

A How-to Guide for Primary School Teachers

Getting Started with the Carnival

Welcome to the Shakespeare Carnival. I hope the following outline, and the downloads it refers to, help you with your work with your students.

We feel the key to introducing students to the Primary Shakespeare Carnival is to take it one small step at a time and build the skills to tackle increasingly challenging tasks.

We are get into some sophisticated detail below and it may be too much for some students – I'm not asking you to push them beyond what their ready for. I just want the students the take the next step they can when they can. I *REALLY* don't want them to lose the joy of a fun event. And I don't want you to lose the fun either – we should all be having a good time learning through the performing arts!

Here's some ways I'd try to start for all the different category options – with some work most useful for the *Duologue* and *Ensemble Scene* categories:

[For Dance and Group Devised categories, keep reading.]

If you have any questions, please get in touch and I'll do what I can to help.

All the best

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ALL CATEGORY STARTING POINTS & DUOLOGUE & ENSEMBLE SCENE CATEGORIES

Step 1: Choose the play or plays

*What stories of characters will your students have the most fun with?

If you're not sure try reading a few synopsis of the stories – they're easily found online.

*Read a play a couple of times to become really familiar with it – watching a filmed version is also sometimes helpful [but remember not to be 'fenced in' by the choices they make].

Step 2: Statue Stories

*Tell your students the story of the play/s. Or rather tell it together using the 'statue story' exercise [see links below].

*Narrate through the plot - you can be as playful and comic as you are comfortable with, even with the tragedies, as this helps bring the stories alive and foster a playful, creative environment.

*In the plot outline focus on the key relationships and the moments that they change – you don't need to cover everything in detail.

*Select a few key quotes that illuminate those moments of change, print them on large pieces of paper or have them on a tablet screen [or project them on a smart screen – you know what's best for you], and hold them up so that everyone can speak the words.

Sometimes it's good to start with call and response [where you say the line and they repeat it] to help the students become more comfortable, then gradually get them to do it on their own and encourage them to 'relish' the words and sounds and play with them for emphasis and emotional importance.

*You can also encourage everyone to take a statue pose of the character – a king, a witch, a brave young woman, a silly fat old man – while they speak the line.

*Explore the story so that everyone has an understanding of how it goes.

You can get a more extensive description by downloading our sheets “Statue Stories Explained” and “Knife and Fork Explained” may also assist as it gets people used to making images and characters with their bodies.

Step 3: Character

* Choose a couple of the main characters and ask the students what might they be like as people, how might they walk, how they might sound when they talk. Get the students to walk around the room in character saying some of the character’s lines from the Statue Story. [Here’s fun chance to use the exercise “Exploding Telephone” which you can download from our website.]

Step 4: Phrases

* As they are more comfortable with speaking and embodying you can get the students into pairs or trios and give them lines that characters say in response to each other.

eg

OSBERON

Am not I thy lord?

TITANIA

Then I must be thy lady!

or

HELENA

Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray,
My legs are longer though, to run away.

Exit

HERMIA

I am amazed, and know not what to say.

or

PYRAMUS

O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!

THISBE

I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

Step 5: Small Gobbet Scenes

* Now they are starting to get comfortable with interacting with bits of text, you can increase the number of lines that they have to play with. Start by using small bits of the scene you’d like them to explore – some scenes are available for download on our website, but you are very welcome to choose your own and edit them how you see fit.

Step 6: A Fistful of Shakespeare - Meaning

*Ask the students to work out what the words mean – they can use dictionaries, google etc for specific words and they can find resources on line that offer plain English versions.

* Encourage them to write out and/or speak the lines in their own words as well as Shakespeare's.

Step 7: A Fistful of Shakespeare – Rhythm

*Shakespeare wrote mostly in poetry. That means his words have an underlying rhythm.

This can help you know which words to emphasise.

*The main poetic rhythm he used is called 'Iambic Pentameter' – this just means there are usually 10 syllables in a line and the emphasis falls on the even numbered syllables.

e.g.

But **soft**, what **light** through **yonder window breaks**

It is the **east** and **Juliet is the sun**

or

The **quality of mercy is not strained**

It **droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven**

Notice that in both these examples the words "Juliet" and "heaven" are 'elided' – that means that the vowels are blurred into each other to reduce the number of syllables in the word.

So 3 syllable "Ju-lee-et" becomes 2 syllables as "Jul-yet" and 2 syllable "he-van" becomes one syllable "he'v'n".

All of this rhythm information can seem technical and academic – so use it as you wish, but it can be helpful for finding where Shakespeare intended the emphasis to fall.

*The other poetic rhythm he used frequently is 'Trochaic Tetrameter' where a line has 8 syllables and the emphasis falls on the odd numbered syllables. This is used mostly for magic – like the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the witches in *Macbeth*.

e.g.

Double, double, toil and trouble

Fire burn and cauldron bubble

Exercise - Galloping Out the Rhythm: To explore these rhythms get your students to speak the words while 'galloping' around the room or playground. They use a small step for the *unemphasised* syllables and a longer step for the *emphasised* ones.

Importantly, once you have explored this, you can often let it go and just see what the exploration has released in the performers.

Step 8: A Fistful of Shakespeare – End Words

One of the common mistakes that people make when speaking Shakespeare's words is to 'drop off the end of the line'. This means that they often start their words with a strong voice, but that the energy of their voice falls away as they reach the end of the line. The solution is to 'drive to the end words' on every line – and if there is a full stop, question mark or other major punctuation point in the middle of the line to drive towards that as well. This means you say it just as strongly [or maybe even slightly stronger] that the first words of the line.

