

# ACTIVITIES:

## DRAW THY BREATH IN PAIN TO TELL MY STORY

Before seeing the play, review Gertrude’s famous “Willow Speech”. (Act IV, scene vii, lines 165 – 181.) Gertrude must deliver the news of Ophelia’s death to Ophelia’s brother, who is already angry and mourning the recent loss of his father. **(LSV.01, LS1.01, LS1.02, LS3.01)**

- What details does Gertrude include? What mood does her language create? What words or phrases lend clarity to the facts, and which give richness to the images?
- Do you think this is a literal account of Ophelia’s death? Does Gertrude tell exactly what happened? Why, or why not? What details might she have chosen to leave out?
- How is her account appropriate to the situation in which she must deliver it?
- Do you think she’s speaking mostly to Laertes, or to Claudius? Or to herself?

Then choose one of the characters in the play who will die onstage – the list includes Polonius, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet.

As you watch the play, pay close attention to everything around the moment of that character’s death. Observe the circumstances of their death, their behavior, their vocal quality, what else is happening onstage around them. You will have just this one opportunity to view this once-in-a-lifetime event – the moment of someone’s passing. **(LA2.03)**

Then, using Gertrude’s speech as a model, prepare the news of your chosen character’s death. Be certain to include the specific details that will add clarity, and the images that will add richness and weight to your account. Consider the “audience” for your news: will you be telling the character’s child or their mother of their passing? How will your language reflect that choice? Are there details you choose to add, or anything you gloss over in order to spare those you must tell? **(WRV.02, WR2.01, WR2.04, LA2.06, MD1.01)**

Share your report of the death to a classmate, taking care to use an appropriate tone and pace as you deliver the news.

# ACTIVITIES:

## BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE - GIVE ME UP THE TRUTH

This short scene is from Act One, scene three of Hamlet. It has been cut here to closely conform to the version that Classical Theatre Project uses in performance. The language and circumstances of the scene are quite simple, but there are some words that have archaic or multiple meanings; it may be useful to have a dictionary or glossary at the ready.

In this excerpt, Polonius confronts his daughter, Ophelia, about her relationship with Hamlet. He casts doubt on the sincerity of Hamlet's love, and orders Ophelia not to see him again.

Read through the scene a couple of times as a group – either chorally, or perhaps with each student taking a line in turn. When everyone has had a turn to speak, take a moment to answer (or investigate) any questions about the meaning of the words and the action of the scene.

This scene is the first time we see Polonius and Ophelia alone together. What inferences can we draw about the characters and about their relationship, based on this scene? The characters exist only through what they say – there is nothing else to go on – so we can only assess what kind of people they are based on their words to make the scene come alive. (LS3.01, LS3.03)

Now have a pair of volunteers read through the scene, so as to hear each character with an individual voice. As you continue, you might now have everyone speak lines of interest all at once; encourage experimentation with rhythm, tone, and volume. What do you notice about the language and rhythms of the scene, about the length of each character's lines? How does each character shape their side of the argument? What repeated words and phrases stand out? Why so many repetitions of the phrase "my lord"? Experiment with changes in tone or emphasis to lend clarity and meaning to the repetitions. Why does Polonius echo so many of Ophelia's words? (LS3.03, LS3.04, LA1.01)

Next break into pairs to read through the scene. (You could also use trios, where one member of the group acts as a "director", helping to shape the reading of the scene.) Read through a couple of times (perhaps switching characters, even) to get familiar with the language, considering the following: Are there times when Ophelia uses her words to evasively? When is she more direct? Chart a course for each character through the scene. Do they push ever more strongly, more aggressively throughout the scene? Or are there times that they give in, soften, fall back? (LS3.01, LS3.03, LS3.04, LA1.01, LA2.03)

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Then try a reading of the scene where Ophelia is as submissive and obedient as possible. Then try again, making Ophelia stronger, more certain of herself – how might she use her words more aggressively? Defensively? Sarcastically? How will Polonius' reactions change in response? How does it change the scene? Does it still work?

As time permits, have a number of groups share their scene with the class. Compare the nuances of the assorted interpretations. What do you learn about the characters, and about their relationship through seeing the scene in these different ways?

WRITE: Consider what might happen for Ophelia after this barrage of advice from her father and brother. Imagine that you are Ophelia's friend – what advice would YOU offer her in this situation? How should she deal with her father? With Hamlet? (LS1.01, LS3.01, WRV.02, WR2.02, WR2.04, WR3.02)

LORD POLONIUS

What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

LORD POLONIUS

Marry, well bethought.

'Tis told me, he hath very oft of late

Given private time to you, and you yourself

Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.

What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders

Of his affection to me.

LORD POLONIUS

Affection! You speak like a green girl.

Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

OPHELIA

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

## BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE - GIVE ME UP THE TRUTH

LORD POLONIUS

Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby  
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,  
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly.

OPHELIA

My lord, he hath importuned me with love  
In honourable fashion.

LORD POLONIUS

Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.

OPHELIA

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,  
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

LORD POLONIUS

I do know,  
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul  
Lends the tongue vows. In few, Ophelia,  
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,  
Have you so slander any moment leisure,  
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.  
Look to't, I charge you.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

