

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE

STUDENT WORKSHEET #1

Connect with the ideas, emotions, and images in Shakespeare's text.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED



- A copy of Romeo's soliloquy from *Romeo and Juliet* Act 2, Scene 2 (below) or an extract from any other Shakespeare play.
- A notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection ready to play [this video](#).
- A dictionary or glossary.

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY



Watch [the video](#) featuring Huw Mckinnon on Understanding Shakespeare. Note down at *least three* tips mentioned by Huw.

ACTIVITY



Try these exercises to put some of the ideas discussed in the video into practice.

1. In groups of three or four **read** the soliloquy from *Romeo and Juliet* (below) or an extract from another Shakespeare play you have chosen.
2. Now, **divide** the text up evenly among the group.
3. **Read** your allocated text and **highlight** any words you find interesting, confusing or that stand out. **Look up** any words you don't understand in a dictionary or glossary. What **images, ideas** or **thoughts** come to mind when you hear these words? What do you think the character is trying to convey with these words? Discuss with your group.
4. Now **rewrite** your allocated lines of text in your own words, in the way we speak today. Don't worry about translating your text word for word, it's more important to **translate the ideas and images** in Shakespeare's language into modern day language.
5. **Read your allocated lines** to the group followed by your rewrite. Listen to other members of the group read their lines and rewrites. Give feedback to each member of the group on their rewritten text. Note: The most important thing is that your definition makes sense to you.

ACTIVITY CONT.

6. Now, say your original lines **aloud**, emphasizing the **vowels** and **consonants**. Listen to the **sound** of the words. This may feel silly to do, but it's important as Shakespeare is also conveying meaning through the sound of the words. For example, are the sound of the words short and sharp or long and smooth? Do some words rhyme, or begin with the same letter, or sound the same? What effect does this have?
7. Next, focus on the **emotions** that are being conveyed in the text. How is the character feeling? What words give you the clues to what emotions are being felt by the character? How might you feel if you were in this situation?
8. Now, as a group, **devise** a way to present the soliloquy or extract to an audience. Experiment with how you can connect with the language **physically**. Make sure you use the images Shakespeare gives you in the text in your presentation. Ensure every person in the group gets allocated lines to say and is **active** in the performance.
9. **Present** your performance in front of your class or in front of friends or family.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY



In your group or as a class, **discuss** the **similarities** and **differences** between the group performances. What was surprising? What was confusing? How did the performances make you feel? Did you discover anything about the character that was new, in watching other people's performances and interpretations?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY



After you have completed this exercise, try **translating a key scene** from one of Shakespeare's plays into modern language. How might you convey the meaning using language you use every day? Remember: Don't worry about translating the text word for word, it's more important to translate the ideas and images in Shakespeare's language.

SCENE EXTRACT



ROMEO AND JULIET ACT 2, SCENE 2

Romeo Montague has fallen in love with Juliet Capulet at a masked ball. He has snuck away from his friends and into the property of the Capulets, the sworn enemies of the Montagues. While he is hiding in the darkness, he spots Juliet above...

Romeo

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.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!

ABOUT HUW MCKINNON

Huw McKinnon is Bell Shakespeare's Resident Teaching Artist. Huw is a trained actor (Nepean) and has appeared on the Bell Shakespeare mainstage in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. In 2019 he co-directed the Bell Shakespeare production of *Macbeth* for high school students at Sydney Opera House and Arts Centre Melbourne. Huw first joined Bell Shakespeare in 2004 as an actor, touring schools around the country in *Actors at Work* (now *The Players*). Since then Huw has fostered a passion for teaching Shakespeare and has become involved in the delivery of almost every aspect of Bell Shakespeare's education program.

He has been central to the Company's Juvenile Justice program, delivering Shakespeare focused workshops in youth detention centres across NSW and Victoria. His work with young people in detention was the focus of the award-winning documentary *Kings of Baxter* (Grumpy Sailor Productions). Huw regularly tours Australia, often to the most remote locations, helping teachers inspire an enthusiasm for Shakespeare in their students and helping young people see the plays in a whole new light. Huw is a key part of Bell Shakespeare's Regional Teacher Mentorship and finds great satisfaction in being able to give teachers from all over Australia the tools and confidence they need to bring Shakespeare to life in their classrooms.