

# SHAKESPEARE

MONOLOGUE & SCENE

CONTEST



PITTSBURGH  
**PUBLIC**  
THEATER

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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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# TRAGEDIES

## Coriolanus

In ancient Rome, in the aftermath of a famine, the common people, or plebeians, demand the right to set their own price for the city's grain supply. In response to their protests, the ruling aristocracy, or patricians, grant the plebeians five representatives a decision that provokes the ire of the proud patrician soldier Caius Martius, who has nothing but contempt for the lower classes.

At this time, war breaks out with a neighboring Italian tribe, the Volscians, who are led by Martius' great rival, Tullus Aufidius. In the campaign that follows, the Volscians are defeated, and the Romans take the Italian city of Corioles, thanks to the heroism of Martius. In recognition of his great deeds, he is granted the name Coriolanus.

Upon his return to Rome, Coriolanus is given a hero's welcome, and the Senate offers to make him consul. In order to gain this office, however, he must go out and plead for the votes of the plebeians, a task that he undertakes reluctantly. At first, the common people agree to give him their votes, but they later reverse their decision at the prodding of two clever tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, who consider Coriolanus an enemy of the people. This drives the proud Coriolanus into a fury, and he speaks out intemperately against the very idea of popular rule; Brutus and Sicinius, seizing on his words, declare him a traitor to the Roman state and drive him into exile.

Desiring revenge against Rome, Coriolanus goes to his Volscian enemy, Aufidius, in the city of Antium, and makes peace with him. Aufidius is planning a new campaign against the Romans, and he welcomes Coriolanus's assistance, although he soon feels himself to be falling into his new ally's shadow. Their army proceeds to march on Rome, throwing the city into a panic--Rome's armies are helpless to stop the advance, and soon Aufidius and Coriolanus are encamped outside the city walls.

Two of his oldest friends come pleading for mercy, but Coriolanus refuses to hear him. However, when his mother, Volumnia, to whom he is devoted, begs him to make peace, he relents, and the Romans hail Volumnia the savior of the city. Meanwhile, Coriolanus and the Volscians return to Antium, where the residents hail Coriolanus as a hero. Aufidius, feeling slighted, declares that Coriolanus's failure to take Rome amounts to treachery; in the ensuing argument, some of Aufidius' men assassinate Coriolanus.

## Characters

**Caius Martius** - A Roman general, he is given the name "Coriolanus" after he leads the Roman armies to victory against the Volscian city of Corioles. Brave, fearsome in battle, and extremely honorable, he is also overly proud, immature, inflexible, and stubbornly aristocratic. These faults, combined with a fierce contempt for the lower classes of Rome, lead to his exile from his native city.

**Volumnia** - A Roman noblewoman and the mother of Coriolanus. She is devoted to her son and delights in his military exploits, having raised him to be a warrior; he, in turn, often allows himself to be dominated by her iron will.

**Menenius** - A Roman nobleman, or patrician, and a friend to Coriolanus. Gifted with a clever tongue, he has a reputation as a great wit, which he uses adeptly to avoid conflict.

**Brutus** - One of the tribunes elected by the common people, or plebeians, of Rome to serve as their representative in the government. A clever politician, he regards Coriolanus as a great danger to the class he represents and to the Roman state and works to keep him out of power.

**Sicinius** - A Roman tribune, a clever politician, and Brutus' ally in the struggle against Coriolanus.

**Tullus Aufidius** - A general of the Volscians, Rome's enemy. He is Coriolanus's great rival in warfare but is not quite the equal of the Roman general, and his inability to defeat Coriolanus rankles him.

**Cominius** - A patrician of Rome and a former consul. He is a friend of Coriolanus, and he's one of the generals who leads the Roman army against the Volscians.

**Titus Lartius** - An old Roman nobleman. He is appointed, along with Cominius, as a general against the Volscians.

**Virgilia** - A Roman noblewoman and Coriolanus's loyal wife.

**Valeria** - A Roman noblewoman, she is close friends with Virgilia and Volumnia.

**Young Martius** - Coriolanus and Virgilia's son.

## Suggested Scenes

Act IV, scene V (Coriolanus, lines 69-105)

Start: "My names is Caius Martius, who hath done..."

End: "It be to do thee service."

Act V, scene iii (Volumnia, lines 132-156)

Start: "Nay, go not from us thus..."

End: "He cares not for your weeping. Speak thou, boy."

# Hamlet

On a dark winter night, a ghost walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Discovered first by a pair of watchmen, then by the scholar Horatio, the ghost resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet, whose brother Claudius has inherited the throne and married the king's widow, Queen Gertrude. When Horatio and the watchmen bring Prince Hamlet, the son of Gertrude and the dead king, to see the ghost, it speaks to him, declaring ominously that it is indeed his father's spirit, and that he was murdered by none other than Claudius. Ordering Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who usurped his throne and married his wife, the ghost disappears with the dawn.

Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's death, but, because he is contemplative and thoughtful by nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and even apparent madness. Claudius and Gertrude worry about the prince's erratic behavior and attempt to discover its cause. They employ a pair of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. When Polonius, the pompous Lord Chamberlain, suggests that Hamlet may be mad with love for his daughter, Ophelia, Claudius agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with the girl. But though Hamlet certainly seems mad, he does not seem to love Ophelia: he orders her to enter a nunnery and declares that he wishes to ban marriages.

A group of traveling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He will have the players perform a scene closely resembling the sequence by which Hamlet imagines his uncle to have murdered his father, so that if Claudius is guilty, he will surely react. When the moment of the murder arrives in the theater, Claudius leaps up and leaves the room. Hamlet and Horatio agree that this proves his guilt. Hamlet goes to kill Claudius but finds him praying. Since he believes that killing Claudius while in prayer would send Claudius's soul to heaven, Hamlet considers that it would be an inadequate revenge and decides to wait. Claudius, now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fearing for his own safety, orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bedchamber Polonius has hidden behind a tapestry. Hearing a noise from behind the tapestry, Hamlet believes the king is hiding there. He draws his sword and stabs through the fabric, killing Polonius. For this crime, he is immediately dispatched to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. However, Claudius's plan for Hamlet includes more than banishment, as he has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sealed orders for the King of England demanding that Hamlet be put to death.

In the aftermath of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns in the river. Polonius's son, Laertes, who has been staying in France, returns to Denmark in a rage. Claudius convinces him that Hamlet is to blame for his father's and sister's deaths. When Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet indicating that the prince has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, Claudius concocts a plan to use Laertes' desire for revenge to secure Hamlet's death. Laertes will fence with Hamlet in innocent sport, but Claudius will poison Laertes' blade so that if he draws blood, Hamlet will die. As a backup plan, the king decides to poison a goblet, which he will give Hamlet to drink should Hamlet score the first or second hits of the match. Hamlet returns to the vicinity of Elsinore just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Stricken with grief, he attacks Laertes and declares that he had in fact always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he tells Horatio that he believes one must be prepared to die, since death can come at any moment. A foolish courtier named Osric arrives on Claudius's orders to arrange the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

The sword-fighting begins. Hamlet scores the first hit, but declines to drink from the king's proffered goblet. Instead, Gertrude takes a drink from it and is swiftly killed by the poison. Laertes succeeds in wounding Hamlet, though Hamlet does not die of the poison immediately. First, Laertes is cut by his own sword's blade, and, after revealing to Hamlet that Claudius is responsible for the queen's death, he dies from the blade's poison. Hamlet then stabs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies, and Hamlet dies immediately after achieving his revenge.

At this moment, a Norwegian prince named Fortinbras, who has led an army to Denmark and attacked Poland earlier in the play, enters with ambassadors from England, who report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Fortinbras is stunned by the gruesome sight of the entire royal family lying sprawled on the floor dead. He moves to take power of the kingdom. Horatio, fulfilling Hamlet's last request, tells him Hamlet's tragic story. Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be carried away in a manner befitting a fallen soldier.

## Characters

**Hamlet** - The Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist. About thirty years old at the start of the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle's scheming and disgust for his mother's sexuality.

**Claudius** - The King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. The villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven by his sexual appetites and his lust for power, but he occasionally shows signs of guilt and human feeling—his love for Gertrude, for instance, seems sincere.

**Gertrude** - The Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married to Claudius. Gertrude loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth.

**Polonius** - The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, a pompous, conniving old man. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia.

**Horatio** - Hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlet's death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlet's story.

**Ophelia** - Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes.

**Laertes** - Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet.

**Fortinbras** - The young Prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras) was killed by Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet). Now Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honor, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet.

**The Ghost** - The specter of Hamlet's recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. However, it is not entirely certain whether the ghost is what it appears to be, or whether it is something else.

**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern** - Two slightly bumbling courtiers, former friends of Hamlet from Wittenberg, who are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior.

**Osric** - The foolish courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.

**Voltimand and Cornelius** - Courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

**Marcellus and Bernardo** - The officers who first see the ghost walking the ramparts of Elsinore and who summon Horatio to witness it.



**Francisco** - A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

**Reynaldo** - Polonius's servant, who is sent to France by Polonius to check up on and spy on Laertes.

## Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene ii (Hamlet, lines 129-159)

Start: "Nay, go not from us thus..."

End: "He cares not for your weeing. Speak thou, boy."

Act I, scene v (Ghost, lines 42-72)

Start: "Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast..."

End: "All my smooth body."

Act III, scene i (Hamlet, lines 56-90)

Start: "To be, or not to be- that is the question..."

End: "Be all my sins remembered." **M**



# Julius Caesar

Caesar has returned in triumph from the war against Pompey, though tribunes Marullus and Flavius express their discontent to the people at the outcome. During the celebrations, a soothsayer warns Caesar to beware the Ides of March. Cassius and Brutus discuss their fears that Caesar's ambition is to become king, despite learning from Casca that he had refused the people's offer of the crown.