Exercise – Throwing the End Word: With this exercise you speak the words and, as you say the final word of a verse line or a thought, [e.g. Where a sentence ends.] you mime throwing a ball to your acting partners. This physical action encourages more breath support and therefore volume and vocal energy.

Step 9: A Fistful of Shakespeare – Repetition

One way to help students explore the poetic qualities of the language is to look for repetition of ideas, of words and of sounds –e.g. alliteration and assonance.

e.g.

Repetition of ideas:

“Oh that this too, **too solid** flesh would **melt**,
thaw and **resolve itself into a dew.**”

Repetition of words:

“If it were **done** when tis **done**, then it were well
It were **done** quickly...”

Repetition of sounds:

“...If the **assassination**
Could trammel up the consequence and catch
With his **surcease success.**”

These repetitions are opportunities for the actor to have fun in exaggerating these repetitions with the way they say them or physical gestures that they use as they are said.

For an exercise that helps explore the expressive use of language download “Shakespeare’s Insults Explained”.

Step 10: A Fistful of Shakespeare – How Are They Changed?

Think about how the character is changed by what happens to them? If they are happy at the end of the scene, can you find a way to have them be very sad at the start? Or vice versa? Can you find a way to give the character a wide journey across the scene so that the audience gets to see them changed by what they experience?

Step 11: A Fistful of Shakespeare – Connect Thought to Movement

This is a way to become really sophisticated with your performance. Most kids will have an instinctive version of this [as with the rest of the work] but your ‘outside eye’ can really help them bring clarity to their character’s intentions as they act and thus make the story clearer and more powerful.

My basic starting points are:

*don’t have characters spread evenly, in a straight line across the stage. If you are doing an Ensemble Scene, keep them in varied numbered ‘clumps’ where they can relate to one another [i.e a hand on a shoulder or standing behind someone’s shoulder and looking over it, someone on a chair while someone stands and someone else kneels next to them on the floor]. This will help them create visual variety, which will keep a scene interesting and help tell the story of how the characters all feel about each other.

*keep a reasonable distance between the characters if you can [i.e. Don’t let them stand right next to each other all the time].

*are the characters wanting to be moving towards or away from the other character as they speak?

* are the characters wanting to be moving in a straight line [direct] or a curved line [indirect]?

*when they are not speaking, what reaction can they be giving to show that they are still 'alive to the moment', still affected by what is going on around them.

FOR THE GROUP DEVISED/MASH UP CATEGORY

Start as above with a story that evolves into a script

This category is the most open and unstructured, and some students find that a challenge, but others will naturally play with the scripts you give them develop their own Group Devised/Mash-Up quite by instinct. So perhaps the best advice is start with a duologue or ensemble scene and let the students develop their own GD/MU if that's what happens naturally.

Then the basic advice is follow the above steps and see what evolves – especially around **Step Six**, where you may ask them to try putting the scene into their own words.

However, if you wish to encourage the sort of creativity that a GD/MU requires you can try some of these approaches:

*Encourage the students to improvise and then write out a [or just write it as a creative writing exercise, if that's more comfortable for them] new version of the scene inspired by: its **theme** – where else in life might someone betray someone, or be lost on an island etc? a **character** – if you were a witch what else would you do on your weekends/at the footy/to make soup?

a **group of characters** [from one or many of the plays] - if Macbeth met the wizard Prospero and a smart young girl called Juliet, what might happen to them?

A '**genre adaptation**' – taking a style they are familiar with and populating it with characters from the show, and finding clever ways for them to work Shakespeare's lines into the piece in a new context. E.g. you could use game shows, documentary, murder mystery, turn drama into comedy [or vice-versa], news report, musical, sports commentary, hip-hop...literally anything they are excited by.

After they have created their piece or developed their idea sufficiently, you can return to Step 7 above and continue working through the how-to guide in whatever way seems best to you.

FOR THE DANCE CATEGORY:

I think a story and some script is still the best starting point for this category, but when you reach **Stage 6** after working with them to write their own version of the scene's language, ask them to make images for the beginning, middle and end [or each major moment] of the scene.

Here it would be very useful to use [or return to] the exercise 'Knife and Fork', which is about creating dynamic and varied storytelling images with the body. [see the download "Knife and Fork Explained"]

You can then ask them what music would be fun to work with/best to work with for the dance and let them explore movement and storytelling to that music. That may well be enough for them to create their own piece, in which case you can jump back into the process above at **Step 10** and go on to **Step 11**. [Also, if the students want to use some words in their dance, they are welcome and some of the work from **Steps 7** onwards.

Trouble Shooting For Dance

If your dancers have trouble with putting together a piece, or get stuck midway through the process you can return to their initial three images from the scene's beginning, middle and end, ask them:

- *What happens before the beginning?
- *What happens between the beginning and the middle?
- *What happens between the middle and the end?
- *What happens after the end?

You can keep 'drilling down' so that the beginning has its own 'beginning, middle, end' and the 'beginning of the beginning' has its own 'beginning, middle, end', and the 'middle of the beginning' has its own 'beginning, middle, end' etc until you have a series of frozen tableaux/images that you can then ask them to find linking moves between.

It is often helpful to give the dancers a chair or table or rope or similar object they can use to relate with each other through and use in expressive and imaginative ways. Ask them how many different ways can they use the object? A chair can be a chair or a ladder or an umbrella or a horse or a hat - it's all possible in the imagination.

I hope this has helped.

Do let me know what works for you.