



HOUSTON  
SHAKESPEARE  
FESTIVAL

ONE ROLE, TWO ACTORS: Hamlet Act III, sc. 4

## Bringing Words To Life

Curriculum Authors: Laura B. Turchi, Abbey Bachmann, and Cori Stevenson

Approximate timeline: 50 minutes – see sequence

### TEKS (9th Grade) :

(4) Comprehension skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts. The student uses metacognitive skills to comprehend text with increasing depth and complexity. The student is expected to: (A) establish purpose for reading assigned and self-selected texts; (B) generate questions about text before, during, and after reading to deepen understanding and gain information; (C) make, correct, or confirm predictions using text features, characteristics of genre, and structures; (D) create mental images to deepen understanding; (E) make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and the larger community; (F) make inferences and use evidence to support understanding; (G) evaluate information read to determine what is most important; (H) synthesize information to create new understanding; and (I) monitor comprehension and make adjustments when understanding breaks down.

(5) Response skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts. The student responds to an increasingly challenging variety of sources that are read, heard, or viewed. The student is expected to: (A) describe the personal and emotional connections to a variety of sources, including self-selected texts; (B) write a response with accurate and relevant text evidence and commentary to compare texts within and across genres; (C) use text evidence to support an appropriate response; (D) paraphrase and summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order; (E) interact with sources in meaningful ways such as notetaking, annotating, freewriting, or illustrating; (F) respond using acquired content and academic vocabulary as appropriate; (G) discuss and write about the explicit or implicit meanings of text; (H) respond orally or in writing with appropriate register, vocabulary, tone, and voice; (I) reflect on and adjust responses as new evidence is presented; and (J) defend or challenge authors' claims using relevant text evidence.

(6) Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to: (A) analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot in a variety of literary texts; (B) analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils. (C) analyze non-linear plot development such as flashbacks, foreshadowing, subplots, and parallel plot structures and compare it to linear plot development; and (D) analyze how the setting influences the theme.

(7) Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts--genres. The student recognizes and analyzes genre-specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate knowledge of American, British, and world literature across literary periods; (B) analyze the effects of metrics; rhyme schemes such as end, internal, slant, and eye; and other conventions in poetry; (C) identify and explain the function of archetypes and motifs; (D) analyze characteristics and structural elements of informational texts such as: (i) clear thesis, relevant supporting evidence, pertinent examples, and conclusion; and (ii) the relationship between organizational design and thesis; and (E) analyze characteristics and structural elements of argumentative texts such as: (i) clear arguable claim, appeals, and convincing conclusion; (ii) counter arguments, types of evidence, concessions, and call to action; and (iii) identifiable audience or reader

(8) Author's craft: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts. The student uses critical inquiry to analyze the authors' choices and how they influence and communicate meaning within a variety of texts. The student analyzes and applies author's craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances. The student is expected to: (A) identify and analyze the use of allusions and motif; (B) identify and analyze how the author's diction and syntax contribute to the mood, voice, and tone of a text; and (C) identify and analyze the use of rhetorical devices, including appeals, understatement, overstatement, parallelism, and shifts.

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### **Overview** (notes for the teacher)

#### ***Thinking about the role of props and eye contact.***

One goal for this lesson (in addition to diving deeper into Shakespeare’s text) is to think about the choices that actors make when performing and reading Shakespeare’s words. The words on the page can be brought to life by the emphasis actors place on words, eye contact by a performer, or the use of a prop on stage. These approaches are especially important for adolescents tackling a text such as Shakespeare.

#### ***What is this scene about?***

In this scene, Hamlet responds after Gertrude confronts him about his recent behavior. Hamlet reveals how appalled he is at Gertrude’s actions and decisions to marry Claudius after the death of his father. After his outburst, Hamlet kills the innocent Polonius who was merely hiding behind a curtain. The ghost of Hamlet’s father appears again, only to him, causing Gertrude to show even more concern for the state of her son.

#### ***If you’re teaching the whole play***

This scene gives us a look at the struggle Hamlet has repeatedly throughout the course of the play. He feels strongly about avenging the death of his father but cannot decide on the best course of action to take to accomplish this. Often, he finds himself making decisions that aren’t well thought out than have unintended consequences, as in this case when Hamlet kills Polonius after giving this speech. Students can use this scene to discuss Hamlet as a character: is he mad or is he just making bad decisions because he doesn’t know what path to go down? Ultimately this scene is an example of what leads to his downfall by the end of the play.

#### ***If you’re teaching just this excerpt***

This excerpt does a great job of giving students a peak into archetypes and Hamlet’s “tragic flaw”. Provide students with a brief background of Hamlet’s situation and what he is aiming to accomplish throughout the play. Explain basic characters, Gertrude, Claudius and Polonius before leading students into this scene. Students can still analyze the actor’s portrayals of Hamlet via the video, given the background. This can also lead to a discussion around Hamlet’s indecisive nature and an example of his decision making that isn’t well thought out.

