



THE IMPROVISED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Applause Series Curriculum Guide
April 27-29, 2016



CIVIC CENTER • STONER THEATER • TEMPLE THEATER • COWLES COMMONS



Dear Teachers,

Thank you for joining us for the Applause Series presentation of The Improvised Shakespeare Company! This unique improvisation group displays a lightning quick wit and an incredible sense of comedic timing. Even more impressive, they do so while channeling the language and themes of the greatest poet and playwright in the history of the English language — William Shakespeare! In doing so, they manage to make Shakespeare feel exciting, accessible, and relevant to even the most reluctant young readers.

As you prepare your students for this experience, we hope that this study guide helps you connect the performance to your classroom curriculum in ways that you find valuable. In the following pages, you will find contextual information about the performance and related subjects, as well as a variety of discussion questions and activities. Some pages are appropriate to reproduce for your students; others are designed more specifically with you, their teacher, in mind. As such, we hope that you are able to “pick and choose” materials and ideas from the study guide to meet your class’s unique needs.



Actors improvise a scene in Shakespearean style.

See you at the theater,

Des Moines Performing Arts Education Team

Support for Des Moines Performing Arts education programs and the Applause Series is provided by:

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This study guide was compiled by Karoline Myers; edited by Michelle McDonald.
Based on The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide © The Improvised Shakespeare Company

ABOUT DES MOINES PERFORMING ARTS



Des Moines Performing Arts is a private, nonprofit organization and is an important part of central Iowa's cultural community. It is recognized nationally for excellence as a performing arts center and is committed to engaging the Midwest in world-class entertainment, education, and cultural activities.

Des Moines Performing Arts presents professional touring productions, including theater direct from Broadway, world-renowned dance companies, family programming, comedy, and concerts.

Education and Community Engagement programs are core to Des Moines Performing Arts' mission as a nonprofit performing arts center.

Public education programs allow audience members and local artists to make meaningful and personal connections to the art they experience on our stages. Guest lectures and Q&As with company members allow audiences to explore the inner workings of the performance. In addition, master classes, workshops, and summer camps taught by visiting performers give local actors, dancers, and musicians the chance to increase their skills by working directly with those who know what it takes to succeed on the professional stage.

Through its **K-12 School Programs**, Des Moines Performing Arts strives to ensure that central Iowa students have affordable access to high quality arts experiences as part of their education. More than 50,000 students and educators attend curriculum-connected school matinee performances through the Applause Series annually. In addition, Des Moines Performing Arts sends teaching artists into the schools to provide hands-on workshops and residencies in special opportunities that engage students directly in the creative process. And, through its partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center, Des Moines Performing Arts provides teachers with in-depth professional development training on how to use the arts in their classrooms to better impact student learning. The Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards is Des Moines Performing Arts' newest initiative to support the arts in Iowa schools, providing important learning tools and public recognition to celebrate the achievements of students involved in their high school theater programs.

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 300,000 people visit Des Moines Performing Arts venues each year.

Des Moines Performing Arts opened in 1979.

Des Moines Performing Arts has three theater spaces:

- *Civic Center, 2744 seats*
- *Stoner Theater, 200 seats*
- *Temple Theater, 299 seats (located in the Temple for the Performing Arts)*

No seat is more than 155 feet from center stage in the Civic Center.

Cowles Commons, situated just west of the Civic Center, is a community gathering space that is also part of Des Moines Performing Arts. The space features the Crusoe Umbrella sculpture by artist Claes Oldenburg.

As a nonprofit organization, Des Moines Performing Arts depends on donor funding to support facilities, programming, and education programs.

The Applause Series started in 1996. You are joining us for our 20th season of school performances.

GOING TO THE THEATER . . .



YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

Attending a live performance is a unique and exciting opportunity. Unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, audience members play an important role in every live performance. As they act, sing, dance, or play instruments, the performers on stage are very aware of the audience's mood and level of engagement. Each performance calls for a different response from audience members. Lively bands, musicians, and dancers may desire the audience to focus silently on the stage and applaud only during natural breaks in the performance. Audience members can often take cues from performers on how to respond to the performance appropriately. For example, performers will often pause or bow for applause at a specific time.

As you experience the performance, consider the following questions:

- * What kind of live performance is this (a play, a dance, a concert, etc.)?
- * What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
- * What is the mood of the performers? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
- * Are the performers encouraging the audience to clap to the music or move to the beat?
- * Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?

