

The Young Shakespearians

SPEAKING SHAKESPEAREAN

Part I - "I'VE GOT RHYTHM" – Scansion

Scansion means scanning a line of verse. This helps us determine its rhythm and understand how the poetic verse should be said aloud since Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed, not read in a book.

Shakespeare used different poetic rhythms – today we focus on the one called "Iambic Pentameter".

An **IAM** (sometimes called a "foot") is a poetic unit that has **2 syllables** where the **1st syllable is unstressed, and the 2nd syllable is stressed.**

It sounds like a heartbeat. Tap your chest like a heartbeat: ba **bum**

Which of the following words have iambs, and which don't?

Balloon, Party, Instead, Repeat, Carriage, Lovely

How about these words:

Ridiculous, Television

(Note that these words have 4 syllables each - **ridiculous** has two iambs, **television** does not.)

PENTA is a Latin word that means 5. METER is another word for Rhythm.

Iambic Pentameter verse has a rhythmic pattern of **5 iambs = 10 syllables** stressing the **2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th**.

Tap your chest like a heartbeat: ba **bum**, ba **bum**, ba **bum**, ba **bum**, ba **bum**

Let's try it on a sentence in common English:

The brown and fuzzy dog is very cute.

How many syllables are in this line? (10) Are the stresses on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th? (YES)

The **brown/** and **fuz/zy dog/** is **ve/ry cute."**

Is the following sentence in Iambic Pentameter?

The cute fuzzy and brown dog is happy. (NO)

How about this one?

I really like the cherry cake tonight.

How many syllables are in this line? (10) Are the stresses on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th? (YES)

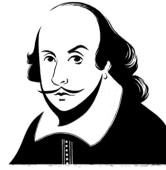
I **real/ly like /the cher/ry cake/ tonight."**

Is this sentence in Iambic Pentameter?

I really like the vanilla cake tonight.

How many syllables are in this line? (11) Are the stresses on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th? (NO)

I **real/ly like /the va/nilla/cake tonight.**



The Young Shakespeareans

SPEAKING SHAKESPEAREAN

Part II - "WHAT'S IMPORTANT?" – Operative Words

Operative Words are **emphasized** to help the audience follow not only what we are saying, but also to understand what we really mean.

We can change the meaning of what we say by choosing different Operative Words.

Let's look at the following sentence:

I love you.

Let's emphasize different words to give the sentence different meanings:

I love you. **I'm** the one who loves you, **he/she** doesn't.

I **love** you. I don't just **like** you, I **love** you.

I love **you**. I love **you**, not **him/her**.

In his Iambic Pentameter verse, Shakespeare often left clues about each character's thoughts and feelings. These clues help us choose certain Operative Words over others:

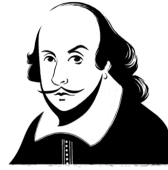
1. The **last** word of each line is **usually** (but not always) an **operative** word;
2. Only words with a **stressed syllable** can be an **operative** word;
3. Words that **rhyme** are often operative.

Of course, there are exceptions so remember that these are **tools, not rules**.

Also, remember to choose only **a few operative words per line** because emphasizing too many words will confuse the audience and make it difficult for them to follow the story and know what's important.

And, even though Shakespeare left clues, **an actor can choose** what their character means by choosing which operative words to stress.

There are lots of other tricks, but understanding Scansion and Operative Words will set you off on the right "foot"!



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Part III - "LET'S DO IT!" – Recite considering Scansion and Operative Words

Teacher recites Epilogue; Students Repeat Line-by-line

Is the Epilogue in Iambic Pentameter?

For each Line:

Students Identify new Vocabulary Words; Submit to Dictionary Person of the Day for definition;

Ask what is being said/what the line means - encourage students to figure it out;

Lead students in choosing 2 to maximum 3 Operative Words per line;

Recite Epilogue with students, emphasizing chosen Operative Words.

EPILOGUE for "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM"

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.

And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.

And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long.

Else the Puck a liar call.
So good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Puck shall now restore amends.