

SHAKESPEARE

MONOLOGUE & SCENE

CONTEST



PITTSBURGH
PUBLIC
THEATER

A.D and J.W. Wilson
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WELCOME!

Dear teachers, parents, and participants:

Pittsburgh Public Theater's Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest is a time-honored tradition that began over 20 years ago with just 75 students. Now, over 1,000 students participate from nearly 100 schools and groups annually!

At the heart of the Shakespeare Contest remains a dedication to instilling a love for the theater and appreciation for Shakespeare into the lives of young people.

I hope that this handbook helps to simplify and demystify participation in the Contest. In the following pages you'll find the rules, tips & tricks, information about many of Shakespeare's plays, and more. That said, please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions that may arise.

Pittsburgh Public Theater looks forward to welcoming you and your students to the O'Reilly Theater for another great year of the Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest. Thank you, in advance, for your dedication & support as none of this would be possible without you.

See you at the theater!

Shaun

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OVERVIEW AND IMPORTANT DATES

Students in grades 4-12 are invited to participate as part of their school, an activity group, or individually with a monologue or scene from one of Shakespeare's plays. Participants receive free coaching (by request and based on availability), a contest T-shirt, and a ticket voucher.

Teacher registration continues through January and participation in the Preliminary Round is by appointment only, as space allows. The Preliminary Round takes place at Pittsburgh Public Theater on the O'Reilly Theater stage (with back-up location being the 3rd Floor Rehearsal Hall). Students are split into the lower division (grades 4-7) and upper division (grades 8-12) for judging purposes.

In the Preliminary Round, students perform before a panel of independent judges. These judges determine which students are invited to participate in the Showcase of Finalists.

After the contest, teachers/leaders/parents may request copies of student scoresheets for educational purposes.

PLEASE VISIT PPT.ORG/ENGAGE-LEARN for updated contest dates for the current season.

CONTEST RULES

- **REGISTRATION:** All schools/groups, and students must be properly registered, in advance, in order to perform in the preliminary rounds.
- **ENTRIES:** Students are encouraged to enter either one monologue or scene and focus on that piece, and most students follow this advice. No student may appear in more than two pieces - one monologue and one scene. Students are strongly discouraged from repeating material they performed in the past.
- **WEATHER:** Every effort to reschedule for weather-based appointment cancellations will be made, but cannot be guaranteed.
- **COACHING:** Based on availability, limitations apply. See coaching section.
- **MEMORIZATION:** all pieces must be completely memorized; no prompting.
- **LENGTH OF MONOLOGUE/SCENE:** Monologues are restricted to 2-3 minute (approx. 20-50 lines) and scenes to 3-4 minutes (approx. 80 lines, but adherence to time is more important than number of lines). No performance may exceed 5 minutes.
- The judges **will call time on any piece exceeding 5 minutes** as the contest schedule must remain on time for all students to perform. We don't want to see this happen, so please ensure all pieces are well-rehearsed and timed.
- **Monologues & scenes should not be edited**, but students may begin a piece late or end it early for timing purposes. Removing one non-essential line to meet monologue minimums is permitted.
- **COSTUMES, SETS, & PROPS:** Students are encouraged to focus upon their performance and understanding of the text, so costumes & props should be kept to a minimum. No set pieces are permitted. PPT will provide one bench and two stools for students to use if wanted.
- **Absolutely NO liquid, glitter, high heels, sharp objects** or anything else that could damage the stage or set.
- **WATCHING:** Only the school/group performing and their teachers, chaperones, parents/guardians and contest judges/staff are permitted in the audience.
- **SKIP the accent!** We want to hear YOUR VOICE.
- **LAST but not least...Have Fun! Support your fellow participant!**

GETTING STARTED

Don't believe the idea that one should treat Shakespeare with some sort of reverence. Shakespeare was very aware of the need to entertain an audience and he wrote his plays with that in mind. In Shakespeare's time, most people were illiterate. What they knew of the world came from what they saw around them. Since Shakespeare was quite successful as a playwright, theater manager, and actor, it seems clear he knew his audience.

