

THEATER ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

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Introduction by Gayle V. Fischer

Engaging students in the study of history is a challenge for all of us who teach history survey courses to non-majors. As a relatively recent Ph.D. and college professor, I am still honing my teaching style and discovering what works for me in the classroom and what does not. After one particularly brutal quarter in which I assaulted my students with exam after exam, I realized that I hated exams. I hated writing them, I hated grading them, I hated teaching to them, I hated being asked, "Will this be on the exam?" At the same time, I wanted my students to do the reading, come to class, learn something, and enjoy history. I devoured pedagogical literature, searched the Internet for teaching suggestions, and scanned back issues of *The History Teacher*, *The OAH Magazine of History*, and *Teaching History* in my quest for a solution to the problem of getting students to do the work without exams.

I finally found a germ of an idea on an H-Net list, although at the time I did not realize it. The site and discussion topic are lost to me now. When I initially read the posting I had not been greatly impressed with the author's contribution, so I promptly forgot it--or so I thought. The rather boastful writer painted a picture of a class in which the students enjoyed history so much that they did not want to leave when the period ended. Students dressing in costume, students eagerly researching, students doing the reading, students vying with one another to contribute to the class--such was the utopia described by some successful professor. It all sounded too good to be true. Gorging on pedagogy had left me muddled and it was not until several days later that I realized that the class portrayed on the Internet was the class that I wanted. Having rather primitive computer skills and outdated computer hardware, I was never able to retrace the steps that led me to that posting, but I remembered two points: the enthusiasm of the instructor and an assignment that called for the students to write their own historic plays. I already had enthusiasm; now all I needed to do was to have my students write their own plays and the class would come alive.

Such was my state of mind when I sat down to write my first "play assignment." Having majored in theater as an undergraduate and having worked in the professional theater before returning to graduate school, I assumed coming up with an assignment that merged history and theater would be easy for me. After several false starts, I recalled that a colleague and friend at Baruch College, the Business School of the City University of New York, Susan Spector (who is also my mother-in-law), was actively involved in promoting "theater across the curriculum," using theater as a teaching tool *Teaching History* 26(2). DOI: 10.33043/TH.26.2.59-70. ©2001 Gayle V. Fischer and Susan Spector

in other disciplines. Within minutes of recounting to her my ideas, she had a suggestion: Rather than having students write their own plays, start with a play as the basis for historical research. She sent me a copy of a historical research assignment she gave her advanced acting classes. With some modifications I turned Spector's acting exercise into a historical research project. I have used some variation of this project for the last five years.

Introduction by Susan Spector

In the early 1970s I was a student in Uta Hagen's acting class at HB Studio in New York City. Hagen, a renowned teacher and leading actress, was still glowing from her international triumph playing Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. In her class, one of my favorite assignments was called "The Historical Exercise." As part of developing a theatrical characterization, Hagen outlined an engaging program of background research into the character's imagined life and time. For example, to prepare for an assigned scene-playing Olga, the oldest sister in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, I threw myself imaginatively into late nineteenth-century Russia.¹ I read biographies of Chekhov, found pictures of life in a provincial Russian town, and visited museums looking for dramatically appropriate images and artifacts of that era. On the basis of this research, I did a short rehearsal exercise for the class in preparation for performing the scripted scene. As the goal of this exercise, Miss Hagen asked us to create a specific activity from what we could imagine as the character's daily routines, within the historical circumstances of the play. In *Three Sisters*, Olga is a secondary school teacher; for my exercise I used a set of student essays to correct and grade while sitting at a desk with turn-of-the-century writing tools. Placing myself into Olga's imagined life, I drew on my own long desire to be a teacher. For the classroom exercise, playing Olga in action "outside the scene itself," I corrected student essays after a long day of teaching. My scene partner and I then began to rehearse the *Three Sisters* scene itself: In it, the other character, Olga's bourgeois sister-in-law, seems to have all the best lines and the majority of the dialogue. Olga actually says very little. Nevertheless, because I was so actively connected to the practical and emotional life of the scene through my historical research, the character came to life. Miss Hagen was satisfied, and I learned how to imagine at least one aspect of late nineteenth-century Russia from the inside.²

¹*Three Sisters* is Chekhov's tragicomedy, which begins one year after the death of Olga, Masha, and Irina's father, the General who had been the leading citizen in the provincial Russian town. More cultivated than the other townspeople and the soldiers in their father's regiment, the three women long to return to Moscow. This dream is gradually eroded in the course of the play.

²Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting* was published in 1973 with a detailed description of this exercise. When I started teaching in 1982 I assigned Hagen's book and used the "Historical Exercise" in my own theater classes at Baruch College. Uta Hagen with Haskel Frankel, "History," in *Respect for Acting*

Historical Research in the Theater Classroom by Susan Spector

Over the last seventeen years at Baruch, I have seen many "Historical Exercises." They ground students in the time, place, and state of mind of characters they will portray in scenes from historical plays as different as Moliere's *Tartuffe* or Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. In one exercise an actress preparing to play Anouilh's Antigone ritually washed herself after burying her brothers. In another unscripted moment from *Tartuffe* imagined by an actress, Marianne read an impassioned letter from her lover Valere and then wrote a reply. An Abigail preparing her scene for *The Crucible* shaped a voodoo doll to hex John Proctor's wife. The "exercise" takes the character outside the specific action of the play and invents two to three minutes of the character's life using clothing and a physical set-up appropriate to an historical time and place. In all these instances, the students' subsequent work on the plays was enriched by these exercises. More important, the students connected historical research with their acting assignments. They saw that the tools and practices of research and theater were related activities, not separable into "work" and "play." The assignments bridged the imagined gulfs between "performing art" and "academic study."

In *Respect for Acting* Hagen encourages us to "Discover the customs and habits and manners of the time and place, the social and political influences on the people, the architecture and households, the furnishings and clothing of the time."³ I challenge my own students to go beyond simple encyclopedia research: **"DON'T JUST READ BOOKS!"** I encourage listening to different kinds of music of the period and looking at paintings from the era. The museums of New York City provide a rich treasury of historical artifacts. (Local historical societies, college archives, antique dealers, and interior decorators are also possible resources in any college community.) I encourage students to look through library art collections and art history books for images from their relevant historical period. To get a glimpse of what it was like to live in that distant time, they might visit historical houses or churches built in styles reflecting their period. As a distinct task, students research the production history of their play through theater reviews and archives (where available). At this point in the students' work, I add other components to Hagen's "Historical Exercise." I ask the students' to assemble their research as a workbook to record and to organize their findings.

Using the workbook, students prepare a 48-hour diary of their characters' lives for the days just preceding their scripted scene. They describe daily routines of eating, working, and sleeping. They interpolate any occurrences the author has woven into the scene. Ideally the diary should reflect how the historical research affected the

(New York: Macmillan, 1973), 134-138.

³Hagen, *Respect for Acting*, 136.

choices made about imagined place, chosen objects, and ongoing activities used to establish the rhythms and flavors of "normal life" in the scene.

After the research and imaginative preparation, and after doing their "historical exercise," students rehearse and present their scenes. Not all of them are equally successful, but some are transcendent and memorable. One semester climaxed with five minutes of dialogue from *Much Ado About Nothing* prepared by two acting students. Earlier in this particular acting class, I had seen students perform scenes from *The Matchmaker*, *Tartuffe*, *Antigone*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*. The *Much Ado* actors draped two rows of ordinary chairs with black velvet. At the back of the stage they covered a pipe-work clothes rack with rich-looking painted fabric. An altar with candlesticks holding tapers was created from a packing crate draped with another cloth. The bare classroom stage had been transformed into a small family chapel. Downstage, near the audience, another altar, smaller than its upstage counterpart, held small, lighted candles. As the scene from *Much Ado* began, Beatrice, dressed in a long orange dress, knelt at the downstage altar. While she prayed, Benedict entered, wearing a flowing shirt and cape, trousers tucked into black boots, sword hanging from his waist, and two inexperienced students were transformed into Renaissance characters whose "natural" way of speaking happened to be the elegant words of Shakespeare.

In my theater classes, this assignment always has three major components: an imaginative exercise to recreate the time, place, and circumstances of a script, a workbook recording and organizing research, and a scene presentation with a partner. The workbook includes a fictional diary a character might have written in the 48 hours before the scene took place. Some students, when faced with this assignment, include pictures of every scrap of research they did, without regard to whether the research is relevant to the exercise and scene. Whole articles are sometimes copied and added to handsomely bound scrapbooks. Impressive as such responses can be, sheer bulk does not make the workbook an effective learning experience. Instead, the 48-hour diary of the character better demonstrates if students have incorporated their work on the historical period into the "life" of their character.

