

2021

## Creating Presence Through Video in Teaching Shakespeare Online

Jennifer Black  
*Boise State University*

---

### Publication Information

Black, Jennifer. (2021). "Creating Presence Through Video in Teaching Shakespeare Online". *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 34, 166-181.

This document was originally published in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* by Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp DBA Associated University Presses. Copyright restrictions may apply.

# Creating Presence through Video in Teaching Shakespeare Online

Jennifer Black

## Introduction

What does it mean to be present in an online class? “Presence” is a surprisingly complex concept, especially when applied to online teaching. The Community of Inquiry model—a framework for creating meaningful learning experiences—defines three kinds of presence that contribute to an effective online course: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence<sup>1</sup>. Teaching presence includes course design, as well as effective facilitation of student learning. Social presence describes the ability of instructors and students to trust and connect with each other as human beings. Cognitive presence allows learners to “construct meaning through sustained communication.”<sup>2</sup> These three kinds of presence work together to promote student engagement and success in online courses, as well as to help instructors feel connected and fulfilled in their work. All three help create a sense of “immediacy,” which Kelly Rocca defines as “a perception of physical and psychological closeness.”<sup>3</sup> Rocca’s work on immediacy focuses on practices in the face-to-face classroom, but the Community of Inquiry model extends the same principles to the online environment. By being “present” in online classes, instructors help students not only feel more satisfied with their learning experience, but also learn more effectively.<sup>4</sup>

Presence is not synonymous with instructor effort or engagement. It is possible for an instructor to be highly engaged in an online course—building assignments, reading through student work, assigning grades, curating resources—without students feeling that the instructor is really “there” in the class. Just as the extensive work behind the scenes in a play might not be apparent to theatre audiences, the hours of work spent in creating and facilitating online and hybrid courses are often not visible to students. It is only when the actors are onstage—or when the teacher’s presence is apparent—that meaningful connection happens. Indeed, many online students can feel like they are teaching themselves or each other, even when working in a well-designed course, if they do not see or interact with their teacher in the

class. This absence is particularly apparent in online Shakespeare classes, since the challenges that students may face in deciphering Shakespeare's language, understanding the content of his writing, and analyzing the complex themes he presents can seem even more daunting when students feel they are left to face them alone. Moreover, the essentially interactive nature of Shakespeare's plays, where characters are constantly in conversation with each other, rewards a collaborative approach to learning that involves participation from both learners and teachers.

This need for presence became apparent to me several years ago, when I was serving as an external reviewer of an online Shakespeare course at another institution. It was a well-designed, robust course, with lots of interesting readings and challenging assignment prompts. But the course felt cold and impersonal, without any of the energy I expected from a Shakespeare class. As I browsed through the course site and evaluated its strengths and weaknesses, I started to realize what was missing: meaningful interaction. There was no sense of a teacher in the online classroom, no indication that students were being welcomed into an exploration of Shakespeare's work by a fellow explorer who knew the way around a little better, no invitation into a community of learners who would engage with each other. It felt more like a correspondence course—facilitated by computer—than an actual online class, since the instructor had no presence in the class.

Returning from that course site to my own face-to-face Shakespeare class felt like walking into the sunshine. My students were performing scenes, taking turns reading out loud, working collaboratively on analysis, and engaging in spirited conversations about the texts we were reading, and I was fully present with them. As their teacher, I was not just physically present in the class, but I was also actively engaged in our shared learning process by participating in conversations, coaching informal performances, offering my own interpretations of passages and scenes, and sharing my own questions. My students saw, heard, and interacted with me; to use Paulo Freire's terminology, I was a "teacher-student" working with "students-teachers" in a collaborative process of learning taking place in our class.<sup>5</sup>

Although I was only teaching Shakespeare face-to-face at that time, I had already been developing and teaching other literature and humanities courses online for a few years. I enjoyed interacting with my students through participating in written discussion boards and giving feedback on assignments, as well as through e-mail and even the occasional phone call. But I felt like I was not yet tapping into the full potential for interaction offered by the online environment, especially in relation to creating presence. So I decided to start exploring how I could use video to help students in online learning environments feel more connected to me, to each other, and to Shakespeare.

