

Writing through pandemic times in secondary English

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This paper explores what happened in a NSW English class when the pandemic entered into the pedagogic assemblage along with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, lockdown learning and socially distant teaching. An open-ended invitation was offered to Year 9 students to write soliloquys about the pandemic present, as themselves, an imaginary character or a character from *Macbeth*. Each student played differently, often exuberantly, with language and form, affect and aesthetics. They experimented with resources offered by the Shakespearean text, and threaded potent motifs of the present into their soliloquys in very different ways. Taking up the mode of play and pleasure suggested by the students' writing, this paper also experiments with form. Rather than assessing their characterisations, or evaluating and selecting the most successful soliloquys for close analysis, instead it endeavours to read across the corpus of 17 texts by following pandemic materialities - toilet paper, hand sanitiser, Karens - and pandemic affects - fear, fury, boredom, loneliness.

The diversity of their writing and the apparent joy they took in the task suggests that perhaps it might be time to think again about how and when we design opportunities for students to engage with the world they are living in, how we make spaces for play outside the lockdown pressures of assessment.