Casca, Cassius, and Cinna meet during a stormy night that has been full of unnatural events, and agree the need to win Brutus over to their cause, the elimination of Caesar. Brutus meanwhile has been reflecting on the dangers of having Caesar crowned, so when the conspirators arrive at his house he agrees to the assassination plot. He is reluctant to reveal his intentions to his wife, Portia, but yields to her persuasion.

Caesar's wife Calphurnia, frightened by dreams and omens, tries to persuade him not to go to the Capitol. He agrees, but Decius reinterprets the omens in a favourable light, and he leaves, disregarding a warning on the way from Artemidorus. When Caesar refuses to grant Metellus Cimber's suit, the conspirators kill him. Caesar's friend Mark Antony meets the conspirators, who allow him to speak at Caesar's funeral following Brutus' own speech. Brutus justifies their action to the citizens and receives their support; but Antony's speech rouses them against the conspirators, and Brutus and Cassius flee. The angry people kill Cinna the poet, mistaking him for Cinna the conspirator.

Antony forms a triumvirate with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, and they plan the deaths of the conspirators, and form an army. Brutus and Cassius join forces at Sardis, agreeing to fight together at Philippi after a fierce personal quarrel. Messala brings news of happenings at Rome, and reports that Portia has killed herself. Caesar's ghost visits Brutus at night and warns him that he will meet him at Philippi.

The two sides parley, then the battle begins. Thinking they are defeated, Cassius orders his servant Pindarus to kill him. He does so, but it is then revealed that the news was misleading, as Brutus had gained an advantage. A further battle leads to Brutus' defeat, and he too commits suicide. Antony and Octavius acknowledge Brutus' nobility, and arrange to bury him with honour.

## Characters

**Brutus** - A supporter of the republic who believes strongly in a government guided by the votes of senators. While Brutus loves Caesar as a friend, he opposes the ascension of any single man to the position of dictator, and he fears that Caesar aspires to such power. Brutus's inflexible sense of honor makes it easy for Caesar's enemies to manipulate him into believing that Caesar must die in order to preserve the republic.

**Julius Caesar** - A great Roman general and senator, recently returned to Rome in triumph after a successful military campaign. While his good friend Brutus worries that Caesar may aspire to dictatorship over the Roman republic, Caesar seems to show no such inclination, declining the crown several times. Yet while Caesar may not be unduly power-hungry, he does possess his share of flaws. He is unable to separate his public life from his private life, and, seduced by the populace's increasing idealization and idolization of his image, he ignores ill omens and threats against his life, believing himself as eternal as the North Star.

**Antony** - A friend of Caesar. Antony claims allegiance to Brutus and the conspirators after Caesar's death in order to save his own life. Later, however, when speaking a funeral oration over Caesar's body, he spectacularly persuades the audience to withdraw its support of Brutus and instead condemn him as a traitor.

**Cassius** - A talented general and longtime acquaintance of Caesar. Cassius dislikes the fact that Caesar has become godlike in the eyes of the Romans. Impulsive and unscrupulous, Cassius harbors no illusions about the way the political world works. A shrewd opportunist, he proves successful but lacks integrity.

**Octavius** - Caesar's adopted son and appointed successor. Octavius, who had been traveling abroad, returns after Caesar's death; he then joins with Antony and sets off to fight Cassius and Brutus. Antony tries to control Octavius's movements, but Octavius follows his adopted father's example and emerges as the authoritative figure, paving the way for his eventual seizure of the reins of Roman government.

**Casca** - A public figure opposed to Caesar's rise to power. Casca relates to Cassius and Brutus how Antony offered the crown to Caesar three times and how each time Caesar declined it.

**Calpurnia** - Caesar's wife. Calpurnia invests great authority in omens and portents. She warns Caesar against going to the Senate on the Ides of March, since she has had terrible nightmares and heard reports of many bad omens.

**Portia** - Brutus's wife; the daughter of a noble Roman who took sides against Caesar. Portia, accustomed to being Brutus's confidante, is upset to find him so reluctant to speak his mind when she finds him troubled.

**Flavius** - A tribune (an official elected by the people to protect their rights). Flavius condemns the plebeians for their fickleness in cheering Caesar, when once they cheered for Caesar's enemy Pompey.

**Cicero** - A Roman senator renowned for his oratorical skill. Cicero speaks at Caesar's triumphal parade. He later dies at the order of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus.

**Lepidus** - The third member of Antony and Octavius's coalition. Though Antony has a low opinion of Lepidus, Octavius trusts his loyalty.

**Murellus** - Like Flavius, a tribune who condemns the plebeians for their fickleness in cheering Caesar, when once they cheered for Caesar's enemy Pompey. Murellus and Flavius are punished for removing the decorations from Caesar's statues during Caesar's triumphal parade.

**Decius** - A member of the conspiracy. Decius convinces Caesar that Calpurnia misinterpreted her dire nightmares and that, in fact, no danger awaits him at the Senate. Decius leads Caesar right into the hands of the conspirators.

### Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene ii (Cassius, lines 92-113)

Start: "I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus..."

End: "Caesar cried "Help me, Cassius or I sink!"

