**Adaptation as Interpretation (For Instructors)**

**What is this?** The following is an assignment designed to provide students a creative space to analyze drama and rethink the breadth of their interpretive toolkits. In particular, this assignment offers a framework for using video essay, blogpost, or other digital modality which allows for virtual delivery. Included here is an **instructor information, assignment description and examples**, and **materials for blogpost and video-essay design**.

**Why this format?** The obvious answer is that due to COVID, classes will need to be prepared to be online and also to provide engagement for students that is stimulating without the benefit of a classroom. But this assignment is also a good way to encourage students to realize that interpretation is not just academic but is both creative and diffuse in the way we engage with art. Finally, this assignment allows students to undertake an assignment that is optimized for a world whose primary platform is increasingly digital.

**A Note on “Adaptation”:** Just as this assignment encourages students to think about adaptation, you too can adapt this assignment as it suits the needs of your classroom. Your adaptation might be slight (swapping one play for another) or totalizing (reframing the assignment as an analysis OF an adaptation, showing how a particular performance highlights its own interpretation of the source material). This can be easily adapted for groups and/or presentations as a PowerPoint.

**Helpful tips:** This sort of thinking often feels unfamiliar to students and this assignment banks on engaging their creativity to have them push deeper than they otherwise would. Because of that, consider a few things. First, breadcrumb the due dates: have them write an initial thesis paragraph a week early to get ideas rolling, have them set up a blogpost on the website to troubleshoot tech issues, etc. Second, encourage them to take risks with their choices—often the more radical their adaptation choice, the more they must argue to articulate their choices in connection to the text.

* Remember that the IDEAL studio provides class visits for tech support, a broad website of video instructions (Wordpress, ClipChamp, etc), as well as instructor and student consultations.
* As you build up to the assignment, be sure to research and bring in compelling examples of adaptation and performances to give students a sense of drama’s life beyond the page.
* I like to provide in-class time for students to bring computers and begin a new WordPress post or a ClipChamp video. It demystifies the technology and troubleshoots issues.
* Go through the assignments together as a class to talk through expectations, discuss primary aims, and flesh out their sense of interpretation versus summary.
* Use [this](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Te4S0sfgkEw) to set up and invite students to the Wordpress site:
* Cut and revise as you like! I use examples from common plays and about topics I’ve taught but these may not work for your class. Model what you want to see.
* Decide how to deal with turn-ins. You can grade each one with full feedback, which is a lot of work but more helpful. Or, you can have the first two as workshops in small groups, perhaps as a pass-fail grade.

**Assignment Description: Blogpost (For Students)**

Congratulations! You have been named director for a local theatre troop to stage a performance of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The theater owner has given you complete creative freedom but expects you to justify your adaptation choices to ensure they are true to the play’s core ideas and themes. Your blogpost will suggest stage direction that will bring to life the play in whatever way you deem fitting but must justify these choices based on **textual evidence**. The bulk of your essay will be this evidence—spending the larger portion showing how the text is already exploring ideas that you intend to highlight.

The assessment for this essay is less about the adaptive choices but instead how the choices reflect **a clear, complex, and persuasive interpretation of the text.** You’ll provide key details of your adaptation of a handful of important scenes, which suggest the ideas the play is exploring, how your adaptation highlights them, and what the text itself reveals about these ideas. An example of this balance can be seen in the following example.

**Poor Example**: *This adaptation takes place on a college campus because ‘Hamlet’ is about youth and growing up. In act 1 scene 5 Hamlet is facing the ghost of his father and is told about his uncle’s betrayal. Hamlet will be wearing black to reflect his sadness and will be wandering through the university hallways to show how he feels lost. The father’s ghost will be represented only be a cell phone through which Hamlet is Face Timing. This set up will reflect the play’s ideas about feeling alienated and alone in adolescence, as college students often have less parental interaction—with technology as a cold comfort.*

-This example makes directorial choices (a modern college setting, costume and scenery choices) and these choices even reflect a view that the play is about “youth” and “maturing”. But there is too much focus on the choices and the interpretation itself is too vague. There is no direct quotation of the play.

**Stronger example**: *’Hamlet’ is a play about coming into adulthood with all its struggles and uncertainties. In act 1 scene 5 Hamlet learns of his father’s murder and resolves to mature and avenge him. Hamlet asks his body “grow not instant old,/But bear me stiffly up,” wanting to be strong enough to do what he must but not so stiff as to be paralyzed. He goes on to meditate on memory, saying “from the table of memory/I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records” (1.5.95-100), believing he must let go of his youthfulness. This adaptation will take place on a college campus since there is no modern place more associated with being caught between adolescent and adult. In the scene, Hamlet wanders through hallways talking to his father’s ghost on a cellphone, symbolizing his struggle to let go of the past and come into his own. Hamlet’s presence alone on stage reflects the play’s argument that ultimately, there is no model for us coming into maturity, and we must face it on our own.*

-This emphasizes more interpretation of the text, using the creative choices to call attention to the

passages and suggest how those passages work toward broader ideas. It doesn’t just suggest the play is

“about maturing” but that the play makes a specific point about maturing—namely, that we do it alone.

**First Turn-in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** on ICON by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Thesis Paragraph** – Introduce the ideas you are interested in and the argument you see the text making about them. Be sure it is meaningful, specific, and arguable. The instructor may not provide feedback, but this will ensure an early start.