In the process of doing their research, students made imaginative leaps into what it might have been like to live in another time and place. They also learned about doing research in libraries, museums, and historical sites. Venturing out to research their scene's historical period had empowered students to use unsuspected treasure troves of information, now accessible in any project they might undertake in another class. Learning the pleasure of studying history through artifacts, architecture, music, and paintings, as well as books, had, I hope, given them tools for life-long learning.

The intention of the exercise is not to transform Baruch College students, overwhelmingly business majors, into professional actors. Rather the course is formulated as a liberal arts class. Studying acting in this way can lead students to read plays actively and to see theatrical productions of plays as educated viewers. From

their own reports over the years, these students become enthusiastic audiences for theater and supporters of the arts in their communities.

Theater in the History Classroom by Gayle V. Fischer

With Spector's assignment in hand, I adapted the "Historical Exercise" to emphasize historical research and interpretation.⁴ When I first revised the assignment, I had the entire class read the same play. As the project evolved and began to include class presentations, however, students wrote in their evaluations that the presentations bored them after the first few because they had done similar research. I now assign a different play to each group and have each group summarize their play for the class before they present their research.

I use this project in the non-majors sections of the United States survey which have anywhere from 25-35 students, although I have also used this exercise with 150-300 students. The diary/play project counts for twenty-five percent of the final grade, class participation and attendance are an additional twenty-five percent, and the remaining fifty percent of the grade is based on short papers. I seldom lecture. My students read a variety of texts, write short papers on the readings, and discuss these in class. Given my small class size, this method works for me and allows me to better incorporate the final project into the class material. For example, when the class analyzes a primary document, students learn a skill they will use in their project research. Or when the class studies opposing interpretations of an historical event, students recognize the variety of forces that shape viewpoints, giving them greater insight into their characters. When I taught large lecture classes, I condensed the project into four weeks and chose plays that dealt with the unit being studied (e.g. *Andersonville* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the Civil War).

The only criteria that is constant in my choice of plays is that the action occur during the historical period the class is covering and that it be relevant to American history.⁵ I have used plays that not only take place in a particular historical period, but were written in that period as well, for example, a nineteenth-century dramatic

⁴For the latest version of the historical exercise used in my United States survey classes, please visit my website which contains a link to the project: www.salem.mass.edu/~gfischer/

⁵I tried this assignment in a world history survey and chose plays from a variety of countries. All of the plays were one acts. "The Guillotine," by Matias Montes Huidobro in *Selected Latin American One-Act Plays*, edited and translated by Francesca Colecchia and Julio Matas (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973); "Living Koheiji," by Sensaburo Suzuki in *The Passion by S. Mushakoji and Three Other Japanese Plays*; "Longing for Worldly Pleasures," by Ssu Fan in *Traditional Chinese Plays*, vol. 2, translated, described, and annotated by A.C. Scott (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967-1975); "The Bishop's Candlesticks," by Victor Hugo in *Classics Adapted for Acting and Reading* (Boston: Plays, Inc., 1970); "Thirst," by Myles na Gopaleen [Flann O'Brien] in *Stories and Plays* (New York: Viking Press, 1976).

adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. One of my initial reservations about this project was that I would have students focusing on a single time period or event. As I re-examined pedagogical literature and spoke to colleagues, I saw this assignment for what it really was, a "mini-research paper." If I had assigned a more orthodox term paper or research paper, students would still focus on a narrow topic. But research papers are seen as teaching students a variety of skills, not simply information. As you will see, this assignment also teaches a number of skills relevant to the study of history.

The play becomes the starting point for students' historical research, but the play also opens students to the new ideas about history and theater.⁶ Many students were intrigued by the use of plays and expressed interest in seeing them performed. For some it was the first time that they had ever read a play, and most expressed their enjoyment at using plays in this "unconventional" way. An unintended result of this exercise fit perfectly into Spector's efforts in "theater across the curriculum"--my students opened their minds to theatrical productions as more than a source of entertainment.