Act II, scene I (Brutus, lines 113-138)

Start: "No, not an oath: if not the face of men..."

End: "Of any promise that hath passed from him."

Act III, scene ii (Anthony, lines 73-105)

Start: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears..."

End: "And mend have lost their reason!"

# Macbeth

Three witches anticipate a meeting with Macbeth. King Duncan hears a report of how his generals Macbeth and Banquo defeated the Norwegians and the Scottish rebels. The witches gather on a heath and meet the generals returning from the war. They predict Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor, and one day king, and that Banquo will be the father of kings. Macbeth is then greatly impressed when he is greeted by Ross and Angus with the title of Cawdor.

Duncan greets Macbeth with great praise and proposes to visit him. Macbeth writes to his wife telling her of what has happened and the King's plans. Lady Macbeth, seeing the opportunity, plots with her husband how they might kill Duncan when he arrives. After initial enthusiasm, Macbeth changes his mind, but Lady Macbeth persuades him to carry out the deed. He murders Duncan, making it seem that the servants were to blame and describes the scene to his wife. She finds herself having to return the daggers he has used to Duncan's bedroom, and her hands become covered with blood too. They retire when they hear repeated knocking at the castle gates.

Macduff arrives, and has a brief exchange with the Porter. He discovers the dead king and rouses the castle. Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing blame for their father's death, flee abroad. Soon after, Ross and Macduff reflect on what has happened, and Macduff reports that Macbeth has been made king.

Macbeth is concerned about his position, very aware of the prophecies about Banquo. He arranges with a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance; they succeed with Banquo, but Fleance escapes. At a dinner that night, where Banquo would have been the chief guest, Macbeth is terrified by the appearance of his ghost. Macbeth decides to return to the witches to find out his fate. They tell him that he should fear Macduff, that no man born of woman can hurt Macbeth, and that he will never be vanquished until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. They then show a line of eight kings deriving from Banquo.

Macbeth learns that Macduff is fled to England, so he arranges the death of Macduff's wife and children. Macduff meets Malcolm, who tests Macduff's allegiance to Scotland by first painting a bleak picture of his own personality as a future king, then revealing his true character. They agree to fight together, with English support. During the meeting, Ross brings news of the murder of Macduff's family. In Scotland, a doctor and gentlewoman observe Lady Macbeth sleepwalking, imagining she cannot clean her hands of Duncan's blood.

The Scottish nobles gather, and Malcolm orders his men to camouflage themselves with tree branches as they attack, thus giving the appearance of Birnam Wood approaching Dunsinane. Macbeth learns his wife has died. Fearing no man born of woman, Macbeth fights on, killing Young Seyward, but on meeting Macduff he learns of Macduff's caesarian birth. Macbeth refuses to yield, is killed by Macduff, and Malcolm is proclaimed king.

## Characters

**Macbeth** - Macbeth is a brave soldier and a powerful man, but he is not a virtuous one. He is easily tempted into murder to fulfill his ambitions to the throne, and once he commits his first crime and is crowned King of Scotland, he embarks on further atrocities with increasing ease. Ultimately, Macbeth proves himself better suited to the battlefield than to political intrigue, because he lacks the skills necessary to rule without being a tyrant. His response to every problem is violence and murder.

**Lady Macbeth** - Macbeth's wife, a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position. Early in the play she seems to be the stronger and more ruthless of the two, as she urges her husband to kill Duncan and seize the crown.

**The Three Witches** - Three "black and midnight hags" who plot mischief against Macbeth using charms, spells, and prophecies. Their predictions prompt him to murder Duncan, to order the deaths of Banquo and his son, and to blindly believe in his own immortality.

**Banquo** - The brave, noble general whose children, according to the witches' prophecy, will inherit the Scottish throne. Like Macbeth, Banquo thinks ambitious thoughts, but he does not translate those thoughts into action.

**King Duncan** - The good King of Scotland whom Macbeth, in his ambition for the crown, murders. Duncan is the model of a virtuous, benevolent, and farsighted ruler.

**Macduff** - A Scottish nobleman hostile to Macbeth's kingship from the start. He eventually becomes a leader of the crusade to unseat Macbeth. The crusade's mission is to place the rightful king, Malcolm, on the throne, but Macduff also desires vengeance for Macbeth's murder of Macduff's wife and young son.

**Hecate** - The goddess of witchcraft, who helps the three witches work their mischief on Macbeth.

**Fleance** - Banquo's son, who survives Macbeth's attempt to murder him. At the end of the play, Fleance's whereabouts are unknown. Presumably, he may come to rule Scotland, fulfilling the witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons will sit on the Scottish throne.

**Lennox & Russ** - A Scottish noblemen.

**The Murderers** - A group of ruffians conscripted by Macbeth to murder Banquo, Fleance (whom they fail to kill), and Macduff's wife and children.

**Porter** - The drunken doorman of Macbeth's castle.

**Lady Macduff** - Macduff's wife. The scene in her castle provides our only glimpse of a domestic realm other than that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. She and her home serve as contrasts to Lady Macbeth and the hellish world of Inverness.

