



## Bringing Shakespeare to Life!

### Topics:

- Literature (Shakespeare)

**Summary:** In this interactive workshop, students learn the basics of Shakespeare's writing style including how to define and identify iambic pentameter, blank verse, rhymed verse, and prose. Workshop culminates in students bringing to life parts of Shakespeare's text using choral readings, simple staging, and tableaux.

**Grades:** 6-12

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

### Materials:

- Text from *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Romeo and Juliet* (provided in Appendix)

### Learning Targets:

- I CAN define "iambic pentameter", "blank verse", "rhymed verse", and "prose"
- I CAN work collaboratively with my peers to bring Shakespeare's words to life.

### Introduction (5 minutes)

#### Who is William Shakespeare?

To get students warmed up, let them share their knowledge of William Shakespeare and his works. If possible, teacher or student helper could write ideas up on the board.

### Key Points:

- William Shakespeare is a famous poet and playwright who lived more than 400 years ago.
- He wrote many plays including, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- *His writing has its own unique style, which we will be learning more about today!*

### Introduce Shakespeare's Writing Style (15 minutes)

**Point 1** → Shakespeare often wrote in **iambic Pentameter**, a rhythm that closely resembles natural speech

**Definition: iambic** → iambic meter is two syllables, consisting of a soft stress followed by a strong stress such as deDUM. A **heartbeat** also mirrors the rhythm of iambic meter.

**Definition: Pentameter** → Five units of the meter per line ("penta" = five)

Thus, "**iambic Pentameter**" is five units of iambic meter per line, or a rhythm of:  
deDUM deDUM deDUM deDUM deDUM



**Some examples of iambic Pentameter from Shakespeare's writing:**

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? (*Romeo and Juliet*).

If music be the food of love, play on (*Twelfth Night*).

Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more (*Henry V*).

**Point 2 → Shakespeare wrote in rhymed verse, blank verse, and prose.**

**\*Rhymed Verse:** Lines typically in iambic pentameter, rhyme scheme typically was aa, bb, etc.:

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the **mind**;  
And therefore is winged Cupid painted **blind**.  
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement **taste**;  
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy **haste**:  
Ad therefore is Love said to be a **child**,  
Because in choice he is so oft **beguiled**.  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena)

**\*Blank Verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,  
And won thy love, doing thee injuries  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus)

**\*Prose:** Ordinary speech, there is no pattern of stressed or unstressed syllables or rhyme scheme.

Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves  
as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and  
the reason why they are not so punished and cured  
is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers  
are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel.  
(*As You Like It*, Rosalind)

**Students Bring Passages from Shakespeare's Plays to Life (30 minutes)**

- Break students into four groups, ideally with 4-5 students per group and give each group one of the excerpts provided in the Appendix. If needed, more than one group could do the same passage to keep group numbers low.
- Once in their groups, students should read through their passages at least twice and notice if their excerpt is in **iambic pentameter** and if it is **rhymed verse, blank verse, or prose**.
- If needed, students may be given time to look up unfamiliar words or check in with teacher as necessary. It may be helpful for the groups to "translate" what is being said into everyday speech.



**Students Create Choral Readings for Their Passages (15 minutes)**

A choral reading will have the students reading the entire passage.

Students work as a group to decide how to read the passage, and may bring in any of the following elements. Encourage students to use at least 3-4 different elements in their reading. Each student should read at least one line or part.

- 1) Reading words or sentences as a chorus (all together)
  - 2) Using a single reader or partners for a word or sentence
  - 3) Repeating words or phrases
  - 4) Speeding up or slowing down sections
  - 5) Increasing or decreasing volume
  - 6) Adding in percussion such as clapping, snapping, or stomping feet
  - 7) Adding in other sound effects as described in the text
  - 8) Speaking words to show their tone -for instance, saying the word “biting” with the intention of conveying a biting tone.
- As students work on their choral readings, teacher may circulate to each group for feedback and assistance as needed.

**Students Stage Their Choral Readings Using Simple Movement and Tableaux (15 minutes)**

- Once students have a solid draft of their choral reading, they may then move on to giving it some simple staging. Either adding in simple movement or working with **tableaux** -frozen pictures that tell a story. If time is limited, students could simply arrange how they will sit and stand when they share their work with the rest of the group.

**Students Share their Performances (15 minutes)**

- Give students the opportunity to share their work with the class. As groups are presenting, have the rest of the class consider the staging and vocal choices used by each group.

**Closing Reflection (5 minutes)**

- How did creating the choral reading for your piece influence your understanding of the writing?
- How did hearing and seeing the performances of your peers affect your understanding of the writing?
- What was challenging about this activity? What came more easily? Why do you think this is so?



## Appendix

### **Romeo from *Romeo and Juliet***

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief,  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:  
Be not her maid, since she is envious;  
Her vestal livery is but sick and green  
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

### **Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet***

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
And for that name which is no part of thee  
Take all myself.

### **Harry from *Henry V***

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead.  
Then imitate the actions of the tiger;  
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
For there is none of you so mean and base  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start. The games afoot!  
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge  
Cry, "God for Harry, England, and St. George!"



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**Horatio from *Hamlet***

Marcelus and Barnardo, on their watch,  
In the dead vast and middle of the night  
Been thus encountered: A figure like your father,  
thrice he walked  
By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes,  
Whilst they, distilled  
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,  
Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me  
In dreadful secrecy impart they did,  
And I with them the third night kept the watch,  
Where, as they had delivered, both in time,  
Form of the thing, each word made true and good,  
The apparition comes. I knew your father,  
These hands are not more like.