



Performance—by Students—as a Text

Chicago Shakespeare SLAM celebrates the power of Shakespeare’s language and students’ own voices. The SLAM is an ensemble program—building community within and between the many high school teams participating across the entire region. Together, students have the opportunity to dive deep into a shared text—and do so through an infinite number of lenses crafted out of students’ own imaginations.

SLAM teams create two brief performance pieces. For the Scene Round, students perform a single scene from any Shakespeare play of their choice; cutting is encouraged to provide focus. For the Dream Round, teams develop and perform their own script by mixing up lines from one shared focus play; using Shakespeare’s language, students explore the play’s themes or characters or to create completely original stories of their own.

We’ve found that students watching other students perform Shakespeare, take risks, and clearly be having fun in the process can be one of the best motivators for trying something out of their own comfort zone. The activities here incorporate some of the student performances we’ve seen on our SLAM stage as text and a launching pad into your classroom’s study of Shakespeare. We hope that they’ll inspire your students to play with language and interpretation!

One Scene. Two Lenses.

One of our favorite parts of SLAM is in seeing how two teams perform the same scene with totally different interpretations. Share these paired performances with your students to examine how the same text can provide countless opportunities for unique, language-based choices.

Choose one set of performances below and think about what the teams’ titles tell you about the scene. Based on each title, what do you expect to see? Then watch both scenes all the way through and think about the choices each team made. Did the tone of the scenes feel different, even though they came from the same text? If so, what specific choices did the teams make to give the scenes that unique tone or mood? Consider the way the scenes were blocked (who stood where), how many characters were on stage, the lines they emphasized, etc.



To dig deeper, look at the way each script was cut. In the [Appendix](#) of this document, you can find Shakespeare’s original text for a portion of the paired scenes. Using that script, watch the scenes again, listening for where lines may be cut or emphasized differently between the two performances. Why do you think a team might have chosen to cut some lines and not others?

If you want to go one step further, take a scene from whatever play you are reading, and create your own Scene Round. Choose which parts of the script to cut in order to tell the story you want to tell. Think about tone and blocking, too, and stage the scene for your classmates.

SCENES TO WATCH:

Romeo and Juliet, Act 1, scene 1

- ▶ [“The Dueling Households,” Warren Township High School, 2019](#)
- ▶ [“Two Houses, Both Alike in Choreography,” John Hancock College Preparatory High School, 2019](#)

Macbeth, Act 1, scene 3

- ▶ [“Who Does Evil Want? The Good Guy,” Fenton Community High School, 2017](#)
- ▶ [“Come What May,” Rich Central High School, 2017](#)

Hamlet, Act 5, scene 2

- ▶ [“I Guess Everyone’s Dead Now,” Homewood-Flossmoor High School, 2019](#)
- ▶ [“Poisoned Foil,” Kenwood Academy High School, 2019](#)

Julius Caesar, Act 3, scene 1

- ▶ [“You Should’ve Listened to the Soothsayer,” Lindbloom Math and Science Academy, 2018](#)
- ▶ [“Let Slip the Dogs of War,” Fenton Community High School, 2019](#)



Much Ado About Nothing, Act 2, scene 3

▶ [“He Do, She Do, We Do, Much Ado,” Mundelein High School, 2017](#)

▶ [“The Birds and the Beatrice,” Warren Township High School, 2018](#)

Listening to Language

For our Dream Round, the entire SLAM community focuses on a single shared play each year. Particular words and phrases seem to resonate and are often selected by multiple teams as they create their unique scripts. Hearing some of the same lines in varying contexts can lead to a richer understanding.

Macbeth was our Dream Round focus play in 2018. In Shakespeare’s text, Lady Macbeth says, “What’s done is done” to Macbeth as he dwells on the king’s murder; later, while sleepwalking, she says, “What’s done cannot be undone” to the visions in her mind. Lady Macbeth’s lines **“What’s done is done”** and **“What’s done cannot be undone”** became an “anthem” of sorts that year, with many teams incorporating these lines into their Dream Round.

Watch the three Dream Round performances below, and notice how each team uses these lines. As you watch each performance, start by identifying the following elements:

- Which “characters” speak the lines?
- To whom are the lines spoken?
- What are the lines referring to in the context of the scene?