There are many reasons that we are still so interested in Shakespeare after more than four hundred years. Shakespeare is still popular because he wrote about basic universal human themes in his work.

The idea is to let you and your students have the freedom to explore the language and its themes on your own, and create performances that come from your creativity.

Pick monologues or scenes that seem to make sense to you on first reading, or find one that is about a human idea that interests you. If you understand what is going on first, the rest will fall into place. Some themes Shakespeare wrote about include:

- Jealousy
- Greed
- Ambition
- Love
- Passion
- Grief
- Joy
- Good vs. Evil
- Revenge
- Family
- Gender roles
- Anger
- Loyalty

QUICK TIP!

Keep it short! There is no need to learn a long monologue or scene.

A short piece that you know well is *much* better than a long piece that you don't know as well. Check out the guidelines.

Read the piece out loud to discover its rhythm and any words or ideas you do not understand. Look up everything you didn't understand. Translate the piece into modern English. Read the original while thinking about the translation.

Look at the punctuation to see where the thoughts begin and end and what is connected to what. Note whether the piece is in iambic pentameter -- or prose -- or if it rhymes -- or if it is a combination, but do not worry too much about this.

Here's a secret: It does not matter if the part is written in iambic pentameter, or rhyme, or prose. If you know what it is about and how the thoughts are connected the words will take care of themselves!

The most important thing is to make sense of the piece. Know what the play is about and who your character is in the play. Know what has happened in the play before your scene or monologue (this is what informs how you feel in the scene or monologue). Know what your relationship is to the other characters. Here are some questions to ask about your character:

- What is your status in the world of the play?
- Are you a King or Queen?
- Are you royalty of any kind?
- Are you a servant?
- Are you a commoner?
- Are you a fool?
- What do you want?

Each of these people have different ways of speaking and fulfill different roles in the structure of the play. Knowing (or finding!) the answers to these questions will help you form your character and understand their motivation (meaning why they do what they do and feel how they feel).

MAKING YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD

The Contest puts great emphasis on clarity of speech and understanding of the material. Emotional intensity is a secondary factor in your evaluation. That being said, if your piece has clarity, understanding and emotional intensity, you are off to a great start.

Some performance elements to consider:

Clarity/Diction – it is very important for your speech to be clear and easy to understand.

Emphasis – be clear about what deserves emphasis and what does not. Just like in other plays, not every word is a gem worthy of being admired.

Speed – It is rare that a participant goes so slowly it scores against them, unless of course it is because they do not know their lines. However, many students go too fast, getting caught up in the excitement and making it hard to understand their words.

Volume – You must be heard clearly. You will perform in the O'Reilly Theater and it requires a fair amount of volume for the judges to hear you. Try shouting part of your piece as a rehearsal technique. Have everyone be as far away from each other as possible and have them listen to see if they understand everything.

People and Places – In Shakespeare, one way to increase comprehension is by putting emphasis on people's name and the names of places. Shakespeare often tells the story by using names and where they are and where they came from. This helps the audience follow the story.

Punctuation – this one is big. Super, super big. In general, punctuation tell us how to tell the story. We can send signals about character, meaning, and emphasis by using simple punctuation. When speaking, use these marks in a standard manner.

- Period = stop BUT Comma = pause
 - Colon = an illustration follows
- Semi-colon = a break in a list of series of comments
 - Question mark = rise in inflection, tone
- Exclamation point = something important!

It can be difficult to figure out just where a thought begins and ends. Some are short, some are very long and some can be woven in and out of an entire piece. The punctuation will not always tell you where the thought begins and ends. Use your modern translation to help you figure out what goes with what.

QUICK TIP: Pay more attention to punctuation than line endings.

Words first, emotion second: As mentioned previously, make sure the piece is clear and understandable before working on a deep emotional delivery.

Literary devices: The following are common literary devices Shakespeare uses to illustrate a character's feelings. It is important to recognize them and make use of them. They will help make your work clear and interesting.

- Lists
- Rhyming Couplets
- Juxtaposition
- Comparison

What are the judges looking for?

