

Creating Voice:

Letters to Juliet



**Encouraging Authentic Expression and Personal
Investment in Student Writing**

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Creating Voice: Letters to Juliet (Teacher Handout)

Strategy: Our goal is to produce emotionally charged and authentic student writing that targets student voice. This goal will be achieved by adapting the tradition of ‘Letters to Juliet’; a contextualization that we will use to encourage authentic writing through the mechanisms of anonymous personal letters and object/word associations.

Grade Level & Stream: Grade 10, academic English (ENG2D). To be used, ideally, at the end of the creative writing unit and as a transition into a unit on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

Activities: There are two main activities in this lesson. The first activity uses object/word associations to encourage students to consider a person with whom they have a meaningful relationship while simultaneously producing anonymity as the object name replaces the person’s name. In the second activity students write letters to Juliet, expressing charged emotions such as anger, love, disappointment, and loss. These emotions can arise through either familial, philial, or romantic love. The letter is an exercise to reflect on and communicate about a situation where the student was for example, disappointed or supported by a loved one. As long as the letter focuses on a meaningful relationship, the teacher may encourage students to express a complex range of emotions.

Activity 1: Word/Object Association

The teacher must first copy onto the chalkboard the chart that is on the student handout (located on the reverse side of this handout). The teacher then introduces this activity by bringing to class an object that recalls someone with whom they have a meaningful relationship, and explains to students the association between their chosen person and the object. It is also necessary that the teacher explain that they chose a person with whom they had an experience that produces at least one of the emotions from the chart on the chalkboard. For example, a teacher could bring in an apple and explain that the apple reminds them of their father as they would pick apples at orchards with their father as a child.

The teacher should then ask students to spend two to three minutes carefully considering a relationship they had or have that involves at least one of the emotions from the chart. Students should then consider an object that is representative of the person with whom they have the relationship (this person may be a family member, friend, or partner). Students then need to complete a fast write, explaining how this object recalls their chosen person. The purpose of this activity is to prompt students to reflect on a meaningful relationship. It also produces a coded name that can be used in their letter, maintaining anonymity for both the writer and chosen person. It is important that these names remain anonymous as the letters will be attached to a wall in the classroom, albeit in envelopes. Moreover, the purpose of this anonymity is to encourage students to produce more authentic writing by creating an environment where they may be comfortable expressing their voice.

Activity 2: Letters to Juliet

For the second activity the teacher should begin by asking students to lower their heads onto their desks and close their eyes. The teacher should then read an example ‘letter to Juliet’ in that discusses the relationship and associated emotion(s) towards the person described in activity one, but

instead use the word/object association when referencing the person in lieu of the actual name. In this example, the teacher would replace the term ‘father’ with ‘apple’. The letter should be addressed to Juliet, but otherwise not be bound by any strict format constraints as long as it reflects at least one of the emotions found in the chart on the student handout, which may be adapted to fit the needs of the class.

It is also important to recognize that this read aloud portion of the activity is very dependent on knowing the maturity level and environment of the classroom as it involves a degree of vulnerability; hence, this portion should be used at the discretion of the teacher. After reading aloud their letter the teacher should then pass around the student handout that contains the instructions for this activity (*see back of this page for instructions). It is crucial that the handout be passed out in envelopes because the students will then transfer their letters into these envelopes prior to posting them on the wall, or, alternatively, return it to the teacher who will then post the envelope. Additionally, the teacher should verbally explain the instructions while passing out the handouts to ensure everyone understands the expectations. The purpose of this activity is to encourage personal investment in student writing.

After students finish writing their letters they should place them in the envelopes and then pin the letters to the “Juliet Wall” in the classroom, which is simply a wall that has been decorated to represent the wall in Verona. If the student is uncomfortable doing this portion then they may return the letter to the teacher who may post it anonymously. It may be a good idea for the teacher to attach some empty envelopes to the wall ahead of time as this may help encourage students to pin their envelopes on the wall. The purpose of this portion is to simulate the actual experience of writing letters to Juliet. The teacher may then remove the letters from the wall and grade them, although the letters could be reattached afterwards if comments and grades are recorded on separate sheets.

Benefits: This strategy should foster authentic student voice and expression in writing because students reflect on and write about a meaningful relationship and become personally invested through the writing process. Since the letters contain a degree of anonymity, a situation is produced whereby students may feel more comfortable expressing honest emotion. Secondly, in writing the letter to Juliet students must explain their experience and the emotions involved; a process that cannot be accomplished without personal reflection, which is important for any writing process.

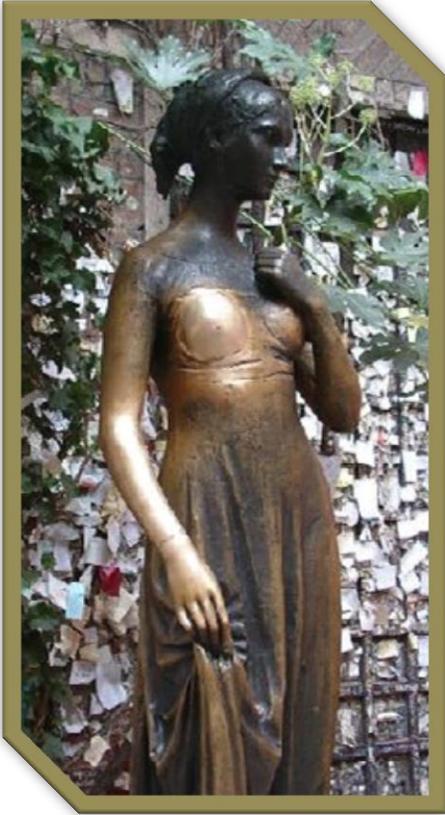
Limitations: Students may, in spite of the anonymity, feel uncomfortable expressing their emotions or their maturity level may not be high enough that they can do so in a productive manner. Hence this activity is very dependent on the classroom community. Secondly, as the strategy is associated with love letters some students may be resistant to the activity, considering it ‘too feminine’. However, this limitation is also an important reason for doing this activity – it may help break down stereotypes concerning masculinity and emotion.

Resources:

- Video clips showing the walls of the Casa de Giulietta (Juliet’s house in Verona, Italy) and clips describing the tradition and historical context.
- Teacher’s object and letter, and student handouts in unsealed envelopes.
- Decorated wall in classroom onto which students may pin their letters.

Creating Voice: Letters to Juliet (Student Handout)

On a separate sheet of paper you will write a letter to Juliet, similar to the letter read aloud in class. Please follow the instructions listed below when writing your letter.



1. Write your student number in the top left corner instead of your name as it is important that you keep this letter anonymous.
2. Address your letter to Juliet.
3. In the letter to Juliet, describe an experience or relationship that you shared with the person you thought of during the word/object association activity. As you write the letter, make sure to replace this person's name with the word/object that represents them.
4. In your letter, you must address at least one of the emotions listed in the chart below. Think of an experience or relationship in which you felt one or more of these emotions. If you wish to address an emotion that is not listed in the chart then you must receive teacher approval before you begin your letter
5. Must be 1 to 2 pages long, single spaced.
6. Sign the letter with your student number instead of your name; it is important that you keep this letter anonymous. (I.e. Sincerely, 267 890).
7. After you finish your letter you must then put it in the envelope provided and attach it the wall that has been put up in the classroom. Alternatively, you may return it to the teacher for posting.

Loss	Love/Fondness	Disappointment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death • Absence • End of relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement • Confide in • Selfless Acts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal • Loss of trust • Broken loyalty

