

# How to Stage a Scene



If you're new to performance-based teaching, have never acted or directed, or have never thought of Shakespeare as a script to be played, DON'T WORRY!

In the Folger's handbook, *Page to Stage: Preparing for Your Festival* (included in the Shakespeare Set Free Toolkit), the first page instructs, "Teachers don't have to know anything about acting or directing in order to get their students up on their feet performing. The man really knew how to write; most often he directs you, or lets you decide" (1).

## So how does Shakespeare *direct* us?

Here are a few questions to ask of a text (which, not surprisingly, will lead to very close reading!):

1. What time of day is it?
  - a. Look for clues in the language? Does a character comment on how dark it is? Mention the time? Refer to breakfast?
2. Where are you?
  - . Is there bad weather? If so, are you outside? Is this a private area where, for instance, a meddling figure hides behind an arras (a curtain) to overhear a private conversation (only to be killed)? Is a battlefield mentioned? Since Shakespeare's company played on an empty stage, the clues are everywhere in the text.
3. Who is talking to whom? Most of the time, it's pretty clear. But this is a basic question to have student keep in mind all the time. Sometimes, remember, it's the audience!
4. How does the diction of a character reveal his or her state of mind? Does the character speak in short, stabbing mono-syllables, or does she wax poetic? Constantly ask *how* a character speaks and not just *what* she speaks. Very often, the style and form gives us clues about a person's emotional frame of mind.
5. What props do you need? Is a taper mentioned? A sword? A skull? Again, do a "prop hunt" when preparing.
6. How does the human traffic move on stage? If Brutus and Cassius are having a face-off with Mark Antony and his army in Julius Caesar, would they enter from the same door? Probably not. This is a place where Shakespeare lets us decide how and where people enter -- we just need to use our judgment to know where we shouldn't enter.

These six questions will give you the tools to problem-solve the staging of a scene quite effectively. After that, make sure that students can be heard and seen, and the rest will take care of itself!