**Second Turn-in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** on WordPress by  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**New Blogpost ­**– Make a new blogpost on Wordpress with an image and your thesis paragraph. These can change as you revise but this will ensure you’re signed up and familiar with posting text and images

**Final Turn-in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** on WordPress by  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Final Draft** Post your **1200-1500** word blogpostwith the polish and rigor of language that you would bring to a college essay. Please include engaging images to support your ideas.

**Assignment Description: Video Essay (For Students)**

Congratulations! You have been named director for a local theatre troop to stage a performance of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The theater owner has given you complete creative freedom but expects you to justify your adaptation choices to ensure they are true to the play’s core ideas and themes.

Your video essay will suggest stage direction that will bring to life the play in whatever way you deem fitting but must justify these choices based on **textual evidence**. The bulk of your essay will be this evidence—spending the larger portion showing how the text is already exploring ideas that you intend to highlight.

As such, the assessment for this essay is less about the adaptive choices themselves but instead how the choices reflect **a clear, complex, and persuasive interpretation of the text.** Your script should dig into the play itself, discussing the events, tone, and language of the scene which contributes to your interpretation. This should be supported by relevant and engaging images or video in the background. When you do describe the adaptive choices you’re making, make full use of the video format (sound, image, text) to demonstrate your choices.

**A good video essay will include** all the hallmarks of a traditional essay:

* A clear **introduction**, providing the work in question, the main argument about its ideas, and some sense of the scope of the project.
* Clearly **defined sections** which center around specific points and work to develop and push forward the main ideas.
* **Textual evidence** which supports the claims made and drives the analysis via close-reading.
* A **conclusion** which ties together the various parts and gives a sense of the scope and stakes of the main argument.

Since this is an interpretation class, your ideas are the most important thing. But compositional choices can help let them shine. Showing the text of a quote your analyzing with relevant bits in colored type is a tiny detail that’s easily executable and can make for more comprehension and engaging viewing.

Be sure to choose scenes that offer-up compelling quotations for analysis toward your main argument. Looking at the longer soliloquies can offer the chance to get away from the plot and into the language and ideas from which most interpretation takes place.

**First Turn-in** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on ICON by \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Rough Script** – Develop a 2-paragraph script, introducing your argument about the text and the adaptation which will articulate it. The instructor may not provide feedback, but this will ensure an early start.

**Second Turn-in** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on ICON by \_\_\_\_\_\_

**New Video** – Start a new video on ClipChamp in which you include your voice recorded over both images you’ve chosen and written text.

**Final Turn-in** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on ICON by \_\_\_\_\_\_

Link your **5-7 minute video essay** which clarifies a complex and compelling interpretation of the text and develops an adaptation which demonstrates this interpretation.

**Further Examples to consider:**

***A Streetcar Named Desire***’s drama is driven by differences in social class. How might your costumes/props showcase the arguments about these divisions and analogous ones today?

***A Midsummer Night’s Dream***is a play exploring issues of sexuality and society. How might changing the gender of certain characters highlight the plays exploration of sexuality?

***Trifles*** critiques gender disparities by looking at traditional roles in rural life. How might an update, in say, Silicon Valley, help demonstrate the plays ideas about how such roles persist?

***Othello***is a play in part about racial prejudice in Shakespeare’s period. What points in the text could be underscored by setting it in one of the cities at the center of the BLM movement?

**Check out some of the ways Othello alone has been adapted…**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A person talking on a cell phone  Description automatically generated | Gadfly Theater, gender-swapped and queer “Othello” (2013) |
| A group of people in uniform  Description automatically generated | National Theater, modernized “Othello” (2013) |
| A picture containing monitor, photo, screen, television  Description automatically generated | Honolulu Youth Theater, rapped  “Othello” (2007) |
| A close up of a womans face  Description automatically generated | Lionsgate Films, retelling of “Othello” in high school basketball team (2001) |
| A close up of a person  Description automatically generated | Royal Shakespeare Company, casts a black actor as Iago, 2015 |

**IDEAL Resources for WordPress and ClipChamp:**

**Blogpost Resources:**

**From the IDEAL Studio (our** [**website**](https://ideal.uiowa.edu/)**)**

[Accepting the invite and getting started](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-29f9-oE3O0&t=2s)

[Making a blogpost](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg88ZQwVDWw&t=5s)

**Other Blogpost Resources and Tips:**

* Remember that reading online feels different than a page. You don’t need to “dumb down” your thoughts but you may make paragraphs shorter and easy to digest.
* Embedded video and images are much better than links to new tabs.
* Remember that images are not decorative but should demonstrate key concepts you want to explore.
* Check out [some blogs](file:///Users/jcosner/Library/Containers/com.microsoft.Word/Data/Desktop/-%09https:/digitalshakespeares.wordpress.com) on this site for some effective and compelling style ideas

**Video Essay Resources:**

**From the IDEAL Studio (our** [**website**](https://ideal.uiowa.edu/)**)**

[ClipChamp tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUURNWr0YUk)

[iMovie Tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c86dCFCtuo&t=32s)

**Other Video Essay Resources and Tips:**

* Use the video essay form to its fullest extent. You can clip video, add images, quote text, even screenshot important parts of secondary sources.
* That said, don’t be afraid of quieter moments with a still screen and just your voice—this can be particularly effective for important points or to make clearer complex concepts.
* [This channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvfNLPcm8ZIvkAUCnlFO-jA) has a lot of material on academic video essays
* [This site](https://www.storycenter.org/cookbook) from Berkley has a long but compelling PDF on digital storytelling