Rationale

1. Backstory: brainstorming prompts, approaches, etc.

Thinking back to my own experiences in high school and to some of the responses I got from students when teaching the plays “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “Romeo and Juliet”, I remembered oftentimes thinking to myself or thinking of a character in the work I was reading as “man, this guy’s so stupid. What a horrible decision. If I was in his place, I wouldn’t have done that”. It wasn’t until years later, as I started studying literature in detail and came across the concept of perspective (yes, I was oblivious to perspective until I majored in English. Oh the horrors!) that I realized that it was important to realize that what we see is not what the protagonist (or what any of the characters for that matter) is seeing.

This is particularly the case in Shakespeare plays, where the audience is given an omniscient point of view, where they are spectators to every scene and know the thoughts of each and every character as they pour out their emotions in monologues and soliloquies. And even when we are not privy to some information, we would be pampered with a narrator which tells us what is going on. To put it simply, as an audience, we are spoiled. However, oftentimes, as novice readers, we do not realize this. We almost assume ourselves into the roles of the characters, and implicitly assume that if we know something, the main character MUST know it as well! Another complaint about Shakespeare is that his work has become irrelevant, and that the language is difficult, so that students struggle to understand and grasp the work.

Because of these two notions and concepts, I decided to create a “Create Your Own Adventure” story, where only the perspective of the protagonist is given. Students will be given an element/”illusion” of choice (illusion because all choices will eventually lead to the same ending. I’m horrible, I know), where they will feel that they are the ones making decisions so that they would build an attachment to the main character and be able to relate themselves to the ordeals the protagonist is struggling with. Additionally, students will be forced to make decisions based on the limited information they are given, with the full truth being hidden until the very end, when all is revealed. Through this activity, students will be (hopefully!) given a better understanding of both perspective and Shakespeare. What play was this story based on? Read onwards!

1. Process: Pre-Production and Production

The process for this assignment was very fluid, and thus, there are no rough drafts/pre-production templates for observation. I had an idea of what I wanted to do (A Create Your Own Adventure story), and with the help of my best friend, Google, I found <http://textadventures.co.uk/>. Within the website was a template which allowed for you to type in your text and pick your options, and link them together, so I typed up my story from scratch within there.

I went and reread Shakespeare’s “Othello” from start to finish, thinking of incidences of deception as I read along. While I read, I made mental markers of where Iago laid his web of lies (overheard conversations, handkerchiefs, etc.) and then rearranged them in my mind to make the events make sense to form a new story. And from there, it was off to the races.

1. Gameplan: Allocation of Parts and Management of Time

As I worked by myself, I did all the creating (though I did get a classmate to test-run the game to make sure it worked and troubleshoot it). No one was consulted in the production of my assignment (except Google. I talk to Google about everything). As for my management of time, let’s not talk about it. You don’t want to know when I started or when I finished…

1. Assessment + Challenges

The implementation of a “Create Your Own Adventure” activity into a classroom has been a consideration of mine since the beginning of the program. Not only is the creation of them complex (the multiple plot lines and multiple endings amongst other things), but the integration of it within a classroom writing activity is even more difficult (how would I get students to collaboratively write a whole story together? What will students be doing while they wait for their prompt to arrive? Etc). And while I have envisioned posting different “stations” around the classroom which students have to find and move to based on their choices, the spacing of such an arrangement might also be a problem.

I feel that having students write alternate endings would be an effective Assessment for Learning activity, as they need to fully grasp the key elements of what they are reading before they can synthesize and write an alternate ending.

A more traditional approach would be the writing of a Compare and Contrast Essay between what they’ve read and what they’ve experienced in the activity. In this scenario, students might write a Compare and Contrast Essay between what Othello (or “Mr. Lo”) would know in comparison to what the audience watching/reading Othello would know. Alternatively, students can also write a Compare and Contrast Essay between motifs and items in the two works (For example, talking about the handkerchief in Othello and its counterpart in the Create Your Own Adventure, the teacher’s keys). Such an assignment will be marked on a typical essay rubric such as the one my SA gave me to use during my practicum (<http://hghaug.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/english-10-essay-writing-rubric.pdf>).

It is rather unfortunate that an activity using e-literature has to result in a rather “boring” and traditional assessment piece. As my sample CYOA requires a lot of teacher preparation and teacher writing, there is little to assess during the process. I am still in the process of exploring the potential options which may arise from such an activity, but at the moment, a standard writing piece will end up being the conclusion of such an activity, unfortunately.