

VIDEO: PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE WITH JAMES EVANS



Now that you have watched James Evans' tips on performing Shakespeare, try these exercises to put some of the ideas discussed into practice.

Warm ups

As James explains, an important part of performing Shakespeare is being physically and vocally ready! We need to warm up our bodies and our voices.

Form groups of 3 or 4 and stand facing each other. With your group as you run through these exercises, rotate the leader.

1. First, each member of the group demonstrates a physical stretch for the whole group to copy, one at a time. Try to stretch different parts of the body with each one.
2. Choose one person to move their hand up and down, at varying speeds, while the others in the group make a 'hum' sound. As the leader's hand moves up or down, change the pitch of your hum accordingly.
3. Each member of the group makes up a sound using only consonants. For example, "Buh duh guh, buh duh guh" or "K, T, SSSSS, K, T SSSS" or "ZZZZZZ". The rest of the group repeats each sound a few times. Then move on to the next group member and a new sound to copy.
4. Now it's time for some tongue twisters! Take turns to share your own and get the group to repeat them, or choose from the tongue twisters listed below.

Remember, the secret with tongue twisters is that it helps to have the visual images in your head. It's much easier when you can actually imagine what it is you're saying.

Tongue twisters to try (see what we did there?)

- A tree-toad loved a she-toad who lived up in a tree
He was two-toed tree-toad, but a three-toed toad was she
- The great Greek grape growers grow great Greek grapes
- Betty Botter bought some butter, “But” she said, “this butter’s bitter!
If I bake this bitter butter, that will make my batter bitter!
But a bit of better butter, that will make my batter better.”
So Betty bought some better butter and her batter was not bitter.

Be a Shakespeare Detective

5. Read the attached scene (see over) from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
6. Shakespeare often wrote in a rhythm called Iambic Pentameter, a rhythm that sounds like a human heartbeat. Each line of Iambic Pentameter consists of ten syllables made up of 5 ‘heartbeat’ sounds – each ‘heartbeat’ has one weak stress, and one strong stress – Da Dum / Da Dum / Da Dum / Da Dum / Da Dum.

In your group, read the scene attached with the rhythm of Iambic Pentameter in mind. Emphasise the weak and strong stresses in the syllables. How obvious can you make this rhythm?

For example, we could take the first line of the scene and emphasise the strong syllables:

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.

As you can see, the line above fits the Iambic Pentameter rhythm.

7. Are there any sections of the scene where the rhythm doesn’t fit the Iambic Pentameter rhythm? See if you can identify any as a group. Why do you think Shakespeare might have done this, and changed the rhythm? What do you think it tells us about the character’s state of mind at this point?
8. Underline any examples of opposites (or ‘antithesis’) in the text. How many can you identify? List the opposites on a page, placing them next to each other. Why do you think Shakespeare did this? What impact do these opposites or ‘antithesis’ have on what the character is saying?
9. Circle any clues in the text regarding stage directions. Look for any clues in the words that tell us where the character is, whether they are moving, how they are moving, or what they might be doing. Remember, Shakespeare put his stage directions into the words the characters are saying.
10. Now that you’ve warmed up, studied the rhythm of the words in the scene, noted all the opposites/ antithesis, and identified stage directions in the text, rehearse the scene! Understanding all these things will help you stage the scene and communicate the important information clearly. Make sure you add your own creative ideas, and make the scene and the characters meaningful to you.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 2, Scene 1 (extract)

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me.
Thou told'st me they were stolen unto this wood;
And here am I, and wode within this wood,
Because I cannot meet my Hermia.
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant;
But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
Is true as steel: leave you your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? do I speak you fair?
Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth
Tell you, I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love,--
And yet a place of high respect with me,--
Than to be used as you use your dog?

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

About James Evans:

BELL SHAKESPEARE SHORTS FESTIVAL

James Evans is Associate Director at Bell Shakespeare. He is a graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (Acting) and holds a Master of Arts (English) from the University of Sydney. For Bell Shakespeare James directed the national touring productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Julius Caesar*, as well as *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Bell Shakespeare's education program at Sydney Opera House and Arts Centre Melbourne. As an actor he has appeared in *Hamlet*, *Richard 3*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Henry IV* and *Actors At Work*.

James co-wrote and presented the acclaimed iPad App *Starting Shakespeare* (named Best New App by Apple in 17 countries) and co-directed the ABC online series *Shakespeare Unbound*. He has been a visiting artist at the University of San Diego, as well as presenting a series of Shakespeare seminars in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, Mumbai and Singapore. James' work with Bell Shakespeare in juvenile detention centres is the subject of the feature film *Kings of Baxter*, winner of Best Australian Documentary at the 2017 Antenna Documentary Film Festival and the Supreme Jury Prize at the 2018 Melbourne Documentary Film Festival.

BELL
SHAKESPEARE.



Australian Government
Department of Education