

ACTING SHAKESPEARE
Robert Resnikoff, Teaching-Artist

SYLLABUS

Readings

“Othello,” “Much Ado About Nothing,” “Measure for Measure,” by William Shakespeare (any edition) to be read before first class. Soliloquies and scenes are selected from these plays

Performing Shakespeare, by Oliver Ford Davies; Nick Hern Books, London, 2007, as assigned.

Class 1

Discussion: Acting as action, identifying beats and playing intention, rather than feeling. Speaking Shakespeare’s verse: scanning the meter; iambic pentameter and Shakespeare’s purposeful departures from it, including caesura, trochee and feminine endings; the music of Shakespeare’s verse and what it tells the actor; rhythm and melody through the sounds of consonants, vowels and syllables. Selection and discussion of soliloquies.

Assignment: Break soliloquy into beats, and identify the action for each beat. Performing Shakespeare, pages 25-39 and 44-51.

Class 2

Discussion and Exercise: Movement and stillness. Vocal preparation. First work on the soliloquies.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 84-94; memorize soliloquy.

Class 3

Vocal exercises. Discussion: The actor’s imagery; having the thought before you speak it; the “As If” exercise. Further work on the soliloquies.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 96-106; prepare for final performance of soliloquy.

Class 4

Vocal exercises. Final performances of soliloquies. Assignment of scenes.

Assignment: Break the scene into beats; Performing Shakespeare, pages 66-76

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Syllabus/page 2

Class 5

Vocal exercises. Building a Shakespearean character; finding your arc and function in the story. Discovering the simple truth. Acting exercise: "Body, Eyes, Speak." What is at stake? Finding the urgency in the scene. Scene work.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 106-127

Class 6

Vocal exercises. Being a human being onstage: body shape, independent activity, eye contact, thoughts. Getting the scenes up on their feet.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 139-152

Class 7

Vocal exercises. Putting it all together: scene work focusing on action, intention, verse-speaking, movement, stillness, character, urgency and being a human being onstage.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 179-189

Class 8

Vocal exercises. Review of movement and stillness exercises. Scene work.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 189-196; memorize scene

Class 9

Vocal exercises. Discussion: Acting Shakespeare: comparisons to performing contemporary American drama. Scene work.

Assignment: Performing Shakespeare, pages 155-176

Class 10

Vocal exercises. Final performance of scenes. Discussion: What an actor's approach tells us about Shakespeare's plays.

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