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### **Key Vocabulary:**

Jove (Line 57) - also known as Jupiter. Ancient Roman God of the sky and king of the Gods

Mars (Line 58) - ancient Roman God of War

Mildewed ear (Line 65) - meant as an insult to Claudius after comparing Hamlet's father to a Roman God

Moor (Line 68) - a person with dark skin; Hamlet means this term as an insult in that Claudius has a lower status than his father

Heyday (Line 70) - Hamlet is referring to his mother's desires

Cozened (Line 78) - trick or deceive

Because this lesson is based on dramatic performance, this is a great opportunity to start a conversation – or even a collaboration – with a drama teacher. And here's a music connection: theater people call this speech an aria because, like in an opera or oratorio in classical music, it is a formal expressive piece for one performer. The Metropolitan Opera explains that, "arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting on their emotions.<sup>1</sup>" This video enables students to hear two actors talk about how they understand the speech, and to see how each performs it as a result.

1<https://www.metopera.org/discover/education/educator-guides-content/agrippina/10-essential-musical-terms/>

### **Materials needed for this lesson**

Script for Act III, Scene 4 Hamlet Speech – 1 per student

2 Actors, 1 Role Video – Hamlet [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdWBbuu\\_UVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdWBbuu_UVI)

### **Objectives:**

Students will gain a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's text by centering word choice and the decisions actors make when performing Shakespeare's language.

Students will analyze the importance and role of facial expressions, eye contact, and prop usage in oral reading and conveying messages. are aphorisms supposed to help us make decisions?

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### **Lesson Sequence**

**Lesson Activities:** Approximately 45 minutes

### **Warm-Up/Activate Prior Knowledge** (5-10 Minutes)

If students are reading the play in its entirety, use the warm-up time to review the last scene of the play that students read.

**Suggestion:** Cloze summaries of the previous scene are always a great idea to get students engaged in the review process without taking up too much time in class. Provide students a fill in the blank summary, and fill out or review the answers as a class to ensure everyone is on the same page before diving into this scene.

If students are not reading the entire play, use the warm-up time to set the stage for the reading of the aria.

**Suggestion:** Since the aria for this particular video resource isn't at the beginning of Act III, scene 4, the warm-up time could be spent reading the beginning of the scene up to the aria. This would allow students to have a little background on the relationship between Hamlet and his mother. It's important to give students background on the initial conflict of the play (Hamlet's father's death and Gertrude's marriage after his death). You should also introduce the character of Polonius as the unintended target of Hamlet's impulsive decision making in this scene.

As an alternative warm-up, students can participate in a quick write about decisionmaking. What do you do when you have a hard decision to make? Do you think about the pros and cons? Do you act impulsively? These questions will help students to put themselves in Hamlet's shoes as they read the aria in this scene.

### **Text Focus Instruction** (15-20 Minutes)

- Teacher Reading & Discussion (10 Minutes)

Start by reading the scene and aria together as a class. Students should have their own copy. The teacher can model reading out loud first. Ensure students don't have any questions regarding the words in the scene. Discuss all the important aspects of the scene before you get to the aria. What are Gertrude and Hamlet discussing before he launches into the aria? (Note: You can supplement this part of the discussion with 3:15 - 4:52 in the 2 Actors 1 Role video)

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### **Lesson Sequence** *(continued)*

- Ask students to work in groups of 3-4 to read through the focused aria/speech as a group. Choral reading is a great option for groups to utilize here. Once students have read the speech, ask them to ensure they understand the plot. What has happened here? What is Hamlet trying to say to Gertrude?

*Focus questions for students: Hamlet's emotions/feelings*

What emotions is Hamlet feeling prior to giving this speech?

What happens to his emotions as he continues through the speech?

If you feel as though his emotions change, how can you tell?

- If time allows, ask students to take turns reading this speech one at a time in their small groups. How would Hamlet deliver these lines? What props might be helpful to get his point across? (Look for keywords in the speech). What example of repetition do you notice in the speech? How would this repetition be portrayed when reading the speech out loud?

### **Video Focused Instruction (20-25 Minutes)**

*Watch video for Benjamin and Patrick's portrayals of Hamlet in Act 3, Scene 4*

6:00 – 8:30 - The Aria Reading: Act III, Scene 4

Benjamin: 6:03 – 7:45

Patrick: 7:45 – 8:30

After watching Benjamin's performance, pause the video. Ask students what they noticed about the way that Benjamin brought Hamlet to life. (Note: You can come back and have these discussions with the whole class or ask students to discuss in groups. Teachers can monitor conversations for each group or bring groups back to share whole class)

Some questions to help students focus on this: What did you notice about his facial expressions? Were there some words that had more emphasis than others? If so, what were they? Where was the actor looking? Why do you think he decided to focus his attention here? What emotions does he portray the most clearly? What is the most effective technique he uses to convey this emotion?

Repeat this process with Patrick's performance. Ask students what they notice about the way that Patrick brought Hamlet's character to life. (Whole class or small group share outs)

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### **Whole Class Discuss:**

Ask students to compare and contrast the two actors' portrayals of Hamlet. Students are likely to use this moment to say one performance is better than the other. Encourage students to positively critique, knowing that mutual admiration and individual/actor interpretation can be supported with lines from the text (why the actor chose to deliver a line a certain way) Difference acting choices doesn't mean one is right or wrong, they are just likely to have different effects on the audience. What effect do the performances of Benjamin and Patrick have on you as you watch?

