



Theatre Workout™ Ltd

Creating bespoke theatre workshops & experiential events since 2006!

+44 (0)20 8144 2290, enquiries@theatreworkout.com

www.theatreworkout.com

Free Education Resource

Teaching Shakespeare

By Adam Milford, for Theatre Workout *Education*



www.theatreworkout.com





Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
About Theatre Workout	3
Preparatory Exercises	5
Discussion on Voice and Speech	5
Voice and Speech Exercises	6
Breath	6
Shoulders, Neck and Back	6
The Face	6
Voice	7
Speech	7
Words, words, words	7
Starting with Shakespeare	9
Iambic Pentameter	10
Driving the Energy	11
Reading the Rhythm	11
Working With Rhythm	11
Identify the Thought	11
Creative Exercise	12
Standing It Up	13
Coping with Anxiety	13
Performing in Character	14
Staging a Play	14
Conclusion	15
Further Support	15





Introduction

I'm not a Shakespeare academic, but I am pretty sure that Shakespeare never thought that Hamlet would make a great A-level study text. He never thought Macbeth would be used in primary schools to explore the issues of morals and what is right and wrong, and he certainly never thought Othello would be a good resource for exploring the issue of domestic violence.

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be given to actors to perform on stage!

William Shakespeare is credited with inventing about 20,000 words and phrases, many of which are still in use today. No other playwright, or any other individual, has had such an influence on our culture, society and language.

400 years after his death, Shakespeare continues to influence not just the culture of the United Kingdom, but of the whole planet. His work has been performed in just about every language and in nearly every country on earth because his work resonates with all of us. Whatever our social, economic, cultural or ethnic background, Shakespeare's characters and stories continue to provoke discussion, ask questions, and are continually performed in new and exciting ways.

Despite all this success and global influence, many of us have negative experiences with Shakespeare. I count myself as one of those people, because the way I was first taught about Shakespeare in GCSE English classes wasn't the most thrilling experience.

To read Shakespeare can be a challenge, to understand him can feel impossible, and not everyone is confident enough to speak his words out loud.

This resource is designed with non-drama teachers in mind, to give them some practical techniques for use in the classroom, to help boost confidence in students and teachers alike, to inspire creativity, provoke thought and discussion, and to help students and teachers understand Shakespeare on a personal level, as part of coursework studies and exam preparation.

About Theatre Workout

Theatre Workout was created in 2006 by an actor, Adam Milford, to create bespoke theatre workshops for school groups visiting London's West End. Since then, Theatre Workout has been invited to develop the official education programmes for over 30 major West End plays and musicals, and now works with over 8,000 students a year from all over the world as part of their theatre visits.

Theatre Workout is now a market leader for the creation of workshops in London's West End, which also offers a range of teacher training programmes, runs corporate events, parties and delivers hospitality packages for groups with excellent discounts on theatre tickets, travel and accommodation in London.

Theatre Workout *Productions* was founded the 2007 as the English Theatre in Venice, with a production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Theatre Workout *Productions* also staged *Fame* in 2013 and produced *Timon of Athens* with Lock and Key Theatre in 2014.

Theatre Workout continues to run an unrivalled range of bespoke programmes for groups of all ages, backgrounds and abilities in London's West End and in schools around the UK, Europe and Asia.

For more information, please visit www.theatreworkout.com.

THINGS WE SAY TODAY, WHICH WE OWE TO SHAKESPEARE:

"KNOCK, KNOCK! WHO'S THERE?"
 "IN A PICKLE" "SET YOUR TEETH ON EDGE" "HEART OF GOLD"
 "FAINT HEARTED" "SO-SO" "GOOD RIDDANCE"
 "LIE LOW" "FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE" "BAITED BREATH" "SEND HIM PACKING"
 "COME WHAT MAY"
 "WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE"
 "NOT SLEPT ONE WINK" "FULL CIRCLE" "OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH"
 "WHAT'S DONE IS DONE" "NAKED TRUTH" "TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING"
 "LAUGHING STOCK" "BREADED HIS LAST" "BREAK THE ICE" "WILD GOOSE CHASE"
 "HEART OF HEARTS" "VANISH INTO THIN AIR" "WILD GOOSE CHASE"
 "SEEN BETTER DAYS" "MAKES YOUR HAIR STAND ON END"
 "DEAD AS A DOORNAIL" "FOR GOODNESS' SAKE" "LOVE IS BLIND"
 "GREEN EYED MONSTER" "FAIR / FOUL PLAY / PLAY" "OFF WITH HIS HEAD"
 "THE WORLD IS MY OYSTER" "BRAVE NEW WORLD"
 "BE ALL / END ALL" "A SORRY SIGHT"



Preparatory Exercises

Shakespeare's work is meant to be performed. Many of the words he chose to use, were chosen because of their sound. Where those words were invented by Shakespeare, their meaning has developed based on their sound and the context in which he wrote them.

Therefore, to understand Shakespeare, he needs to be heard. By speaking his words out loud, the actor can play with their sound, experiment with tone, pitch, pause, pace, volume and resonance. Words can be toyed with, used to provoke pleasure or cause harm, they can be powerful weapons and Shakespeare has an arsenal!

Sight-reading in full character, with emotion, thought and understanding is a huge challenge for experienced, professional actors. For inexperienced students, it can be terrifying. Students are continually told to be quiet, to listen, pay attention and not to talk in class, so it is understandable that they may be hesitant and anxious about speaking Shakespeare's unfamiliar language out loud in class, fearful that they will make a mistake and feel embarrassed.

To move past this awkwardness, it is worth discussing voice and speech with your class, before trying out some practical exercises to help them loosen up, relax and start to play.

Discussion on Voice and Speech

What is the difference between voice and speech?

How do we use sound (not words) in conversation?

How do we tell when someone is nervous, calm, excited or angry?

It's not what we say but how we say it which truly communicates our inner thoughts and emotions. We can say the most joyful words, but if we are nervous or scared, it is that emotion which is communicated.

The voice is the tone, pitch, volume and energy with which we speak. Speech is the conversion of sounds into words we use to communicate information.

Shakespeare plays with voice and speech in his careful use of words and sounds. The classic 'O' at the beginning of lines can be an exclamation, a realisation or expression of intense emotion. Sometimes it is just to make the iambic pentameter (we'll get to that later) work.

*"O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!*

Hamlet, *Hamlet*



Voice and Speech Exercises

The voice is a muscle like any other. As you would before exercising, the voice must be warmed up properly. Everyone should look foolish doing this, but they must get passed this and give it a go.

It will help to break the ice if you do these exercises with the group, make a fool of yourself, acknowledge that they all look and sound funny, let them laugh, then reel them in to focus. Each time you do these exercises they will find them less funny, and focus more on the technique, developing an appreciation of their benefits.

The voice is manipulated by the tongue, lips, and teeth. It is fuelled by breath, which is influenced by tension in the chest, neck, shoulders and back. Actors incorporate a mixture of stretches and other exercises to relax the shoulders, neck and chest, before exercising the mouth and surrounding muscles to prepare the voice. Here are some simple exercises for you to play with:

Breath

Correct breathing technique helps us relax the body, clear the mind and gives us the raw resources we need to speak.

- Take a deep breath. Then breath out (always remember to do this). If your shoulders went up, you are only breathing into the top of the lung. This is bad.
- Try again, this time breathing deep into the pit of the stomach, to the diaphragm. When done correctly the shoulders should remain relaxed, the stomach and ribs should move a little as the chest cavity is filled by the lungs and everything below the diaphragm is pushed outwards.
- Take several slow, deep breaths. If you feel light headed, it is natural. It is just added oxygen going to the brain.

