

Staging Shakespeare

How do you stage a comedy scene?

Grades 9-12 Lesson: Staging Shakespeare

Grade Band: 9-12

Arts Subject: Comedy

Other Subject: English & Literature

SUMMARY

In this 9-12 lesson, students will explore the nature of comedy by informally staging the opening scenes from William Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*. Students will apply a variety of stylistic approaches to stage scenes from the play, then perform for an audience.

PREPARATION

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze scenes from *As You Like It*.
- Interpret visual and aural production choices.
- Paraphrase scenes from a play.
- Evaluate the artistic choices of actors and directors.
- Plan staging for one scene.
- Perform a scene for an audience.
- Analyze and discuss scene performances.

Standards Alignment

National Core Arts Standards

[TH:Cr1.1.1.c](#) Use script analysis to generate ideas about a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

[TH:Cr3.1.1.b](#) Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.

[TH:Pr4.1.1.a](#) Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work.

[TH: Re7.1.1.a](#) Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

[TH:Re9.1.1.c](#) Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a drama/ theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience.

[TH:Pr6.1.1.a](#) Perform a scripted drama/theatre work for a specific audience.

Common Core State Standards

[ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B](#) Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.



[ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B](#) Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Recommended Student Materials

Editable Documents: *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu. Check out [Sharing Tips](#) or [Instructional Benefits](#) when implementing Google Docs and Google Slides with students.*

- [As You Like It Scene Study, Act I Scene i](#)
- [As You Like It Scene Study, Act I Scene iii](#)

Websites

- [As You Like It by William Shakespeare](#)

Teacher Background

Teachers should be familiar with the play *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare. A discussion and demonstration of the play can be watched from the video [Royal Shakespeare Company's As You Like It at The Kennedy Center](#). Teachers or students can explore “story and language, and how changes to intent can alter a scene.”

Student Prerequisites

Students should have general knowledge of theater and the genre of comedy.

Accessibility Notes

Modify handouts, text, and utilize assistive technologies as needed. Allow extra time for task completion.

INSTRUCTION

Engage

1. Share the play, [As You Like It by William Shakespeare](#) with students. Allow a few days or class periods for students to read the play.

2. Lead a discussion of the play. *As You Like It* has been referred to as the “happiest of Shakespeare’s comedies,” and yet it has a set of mean-spirited brothers; Oliver wants his little brother Orlando pummeled and killed, and Duke Senior is banished to the woods by his little brother Duke Frederick (who shows little empathy for his daughter and niece). *How do such characters fit into a “happy comedy?” How do theater practitioners handle these characters?* (Possible responses: They provide intrigue, they could be portrayed in a physically comedic, exaggerated, or satirical way.)

3. Tell students that opposition in theater allows for conflict. Have students discuss the opposites in the play, and where they find them. Ask students: *What do you imagine the setting looking like? What does the Duke's court look like? The orchard?*

4. Explain that although the “evil” brothers in *As You Like It* will transform by the end, their characters set a certain tone at the beginning to get the play in motion. The question that actors and directors face is one of balance. Not all productions of *As You Like It* are as happy and bright as Tanner suggests. Some modern directors have taken darker views of the play with productions described by critic Sylvan Barnet as being more like Chekhov in tone than that of a happy romantic pastoral comedy.

5. Explain that there have been many different approaches to staging the play through the last century. Some productions might honor the pastoral tradition and emphasize the idealized setting of the beautiful Forest of Arden. Others might see the play as Shakespeare's playful commentary on the pastoral tradition.

6. Ask students to discuss staging possibilities. *What types of staging techniques could be used? How would you stage this play?* Tell students that Shakespeare can and probably has been staged in every era and location you could think of. For example, 10 Things I Hate About You (“Midsummer”), *She's the Man* (“Twelfth Night”), and *O* (“Othello”).

7. Tell the students that they are going to stage the opening scenes from *As You Like It*. Students will experiment with various approaches to the text to determine the tone and style they think is appropriate for a production of this play. Try to generate some questions students may want to consider as they read the scenes and explore the text, such as: *Is it dark and disturbing, or light and frothy? Is it a folktale with a fairy tale ending? Is it a serious commentary on family relationships, love, and social class?*

Build

1. Give the students a copy of Orlando's opening monologue from *As You Like It*. First read through the passage together and clarify any questions students may have about vocabulary and context.

2. Ask students to detail what Orlando's complaints are and what he plans to do about it.

Responses may include:

- His older brother is depriving him of an education thus keeping him from advancing.
- He is not being treated as well as his younger brother, Jacques.
- His brother's horses are treated better than he is.
- He is not going to put up with it anymore, but he doesn't know exactly what he will do.

3. Now ask for students to discuss what they imagine Orlando’s emotional state is as he speaks these lines to Adam. List the ideas on the board. Responses may include: angry, petulant, jealous, hurt, indignant, furious, reasonable, curious, surprised.

4. Break students into pairs to create monologues. Have students experiment with the lines and the various emotions, creating several ways to interpret the emotional content of the opening monologue. Allow time for students to rehearse then have them their monologues to the class.

5. Engage students in a discussion about the differences in the various interpretations. *What about the character is believable? What about the character was likable? Do you feel empathy for him? What humor is in the speech? What details from the speech were upsetting or disturbing? What did Orlando want to achieve by communicating this message to Adam?*

Apply

1. Unpack the meaning of Orlando’s speech by paraphrasing the text. Tell students they will go line by line to paraphrase Shakespeare’s words into their own words. For example: “As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion...” translates to “Adam, if I remember correctly, I know the reason why...” Encourage students to research definitions of unknown words or phrases.

2. Edit paraphrased speech. Students should ensure their re-written speech is as close to their own speech patterns/vernacular as possible. Explain that they will be doing this with all their lines when they eventually perform the scene. Make sure they understand that the performance will be staged and spoken in Shakespeare’s text, but this exercise will provide them a deeper understanding of the text.

3. Read through Act I scene i and Act I scene iii aloud, keeping in mind the staging discussions from earlier in the lesson. Clarify any questions students may have regarding the vocabulary and content.

4. Divide the class into groups and give them the [As You Like It Scene Study, Act I Scene i](#) and [As You Like It Scene Study, Act I Scene iii](#) handouts. Tell students the scene studies will help them explore the tone and style of the scene in the same way they explored the opening monologue from earlier in the lesson.

5. Have students map out a plan for props, lighting, or simple staging techniques. Collaborate in groups to determine what style and tone they think is most appropriate for the text and then rehearse it several times. Students should rehearse their staging and scenes prior to performing.

Reflect



1. Present scenes to an audience. Allow time for each group to perform for the class or an audience. Before each scene is presented, the group should give a brief introduction, which states the style and tone they applied to the text with a brief explanation supporting their choice.

2. Have a follow-up discussion with students. Ask students: *What various styles of presentation affected the meaning of the text? How do actors influence the meaning of a text? What did you learn about staging comedy?*

Credits

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