

**Atlanta Shakespeare Company/ Therrell High School**  
**8-week Residency program**  
**Detailed Lesson Plans**

**Needs (at all times):**

Copies of scripts  
Dictionary  
Shakespeare Lexicon  
Stage Manager's Prompt Script  
Pens, Pencils, and Highlighters  
Snacks/ Snack Money Bag  
MARTA cards/ MARTA card sign out sheet  
Call Board  
Thumb tacks and Expo marker  
Call Board folder and pertinent paperwork

**Young Actors Expectations**

We expect that our young actors will participate fully and to the best of their ability at all times.

We expect that our young actors will use their voices, bodies, and imaginations to create Shakespeare's characters and tell the story of the play.

We expect that our young actors will learn their lines and know the definition of all words and phrases that their characters speak and are spoken to them onstage.

We expect that our young actors will learn to read their weekly schedule and manage their personal schedule to honor their commitments to our program, their families, and any other after-school commitments.

We expect that our young actors will prioritize their academic commitments and follow all school rules while in rehearsal.

We expect that our young actors will learn to name their feelings more and more accurately throughout our process.

We expect that our young actors will use non-judgmental language when exploring their feelings, discussing their work, and commenting on their peers' work.

We expect that our young actors will work together to solve problems.

We expect that our young actors will learn to work with all kinds of young actors, not just their friends or former cast members.

We expect that our young actors will celebrate each others' work and accomplishments as well as their own.

We expect that our young actors will leave the playing space as good as or better than they found it.

We expect that our young actors will be kind and respectful to themselves, each other, their directors, and their environment.

## Check In

Check in is the first activity after the group is called to order. It allows people to speak about themselves - to report on themselves - so that each person in the room becomes more aware of how they themselves or each other person in the room is feeling. The teaching artists lead the young actors through check in as a diagnostic tool to be better informed about their physical and emotional states, but also because the ability to specifically identify and express emotions is a critical tool when performing the text of William Shakespeare.

- One person begins and speaks until finished. Others in the group listen.
- The person speaking passes to the next person by touching them lightly.
- That person speaks until finished. Others in the group continue listening.
- Continue around the room until everyone has spoken.
- Return to people who need to say more.
- Additional prompts, observations can be included.
- Move on to the next agenda item.

Check in is

- an opportunity for everyone in the room to speak about themselves in order to be more fully present in the room for the planned activity.
- a way to let go of strong feelings that one can carry into the room.
- a way for everyone to speak before the work begins.
- allows other people 'in' to each person's experience.
- an opportunity to practice empathy, to listen, to speak, to be human.

We encourage the young actors not to comment on each others' check in while it is taking place. If they feel the strong need to comment later, they must first ask the other actor's permission. We also encourage the young actors to maintain eye contact with the rest of the cast while checking in rather than speak to the floor or the ceiling.

In general, young actors have little facility in distinguishing between thoughts and feelings. Often we use the expression, "I feel like..." to express a judgment, a belief, or a thought, rather than naming a feeling. This careful attention to the language we use creates better communication, better learning, and develops emotional vocabulary. "I feel weird," is heard less and less frequently as the nuances of feeling: enraged, terrified, delighted, bereft, hopeful, etc. are experienced consciously.

## Warm Ups

Each rehearsal will progress from check in to a series of warm ups designed to engage the young actors' bodies, voices, and imaginations. Warm ups are also an excellent opportunity to play games and exercises that sharpen the following skills: team work, focus, observation, hand-eye coordination, and trusting and following instincts. A typical daily physical warm-up might include stretches, calisthenics, yoga exercises, shake down, or a dance-based game (freeze dance or clown walks).

A typical vocal warm up might include humming and buzzing exercises, face massages, tongue stretches, tongue twisters, a singing exercise (1,121 or Huk Alayla), or a group text exercise such as the Henry V prologue.

There are possibly as many theatre games out there as there are teaching artists in the world. If you would like to see descriptions of all of the games that the Atlanta Shakespeare Company utilizes in our rehearsal processes with students, we can provide you a PDF of our Games Database document.