Shoulders, Neck and Back

- Standing in neutral, with hands by the side, feeling tall, breathing into the diaphragm.
- Lift your shoulders to your ears. A little higher, then drop them. Repeat a few times
- On an outward breath, slowly relax the neck and take the left ear to the left shoulder. Breathe in as you come up and repeat on the right.
- Relax the neck and bring your chin to the chest, then let the weight of the head pull you down to curl the spine. Relax the kneed and try to touch your toes. Breathe in, and on the out breath try to straighten the legs and bend down even further. Relax the knees and breathe in, then out while straightening the legs and reaching down further. Curl back up on an in breath, one vertebra at a time with the head coming up last.

The Face

- Massage the muscles around the mouth including the lips, cheeks, nose, temples, forehead, jaw and neck.
- Stick out the tongue. Write your name with your tongue in the air.
- Blow raspberries
- Make a big face, then a small, screwed up face, big, small, big small



Voice

It's time to make some noise. The group should focus on projecting the voice, not shouting, which can only cause harm. These will help build confidence in the voice

- Breathe out on a hum. Feel the vibrations in your forehead, chest, and neck. This is your body resonating, like a drum. Feel your lips and sinuses vibrate and tingle.
- Open the mouth wide and exhale on an 'Ah' sound. It should be loud and clear and last at least 20-30 seconds.
- Clasp your hands together in front of the chest with elbows tucked into the side. Shake them vigorously and exhale on an 'Ah' sound.
- Make a siren noise, exploring the vocal range from high to low and up again.

Speech

Work on some tongue twisters with your group, such as the following:

"She sells sea shells by the sea shore"

"Round and round the ragged rock the rugged rascal ran"

"Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry"

Words, words, words

- Walk around the class and in a loud and clear voice point to something and say what it is.
 - E.g. Radiator, window, desk, chair...
- Walk around the class and in a loud and clear voice point to something and say the name of the last thing you pointed at
 - E.g. X, radiator, window, desk...
- Walk around the class and in a loud and clear voice point to something and call it anything other than what it is
 - E.g. Bagpipes, rabbit, helicopter, daffodil, Scooby doo, flapjack...
 - This will likely be the hardest. We have many thousands of words in our vocabulary so it should be the easiest. Pick up the pace and even if you only say "blahghsh" or some other random sound, say something and move on



It's Greek to Me!

When it comes to creative writing or speaking, there's something rotten in Denmark:

If you cannot understand my argument, and declare, "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you recall your *salad days*, you are quoting Shakespeare;

If you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise - why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare.

If you clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop); without rhyme or reason, then to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare.

Even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a doornail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - By Jove! O Lord! Tut, Tut!; For goodness' sake!; What the dickens! But me no buts - It is all one to me

FOR YOU ARE QUOTING SHAKESPEARE



Starting with Shakespeare

Take a look at the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet*. This is a simple, short speech which some may be familiar with and which also poses some interesting questions and interpretations by practitioners and academics.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Prologue, *Romeo and Juliet*

Discuss the speech with the class. What do we learn from this? What is the point of the prologue?

Start by asking the class to translate into modern language. How would you say this?

Look at the choice of words. In particular, discuss the choice of the word 'unclean' in line four. Why unclean? It isn't an existing word. It was invented because of the rhyme and we understand it. It is a great word, but it is one he probably had to think about.

What happens when you actually think about alternative words when speaking the text out loud, as if the character is trying to find the right word, in the moment?

Discuss the two lines "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes / A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life". We know they die at the end, so we assume this is a prediction, a spoiler alert of what is to come.

However, there is some thought that the two lines could be switched to be "A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life / From forth the fatal loins of these two foes". What difference does this make to the prologue? Is the interpretation different?



Iambic Pentameter

The Iambic Pentameter (IP) is the rhythm with which much of Shakespeare's plays are written. It is often called poetry or verse, because of its poetic nature. It often rhymes and it has a pace running through it.

It is five, double beats. It is based on the heart beat and is a common structure for many sentences. The use of IP helps break up thoughts, gives emphasis to key words and phrases, directs the actor when to pause, quicken or slow his pace, and can help express emotion.

"But soft, what light through yon-der window breaks

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!"

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

The IP doesn't always work. Sometimes there are too few or too many beats. Discuss what purpose this serves with the group. How does it affect the flow of the line?

