

CHICAGO 2026 SHAKESPEARE SLAM



TEAM RESOURCE GUIDE

CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE
THEATER

Intro!

Keeping it short, sweet, and real.

Welcome to the 2026 Chicago Shakespeare Slam and what we hope is the start of a process of creativity, discovery, and—most of all—fun! This Team Resource Guide is a roadmap to SLAM to get you started and set up for what’s to come in the weeks ahead. In these pages, you’ll find SLAM goals and guidelines, important dates this fall, and a host of online resources. We hope this will be helpful as you build your SLAM team and begin your work and play together.

We want, as always, to create a SLAM environment in which students play with the endless possible interpretations that live inside Shakespeare’s words and their own imaginations. Our Workshop Days and Bouts are full of energy, community, learning, and sharing. BUT it’s all about those rehearsals leading up to that performance—the process of exploration and creativity shared among the members of your team—that will make this experience take root. So...

Here are some details and guides that we hope can make the road ahead a bit easier to navigate.

The ONE SLAM RULE to never, ever forget: each time your team gets together, HAVE FUN!

P.S. If you’re looking for more guidance on the rehearsal process, Shakespeare, and anything else SLAM related, check out the Team Resource Guide: Act 2.



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Questions?

Get in touch with **Chicago Shakespeare Theater Education**
at 312.595.5678 or csteducation@chicagoshakes.com



SLAM Goals

As you prepare your scenes, we encourage your team to work toward these goals:

5 GOALS

What does your performance look and sound like to your audience?

BE SEEN!

You use your body and facial expressions to communicate the essence of your character. We understand who your character is—and their relationship to others—by how you hold your body and how you move. The operative word here is YOU! We want to see your spirit embody this character!

BE HEARD!

You project your voice with power and intention, and use your authentic voice to communicate the meaning of the language. We experience the energy of Shakespeare's language through the words you speak.

BE CREATIVE!

Your choices of text, staging, and interpretation provide a fresh take on the material and are true to your team and school community. We see moments in these plays in ways we've never seen before and learn something about you—through Shakespeare.

TAKE RISKS!

You fully commit to your choices and demonstrate confidence and energy. We are drawn in by your enthusiasm and by your bravery.

PLAY AS AN ENSEMBLE!

You perform as a cohesive group, with each member supporting one another to perform at their best. We see your team working together as a unit, supporting, connecting, and responding to one another on stage.



Team Guidelines

Our Chicago Shakespeare Slam remains, first and foremost, an ensemble program—building community among the members of a school’s team and between the many teams participating across the Chicago region. Together, we’ll have the opportunity to dive deep into Shakespeare and *Hamlet*—with each team approaching its scenes through a unique lens.

We’ve developed a short list of guidelines that we ask each team to follow.

The bonus to having a few parameters? They can spark creativity like nobody’s business.

1. Each school’s team is comprised of **2–8 student performers**.
(Have students interested in supporting the team “behind the scenes”? You have the option of 2 additional students serving as Peer Coaches.)
2. The entirety of the Scene Round text must be from one of Shakespeare’s plays. You may choose a scene from *Hamlet*, but it must be a different scene than your Dream Round selection.
3. The Dream Round text must be from *Hamlet* and can be in conversation with 1 other published text (see “The 2 SLAM Rounds Explained” on page 6 for more on the Dream Round).
4. All scenes must be **5 minutes or under**. You may (and are encouraged to) cut the text.
5. All team members and teacher coaches are responsible for cultivating an atmosphere that not only fosters creativity, but also nurtures a supportive environment through the **physical and emotional safety** of all participants.
6. Students are encouraged to **play any role or roles** that excite them, with intentionality in casting choices about age, gender identity, ability, race, or ethnicity.
7. Teams are encouraged to intersperse lines or words from their scene that they’ve **translated from English into another language**. (Intrigued but not sure where to start? We’ve included a link in our “Techno Shakespeare” section to a Spanish translation of *Hamlet*!)
8. Ideally, performance pieces are fully **memorized**.
9. We want to keep the focus on the students, their imaginations, their audience’s imagination, and the language. **No costumes, props, or technical enhancements, please!**

This is so important to the SLAM community and living our SLAM goals. See page 10 to learn more about what safety means and looks like for SLAM.

