

SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

Character Entrances and Elizabethan Card Party

ACTIVITY 1: CHARACTER ENTRANCES

Grades: K-12
Goal(s): To explore characters and relationships to other characters within a play/scene
Materials: Elizabethan music

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Establish a setting familiar in the works of Shakespeare (a ball, a marketplace, a forest, throne room, etc.).
2. Assign each actor a character. Characters can be stereotypes (The Lover, The Villain, The Queen, etc.), occupational (nurse, hunter, knight, etc.) or based on emotions (melancholic, ecstatic, angry, grief stricken, etc.).
3. Begin the music. Appropriate to the character they have been assigned, and without words, each actor must:
 1. Make an entrance.
 2. Make contact with every other character - greet, interact, or actively ignore others based on the character's relationship to others.
 3. Respond to the arrival of other characters.
 4. Call, "Freeze," when all of the actors have made their entrances and have had time to interact with each other.
5. Review the work guided inquiry:
 - What did you learn about your character?
 - What did you learn about others' characters?
 - How does it feel to be in a different body?
 - How does it feel to be in a different time and place?
 - How can you use this improvisation in your scene work?

SUGGESTED VARIATION(S):

- Use costume pieces or hats to establish character.
- Explore the exercise specific to a location, event, and or moment within one of Shakespeare's plays.
- **Raising The Bar:** Repeat the exercise verbally — the actors can create their own pseudo-Elizabethan language or use gibberish.



ACTIVITY 2: ELIZABETHAN CARD PARTY

Grades: 3-12

Goal(s): To study the status and power among different characters.

Materials: Deck of Cards. Every actor will use one card.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. From the deck of cards, pull out and do not use the Jokers or face cards.
2. Establish a party or celebration familiar in the works of Shakespeare (a wedding, a feast, a coronation, etc.). Select one actor to be the Host/ess of the event.
3. The actors are each given a card from the deck. The actors should not look at their own card — this is done by holding the card against one's forehead face out, allowing for other actors to see the card.
4. Each actor's card defines his or her status at the party. Ace being the lowest, "10" being the highest.
5. Each actor must:
 - Arrive at the event.
 - Knock at the door.
 - Exchange greetings with the Host/ess.
 - Interact with the other guests.
6. The interaction can be verbal or non-verbal but must be based on the status of the card they see on the forehead of the actor they are interacting with. The actors do not see their own card, they only see how that card's status effects the other actors.
7. The actors should be aware of the status of others and interact with each other appropriate to the status. For example, "10" might chose not to talk to "3" except to ask for a service or "10" might chose to hand out money or goods to cards lower in status.
8. Based on how they are treated or received by the other actors, each actor should try to figure out their own status (is their card high or low?). The actors adjust their movement, speech, poses, entrances, and exits to what they feel is their status to others.
9. End the party when all of the actors have arrived and have had time to interact with each other.
10. Have the actors line up in the order of status - actor with the highest status at the start of the line and the actor with the lowest status at the end of the line.



11. Have everyone look at his or her card. Review the work with guided inquiry:

Was the ranking what you thought it was?

What differences in other actors' behavior gave you a clue as to your number?

What was it like to be a 2 or 3?

What was it like to be a 9 or 10?

Did you feel different from the others?

Did you want to be accepted in the other group?

What are some stereotypical behaviors of various numbers? Did any of the actors make a choice beyond the stereotype?

Suggested Variation(s):

- Instead of cards, use primary colors or the letters of the alphabet. At the end of the exercise (Step 8), have colors try and group themselves together or letters to arrange themselves from "A" on the left to "Z" on the right.
- **Raising The Bar:** Use the exercise to test understanding/memory of specific characters within a Shakespearean text. Instead of playing cards, give the actors an index card with the name of a character. At the end of the exercise (Step 8), have the actors find family, loved-ones, confidants/servants, etc.