"And the continuance of their parents' rage"

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1

"And the continuance of their parents' rage"

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

The word 'continuance' could be pronounced with four syllables (con-tin-u-ance), but to make it work it must be spoken with just three as 'con-tin-uance'.

Did Shakespeare just get the IP in this line wrong? Is 'continuance' three or four syllables? Has our pronunciation of this word changed, which has changed the rhythm? Was it intentional?

In other cases, there is a clear direction from Shakespeare to the actor to leave a pause

"I know what you would say: if I have known her,
You will say she did embrace me as a husband,
And so extenuate the 'forehand sin:
No, Leonato,
I never tempted her with word too large
But, as a brother to his sister, show'd
Bashful sincerity and comely love."

Claudio, *Much Ado About Nothing*

The line 'No Leonato...' is written with a massive gap in it. Does the actor ignore that and read through it, or play with that structurally written gap as a pause to give weight to the fact that Claudio, a young man, has just ordered Leonato, whose house he is staying in, and the father of the girl he has just disgraced at the altar, to be quiet?

Find other examples of prose where the iambic pentameter doesn't fit and discuss what impact this has on the actor as he speaks the line.



Driving the Energy

In other cases, the IP is complete by another character

MACBETH

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?

Macbeth

In this instance, the actress playing Lady Macbeth must come in with her line quickly, to keep the flow of the scene going, almost speaking the first word 'What' just as Macbeth says 'none'. This technique drives the energy forward through the scene.

Reading the Rhythm

It would be ve-ry an-noy-ing to say ev-ry sy-la-ble to hi-light the i-am-bic pen-ta-me-ter. So, we don't. It is there as a guide and to direct the energy of the speech or scene.

There are a few techniques you can work on with your group to explore this further.

Working With Rhythm

Identify the Thought

As a rule, each line is an individual thought. However, like all rules, these are regularly broken. Sometimes a thought runs over several lines, sometimes there are thoughts within thoughts. This is where punctuation has been added, and can be added by the actor, to separate out each through and sub-thought.

Take a section of verse and ask the group to isolate each separate thought. If reading it, give them an action to do at the end of every thought, such as clicking their fingers or clap of the hands.

For example, I have added a '|' where I think there is the end of a thought, and a '/' where there is a break or sub-thought within the thought:

Not see him since? | Sir,/ Sir, / that cannot be:|
But were I not the better part made mercy,
I should not seek an absent argument
Of my revenge, thou present. | But look to it: /
Find out thy brother, / wheresoe'er he is; |
Seek him with candle; / bring him dead or living
Within this twelvemonth, / or turn thou no more
To seek a living in our territory. |

Duke Frederick, *As You Like It*

There are no real right or wrongs with this, and each student may decide to read and therefore play the speech in a slightly different way. This is fine.



Creative Exercise

Can your students have a conversation in IP? Try exchanging a few sentences between one another.

A: What are you doing later on today?

B: I'm going to have tea with an old friend.





Standing It Up

An essential part of teaching Shakespeare is to stand the play up on its feet, with actors reading any part, swapping characters around and finding something new in it.

It is worth noting that in Shakespeare's day, there were no female actors. For a woman to appear on stage was scandalous. The theatre would be closed and the managers fined or thrown in jail.

As a result, all characters were played by men, with the female parts usually played by younger boys.

Depending on your students, it may be worth cross-gendering the roles from the second or third session, once the group are more confident and willing to play.

Coping with Anxiety

It is normal for some students to feel intimidated or nervous about speaking in public. Taking time to run through voice and speech exercises and other whole group games should help to relax students and ease them into the process.

Starting with speech

Take a central speech from the play being studied and ask students to read it to themselves before discussing it as a group.

- Who is the character speaking the speech?
- Where is it set?
- When is it set? This could be time of day, position in the story, era, etc.
- What are they talking about? Why is this speech important?

As a group, proceed to reading the speech aloud, starting with two lines per student before moving on to the next reader. Discuss it again, focusing on key lines, issues or plot lines raised.