Using video to teach Shakespeare online seems like an obvious pedagogical strategy, since there is such a wealth of wonderful video productions of

Shakespeare's plays and even his poetry. Resources like the BBC Shakespeare plays, the Globe Player, the Stratford Festival on Film, the RSC Live Collection, the Sonnets app, and even just Netflix or YouTube make it easy to share monologues, scenes, and even whole performances with students. Online course sites can be enlivened by embedded videos or clips, especially when students get to respond or evaluate the performances and connect them to the texts they are studying. Having students start or end their study of a Shakespeare play by watching one or more performances on video offers them the chance to experience the text differently and explore more of its possibilities, especially when such viewing is paired with active learning, such as guiding questions or a related assignment.<sup>6</sup> Whether students choose from among a range of performances or all watch the same version, video productions help to emphasize the performative aspects of Shakespeare's texts and show students how much room there is for a range of interpretation.

But although performance videos like this can add much of value to an online course, they do not establish instructor or social presence unless they are part of larger collaborative assignments. Since social presence happens through communication and interaction,<sup>7</sup> video that is geared toward creating immediacy needs to involve those elements as well. Many times the best way to include meaningful video in online classes is to create it yourself, especially since doing so can address all three kinds of presence: instructor, social, and cognitive. I have found that three general types of video can be very effective in establishing presence while teaching Shakespeare online: instructor-created video, student-created video, and synchronous video meetings. All three types of video serve different, but often complementary, purposes and help to create a sense of online community. It is not necessary to use all of them in one course; choosing just a few and using them consistently is usually the most effective (and sustainable) approach. By using one or more of these types of video in online Shakespeare classes, instructors can be seen and heard in the online classroom, students can feel more connected to each other, and the whole class can work together toward deeper understanding of the texts they are studying. Moreover, students can experience some of the interactive methods of studying Shakespeare that can add so much to their learning and enjoyment.

## **Instructor-Created Video**

### *Orientations*

Since all three kinds of presence affect students from the beginning of an online course, it is important to be intentional about starting to create them early on. Students can begin to feel the instructor's presence from the first pre-course email or their initial entrance into the course site. With this in mind,

I decided to focus my first efforts on instructor-created video—specifically a welcome video to share with students at the beginning of the semester. Like an effective exposition in a Shakespeare play, a course introduction video that guides and educates students can help them be more ready to engage with the course content. It can also show them that they have an instructor who cares about their success and believes in their ability to understand Shakespeare and contribute to an online class community. I knew from talking to students that many of them felt isolated in their online classes; they missed the connection with a teacher who cared about their success. I wanted my students to know that I was available to them and committed to creating a meaningful learning experience. I also wanted to set the tone for the class and help them feel my excitement about the literature we were studying, much as I might do on the first day of an in-person class. Even though I communicated this information in written form, it did not always come across effectively, especially to students who were new to online learning. So I recorded a short introductory video for students to watch when beginning the class, a video simply consisting of me reading a script in front of the camera. I made many mistakes the first time around. I tried to make it too professional, recording it with fancy equipment in a studio on campus. It ended up taking many hours and still seemed stiff and formal to me. So I re-recorded it on a smartphone at home, against a backdrop of books and images that I hoped would communicate warmth and friendliness. I uploaded it to YouTube (as an unlisted video) and linked to it on my course site. Since then, it has been easy to re-record it as necessary for different semesters and courses.

I find that friendly introductory videos help to build a feeling of community, as, like the chorus at the start of *Henry V*, I welcome students into the class and invite them to be part of our shared project of working toward greater understanding of Shakespeare and his plays. In my introduction videos, I orient students to the course structure, share my own passion for the texts we will be studying, and give them a general overview of the structure and purpose of the class. I sometimes recite a few favorite lines from a play (e.g. Jacques' famous speech from *As You Like It*) or explain why I have chosen the texts we will focus on. I use the auto-captioning feature on YouTube or Panopto to add captions for accessibility, and I post the video prominently in the course site. My students have reacted very positively, commenting that they enjoyed seeing and hearing me welcome them into the course and felt more confident that the class would be a meaningful learning experience.

