

Shakespeare Performance and Staging

KS3 English · Follows the national curriculum

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

1. Worked example

How does Shakespeare set the scene without scenery? 'But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.'

Step 1 · What does the line tell the audience?

There is a window above Romeo, and light is coming from it: Juliet has appeared on her balcony at night.

Step 2 · Why was this needed at the Globe?

The play was performed in afternoon daylight with no lighting, so the words create the night.

Step 3 · What extra job does the metaphor do?

'Juliet is the sun' turns the dark night bright: she is the centre of his world.

Answer: The lines create a night-time balcony scene in words (word scenery) and, through the metaphor, show Romeo's love at the same time.

Check: Setting and character are created together by the language.

2. Now try one with the steps

Plan the staging of Macbeth's aside: 'Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires:'

Step 1 · Who must not hear?

Step 2 · Position

Step 3 · Voice and body

Step 4 · Effect on the audience

Answer:

3. Practice

Show your working. The marks tell you how much is expected.

1. In which year was the Globe Theatre built? Write the year. [1]

2. How many acts does a Shakespeare play usually have? Write the number. [1]

3. What name was given to the playgoers who paid a penny to stand in the yard? [1]
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4. What is a soliloquy? [1]
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5. What is the difference between an aside and a soliloquy? [2]
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6. Why were female roles played by boys or young men in Shakespeare's theatre? [1]
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7. What is meant by 'word scenery'? [1]
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8. Give two things an actor can change with their voice to show a character's feelings. [2]
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9. What does 'proxemics' mean on stage? [1]
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10. How does the staging of an aside create dramatic irony? [2]
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11. Why might a director stage the witches in Macbeth in darkness and mist, even though Shakespeare's audience saw them in daylight? [2]
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12. Lady Macbeth speaks in verse early in the play but in prose when sleepwalking. What might this show an actor about how to play the scene? [2]
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13. Puck calls the actors 'shadows' in the epilogue. Explain one way this word works on two levels. [2]
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14. Explain why two productions of the same Shakespeare play can give an audience very different ideas about a character. [3]

4. Before you hand it in

Writing about a play it were a novel: 'the reader feels...'

Say 'the audience' and think about what they see and hear on stage.

'Shakespeare's audience sat quietly in the dark.'

Remember the open-air, daylight setting: this explains why the language sets the scene.

Thinking there is one 'correct' way to say a line.

Offer a choice and justify it from the text: 'A director might... because the line...'

Mixing up asides and soliloquies.

Ask: is the character alone (soliloquy) or are others on stage who must not hear (aside)?