



STUDENT INFORMATION PACKET

The Pittsburgh Public Theater is thrilled to invite you to participate in the Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest, presented by Highmark Pittsburgh, which will be held virtually in February 2021. We have a number of very exciting online and virtual innovations that will allow the Shakespeare Contest to provide opportunities for student performance, professional adjudication, and workshop instruction in theater arts.

This packet will help students get started with diving into Shakespeare's work and bring it to life through acting and performance

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.



GETTING STARTED: 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, alliteration.

What are the judges looking for?

The judges' rubric includes prompts such as:

- 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?
- Did the scene/monologue 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 and understanding of what YOU are trying to accomplish in a scene or monologue.

How do I memorize all of this?

- **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 loose 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 bench A because that's what you wrote next to a line. You are walking over to sit down on bench A with purpose. *Make sure all blocking is purposefully.*
- **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 characters 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 VAULNERABLE:** Acting is conveying human emotion. Let yourself understand what you are saying and try to connect to it. Put yourself in your characters shoes. Try to open yourself up and let the character take you on a journey.



- **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?)
- **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 an 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 PARTNERS 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.

MOST IMPORTANTLY.... **HAVE FUN!!!**