I divide the class into groups of 4-5 students; in larger classes students are assigned to groups in discussion sections.⁷ Each group reads a play and I set aside class time in which the groups can discuss the play. If necessary, to ensure that everyone reads the play, I require that each member of the group turn in a summary. Students choose a character from the play as the focus of their diary/research essay. Group work is problematic, perhaps even more so at Salem State College, which is primarily a commuter school. Students often drive an hour one way to get to the college. In addition, most of them work a minimum of twenty hours per week. These conditions make it difficult for group members to meet outside the class. I do what I can to facilitate group contact--at times turning over the last ten or fifteen minutes of class for group meetings. However, only one grade in this assignment is a "group grade"--the presentation. The diaries, the research summaries, and the character sketches all receive an individual grade. Therefore, meeting as a group is not as burdensome as it can be with other types of group projects.

The first writing assignment that students do is a character sketch. Because plays often give little but the most cursory of information about characters, I ask my students to "read between the lines." Because historians must also "read between the lines" when they read primary sources, this exercise forced students to look beneath the surface. To aid them as they try to figure out who their character is, I give the class

⁶At the end of each semester, students turn in anonymous critiques of the historical play exercise. The student quotes used in this paper are taken from these anonymous critiques.

⁷My teaching assistants often expressed skepticism at the beginning of the assignment, but after they have seen the presentations and read the essays they often remark that they would use the exercise when they have their own classes.

the following questions: How does he or she change or not change over the course of the play? How does the character interact with others? What clues does the playwright give you about your character? What does the character look like? What do you infer about your character's personality? The character sketch assures me that the students understand their character and will be better able to write a historical diary from their character's perspective. Students become aware of the concept of interpretation because each character will have a unique view of the world in which they live.

After I am confident that the class understands their play and their characters, I set aside a class period to begin the research. The era in which the character lives and the place where the action occurs are what the students have to research. I follow Spector's example and have students listen to Hagen's advice to actors to immerse themselves in the culture of another time, listen to its music, read its magazines and newspapers, study its politicians, and eat its food. Lest they think that only actors immerse themselves in the past, I remind them that "the activities whose history [the historian] is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through."⁸ The groups are not expected to research all of the elements of the past; part of the assignment is testing their ability to determine which historical elements are important. This is what historians do. The groups discuss the play some more and decide what they need to know to understand the time and place of their play; or, as one student remarked, "In doing this project, I had to figure out what kind of information I needed and how I was going to use it."

In addition to opening students' eyes to the resources around them, I schedule a minimum of two library tours structured specifically for this assignment. The tours serve a number of purposes: familiarizing students with the library and its resources and acquainting them with at least one librarian they can approach to ask questions. Additional research suggestions include looking at the bibliographies in textbook as well as primary sources in the body of the book. I let them know about journals such as the *Journal of American History* and the *American Historical Review*. I suggest art history books and old cookbooks. I advise caution when using the Internet. I encourage watching films about the period they are researching, with the caveat that movies do not replace historical research. I discuss the differences between primary sources and secondary sources and let them know that the strongest essays and presentations will rely more on primary than on secondary sources. I do not require a minimum number of sources. I let the students determine when they have enough research material, just as historians have to decide.

The members of the groups share the research component of this project. About half way between the distribution of the assignment and the due date, I have the students turn in a short paper with bibliography summarizing their research to date.

⁸Robin Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 36.

On the day that the research summary is due, students bring enough copies of the paper to share with their group. The groups meet for all or part of the class and share research information, trials, and successes. They are also asked to write a paper as a group that answers the following:

Many of the customs that were an accepted part of the way of life in this period might be rejected or viewed as peculiar by today's standards. It is only when we investigate or explore the reasons behind the customs that we gain insight and understanding. What unusual or interesting customs or values did you find in your research? What insight do these customs/values give you on the society you are researching? What insight do these customs/values give you on your character? Do you agree with the playwright's interpretation of the period? Why or why not?

Although students have been encouraged to meet as groups as soon as they divide up the research, for most of the groups this class is the first time that they have shared information and met again as a group. It is usually at this point that students start to panic a little and arrange meeting times and begin planning their presentations.

Overwhelmingly students enjoy this project but when they complain it is usually about the research and the groups. Their complaints usually mention conflicting schedules, their aversion to group work, and the amount of research required. Most students, however, liked the groups and research. One student noted that the researching with a group was "very helpful and less time-consuming." Others commented that listening to their classmates opened their eyes to different interpretations of history. In my large lecture classes (150-300 students) students found an added benefit to group work as it provided them with "a chance to meet some of my classmates." I also noticed that some groups began sitting together in the lecture portion of the class and even arranged study groups with one another.