The 2 SLAM Rounds Explained

Chicago Shakespeare Slam encourages ensemble performance, focusing on what happens when performers engage in conversation with one another—and with their audience.

SCENE Round

[Time limit: 5 minutes • Participants: 2–8 team members]

Students from each team perform a single scene (or a cut version of a single scene) from any of **Shakespeare’s plays**.

- * For the Scene Round, language should be cut to streamline a scene—or even to cut out a character.
- * Remaining text is performed “as is,” without remixing, reordering, or tossing in other text—save that for the Dream Round!

DREAM Round

[Time limit: 5 minutes • Participants: all members of the team]

Dreams are mixed-up, ransacked—and most of all, personal— retellings. They are our imaginations gone wild. And voila! The Dream Round!

Students will devise a remixed performance piece to explore a character, theme, or story that they want to tell in an original and creative way.

Unlike the Scene Round, which is a single linear Shakespearean scene, for the Dream Round students mash-up text into a wholly original and imaginative performance piece, created from:

- A)** text sampled from *Hamlet* exclusively, **OR**
- B)** language from *Hamlet* in conversation with a single published author, playwright, poet, orator, or songwriter

Meant to be a conversation with Shakespeare, like any good conversation, you want to hear from both parties on the subject—something like a 50/50 split as a goal. That kind of equal split gives students the chance to really wrestle with Shakespeare. Ideally, your audience will be hugely aware of Shakespeare’s presence, hearing lots of echoes in your performance script of themes, ideas, characters, relationships in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*!

NOTE: No original, student-written language should be included in the Dream Round. We’re looking for a mash-up of *Hamlet* with an existing work, adapted into a Dream Round scene.

More on the Dream Round...

Get familiar with *Hamlet*. As a team, read a synopsis and character descriptions, watch a film version, introduce the activity *A Hamlet Night's Dream: In a Snap!* (find the instructions and handout for this activity in the Team Resource Guide: Act 2). Everyone needs a solid understanding of the plot and characters....

Decide on your approach to this non-linear, remixed performance piece.

What story does your team want to tell? **Here are seven possible entry points** into this round. Use one of these suggestions, combine two or more ideas, or show us something completely new!

1. Explore a theme, like, betrayal, grief, revenge, or family, found in *Hamlet*.
2. Create an entirely new story with entirely new characters. They don't have to be the ones that Shakespeare imagined in his *Hamlet*—they just have to use their language. Think of other stories you could tell using the words from this play.
3. If your team wants to place Shakespeare's language "in conversation" with another published author, a poet, an orator, a lyricist, consider a work that resonates with themes/ideas/characters in *Hamlet*. Early on in your process, create a storyboard of the arc you want to tell with two very different pieces of work woven together.
4. Track the arc of a single character who interests your team throughout the play. Pull the key, defining language of this character, or from what others say about them.
5. Create an action-packed abridged version of the play—in 5 minutes or less! Pull out the key lines and phrases in the entire play that help advance the plot.
6. Splice two or more scenes together from *Hamlet*, intercutting the language from different scenes to see how two or more parts of the story "talk" to one another.
7. Think about two or more characters interacting out of context—perhaps both from *Hamlet*, or perhaps one is from that second author/poet/songwriter you've chosen. Choose language from two or more characters to remix your dialogue.

Open Source Shakespeare provides a free online resource to search for words in Shakespeare's plays: opensourcehamlet.org

The additional author should be about a 50/50 split with *Hamlet*. Find a text that has a strong link to the play and be sure to engage both voices equally.

CONSIDER YOUR TEAM

The number of students on your team and everyone's specific strengths and interests should be factors when deciding your text for this round. Choose a structure and language that allows the team to best show itself off.