**Donalbain** - Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.

### Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene v (Lady Macbeth, lines 1-29)

Start: "They met me in the day of success..."

End: "To have thee crowned withal."

Act I, scene vii (Macbeth, lines 1-28)

Start: "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well..."

End: "How now? What news?"

Act II, scene i (Macbeth, lines 128-170)

Start: "Her father loved me; oft invited me..."

End: "Here comes the lady. Let her witness it."

# Othello

In the opening scene, Iago complains to Roderigo that Othello, his Commander, has passed him over to promote the handsome young Cassio to be his Lieutenant. He vows to get revenge. Iago first asks Roderigo to tell Desdemona's father, Brabantio, that his daughter has left to marry Othello, a marriage Brabantio opposes because Othello is a Moor. Brabantio confronts Othello, and they take their argument to the Duke, who has summoned Othello to ask him to sail to Cyprus to stop a Turkish invasion. Convinced by Othello and Desdemona that they love each other deeply despite their differences, the Duke gives Desdemona permission to travel with Othello. By the time they reach Cyprus the foreign threat has gone.

Iago manipulates Cassio to make him drunk and gets Roderigo to draw him into a street fight. Iago has his revenge on Cassio when Othello strips Cassio of his rank for misbehavior. Then Iago decides to make Othello believe his wife is unfaithful. He encourages Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello to be reinstated. Iago suggests to Othello that Desdemona is Cassio's lover. Trusting Iago, and mad with jealousy, Othello promotes Iago and asks Iago to help him kill Cassio and Desdemona.

Iago plants Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's room. Cassio gives it to his mistress, Bianca. Othello believes Bianca's possession of the handkerchief is proof that Desdemona and Cassio are lovers. He verbally abuses his wife in front of others, who are shocked at the change in the noble and powerful man.

Iago has manipulated Roderigo into trying to kill Cassio. The attempt goes wrong, and Cassio wounds Roderigo; Iago stabs Cassio in the leg. Othello hears Cassio cry out and thinks Iago has killed him. He returns home, ready to kill Desdemona. Meanwhile, Iago "finds" the wounded Cassio and accuses Bianca of causing Cassio's injury. Iago quietly kills Roderigo and sends Emilia (Iago's wife) to Desdemona with news of what has happened.



Othello reaches the sleeping Desdemona first. He kisses her, wakes her, and accuses her again. Over her protests that she loves him and is innocent, he smothers her. Emilia enters and Desdemona revives for a moment, declaring herself guiltless but saying, as she dies, that Othello is innocent of her death. Iago and others enter, and Emilia defends Desdemona's innocence, recognizing that Iago is behind the tragedy. Othello sees the truth and tries to kill Iago. Iago kills Emilia and flees; Othello condemns himself and commits suicide. Iago is seized and taken away.

## Characters

**Othello** - The play's protagonist and hero. A Christian Moor and general of the armies of Venice, Othello is an eloquent and physically powerful figure, respected by all those around him.

**Desdemona** - The daughter of the Venetian senator Brabantio. Desdemona and Othello are secretly married before the play begins. While in many ways stereo typically pure and meek, Desdemona is also determined and self-possessed.

**Iago** - Othello's ensign (a job also known as an ancient or standard-bearer), and the villain of the play. While his apparent reason for desiring Othello's demise is that he has been passed over for promotion to lieutenant, Iago's motivations are never very clearly expressed and seem to originate in an obsessive, almost aesthetic delight in manipulation and destruction.

**Michael Cassio** - Othello's lieutenant. Cassio is a young and inexperienced soldier, whose high position is much resented by Iago. Truly devoted to Othello, Cassio is extremely ashamed after being implicated in a drunken brawl on Cyprus and losing his place as lieutenant.

**Emilia** - Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant. A cynical, worldly woman, she is deeply attached to her mistress and distrustful of her husband.

**Roderigo** - A jealous suitor of Desdemona. Young, rich, and foolish, Roderigo is convinced that if he gives Iago all of his money, Iago will help him win Desdemona's hand.

**Bianca** - A courtesan in Cyprus. Bianca's favorite customer is Cassio, who teases her with promises of marriage.

**Brabantio** - Desdemona's father, a somewhat blustering and self-important Venetian senator.

**Duke of Venice** - The official authority in Venice, the duke has great respect for Othello as a public and military servant.

**Montano** - The governor of Cyprus before Othello.

**Lodovico** - One of Brabantio's kinsmen, Lodovico acts as a messenger from Venice to Cyprus. He arrives in Cyprus in Act IV with letters announcing that Othello has been replaced by Cassio

**Graziano** - Brabantio's kinsman who accompanies Lodovico to Cyprus.

**Clown** - Othello's servant. Although the clown appears only in two short scenes, his appearances reflect and distort the action and words of the main plots: his puns on the word "lie" in Act III, scene iv, for example, anticipate Othello's confusion of two meanings of that word in Act IV, scene i.

## Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene iii (Othello, lines 128-170)

Start: "Her father loved me; oft invited me..."

