

Exploring Shakespeare’s Language: “Shakespeare Charades”

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This is a GREAT exercise for ‘reading’ a speech for the first time. A lot of the words and phrases that can be difficult in reading comprehension are often easily illuminated by the physical and kinesthetic impulses that the exercise requires.

Works best with text that includes a lot of active verbs and/or imagery.

Use this exercise for:

- Slow/close reading of a monologue or short scene
- Initial comprehension
- Engaging visual and kinesthetic learning

Preparing for the Exercise:

- Choose a monologue from the play you’re reading that you’d like to unpack/discuss with students. (We’ve provided Romeo’s monologue from Act 2 scene 2 of ROMEO & JULIET below.)
- Hand out a physical, printed copy of a speech to each student. Be sure that the font and spacing is large enough to read easily.
- Read the monologue out loud together as a group. Briefly discuss any new words or vocabulary.
- Talk about the game ‘charades,’ and engaging body language to communicate meaning. How can you “show” the meaning of words physically with your body, objects, space, etc? (Encourage students to move/travel, and to use props or objects as they work.)

Playing the Game:

- Pair students up in the classroom, with space to stand and move. Assign a line or phrase from the monologue to each pair.
- In each pair, one student will agree to be the ‘reader’; the other will be the ‘mover’/performer.
- Give everyone time to invent the best possible ‘charade’, or physical expression, of their assigned text. How can they perform the image or the idea physically?
- Now read - and act out! - the speech together. As the ‘reader’ from each pair reads their text aloud, the other partner acts out the physical expression.



Variations:

- Provide single key words/phrases from a piece of text, and assign the physicalization of those specific words.
- Have pairs or groups collaborate on longer sections of text, and invent the BEST POSSIBLE physical demonstration of their text to rehearse and share with the group
- **For more advanced students:** Have one person read the full text while 3-4 other students all act it out / physicalize it simultaneously. (The fun of this version is seeing different interpretations!)



ROMEO & JULIET

Act 2 scene 2

Text from [MIT Shakespeare online](#)

Romeo and Juliet met and kissed earlier in the evening at the Capulet's ball. Romeo has snuck into Juliet's back yard to try and get a glimpse of her; when she appears in her bedroom window, this is what Romeo has to say:

ROMEO:

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

Be not her maid, since she is envious;

Her vestal livery is but sick and green

And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

It is my lady, O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

Her eye discourses; I will answer it.

I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,

As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven

Would through the airy region stream so bright

That birds would sing and think it were not night.

See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

