



Tabletop Shakespeare

Creative Learning
Teacher Resource



TABLE TOP SHAKESPEARE

Contents

- **Subjects:** English and Drama
- **General capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, and Personal and Social Capability
- **Age Group:** Designed for students in Stages 4–6 (Years 7–12), with adaptable entry points for a wide range of abilities and prior knowledge
- **Genre:** A minimalist, object-based performance of Shakespeare’s plays using household items, combining storytelling, improvisation, and visual theatre
- **Themes:** Core Shakespearean themes such as power, love, revenge, ambition, identity, loyalty, fate, and appearance vs reality are explored through playful reinterpretation and symbolic performance

Teachers are invited to use this resource alongside the education notes prepared by the Adelaide Festival Centre and Forced Entertainment. Please apply the NSW Curriculum Links at the end of this resource if based in NSW.

Excursion note for teachers:

- There are three different Shakespeare performances per day across the season at the Sydney Opera House.
- Performances can be booked as stand-alone sessions, or schools have the option to book two performances on the same day to make the most of a day out at the Opera House.
- Viewing two performances on the same day can help students compare the themes, set, objects and performance of each play, enriching their understanding of Shakespearean theatre, and enlivening discussions back in the classroom.

Performance connection to curriculum

Forced Entertainment's clever and creative reimagining of Shakespeare's greatest plays encourages students to think creatively, explore symbolism, and appreciate the power of storytelling with limited means.

The performance strips back complex language to reveal the heart of each story – making Shakespeare accessible, funny, and fresh for young audiences. How can you pare back such iconic and historic works of theatre, to just a tabletop?

Ideal for secondary school audiences, it highlights how theatre can thrive with nothing more than a table, a few objects, and a great story. There is a strong focus on storytelling, visual humour, and clever reinterpretation. Students will see how objects are transformed to convey character, setting, and emotion – all through a simple but captivating performance style.

Teachers can expect:

- A witty and engaging performance that brings Shakespeare's stories to life in a completely new way
- Clear storytelling that simplifies complex plotlines and makes classic texts more accessible
- A creative approach that inspires students to think differently about drama, character, and performance
- Opportunities for connection to English and Drama curriculum areas, with links to classic texts and performance styles
- This is not a traditional Shakespearean production – it's imaginative, surprising, and full of inventive ways to explore the classics.

What to expect in the performance

Lighting:

- The lighting stays consistent and soft throughout the performance.
- There are no sudden blackouts, strobos, or intense effects.
- Subtle changes in light may signal different scenes or moods.

Seating:

- Students will sit in standard theatre seating.
- Accessible seating arrangements can be provided upon request.

Music and Sound:

- The performance is mostly spoken word.

Performance:

- A retell of one of Shakespeare's play using only voice, gesture, and ordinary items (e.g. saltshakers, sponges, tea bags) as characters.
- The performer speaks directly to the audience, often narrating and shifting roles fluidly.
- The tone is humorous and engaging, making classic stories fun and easy to follow.

Interaction:

- There is no required audience participation, but students are encouraged to respond with laughter or reactions.
- The intimate, storytelling style makes students feel included and connected to the story.



Glossary/vocab page

Table Top Shakespeare

Shakespeare: A famous playwright and poet from the 1500s and 1600s. He wrote well-known plays like Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and Hamlet.

Minimalist: A simple, stripped-back style. In this show, it means using only a few objects and a table to tell a big story.

Prop: An object used on stage to stand for a person, place, or idea. In this performance, everyday items like cups, jars, or saltshakers are used as characters.

Character: A person (or object representing a person) in a story. Each item on the table becomes a distinctive character in the play.

Narration: When a story is told by a speaker, often describing the action and guiding the audience through the plot.

Interpretation: A way of showing or explaining something in your own style. This performance offers a creative interpretation of Shakespeare's plays.

Audience Participation: Moments when the performer might speak directly to the audience or involve them in the storytelling.