THEATER ETIQUETTE

Here is a checklist of general guidelines to follow when you visit the theater:

- * Leave all food, drinks, and chewing gum at school or on the bus.
- * Cameras, recording devices, and personal listening devices are not permitted in the theater.
- * Turn off and put away all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices before the performance begins.
- * Do not text during the performance.
- * When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- * **Talk before and after the performance only.** Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound. Other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- * Use the restroom before the performance or wait until the end. If you must leave the theater during the show, make sure the first set of doors closes before you open the second — this will keep unwanted light from spilling into the theater.
- * Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage — they will let you know what is appropriate.
- * Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!

GOING TO THE THEATER information is adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts study guide materials.

TEMPLE THEATER FIELD TRIP INFORMATION



**Thank you for choosing the Applause Series with Des Moines Performing Arts.
Below are tips for organizing a safe and successful field trip to the Temple Theater.**

ORGANIZING YOUR FIELD TRIP

- Please include all students, teachers, and chaperones in your ticket request.
- After you submit your ticket request, you will receive a confirmation e-mail within five business days. Your **invoice will be attached to the confirmation e-mail.**
- Payment policies and options are located at the top of the invoice. (Full payment and cancellation policies may be viewed at DesMoinesPerformingArts.org/education.)
- DMPA reserves the right to cancel unpaid reservations after the payment due date.
- Tickets are not printed for Applause Series shows. Your invoice will serve as the reservation confirmation for your group order.
- Schedule buses to arrive in downtown Des Moines at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the performance. This will allow time to park, walk to the Temple for the Performing Arts, and be seated in the theater.
- Performances are approximately 60 minutes unless otherwise noted on the website and printed materials.
- All school groups with reservations to the show will receive an e-mail notification when the study guide is posted. Please note that study guides are only printed and mailed upon request.

DIRECTIONS

- The Temple Theater is located in the Temple for the Performing Arts located at Tenth and Locust Streets in downtown Des Moines.
- Directions from I-235: Take Exit 8A (downtown exits) and the ramp toward Third Street. Travel south on Third Street approximately six blocks to Grand Avenue. Turn west on Grand Avenue and travel to Thirteenth Street. Turn south on Thirteenth Street and then east on Locust Street.
- Buses will park on the south side of Locust Street in front of the Nationwide building. See next column for additional parking information.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact the Education department at education@DesMoinesPerformingArts.org or 515.246.2355.
Thank you!

PARKING

- Police officers stationed at the corner of Tenth and Locust Streets will direct buses to parking areas with hooded meters near the theater. Groups traveling in personal vehicles are responsible for locating their own parking.
- Buses will remain parked for the duration of the show.
- Buses are not generally permitted to drop off or pick up students near the theater. If a bus must return to school during the performance, prior arrangements must be made with DMPA Education staff.

ARRIVAL

- When arriving at the theater, please have an **adult lead your group** for identification and check-in purposes. A staff member may be stationed outside the building to direct you.
- DMPA staff will usher groups into the building as quickly as possible.
- Seating in the theater is general admission. Ushers will escort groups to their seats; various seating factors including group size, grade levels, arrival time, and special needs seating requests may determine a group's specific location in the theater.
- We request that an **adult lead the group into the theater and other adults position themselves throughout the group**; we request this arrangement for supervision purposes, especially in the event that a group must be seated in multiple rows.
- Please allow ushers to seat your entire group before rearranging seats or taking groups to the restroom.

IN THE THEATER

- In case of a medical emergency, please notify the nearest usher.
- We ask that adults handle any disruptive behavior in their groups. If the behavior persists, an usher may request your group to exit the theater.
- Following the performance groups may exit the theater and proceed to their bus(es).
- If an item is lost at the Temple Theater, please see an usher or call 515.246.2355.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE



For many students, the language of William Shakespeare can seem intimidating, difficult to comprehend, and out of touch with the contemporary reader. This special performance for schools by The Improvised Shakespeare Company, is designed to break down these barriers. The goal of the performance is to make Shakespeare feel exciting, accessible, and relevant to the young reader.

Actors Performing: Likely 3-4

“Staggeringly brilliant”
—Time Out Chicago

“On-the-spot soliloquies and perfect pentameter ... Go laugh your iams off.”
—New York Times

“The chemistry among the performers was amazing, and their play came together seamlessly. By the time they started to speak in rhyming couplets, the crowd was totally sold...”
—Time Out New York

SHOW DESCRIPTION

Based on one audience suggestion (a title for a play that has yet to be written) The Improvised Shakespeare Company creates a fully improvised play in Elizabethan style. Each of the players has brushed up on his “thee’s” and “thou’s” to bring you a show filled with off-the-cuff comedy using the language and themes of William Shakespeare.

Any performance could be filled with a combination of:

- * Power struggles
- * Star-crossed lovers
- * Sprites
- * Kings, Queens, or Princesses
- * Fools
- * Sword-play
- * Rhyming couplets
- * Asides
- * Insults
- * Persons in disguise
- * Other tropes that we’ve come to expect from the Great Bard

Nothing is planned out, rehearsed, or written. Each play is completely improvised, so each play is entirely new!