I eventually also added “course tour” videos to my course sites, using screen capture software to guide students around the learning management system and explain essential elements of the course. In the tours, I demonstrate how to submit assignments and find my feedback in the gradebook, as

well as where to find resources for support throughout the course, like e-texts of the plays and poems, online summaries and glossaries, and video clips of performances. Creating the course tour videos with the learning management system in “student preview” mode ensures that the course site looks in the videos the way it will look for students. I sometimes even submit practice assignments in the preview mode and post feedback to them beforehand so that I can show students see exactly how and where they will find my feedback on their work. In her book *Effective Online Teaching*, Tina Stavredes explains that this kind of “scaffolding,” or preparation for the course, creates clear expectations, supports learners in the new course environment, and decreases frustration that students might feel trying to navigate an unfamiliar learning environment.<sup>8</sup>

### *Mini-Lectures*

In addition to orientation videos at the start of the semester, I often create short mini-lectures on the plays we are studying and include them throughout my online and hybrid courses. Video mini-lectures can serve many purposes. First, they allow me to share my knowledge and expertise with students in a way that is accessible to them. Certainly my ideas are spread throughout the course site in various places, but the videos make it easy for students to benefit from my years of study and teaching. They see that they have a knowledgeable instructor who is doing more than just assigning independent study materials. Second, the videos communicate my enthusiasm for Shakespeare and his work, which is one of the elements of my classes that students tell me has the greatest effect on their engagement and learning. By hearing my voice as I read passages from the plays or poems, talk about their meaning, and share my ideas about them, students become aware of my own investment in the material I am asking them to spend their time studying. Third, the videos provide a model for students about how they might engage with specific themes or passages from the texts we are studying. I spend time in the mini-lectures on close reading of specific passages, demonstrating how to notice patterns and make connections in order to create meaning. I model how I grapple with complex passages and explore multiple meanings that might arise from different ways of reading. I use a mixture of speech and visual tools (e.g., annotated blocks of text, images from performances, etc.) to discuss overall themes, words, and phrases from the plays, character development, scholarly opinions about interpretation of different lines, etc.

One of my fears when I started teaching online was that I would lose the interactions I valued most in teaching literature, especially the chance to share stories and insights with students. I wanted to *teach* students about literature, not just give them resources to teach themselves. Although I gave them lots of text-based guidance in the course site, I missed the experience of talking with them about the texts and sharing some of what I have learned

through my own years of study and research. Creating mini-lectures allowed me to take on that teacher role in the online classroom.

Most of my mini-lectures are narrated presentations, with PowerPoint slides containing text and images that serve as talking points for the ideas I want to discuss with the class. Then I use screen-capture software like Camtasia, Screencastomatic, or Panopto to record the slides along with my audio narration. Again, my first efforts at this were far less than perfect and required multiple takes to record and upload, but, even with my lack of experience, the mini-lectures were enjoyable to make, since they let me offer students the kind of helpful discussion of Shakespeare's plays that I might give in a face-to-face class. For example, in a mini-lecture video on *Hamlet*, I give my students some historical context for the play and its sources and a small taste of some of the critical conversation surrounding its themes. I read through a couple of passages from the play (usually only three or four lines at a time) and show how I derive meaning out of them. Some students watch the videos as a pre-reading activity, while others watch them after completing the reading to gain deeper understanding. Some students may not watch them at all, but the course site analytics show me that many students watch them multiple times. Unlike with in-class lectures, they can pause and review them to make sure they are understanding the ideas I am talking about. They have control over the pace of the information they are receiving and can review as much as they want.

At first, making each mini-lecture took me several hours, since I tried to pack a lot into it and kept stopping to re-record every time my dog barked or I stumbled over my words. But over time, I learned to make my mini-lectures more quickly and effectively. Through research and experimentation, I discovered many of the principles that Cynthia Brame of Vanderbilt University recommends for effective educational videos: I learned to use conversational language, express my enthusiasm, and connect videos to my specific students' knowledge and experience.<sup>9</sup> Video mini-lectures are a tool that many Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs, such as those on Coursera and edX) have taken full advantage of, so I was able to learn from what I liked and disliked about the videos in those free courses as I built my own. Research about video lectures in MOOCs suggests that offering a series of short, focused videos, rather than one long video with many sections, seems to make it easier for students to watch the videos and understand them.<sup>10</sup> This kind of segmenting not only decreases the time students have to commit to each video, but also might help students manage the cognitive load of processing new information, since they are trying to take it in in smaller chunks. So, in a unit on *Henry V*, for instance, I created six 5–10-minute videos, each focusing on a different scene or element of the play, such as the role of the chorus, Harry's speech at Harfleur, the wooing scene in act 5, etc. I read passages aloud, shared research and scholarly conversation about specific themes at work in these scenes, and described my own emotional responses

