



NATIONAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPETITION

Teacher Handbook



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Dear Teachers,

The English-Speaking Union is pleased to invite you to participate in our Annual **ESU National Shakespeare Competition!**

This performance-based education program unites high school students and teachers with ESU Branches nationwide, and on average reaches approximately 18,000 teenagers in over 800 schools across the United States. In the competition, students read, analyze, perform and recite Shakespearean monologues and sonnets in three qualifying stages: school, ESU Branch, and national. Approximately 45 branches currently participate in the program. We encourage you to become one of the many teachers involved in the competition. And to those dedicated teachers who continue to participate, we look forward to another year of celebrating the Bard with you.

Since 1983, the **ESU National Shakespeare Competition** has helped teachers make Shakespeare's work come alive. Students nationwide read, analyze, perform, and recite Shakespearean monologues and sonnets. They practice the essential skills you've taught them, such as critical thinking and close reading. Students connect with like-minded peers and increase their self-confidence. In its forty-year history, the ESU National Shakespeare Competition has empowered more than 425,000 students to create and convey their own unique perspectives to an audience.

Additionally, this program is aligned with national and state curriculum standards.

Important Information:

- In order to participate in the competition, your school must register with the closest participating ESU Branch. A list of participating branches and their respective forms is available online at www.esuus.org.
- All high school students, regardless of past participation, are eligible to participate in both the Branch and National Competitions, including previous Branch and National Winners.
- Students at all levels (school, ESU Branch, national) are required to select their monologues and sonnets from the provided packets. The monologue packet includes over 260 monologues from more than 120 characters in all 38 plays. Students who edit these monologues or perform monologues other than those listed in the packet will be disqualified.
- All forms, handbooks, packets and resources can be found on our website at www.esuus.org.
- More resources for remote teaching, more prizes for the teachers of our winning students, and a year-long celebration of learning, reading, writing and performing through contests, professional development sessions and workshops for teachers and students.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns you may have. It will be my pleasure to assist you in any way I can. Please join us as we Shakespeare with students and teachers across the country!

Warm regards,

Maryellen Liotta, Shakespeare Program Manager
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Program Overview

What is the Competition?

The English-Speaking Union (ESU) National Shakespeare Competition is a nationwide competition in which high school students read, analyze, perform and recite Shakespearean monologues and sonnets in three qualifying stages: school, ESU Branch, and national.

Competition History

The ESU National Shakespeare Competition began 43 years ago with 500 students in New York City. Now the competition involves approximately 45 ESU Branch communities nationwide. Thousands of high school students and their teachers, from Honolulu to Boston, participate in the program each year. Over the competition's history, more than 425,000 young people of all backgrounds have rediscovered Shakespeare's writings and learned to earn to express his words with understanding, feeling and clarity.



The ESU National Shakespeare Competition has been recognized by the Globe Center (USA), the Children's Theatre Foundation of America, and the American Academy of Achievement. Judges for the competition have included: Andre Braugher, Kate Burton, Maurice Charney, Blythe Danner, Barry Edelstein, Lisa Gay Hamilton, Helen Hayes, Edward Herrmann, Dana Ivey, Peter Francis James, Kristin Linklater, Peter MacNicol, Jesse L. Martin, Cynthia Nixon, Tina Packer, Annie Parisse, Sarah Jessica Parker, Nancy Piccione, Phylicia Rashad, Christopher Reeve, Louis Scheeder, Carole Shelley, Jean Simmons, Richard Thomas, Courtney B. Vance, Sam Waterston, Dianne Wiest, Gene Wilder, and Irene Worth.



Competition Structure: School → Branch → National

The program begins in the classroom as an integral component of a Common Core-aligned ELA, Humanities and/or Theater curriculum, affording teachers the opportunity to use performance as a learning tool. A schoolwide competition is held in the Fall/Winter semester, in which students perform a monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays and declaim a sonnet from his 154 sonnet cycle. The school competition winner advances to the ESU branch (community) competition in the winter. The branch competition winner advances to the national competition held remotely in the spring; all of the winners perform their monologue and sonnet virtually. Seven to ten of those contestants are chosen for the final round of the competition. The finalists perform their selections again for a second panel of judges.

