

Performance Projects

During the last week of class, you will stage scenes from the plays we have read this semester. To do so, you must form yourselves into small “acting companies.” Each company must have at least 3 members, and every member must have a speaking part. You must inform me in writing by **November 16** of which scene your company will perform, who is in your company, and what roles each member will play. I will announce the schedule for performances by **November 23**.

The scene you select should be no less than 5 and no more than 10 minutes long; that usually means between 100 and 200 lines of verse. You can pick any scene or any part of a scene from any of the plays we have read this semester; you may make cuts in a longer scene to keep it under 10 minutes. Do not play double roles; it may seem like fun, but it usually becomes a distraction; better to cut the scene creatively or recruit another actor than to confuse your audience. Do not choose a difficult or dull scene just because it has the right number of roles. *Do* pick a scene that presents an interesting conflict or moment of decision. Feel free to consult with me about selecting or editing your scene.

You do not have to memorize your lines, but doing so is likely to enhance your grade. Although you may not spend any money on costumes, you should think about how what you wear can enhance your performance. (For example, an acting group called Shenandoah Shakespeare used to wear blue jeans and tennis shoes with different shirts to differentiate characters: Dukes in coats and ties, Clowns in tie-died T-shirts, soldiers in camouflage, and so on.) Keep props to a minimum; avoid them altogether if possible. Focus on using the *language* of the scene, not clever props or elaborate stage effects. You will have only 30 seconds to set up and 30 seconds to get off stage.

This project should give you a first-hand sense of how Shakespeare’s words work when spoken. I will not grade you on “acting ability” but on how carefully and thoroughly you’ve thought through the scene and how clearly you communicate your scene to an audience. Decide what EFFECT you want your scene to have on the audience. How do you want the audience to respond? Everything in your performance should contribute to producing that response. To do this, you first need to understand your scene thoroughly. Then you need to figure out how to convey what you understand about the scene to us. In practice, this means analyzing your scene, discussing it with your fellow actors, and then rehearsing it over and over and over again.

I will base your grade for the performance project on four things: 1) Cave-Man Script; 2) Character Sketch; 3) Prompt Book; 4) my evaluation of your performance. The Cave-Man Script, Character Sketches, and Prompt Book are all due the day you perform your scene. Each member of the company will receive an individual grade.

Cave-Man Script

Make a “cave-man” version of your speeches by getting rid of all except the most basic, most important words. Reduce your speeches as closely as you can to basic noun-verb sentences-or to sentence-fragment exclamations. (It might help run through your first rehearsal using these reduced scripts.) Cut and paste each actor’s cave-man script together into a single document when you submit it to me.

Character Sketch

Write a BRIEF (300 words maximum) sketch of the character you play. This should NOT be a plot summary. Don't tell me what happens in the play, tell me about your character’s traits and motivations.

Here are the kinds of questions your character sketch should address:

- First, of course, who is this person? What are they like?
- What status does your Character have in relation to others in the scene?
- What does your Character want in this scene? Does this change at any point(s)? If so, is there an overall goal behind it all?
- Why does your Character want this?
- What obstacles stand in the way?
- How does your Character deal with the obstacle(s)?

Prompt Book

Make a Xerox copy of your scene script with all the stage directions, subtext, emphases, gestures, emotions, and so on marked. You will submit one Prompt Book for your group, incorporating everyone’s input about the scene and their character. Here are the kinds of things you should mark in your Prompt Book:

- your character’s intention (vs what you happen to say out loud)
- implicit stage directions
- clues about whom you are talking TO
- subtext of any sort
- unspoken but implied thoughts
- ambiguous references
- rhythm, especially pauses
- changes in mood, intention, tone, audience being addressed, and so on
- emphasis: which words should be stressed?
- body motion (look for any excuse to move!)
- emotion and changes in emotion
- gesture, facial expression, tone of voice, and so on
- what you are doing with your face and body while the OTHER characters are speaking

Performance Evaluation

I will evaluate your performance by asking the following questions:

- Could we understand what you were saying and why?
- Did you interact with the other characters (rather than saying your lines like a monologue, as if no one else were on stage)?
- Did you convey the movement and tone implied by the lines? (This will come out in your annotated script, even if you feel you can't “act” it convincingly.)
- How creative (in an appropriate way) was the group's interpretation?