to some of the key moments in the play. I embedded the videos within Blackboard (my school's learning management system) so that students could mark each video as "reviewed" after watching it and could watch (or re-watch) the videos to be more prepared for the discussion forum and assignments for that play.

I usually embed my mini-lectures directly in my course site so that students can watch them easily without leaving the learning management system. I tend to place them toward the beginning of a unit, since students have said they are a valuable pre-reading tool. But I will sometimes put them closer to a specific assignment or send a link to one out in an announcement if it is particularly relevant to a discussion prompt or paper that students will be working on. In any case, I make sure that the videos are prominently featured in the course site so that students do not miss them. I list them in the to-do list for each unit so that students remember to plan time to watch them as they are working on the week's assignments.

In addition to the content knowledge and sense of connection they create, one minor, but meaningful, benefit of including videos about Shakespeare's texts is that they can help students learn how to pronounce the names of characters and places that might otherwise seem intimidating or confusing to them. They can also gain this familiarity with pronunciation by watching film productions or listening to audio versions of the plays carefully, but it definitely helps them to hear me speak some of the names as I teach them about other aspects of the texts. Knowing how to say them correctly gives them more confidence in talking about the plays with others and entering into deeper analysis.

Many students have thanked me for my mini-lectures, especially for the way they create a sense of connection between them and me. They appreciate mini-lectures like my reading of Henry V's Agincourt speech and my analysis of *Hamlet's* sources, not only because they aid their understanding, but also because they help them feel like they have a coach in their own study of the plays. One student wrote in a course evaluation, "It's really nice to have the classroom feel in an online class and I love the mini-lecture videos. I've had a few professors who do this in online classes and I can't really explain how indispensable they are! They help with my comprehension and retainment. And it's nice to hear another speaking voice besides my own in the course!!!" A second one said "[the] mini-lectures help me feel as though this is a real class."

### **Student-Created Video**

A second kind of video that can create social and cognitive presence in online Shakespeare courses is video that students create themselves. These



videos can range from informal self-introductions to polished presentations, from recordings of students speaking directly to the camera to narrated PowerPoints to animations, but just as with instructor-created videos, having students create and share their videos with each other can contribute to social and cognitive presence. As they share, watch, and respond to videos, students realize that they are part of a community of learners engaged in a collaborative task.

The technology aspect of asking students to create video might be daunting to some instructors, but there is a wide range of video recording and editing software that students can use, ranging from programs that require almost no training (like Flipgrid and Screencast-O-matic) to those that take a more time to figure out, but offer more options (like iMovie and Panopto). In many semesters of assigning videos, I have never had a student who was not able to figure out how to record and share a video, though sometimes they needed help from the university's technical support or tech-savvy friends. I usually offer students a list of software options they might try and sometimes make quick tutorial videos to get them started, but many times students do things with video technologies that go way beyond what I know how to do. And even very basic and simple videos let them add their voices and (sometimes) faces to the class in a way that builds presence.

Having students create their own video content helps them be more actively engaged in their own learning and can increase their self-efficacy: their belief in their ability to accomplish tasks and meet challenges.<sup>11</sup> Offering a clear process to follow in planning and creating the video tends to help it be an even more meaningful experience.<sup>12</sup> Watching and responding to each other's videos (and re-watching their own) turns the class into a lively conversation of different voices. It helps students feel more connected to each other and experience social presence as part of a community of learners.