Awards

Branch Awards: In 2026 branch winners will travel to New York City for the national finals. Additional prizes at this level vary by branch. Some branches also provide awards for the branch winners' teachers.

National Awards: The three winners of the ESU National Shakespeare Competition receive the following scholarships or a cash awards. The ESU reserves the right to change, postpone, substitute or swap prizes.

1st place: A scholarship to the Midsummer Conservatory at the British American Drama Academy in Oxford, U.K.

2nd place: A scholarship to the American Shakespeare Center's Theatre Camp in Staunton, VA.

3rd place: \$1000

National Competition Dates

Schools may begin registering and holding their school-level competitions immediately. Please visit our website for school registration forms for your specific branch. Your school competition must end before your branch's deadline. All branch competitions must be concluded by **March 2, 2026**.

Branch winners must submit the 2026 ESU National Shakespeare Competition Branch Winner Packets with video links for the People's Choice Award by **March 16, 2026**.

The competition finals are tentatively scheduled for **Monday, April 27th, 2026 in New York City**.
(To be confirmed in early 2026.)

Conditions of School Participation

In order for a school to participate in the ESU National Shakespeare Competition, it must meet the following criteria.

School/Home School Eligibility

- The school must register with its local ESU Branch via the [School Participation Form](#).
- The School Competition must be open to all students enrolled in the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades or the equivalent for home school students.
- The School Competition must involve a minimum of three students. Home school students must also advance from a competition of three or more students.
- School and home school competitions must be judged by a panel of at least three individuals familiar with Shakespeare's works.

Please use the *Sample Memo to Principals & Administrators* (pg. 67-68) if you need to propose the program to your principal or other administrators.

All students participating in the competition must meet the following criteria.

Student Eligibility

- Students must be enrolled in the 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade or the equivalent for home school students.
- Students *may not* act for pay on television, the stage, or in film during the 2025-2026 school year.
- Students should be available to represent their school at the Branch Competition. If, for any reason, the School Winner is unable to participate, the school should send the First Runner-Up.
- Previous School and/or Branch Winners may participate each year they are eligible (regardless of results in past competitions). Schools and/or branches may not limit student participation except for the above mentioned eligibility requirements.

Selection Eligibility: Monologue and Sonnet

The selections that your students perform must meet the following criteria. The School Coordinator should check that students' selections meet these criteria.

Students must select their monologues from the [Monologue Packet](#), provided by the ESU. The packet includes over 260 monologues from more than 120 characters in all 38 plays. The selections offer a variety of monologues, of 15 to 22 lines a piece; students may select any monologue, regardless of gender. Selections have been taken from the Folger Digital Texts resource (folgerdigitaltexts.org).

No alterations may be made to the monologues. They must be performed as written in the packet.

Sonnets must come from Shakespeare's 154 sonnet cycle. These are all listed in the [Sonnet Packet](#) and are available at folgerdigitaltexts.org. Students must perform the complete sonnet; **no alterations are allowed**.

School Competition Rules

The school must adhere to the following rules at their competition

- Each student must select, memorize and perform one monologue from a Shakespeare play.
- Students' order of performance should be determined by lot.
- Students should introduce themselves by name *only*.
- Students should identify their selection before they begin their performances.
- Students *may not* wear costumes or use props of any kind (including chairs, jewelry, items of clothing, and hair/hair clips). The use of props is grounds for immediate disqualification.

- Students should speak naturally in their own voice (rather than affect a British accent).
- Students are expected to memorize their pieces. If necessary, however, prompting is allowed. If a student requires prompting, they must say “Line.”
 - A prompter must be available to students during the competition. Another student (one who is not participating in the competition) may fulfill this role.

Additional Rules for the Branch & National Competitions

These rules apply only to the Branch and National Competitions.

