Basic Rationale

I chose *Measure for Measure* because I wanted to do something on one of Shakespeare’s plays, and this was my favorite play of the ones left as options by the time I came around. Although it is not one of the Bard’s most commonly taught plays, it is an interesting play that addresses interesting issues. It is often considered one of Shakespeare’s most problematic plays because it raises a lot of questions and doesn’t seem to answer those questions to a contemporary audience’s satisfaction. That is actually one of the things that I think make it valuable for teaching in a high school setting. Questions are raised, and students can get involved in deciding how they think those questions can and should be resolved. I see a lot of potential for interaction between the students and other students and between the students and the text.

I think that the themes of the play are good for a high school audience as well. The plotline and dialogue bring with them opportunities to discuss priorities, authority, justice and mercy. What teenager hasn’t felt rebellious towards an authority figure? Well, how would it change things to have students putting themselves in the shoes of the authority figures, thinking about what makes a good leader and the kinds of responsibilities that these people carry? It is a rich text for thinking about the way we interact within our society.

As a Shakespearean play, *Measure for Measure* is replete with rich literary text, and is thus a perfect setting for teaching and reviewing a plethora of literary terms. Virtually all of the literary terms taught in 6th-12th grades could be addressed with the text of the play. Obviously that would be a bit overdone, but a teacher has the luxury of choosing those terms that he or she wants to teach. The poetic terms are generally taught with Shakespeare, so those are the most likely to be taught during the unit.

I would suggest teaching the play in the 10th-12th grades. The language is automatically intimidating, and the story is most likely unfamiliar for the students, so I think that it would really be pushing it to go younger.
There are seventeen scenes in the play that vary in length. If we averaged a scene a day, and added a couple days beforehand – for background and preparation – and a few days at the end – for the larger projects with which the unit will culminate – then that comes out to 22 days, or three and a half to four weeks of study. The time could be compressed, but – as is always the dilemma – content would be lost.