In the more than eight years I have asked online students to create their own videos to share with the class, I have only had a very few who do not want to be seen or who feel intimidated by the technology. For those students, I try to be flexible in allowing them to create videos that they do not appear in (like narrated PowerPoints or computer animations) or to share them privately with me instead of with the whole class. I also try to recommend video tools that tech support at the university can help them with, so they can get lots of assistance if they need it. But the vast majority of students complete the assignments with no complaints, and some even thank me for giving them the opportunity to learn new technological skills.

### *Performances*

One easy and effective kind of student-created video I have assigned to help in creating social and cognitive presence is student performance, either

individual monologues or scenes. I often require students to analyze and memorize one monologue from a play we are studying, then record their performance of those lines on video to share with the class. Since my classes often include students with little or no performance experience, this assignment terrifies some of them, but they generally all rise to the occasion. I make it clear that they are not graded on their acting ability, and I have them prepare for the assignment by translating and reflecting on different aspects of the monologue they are performing (e.g., context in the play, audience, character, etc.). Many of them express pride in sharing their hard work with the online class. In fact, many of them find the video monologues to be preferable to in-class performances, since they have time to collect their thoughts and try again if they make a mistake.

Another possibility, though one that can sometimes be harder to work out logistically, is for students to perform scenes with multiple characters. They can create videos in groups or bring in friends or family, either meeting up in person to record together or using technology to collaborate at a distance. They can edit separate media files together or meet synchronously to record audio or video at the same time. They can work on polished long-term projects or on smaller collaborations. They can even play multiple roles themselves, using costumes or voices to differentiate the various characters. In any case, working with multi-character scenes gives online students more of the formal and informal performance experience that Edward Rocklin, in his *Performance Approaches to Shakespeare*, describes as such a helpful tool for both comprehension and analysis. Rocklin argues that performance activities help students learn to read “the language of drama,” which includes far more than just the plot, characters, and dialogue of the plays.<sup>13</sup> This language requires awareness of the different possibilities for how characters, scenes, and lines can be interpreted, along with the ways that different choices influence the meaning we take from the texts. As Rocklin explains, experimentation through performance allows students to “experience the power and delight—and, at times, frustration—of becoming co-creators with Shakespeare of the play.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Creative Reworkings*

In addition to video performances, student-created video can take the form of creative works that interpret or expand on Shakespeare’s plays. Examples of professional reworkings of nearly all Shakespeare’s plays (like the BBC’s *Shakespeare Retold* series) are widely available online for students to watch,<sup>15</sup> so students can get a sense of what kinds of projects they might create. They use Shakespeare’s plots and characters as a jumping-off point for their own creative inventions, much in the same way that Shakespeare himself borrowed plots and characters to create his own work. For example, one of my students performed a scene he wrote, inspired by *The Taming of*

*the Shrew*, in which Katharina is a weary coffee shop worker dealing with a bossy and annoying customer who tries to intimidate and control her. He dressed in a floppy hat and comfortable sweater to tell his story, tried out different voices for his different characters, and added the sounds of clinking coffee mugs and coffeeshop chatter in the background. In reflecting on his video, he said that it helped him pay attention to details in the play and to the ways that different performance approaches affect an audience's experience. Another student created a film imagining Hamlet's experiences in the after-life, exploring the question of whether the prince would be damned or rewarded for his actions in Shakespeare's play. His video not only allowed us to think more deeply about the messages of the play, but also helped us to understand his own questions about human existence and the long-term effects of our choices.

### *Formal Presentations*

Since much of the work my students do for class is academic in nature, I sometimes have them use video for more formal presentations, such as a final project or research-based assignment. They can (and do) share ideas in writing as well, but creating a video presentation gives them the opportunity of distilling their ideas for a specific audience: their classmates and me. Sometimes such videos build on and share insights from writing assignments: for instance, I might have students write a 10-page final essay that they submit to me privately, but also make a 2-3-minute video summarizing their key ideas for their classmates. Or I might have students submit a written outline of their ideas—including passages and research sources they plan to use—before they record a narrated PowerPoint or Prezi in which they use images and text to share their research with each other. These presentations give students a larger audience for their ideas than just their instructor and let them hear each other's ideas and insights. I will often frame video presentations like this by describing them as “mini academic conferences,” in which students get to do what scholars do: share their research with others and get feedback. By responding to each other's videos, students get to learn from each other, evaluate each other's ideas, and explore a wider range of interpretations of Shakespeare's texts than they might get just from me.