Imagination: Using your mind to picture something that isn't physically there. Audiences need to imagine castles, battles, and emotions—even when it's just a spoon on a table.

Monologue: A long speech by one character. Some actors in the show might deliver famous lines this way.

Symbolism: When one thing stands in for something else. For example, a candle might symbolise love, or a broken cup might represent betrayal.

Theme: The main ideas in a story. Shakespeare's plays often explore love, power, revenge, and fate.

Soliloquy: A special kind of speech where a character talks to themselves to show their thoughts and feelings.

Reinterpretation: A new or updated way of showing an old story. Table Top Shakespeare reimagines classic plays using ordinary items.

Activities in the classroom



Pre- and post-show activities – English

Plot Predictions: Introduce different titles of Shakespeare’s plays (e.g. Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Macbeth etc). Have students brainstorm what the plot might include. Share synopses afterwards and compare.

Character Mapping: Choose one play for study and provide a simple list of characters. Ask students to match each one with a household item (e.g., “Romeo is a red candle”). What qualities does the object represent?

Shakespeare in 10 Lines: Select 10 key quotes from the chosen play. Students annotate them with who said it, what it means and why it matters. Suggestions include

- “To be, or not to be: that is the question.” – Hamlet
- “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” – As You Like It
- “Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?” – Romeo and Juliet
- “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” – Macbeth
- “The better part of Valour, is Discretion.” – Henry IV, Part I
- “If music be the food of love, play on.” – Twelfth Night
- “Beware the Ides of March.” – Julius Caesar
- “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” – Twelfth Night
- “We are such stuff as dreams are made on.” – The Tempest
- “Et tu, Brute?” – Julius Caesar

Pre- and post-show activities – English

Retell and Reflect: Students write a summary of the play they saw using a modern voice. Then, respond to:

- How did using objects affect your understanding of the story?
- What themes stood out to you most?

Character Voice Diary: Choose one object-character from the show. Students write a short diary entry from their perspective reflecting on the events of the play.

Compare and Contrast: Compare a scene from the original Shakespearean text with how it was portrayed in the performance. Analyse differences in tone, language, and meaning.

Historical context: Research the historical and cultural context of Shakespeare's time and how it translates into minimalist performance.

Your own Table Top Shakespeare: Have students to write their own scene inspired by Shakespeare but set in a modern context, performed with objects.



Pre- and post-show activities – Drama

Watch this short video with **Forced Entertainment's Artistic Director Tim Etchells** discussing the making of **Table Top Shakespeare**.

Object Improvisation Warm-Up: Provide a random object (toothbrush, teacup, spoon) and ask students to turn it into a character. Prompt: "This is now a king. What does that look like? Sound like?"

Tabletop Staging Challenge: In small groups, students re-tell a fairy tale using only household items on a table. Focus on clear storytelling, voice, and movement.

Monologue as Object: Have students choose a short Shakespeare monologue and deliver it as if they are an object. How does becoming the object change the performance?



Pre- and post-show activities – Drama

Class discussion: ask your students why they think Forced Entertainment chose to represent Shakespeare with simple objects, as compared to other interpretations or versions of Shakespeare on stage? Which do they think is better and why?

Create Your Own Tabletop Scene: In groups, students choose a scene from the play and re-stage it using classroom items. Focus on using voice, gesture, and object movement.

Design Brief - Minimalist Set: Have Students create a design brief for a future Table Top Shakespeare show. What objects would represent which characters? How would they use the table space?

Director's Notes: Have students write “director’s notes” for a Table Top performance of a different Shakespeare play, outlining their creative choices in casting objects, using sound, and setting mood.