End: "Here comes the lady. Let her witness it."

Act II, scene i (Iago, lines 220-246)

Start: "Lay thy finger thus..."

End: "...And the woman hath found him already."

# Romeo and Juliet

On a hot morning fighting by young servants of the Capulet and Montague families is stopped by the Prince who tells them that the next person who breaks the peace will be punished with death.

Capulet plans a feast to introduce his daughter, Juliet, who is almost fourteen, to the Count Paris who would like to marry her. By a mistake of the illiterate servant Peter, Montague's son, Romeo, and his friends Benvolio and the Prince's cousin Mercutio, hear of the party and decide to go in disguise. Romeo hopes he will see his adored Rosaline but instead he meets and falls in love with Juliet.

Juliet's cousin Tybalt recognizes the Montagues and they are forced to leave the party just as Romeo and Juliet have each discovered the other's identity. Romeo lingers near the Capulet's house and talks to Juliet when she appears on her balcony. With the help of Juliet's Nurse the lovers arrange to meet next day at the cell of Friar Lawrence when Juliet goes for confession, and they are married by him.

Tybalt picks a quarrel with Mercutio and his friends and Mercutio is accidentally killed as Romeo intervenes to try to break up the fight. Romeo pursues Tybalt in anger, kills him and is banished by the Prince for the deed. Juliet is anxious that Romeo is late meeting her and learns of the fighting from her Nurse. With Friar Lawrence's help it is arranged that Romeo will spend the night with Juliet before taking refuge at Mantua.

To calm the family's sorrow at Tybalt's death the day for the marriage of Juliet to Paris is brought forward. Capulet and his wife are angry that Juliet does not wish to marry Paris, not knowing of her secret contract with Romeo.

Friar Lawrence helps Juliet by providing a sleeping potion that will make everyone think she's dead. Romeo will then come to her tomb and take her away. When the wedding party arrives to greet Juliet next day they think she is dead. The Friar sends a colleague to warn Romeo to come to the Capulet's family monument to rescue his sleeping wife but the message doesn't get through and Romeo, hearing instead that Juliet is dead, buys poison in Mantua.

Romeo returns to Verona and goes to the tomb where he surprises and kills the mourning Paris. Romeo takes the poison and dies just as Juliet awakes from her drugged sleep. She learns what has happened from Friar Lawrence but she refuses to leave the tomb and stabs herself as the Friar returns with the Prince, the Capulets and Romeo's father. The deaths of their children lead the families to make peace, promising to erect a monument in their memory.

## Characters

**Romeo** - The son and heir of Montague and Lady Montague. A young man of about sixteen, Romeo is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive. Though impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character.

**Juliet** - The daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. A beautiful thirteen-year-old girl, Juliet begins the play as a naive child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly upon falling in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy.

**Friar Lawrence** - A Franciscan friar, friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Kind, civic-minded, a proponent of moderation, and always ready with a plan, Friar Lawrence secretly marries the impassioned lovers in hopes that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona.

**Mercutio** - A kinsman to the Prince, and Romeo's close friend. One of the most extraordinary characters in all of Shakespeare's plays, Mercutio overflows with imagination, wit, and, at times, a strange, biting satire and brooding fervor.

**The Nurse** - Juliet's nurse, the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the Nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. But, until a disagreement near the play's end, the Nurse is Juliet's faithful confidante and loyal intermediary in Juliet's affair with Romeo.

**Tybalt** - A Capulet, Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. Vain, fashionable, supremely aware of courtesy and the lack of it, he becomes aggressive, violent, and quick to draw his sword when he feels his pride has been injured.

**Capulet** - The patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet, and enemy, for unexplained reasons, of Montague. Often prudent, he commands respect and propriety, but he is liable to fly into a rage when either is lacking.

**Lady Capulet** - Juliet's mother, Capulet's wife. She is an ineffectual mother, relying on the Nurse for moral and pragmatic support.

**Montague** - Romeo's father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet.

**Lady Montague** - Romeo's mother, Montague's wife. She dies of grief after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

**Paris** - A kinsman of the Prince, and the suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet.

**Benvolio** - Montague's nephew, Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend, he makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public places, though Mercutio accuses him of having a nasty temper in private.

**Prince Escalus** - The Prince of Verona. A kinsman of Mercutio and Paris. As the seat of political power in Verona, he is concerned about maintaining the public peace at all costs.

**Friar John** - A Franciscan friar charged by Friar Lawrence with taking the news of Juliet's false death to Romeo in Mantua. Friar John is held up in a quarantined house, and the message never reaches Romeo.

**Balthasar** - Romeo's dedicated servant, who brings Romeo the news of Juliet's death, unaware that her death is a ruse.

**Sampson & Gregory** - Two servants of the house of Capulet, who, like their master, hate the Montagues. At the outset of the play, they successfully provoke some Montague men into a fight.

**Abram** - Montague's servant, who fights with Sampson and Gregory in the first scene of the play.

**The Apothecary** - An apothecary in Mantua. Had he been wealthier, he might have been able to afford to value his morals more than money, and refused to sell poison to Romeo.