- In addition to their monologue, each contestant must select, memorize, and perform one sonnet.
- Contestants may perform their pieces (monologue and sonnet) in whatever order they prefer.
- If the student has documented hearing, learning, physical and/or visual disabilities, please advise your local ESU Branch **prior** to the Branch Competition, so that appropriate accommodations may be made.

Note on cold readings:

Branch Competition (optional): Some ESU Branches with a large number of contestants also include a cold reading of a monologue in the final round of their Branch Competition. Cold reading options are chosen by ESU Branch representatives.

National Competition: National Semi-Finalists will perform a monologue, and sonnet. The cold reading has been removed.

**If you are prepared to participate in the program, please
complete the [School Participation Form](#).
Registration Information**

Schools must register with their local English-Speaking Union Branch to participate in the Competition. Approximately 50 ESU Branches across the country participate in the program annually; this is a list of ESU Branches that participated between 2022 and 2024. To find out if an ESU Branch near your school is participating this year, please check online at www.shakespearecompetition.org. If you are unsure which branch to apply to, or would like the contact information for your local ESU Branch Coordinator, please email shakespeare@esuus.org.

Schools without a local branch should check online for information about our [E-Branch Competition](#).

ARIZONA Phoenix Tucson	GEORGIA Atlanta Savannah	MISSOURI Kansas City St. Louis	PENNSYLVANIA Central PA Philadelphia
CALIFORNIA Los Angeles Palm Springs (Desert) San Diego San Francisco	HAWAII Honolulu	NEW JERSEY Monmouth County Princeton	RHODE ISLAND
COLORADO Denver	ILLINOIS Chicago via Online Competition Registration	NEW YORK Albany Buffalo (Niagara Frontier) New York City Rochester Syracuse	TENNESSEE Memphis Nashville
CONNECTICUT Greenwich	INDIANA Indianapolis	NORTH CAROLINA Colonial NC (New Bern) Greensboro Research Triangle (Raleigh) Sandhills	TEXAS Austin Dallas/Fort Worth Houston
DELAWARE	KENTUCKY Louisville	OHIO Cincinnati Cleveland	VIRGINIA Charlottesville Lexington Southwest Virginia (Roanoke)
WASHINGTON, D.C.	LOUISIANA New Orleans	OKLAHOMA Tulsa Oklahoma City	WASHINGTON Seattle

Organizing the School Competition

Hold your school competition as an individual event or combine it with another program (see below). If you hold the competition as a stand-alone event, we recommend that your school hold the competition during an assembly or on a weekday after school.

Selecting a Date

The majority of School Competitions take place during the Fall/Winter semester. Dates vary depending on the availability of your school venue and any Branch Competition deadlines and dates. Branch Competitions usually take place from January to early March (and must be held by March 2). School Competitions must be held at least **one week prior to the date of your local Branch Competition.**

When selecting a date, please be mindful of:

- School Breaks
- Holidays (Religious and National)
- State and Standardized Testing Days (SAT, ACT, etc.)
- Teacher/Professional Development Days
- Competing Education Programs
- Other Community Events

Partnering Events

Some schools combine their School Competition with another event or activity at their school. These events need not be about Shakespeare and his works, but they should connect in some way to language, literature, drama and/or education. An ideal event will complement your School Competition.

Here are some suggestions for events that might complement your School Competition:

- Shakespeare Festival
- Theater Production
- Assembly
- Student Group or Club Meeting
- Student Workshop
- Speech Competition

Securing a Venue

Reserve a local theater, auditorium, library, school theater or other appropriate space. Use existing school contacts within the community to find a venue or use the program to make connections with new organizations within the community. The ideal setting should have a raised platform or stage with thrust or proscenium seating. No sound system is required; contestants are expected to perform without amplification.

Publicity Tips

Boost school spirit and generate positive visibility for your school! Advertise the competition to students and faculty, hold a great School Competition, and then celebrate and share your students' achievements with the local community.