Then, examine the idea being explored in each scene through this language. Why might multiple teams have chosen to focus on these lines? Finally, take a moment to think about your own interpretations of Lady Macbeth’s lines. How might you use these same lines to tell a different story of your own?



SCENES TO WATCH:

- ▶ [“The Lady’s Crumbling Mind,” Kennedy High School](#) (start at 4:40)
- ▶ [“Fair Is Foul,” Lindblom Math and Science Academy](#) (start at 5:00)
- ▶ [“Two Truths Are Told,” Warren Township High School](#) (start at 5:50)

Shakespeare’s Big Ideas

Dream Round performances “harvest” language from one of Shakespeare’s play to tell a unique story—sometimes, as in the examples below, in conversation with a “big idea” that the play presents. Consider using SLAM performances as an entry point as you consider the themes in a text. Watch a set of scenes below to see how lines gleaned from the same play can provide insight into very different ideas. After you’ve watched a set of scenes, discuss what themes and types of characters you might expect to find as you read. What questions do these thematic “trailers” raise for you?

SCENES TO WATCH:

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 2017

- ▶ [“Waking Up from the Dream,” Fenton Community High School](#) (start at 5:29)
- ▶ [“A Midsummer Nightmare,” Huntley High School](#) (start at 4:49)
- ▶ [“In the Mind of the Changeling Boy,” Mundelein High School](#) (start at 6:12)

Macbeth, 2018

- ▶ [“Heat Oppressed Brain,” Fenton Community High School](#) (start at 5:07)
- ▶ [“What Ever Happened to Fleance?” Chicago High School for the Arts](#) (start at 4:54)
- ▶ [“Fair Is Foul,” Lindblom Math and Science Academy](#) (start at 5:01)



The Comedy of Errors, 2019

- ▶ ["Create Me New," Marengo Community High School](#) (start at 5:08)
- ▶ ["Accusations of Immigration," Homewood-Flossmoor High School](#) (start at 5:12)
- ▶ ["Errors of Tinder," John Hancock College Preparatory High School](#) (start at 4:00)
- ▶ ["Unjustified Justice," Lindblom Math and Science Academy](#) (start at 4:50)

Five-minute Shakespeare

Some teams decide to approach the Dream Round by distilling the entire story into five minutes or less. After watching the two performances below, create your own five-minute Shakespeare for the play you're reading. Start by considering the most important plot elements, then look for lines that reveal those moments. Share your performance (and your scripts!) with your classmates and compare your choices. Which lines were most frequently included? Which did you hear in other groups' performances that you now want to add to yours? This activity is another example of how many ways there are to interpret a single text!

SCENES TO WATCH:

- ▶ [Five-minute *Macbeth*, "Toil and Trouble," Kenwood Academy High School, 2018](#)
- ▶ [Five-minute *The Comedy of Errors*, "The Incredibly Abridged and Shredded Version of the Hilarious Comedy of Errors, To an Encore of William Tell Overture, or As Our Coaches Say, 'Do It Faster!'" Fenton Community High School, 2019](#)
(start at 5:43)



Appendix

Romeo and Juliet, Act 1, scene 1

Start at 1:46 for Warren Township High School

Start at 1:59 for John Hancock College Preparatory High School

GREGORY

Draw thy tool. Here comes
of the house of Montagues.

Enter Abram with another Servingman.

SAMPSON

My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back
thee.

GREGORY

How? Turn thy back and run?

SAMPSON

Fear me not.

GREGORY

No, marry. I fear thee!

SAMPSON

Let us take the law of our sides; let them
begin.

GREGORY

I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it
as they list.

SAMPSON

Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at
them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.



He bites his thumb.

ABRAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON

I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON *[aside to Gregory]*

Is the law of our side if I
say "Ay"?

GREGORY *[aside to Sampson]*

No.

SAMPSON

No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir,
but I bite my thumb, sir.

GREGORY

Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAM

Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

SAMPSON

But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as
good a man as you.

ABRAM

No better.

SAMPSON

Well, sir.

Enter Benvolio.



GREGORY *[aside to Sampson]*
Say "better"; here comes
one of my master's kinsmen.

SAMPSON
Yes, better, sir.

ABRAM
You lie.

SAMPSON
Draw if you be men.—Gregory, remember
thy washing blow.

They fight.