**Peter** - A Capulet servant who invites guests to Capulet's feast and escorts the Nurse to meet with Romeo. He is illiterate, and a bad singer.

**Rosaline** - The woman with whom Romeo is infatuated at the beginning of the play. Rosaline never appears onstage, but it is said by other characters that she is very beautiful and has sworn to live a life of chastity.

**The Chorus** - The Chorus is a single character who, as developed in Greek drama, functions as a narrator offering commentary on the play's plot and themes.

## Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene iii (Nurse, lines 16-48)

Start: "Even or odd, pf all days in the year..."

End: "And, pretty fool, it stinted and said "Ay."

Act I, scene iv (Mercutio, lines 53-95)

Start: "O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you..."

End: "This is she- Thou talk'st of nothing." **M**

Act II, scene ii (Romeo, lines 2-25)

Start: "But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?"

End: "That I might touch that cheek!" **LD**

Act II, scene ii (Juliet, lines 1-35)

Start: "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds..."

End: "That Romeo bid thee fetch?"

Act III, scene ii (Juliet, lines 97-127)

Start: "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?"

End: "Where is my father and my mother, nurse?" **LD**

Act III, scene iii (Friar, lines 108-145)

Start: "Hold thy desperate hand..."

End: "Take heed, take heed, for such die miserable."

Act IV, scene iii (Juliet, lines 14-58)

Start: "Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again."

End: "Romeo, Romeo! Here's drink. I drink to thee." **M**

Act V, scene iii (Romeo, lines 74- 119)

Start: "In faith, I will. Let me peruse this face..."

End: Here's to my love! [drinks.] **M**

# Timon of Athens

Timon, a kindly, friendly and generous Athenian nobleman, has many friends because of his generosity. He loves to spend money and holds frequent parties. A day comes, however, when he falls into debt and his many creditors put pressure on him to pay them what he owes. His steward, Flavius, tells him that he's completely out of money. Timon sends servants to his friends to ask whether they can lend him the money he needs but they are met with excuses. Timon is disappointed and angered. He invites all his friends to a final feast, where he presents them with only warm water. He makes a speech denouncing them, and also harangues them with a bitter tirade against mankind generally.

Elsewhere, an Athenian army general, Alcibiades, is trying to get the senators to change their minds about the death sentence they have imposed on one of his men. They don't like his persistence and he is banished. He decides to turn against them and to influence the army to join him. He hears about Timon, who has gone to live in isolation in a cave away from Athens.

Timon has, in the meantime, found a stash of gold as he was digging for roots to eat. When Alcibiades arrives Timon offers him gold if he will march on Athens. Alcibiades agrees and uses some of the gold to bribe the army. He then marches on Athens. A band of pirates visit Timon and he offers them gold to put pressure on Athens with pirate attacks. Timon sends his faithful steward away and is left completely on his own.

Alcibiades enters Athens and meets with little resistance. The Senate sends to Timon to intervene on their behalf but he refuses. He offers them the tree at the mouth of his cave, on which he tells them they can all hang themselves.

The senators then hand Alcibiades' enemies over to him, as well as Timon's former companions. Alcibiades then agrees to withdraw and promises peace in Athens. This is a victory for Timon but just at that point a soldier enters and informs them that Timon has died, all alone, in his cave.

## Characters

**Timon** - Timon of Athens is the title character in Shakespeare's Timon of Athens. Beginning the play as a wealthy man, Timon enjoys giving gifts to his friends and sharing his wealth. He believes that friendship means giving to his friends, without expecting something in return.

**Apemantus** - Apemantus is not one of Timon's friends, but he attends Timon's feasts anyway, looking for an opportunity to scorn Athenian citizens.

**Alcibiades** - Alcibiades is an acquaintance of Timon, apparently a soldier. When one of his friends is sentenced to death by the Senators, Alcibiades protests and is banished. He promises to raise an army and conquer Athens.

**Flavius** - One of Timon's servants, Flavius is terrified to talk to Timon about his finances because Timon refuses to listen to him.

**Lucullus, Lucius, Sempronius, Ventidius,** - One of Timon's friends, Lucullus accepts Timon's gifts but refuses to give him a loan when he runs out of cash.

**Lucillus, Flaminius, Servilius, Servant,** - Timon's servants sent to ask for loan.

**Caphis, Varro's servant, Isidore's servant** - A servant of a creditor, one of Timon's friends who loaned Timon money, sent to Timon's house to demand the payment of a loan.

**Poet** - One of Timon's hangers-on, the Poet composes verses for pay when Timon is wealthy.

**Painter** - One of Timon's hangers-on, the Painter paints Timon's likeness for pay when Timon is wealthy. Timon thinks he's a money-grubbing flatterer.

**Jeweler** - One of Timon's hangers-on, the Jeweler provides the ostentatious jewelry that Timon gives as gifts to his friends.

**Fool** - The Fool appears with Apemantus outside Timon's house while servants of creditors wait for their payments. . As is often the case in Shakespeare, the Fool appears to be unconsciously wiser than most other characters.