COMPANY HISTORY

The Improvised Shakespeare Company, founded in 2005, has been performing its critically-acclaimed show every Friday night at the world famous iO Theater for over seven years and continues to entertain audiences around the globe with its touring company. The ISC continues to sell out their recurring limited engagements Off Broadway in NYC and in Los Angeles at the comedy mecca, LARGO AT THE CORONET. The ISC has been featured at The San Francisco Sketchfest, UCB’s Del Close Marathon, the Bumbershoot Music and Arts Festival, Bonnaroo, the Just For Laughs festival in Montreal and were a huge hit last summer at Outside Lands in San Francisco, where Sir Patrick Stewart famously played with the group. The ISC has been named Chicago’s best improv group by both the Chicago Reader and the Chicago Examiner and has received a New York Nightlife Award for “Best Comedic Performance by a Group”. The ISC was recently honored by the Chicago Improv Foundation as its “Ensemble of the Year”.

SHAKESPEAREAN GLOSSARY

alas: used to express regret or sadness. “*Alas*, she is going to prom with another.”

anon: soon, in a moment.

bodkin: a dagger

century: one hundred. “I have a *century* of assignments to finish.”

cut-purse: thief.

don: to put on. “I shall *don* a hat for the ballgame.”

dram: a little bit, a small amount.

forsooth: in truth, truly. “*Forsooth*, Hercules is very strong!”

gaskins: loose-fitting breeches.

gleek: a taunt, an insult. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but thy *gleek* shall never hurt me.”

harpy: mythical creature with the head of a woman and the wings and talons of a vulture; usually used to symbolize revenge.

henceforth: from now on; from this time forward. “*Henceforth*, I shall never forget to floss.”

jack: a man with mean and lousy manners.

kicky-wicky: girlfriend or wife (used in a merry way).

knave: a scoundrel; or a young boy; or a male servant.

livings: possessions.

loggerhead: numbskull.

love-shaked: lovesick (as though someone is shaking with a love fever).

mountebanks: a con-man who sells fake medicine.

ninny: a fool; a simpleton.

oft: often. “How *oft* I think of thee.”

perchance: perhaps; possibly; maybe. “*Perchance* we shall meet again.”

prithee: please. “*Prithee* pass the salt.”

posy: a short line of poetry, often inscribed inside a ring.

remembrances: memories; or love-tokens, keepsakes.

saucy: naughty.

slug-abled: a lazy person.

smilets: little smiles.

spongy: drunk; soaked with alcohol.

surmount: exceed; surpass. “Thy beauty *surmounts* the sun.”

taper: a candle.

’tis: it is.

trimmed: dressed up.

tristful: sad, sorrowful.

truepenny: an honest, trustworthy fellow.

unbend: relax.

untaught: unmannerly, ignorant.

villanies: evil qualities.

visage: face; appearance.

vizard: a mask.

welkin: sky; heavens.

wherefore: why?

yesternight: last night.

yonder: over there. “*Yonder* lies my backpack.”

zenith: the highest point of something.

zephyr: a gentle breeze.

dismount thy tuck!: take your sword out of its sheath!

drops of sorrow: tears.

Dun’s the mouse!: stay quiet!

God gi’ good-e’en: God give you a good evening.

have at thee: on guard!

man of wax: a man who is so perfect and handsome it’s as though he was molded out of wax.

methinks: I think.

perpetual wink: endless sleep; death.

rest you merry: “farewell!” or “be well!”

reverb no hollowness: be quiet.

sift him: question him; find out what he knows.

skimble-skamble stuff: rambling, incoherent nonsense.

traveling lamp: the sun.

void your rheum: spit.

wonder-wounded: awestruck; overcome with wonder.

Glossary terms from The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide.

ABOUT SHAKESPEARE, pg. 1

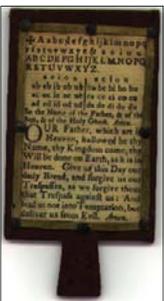


ABOVE: William Shakespeare's school in Stratford-upon-Avon. Image courtesy of Stratford-upon-avon.co.uk

William Shakespeare is considered by many to be the greatest playwright ever to write in the English language. Read on to learn more about the life and works of the Great Bard.

EARLY LIFE

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in the year 1564, the son of John and Mary Shakespeare. His actual date of birth is unknown, but it is commonly accepted to be April 23 of that year. His father was a tanner of leathers (a glover) and dealt in farm products and wool.



A horn book. Image courtesy of elizabethaneducation.blogspot.com.

