TEXT MERGING – Bard College Writing & Thinking Institute

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Text merging is a strategy involving what happens when one text is interrupted or disrupted by another, and consists of combining language from two different texts/word banks into another creation: a poem, prose, or nonsense piece, and always it seems to illuminate both texts in new and surprising ways.

Try combining related or distinctly different selections, both in form and content. Here are examples of what high school sophomores did with Shylock’s speech from *Merchant of Venice* and Mary Oliver’s poem, “Geese.”

After “merging” two texts without adding new words or changing tenses, ask students to compete the following metacognitive questions.

1. What were you aware of experiencing or noticing? What was in your mind as you did this?
2. How did you make your choices?
3. What if anything happened to the speech when disrupted by the poem? To the poem when interrupted by the speech?

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

Love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

Are moving across the landscapes,

Over the prairies and the deep trees,

The mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

Are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

The world offers itself to your imagination,

Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—

Over and over announcing your place

In the family of things.

Mary Oliver

Shylock: To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hind’red me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickles us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will remember you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Act III Scene I *Merchant of Venice*

Text Mergings from Sophomores at Woodinville High School

It will feed my revenge, to bait the good

Whoever you are; you hath disgraced me.

The world offers itself to me

On your knees, repenting.

I do not bleed, you do.

You poison my nation, shall I not revenge?

Villainy calls to to you, over and over

In my family of things. You have nothing—

You have to walk a million miles in the desert.

Meanwhile, I, in the high blue mountains

Will feed on your disease.

You have no love; you laughed at me.

You are scorned.

Jeff S.

I am a Jew. You don’t have to be good.

Do I not cry the clear pebbles to the rain

Tell me your despair & I will tell you mine

What is the Christian’s Humility?

Revenge!

Just let the soft body of the animal

Love what it loves

No matter who you are; you will die

If poisoned, bleed if pricked

Villainy is moving across the landscape

Revenge is harsh and is in the mountains

Kameron R.

Whoever is repenting,

You have to love his friends.

Do not take revenge.

Let the deep passions hurt.

The pebbles teach me to execute

And the organs bleed.

In this world

The wild hands are heated

And the rivers of imagination are soft.

Clean is no good.

We have only despair.

A Jew disgraced a Christian

But we did not laugh.

Joanna S.

I am a Jew. You do not have to be good. Hath not a Jew eyes? You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed by the same summer and cooled by the same winter. Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, do we not revenge? Meanwhile, the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Meanwhile the world goes on.

Yvonne S.

Announcing your Place

Whoever you are, we like you.

Moving across the landscapes

we will resemble the wild Jew.

Tell me about despair: bleed,

Hurt in the clean blue air.

Eyes, hands over the prairies

And the deep trees.

We do not die. You teach me

How my scorned nation offers itself

To your imagination, calls to you

What it loves.

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