



UnRound Robin

We love this activity because it helps students gain fluency and confidence with complex texts. In UnRound Robin, students work with a partner to dive deep into a single scene and practice close reading (and re-reading with multiple purposes!) up on their feet. It's a great way to help build stronger readers and fluency with any challenging literature you might be reading in class—whether it's Shakespeare or anything else!

To help you and your students as you learn remotely, check out [▶ this video](#) to see one of Chicago Shakespeare's Education Team (and spouse!) model what UnRound Robin looks like at home, using a [scene](#) from *Romeo and Juliet*.

What you'll need:

- a short two-person scene
- a partner (whether it's in-person or online)
- a handy dictionary, lexicon, or website like shakespeareswords.com

In pairs, students will read through their scene multiple times. Each read-through will have a different prompt, so UnRound Robin asks students to keep going back to the text AND discussing how their interpretation of the scene changes with each re-reading.

The key to UnRound Robin is discussion—ask students to unpack how each reading changes their interpretation of the scene, the characters, and their relationship. Make sure they are going back to the text to cite their evidence! This is a great activity to help students become strong, fluent readers as they explore multiple interpretations of a text.

We recommend a short two-person scene—no more than 20 lines ideally. Ask students to divide into pairs. Decide who will be A and who will be B. Then, reading aloud...



Read-through #1: Alternating readers at every **punctuation mark**, read the passage aloud. Circle any unfamiliar words or words confusing in this context. Look them up when you're finished reading and discussing the scene. What did you learn?

Read-through #2: Read to the end of a **complete sentence** (period, question mark, or exclamation point = "Full Stops"), alternating readers at each Full Stop, sentence by sentence. Again, circle any words or phrases that are confusing. Don't forget to look them up!

Read-through #3: Read the passage, standing **back to back**, each partner this time taking the lines of one character throughout. Listen closely to what your partner says. Did you learn anything about your character? What about your partner's character?

Read-through #4: This time, read the passage again (same roles) **whispering**—making sure that your partner can hear all the words. Are there moments when whispering feels instinctively right? When? Why?

Read-through #5: Next, standing as far apart as the space allows (about **five big paces** is ideal), read the passage again at "full" volume, sending your voice to one another. Are there moments when this elevated volume fits the meaning? When? Why?

Read-through #6 (at last!): While one partner stands still, the other **moves** wherever/however they want to in relationship to their scene partner. Based on the words you both say, move how it feels right instinctively. (If space is limited, explore the options of sitting and standing rather than moving around the room.)

Some coaching tips...

- Stress to your students: There's no one "right" answer! Each pair is playing with the language and interpretation.
- Having a couple of dictionaries close at hand (whether they are hard copies or an online lexicon like shakespeareswords.com) makes the otherwise-tedious process of looking up words a "team sport."



- Discussion of the process is key—within the pairs and among the class as a whole—whether you’re in the same room or in an online learning environment.

Consider Common Core Anchor Standards R1, R4, SL1



Appendix

Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, scene 3 (with cuts)

ROMEO

Father, what news? What is the Prince's doom?
What sorrow craves acquaintance at my hand,
That I yet know not?

FRIAR LAURENCE

Too familiar

Is my dear son with such sour company!
I bring thee tidings of the Prince's doom.

ROMEO

What less than doomsday is the Prince's doom?

FRIAR LAURENCE

A gentler judgment vanished from his lips:
Not body's death, but body's banishment.

ROMEO

Ha, banishment! be merciful, say 'death':
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'!

FRIAR LAURENCE

Here from Verona art thou banishèd.
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.

ROMEO

There is no world without Verona walls,
But purgatory, torture, hell itself:
Hence 'banishèd' is banished from the world,
And world's exile is death; then 'banishèd'
Is death mistermed. Calling death 'banishèd,'

Act 3, scene 3 (full text)

ROMEO

Father, what news? What is the Prince's doom?
What sorrow craves acquaintance at my hand
That I yet know not?

FRIAR LAURENCE

Too familiar

Is my dear son with such sour company!
I bring thee tidings of the Prince's doom.

ROMEO

5 What less than doomsday is the Prince's doom?

FRIAR LAURENCE

A gentler judgment vanished from his lips:
Not body's death, but body's banishment.

ROMEO

Ha, banishment! be merciful, say 'death':
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'!

FRIAR LAURENCE

Here from Verona art thou banishèd.
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.

10

ROMEO

There is no world without Verona walls,
But purgatory, torture, hell itself:
Hence 'banishèd' is banished from the world,
And world's exile is death; then 'banishèd'
Is death mistermed.
Calling death 'banishèd,'
Thou cut'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.

15



Thou cut'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.

FRIAR LAURENCE

O deadly sin! O rude unthankfulness!
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.

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FRIAR LAURENCE

O deadly sin! O rude unthankfulness!
Thy fault our law calls death; but the kind prince,
Taking thy part, hath rush'd aside the law,
And turn'd that black word death to banishment:
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.

Uncut text: 25 lines



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