



STUDY GUIDE



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For many students the language of William Shakespeare can seem intimidating, difficult to comprehend, and out of touch with the contemporary reader. SHAKE IT UP! is designed to break down these barriers. The goal of the SHAKE IT UP! performance and workshop is to make Shakespeare feel exciting, accessible, and relevant to the young reader. Utilizing improvisation and comedy, the ISC has developed a unique and interactive approach to deepening students' understanding of Shakespeare's texts.

A Little Shakespeare History

William Shakespeare is considered by many to be the greatest playwright to ever write in the English language. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1564. He died when he turned 52 years old on April 23, 1616. Over the course of his life Shakespeare is believed to have written 38 plays and 154 sonnets. The Improvised Shakespeare Company wishes he'd written more! So, they travel the country making up brand new Shakespearean plays and teaching students how to create their own Elizabethan prose and verse.

The Improvised Shakespeare Company History

The Improvised Shakespeare Company has been performing its smash hit improvised show to sold out houses in Chicago since 2005. In 2006 The Improvised Shakespeare Touring Company was created to take The ISC's unique brand of comedy beyond the borders of Chicago. The ISC has performed at schools, performing arts centers, and festivals throughout the world. The ISC has been featured at the Piccolo Spoleto Fringe Festival, the Bumbershoot Music and Arts Festival, and the prestigious Just For Laughs festival in Montreal. It has been named Chicago's best improv group by both the Chicago Reader and the Chicago Examiner. It has been honored with New York Nightlife Award for "Best Comedic Performance by a Group" and it was the recently named "Ensemble of the Year" by the Chicago Improv Festival.

In 2007 The Improvised Shakespeare Company workshop was created to teach readers of all ages how to create their very own Elizabethan prose and verse.

Show Description

Based on one audience suggestion (a title for a play that has yet to be written) The Improvised Shakespeare Co. creates a fully improvised play in Elizabethan style. Each of the players has brushed up on his “thee’s” and “thou’s” to bring you a show filled with off-the-cuff comedy using the language and themes of William Shakespeare. Any performance could be filled with power struggles, star-crossed lovers, sprites, kings, queens, princesses, sword-play, rhyming couplets, asides, insults, persons in disguise and all that we’ve come to expect from the pen of the Great Bard. The performance could reveal a tragedy, comedy, or history. Nothing is planned-out, rehearsed, or written. Each play is completely improvised, so each play is entirely new!

Workshop Description

In the SHAKE IT UP! workshops, students learn some of the basic rules of Elizabethan dialogue and then work together to create their own Elizabethan prose and verse right on the spot! The results are engaging, fun, and hilarious. By using Shakespearean archetypes and language to develop their own scenes, students will discover a richer appreciation of the mastery and depth of the work of Shakespeare himself. (For more detail on the sort of exercises performed in the workshop, see the SHAKE IT UP! handout, “Example Exercises for the SHAKE IT UP! workshop”.)

Classroom Activities for Teachers

The SHAKE IT UP! show and/or workshop can be used in conjunction with lessons on Shakespeare, playwriting, and listening/speaking. The following activities are designed to meet several state standards.

Sonnets

Activity:

Noting that The Improvised Shakespeare Company creates its own Elizabethan dialogue, you can have your students write their very own sonnets!

Directions:

Each student is to write their own 14-line love poem in rhyming couplets. The poems should be written in Elizabethan style. That is, try to sound like Shakespeare! (For tips refer to the SHAKE IT UP! handout, “How To Write Your Own Sonnet”).

Twists:

1. Give extra credit if the poem is written in iambic pentameter.
2. Assign words from the SHAKE IT UP! vocabulary list that must be used in each sonnet OR have each student draw two vocabulary words from a hat.
3. Give extra credit for a pun or wordplay.
4. Have each student read his/her sonnet for the class.
5. Have each student write his/her sonnet to a classroom mascot and read the sonnet before the class to the mascot.
6. Do this exercise in conjunction with analysis of an actual Shakespearean sonnet.

Plays

Activity:

Noting that The Improvised Shakespeare Company creates plays on the spot, you can have your students write their own short plays.

Directions:

Individually or in groups, students will write their own short plays. (For tips on playwriting, see the SHAKE IT UP! handout, “How To Write a Play”).

Twists:

1. Have the students write their plays in Elizabethan style.
2. Assign words from the SHAKE IT UP! vocabulary list that must be used in each play OR have each student draw two vocabulary words from a hat.
3. Give extra credit for puns and wordplay.
4. Since The Improvised Shakespeare Company makes up a play on the spot using a title from the audience, give your students the title of their play in advance.
5. Have the students perform a staged reading of their plays for the class.

Letters to The ISC

Activity:

Actors love praise! Have your students write us a letter telling us what they thought about the performance.