Prior to the School Competition

- Distribute the Student Handbook and Monologue and Sonnet Packet to your students.
- Post an announcement about the competition on bulletin boards throughout your school.
- Mark your school calendar with the competition date.
- Publicize the competition on your school website, announcements, newsletter and/or newspaper.
- Announce the competition at your school/department meetings and share this handbook with your colleagues.
- Encourage your colleagues to forward information about the competition to other teachers and distribute competition materials to their students.

Following the School Competition

- Post results, photos and videos of the competition to your school website.
- Publicize the results of the competition on your school website, announcements, newsletter and/or newspaper.
- Encourage participating students and teachers to post about the competition on social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, etc.).
 - The official hashtag for this year is #ESUNSC2026 - please include it in all your social media posts!
- Encourage the School Winner to perform their selections at other community events/locations (such as Shakespeare festivals, libraries, public spaces, etc.).
- Send any coverage, as well as photos and videos, to ESU National Headquarters.
- Support the School Winner at the local ESU Branch Competition.

Staffing the School Competition

The School Competition is open to all eligible students, regardless of enrollment in a Shakespeare or drama course. Therefore, we encourage the entire school to be involved in the program. Send out information to all your colleagues (include English, drama and speech/debate) and administrators informing them about the competition and the different volunteer positions. If needed, enlist help from sources outside your school community.

Staff Positions

- **School Coordinator:** A current English or drama teacher at your school. This person acts as a liaison between the school and the local ESU Branch. We recommend that each School Coordinator have at least one Co-Coordinator.
- **Master of Ceremonies** (at least 1): The MC will narrate the School Competition to the audience (provide introductory remarks, introduce judges, and announce the winners).
- **Judges** (at least 3): Judges should be professionals with expertise in Shakespeare studies, production or education. The School Coordinator and/or Co-Coordinator may invite teachers, actors, directors and school officials to judge the competition. You are allowed to use your school's faculty.
- **Judges' Liaison** (1): This person should be familiar with the judges and the Judge Handbook. This role may be filled by the School Coordinator or one of the Co-Coordinators.

Volunteer Positions

Students don't need to be onstage in order to make an impact. Even those who prefer to stay behind the scenes can and should be involved in your School Competition.

- **Prompter** (1): Responsible for the prompting book and for prompting the students during the School Competition. The prompter follows along with the text as the students recite their selections.
- **Photographer**
- **Videographer**



Judges

*Judges are obviously essential elements of your School Competition. **You require at least 3 judges. Please be mindful and sensitive to any conflicts of interest (actual or perceived) within your judging panel.** This may include (but is not limited to) judges who are past or present teachers, relatives or friends of participating students.*

Soliciting Judges

- Your judging panel should be diverse in background. Try to strike a balance between judges with an **academic** background (English teacher/professor, Shakespeare educator), **artistic** background (Drama teacher/professor, director, teaching artist, actor), and another person familiar with Shakespeare (casting director, theater critic, administrator, etc.).
- Contact prospective judges and describe the program. Mention other judges who will be on the judging panel (if known) or people who have judged in the past.
 - Inform them of the details of the School Competition (date, time, place and time commitment).
 - Request a short biography to include in the School Competition program.

Preparing Judges

- Send your judges the Judge Handbook (which includes competition rules/guidelines and instructions for judging at the school level). Copies of the Monologue Scoring Rubric, and Judges' Evaluation Form are included in this handbook.
 - Familiarize yourself with the Judge Handbook so that you may better answer any questions.
- Encourage your judges to view videos of the National Competition Finalists' performances on the ESU YouTube Channel. Suggest that your judges practice scoring these performances in order to prepare themselves for the School Competition.

Guidelines for Judges

- Judges should not interact with the students or with the audience until the winners are announced at the end of program.
- Judges should not see a copy of the School Competition program until the winners are announced at the end of the program.
- Judges should be made aware of the fact that the Monologue Scoring Rubrics and Judges' Evaluation Forms will be shared with the students and their teachers at the end of the program.
- If possible, separate the judges from the rest of the audience, so that they are not distracted by anyone.
 - Do not allow audience members to sit behind the judges. This ensures that no audience member can see the judges' evaluations as they score and take notes on contestants' performances.
- Judges should be informed by the Judges' Liaison of any issues with a contestant's performance (i.e. an ineligible monologue, added or dropped lines from a sonnet and/or monologue or use of a prop).
- Have a Judge Handbook on hand during the competition, for reference.