Shakespeare likely began his education at the age of six or seven at the Stratford grammar school. While there, he learned basic reading and writing skills using a horn book, a primer made of wood printed with the alphabet and the Lord's prayer.

Shakespeare was likely removed from the school at the age of thirteen due to his father facing financial and social difficulties.

There is little reason to believe that he did not continue his studies elsewhere. After all, we do know that he had a fine mastery of both English and Latin languages.

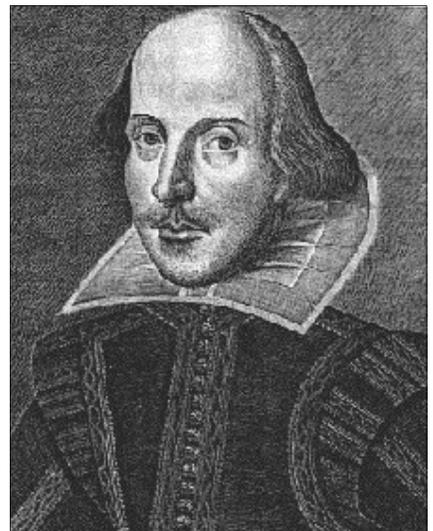
LOST YEARS

Between the years of 1578 and 1582, little is known of Shakespeare's whereabouts or doings. Some suggest he worked as a butcher, a schoolmaster, or a glover with his father. Others believe he continued to study intensely to become a master at his literary craft and traveled outside of Stratford, working as an actor. About the only thing that is known for certain about Shakespeare's "lost years" is that during the time he married a woman named Anne Hathaway.

Together, Anne and William had three children: a daughter, Susanna, born in 1583, and a set of twins, Hamnet and Judith, born in 1585.

Did you know?

Shakespeare is said to have had a vocabulary of 29,066 words. An average person today might use just 2,000 words in everyday conversation.



ABOVE: This portrait of Shakespeare was created by English engraver Martin Droeshout and appeared on the cover of the First Folio. It is one of only two images of Shakespeare considered to be genuine. Image courtesy of Shakespeare.mit.edu.

ABOUT SHAKESPEARE, pg. 2



ABOVE: This sketch shows the location of the Globe Theatre in relation to the Thames River and other London area theaters during Shakespeare's time. Image courtesy of shakespeareglobe.com.

CAREER IN LONDON

No one knows for sure how Shakespeare came to start a career in the theater and how he came to leave Stratford for London. Scholars do know that Shakespeare was an established actor in London by 1592.

Shakespeare actively took on several roles in the theater during his career:

PLAYWRIGHT

Shakespeare is best known for his work as a playwright, having penned at least thirty-seven plays over a period of twenty years.

His famous plays include tragedies, such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*; comedies such as *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *Twelfth Night*; and history plays such as *Richard III* and *Henry IV*.

ACTOR

Shakespeare not only wrote plays, he performed in many of them as an actor. For much of his career, he was a member of the Chamberlain's Men. The troupe performed regularly for the public at London theaters, toured

surrounding areas, and gave regular performances at court for Queen Elizabeth I.

THEATRE OWNER

Shakespeare not only acted in and wrote plays, he was one of the owners of the theater buildings. For seventeen years he was one of the owners of the Globe Theatre and for eight years he was also one of the owners of the company's second theatre, the Blackfriars.

DEATH

Shakespeare died on his birthday in 1616 of unknown causes at the age of 52. (The average life expectancy in London at the time was 35.) He was buried in his hometown of Stratford. On his gravestone is an epitaph that he supposedly wrote himself:

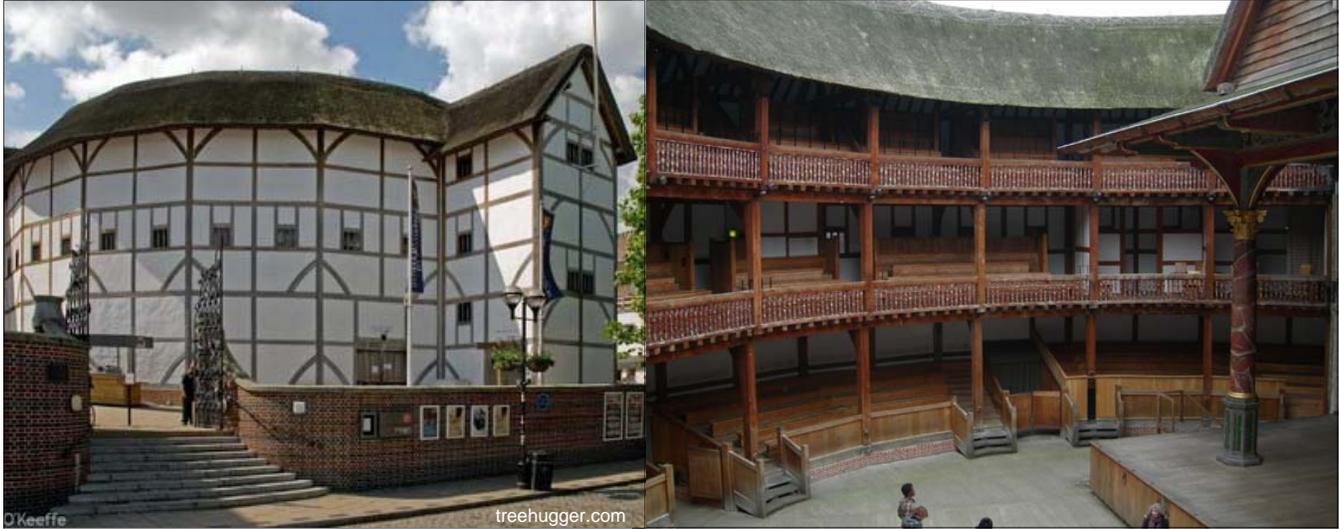
*Good friend for Jesus sake
forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares
these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my
bones.*