Since social presence develops through interaction, it is important that students watch each other's videos and share their reactions. I have my students share their video links in a discussion forum, then respond to two or three classmates' videos by answering specific questions about what they liked best in the videos, what they learned about the play, and how their classmates' videos helped them reflect on their own videos. Having a larger audience for their work than just their instructor helps many students to take the projects more seriously, but also to have more fun with them. As students

learn from each other's videos, they tend to improve the quality and creativity of their own work.

Grading student-created videos depends on how those videos relate to the learning objectives of specific courses, but I follow some general practices, regardless of the level of the online course. First, I give students clear guidelines for what is required in terms of length (usually 3–5 minutes, but can be longer for collaborative videos), content, language use (e.g., original text or their own translations), props or costumes, oral communication skills, etc. These guidelines are reflected in grading rubrics that are available to students from the beginning of each project, as well as in sample videos I share to give them ideas for how other students have approached the assignments. I assure students that they are not graded on their acting ability, but rather on meeting the requirements and demonstrating active engagement with Shakespeare's language, characters, and themes.

### **Synchronous Video Conferencing**

The third use of video I want to discuss, and the one I took longest to adopt, is synchronous video conferencing. Unlike recorded video, synchronous video creates a sense of immediacy and spontaneity that feels familiar to many teachers and students used to face-to-face discussions, which is one of the reasons so many classes turned to video meetings through software like Zoom or Google Meet when the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools down. But I had taught many successful online literature classes without using any synchronous meetings, and I was hesitant to use this kind of video to teach Shakespeare for many reasons: fear of problems with the technology, concerns about student internet access, insecurity about how to facilitate discussion in a video setting, questions about how to schedule meeting times around students' busy schedules, and a strong desire to make sure that I was using their time wisely. I felt (and feel) strongly that synchronous video should be used for interaction, not lecture. With so many other video lecture options available that do not require students to clear their schedules and figure out access to technology, asking students to get online at a specific time just to listen to me talk seemed to be an inefficient use of their time. But synchronous video allows for real-time conversation in a way that written discussions or recorded videos do not, so I determined that I would try it out and do my best to use it only for meaningful interaction.

I knew that synchronous meetings might involve a steep learning curve for me and my students, but fortunately there was plenty of information available to help me prepare. After doing some research about best practices and experimenting in meetings with colleagues using some of the available platforms supported by my university (e.g., Google Hangouts Meet, Zoom

Meeting, Blackboard Collaborate), I felt ready to dive in. I scheduled two synchronous meeting assignments about one-third and two-thirds of the way through the semester and added information to the syllabus about students needing a webcam or smartphone to participate. I made the meetings low-stakes (in terms of points) and offered several different meeting times for students to choose from. I required students to sign up for a specific time through a Discussion Board forum and limited each meeting to six participants so that we could have a manageable small-group conversation. Once students had signed up (a week or two before each meeting), I sent out calendar invitations with details about how to join the meeting and what technology preparations they might need to make (e.g., testing out microphones, downloading plug-ins, etc.). I made sure that students could join by phone if they did not have access to high-speed internet, though I encouraged them to enable their webcams (or smartphone cameras) if at all possible. In the instructions, I asked students to come to their meeting time with 4–5 questions about the assigned readings written down for us to discuss and let them know that their questions would guide the conversation and determine which aspects of the reading we focused on.

From the first video meeting, I realized that these synchronous discussions could be a great tool for creating meaningful social, cognitive, and instructor presence. The questions that students had prepared ranged from comprehension questions to deep analysis prompts, which gave us plenty to talk about during the hour-long meetings. Every student had a chance to speak and have a more free-form conversation than is often possible in written discussion forums with defined prompts, especially since some students felt more comfortable speaking their ideas than writing them. Students could bring up new questions and take the conversation in different directions as they responded to each other. They could ask me for clarification or strategies for interpreting specific passages. Students could speak a lot or a little, but could also post questions in the chat box if they felt less comfortable raising their hands (or un-muting their microphone, which we used as the signal that someone had something to say). The synchronous meetings allowed the students to interact with each other and with me personally and to remember that they had a real live instructor that was available to them when needed.

