



Text Clues 101

At the center of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's work with actors, and with teachers and students, is a process called "text work" or "verse work." This process shows us how to use the clues Shakespeare gave us to shape the way we read. For each of the clues below, you can click to watch as Kevin Long (Associate Professor of Theatre at Harper College, and long-time collaborator and instructor with Chicago Shakespeare's Education Department) virtually leads a group of CST staff members through a series of text clues using passages from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Ecphonesis O

Watch [▶ this video](#) to see the clue in action!

This sound comes from the Greek theater and it is a cry of passion. If you are confronted with the spelling "Oh," it is clear Shakespeare wanted you to pronounce it as you normally would. However, if you encounter the spelling "O" in your text, then this is the Ecphonesis O and Shakespeare is looking for the actor to cry out in passion.

JULIET
O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

Act 2, scene 2

ROMEO
It is my lady, O it is my love:
O that she knew she were!

Act 2, scene 2

JULIET
But old folks, many feign as they were dead,
Unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead.



[Enter Nurse and Peter]

O God, she comes! O honey Nurse, what news?

Act 2, scene 5

Repetition of Words

Watch  [this video](#) to see the clue in action!

By stressing, or treating each repetition differently, whether it is repetition of sounds, words, or phrases, the meaning of the language becomes clearer and emotion evolves. Each time you repeat, give it a different emphasis and a natural build will occur. Be aware that repetitions may occur between more than one character and sometimes across an entire scene, not just in individual speeches.

JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

Act 2, scene 2

ABRAHAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON

I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAHAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON *[Aside to Gregory]*

Is the law of our side if I say ay?

GREGORY *[Aside to Sampson]*

No.



SAMPSON

No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite
my thumb, sir.

Act 1, scene 1

Repetition of Sounds (Assonance and Alliteration)

Watch [▶ this video](#) to see the clue in action!

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds (“How now brown cow”) and alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds (“Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers”). What do repeated sounds suggest about a character’s emotion?

NURSE

O woe! O woeful, woeful, woeful day!
Most lamentable day, most woeful day
That ever, ever, I did yet behold!

Act 4, scene 5

JULIET

I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life:

Act 4, scene 3

Antithesis

Watch [▶ this video](#) to see the clue in action!

Antithesis is the setting up of opposites in the text. These are wonderful to play with. It is important to use the language to help convey meaning and paint specific pictures for the audience.



JULIET
My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!

Act 1, scene 5

BENVOLIO
Alas, that love, so gentle in his view,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof. [cut]

ROMEO
Dost thou not laugh?

BENVOLIO
No, coz, I rather weep.

Act 1, scene 1

Monosyllabic Lines

Watch  [this video](#) to see the clue in action!

Through the use of monosyllabic lines, Shakespeare is telling you to slow down. The character is speaking something that is vitally important or difficult to say or understand.

CAPULET
God's bread, it makes me mad!

Act 3, scene 5

CAPULET'S WIFE
O me, this sight of death is as a bell
That warns my old age to a sepulchre.

Act 5, scene 3

ROMEO
Yet banished? Hang up philosophy!



Unless philosophy can make a Juliet,
Displant a town, reverse a prince's doom,
It helps not, it prevails not. Talk no more.

Act 3, scene 3

Shared Lines

Watch [▶ this video](#) to see the clue in action!

Shared lines in verse typically contain ten syllables; however, the line is divided between two characters. If the shared lines contain more than ten syllables, Shakespeare has again given us a clue to the emotion for the scene. Shared lines function like a mid-stop; therefore, we treat them as such. The first actor tosses his line to the second actor and s/he, in turn, picks up the energy by immediately speaking their line.

ROMEO
O that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET
Ay me!

ROMEO
She speaks.
O speak again, bright angel...

NURSE *[within]*
Madam!

JULIET
I come, anon! But if thou meanest not well,
I do beseech thee

NURSE *[within]*
Madam!



JULIET

By and by, I come!

Tomorrow will I send.

ROMEO

So thrive my soul.

JULIET

A thousand times good night.

Act 2, scene 2

WANT TO LEARN EVEN MORE TEXT CLUES?

 [Click here](#) for more text clues and examples. This document was originally given to teachers at our "Teaching *Romeo and Juliet*" Teacher Workshop in October 2019.



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