Read the speech again, this time reading the thought. Students can only move on when they believe the thought has ended. This is open to personal opinion and in many cases there are no definitive right or wrong answers, but it may raise further discussion on why certain choices were made, giving you the opportunity to try speaking a speech in different ways to see what difference different thought structures make to the reading of the speech.

Continue this way should build up confidence, enabling students to speak larger blocks of text without fear or anxiety. Help them to relax, breath, laugh it off and continue.



Performing in Character

Getting students to create characters and improvise can be easy. Speaking text aloud can also be fairly simple. Getting them to do both can be almost impossible.

One of the quickest ways of creating diverse characters can be through the use of tableaux or still-frame images, later finding a voice for that character, and then applying the text.

Try the following character exercise with the group:

- Stand in the space in neutral – a relaxed posture with feet in parallel, knees relaxed, shoulders back and head lightly balanced on the neck
- Give them an emotion to think about, such as Happy, Sad, Anger or Love. Count to three and say go. On Go they should create a frozen tableaux of that emotion, making it as big and bold as possible. Hold it while you look at the group.
- Repeat with other emotions
- Repeat the exercise with stock characters from the play being worked on, such as a King, Queen, Villain, Hero, Mother, Beggar, Bully, Victim, etc.
- Repeat again with students choosing a character and combining with an emotion. What does an angry king look like, or a Beggar in love? Keep the same character and change the emotion a few times, each time adding a vocal sound. This should be non-verbal, so a sound not a word, which conveys the emotion of the character.
- Take a section of text from the play, identify the character and the emotions within the text, playing with the sound of the speech when spoken. Listen to a few and play with them.

Staging a Play

Shakespeare's plays have been performed in a vast variety of ways, from straight plays to musicals, ballet to physical theatre. Its lack of stage directions, versatility of language and dramatic quality of stories makes it a flexible and diverse resource for performers.

As a class project, it is worth exposing your students to a variety of performance styles. If you are unable to see live productions, film adaptations or live theatre archive footage may offer you a solution.

Take a key scene and improvise the dialogue between the two characters in their own words. Change the setting of the scene to improvise different outcomes – in a hairdressers, as a Disney film, film noir, soap opera or mime.

In groups, ask students to devise a short performance of a section of the play in a style of their own. They could keep to the original text, adapt it, re-write it or work only with movement, but each performance should stay true to the characters, emotions and story provided.

Discuss the development process, merits and shortfalls of each piece of work as a group to discover the learning outcomes for the whole group.



Conclusion

Shakespearean language can sound alien and overwhelming when read for the first time. He invented words and phrases, some of which are still in use, but many have never been used since and so cannot easily be understood.

Nevertheless, it is still English.

Shakespeare never wrote a play to be read and studied. He wrote his plays to be performed by actors on a stage. Few writers since have demonstrated such an acute understanding of the English language, and so his work deserves to be respected.

The genius of his work cannot always be appreciated through reading. It is only once it is spoken that the actor, not the reader, can start to understand his brilliance.

The techniques shared in this resource are based on professional acting techniques, which should help build confidence, making students more comfortable working with Shakespeare. The more often they are practiced, the easier it will be to study and perform his work.

However, the golden rule with studying Shakespeare, or any other playwright, is to read the text out loud. Only by bringing the text to life through speech can students start to learn to listen to the language and to appreciate the language Shakespeare has used to convey the thoughts and emotions of each character.

Further Support

Theatre Workout specialises in the creation of bespoke workshops for schools, with professional actors and directors teaching students how to work with Shakespeare in a fun, entertaining and engaging way.

Find out more about our bespoke workshops at www.theatreworkout.com.

Additional online resources you may find helpful include the following websites:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/>

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/> the complete works of Shakespeare

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/william-shakespeare-fact-pack-for-key-stage-2-6371752> Shakespeare Fact Pack

<http://shakespeareweek.org.uk/> Shakespeare Week

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home.htm> Shakespeare's Birthplace

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=shakespeare Shakespeare videos online