REVISE, REVISE, REVISE

You'll need to have made some decisions before you begin staging the scene, but allow the rehearsal process to reshape and shift the language to most effectively tell the story you've chosen. And remember, cutting text will likely be part of the revision process, so don't be afraid to continue chopping away at the text as you sculpt your performances!

Find some early "preview" audiences!

Until a performance has an audience, it's not complete. Invite a few trusted peers who've not been involved in the process to watch and give feedback! What's clear? What's not? Then (you guessed it...) back to rehearsals!

Avoid these few Dream Round "hiccups"

The goal of the Dream Round is to get your team (and your audience) excited about language and recontextualizing! Approach the development of your scene for this round in that spirit, and keep in mind...

WHAT THE DREAM ROUND IS NOT:

- * An original scene, written in contemporary language
- * The stringing together of individual words (even if every word can be found somewhere in *Hamlet*) to create new sentences
- * A mash-up of *Hamlet* with another of Shakespeare's plays — the "in conversation" is about bringing in a voice other than Shakespeare's.



We totally support reimagining and recontextualizing the language. We just mean don't pull an "of" from Act 5 and a "the" from Act 1 just to make a sentence make sense. Theme and story should drive any splicing and cutting.

Schedule

TEAM DOCUMENTS DUE

* **Saturday, March 7th, 8:30 AM-1:00 PM**

Documents to submit include:

- Team Roster
- Student Permission/Release form for each student
- Teacher Coach Publicity Release Form

ALL TEAM WORKSHOP

* **Saturday, March 7th, 8:30 AM-1:00 PM**

OPEN STUDIO (optional workshops)

- * **Monday, March 16, 4:30 PM-6:00 PM**
- * **Wednesday, March 18, 4:30 PM-6:00 PM**
- * **Saturday, March 21, 11 AM-1:00 PM**

PRELIMINARY BOUTS

- * **Monday, April 13, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM**
- * **Saturday, April 18, 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM**

FINAL BOUT

- * **Monday, April 27, 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM**

→ **ONE WEEK BEFORE YOUR PRELIMINARY BOUT**, please finalize your script and send to CST. We'll take a look and may have follow-up questions or suggested edits to help you avoid point deductions at the Bout.

All events held at:

Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier
800 E Grand, Chicago, IL 60611



Cultivating a Safe SLAM Rehearsal Process

CONTENT WARNING

Hamlet contains mention of multiple distressing topics, including but not limited to: violence, misogyny, suicide, and murder. We recommend checking in with students regarding potential triggers prior to staging.

In all of Chicago Shakespeare’s work—on our own stages, throughout our Theater, and in every aspect and venue of this SLAM program—there is nothing more important than the physical and emotional safety of every participant.

TIPS FOR MAINTAINING SAFETY THROUGHOUT THE SLAM

- * Cultivate a safe SLAM environment where all participants are **free to voice their concerns** about any discomfort—emotional or physical—an injury, or fatigue at any point before, during, or after rehearsals.
- * On the first day of rehearsal, establish a **vocabulary of safety** (such as using the word “Hold” to stop a movement mid-execution in the event that a student feels nervous or unsafe in any way).
- * Teacher Coaches and students are responsible for staying within agreed-upon boundaries. **Consent is an ongoing boundary** and is a requirement for any planned intimacy, violence, or onstage action.
- * Students should only participate in physical contact that is **discussed, agreed upon, and carefully rehearsed**. There should be absolutely no physically violent contact in staged violence. Onstage violence only represents violence; it is not actual violence. When professional actors perform a staged hit, punch, slap, kick etc., their actions are illusions meant to portray harm. The actors remain safe at all times.

EXAMPLES OF VOCABULARY THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL IN A REHEARSAL PROCESS:

- * **“Boundaries”**: The parts of me that I need to protect (this can be physical, emotional, or spiritual)
- * **“Destinations”**: Signals exactly where body parts, props or costumes are handled. An actor might approach staging by saying, “What might it look like for your left hand to graze my right cheek?” The actor has indicated what body parts might touch, how the touching happens (“graze” which indicates gentleness) and has posed a question which invites conversation around possibilities.
- * **“Visible Power Shift”**: Staging that physicalizes a shift in authority that takes place in the text. This might look like a character standing up, puffing their chest, running towards another character, or facing off without words.