As the semester draws to a close, the groups have done as much research as possible. Individually, they prepare one or two days worth of diary entries for their characters. Although the diary entry is "fictitious," the aim of the diaries is to be as historically accurate as possible in assertions and descriptions of appropriate events, documents, or other elements in the characters' lives. The format of this assignment is more creative than that of a formal research paper. However, I remind the class that they may be as creative in their explorations as possible, but they must, as historians, remain rooted in fact. The grade for the diary is based on the content AND the creativity.⁹ For most students, creativity is the hardest part of the assignment, in part, because they often confuse it with fiction.

⁹I tell the students that by content I mean their mastery of factual/philosophical information. And by creativity, I mean their ability to interpret, to bring out the meaning of, to make sense of the research and to render it so that the character "lives."

I spend a fair amount of time making this aspect of the assignment clear to the class. I tell them that their diaries must give me, the instructor, a sense of the character and the specific period when they lived. When reading, I should be transported back in time, but not to the "generic" past. Essentially the class is being asked to write a "research paper" from a dramatic character's perspective.

Because I see this assignment as a variation on a research paper, I insist on the various conventions of the research paper, such as a stipulated length, a title, and a bibliography. At times I have asked for footnotes or parenthetical references; neither is ideal for this style of paper. I require quotation marks around quoted material. Points are deducted from papers that do not use the proper bibliographic style and do not acknowledge sources of information.¹⁰ I added an alternative to the diary entry--a "Mini-Research Paper"--for those students who insist that they are "not creative." To date no one has taken me up on the offer.

Spector loaned me some of her students' workbooks, and I showed these to my classes. My students liked examining the workbooks and asked if they, too, could do something similar. This particular class designed "scrapbooks" of their research and showed these to their classmates. The scrapbooks and presentations proved to be successful enough for me to make them a formal part of the assignment.

Each group presents its research. The number of groups and the time constraints determine the length of presentations.¹¹ Because the class reads different plays, each group begins with a brief summary of their play. The rules for the presentations are minimal: The groups must present what they learned from their historical research and the presentations must be planned in advance and be well-executed. Students have written skits in which the characters interact, produced videos, created history "games," or performed "newscasts" to present their research. A group that read *Inherit the Wind* created two classroom lectures; one concentrated on evolution, the other focused on creationism. After the lectures, the students opened the floor for discussion. Students bring their talents from a variety of majors into the classroom, and nowhere is this more evident than in their presentations. One group had a television/film major who convinced the others to write a documentary of the 1940s. The result was a sophisticated film that impressed the entire class. Another group, made up almost entirely of education majors, read a play that dealt with slavery. This group combined their interest in educational theory with the play's theme. Their project consisted of interviewing elementary students about their ideas of slavery. The result was videotaped interviews and a series of drawings depicting slavery from the eyes of

¹⁰I use Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Sixth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), for bibliography style.

¹¹I have eliminated final exams and now do the presentations during the final exam period, which is two hours.

seven and eight-year olds. I have numerous examples of art majors, music majors, even business majors, adding their perspective to historical research.

Of course, I must also deal with mundane matters such as grading. Each presentation is graded on creativity and the historical information presented. Each student receives an individual grade for the diary essay. However, the presentation receives a group grade. Remembering all too well my own group experiences as an undergraduate, I take group work seriously. I joke with students and tell them that I am one of those students who always did the work in the group and now I am grown up and ready to get even with those that did not do anything. Although the group earns a group grade, I make exceptions when an individual in the group fails to do her/his part. At the end of the assignment, I have groups write a "Group Assessment" to explain how everyone contributed to the project--research and presentation--everyone in the group must sign the assessment. I use the assessment to raise or lower individual grades--depending on contribution or lack of it.

The day of the presentations is one of excitement. Students come to class wanting to present first. They pay attention to their classmates. They come dressed in costume. They come to class and have fun and learn history and show off what they have learned. It is one of my favorite days of the semester.

Can I really describe my own classroom as one in which the students were so "turned on" to history that they did not want to leave when the period ended? Students dressing in costume, students eagerly researching, students doing the reading, students vying with one another to contribute to the class--such as that described by some anonymous professor on the Internet? I might not have reached utopia, but this historical exercise comes close.

