

Introduction to Scene Analysis

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Exercise: Given Circumstances

If working on Shakespeare or other text, the teacher can introduce the concept of the Facts or Given Circumstances as a way to begin to understand the text. The facts have to be just that: things that are IN THE TEXT (not an opinion or an interpretation). For example, if the text says, “Peter loves candy.” a fact would be just that. An opinion or interpretation would be, “Peter has cavities.”

Categories:

Who - facts about the characters in the scene (what do people say about them? What do they say about them?)

What - any facts related to the circumstances or events of the scene

Where - location, any reference to physical realities

When - time of day, time of year, time period?

Misc. - any other facts you find

The instructor can break the class into small groups and have them dig through the text for Givens. Create a comprehensive sheet of givens as a class.

Applying Given Circumstances to Shakespeare:

Especially given the unfamiliarity of the language, searching for Givens in a Shakespeare play or scene can be a great way to get to engage with the text. Depending on the grade level of the students, the teacher can either assign scenes to the students in small groups or work with the whole class to dig for Givens. Here is an example below of a few lines from MACBETH, Act V, i.:

Below you'll see highlighted words or phrases that capture different kinds of Givens: **characters**, **actions** (“she rubs her hands”), **and objects/scenic elements** (light, taper etc.).



Gentlewoman

That, sir, which I will not report after her.



Doctor

You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should.

Gentlewoman

Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech.

Enter **LADY MACBETH**, with a *taper*

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; **stand close**.

Doctor

How came she by that **light**?

Gentlewoman

Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

Doctor

You see, her eyes are open.

Gentlewoman

Ay, but their sense is shut.

Doctor

What is it she does now? Look, how **she rubs her hands**.