### **Extension - Further Play Reading**

While this video focuses exclusively on Act III, Scene 4, you can ask students to repeat this process at various points in the play. While there aren't videos for all the scenes in the remainder of the play, there is a video for Hamlet's first soliloquy Act I, Scene 2 (O, that this too too solid flesh would melt).

Video Link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdt-bCZpB-k&t=3s>

One suggestion is to ask students to volunteer reading some shorter lines and comparing student readings of various lines. This approach will get students thinking about their oral reading fluency and prosody. What are all the things to consider before reading out loud? (emphasis, speed, phrasing, etc.)

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### **The Aria - Act 3, Scene 4**

*Note: The text that is marked through has been left off of the performance on the video.*

#### **Hamlet: Benjamin's Performance**

Look here upon this picture and on this, 54

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.

See, what a grace was seated on this brow?

~~Hyperion's curls,~~ the front of Jove himself,

An eye like Mars to threaten and command,

~~A station like the herald Mercury~~

~~New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—~~

A combination and a form indeed

Where every god did seem to set his seal

To give the world assurance of a man.

This was your husband. Look you now, what follows.

Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear 65

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed

And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?

You cannot call it love, for at your age

The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,

And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment

Would step from this to this? ~~Sense sure you have,~~

~~Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense~~

~~Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,~~

~~Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd,~~

~~But it reserved some quantity of choice~~

~~To serve in such a difference. What devil was 't~~

That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?

Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,

Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all, 80

Or but a sickly part of one true sense

Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?

~~Rebellious hell,~~

~~If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,~~

~~To flaming youth let virtue be as wax~~

~~And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame~~

~~When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,~~

~~Since frost itself as actively doth burn,~~

~~And reason panders will.~~

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### **The Aria - Act 3, Scene 4**

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#### **Hamlet: Patrick's Performance**

Look here upon this picture and on this, 54

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.

See, what a grace was seated on this brow?

~~Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,~~

~~An eye like Mars to threaten and command,~~

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~~New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—~~

~~A combination and a form indeed~~

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### Video Timeline:

**Patrick Earl** – 2015-2016 production of *Hamlet* at American Shakespeare Center

**Benjamin Reed** – 2012 Houston Shakespeare Festival production of *Hamlet*

**0:15 – 0:30** – Both *Hamlet* actors introduce themselves, their roles, and their respective productions

**0:30 – 1:33** – Venues: Both actors discuss their respective venues. Patrick discusses Blackfriars as a reproduction of Shakespeare’s theater with good acoustics. Benjamin focuses on the massive outdoor space and audience at Miller Outdoor Theater.

· Blackfriars Playhouse – Staunton, Virginia – Patrick Earl

· Miller Outdoor Theater – Houston, Texas - Benjamin Reed

**1:33 – 3:15** - The Production: Patrick discusses the minimal set at Blackfriars and the Elizabethan costumes mixed with modern choices; Benjamin discusses the post WWI era set that their production embraces as well the musical choices their production used such as instrumental string music.

**3:15 – 4:52** - The Aria: What Launches It? The actors discuss what launches the aria and what inspires Hamlet to say this speech. Gertrude’s prior line (what have I done that causes you to speak this way towards me) and the death of Polonius by Hamlet’s hand. Gertrude doesn’t truly understand what she did wrong by marrying King Claudius so quickly after Hamlet’s father’s death.

**4:53 – 5:59** - Aftermath of the Aria: Benjamin discusses the requirement of the reconciliation of the disconnect between Gertrude and Hamlet for the plot of the play to progress. Patrick discusses the approach he takes when playing this scene in *Hamlet*.

**6:00 – 8:30** - The Aria Reading: Act III, Scene 4

· Benjamin: 6:03 – 7:45

· Patrick: 7:45 – 8:30

**8:30 – 10:25** - The Mutual Admiration Society: Patrick points out how the difference in the two performances would affect their respective productions. Patrick’s version was cut and shortened more so than Benjamin’s. Patrick also discusses that Benjamin’s performance gives Hamlet a vulnerability and relatability. His love for Gertrude is clear in Benjamin’s performance. Benjamin points out Patrick’s emphasis on the words “is” versus “was” and his clear command of the language makes it easy to follow Hamlet’s thought process during the aria.

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## Act 2, Scene 1

*BRUTUS*

It must be by his death. And for my part 10

I know no personal cause to spurn at him,

But for the general. He would be crowned:

How that might change his nature, there's the  
question.

It is the bright day that brings forth the adder, 15

And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,

And then I grant we put a sting in him

That at his will he may do danger with.

Th' abuse of greatness is when it disjoins

Remorse from power. And, to speak truth of Caesar, 20

I have not known when his affections swayed

More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof

That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,

Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;

But, when he once attains the upmost round, 25

He then unto the ladder turns his back,

Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees

By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.

Then, lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel

Will bear no color for the thing he is, 30

Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,

Would run to these and these extremities.

And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,

Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow

mischievous, 35

And kill him in the shell.

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