Some Suggested Plays for this Activity

This is a short list of some of the plays that I have used with varying degrees of success. Spector mentions a number of plays in her sections above that would be appropriate for world or European history courses.

Thomas Babe, *Rebel Women* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1977). The action of this play takes place in Georgia during the Civil War. Several Southern women are alone at home when Yankee soldiers approach with the intention of stealing provisions. The play centers around their interactions. Although *Rebel Women* takes place during the Civil War, the issues and style of the play speak more to the 1970s. Using this play requires a good bit of discussion with students before you send them off to do research.

Jerome Lee and Robert E. Lee, *Inherit the Wind* (New York: Bantam Books, 1955). *Inherit the Wind* is a retelling of the Scopes monkey trial. This is another play that is popular with students, as they seem to enjoy researching the trial and the issue of teaching evolution. They also like to point out the exaggerations in the play versus what "really happened."

Saul Levitt, *Andersonville* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1960). Students really like this play and researching Andersonville, the infamous Southern Civil War prison. The play is set up as the trial of Henry Wirz, the commandant of Andersonville and the only man executed for war crimes after the Civil War. There are a number of published diaries written by survivors of Andersonville and students relish recounting these horror tales of prison life.

Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding: A Play* (New York: New Directions, 1951). This play takes place in the South at the end of World War II. Although students complain about the lack of "action" in the play, it encourages them to research the home front, racial issues, and the war.

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). Many students are already familiar with *The Crucible* from high school and sometimes it takes persuading to convince them that the play is college material and a wonderful source for starting historical research. The Salem witch trials have fostered a number of books of primary and secondary sources, making this one of the easier plays to research.

Aldyth Morris, *Captain James Cook* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995). This play looks at Cook's travels to Hawaii and the impact that they had on him and his wife. This is a good play for getting students to understand exploration. When I use this play at least one group always focuses on the hardships of traveling across the ocean in a ship.

John Murrell, *Waiting for the Parade* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990). *Waiting for the Parade* takes place in Calgary, Canada, during World War II. It focuses on five women who work for the war effort. This play works well in a world history class and offers students an opportunity to research Canada. Without too much difficulty, an instructor could change the location to the United States.

Jeffrey H. Richards, *Early American Drama* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997). This collection contains a number of plays that work extremely well in the first half of the United States survey. What makes this collection especially useful for this exercise is that it includes introductions explaining the historical context of the play and bibliographies. The plays are written near the time of the action of the play: *The Indian Princess* re-tells the Pocahontas story; *Andre* takes place during the American Revolution and focuses on traitors, particularly John Andre; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's classic; *The Drunkard* introduces students to the temperance movement; *Fashion* is a satirical look at high society in the mid-nineteenth century; *The Octoroon* is about a young woman in the mid-nineteenth century who discovers that she is not white but in fact an "octoroon."

George Bernard Shaw, *The Devil's Disciple* (Studio City, CA.: Players Press, Inc., 1991). The notes describe this play as a "British play about Puritans but set . . . in Colonial America"--really the years of the Revolution. Shaw caricatures many of the stereotypes associated with Puritans and Puritanism such as social and religious rigidity, and, of course, witches. Although this play has yielded some wonderful

research from students, I must add the caveat that Shaw is sometimes difficult for students "to get" if they are unfamiliar with his style of irony and satire. If you use this play, you might want to spend some time discussing it in class before sending the students off to do research.

Resource Suggestions

We have mentioned resources we used for historical research. Not every college is located in a town or city with the bounty we have available to us. If getting students to see history around them is important to you, then before choosing a play examine the resources available at your college library and town and choose a play that will utilize those resources. Most towns have historical societies--contact them. Most libraries have microfilm collections--what does your library own? If you want to teach Internet skills, then search for sites that will give students a start on their research. Just as you will be asking students to use their imaginations in this project, you must first use yours to explore the research opportunities available to your students.

One of the most important aspects of this project is that it encourages instructors to get to know their college's librarians. My experience has been that librarians go beyond their job descriptions and become active members of the project and the class. I usually plan 2-5 sessions at the library. Students will complain about this believing that they already possess adequate library skills--they do not. The library tours introduce students to microfilm collections, special collections (if the library has them), interlibrary loan, Internet research skills, print primary sources, and a librarian they can approach without fear. Most of us teach at colleges with small and often inadequate libraries, which makes the relationship you establish with librarians of the utmost importance for they know their own collection much better than you do.