If you have any questions about student safety as you’re developing your Scene and Dream Rounds, please do not hesitate to reach out to the CST Education Department by phone (312.595.5678) or email (csteducation@chicagoshakes.com).

What to expect at the All-Team Workshop

The Saturday Team Workshop provides tools and practice diving into—and playing with—Shakespeare’s language to help you begin creating your two performance pieces back at school. All participating teams (the teacher coach with ideally all, but with a minimum of two, student team members) must attend the all-team workshop.

THE DAY’S EVENTS

When you arrive at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, you’ll first check in at Registration. We’ll begin the day with a full-group physical and vocal exercise, helping us to warm up and begin to build our SLAM community across schools.

With your school team, you’ll move through a few different sessions, each providing different kinds of tools and strategies to take back into your school rehearsals. Topics include voice and movement, acting basics, and text work. Following the breakout sessions, we’ll end the workshop with a share-out of what we learned.

WHAT TO BRING, AND HOW TO PREPARE

- * Wear comfortable clothes and closed-toed shoes that allow you to move freely.
- * Bring a water bottle, with your name on it, to use throughout the day. Pizza lunch and snacks will be provided.
- * No need to prepare in any way for our Saturday Team Workshop—apart from setting your alarm the night before! We’ll provide all the SMALL bits of text that we’ll be using in different workshop sessions throughout the day.

At our Saturday workshops, all SLAM teams will be in different parts of their process. There is NO need to have started rehearsal, cast your roles, or selected your scenes. For many teams, the Workshop is the very first part of the SLAM process. Just bring yourself and you’ll be all set!

One of the most amazing parts of the Chicago Shakespeare Slam is getting to meet other students from all over the city and suburbs, and from all kinds of schools.



What to Expect at Your Preliminary Bout

Each team will perform at Preliminary Bout. In addition to your own performances, teams are very much present throughout the entire Bout as the other essential element to any performance: as **a warm, supportive audience** to the other teams as they perform.

CHECKING IN

If possible, travel together to Chicago Shakespeare Theater so you can arrive and register as a group. First, check in at the SLAM Registration table. If you get there a bit early (**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED!**), your team will have time to both grab a quick breakfast snack and take some time in a warm-up space to run through any final prep. You'll also have the chance to see the stage to acquaint yourself with the layout prior to the start of the Bout.

At check-in, your team will draw a number to randomly determine the order of performances for each round. This order will then be posted in the auditorium, and teams are asked to track when they're "on deck" for each of the rounds.

Family and friends are welcome to attend the Regional Bouts! Encourage them to be there to cheer you on!

For the two rounds, your team will have a different position in the order of performances, so make sure you know and keep track of which team is slated to perform right before you!

STRUCTURE OF THE BOUT

With all teams seated together in the auditorium, the Emcees and our DJ will be on stage to host the Bout. There will be five Judges scoring each performance, as well as a Bout Manager, a Timekeeper, and a Deduction Tracker. The Emcees go over the rules and structure, and lead everybody in a warm-up.

- * **The SCENE Round:** Each team will perform its Scene Round in turn. Those performing in the Scene Round will take the stage, introduce their team and the name of their scene (see next section), and then perform their scene from any of Shakespeare's plays. The judges will score each team's performance, and the next team will take the stage for their scene.
- * **The DREAM Round:** Following the Scene Round, we'll take a short break, then begin the Dream Round. Like the Scene Round, each team in turn takes the stage, introduces their team and the name of their ensemble piece, and performs. The judges will score the performance, and then one judge will share some comments with the team before we move on to the next performance.
- * **The END of the Bout:** The Emcees will announce the teams from your Regional Bout who will be advancing. These teams will bring the same Scene or Dream performance pieces to the Final Bout. We close the day with shout-outs from each team about specific moments, students, and performances that stood out—and then pizza and time for teams to hang out with each another.