After the Competition

- Some judges like to speak to the students after the competition. They are welcome to offer constructive feedback.
- Collect the completed Monologue Scoring Rubrics and Judges' Evaluation Forms and share the results with the students and their teachers.
 - *Review all forms and take necessary steps to omit feedback that is not constructive.*
- Thank the judges. Acknowledge them in the school newsletter, paper, etc.

School Competition Supplies

For Students

- **Student Handbook**
 - Distribute this handbook prior to the competition to help students prepare. This handbook also contains pertinent information for whichever student advances to the Branch Competition.
- **School Winner Entry Form (School Winner Only)**
 - The link to this online registration form should be given to your School Winner as soon as your School Competition has concluded. It can be completed by the School Winner and/or their teacher.
- **Sonnet Packet (School Winner Only)**
 - This document should be given to your School Winner as soon as your School Competition has concluded. It is necessary in order for a student to participate in the Branch Competition.
- **Photo Release Form (School Winner Only)**
 - This document should be given to your School Winner as soon as your School Competition has concluded. However, it is *not necessary* in order for a student to participate in the Branch Competition.

For Judges

- **Scoring Book (1 : Judge)**
 - Compile a binder or notebook with Monologue Scoring Rubric and Judges Evaluation Form for each contestant in the order of performance.
- **Judge Handbook (1:Judge, 1:Judges' Liaison)**
 - A copy of this handbook (available for download online) should be given to all judges. Please point out the sections on rules, rubrics and evaluations.

For the General Audience

- **Program (Optional)**
 - Contestants' Names
 - Participating Teachers
 - Contestants' Monologue Selections
 - Judges' Names and Biographies
 - Awards
 - Local Funders/Donors

For Volunteers

- **Teacher Handbook (1):** Have this on hand during the competition, for reference
- **Prompt Book (1):** A prompt book consists of large-font copies of the contestants' monologues in order of performance.

School Competition Sample Schedule

Length of Time	Description
5 minutes	Welcome remarks and an explanation of the ESU National Shakespeare Competition. Introduce the judges and summarize the School Competition rules and criteria.
3-4 Minutes : Student	Student performances (approximately 3-4 minutes : student). Judges should take no more than 1 minute to write notes between performances.
15-30 minutes	Student performances conclude. Judges retire to another room to deliberate.
5 minutes	Deliberations conclude. Judges return to the theater/auditorium. The Student Winner and Runner-Up(s) are announced. Closing remarks.

Following the Conclusion of the School Competition

- Give the School Winner access to the School Winner Entry Form and Photo Release Form. Check that there is no conflict with the date of the Branch Competition. If, for any reason, the School Winner is unable to participate in the Branch Competition, the school should send the First Runner-Up.
- Give the School Winner a copy of the Sonnet Packet. Instruct them to select and rehearse a sonnet for the Branch Competition.

The Competition: In the Classroom & Beyond

Competition Preparation in the Classroom

A Note on Teacher Instruction: We encourage you to mentor your participating students during the selection, analysis and rehearsal processes. Students should be empowered by your teaching and guidance to choose their own material and make interpretive decisions. Although this process culminates in a competition, this should be a student-centered learning and growth opportunity for your school community. We ask that you encourage your students to closely examine the text for themselves, ask questions that will expand their comprehension, and decide how to best express themselves through the text. This competition supports your efforts to teach necessary academic and life skills by providing a forum for their use. The benefits of participation should outlast the competition.

This program is designed to complement your established curriculum. As such, we encourage you to incorporate the competition into your classroom practice. To support your efforts, we have provided a [Sample Class Schedule](#) (pg. 24); it does not require full class periods and can be adapted to fit your established curriculum. The program is structured to take place over six weeks; however, it may be adjusted according to your needs.

