

**YEAR NINE ENGLISH****LESSON PLAN 6****THE STEP PROCESS A PHYSICAL APPROACH  
TO TEXT INTERPRETATION****DURATION: 40 minutes****CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

<b>STRAND</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>Literacy</b>
<b>SUB-STRAND</b>	<b>Expressing and developing ideas</b>	<b>Examining Literature</b>	<b>Interpreting, analyzing and evaluating and Interacting with Others</b>
<b>CURRICULUM CONTENT</b>	(ACELA1557)	(ACELT1637)	(ACELY1744) (ACELY1811)

**One of the primary poetical devices employed by Shakespeare is iambic pentameter. The world renowned Royal Shakespeare Company voice coach Cicely Berry proposes that iambic pentameter then and now is rhythmically close to everyday speech patterns (Berry C 1987 P. 52).**

**In order to understand Shakespeare’s compact, densely figurative and inverted language devices and structures it is helpful to explore each one of the components of his dramatic verse. Students have already familiarized themselves with some of his most frequently employed devices such as metaphor, simile, pun and historical/cultural associations.**

**Now it is time to engage in the task of interpreting the dramatic verse. As Berry says, “...you have to speak the text out loud and feel the movement of the language...” (P. 52). The Step Process is a cumulative series of exercises which allows students to engage in a singular experiential exploration of the separate layers of Shakespeare’s language, and to**

progress towards a sound comprehension of what the characters are saying, and a fluency in reading their dialogue.

Text cited: Berry, Cicely 1987 *The Actor and his Text* Harrap Ltd 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: THE IAMBIC CANTER

This exercise is based on the children’s game of pretending to ride a horse around the room. To emphasize the playful disposition required to properly engage in this exercise, we call it ‘horsie-horsie’

Students simply ‘canter’ around the room in a rocking ‘da dum da dum da dum’ rhythm representative of a cantering horse.

This is the basic rhythm of iambic pentameter.

An iambic foot is made up of two syllables. The first syllable, when spoken, is unstressed, the second syllable is stressed. ‘Complete’; ‘bizarre’; ‘alike’; are all examples of iambic words.

**A pentameter simply refers to a line of poetry that has five feet; five sets of two syllables in the unstressed/stressed pattern. Generally speaking, ten spoken syllables per line of iambic text.**

**TIP: Most of the Working with Shakespeare exercises seek to blend a full-body physical experience of the explorative process with vocalization. This is to encourage a holistic exploration and ownership of the experience and discoveries made. By vocalizing with the action, the breathing is brought into synchronicity with the physical movement and mental observation and cognitive interpretation of the experience is profoundly connected to the sensations of the moment. The process is heuristic.**

**This holistic approach even applies to an exercise as simple as horsie-horsie. Students should speak out loud and strong the words, ‘da dum da dum da dum da dum’ or ‘short-long short-long short-long short-long’ as they canter around the room. This is so that they are inculcated in the basic unstress/stress spoken ‘beat’ of iambic.**

**The first syllable in an iambic foot is lightly stressed. The second syllable is heavily or powerfully stressed.**

**As they become more comfortable students might be challenged to make up sentences in the iambic rhythm.**

**“I walked down to the shop to buy some tea;**

**The shop-keeper refused to speak to me” ...**

**Students should note how the stressed ‘beat’ on the second syllable serves to propel them forward; the energy in that second stressed**

**syllable provides a forward momentum or impetus. This is important when beginning to discover the power and propulsion to be found in speaking iambic verse. The same can be seen to operate with most rappers – the alternating stress of their words builds up a forward momentum, and that forward momentum captures our attention; makes us want to listen for the words we can ‘feel’ are coming – words yet to be said. Words spoken in a recurring rhythmic pattern build up a sense of suspense – an expectation of what is coming next.**

**Once students have developed a familiarity with the iambic stress rhythm, it is time to introduce them to the reversal of that pattern: Trochaic rhythm. Trochaic verse structure is also made up of two syllabic ‘feet’, where the first syllable is stressed and the second syllable is left unstressed.**

**To begin with students may find this difficult. It feels ‘unnatural’. The energy in the first stressed beat is interrupted or ‘dropped’ by the lack of energy in the following second syllable beat.**

**Voicing Trochaic rhythm would be “dum da dum da dum da” or “long-short long-short long-short”. The best way to feel trochaic rhythm is actually to canter backwards.**

**Shakespeare wrote in iambic and trochaic rhythms, and, in fact, everything on the spectrum between the two extremes. So, it is beneficial for students to understand both verse rhythms. Iambic rhythm canters us forward – it has an inevitable forward energy. Trochaic is like a horse baulking at something in front of it – it has a faltering regressive energy.**

**TIP:** It is possible for this exercise to be explored using hands tapping or slapping against the top of a desk. It is not a full-bodied experience but a robust approach still enables students to ‘feel’ the essential energy and rhythm of the two poetic styles.

