

# UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE

## TEACHING NOTES FOR WORKSHEET #1

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

The following activity will give students an opportunity to lift Shakespeare's words off the page and bring them to life through language analysis and performance.

Students will develop confidence in their ability to bring their own interpretation and opinion to their understanding of Shakespeare's text.

They will understand that they can use their own experiences, imagination, and creativity to connect with the text on an emotional and physical level to create a performance that is unique and engaging.

Note: Depending on your students' level and ability this activity may also present an opportunity to introduce or revisit some useful literary devices such as imagery, metaphor, or symbolism.

### RESOURCES

Students will need a copy of the soliloquy or chosen extract, either in book or sheet form and dictionaries or glossaries. You will also need a screen and an internet connection to show [the video](#).

### BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

**Warmer:** Read aloud some of the phrases or expressions found in Shakespeare's plays [here](#) on our website. Ask students if they recognise any of these phrases. Explain that all these phrases and more, were originated by Shakespeare. Show students the full list of phrases.

Explain to students that they are often speaking the language of Shakespeare without even realising it! Shakespeare may have written his plays over 400 years ago, but the themes, characters and use of language in his plays are still very relevant and recognisable today.

Explain to students that they are going to watch a clip of a professional actor and teaching artist at Bell Shakespeare giving tips on understanding and finding meaning in Shakespeare's text.

Ask students to note down at least three tips mentioned by Huw in the video. Students share their notes in groups or as a class.

Students are now going to put these ideas into practice.

### THE ACTIVITY

1. Break students into **groups of three or four**. Ensure each student has a copy of the soliloquy (attached) or a different extract from another Shakespeare play. Ask students to **read** through the text as a group.
2. Ask students to **divide** the text up evenly among the group. Encourage students to write out their lines of text in their notebooks so they can annotate the text freely.

## THE ACTIVITY (CONT.)

3. Ask students to **read** their allocated text again and **highlight** any words they find interesting or that stand out. Note: You could also ask students to highlight the **verbs** in the soliloquy in one colour and any **images** or **imagery** in a different colour. Encourage students to **look up** any words they don't understand.  
Invite students to **note down** any **images, thoughts or ideas** that they associate with these words. **Note:** More capable students should be encouraged to identify any **literary devices** used in the text and explore how they add meaning and depth to the text and their understanding of the character and how they are feeling.
4. Ask students to **rewrite** their lines of text **in their own words**. Tell students that they don't need to worry about translating their text for word, it's more important that they **translate the ideas and images** in Shakespeare's language rather than write a literal translation.
5. Invite students to **read their allocated lines** of text to the group followed by the **rewrite** in their own words. The group should then give **feedback** on each student's interpretation. Emphasise that the most important thing in this activity is that each student's interpretation makes sense to them.
6. Invite students to listen to the **sounds** of the words in the soliloquy by saying the words **out loud**, emphasizing the **vowels** and the **consonants**. For example, do the words sound long and smooth, or short and sharp? Where are the sounds placed in the mouth? See if students can identify any examples of **assonance** or **alliteration** and what effect this has on their interpretation and delivery of the text.  
**Note:** Students may feel a little silly, but it's important they do the activity as Shakespeare also conveys meaning through the sounds of the words.
7. Tell students they are now going to focus on the **emotions** conveyed in the soliloquy by asking questions such as: What is the character feeling? What words give you the clues as to the emotional state of the character? How might you feel if you were in this situation?  
Now that students have read the soliloquy carefully, looked up any unclear words, and focused on the language, verbs, images, and emotions being conveyed, they should have a very good understanding of this piece of text.
8. Explain to students that they are going to work as a group to **devise** a way to present the soliloquy to the class. Encourage students to

## AFTER THE ACTIVITY

Invite students to **discuss in groups or as a class** the similarities and differences between the group's performances.

**Elicit:** 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?

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**EXTENSION  
ACTIVITY**

After students have completed this exercise, invite them to try translating Shakespeare's text into modern language. Ask them to think about how they might convey the meaning using language they use every day. Emphasize again that they don't need to worry about translating the soliloquy word for word, it's more important to translate the ideas and images in Shakespeare's language.

# 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.