

**YEAR NINE ENGLISH****LESSON PLAN 5****BREAKING THE TEXT INTO THOUGHTS****DURATION:** 40 minutes**CAESURAS AND THOUGHT BREAKS****CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

<b>STRAND</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>Literacy</b>
<b>SUB-STRAND</b>	<b>Text structure and organisation</b>		<b>Interpreting, analyzing and evaluating</b>
<b>CURRICULUM CONTENT</b>	(ACELA1553)		(ACELY1743) (ACELY1744)

Given that Shakespeare's text was written to be spoken, and given that those words spoken are the enunciation of a character's thoughts, to begin the process of comprehension and interpretation it is reasonable to break the text down into individual thought phrases. The two exercises in this plan are the beginning of what is called The Step Process. This process has been adapted from the work of internationally renowned voice coaches, Cicely Berry and Patsy Rodenburg.

Berry, Cicely 1973 *Voice and the Actor*. George G Harrap & Co. UK

Berry, Cicely 1987 *The Actor and his Text* Harrap Ltd UK

Rodenburg, Patsy 1993 *The Need for Words* Methuen Drama London UK

Rodenburg, Patsy 1997 *The Actor Speaks* Methuen Drama London UK

## **REQUIREMENTS**

**As both these exercises involve students ‘walking’ the words of the text desks and chairs will need to be moved in order to provide sufficient floor space.**

**It is possible to do this exercise tapping the hands back and forth against a desktop, but for maximum kinesthetic experience walking the text is the most effective.**

**If it is possible to provide students with photocopies of the text with large font and double spacing it makes reading the text while being active easier. The blank spaces on the page also clearly indicate that this is a working document requiring notations and decoding marks as a part of the cumulative process in which the student is engaged. The text for the purposes of this approach is not literature nor is it a script requiring performance. It is a working text ready for exploration.**

## **LESSON EXERCISES**

### **EXERCISE 1: FINDING THE CAESURA**

**A Caesura is simply a break between major phrases in a line of verse. As Cicely Berry points out, in a line of iambic verse there is usually at least one major break in each line. This break occurs simply as a major change in thought. The Caesura is usually found towards the centre of the line and is different than the habitual pause (called end-stopping in professional actor speak) that many people put at the end of a line of spoken verse.**

**Rationale: By getting all the students to read out loud the words of the text, working in pairs or small groups (as many as there are characters in a scene) the pressure of reading aloud in front of the class is lessened. By having the students walking as they read, and marking the Caesura or change of phrase by turning around, the physical rhythm and change of rhythm assists in reading for comprehension, again without a self-conscious focus on individual ‘performance’. By recommending that**

there is only one caesura per line, most often indicated by punctuation, it is a very achievable exercise. At the same time, students are beginning a process of self-driven interpretation. They are becoming familiar with using their physical movement as an aid to interpretation, something which will become increasingly important as a means to exploring the detail and layered meanings of Shakespeare's text.

**TIP:** You can do the same exercise with rap lyrics.

**Method:** Working in pairs or small groups, and with pencil in hand (using a pencil acknowledges that all decisions are able to be changed. Students are engaged in an ongoing and cumulative process - not an end game.) students read their text out loud at the same time as walking in a straight line. Once they get to a point in the line which 'feels' (emphasis on 'feels', they are speaking thoughts - let grammatical considerations take a back seat) like there is a natural pause, or change of thought, they mark that point on their page with a / slash; turn around, and begin walking and talking in the opposite direction.

If possible it is important to establish that walking along a 180degree pathway is the best for this exercise. It builds up a cumulative flex and reflex energy which becomes important in later stages of the Step Process.

Students should feel whether it FEELS right to pause at the end of a line, or to simply walk straight through into the beginning of the next line. Not all lines of iambic verse require a pause at the end of lines. If the sense of what you are saying propels you on into the next line then you should do so with your walking. End stopping is a bad habit that no professional actor would allow.

Students should stop and work out any word definitions, metaphors or pronunciations as they progress. If you rigorously and systematically work your way through individual problems of comprehension you develop a confidence in your ability to engage with Shakespeare on your own terms.

**TIP:** Students should be encouraged to stop and go back over choices where they are unsure. By interrupting their process in favour of checking out other options, they begin to understand that this is not an exercise in reading aloud; rather, it is a systematic process of disassembly and reassembly which just happens to involve reading out loud. The focus needs to be on the making of choices, not on the quality of their reading.

When students have walked their way through their section of text they should read and walk their way from start to finish, ensuring that they walk with strong purpose and clearly stop and turn on every major thought break (caesura).

**TIP:** Body/mind synergy is not a capability which our current education system fosters and enables. Consequently, many students will struggle to begin with in stopping walking right when they pause in their talking; or starting walking again right when they begin to speak. Side-coaching from the teacher is remarkably effective in bringing their attention to taking it slow and paying some attention to getting familiar with walking, talking, stopping and turning with accuracy according to the breaks in the text. Again, this becomes extremely important as we progress through the Step Process.

## **EXERCISE 2: STEPPING OUT THE THOUGHTS**

**Rationale:** Shakespeare's text is made up of an extraordinary quotient of figurative language; of inverted objects, subjects and phrases, and of meaning embedded in rhythm, rhyme and other poetic devices; making it extremely dense and energized as a reading and speaking experience.

Just the same as any musician must work in great detail through each bar of a score in order to understand and familiarize themselves with playing the assembly of notes and patterns of a composition; just the same as any mountain bike rider must walk carefully and slowly the terrain of their most challenging tracks, familiarizing themselves with every bump, turn, twist and launch that they must do in order to satisfactorily ride the track at speed; so too does Shakespeare's text

require systematic dismantlement down to its smaller components in order to eventually be able to eventually read the text at speed. Although the Step Process seems quite slow and belaboured to begin with, it quickly results in a proficiency of experiential understanding that makes reading the text very achievable.

**Method:** Once the students have broken the text into Caesura's they can now use the same process to 'slash their thoughts'. This means again, to walk and talk the text until they come to a thought change. For the purposes/ of this exercise/, a thought/ should be considered/ to be any word/ or/ collection of words/ which/ can stand/ or have meaning/ on its own./ For example:

Thou knowest/ the mask of night/ is on my face/  
 Else would a maiden blush/ bepaint my cheek/  
 For that/ which thou has heard/ me speak tonight./  
 Fain/ would I dwell on form/ – fain/ fain/ deny  
 What I have spoke;/ but/ farewell compliment!/  
 O' my face/

Breaking text into thoughts is entirely a personal interpretive choice. As the Step Process progresses actors will continue to shift thought breaks, add new thought breaks and delete others as they discover more of the detail of what they are saying.

Of the five lines from Juliet exemplified above, it can be seen that the actor 'springs' off the end of Line 4 and continues without a break on into the beginning of line 5.

The point of the exercise is that a) the students are engaged in a thought by thought interpretation of what they are actually saying as an intrinsic part of the exercise, and b) they are making interpretive choices. They are engaged in their own process of meaning making. It doesn't matter whether they are 'right' choices. What matters is that they make choices and that they walk the thought changes by changing direction – back and forth – on every thought change.

**Just as a musical score has bars, Shakespeare's text can be broken into thoughts. The students have now begun the process of discovering the rhythmic layer of meaning embedded in the literal and metaphoric meaning of the text.**