Student reaction to the synchronous meetings was even more positive than I anticipated. My course evaluations at the end of each semester invariably included comments about how “real” the class seemed. One student wrote in the course evaluation that “I liked how much work our instructor did to make it feel like it wasn’t an online class. Google Hangouts especially made it feel more real.” Another wrote, “I was hesitant to take an online class, but Dr. Black did a great job of making our group seem like a ‘real’ class.” These comments seemed strange to me at first, since the class seemed very “real” to me before adding the synchronous meetings, but they reaffirmed to me

that part of what students wanted in a “real” class was meaningful engagement with their instructor and classmates, which the meetings helped to encourage.

Since those early experiments with small-group synchronous meetings, I have explored other ways of using synchronous video in my Shakespeare classes and other literature classes. Using breakout rooms for small-group discussions allows even large classes to have meaningful interaction. Students can collaborate in real time on Cloud-based documents or presentations by adding their own slides to a Google Slides presentation about main themes in *The Tempest*, posting their questions about *Macbeth* to a Padlet wall, or sharing six-word summaries of an assigned scene to a Google Sheets spreadsheet. The energy of working and talking together is often palpable and highly satisfying to me and to the students who participate.

## Conclusion

The repeated student comments about an online class feeling “real” demonstrates something important about what students want in their online Shakespeare experience. Clearly the course site is already a real space where students are finding instructions, accessing content, and submitting work, but without a deliberately fostered sense of presence, especially social and instructor presence, many students do not connect what they are doing online with the learning they hope and expect to experience in a college class, especially a class engaged with a writer as influential, intimidating, and multifaceted as Shakespeare. Teaching Shakespeare with video does not mean trying to replicate the face-to-face class; instead it helps take fuller advantage of what is possible in the online learning environment, especially the use of media to create space for reflection and experimentation. Video can be a helpful tool in any online classroom, but it is especially useful in teaching Shakespeare, since it helps to break down some of the barriers that can prevent students from understanding and appreciating these four-hundred-plus-year-old texts. Instead of feeling left on their own to read and decipher plays full of unusual names, complex language, and unfamiliar historical contexts, students get to hear their instructor read and discuss passages, talk through questions with other students, try out their own interpretations of monologues and scenes, articulate their ideas to an audience, and play with some of the possibilities of performance using simple technology.

If “all the world’s a stage,”<sup>16</sup> as Shakespeare so famously wrote, then it seems only appropriate that we bring a little bit of that stage into our online Shakespeare classes and allow our students (and ourselves) to be “players” in a way that connects us to each other for mutual learning.

## Key Points

1. The three kinds of “presence” described in the Community of Inquiry model—instructor presence, social presence, and cognitive presence—can help to create a sense of community in online Shakespeare classes.
2. Instructors can use video to introduce themselves, orient students to the course, explain assignments, or give whole-class feedback.
3. Mini-lecture videos that are short, conversational, accessible (with captions), and focused can share an instructor’s expertise and enthusiasm about Shakespeare’s texts in ways that help students feel the instructor’s presence.
4. Student-created videos—performances, creative reworkings, and formal presentation—can add student voices to the classroom conversation, allow them to engage with the texts in new ways, and contribute to cognitive presence.
5. Synchronous video meetings, especially when they are focused on interaction (rather than lecture) and are student-driven, can be an ideal space for meaningful discussion of literature and a source of social presence.
6. Student-created video and synchronous meetings work best when students have technology support from the institution and clear processes to follow.
7. An instructor need not use every kind of video in a class to create presence, but even using one kind consistently can make a big difference in helping students feel connected to each other and to Shakespeare.

## Notes

1. D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer, “Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model,” *The Internet and Higher Education* 2, no. 2–3 (2000): 88.
2. D. Randy Garrison, ““Online collaboration principles,” *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 10, no. 1 (2006): 26.
3. Kelly Rocca, “Immediacy in the Classroom: Research and Practical Applications,” Presentation at the “Student Motivations and Attitudes: The Role of the Affective Domain in Geoscience Learning” conference, Northfield, MN. February 12, 2007.
4. Carol Hostetter and Monique Busch, “Measuring Up Online: The Relationship Between Social Presence and Student Learning Satisfaction,” *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 6, no. 2 (2012): 8.
5. Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 80.