CREATOR OF WORDS

The English language was forever changed by Shakespeare. He invented over 1,700 of our common words. He changed nouns into verbs, changed verbs into adjectives, connected words never previously used together, added prefixes and suffixes, and created new words entirely. Below are some of the words he invented:

Accused • Addiction • Amazement
Bedroom • Birthplace
Bloodstained • Champion
Compromise • Courtship
Dawn • Deafening • Elbow
Excitement • Eyeball
Fashionable • Flawed • Gloomy
Gossip • Green-eyed • Hint
Jaded • Label • Laughable
Lonely • Majestic • Mimic
Moonbeam • Negotiate
Olympian • Premeditated
Puking • Radiance • Savagery
Scuffle • Swagger • Torture
Tranquil • Undress
Worthless • Zany

THE GLOBE AND LONDON THEATERS



Theater in Elizabethan-era London was a popular form of entertainment but was very different from theaters today. Read on to learn more about London theaters, audiences, and the most famous theater of the era — The Globe.

THE GLOBE THEATRE
One of the most famous theaters during the Elizabethan era was the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare was one of its owners and wrote many of his plays with the Globe in mind. The open-air theater routinely attracted up to 3,000 people to its grounds .

ABOVE: Photos of the outside and inside of the Globe Theatre in London. This re-construction was built in 1966 based on the descriptions of the original 1559 design.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS
Many Londoners were strict Protestants and opposed the theater on religious grounds. All theaters located in the city were forced to move to the south side of the River Thames when London authorities banned plays within the city limits in 1596.

AUDIENCES
Elizabethan audiences included people from all walks of life. At the Globe, poorer audience members, known as “groundlings”, would pay one penny (almost a day’s wage) to stand in front of the stage. Two pennies bought a patron a seat on a gallery bench protected from sun and rain by a thatched roof. Three pennies bought a cushioned seat close to the stage where one could see and be seen.

ACTORS
At the time, the theater profession was not considered to be suitable for women. All actors were men, and female characters were often played by young boys.

CLOSURES
Disease was common in London during Shakespeare’s life. The city was overcrowded, infested with rats, and raw sewage ran directly into the Thames River. During dangerous outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague, the theaters were often closed to try to slow the spread of the disease. During those times, theater companies often left the city and toured in the countryside, putting on shows in courtyards and inns.

The groundlings were a much more boisterous audience than audiences today. Standing in front of the stage, they ate, drank, fought, cheered, and hissed at the action in the play, occasionally even critiquing an actor’s performance by throwing food, such as an orange, at them.

SCENE CHANGES
Stages during Shakespeare’s time did not use curtains or backdrops, which meant scenery could not be changed between scenes. Instead, the actors used words and dialogue to convey the setting of each scene.

COSTUMES
Theater companies owned elaborate wardrobes, and audiences enjoyed watching the extravagant costumes.

Did you know?
The first Globe Theatre burned to the ground in 1613 when a canon fired during a performance of *Henry VIII* caught the thatched roof on fire. The second Globe Theatre was built shortly after in 1614.

HOW TO WRITE A SONNET



Try your hand at writing your own Shakespearean-style sonnet using these helpful tips.

GETTING STARTED:

- * Your sonnet is going to be 14 lines long.
- * Each line will be roughly 10 syllables long.
- * Your sonnet will be written in rhyming couplets.

THEE, THOU, THY, THINE

Sonnets are usually love poems. That means that in your sonnet you will be talking to someone. In that case, you'll need to know how to translate the second-person pronoun "you" into the Shakespeare version.