- Understanding of text/character
- Emotional connectedness
- Physical presentation
- Vocal presentation
- Was the actor able to be heard?
- Was the actor able to be understood?
- Did the actor have any memorization trouble?
- Was the scene/mono a good choice for the actor?

TIPS AND TRICKS

How do I get started?

- **Read The Script!** It is so important to read the play you are doing a monologue or a scene from. Reading the play will give you details about setting, character relationships, facts about the world of the play, character super objectives and more. (Super objectives are your characters overall goals in the play)
- **Write down the facts!** Write down the facts about your character, their relationship with other characters and the facts of the play. The more solid you are on your facts, the more true to your character you will perform.
- **Look up all unknown words!** Know the text you are speaking or that others are speaking to you. If you don't know what a word means, look it up. Playwrights do not write random words on a page. Everything has a very specific reason for being there. Not knowing what a word means can drastically change a monologue or scene.
- **Create beats!** Beats in acting are units of action. They are sections that a play's action can be divided into for the purposes of dramatic exploration. For Example: SALLY. "I cannot believe you. / I am going home." You may mark a beat with a slash. Marking beats are important to help define a change in emotion, psychological position, breath or thought. This helps to make your piece more interesting. It also helps to clarify things to "you," the actor.
- **Create Objectives for your beats!** Objectives are simply what your character wants. Ask yourself, "At this beat, why I am changing the subject? Or why do I say this to this person?" Creating objectives will give you an understanding of what YOU are trying to accomplish in a scene or monologue.

How do I memorize all of the lines?

- Take it in chunks: A trick that might help you is splitting your monologue or scene into a beginning, middle and end. Try learning the end first. Then add the middle section to the end once you have the end memorized. Then lastly, add on the beginning. This may seem strange, BUT it will not only help you memorize, but help to not let your piece lose energy and momentum towards the end.
- Read it 8 times before bed: Reading material right before you sleep often helps to refresh the brain the next day on what you worked on the previous night.
- Take breaks: It is very difficult for anyone to memorize material all at once. Our minds need mental breaks. Take a 10 minute break every so often to help yourself out.

How do I block my monologue or scene?

- Natural Blocking: Try starting with natural blocking to get comfortable in the space. Natural blocking is playing around with what you do naturally psychically. When you find things that make sense make note of them. Make note of what drove you to do that. That way in the future you don't just sit on a bench because that's what you wrote next to a line. You are walking over to sit down on the bench with purpose. Make sure all blocking is purposeful.
- Play Around: Have fun with your piece. Practice doing your piece many different ways. This may mean doing your monologue or scene with a different perspective on your character's wants and needs. This may mean you try playing around with your characters emotions or objectives. This exercise will help you get out of your head and more into your body. It will also help to avoid habitual patterns in your piece.

How do I connect to what I am saying?

- Be Vulnerable: Acting is conveying human emotion. Let yourself understand what you are saying and try to connect to it. Put yourself in your character's shoes. Try to open yourself up and let the character take you on a journey.
 - o Use your five senses: If your character talks about the smell of roses, let yourself smell roses. Let yourself hear things the way your character would hear things! (Would they listen, would they half listen and not take advice?)
 - o Connect using your own experiences: We all have experiences, while probably not as dramatic as Shakespeare's plays, they are still experiences. TAP into those experiences and remember how you felt when that happened. Let that help to drive your character and their intentions throughout the monologue/scene.

What if I forget my lines?

- Take a deep breath: One thing that helps many actors when in this situation is to just pause. Take a deep breath in from your diaphragm and most likely the lines will come back to you. Getting too much in your head and starting to panic can actually make things worse. You have to trust yourself and your muscle memory. Just take a deep breath in and out. It's all going to be okay. This performance is to show all your hard work and effort. We are all here to have fun and learn and support one another. There is no shame in messing up. All professionals do it! It is how you bounce back from your error that will show your growth.
- Help your scene partner out: If you are in a scene and you can see that someone is struggling to remember what comes next, feed them the line. This means that if your scene partner can't remember the line, "What a beautiful day it is." YOU as the partner can say, "Isn't it lovely outside?" Then your partner will start to remember! Remember we are all in this together.