

In my “Text and Context in Western Theatre” class, I was given an assignment to write a research paper involving the original production history of one of the plays I had read in the class. Not fully understanding what the assignment was asking, I chose William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, my favorite of the plays I read. When the realization hit me that the paper centered on the original production history of the play, I practically had a nervous breakdown. The limited amount of information on early Shakespearean productions, along with having one of his lesser-known plays being my topic, gave me much stress.

After a great deal of thinking, I understood that my paper needed to focus on something broader than the production history. That said, my first idea was to center my paper on the theater in which *Titus Andronicus* was first performed, the Rose Theater. Unfortunately, information was lacking on that topic as well. In a panic, I spoke to my teacher, Natalie Tenner, who completely understood my situation and greatly influenced my thought process. Once the meeting was over, I decided to make my topic even broader- my paper would center on the Elizabethan theater in general, and how its structure would have affected the performance of *Titus Andronicus*.

Thankfully, I had a multitude of available sources at hand to find information. The one thing I appreciate most about the University of Maryland is the expansive inventory of information provided for students. The online Research Port on the library website was a tremendous help. It contained the databases I needed to find journal articles and books entries about or similar to my topic. The site was quite easy to use- I simply needed to type in various phrases, such as “Elizabethan

performance techniques” and “Elizabeth theater structure”, and many useful sources would appear. If the port did not have the information, it provided alternative means of accessing the information I wanted.

The university libraries also contained volumes upon volumes on my topic. By the end, I must have checked out twenty different books, ranging from general theatre history to Shakespearean audience members. The vast quantity of materials available in the libraries was extremely impressive and undoubtedly helpful. Most of my books came from the McKeldin Library; however, the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library was essential to my research and convenient in regards to its narrowed subject matter.

The experience of writing this research paper was the one of the most important of my freshmen year. I had only written one research paper before this assignment, which was nowhere near the scale of this assignment. I needed to completely educate myself on the process of writing a research paper and locating appropriate sources and citing them correctly. Although this experience was unexpectedly stressful, I learned that I needed to have fun while doing it. If I did not enjoy the topic I was writing about, it would not have been worth writing. I learned that I play a large part in my paper- if I do not enjoy working on it or reading it, others would not. I am very proud of my product, and I must say, I had a lot of fun working on it. This will help guide me on my future assignments, and will definitely motivate me to create interesting and entertaining papers.