Macbeth, Act 1, scene 3

Start at 2:50 for Fenton Community High School

Start at 3:51 for Rich Central High School

MACBETH *[aside]*
Glamis and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind.
[To Ross and Angus] Thanks for your pains.
[Aside to Banquo] Do you not hope your children
shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

BANQUO
That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange.
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,



Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
In deepest consequence.—
Cousins, a word, I pray you. *[They step aside.]*

MACBETH *[aside]*
Two truths are told
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.

[Aside] This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not.

BANQUO
Look how our partner's rapt.

MACBETH *[aside]*
If chance will have me king, why, chance may
crown me
Without my stir.

BANQUO
New honors come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold
But with the aid of use.



MACBETH *[aside]*
Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

Julius Caesar, Act 3, scene 1

Start at 0:54 for Fenton Community High School

Start at 2:27 for Lindblom Math and Science Academy

CAESAR
I could be well moved, if I were as you.
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me.
But I am constant as the Northern Star,
Of whose true fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks;
They are all fire, and every one doth shine.
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
So in the world: 'tis furnished well with men,
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive.
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshaked of motion; and that I am he
Let me a little show it, even in this:
That I was constant Cimber should be banished
And constant do remain to keep him so.

CINNA *[kneeling]*
O Caesar—

CAESAR
Hence. Wilt thou lift up Olympus?

DECIUS *[kneeling]*
Great Caesar—



CAESAR
Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?

CASCA
As Casca strikes, the others rise up and stab Caesar.

CAESAR
Et tu, Brutè?—Then fall, Caesar

He dies.

CINNA
Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!
Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets.

CASSIUS
Some to the common pulpits and cry out
“Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement.”

BRUTUS
People and Senators, be not affrighted.
Fly not; stand still. Ambition’s debt is paid.

CASCA
Go to the pulpit, Brutus.

DECIUS
And Cassius too.

BRUTUS
Where’s Publius?

CINNA
Here, quite confounded with this mutiny.

METELLUS
Stand fast together, lest some friend of Caesar’s
Should chance—



BRUTUS

Talk not of standing.—Publius, good cheer.
There is no harm intended to your person,
Nor to no Roman else. So tell them, Publius.

CASSIUS

And leave us, Publius, lest that the people,
Rushing on us, should do your age some mischief.

BRUTUS

Do so, and let no man abide this deed
But we the doers.
All but the Conspirators exit.
Enter Trebonius.

CASSIUS

Where is Antony?

TREBONIUS

Fled to his house amazed.
Men, wives, and children stare, cry out, and run
As it were doomsday.

BRUTUS

Fates, we will know your
pleasures.

Hamlet, Act 5, scene 2

Start at 0:52 for Kenwood Academy High School

Start at 0:26 for Homewood-Flossmoor High School

HAMLET *[to Laertes]*

Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong;
But pardon 't as you are a gentleman. This presence knows,
And you must needs have heard, how I am punished



With a sore distraction. What I have done
That might your nature, honor, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness. If 't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
Sir, in this audience
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES

I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge; but in my terms of honor
I stand aloof and will no reconciliation
Till by some elder masters of known honor
I have a voice and precedent of peace
To keep my name ungored. But till that time
I do receive your offered love like love
And will not wrong it.

HAMLET

I embrace it freely
And will this brothers' wager frankly play.—
Give us the foils. Come on.

LAERTES

Come, one for me.

HAMLET

I'll be your foil, Laertes; in mine ignorance



Your skill shall, like a star i' th' darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

LAERTES

You mock me, sir.

HAMLET

No, by this hand.

KING

Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?

HAMLET

Very well, my lord.
Your Grace has laid the odds o' th' weaker side.

KING

I do not fear it; I have seen you both.
But, since he is better, we have therefore odds.

Much Ado About Nothing, Act 2, scene 3

Start at 2:43 for Mundelein High School

Start at 3:58 for Warren Township High School

BENEDICK

This can be no trick. The
conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of
this from Hero; they seem to pity the lady. It seems
her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it
must be requited! I hear how I am censured. They
say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love
come from her. They say, too, that she will rather
die than give any sign of affection. I did never think
to marry. I must not seem proud. Happy are they



that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her! I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage, but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor? No! The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she's a fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in her.

Enter Beatrice.

BEATRICE

Against my will, I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.



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