For information on how to introduce yourselves, read more below under "SLAM Culture."

At the end of your performance, remember to take a bow!

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE SLAM CULTURE

- * **Introducing your team:** Come up with an attention-grabbing title for each of the two performances. Before each performance begins (and the clock starts!), students will introduce their school team and the title of their piece. Please use the following format when introducing your performance:
 - All members performing in a particular Round take the stage and state (loud and proud): **“We are (name of school) and we OWN our voices!”**
 - One person on stage: **“The title of our piece is (title).”**
- * **If you like what you see or hear:** When you’re watching other teams perform and you see a choice you like, snap your fingers in true poetry SLAM fashion. And if you see someone needing a little support from the crowd, a finger snap may be all they need to remember a line...
- * **After your DREAM ROUND performance:** One judge will share some supportive feedback to your entire team on your performance. Enjoy having all of your hard work acknowledged!
- * **Team Shout-outs:** Near the end of the day, each team acknowledges another team or student for something amazing they did—onstage or off. Throughout the Bout, be thinking about the team or person your team might want to celebrate.

Titles need not be serious!
For example, a performance featuring the appearance of Banquo’s Ghost could be called “Guess who’s back, back again!” (Thanks, George Washington High!)

ADVANCING TO FINALS

School teams will have the opportunity to advance to the Final Bout by scoring well in **EITHER** their Scene Round **OR** Dream Round! Our goal is to give as many schools as possible a chance to perform on our stage at the Final Bout and create an evening our SLAM community can be proud of.

Three Scene Round performances and three Dream Round performances from each Preliminary Bout will advance to the Final Bout at Chicago Shakespeare Theater to perform their scenes for the entire SLAM community. These six performances from each Regional Bout include the four highest-scoring performances from the judges, plus the two performances with the most votes from the Teams’ Choice vote, (keep reading!). In total, 12 different teams will perform either their Scene or Dream Round at CST.

JUDGES’ SCORING

Even though each performance will be scored, remember: SLAM is about **Community**, not competition.

Following each performance, the five judges will each score the piece. The performances with the highest final scores will advance to the Final Bout. The scores will not be shared with any SLAM participants.

No, really...the point is PLAY—taking the stage alongside your fellow ensemble members and making big, bold choices, with your SLAM community cheering you on!

THE TEAMS' CHOICE

At the end of each round, teams will decide and anonymously select three performances they feel most exemplify the Spirit of the SLAM. Votes will be tallied, and the two performances with the most votes will also advance to Finals.

If the Teams' Choice is the same as one of the four top-scoring performances from the judge's scores, the performance with the next highest number of votes will advance to Finals. See below for an example of what the team choice ballot looks like!

Select your top three performances for each round.

Dream Round Performance	Scene Round Performance
1. Malvolio High	1. Capulet High
2. Puck Charter	2. CST School
3. Verona Academy	3. Malvolio High

DEDUCTIONS

The Bout Manager, the Deduction Tracker, and the Time Keeper will work together to determine any deductions. Deductions will be subtracted from the total judges' score for either round, but will not be shared at the end of a performance, nor will the Judges be aware of them.

These deductions also affect the Teams' Choice. For every .5 deduction a team incurs, one half of a vote will be subtracted from their total vote tally.

*** Going over the time limit:**

- 0-15 seconds over = 0 pt. deduction
- 16-30 seconds over = 0.5 pt. deduction
- 31-45 seconds over = 1 pt. deduction
- 46-60 seconds over = 1.5 pt. deduction
- each 15 additional seconds = .5 pt. deduction



Share your exact scripts with us one week in advance of the Bout. We'll give you the option to make edits to avoid deductions.

*** Props or costumes:** 1 pt. deduction for each element used

*** Mashing up two or more scenes for the SCENE ROUND:**

- 3 pt. deduction



To keep the rounds distinct, choose a single scene to perform in the Scene Round, not multiple scenes (even if they're consecutive).