Classroom Benefits

- Provides a fully student-centered learning platform
- Stimulates group discussion
- Encourages peer collaboration and review as well as self-assessment.
- Implements both text-based *and* performance-based teaching approaches. ● Responds well to UDL and differentiation providing multiple points of entry ● Structured and easily adapted method for you and your students.
- Aligns with national, state and local standards for English, Drama, and Humanities classes ● Engages exceptional learners: ENL/ELL/ESL and special education students. ● Employs skills that require rigorous cognitive demands thereby reaching DOK 4 and Bloom's Level 6.

The easiest way to incorporate the competition into your school community is to hold classroom competitions prior to the School Competition. These classroom rounds could be considered practice sessions or the first round of eliminations for the School Competition. To encourage participation, teachers have used the competition as unit assessments or as extra-credit assignments.

Competition Preparation as an Extracurricular, Extension or After-School Program

If your curriculum map does not lend itself to the competition, an alternative is to offer the competition as an extracurricular or extension activity (free period/zero hour, lunch period or after school) open to all eligible students. Competition preparation can be incorporated into one or more of the following clubs:

- Drama Club
- Speech/Forensics Club
- National English Honors Society
- Shakespeare Club

The provided lesson plans are useful in this setting as well. We encourage you to review the lesson plans and utilize any and all activities that may benefit your students.

Monologue Selection & Preparation

Each student in your School Competition must memorize and perform one monologue from the 2023 Monologue Packet. Additional resources include the Monologue Scoring Rubric and Judge's Evaluation Form.

Selecting a Monologue

Student's Aim: To select a monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays that interests them.

Have your students choose a monologue to memorize and perform. You may assign them a specific part or have them pick their own. We strongly recommend the latter because it engages students in an active learning process (read, debate, decide). Please offer them guidance and assistance as needed.

Make copies of the 2023 Monologue Packet available to your students. They may pick any role regardless of gender. When selecting their monologue, your students should:

- **Read the script:** Actors research their roles; it would be a rare thing to perform a monologue convincingly without knowing the character inside and out. Therefore, your students should have read the play(s) from which their selections are taken and know the plot and characters. Free online editions of the plays are available at: folgerdigitaleditions.org.
- **Play the casting director:** When your students play their selections, they will need to be actors and casting directors at the same time. Your students should ask themselves if they would be a more convincing Viola or Olivia, Othello or Iago, Macbeth or Lady Macbeth.
- **Consider:** Advice from a teacher: "I see so many students looking for a piece to set them apart, but a speech we know, done with command of the language and brave choices behind it, is JUST AS EXCITING for those of us who know and love these works."

Understanding the Monologue

Student's Aim: To understand the play, their chosen character and their selected monologue.

A monologue is a speech performed by a single character set within the context of a play. Remind your students that actions (whether implied, reported, or performed) have both preceded and/or will proceed from each monologue.

The words spoken by each character fit within the larger framework of the play in one or more of these ways:

- They reveal the character's personality or goals.
- They are used by the character to incite others into action and move the plot forward.
- They set the scene or close the action (as in prologues and epilogues, respectively).

Tasks for Students

Once your students have selected their monologues, they should:

- Become their character!
 - As they read the play, your students will imagine themselves in the circumstances of their character. If necessary, suggest that your students make a chart of their character's emotional journey over the course of the play, highlighting high and low points. Have them pay particular attention to what happens immediately before the monologue begins.
- Be a Textual Investigator!
 - Using textual evidence, have your students answer the following questions:

1. Who is my character?
2. In what situation do I (the character) find myself?
3. What decisions and discoveries am I (the character) making?
4. What do I (the character) want to happen as a result of this speech?
5. Given my past and my personality, how will I (the character) act to bring about the desired effect?
6. What is my character's mood at the beginning of the speech?
7. Has it (my character's mood) changed by the end of the speech? If so, how?