The iambic rhythm beats like a living pulse beneath all of Shakespeare’s dramatic verse.

#### **EXERCISE 2: STEPPING OUT THE IAMBIC TEXT**

This exercise is a straight transition from the previous.

Now, rather than vocalizing ‘da dum da dum’, students simply speak out loud the words of their text as they continue to canter around the room.

**TIP:** Encourage students to speak out loud and strong. Speaking sotto voce (repressing the voice) is counterproductive, because it is psychologically repressing holistic engagement with the exercise and therefore little lasting discovery can be made. If students are self-conscious for any reason, have them speak out in falsetto, or in a silly accent (bad Irish and Scottish accents are excellent for Shakespeare) or they can use ‘hissper’, which is a hissed audible whisper.

Students must understand that they are NOT performing. Neither are they engaged in ‘practice’ as if they have found everything there is to know about the text. They are involved in a process of discovery through physical exploration. As such, they can stop and start again to find their way through difficult passages. They can refer back to partners and the dictionary to check on the meaning of words or historical references and associations. They are explorers in an ongoing process.

**It helps to exaggerate their speaking at this stage. Speak in time to their canter. Speak – the – words – in – the – same – beat – to – the – da – dum – da - dum – rhythm. Make sure they emphasize the beat on the second syllable of each ‘foot’.**

**The first thing students will notice is that sometimes placing the stressed beat on the second syllable does not match with the sense of the words. That is absolutely fine. This exercise is not about making sense of the words. This exercise is about ‘imposing’ the iambic beat onto the words separate from thought changes and from any adjustment of the beat in alignment with the sense of the words.**

**Just have the students canter through their text, emphasizing the iambic beat and mentally taking note of when the beat does, and doesn’t, match the meaning of the words.**

**TIP: For every time the beat does not seem to match with the meaning of the words the student is encouraged to momentarily look into that ‘gap’ to recheck their interpretation or comprehension of what the words are saying. They are therefore inherently engaged in a process of textual interpretation and meaning making even while they are occupied in a separately focused activity.**

**It helps if students are able to go through their text in the iambic rhythm at least twice before progressing onto the next stage of the Step Process.**

### **EXERCISE 3: STEPPING OUT THE IAMBIC IN THOUGHTS**

**Now students have the opportunity to put the separate thoughts, and thought change turns, back into their working of the text.**

**Still adhering to the exaggerated iambic rhythm, students now turn on every thought change at the thought slashes they have marked on their text.**

**Students are again reminded that they are in a process of discovery, and the reason they are working in pencil is so that they can alter decisions already made and add in more thought changes where they discover the possibility.**

**The first thing students will discover is that the action of turning on a thought change sometimes takes up half a beat – an unspoken beat in the steady rhythm of ‘da dum da dum’. What this does is allows a change of the iambic pattern, from iambic to what would otherwise be trochaic rhythm – but most importantly, the half beat of the thought change allows the spoken stress to match the sense of the words. This is particularly the case with the major thought change – the caesura.**

**On other occasions, though they may make a turn to mark a thought change, they will not put in a half beat pause; they will speak ‘through’ the thought change, maintaining the rhythm of the iambic beat; and this action will also match now, the sense with the spoken stress of the words.**

**So, by putting the thought changes into the speaking of the text, we are now finding how they are breaking the text up to start matching the sense of the words with the spoken stress of the iambic rhythm.**

**This is a crucial aspect to Shakespeare’s text. The rhythm of his words, and the tempo of the speaking of those words, profoundly supports the**

**literal and associative meanings of the spoken words. By adding the thought changes to the iambic rhythm we have begun the process of bringing rhythmic sense and the literal sense together.**

**But still, at times, the iambic rhythm can be felt to be ‘getting in the way’ of how the sense of the words needs the words to be spoken.**

**If the students can feel this ‘gap’ between the strict ‘da-dum da-dum’ of the iambic rhythm and the true sense of the words, then they are well positioned to move onto the next phase of the exercise: Stepping out the Sense.**