

Surrey County Council School for Children with Severe Learning Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Testimonial for Early Shakespeare (8th January 2013)

My name is Kirsty Hodge and I am a class teacher in the secondary department of Portesbery School, Camberley – a school for pupils 2-19 with SLD and PMLD, including autistic spectrum disorders.

When our drama teacher announced last September that she wanted to perform ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ as our summer play I did wonder how we were going to make Shakespeare’s play accessible for our students. Then I was shown the Early Shakespeare software.

This software takes a new approach with the stories simplified enough to make them accessible for pupils working within the P levels and Level 1 but, unusually for this level, also includes examples of the original Shakespearian language. This allows the story, which is quite complicated, to be understood while also allowing our pupils to experience and enjoy some of the original language in context.

I used the software during our literacy lessons for a term in two classes, one with pupils working at P4 – P7 and one class with pupils working at P7 to Level 2c. In each class we used the story on the whiteboard to start each session with pupils able to start predicting and recalling the story as the term progressed. The additional online resources enabled me to support this with character names and pictures printed off for pupils to access during the story. I was then able to focus on specific skills areas to practice with the follow up tasks.

The software is simple enough for pupils to use independently with enough challenge in the level 4 activities for my more able pupils. The online resources also helped extend learning with information on Shakespeare’s life and the Globe Theatre presented in an easily accessible way and resources available to print off so pupils could practise the skills they were learning on paper as well as on the computer.

With printed character masks pupils were able to role-play either alongside the story, or, for more able pupils, after reading it. We also made the puppet theatre so pupils were able to develop their understanding of the play that way.

As I have come to expect from SEN Assist the excellent follow up activities helped us to address our literacy targets such as ordering events from a story, reading, word recognition and writing skills through our work on the play. The pupils in both classes were highly motivated by the software, especially as the more able pupils could progress through the different levels and track their own progress. At £57.00 for both CD-ROMs I feel this resource provides excellent value for money and I am looking forward to using ‘Romeo and Juliet’ with my class this year.

I never thought I could be so confident and get so much enjoyment from teaching Shakespeare to pupils with special needs – and the summer play was a resounding success!

Kirsty Hodge (Special Needs Teacher)

- A happy school where every one matters -