### **Audition Workshop**

The first of our eight weeks with the students is spent conducting a five day long audition workshop wherein we aim to get to know the students as well as possible in order to find the role or technical position that will be the best fit for their individual interests and capabilities. Our teaching artists strive to challenge the students with our casting and staffing of each project while making sure that they are also set up for success.

The first two days are spent teaching the students about the function and maintenance of the Three Actor Tools: voice, body, and imagination. We play games and have the students execute exercises wherein they are given practical applications of the Three Actor Tools and invited to start the ongoing process of ensemble-building.

Our teaching artist staff provide each student with the following paperwork/ information on the first day that they join us for auditions:

1. Audition Form
2. Letter to Parent/ Guardian
3. Conflict Calendar
4. Photo Release
5. Injury Release
6. Transportation Form
7. Incoming Assessment Survey

The teaching staff will also put up a sign-in sheet on the call board each day so that at the end of the Audition Workshop they can track how many of the five days each student came to participate.

Days Three and Four of the Audition Workshop are spent playing mostly Improv-based games. The teaching artists will have explained by this point what a scene needs to have in order to be considered successful storytelling: defined characters, a specific relationship between characters, a location recognizable to the audience, and a beginning-middle-end, or plot. The teaching staff will also explain some of the most basic rules of successful improvisation such as always saying “Yes” to your scene partners and not talking over one another. These exercises are helpful at ascertaining which students will make bold character choices, listen to their scene partners, and improve with each new challenge, or exercise.

The final day of auditions are considered call backs for the students that have shown that they are truly interested and willing to commit to this rehearsal process. On this day, the students will actually be invited to speak scripted dialogue and Shakespearean text in front of the teaching staff and other auditioners. Some potential exercises include A/B or contentless scenes, Story of the Play, a *Playshop in Performance* on the selected title, or reading sides from the script itself. Interviews for technical and backstage positions may also be conducted on this day.

The teaching staff will cast the show and staff all technical positions over the weekend to be able to post after-school on the next school day.

### **Text Rehearsals**

Each time that the young actors approach a Beat of the script for the first time, the directors lead them through a Text Rehearsal. The directors will have divided the script in the French Scene Breakdown style, transitioning to a separate Beat each time a character enters or exits the stage. This style has proven to be the most effective to be able to schedule rehearsals working around any other activities that the students might be involved in prior to auditioning for our play. During a text rehearsal, the students that appear in the Beat will sit in a circle onstage and read through the Beat aloud. Each time they do not know what a word means, they will alert the directors who will then assign one of the text assistants (a student that is not in the Beat) to look up the word. If a word does not appear in a traditional dictionary, we also have on hand a Shakespearean Lexicon and the Arden edition of the particular play. The directors will also coach the young actors in the correct pronunciation of all words from the first moment that they read through the Beat to discourage their muscle memory from learning it incorrectly through repetition. By the end of a Text Rehearsal, each young actor will be armed with the definitions of all of their words, understanding of all references made in the text, and correct pronunciations. The ensemble will also discuss what is happening in the plot during this beat and identify what emotions the students' characters are experiencing.

### **Blocking Rehearsals**

A Blocking Rehearsal follows Text Rehearsal and includes selecting where each character will enter and exit the stage during the Beat as well as where they will stand and move onstage during the scene. The director and students will work together to create stage pictures that are interesting to look at and that physically tell the story of that particular Beat. Once blocking is established, the director will have the students run through the Beat several times. Young actors learn blocking most efficiently through specificity and repetition.

If the students' unfamiliarity with the text is preventing them from making strong physical choices, the directors may choose to feed the actors in (or have them fed in by a text assistant). Feeding in involves standing behind the actor and reading their lines as flatly and monotone as possible one ten-syllable line at a time. The actor then speaks the line with authority, adding in emotional intensity. Without their script in their hand, the

actor is more free to move their arms and hands and to walk around the stage as they believe their character might.

The Blocking Rehearsal is also an excellent time in the process to have the students identify what props their character might need to submit to the Props Crew. Prior to the first Blocking Rehearsal, the directors will have taught the ensemble the following skills and terminology: blocking, cue, stage directions, cheat out, full front, full back, profile, cross, levels (1-5), and stage picture.

### **Polishing Rehearsals**

A Polishing Rehearsal happens further into the rehearsal process once a Beat has had both text and blocking rehearsals and is ready to be rehearsed off-book, or memorized. During a Polishing Rehearsal the directors and students will discuss what their characters want in the Beat, what obstacles are standing in their way, and what tactics or strategy that they will utilize to achieve their objective, or goal. The students will begin solidifying vocal and physical choices for representing their characters during Polishing Rehearsals. The directors will also work with the students on pace and projection during Polishing Rehearsals.

### **Common Classes**

A Common Class is an opportunity for the Cast and Crew to all come together to learn a specialized skill that can be used either while creating their specific show or in future acting endeavors. Common Classes are open to the entire school community and students in the Cast and Crew are encouraged to invite their friends, teachers, parents/ guardians, and siblings to come and participate. Some Common Classes that teaching artists from the Atlanta Shakespeare Company have conducted include the following: *Playshops in Performance* on the selected Shakespeare title, Elizabethan Dance, Stage Combat (unarmed), Sound Sculpture, Why We Talk to the Audience (led by ASC Artistic Director, Jeff Watkins), Clown, and Mask.

### **Crew Meetings**

An eight-week residency usually includes the following technical crews: stage management, lighting, sound, props, costumes, and publicity. Other than stage management, most crew members need only be called to rehearsals one day/ week. They will be called weekly either to have design and organizational meetings or for construction work calls. Crew members may also double as cast members or text assistants if they wish. Once the ensemble begins 8 P.M. rehearsals and the cast is running the play in its entirety, the crew will begin to be called more frequently in order to incorporate the technical elements of the production into the runs of the play.

### **Parent Phone Calls/ Meeting**

As soon as a student is hired into our process, their family will receive a phone call from a member of our directing team to introduce themselves, explain a bit about the process and time commitment involved, and to invite them to a parent meeting.

Two weeks into rehearsal, the directing team will remain at the school after rehearsal one evening to conduct an informational meeting for the parents/ guardians of the students involved in the production. The teaching artists give an overview of the process, a synopsis of the play, our expectations of the students, and an explanation of any grants that are funding the experience. The directors stress that making sure that our students maintain their academic and family obligations is an utmost priority. The parents of returning students are asked to speak about their child's previous experiences in our programs. The directors will answer any questions the parents might have and also take down the names of parents that wish to volunteer to assist in the production in any way.

### **Stage Combat Workshop**

If a play requires stage violence of any kind, the ASC Fight Director and his or her fight assistants will oversee the training of the students directly. The Fight Director will make sure that the students know how to properly warm up their bodies to participate in stage combat, can safely execute all fight moves, understand what an acceptable and safe pace is, and how to maintain eye contact throughout a staged fight. The Fight Director will choreograph a series of stage combat moves that completely and physically tells the story of the fight as called for in the plot of the play. He will then fully teach the directing team the fight and instruct them how to lead a fight call with the student combatants each and every rehearsal where the fight will be practiced. Above all, the Fight Director will instruct everyone involved in the process that SAFETY is the number one thing required of any instance of stage violence.

Depending on the age of the students and the play they are producing, real weapons may be used. Wooden weapons or "air broadswords" may also be substituted.

### **Elizabethan Dance Workshop**

If a play calls for an Elizabethan Dance (e.g the party in *Romeo and Juliet*), one of the ASC choreographers will lead all students involved in the production through a Master Class (could be a Common Class) on a specific dance style. Some examples are the Pavane, Galliard, Volte, Gavotte, Almain, Brand, Roundel, Maypole or Morris Dance. Should any of the students take a particular interest in Elizabethan Dance, a student choreographer may be selected to invent the dance for the specific scene. If not, the ASC choreographer or one of the directing team may choreograph the dance and then teach it to the students. The students should also be given a brief history of Elizabethan dance and the story their particular dance style tells.

## **Madrigal Workshop & Rehearsals**

If a play calls for a song (e.g. "Sigh No More, Ladies" in *Much Ado About Nothing*), then a member of the Atlanta Shakespeare Acting Company will teach the students the music. The artist will instruct the students on basic sight-reading as well as teaching the vocal lines of the piece. Songs in eight-week residency productions may be performed a cappella, to a pre-recorded accompaniment, or accompanied instrumentally by a student if they play an instrument already. Some teaching artists have also chosen to add a piece of music to the production even if it is not specifically called for in the text to give the students a more fully rounded experience (e.g a production of *Romeo and Juliet* composed a musical rendition of the Prologue to begin the show) Songs in eight-week residency can include anything from a solo to a two or three vocal part madrigal involving the entire cast depending upon the skill set of the students, the needs of the play, and the musical background of the teaching artists assigned to that particular school.

## **Vocal Projection, Diction, and Articulation**

In order to the students to be heard, unamplified, in some of the school auditorium spaces that we encounter (sometimes seating up to 500), the teaching artists must instruct the young actors on key elements and ideas pertaining to the use of voice. This class begins by the teaching artists asking the students to share their thoughts on what comes to mind when they hear the words "voice" and "projection." Through various exercises, the teaching artists will introduce the ideas of posture creating an open pathway for sound, air support, diaphragmatic breathing, articulation, pitch, and projection. The exercises Text Step Back and the Counting Game are effective in teaching the young actors how to engage all of the muscles in their face as well as their diaphragm to communicate across a large space.

## **Status, Stakes, and Mood**

Some of the acting exercises used with the students throughout the process are designed to help them understand the concepts of Status, Stakes, and Mood. A character's Status is how important in society they were deemed to be. With Shakespeare's plays, the teaching artists explain societal status from the Elizabethan worldview and therefore incorporate the idea of the Great Chain of Being. During discussions of Status, the teaching artists will teach the students the proper way to bow and curtsy. A couple of theatre games that might be used to reinforce the ideas of Status are the Card Game, the Crowd Make the King, and the King Gets a Letter. Stakes are what is at risk in the scene, play and how important and personal the events of the play are to the characters. Bomb & Shelter and Contrapuntal Arguments are effective exercises to illustrate Stakes. The Bell Journey exercise is used to introduce the Mood of the different plays as the students are led through a physical and imaginative exploration of the locale and text of their play.

## **Technical Rehearsals**

The last week-and-a-half to two weeks of the rehearsal process are when the rehearsal hours are extended to 8 P.M. and the cast is able to run their play in its entirety. Each late rehearsal will introduce a new technical element to the process. For example, one rehearsal may add Props and the next adds Costumes. The complete additions from Polishing Rehearsals to the Technical Rehearsals are Props, Costumes, Hair, Makeup, the Stage Manager calling Lights and Sound Cues from the booth, the young actors having to stay backstage throughout the entire run thru, and the ASMs using the On-Deck Book backstage. During Technical Rehearsals, the directors will stage a Cast & Crew curtain call. Each Technical Rehearsal will include Check In, Warm Ups, Fight Call, Half-Hour (in which the young actors get into Costumes, Hair, and Makeup), a Run Thru, and Notes (feedback from the directors on what elements of the performance could be improved).

## **Performance**

The Shakespeare students will perform their play for both their school community as well as a public performance at the New American Shakespeare Tavern. Each Performance experience will begin with Check In, Warm Ups, Fight Call, Half Hour/ House Opens (doors are open for audience to be seated), Curtain Speech by one of the directing team, the Play, and Curtain Call. Performances may also include a Q&A with the young actors and a Photo Call.

## **Final Wrap Up**

Once the students get out of costume after their performance at the Shakespeare Tavern, they will meet with the directing team one last time in one of the theatre's rehearsal spaces to complete an Outgoing Assessment Survey, Check Out, and potentially play a favorite Theatre Game if time allows. The Wrap Up experience provides the students some closure to their eight-week experience and gives them an open forum to say anything that they feel they need to tell their ensemble members and directors before ending the process.