

Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance
SAA 2018: Seminar
Leader: Jessica Winston, Idaho State University

In spring 2018, I ran a seminar on “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance.” Below is a copy of my initial letter to seminar participants. Here are a few things that worked well:

Invitees: I invited four people to participate in the seminar. I was delighted with the four people who agreed, who were all experts in the field of performance-oriented criticism. I felt that their experience, knowledge, and professional profiles helped to underline the significance of the seminar topic and ground the seminar discussion itself.

Commenting on the Papers: Because seminar papers are usually early drafts and one aim of a seminar is to encourage new work and ideas, I wanted to guide the seminar participants to offer encouraging, constructive comments. Also, I didn’t want the work of commenting to be overly burdensome. To organize the commenting on papers, then, I divided the papers into groups of three, and had each participant offer a comment on the two other papers in their group plus one additional assigned paper. I also followed the example of a seminar I was in a few years ago: I asked the participants to write brief, 250-word comments on each paper, identifying “one thing you found helpful or interesting” and “one thing you want to know more about.” This seemed to work well, and participants offered positive, encouraging comments, while also identifying some important issues. The participants shared their paper comments with the members of their group and their one other assigned participant. I did not circulate comments among the entire group.

At the Seminar: Originally, I had planned to run the discussion based on the groups I had established, but I abandoned this immediately after the opening question and instead just let the conversation to develop organically. There was a lot of overlap among the papers and across the groups, and this more organic conversation allowed everyone to participate freely. I moderated to the extent that, when multiple people wanted to speak, I called on people, and when someone who had not spoken at all or much wanted to speak, I tried to turn the discussion to them. Sometimes, I put in a question that had come up across several comments or papers. After 90 minutes, I opened the discussion to the auditors’ questions, although prioritized the seminar participants in responding to it. I then moved to another auditor’s question, and again prioritized the seminar participants in responding to it.

Seminar Respondent: The seminar had a respondent. He read all of the papers and we discussed these in advance over the phone. Instead of providing formal comments, he functioned as another seminar participant. I felt that this worked well, since he brought considerable knowledge to the seminar, and helped the discussion to move forward. Sometimes I feel like formal, read responses can slow down a seminar discussion, and so I felt that this more informal participation worked well.

[Initial Letter]

Dear Seminar Participants:

Welcome to the 2018 SAA Seminar 47, “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance.” I am delighted that this group represents such a wide range of experiences with respect to the teaching of live performance. I look forward to working with you.

Below or attached you will find the following:

- **My contact information**
- **A brief description of the seminar**
- **An outline of important deadlines**
- **A list of seminar participants**

I have also attached an overview of the seminar.

**With best wishes,
Jessica Winston**

Contact Information: Seminar Organizer

**Name
Title
Department
Affiliation
E-mail:
Phone:**

Seminar Objectives

In the pedagogical criticism, little attention has been paid to the teaching of live stage productions of early modern drama, whether as a tool for teaching the text or as an art form to be analyzed in its own right. The aim of this seminar to explore how we introduce and teach live productions of Shakespeare—amateur or professional, live or digital—in the classroom and at the performance. As you develop your contributions, the following questions might spark some ideas, although you should not feel limited to the questions here and should feel free to explore any topic relevant to the seminar theme.

- **In what types of courses do teachers incorporate the viewing of a stage production of Shakespeare or other early modern drama?**
- **What theories of performance underlie and motivate various approaches to teaching live theatre?**
- **What types of activities, assignments, and discussions facilitate the appreciation and analysis live theatre?**

- What metaphors or terms can be used conceptualize performance? Gloss? Interpretation? “Subsequent performance” (Miller)? Event? Contact zone? Something else?
- How is teaching professional theatre similar to or different from teaching university or community productions?
- Do teaching strategies change depending on the type or style of the production, such as original practices, or its relation to the text, such as adaptation or an appropriation, such as *Sleep No More*?
- How does teaching live performance draw upon approaches teaching Shakespeare with active performance exercises, and how does teaching live performance demand different or additional theories, approaches, and protocols?
- How do approaches to teaching live theatre differ depending on class level (lower-division survey, upper-division special topic, or graduate), or disciplinary location of the class, e.g. in Department of English or Theatre?
- How is teaching a digital relay of a professional production similar to or different from teaching live theatre?
- What approaches and methods do teachers and theatre educational staff share, and how are their approaches and aims different?
- How is the teaching of a live Shakespeare play similar to or different from the teaching of other early modern, classical, or modern drama in performance?
- How do films function in teaching in relation to live performance?
- How do the online educational resources of major theatres relate to the teaching of live theatre, e.g. augmentation, substitution, or something else?
- How do teachers and theatres address the challenges of access to live theatre in terms of logistics, finances, and disability?

Seminar Contributions and Deadlines

Seminar participants will submit papers of 2000-3500 words for circulation prior to the conference. These papers could address a variety of topics. Some participants could discuss their own experiences with teaching live performance (methods, lesson plans, assignments, logistics), while others could choose to write a literature review, a concept paper on a key term or theoretical approach, or an analysis of current trends.

I will be sending out reminders as the following deadlines approach.

Friday, December 8, 2017	Brief bio, including any background relevant to the seminar topic. Paper title and abstract bibliography of 2–3 important critical, theoretical, or pedagogical works.
Friday, February 10, 2018	Papers due for circulation among participants
Friday, March 9, 2018	Read and provide brief comments on other seminar papers that will be assigned to you.

Contact Information: Seminar Participants

N.B. If your name, title, or affiliation needs to be revised, please let me know.

[Here I listed the names, affiliations, and email addresses of the seminar participants.]