Suggestion: Incorporate a Research Element (fulfills Common Core Standard RL.9-10.9). Examine the sources which influenced how Shakespeare expressed themes or topics in the chosen play (such as the Bible or works by classical authors.) How are the characters and events incorporated and transformed in Shakespeare's version? Students may also analyze multiple interpretations (fulfills Common Core Standard RL 11-12.7) of the chosen play by researching past productions, adaptations and differences in media (live theatre, films, cartoons, etc.).

Preparing the Monologue

Student's Aim: To thoughtfully interpret the character on stage. The student must understand their role in the play and accurately interpret the meaning of the character's actions.

Our advice to your students comes from Shakespeare himself: "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (*Hamlet* 3.2). Students should discover which movements and gestures best fit with the words of their monologue and vice versa. Great actors are praised for their "natural" performances (i.e. performances that naturally fit and flow with the text and character). Actors do this by mastering the tools of vocal and physical expression so completely that they *seem* natural.

Students become "natural" actors with Shakespeare through on-their-feet trial and error. Your students should explore the words—the character's thoughts and feelings—with their voices and bodies. This helps them make their characters come alive on stage. In doing so, your students convince the audience to accept them as those characters and to believe in the message they deliver. As students discover their own interpretation of Shakespeare's works, guidance and feedback from both you and their fellow classmates are encouraged.

Your students should avoid the temptation to "blow the audience away" with an excess of emotion. In acting, more is often less. An actor who "doth protest too much" (*Hamlet* 3.2) rarely convinces.

Tasks for Students:

As your students work on their monologues, they should:

- Perform with their **whole bodies**.
- **Explore** a range of expressive possibilities, both physically and vocally.
- **Experiment** with emphasis and volume as well as gesture and facial expression.
- Allow their work to naturally **grow and change**.
- **Decide** what means of expression best fits the tone and character of the monologue.



Sonnet Selection & Preparation

The winner of your School Competition is required to memorize and perform a sonnet, in addition to their monologue, at the Branch Competition. Additional resources include the Sonnet Scoring Rubric and Judges' Evaluation Form.

Selecting a Sonnet

Student's Aim: To select a sonnet that serves as a counterpoint to their monologue and demonstrates interpretive range.

You may assign your student a specific sonnet or have them pick their own. We strongly recommend the latter because it engages the student in an active learning process (read, debate, decide.) Please offer them guidance and assistance as needed.

Provide your School Winner and First Runner-Up with the 2023 Sonnet Packet.

Please remind your student that the sonnet should serve as a counterpoint to their monologue. For example, if their monologue features a character in love, they might want to pick one of Shakespeare's poems about death, morality, art, beauty or the passage of time, to name a few.

When selecting their sonnet, the student should:

- **Decide what's missing:** Have them look at their monologue and think about their character's emotions and situation in the play at that moment. Suggest they ask themselves questions about their character's mood and tone in this scene. Point them toward sonnets that contain the opposite emotions, moods, tones, etc.
- **A whole not a half:** Remind them to think of the sonnet and monologue *not* as two separate pieces, but as *one complete performance*. Have them use the sonnet as an opportunity to expand upon and highlight their interpretive range. If necessary, offer them guidance and assistance.
- **Put in the time:** Urge them to read at least 5 sonnets. Explain that the sonnet and monologue are equally weighted (i.e. the sonnet is worth 50% of their overall score). Encourage them to put the same time and attention into selecting their sonnet as they did with their monologue.

Understanding the Sonnet

Student's Aim: To understand the sonnet's form, rhythm and content.

Please review the following elements of a sonnet with the student:

- **Form:** A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, made up of three quatrains and a couplet. A quatrain is four lines of verse. The couplet is the final two lines of verse. The rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.
- **Rhythm:** Shakespearean sonnets are written in iambic pentameter, which is a line made up of ten syllables or five iambic feet – an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
- **Theme:** In his sonnets, Shakespeare touches on the themes of love, death, morality, art, beauty and the passage of time, to name a few.