- When "you" refers to the subject of the sentence, it is translated to "thou." ("You are beautiful" becomes "Thou art beautiful.")
- When "you" is the object of a sentence it is translated to "thee." ("I love you" becomes "I love thee.")
- Instead of saying "your," say "thy." ("Your nose is so pretty" becomes "Thy nose is so pretty.")

- Instead of saying "yours," say "thine." ("I wish I could be yours" becomes "I wish I could be *thine*.")

VERBS

You can also make your verbs more Shakespearean.

- Instead of "I *will*" say "I *shall*."
- Instead of "You *are*" say "Thou *art*."
- Instead of saying "It is", say "tis."
- Occasionally, try adding "—eth" or "—est" to the end of a present-tense verb.

METAPHORS & SIMILES

You might liken the person in your poem to many wonderful things. You might liken the way you feel when that person is absent to many terrible things. In situations like these metaphors and similes are handy. Metaphors and similes both liken something or someone to something else. The difference is that similes do this explicitly using "like" or "as."

Metaphor:

Thou are a rose in the blossom of beauty.

Simile:

Thou are like a rose in full bloom.

Use metaphors when describing feelings, situations, a person's features, a person's personality... when you describe anything! A good strategy for first creating an elaborate metaphor or simile is to first decide what you think someone or something is like. Let's use a rose. Then, think of how that object feels, smells, looks, etc. A rose is soft, smells sweet, is beautiful. Think also of what that thing is used for or does. A rose blossoms, it is used to decorate, it even sometimes has thorns that prick fingers. Think of all the ways that you can describe something using a simple rose!

RHYMING

Here's a tip on creating rhymes. First choose the word you want to rhyme. Then, think of words to set up your rhyme. Suppose you want to describe someone's eyes. Think of several words that rhyme with eyes (skies, pies, flies, guys, size), then choose one to set up your rhyme.

"When I gaze into the night's
starry skies,
Methinks there I see thy beautiful
eyes."

'How to Write a Sonnet' adapted from The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide © The Improvised Shakespeare Company

HOW TO WRITE A PLAY



ABOVE: ISC members engage in a sword fight. This conflict is fueled by something that their characters want.

The Improvised Shakespeare Company makes up a whole new play on the spot based on the audience's suggestion for a title. Even though they are improvising, ISC members draw on the same elements that all playwrights do when writing a play.

Read on for a helpful guide about using the elements of character, conflict, plot, setting, dialogue and theme to write your own play!

If you've answered the two character questions thoroughly, you probably already have a few conflicts in your play. Characters' wants often interfere with each other. But, if you still need conflict, remember that all sorts of things get in our way when we are trying to get something (ourselves, nature, other people, fairies, etc.).

PLOT

As long as your characters are going after what they want, the plot will often take care of itself. The action will rise as those characters try to achieve their goals and it will build as things get in their way. When that action reaches its intense moment, you've hit the climax. Then we will see characters' reaction to what has happened in the falling action. The resolution will show us how the characters' lives have changed now that all of this has happened.

SETTING

The setting is the time and place in which your play occurs. Try to be specific when you decide where to set your play. Think of locations that can fit on a stage.

DIALOGUE

Remember that anything you want your audience to know will need to come out in what the characters say. Also remember to make your dialogue true to your character. Who is speaking? What is the character's age? What is the character's personality like? In what time period is the character? Where is the character? How would the character behave in that location?

THEME

This is the idea that you want the audience to think about after watching your play. This idea can be a statement or it can be a question. It can be several statements and/or several questions! A good way to make sure you have a strong theme is to write about something that you're excited about; something that you love or something that makes you really angry! If you're excited to write your play, there's a good chance that the theme will take care of itself!

CHARACTER

The characters are the persons in your play. For every character that you write, make sure you answer these two questions.

- * What does my character want?
- * How will my character get what he or she wants?

CONFLICT

Conflict occurs when things get in the way of a character getting what he or she wants. This makes your play exciting! The audience will want to find out if the characters can overcome the obstacles to get what they want.

'How to Write a Play' adapted from The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide © The Improvised Shakespeare Company

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES

1) WRITE YOUR OWN SONNET

Goal: To explore the sonnet form and develop understanding of Shakespearean language.

Explanation: Noting that The Improvised Shakespeare Company creates its own Elizabethan dialogue, have your students write their very own sonnets.

Materials:

- * Paper
- * Pencils
- * *How to Write a Sonnet* hand-out, pg. 11
- * *Shakespearean Glossary* hand-out, pg. 7
- * Example of a Shakespearean sonnet (optional)

Activity:

1. Invite each student to write their own 14-line poem in rhyming couplets. The poems should be written in Elizabethan style. That is, try to sound like Shakespeare!
2. As a class, review the *How to Write a Sonnet* handout on page 11 for tips.
2. For additional help, encourage students to utilize words provided in the *Shakespearean Glossary* on page 7.

Twists:

1. Give extra credit if the poem is written in iambic pentameter.
2. Assign specific words from the *Shakespearean Glossary* that must be used in each sonnet OR have each student draw two vocabulary words from a hat.
3. Give extra credit for a pun or wordplay.
4. Have each student read his or her sonnet for the class.
5. Have each student write her or her sonnet to a classroom mascot and read the sonnet before the class to the mascot.
6. Do this exercise in conjunction with analysis of an actual Shakespearean sonnet.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What was challenging about this activity? What was rewarding?
2. Why do you think people, including Shakespeare, would choose to write a sonnet?
3. What surprised you about trying to write your sonnet using Shakespearean-style language?

2) WRITE YOUR OWN PLAY

Goal: To explore playwriting elements of character, conflict, plot, setting, dialogue, and theme.

Explanation: Noting that The Improvised Shakespeare Company creates plays on the spot, have students write their own short plays.

Materials:

- * Paper
- * Pencils
- * *How to Write a Play* hand-out, pg. 12
- * *Shakespearean Glossary* hand-out, pg. 7

Activity:

1. Individually or in groups, invite students to write their own short plays.
2. As a class, review the *How to Write a Play* handout on page 12 and discuss the elements of character, conflict, plot, setting, dialogue, and theme.
3. Encourage students to consider each of these elements when crafting their play.

Twists:

1. Have students write their plays in Elizabethan style.
2. Assign words from the *Shakespearean Glossary* OR have each student draw two vocabulary words from a hat.
3. Give extra credit for puns and wordplay.
4. Since The Improvised Shakespeare Company makes up a play on the spot using a title from the audience, give your students the title of their play in advance.
5. Have students perform a staged reading of their plays for the class.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What makes a story one that is interesting to read or watch?
2. What did one of your characters want in your play? What tactics did they use to try to attain their goal?
3. What title would you give the play that you wrote? Why? Does this title suggest an important theme or some other aspect of the play?

'Write Your own Sonnet' and 'Write Your Own Play' activities adapted from The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide © The Improvised Shakespeare Company.

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES

3) IMPROVISATION GAME: WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Goal: To improvise, one must be creative and able to think quickly on one's feet. Students will practice these skills by playing the game 'What Are You Doing?,' a game where you say one thing but do another.

Activity:

1. Have students stand in a circle.
2. To play, the first person pretends to do an action like brushing their teeth or planting a garden.
3. The person next to them then asks, "What are you doing?"
4. The person who is pretending to do an action must respond by saying an action that is different than what they are showing. For example, they might say "I'm playing the trombone."
5. Then the person who asked must pretend to do the action that was just said (playing the trombone).
6. The next person then asks what that person is doing, and he or she will reply with another action.
7. The game continues around the circle.
8. Once everyone has grasped the game, you may implement the rule that once you make a mistake you are out. To keep everyone thinking quickly, no actions can be repeated. Keep it going as fast as you can!

Follow-up questions:

1. Did you find this challenge easy or hard? Why?
2. What was the most difficult part?

4) IMPROVISATION GAME: PASS THE BALL

Goal: To improvise, one must be creative and able to think quickly on one's feet. Students will practice these skills by playing the game 'Pass the Ball,' a game where participants pantomime throwing a ball.

Activity:

1. Have students stand in a circle.
2. Ask the players to pass a mimed ball to others (one ball at a time). To show whom they are 'passing' the ball to, students should make eye contact with one another.
3. While the ball is passed between two students, the other students should be sure to watch it.
4. As students become comfortable, give suggestions about the nature of the ball. For example, it becomes heavier and heavier until it weighs a ton, or extremely light, extremely big, or extremely small.
5. The actors must convey the ball's characteristics in the way it gets passed.

Follow-up questions:

1. What sort of teamwork was needed to play this game?
2. How did you show that the ball was _____?
3. Do you think The Improvised Shakespeare Company actors will use their bodies to portray the different characters? Do all actors use their bodies? Why?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Shakespeare's Plays

1. What type of Shakespearean play would you classify the performance that we saw? A comedy? A tragedy? A history? What led you to that conclusion?
2. What types of Shakespearean themes did the actors include in their improvised play? (Examples that may have been used are listed on page 6.)

Language

1. Was it difficult to understand the Elizabethan-style language used in the performance? Why or why not?
2. If you didn't understand some of the language in the show, were you still able to understand what was happening? What did ISC do to give you the clues to figure it out?

The Title

1. What was the title of the show that ISC created when we attended? What did you think was going to happen in the play at first based on the title?
2. What ended up happening? How did the title affect the story?

The Company

1. What special skills or knowledge do the members of the Improvised Shakespeare Company need to have in order to do what they do?
2. What do you think the actors do to prepare for their performances?

General Reactions

1. What did you like about the performance?
2. What surprised you in the performance?
3. If you were one of the ISC actors, what would you have changed about the performance that we saw?
4. What were your impressions of Shakespeare before we attended the Improvised Shakespeare Company performance? What do you think of when you think about Shakespeare now? Why?

POST-SHOW ASSESSMENT

1) Write a Letter to ISC

Explanation: Actors love praise! In this assessment, students will write letters to the actors about their reaction to the performance.

Activity:

1. Have your students write The Improvised Shakespeare Company a letter telling the actors what they thought about the performance.
2. Mail student letters to us and we will forward them on to ISC.

Des Moines Performing Arts
Attn: Education Department
221 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309.

Twists:

1. Have your students write their letter in Shakespearean-style prose or verse.
2. Encourage students to use one or two words from the *Shakespearean Glossary* list on page 7.
3. Have your students recall specific characters, plot twists, or moments that they enjoyed.

2) REPORT AND REVIEW

Explanation: Students will reflect on the performance experience by writing a review.

Activity:

1. Remind students that all of the plays that the Improvised Shakespeare Company performs are performed one time only. Your students were part of the only live audience that will ever see that play.
2. Invite students to write a review of the play as if they were writing for a school newspaper.
3. In their review they should report on the play's characters, plot, and conflicts.
4. In addition, have them review the story. What did they like? What would they change?
5. Remind students that they must paint a picture of the experience with their words so that others who did not see the performance can imagine it as vividly as possible.

*Write a Letter' and 'Report and Review' activities adapted from 'The Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide © The Improvised Shakespeare Company.

RESOURCES AND SOURCES

SHAKESPEARE WORKS

Comedies:

- * *All's Well that Ends Well*
- * *As You Like It*
- * *The Comedy of Errors*
- * *Cymbeline*
- * *Love's Labours Lost*
- * *Measure for Measure*
- * *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
- * *The Merchant of Venice*
- * *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- * *Much Ado about Nothing*
- * *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*
- * *Taming of the Shrew*
- * *The Tempest*
- * *Troilus and Cressida*
- * *Twelfth Night*
- * *Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- * *Winter's Tale*

Tragedies:

- * *Antony and Cleopatra*
- * *Coriolanus*
- * *Hamlet*
- * *Julius Ceasar*
- * *King Lear*
- * *Macbeth*
- * *Othello*
- * *Romeo and Juliet*
- * *Timon of Athens*
- * *Titus Andronicus*

History Plays:

- * *Henry IV, part 1*
- * *Henry IV, part 2*
- * *Henry V*
- * *Henry VI, part 1*
- * *Henry VI, part 2*
- * *Henry VI, part 3*
- * *Henry VIII*
- * *King John*
- * *Richard II*
- * *Richard III*

Poetry:

- * *The Sonnets*
- * *A Lover's Complaint*
- * *The Rape of Lucrece*
- * *Venus and Adonis*
- * *Funeral Elegy by W.S.*

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Theater and Improvisation Resources:

Spolin, Viola. Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook. Evanston: Northwest UP, 1986. *Viola Spolin is the internationally recognized originator of theater games — the basis for improvisational theater.*

Shakespeare Resources:

"About Shakespeare." Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. *A series of 13 videos that follow the journey of William Shakespeare's life addressing frequently asked questions.*
<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/about-shakespeare.html>

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu>

Access Shakespeare's complete works online for free.

"Shakespeare for Kids." Folger Shakespeare Library.

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=588>

Interactive exploration of Shakespeare's language, fun facts about his life, and games and puzzles.

Talk Like Shakespeare. <http://www.talklikeshakespeare.org>

Site from Chicago Shakespeare Theater with fun tips and print-ables encouraging celebration of Shakespeare's life and works.

STUDY GUIDE SOURCES

Absolute Shakespeare.

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com>

"Globe Theatre Facts." Elizabethan Era.

<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/globe-theatre-facts.htm>

Improvised Shakespeare Company Official Website.

<http://www.improvisedshakespeare.com>

"Improvised Shakespeare Company Shake It Up! Study Guide."

<http://www.kidsentertainment.net/roster/shake-it-up/docs/Shake%20It%20Up.pdf>

Mabillard, Amanda. Shakespeare Online. 20 Aug. 2000. (19 March 2012.) <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/wordsinvented.html>

Warner, Elise. "The Globe Theatre: London's Woodon 'O'".

<http://www.timetravel-britain.com/articles/london/globe.shtml>