Curriculum links

NSW Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

Creative Arts (Drama) Stage 3

- **CA3-DRA-01:** makes and performs drama to shape meaning using the dramatic elements, and explains how meaning is conveyed to audiences and ways contexts influence drama
- **CA3-CWT-01:** creates written texts to communicate ideas and understanding in Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts

Drama Stage 4

- **DR4-APP-01:** explains how creative choices shape works and experiences through dramatic contexts, processes and elements

Drama Stage 5

- **DR5-MAK-02:** selects and applies dramatic elements to create and refine works and experiences through dramatic contexts
- **DR5-PER-01:** applies and adapts performance skills and dramatic processes to communicate intention and meaning
- **DR5-PER-02:** manipulates dramatic elements to stage works and influence audience response through dramatic contexts

Drama Stage 5

- **DR5-APP-01:** analyses how creative choices shape intention and meaning through dramatic processes
- **DR5-APP-02:** evaluates how dramatic elements are manipulated to influence audience response through dramatic contexts

Life Skills for Stage 4-5

- **DRLS-MAK-01:** improvises and plays using collaborative drama games
- **DRLS-APP-01:** responds to experiences in drama
- **DRLS-APP-02:** communicates how dramatic elements are used in performance and/or production

NSW Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

Drama Stage 6

- **P3.1:** critically appraises and evaluates, both orally and in writing, personal performances and the performances of others
- **P3.2:** understands the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques
- **P3.3:** analyses and synthesises research and experiences of dramatic and theatrical styles, traditions and movements
- **H3.1:** critically applies understanding of the cultural, historical and political contexts that have influenced specific drama and theatre practitioners, styles and movements
- **H3.2:** analyses, synthesises and organises knowledge, information and opinion in coherent, informed oral and written responses
- **H3.3:** demonstrates understanding of the actor-audience relationship in various dramatic and theatrical styles and movements

Drama Stage 6

- **P2.5:** understands and demonstrates the commitment, collaboration and energy required for a production
- **P2.6:** appreciates the variety of styles, structures and techniques that can be used in making and shaping a performance
- **H2.4:** appreciates the dynamics of drama as a performing art
- **H2.5:** appreciates the high level of energy and commitment necessary to develop and present a performance

NSW Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

English Stage 3

- **EN3-RECOM-01:** fluently reads and comprehends texts for wide purposes, analysing text structures and language, and by monitoring comprehension
- **EN3-UARL-01:** analyses representations of ideas in literature through narrative, character, imagery, symbol and connotation, and adapts these representations when creating texts

English Stage 4

- **EN4-URA-01:** analyses how meaning is created through the use of and response to language forms, features and structures
- **EN4-URB-01:** examines and explains how texts represent ideas, experiences and values

English Stage 5

- **EN5-URA-01:** analyses how meaning is created through the use and interpretation of increasingly complex language forms, features and structures
- **EN5-URC-01:** investigates and explains ways of valuing texts and the relationships between them

English Standard Stage 6

- **EST-11-03:** explains the ways context and values influence composition and audience response
- **EST-12-01:** critically analyses the ways an author's choice of language, form and structure shapes meaning in complex texts of different modes and mediums
- **EST-12-03:** analyses the ways context and values influence composition and audience response

NSW Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

English Advanced Stage 6

- **EAV-11-02:** analyses the relationships between texts through context, form and language
- **EAV-11-03:** analyses the ways context and values influence composition and audience response
- **EAV-12-02:** evaluates the relationships between texts through context, form and language
- **EAV-12-03:** evaluates the ways context and values influence composition and audience response

English Extension Stage 6

- **EE1-11-01:** analyses the relationship between author, purpose, form, language, audience and context
- **EE1-11-02:** analyses the ways meaning is made through an author's choice of textual form and language features

English Advanced Stage 6

- **EE1-12-01:** evaluates the relationship between author, purpose, form, language, audience and context
- **EE1-12-02:** evaluates the ways meaning is made through an author's choice of textual form and language features
- **EE1-12-03:** analyses how texts are valued in a range of contexts and cultures for different purposes and audiences

Get in touch

Got questions? Contact us with any enquiries about our education programs for schools via phone or email.

P +61 2 9250 7770

E creativelearning@sydneyoperahouse.com

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