6. Cynthia J. Brame, "Effective Educational Videos: Principles and Guidelines for Maximizing Student Learning from Video Content," *CBE Life Sciences Education* 15, no. 4 (2016): 4–5.
7. Patrick Lowenthal and Tina Parschal, "Teaching Presence," *The Learning Curve* 3, no. 4 (2008): 4.
8. Tina Stavredes, *Effective Online Teaching: Foundations and Strategies for Student Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 84–85.
9. Brame, "Effective Educational Videos," 3.
10. Philip J. Guo, Juho Kim, and Rob Rubin. "How Video Production Affects Student Engagement: An Empirical Study of MOOC Videos." L@S '14: Proceedings of the first ACM conference on Learning @ scale conference (2014): 44.
11. Laurie O. Campbell, Samantha Heller, and Lindsay Pulse, "Student-created video: an active learning approach in online environments," *Interactive Learning Environments*, 9.
12. *Ibid.*, 5.
13. Edward Rocklin, *Performance Approaches to Shakespeare* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2005), xvi.
14. *Ibid.*, xix–xx.
15. Christy Desmet, "Teaching Shakespeare with YouTube," *The English Journal* 99, no. 1 (2009): 66.
16. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7.146.

## Bibliography

- Brame, Cynthia J. "Effective Educational Videos: Principles and Guidelines for Maximizing Student Learning from Video Content," *CBE life sciences education* 15, no. 4 (2016): 1–6. doi:10.1187/cbe.16-03-0125. Accessed June 19, 2020.
- Campbell, Laurie O., Samantha Heller, and Lindsay Pulse. "Student-created video: an active learning approach in online environments," *Interactive Learning Environments* (8 January 2020): 1–10. doi: 10.1080/10494820.2020.1711777. Accessed June 19, 2020.
- Desmet, Christy. "Teaching Shakespeare with YouTube," *The English Journal* 99, no. 1 (2009): 65–70. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40503329](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503329). Accessed June 9, 2020.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Garrison, D. Randy. "Online collaboration principles," *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 10, no. 1 (2006): 25–34. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.96.4536&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Accessed August 12, 2020.
- Garrison, D. Randy, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer. "Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model," *The Internet and Higher Education* 2, no. 2–3 (2000): 87–105. [http://cde.athabascau.ca/coi\\_site/documents/Garrison\\_Anderson\\_Archer\\_Critical\\_Inquiry\\_model.pdf](http://cde.athabascau.ca/coi_site/documents/Garrison_Anderson_Archer_Critical_Inquiry_model.pdf). Accessed August 12, 2020.
- Guo, Philip J., Juho Kim, and Rob Rubin. "How Video Production Affects Student Engagement: An Empirical Study of MOOC Videos," *L@S '14: Proceedings of the first ACM conference on Learning @ scale conference*. March 2014, pp. 41–50. doi: 10.1145/2556325.2566239. Accessed September 12, 2020.



- Hostetter, Carol, and Monique Busch. "Measuring Up Online: The Relationship Between Social Presence and Student Learning Satisfaction," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 6, no. 2 (2012): 1–12. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/josotl/article/view/1670>. Accessed June 9, 2020.
- Lowenthal, Patrick, and Tina Parscal. "Teaching Presence," *The Learning Curve* 3, no. 4 (2008): 1–2, 4.
- Rocca, Kelly. "Immediacy in the Classroom: Research and Practical Applications." Presentation at the "Student Motivations and Attitudes: The Role of the Affective Domain in Geoscience Learning" conference, Northfield, MN. February 12, 2007. <https://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/affective/immediacy.html>. Accessed February 9, 2019.
- Rocklin, Edward. *Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2005.
- Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020. <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/as-you-like-it>. Accessed June 20, 2020.
- Stavredes, Tina. *Effective Online Teaching: Foundations and Strategies for Student Success*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Copyright of Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England is the property of Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corporation and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.