

DIRECTING SHAKESPEARE

TEACHING NOTES FOR WORKSHEET #3

This activity can be used independently or as part of a series designed to give students the skills and confidence to make their own short film inspired by Shakespeare's plays.

OBJECTIVES

This activity will give students the opportunity to direct and perform a short scene from one of Shakespeare's plays.
Student will learn to think about the world the characters inhabit in the scene and their relationship to one another by discovering the given *imaginary circumstances* of the scene.
They will also look deeply into their character's intentions to inform their choices as an actor and experience how the stakes of a scene can change as the character's intention changes.

RESOURCES

Students will need a copy of **Macbeth, Act 3, Scene 2** (edited) - see attached - or another scene from one of Shakespeare's plays. You will also need a screen and an internet connection to show [the video](#) and a room with enough space to move around freely.

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Ask students if they have ever directed their friends in a video, perhaps for YouTube or TikTok? Or has someone ever directed them in a video? What did they like / dislike about the process and experience?
Do they have any favourite film directors? Do they know of any films where the director is also the star or an actor in the film? (Ex. *A Star is Born* / Bradley Cooper). What would be the advantages / disadvantages of doing this?
Explain to students that they are going to watch a clip featuring director Janine Watson giving tips on directing Shakespeare. Ask students to note down 3 tips mentioned by Janine in the video.
Students are now going to put these ideas into practice.

THE ACTIVITY

- Organise students into groups of 3. Give each student a copy of an edited version of **Macbeth, Act 3, Scene 2** - attached. Ask them to **read** the attached scene aloud as a group with one person as the director, one person playing Macbeth and one person playing Lady Macbeth. Tell students they should take turns being the director as they do the following exercises.
- Firstly, tell students they are going to do some detective work! They must discover the **given imaginary circumstances** of the scene by asking questions such as: Who are the characters in this scene? What is their relationship to one another? Where are they located geographically? Inside or outside? Is it a private or public space? How do you know? What is the tone of the scene – casual, or perhaps dangerous?

Note: Encourage students to ask as many questions as they can to determine these circumstances.

THE ACTIVITY (CONT.)

3. Next, ask students to think about each character's **intentions** by asking questions such as: What does the character want? What are they fighting for and why? Do both characters want the same thing or are their intentions conflicting? Why is what they want important to them? What would it mean to achieve what they want? What would it *feel* like to achieve it? How *much* do they want it?
4. Now that students have these given imaginary circumstances and character intentions in mind, ask them to **read the scene out loud again**. Ask students to discuss the following questions in their groups: Did the actors' performances change from your first reading? What did you notice that was different this time, and why do you think it was different? What was the conflict between the two characters, and how was it presented?
5. Now tell students they are going to **play the scene again** but this time they are going to **add a physical task** for one of the characters to complete *during* the performing of the scene.

Note: This can be a very simple task that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the scene. For example, one of the characters could be tidying up or stacking and unstacking some chairs. The other character must work to *undo* the actions of the other character, i.e., unstack the chairs or make a mess of what they have just cleaned.

6. Now ask students to **swap** the physical tasks, so the other person is trying to complete the task, while the other is trying to undo their work. **Play the scene again.**
7. Ask students to reflect on the performances of the scene as a group. **Ask the actors:** how did it feel to have a physical task to focus on? Did it make you engage with the text in different ways? When the other actor tried to stop you from achieving your task did it change your intentions? Did it make you fight *more strongly* for what you wanted? What was surprising? What felt different? Did it change the scene in any way?
8. Finally, tell students they are going to **play the scene** one more time as written, **without** the physical tasks *but retaining the same feelings and intentions* that they just played in the previous scene.
9. Ask students to reflect on the performance again and discuss what differences they saw in the different versions of the same scene. What differences did the actors notice, and what differences did the director notice? Ask them to consider which version was more interesting to watch, and why.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Using the same scene, ask students to see what happens when they **alter the stakes** of the scene. (Note: you may need to explain to students the meaning of the word **stakes** – that it refers to what the characters might win or lose in the scene, and the lengths they are willing to go to, to get what they want. For example, they could win or lose great love (*Romeo and Juliet*) or win or lose significant power (*Macbeth*). Talk to students about how raising the stakes will increase the intensity of the drama happening in a scene, making it more exciting for the audience to watch.

Now, give the actors a number between 1 and 10 on which to play their stakes – 1 being the **lowest stakes** and 10 being ‘**life or death stakes**’. Both actors play the scene at 1 to start with, very casually, with little to no stakes. Then play around with different numbers – you might raise the stakes from 1 to 3 to 5 to 8. You may choose to go straight to 10, which should be ‘**life or death**’ stakes.

Ask students to discuss the similarities and differences of the performances. Which versions did they find to be more powerful to watch? Which one did they prefer and why? As a final exercise, ask students to try giving the two actors different numbers (i.e., Macbeth is playing 8 and Lady Macbeth is playing 3). Ask students what is different about the scene this time.

ABOUT JANINE WATSON

Janine is a graduate of the National Theatre Drama School, Melbourne. For Bell Shakespeare she has previously appeared in *The Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Players*. As a director for Bell Shakespeare, she has directed *Romeo and Juliet* (Sydney Opera House, Arts Centre Melbourne), *The Players*, and was Assistant Director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Her other theatre credits include *Unqualified* (Ensemble Theatre, director), *A View From The Bridge* and *Dolores* for Redline Production/Old Fitz Theatre; *Measure For Measure*, *Antigone* and *Three Sisters* for Sport for Jove; *The Happy Prince*, *Dracula* and *Dangerous Liaisons* for Little Ones Theatre; *American Beauty Shop* for KXT; *Or Forever Hold Your Peace* for La Boite; *Dangerous Liaisons* for MTC Neon/Darwin Festival; *Triangle* and *J.A.T.O* for MKA Theatre; *Cordelia* for Little Dove and *Agatha* for Melbourne Fringe. Her film credits include *That's Not Me*, *The Outside Light*, and *Picking Up At Auschwitz*. Her television credits include *The Code 2*, *Neighbours*, *Crash Burn*, and *The Secret Life Of Us*. Janine was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the 2017 Sydney Theatre Awards, was nominated for Best Female Performer at the 2012 Green Room Awards and received the 2016 Sandra Bates Directors Award.

MACBETH

ACT 3, SCENE 2 (EDITED)

After murdering King Duncan to become the new King of Scotland, Macbeth's mental state deteriorates as he becomes plagued by guilt. He fears losing the crown and worries that the witches' prophecy about Banquo's sons becoming king will come true. Lady Macbeth tries to comfort him.

Lady Macbeth	How now, my lord! why do you keep alone?
Macbeth	We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it...
Lady Macbeth	You must leave this.
Macbeth	O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife! Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.
Lady Macbeth	But in them nature's copy's not eterne.
Macbeth	There's comfort yet; they are assailable; Then be thou jocund: there shall be done A deed of dreadful note.
Lady Macbeth	What's to be done?
Macbeth	Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, Till thou applaud the deed.



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