Twists:

1. Have your students write us a Shakespearean letter in prose or verse.
2. Encourage your student to use one or two words from our vocabulary list.
3. Have your students recall specific characters, plot twists, or moments that they enjoyed.

Report and Review

Activity:

All of the plays that The Improvised Shakespeare Company performs are performed one time only. Your students were part of the only live audience that will ever see that play. Have them write a report on and review of the play.

Directions:

Have the students report on the play’s characters, plot, and conflicts. In addition, have them review the story. What did they like? What would they change?



How to write a play

Character

The characters are the persons in your play. For every character that you write, make sure you answer these two questions.

- **What does my character want?**
- **How will my character get what (s)he wants?**

Conflict

Conflict occurs when things get in the way of a character getting what he wants. This makes your play exciting! The audience will want to find out if the characters can overcome the obstacles to get what they want. If you've answered the two character questions thoroughly, you probably already have a few conflicts in your play. Characters' wants often interfere with each other. But, if you still need conflict, remember that all sorts of things get in our way when we are trying to get something (ourselves, nature, other people, fairies, etc.)

Plot

As long as your characters are going after what they want, the plot will often take care of itself. The action will rise as those characters try to achieve their goals and it will build as things get in their way. When that action reaches its most intense moment, you've hit the climax. Then we will see characters reacting to what has happened in the falling action. The resolution will show us how the characters lives have changed now that all of this has happened.

Setting

The setting is the time and place in which your play occurs. Try to be specific when you decide where to set your play. Think of locations that can fit on a stage.

Dialogue

Remember that anything you want the audience to know will need to come out through what the characters say. Also remember to make your dialogue true to your character. Who is speaking? What is the character's age? What is the character's personality like? In what time period is the character? Where is the character? How would the character behave in that location?

Theme

This is the idea that you want the audience to think about after watching your play. This idea can be a statement or it can be a question. It can be several statements and/or several questions! A good way to make sure you have a strong theme is to write about something that you're excited about; something that you love or something that makes you really angry. If you're excited to write your play, there's a good chance that the theme will take care of itself!

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How to Write Your Own Sonnet

Getting Started:

- Your sonnet is going to be 14 lines long.
- Each line will be roughly 10 syllables long.
- Your sonnet will be written in rhyming couplets.

Thee/Thou/Thy/Thine

Sonnets are usually love poems, so in your sonnet you'll be talking to someone. In that case, you'll need to know how to translate the second-person pronoun "you" into the more Shakespearean version

- When "you" refers to the subject of the sentence it is translated to "thou".
(“You are beautiful” becomes “Thou art beautiful.”)
- When "you" is the object of a sentence it is translated to "thee".
(“I love you” becomes “I love thee.”)
- Instead of saying "your", say "thy".
(“Your nose is so pretty” becomes “Thy nose is so pretty.”)
- Instead of saying "yours", say "thine".
(“I wish I could be yours” becomes “I wish I could be thine.”)

Verbs

You can also make your verbs more Shakespearean.

Instead of "I will" say "I shall".

Instead of "You are" say "Thou art".

Instead of "It is", say "tis".

Occasionally, try adding "-eth" or "-est" to the end of a present-tense verb.

Metaphors and Similes

You might liken the person in your poem to many wonderful things. You might liken the way you feel when that person is absent to many terrible things. In situations like these metaphors and similes are handy. Metaphors and similes both liken something or someone to something else. The difference is that similes do this explicitly using "like" or "as".

- metaphor: Thou art a rose in the blossom of beauty.
- simile: Thou art *like* a rose in full bloom.

Use metaphors when describing feelings, situations, a person's features, a person's personality...when describing anything! A good strategy for creating an elaborate metaphor or simile is to first decide what you think someone or something is like. Let's continue with a rose. Then, think of how that object feels, smells, looks, etc. A rose is soft, smells sweet, is beautiful. Think also of what that thing is used for, or does. A rose blossoms, is used to decorate, it even sometimes has thorns that prick fingers. Think of all of the ways that you can describe something using a simple rose!

Rhyming

Here's a tip on creating rhymes. First choose the word you want to rhyme. Then, think of words to set up your rhyme. Suppose you want to describe someone's eyes. Think of several words that rhyme with eyes (skies, pies, flies, guys, size), then choose one to set up your rhyme.

“When I gaze into the night's starry skies,
Methinks there I see thy beautiful eyes.” OR

“I wish someone would swat these stinking flies,
So I could see the beauty of thine eyes.”*

*“Thine” also functions like the article “an”. It is used before a noun that begins with a vowel.

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A Short Glossary of Shakespearean Words and Phrases

WORDS

alas: this word is used to express sadness or regret. “I wish to ask her to the prom. *Alas*, she is going with another.”

anon: soon; in a moment.

bodkin: dagger.

century: one hundred. “I have a *century* of assignments to finish.”

cut-purse: thief.

don: to put on. “I shall *don* a hat for the ballgame.”

dram: a little bit; a small amount.

forsooth: in truth; truly. “*Forsooth*, Hercules is very strong!”

gaskins: loose-fitting breeches.

gleek: a taunt; an insult. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but thy *gleek* shall never hurt me.”

harpy: a mythical creature with the head of a woman and the wings and talons of a vulture; this creature usually symbolizes revenge.

henceforth: from now on; from this time forward. “*Henceforth*, I shall never forget to floss.”

jack: a man with mean and lousy manners.

kicky-wicky: girlfriend or wife (used in a merry way).

knave: a scoundrel; or a young boy; or a male servant.

livings: possessions.

loggerhead: numbskull.

love-shaked: lovesick (as though someone is shaking with a love fever)

mountebanks: a con-man who sells fake medicine.

ninny: a fool; a simpleton.

oft: often. “How *oft* I think of thee.”

perchance: perhaps; possibly; maybe. “*Perchance* we shall meet again.”

prithee: please. “*Prithee* pass the salt.”

posy: a short line of poetry, often inscribed inside a ring.

remembrances: memories; or love-tokens, keepsakes.

saucy: naughty.

slug-abed: a lazy person.

smilets: little smiles.

spongy: drunk; soaked with alcohol.

surmount: exceed; surpass. “Thy beauty *surmounts* the Sun.”

taper: a candle.

‘tis: it is.

trimmed: dressed up.

tristful: sad; sorrowful.

truepenny: an honest, trustworthy fellow

unbend: relax.

untaught: unmannerly, ignorant.

villanies: evil qualities.

visage: face; appearance.

vizard: a mask.

welkin: sky; heavens.

wherefore: why?

yesternight: last night.

yonder: over there. “*Yonder* lies my backpack.”

zenith: the highest point of something.

zephyr: a gentle breeze

PHRASES

dismount thy tuck!: take your sword out of its sheath!

drops of sorrow: tears.

dun's the mouse!: stay quiet!

God gi' good-e'en: God give you a good evening.

have at thee: on guard!

man of wax: a man who is so perfect and handsome it's as though he was molded out of wax.

methinks: I think.

perpetual wink: endless sleep; death.

rest you merry: “farewell!” or “be well!”

reverb no hollowness: be quiet

sift him: question him; find out what he knows.

skimble-skamble stuff: rambling, incoherent nonsense.

traveling lamp: the sun.

void your rheum: spit.

wonder-wounded: awestruck; overcome with wonder.

Useful Resources

Crystal, David and Ben Crystal. *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*. Penguin Books: USA, 2002.

Schmidt, Alexander. *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*. Vol. I & II. Dover: New York, 1971.

www.kidzworld.com

www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-106333.html



Example Exercises from the SHAKE IT UP! workshop

Insults & Praises:

After developing a basic understanding of the use of “thee” and “thou” in Shakespeare. Students will take turns exploring Shakespeare’s use of metaphor and simile. Each student is given the suggestion of an object (i.e. a puppy, a toaster, a bowling ball, etc.). The student must then use reference to that object to create an insult. For example, “How thou art like a puppy whose incessant yapping drives me mad. I wouldst thou would silence thyself ere thou findest thy nose rubbed in thy own mistakes!” The student will also use reference to suggestions to create spontaneous praises, “How thou art like a puppy! How full thou art of excitement and discovery such that even the motion of a butterfly can capture thy deep wonder. Would that I could see the world afresh as thou dost.”

Shakespearean Interpreter:

Based on a suggestion, two students will improvise a contemporary scene. As they do so, they will pause after each line of dialogue to allow two “interpreters” to translate the dialogue into language that an Elizabethan audience can understand. For example:

Student 1: Hey Stan, do you want to go see a movie?

Interpreter 1: Ho there! Stan! Dost thou wish to observe the newest play?

Student 2: I can’t. My parents said I can’t go out until I finish my homework.

Interpreter 2: I am bound as a prisoner is. My father and mother have forbid me such pleasures ‘til I complete the Herculean tasks that the academy has set before me.

The Shakespearean Actor's Nightmare:

Two students are given Shakespearean texts which they will be allowed to use in the scene; one is not. The students with texts may only speak in the scene using lines of dialogue from the text. The student without a text must respond to the other players without set lines, making sense of their dialogue within the scene.

Exit Line:

A player is given a reason to exit the stage. The player must then exit creating a rhyming couplet to justify their exit before they leave. For example, if a student is told that they must leave the stage because they are being chased by a bear, they might say, "Farewell my friends, stay I do not dare. I must leave in haste, for I'm chased by a bear!"

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