Once the student has selected their sonnet, they should:

- Be a Textual Investigator! ○ Using textual evidence, have the student answer the following questions:

1. What is the central idea of the sonnet?
2. How do the lines break down into an introduction, development of the theme
3. Is there a turning point in the sonnet?
4. How do the meaning and delivery of these words differ from my monologue?
5. Can I strengthen the contrast?
- and conclusion? 6. How should the examples and arguments be emphasized?
7. How should the tone of the couplet be interpreted? Ironic? Witty?

Contradictory? ● Summarize, summarize, summarize!

- Make sure the student understands the sonnet's language with this exercise:
 1. Have the student summarize the sonnet in the shortest sentence possible.
 2. Have the student summarize each line of the sonnet.
 3. Have the student work on achieving this same clarity when delivering the sonnet.

Reciting the Sonnet

Student's Aim: To incorporate an understanding of the sonnet's form, rhythm and content into the recitation.

The student must fully understand the sonnet and its language and clearly convey that understanding to the judges. They should:

- Be aware of the sonnet's **form** as they study and interpret the piece.
- Keep the **rhythm** of the speech in mind as they practice.
- Always be aware of the **content** of the language.

As your student works on their recitation, they should:

- **Recognize the difference:** A sonnet is not the same as a monologue; one is a dramatic text (a speech performed by a single character set within the context of a specific play) and the other is a poem (a verbal composition designed to convey experiences, ideas or emotions through the use of language and literary techniques). Thus, the monologue and sonnet should not be approached in the same way. A monologue requires a *performance* (i.e. embodying the character), but the sonnet requires a *recitation* (i.e. vocalizing the words on the page). **Alert your student to this difference.**
- **Explore the language:** Have your student sit down and recite the language out loud (focusing on the rhythm). Instruct them to articulate every word. If your student is unsure of a pronunciation, offer your assistance. If there are multiple pronunciations for a word, let them decide which pronunciation best fits the sonnet.
- **Speed check:** Every line of a sonnet contains a line break (when the line of a poem ceases to extend, and a new line starts). Not all line breaks are the same, however. Your student should decide if a line break requires a pause, and, if so, for how long.
 - We advise the student to avoid extended pauses that may detract from the recitation.
- **Stand up for sonnets:** Once the student is comfortable with the language, stand up and practice!

**English-Speaking Union National
Shakespeare Competition Judges'
Evaluation Form**

The monologue and sonnet are equally weighted as two parts of a whole performance.

Students are expected to show evidence of the following criteria.

SCALE: 1 = LOW to 4 = HIGH

STUDENT NAME: _____

MONOLOGUE Character: _____ Play: _____	SONNET Sonnet #: _____
<u>UNDERSTANDING</u>	<u>UNDERSTANDING</u>
<i>MEANING:</i> understands the speech and its context in the play. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>	<i>MEANING:</i> understands the sonnet's content (any messages, allusions, ironies, etc.) <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>
<i>LANGUAGE:</i> understands Shakespeare's use of language in the monologue. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div> <i>CHARACTER:</i> an accurate portrayal of character point of view, status, and emotion. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>	<i>LANGUAGE:</i> understands the sonnet's literary and poetic elements (rhythm, imagery, antithesis, etc.) <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>
<u>EXPRESSION & COMMUNICATION</u>	<u>EXPRESSION & COMMUNICATION</u>
<i>VOCAL:</i> clearly, naturally spoken at an effective volume and pace; reflects the character. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>	<i>VOCAL:</i> clearly, naturally spoken at an effective volume attuned to the poetic elements. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>
<i>PHYSICAL:</i> clear, appropriate movement expressing the character and their intentions. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div> <i>OWNERSHIP:</i> confidence, poised, energized, fully in character, captivates the audience. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>	<i>PHYSICAL:</i> an economy of movement that subtly enhances the sonnet. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div> <i>OWNERSHIP:</i> confident, poised, energized, fully committed to sonnet, captivates the audience. <div style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</div>
MONOLOGUE SCORE:	SONNET SCORE: