

Grades 11–12 Playlist: Multiple Interpretations

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7*:

- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Welcome

Works of literature, such as poems and plays, allow readers the opportunity to find multiple distinct meanings in a single line. This process is not only accepted—it's a crucial part of what makes literature so pleasurable. Indeed, one reason to revisit a literary text is to discover how its meanings have changed over time, since each reading brings new experiences and perspectives.

The following playlist will explore how different interpretations of a literary text can bring readers to a deeper understanding of that text. This is especially true for plays, which are not read by solitary individuals but performed live for audiences.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn and practice the following skills:

- analyze multiple interpretations of literary texts.
- evaluate how each version interprets the source text.

Introducing the Standard

Key Terms

- An **interpretation** is a particular way of understanding or explaining a text or a part of a text.
- The **source text** of a performance is the script used by the performers.

Reviewing Interpretations

To practice making interpretations, read this short poem by Emily Dickinson:

This is my letter to the world,¹
That never wrote to me, —
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.

Her message is committed⁵
To hands I cannot see;
For love of her, sweet countrymen,
Judge tenderly of me!



To interpret, or understand, the poem as a whole, it is helpful first to interpret its parts.

- For example, in the first line, what does “This” refer to?
 - Perhaps “This” refers to the speaker’s entire body of writing. (Remember that the speaker of a poem is not necessarily the author.)
 - Perhaps “This” refers to the poem itself.
 - Perhaps “This” refers to the theme, or message, of this particular poem.
 - What are some other possibilities?
- A reader is likely to have questions about other lines as well. For example:
 - In the third line, what is “The simple news that Nature told . . .”? Is it the same as “Her message” in the fifth line?
 - In the sixth line, whose “hands” does the speaker mean? Why can’t the speaker “see” them?
 - In the final two lines, what specifically is the speaker asking “sweet countrymen” to do? How is this related to the speaker’s “letter” or Nature’s “message”?

The reader’s answers to these (and other) questions shape his or her interpretation of the poem. Because different people have different answers, various interpretations of the poem are possible.

Read!

Below are links to three distinct interpretations of Emily Dickinson’s poem. Notice that some versions of the poem have more dashes and capitalized words. This is because Dickinson did not publish official versions of most of her poems; since her death in 1886, editors have made different decisions about how to format and punctuate her poems.

- <http://classroom.synonym.com/this-letter-world-poem-analysis-3027.html>
- <http://teachers.greenville.k12.sc.us/sites/mrivers/Shared%20Documents/example%20TPCASTT.pdf>
- <http://criticsandbuilders.typepad.com/aplitblog/2011/11/a-letter-to-the-world.html>

Listen!

To fully appreciate a poem, read it aloud. Speaking a poem not only requires a reader to interpret it—it can shape his or her interpretation. What might Emily Dickinson’s poem mean to each of the following speakers?

- http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xg69gs_emily-dickinson-this-is-my-letter-to-the-world_creation
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q5ljSYfefs



Teaching Notes: Multiple Interpretations

The goal of RL.11-12.7 is for students to understand and be able to **analyze** multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem and **evaluate** how each version interprets the source text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities:

1. Pick a few scenes from a grade-appropriate play. Two groups of students will then act out the assigned scene for the class. The groups should explain how they came to their interpretation of the scene.
2. Direct students to prepare a presentation on a grade-appropriate poem of their choosing. Students will then teach the class about the poem: how to interpret it, how to compare and contrast different versions of the poem, and why the analysis is important.

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate play or poem and direct students to answer the following question in an essay: How does a visual production of the play or audio recording of the poem differ from your own interpretation of the play or poem?

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.11-12.7:

The complete text of *Macbeth*—including Act 1, Scene 7—can be read here:

- Complete text: <http://nfs.sparknotes.com/macbeth/>
- Act 1, Scene 7: http://nfs.sparknotes.com/macbeth/page_40.html

This video contains clips from various productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and interviews with theater artists and scholars, who give their interpretations of the balcony scene:

- <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/shak15.ela.lit.balcony/the-balcony-scene-shakespeare-uncovered/en/>

