



Unlocking Soliloquies and Unleashing “the Dogs of War”

Teacher’s Guide

This activity works for any Shakespeare soliloquy and is a wonderful way to engage students in the active discovery of how a soliloquy works. Don’t skip any steps—the sequence of steps is important to the whole process. Each step is followed by discussion prompts, but it is important to keep the activity moving. You might want to encourage the students to reflect on what they learned throughout the whole process as a follow-up writing assignment.

1. Have your students stand and form a large circle. Read the soliloquy around the circle, stopping and changing readers at every punctuation mark.

Discuss: What do you notice about the pattern of the lines?

2. Have students read around the circle again, but this time, tell them to read it line by line, forcing the iambic pentameter rhythm. Example: “oh PARDON ME thou BLEEDING PIECE of EARTH.” (For more information on working through meter with your students, you might want to refer to the archived lesson plan, “It’s Elementary: Stomping and Romping with Shakespeare.”)

Discuss: Where was the meter off? (The second line is an immediate example, as “BUTCHERS” ends the line with an extra unstressed foot.) Repeat those lines. Is anything different, important, or unusual about those lines? Is Shakespeare telling us to pay attention?

3. Play “Rock ‘em, Sock ‘em Shakespeare”: have the students spread out around the room and tell them to read the lines aloud while moving in a straight line, changing directions with an abrupt, full-body turn at every punctuation mark. (Remind them not to bump into each other or the furniture.)

Discuss: How does the soliloquy “move”? Is there a pattern emerging?

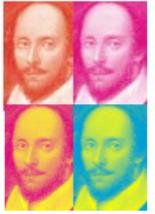
4. Line the students up in two equal lines, facing each other. Alternate speaking the lines as two groups, switching sides each time the students come to a punctuation mark.

Discuss: Does the soliloquy work as a dialogue? How does this exercise make you feel?

5. Have the students repeat step four, but this time, start out by speaking the lines very softly, gradually increasing the volume until they are almost shouting the last line.

Discuss: Now, how do you feel? Does volume affect emotional impact?

Sum up everything the class has discovered about the soliloquy up to this point.



6. Break the class up into small discussion groups of five and have them identify any imagery that they can find. Remind them to look beyond visual imagery and identify images that appeal to the five senses. Look especially for *synaesthesia*, images that appeal to more than one sense at a time—e.g., “with carrion men, groaning for burial” (smell, sight, hearing). This should take about 10 minutes.

Discuss as a class: What imagery patterns did you find? What meaning can you derive from them? How do they work in the soliloquy?

7. Continuing small-group work, ask your students to cut the soliloquy in half, or by a third, and then perform the cut versions for the entire class. Discuss differences and similarities.

Discuss: Why did you cut what you cut? Why did you keep what you kept? Were some lines cut in every version? Were some lines retained in every version? Why? Did cutting and performing the cut versions of the soliloquy bring any new insights about how the soliloquy works?