**Bandits** - Timon encounters these thieves in the wilderness, and he offers them gold to cause destruction and mayhem in Athens.

**Senators** - Members of the Athenian Senate, the Senators judge Alcibiades's friend, and later seek to bring Timon back to Athens.

**Lords** - Among Timon's many friends who attend his feasts and accept his gifts.



## Suggested Scenes

Act IV, scene i (Timon, lines 1-30)

Start: "O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth..."

End: "Base noble, old young, coward valiant."

# Titus Andronicus

Saturninus and Bassianus are in contention for the title of emperor, but dismiss their followers on the arrival of Titus, returning victorious with his sons from war with the Goths. His prisoner Tamora pleads for the life of one of her sons, Alarbus, but Titus has him killed. Titus is offered the emperorship on behalf of the people by his brother Marcus, but he confers the title on Saturninus, who then asks for Titus' daughter Lavinia to be his wife. Already betrothed to Bassianus, Titus' sons stop Saturninus taking her. Titus calls them traitors, and kills his son Mutius in the struggle.

Saturninus then claims Tamora as his bride, and she vows revenge on Titus. Aaron persuades her sons Chiron and Demetrius to ravish Lavinia. Bassianus and Lavinia discover Tamora with her Moorish lover Aaron, but before Bassianus can tell Saturninus, he is killed by Chiron and Demetrius, and his body thrown in a pit. They then rape Lavinia, removing her tongue and hands so that she cannot tell anyone what has happened to her.

Aaron leads Titus' sons Martius and Quintus to the pit where Bassianus' body lies, and traps them there. They are accused of the murder, and sentenced to death. Aaron persuades Titus that if someone removes their hand and sends it to Saturninus it will save his sons' lives, but after Titus sends his own hand it is immediately returned along with the heads of his two sons. Lucius vows revenge, and leaves to raise an army from among the Goths.

Titus, apparently beginning to go mad, argues with Marcus for killing a fly. With the help of Young Lucius and Marcus, Lavinia informs them who attacked her. Planning revenge, Titus sends weapons to Tamora's sons, fires arrows with letters attached to them at Saturninus' court, then sends a Clown to Saturninus with a knife wrapped up in a letter.

Aaron is given his newborn baby by Tamora. Tamora wants the Moorish-looking child killed, to avoid Saturninus finding out about their affair. Aaron takes the baby away, replacing it with a white baby. The Goths capture Aaron and the baby, and Lucius (now their leader) threatens the child with death. Aaron agrees to tell Lucius the truth about events, if he spares the baby's life.

Tamora, Demetrius and Chiron disguise themselves as Revenge, Murder, and Rape, respectively, to trick Titus, whom they believe to be mad, into sending for Lucius. They think they have succeeded in fooling him, but, when Tamora leaves, Titus kills Chiron and Demetrius with Lavinia's help. He then invites Saturninus and Tamora to a parley with Lucius at a dinner, having cooked Chiron and Demetrius in a pie. He kills Lavinia, then reveals to Tamora that she has been eating her own sons, and stabs her. Saturninus kills Titus, and is then killed by Lucius.

Marcus and Lucius relate to the people what has happened, and Lucius is proclaimed emperor. An unrepentant Aaron is sentenced to death, the Andronici are given proper burial, and Tamora's body is thrown to the animals.

## Characters

**Titus Andronicus** - General of Rome and tragic hero of the play. Father of Lavinia and Lucius. He is first held up as a model of piety for his staunch reverence for traditions, but it is this strict adherence to tradition that causes his enemies to take revenge against him. A Senecan hero, he pursues revenge to the end, and dies in the process.

**Tamora** - Queen of the Goths, mother of Chiron and Demetrius. Even though she is opposite in everything to the archetypal victim Lavinia, feminist theorists like to cast her in the position of a victim of a male law of order.

**Aaron** - Tamora's Moorish lover. As he himself admits, there is not a crime in Titus in which he has not had a hand.

**Lavinia** - The only daughter of Titus Andronicus, she spurns Saturninus's offer to make her his empress because she is in love with Bassianus. Deprived of every means of communication, and robbed of her most precious chastity, she comes across as one of Shakespeare's most incapacitated heroines.

**Marcus Andronicus** - Roman Tribune of the People. Brother of Titus Andronicus. Unlike the other Andronici, he never participates in the war.

**Saturninus** - The eldest son of the late Emperor of Rome. Titus successfully advocates for him to be the new emperor. However, Saturninus shows no gratitude.

**Bassianus** - The younger brother of Saturninus. It is to him that Lavinia is betrothed.

**Lucius** - Titus's only surviving son. He defends his sister, Lavinia, from their father after she runs away with Bassianus.

**Chiron and Demetrius** - Two Goth princes. Sons of Tamora. They squabble over who loves Lavinia more, when really they are merely guided by lust.

## Suggested Scenes

Act I, scene i (Titus, lines 73-98)

Start: "Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!"

End: "Thou wilt never render to me more!"