*** Use of non-Shakespeare language in the SCENE ROUND:**

- 3 pt. deduction for "large" amount (approximately 20% or more of the language)

*** Overuse of contemporary language in the DREAM ROUND:**

- 2 pt. deduction for more than half of the Dream Round script containing contemporary text

*** Safety on stage:**

- 5 pt. deduction for any physically violent contact during staged violence



Chicago Shakespeare's number one priority is the safety of each and every member of the SLAM community. Staged violence must be created safely and mindfully. Any punch, hit, slap, stab, or other act of violence should not involve any violent physical contact between performers. This is an opportunity to explore what a staged fight looks like creatively, rather than literally.

What to Expect at the Final Bout

ALL participating 2026 SLAM teams are our honored guests at Finals, with the advancing teams from Regionals performing onstage and the rest of the SLAM community cheering them on. **Teams participating in the Final Bout will perform the same performance pieces that they performed at their Regional Bout.**

SAVE THE DATE!

The Final Bout is Monday, April 27, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. at Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

The basic structure, culture, judges' scoring, and deductions at the Final Bout follow the same format as in the Regional Bouts.

The major difference between the Final Bout and Regionals is the performance space. At the Final Bout, teams will perform in the Elizabethan-style Courtyard Theater at Chicago Shakespeare on its thrust stage. Each team advancing to Finals will be given more information about what the stage will look like, and you may decide to make some staging adjustments to either piece to accommodate this different stage; the script, however, for each piece should remain unaltered between the Regional and Final Bouts.

At Finals, we won't have a Teams' Choice vote; the winners of the Final Bout will be solely determined by the judges' scores.



Techno Shakespeare

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Chicago Shakespeare Slam 2026 Materials

www.chicagoshakes.com/slam

Access an online portal to SLAM dates, permission forms, a list of participating schools, this Resource Guide, and more.

HAMLET TEACHING RESOURCES

Folger Library Educational Resources

www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/hamlet/

Hamlet Spanish Translation

<https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/56454/pg56454-images.html>

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Teacher Resources

https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/education-pdfs/teacher-pack-resources/hamlet-teacher-pack-2025/hamlet-teacher-pack-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=75a64b20_0

TEXTS AND EARLY EDITIONS**Folger Digital Texts**

<https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/all-works/>

All of Shakespeare's plays are available to download here in a variety of file formats—great for downloading plays into a Word document and cutting the text!

Shakespeare Online

<https://shakespeare-online.com/plays/midsscenes.html>

The full text of the play is provided with accompanying activities and information.

The Internet Shakespeare Editions

<https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/m/index.html>

This website has transcriptions and high-quality facsimiles of Shakespeare's folios and quartos, categorized by play with links to any articles written about the play that can be found on the website.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS**Open Source Shakespeare Concordance**

www.opensourceshakespeare.com/concordance/

Use this concordance to view all the uses of a word or word form in all of Shakespeare's works or in one play.

Shakespeare's Words Glossary and Language Companion

www.shakespeareswords.com

Created by David and Ben Crystal, this site is a free online companion to the bestselling glossary and language companion, Shakespeare's Words.

SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE**The Internet Broadway Database**

ibdb.com

This online database of Broadway plays is a great place to search for "Shakespeare" and learn about some of the different productions of the Bard's works.

The Internet Movie Database: William Shakespeare

imdb.com

Similar to IBDB, utilize this online movie database to search for "Shakespeare" and learn about the different cinematic versions of his plays.



• GRATITUDE •

In the theater, we give a big “Standing O” for amazing work we’ve loved seeing on stage. This Standing O is for each of you—students and teachers alike—who have stepped forward and said “Yes!” to participating in this year’s Chicago Shakespeare Slam. Each year we learn more and more about this program’s boundless potential—through your creativity and your ideas. This Guide is a reflection of everyone’s contributions from past years. We hope it can serve as a helpful resource as you work to develop your performance. And remember, always, the two most important ingredients of a truly successful SLAM experience: your team members’ creative encounter with Shakespeare and language—AND having so much fun in the process!

WE CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOUR TEAM AT THIS SPRING’S EVENTS!





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