

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY PACK

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM



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WELSH LANGUAGE ADAPTATIONS BY MARI IZZARD AND NIA MORAIS

AN OVERVIEW

This pack acts as a resource that can be implemented in any order and adapted to suit your needs. We hope that this is seen as a guide rather than an answer book; provoking lively discussion and engagement with the live theatrical experience. Although this pack is primarily intended to link in with the requirements of most of the major GCSE Drama syllabuses there are of course cross overs with other qualifications and areas of the curriculum.

We have broken up the pack into two sections:

- 1) Pre-Show where we give background details to the production including:
 - i. Production introduction.
 - ii. Exercises to engage your participants with the production – some practical and some designed to encourage discussion.

- 2) Post-Show (Available after opening night) where we provide you with responses to explore with your students:
 - i. Examining Physical and Vocal Skills.
 - ii. Scene analysis.

There are also post-show talks on **Thurs 20** and **Wed 26 Oct** that might interest your students (lasting for approximately 40 minutes).

Sherman Theatre takes pride in the fact that these events have moved away from a traditional format – we choose to introduce wider social discussion by inviting thematically relevant University fellows to participate in discussions.

In addition to this resource our education activity packs from past productions are now available for you to download and use. We are delighted to be able to share these highly regarded resources with teachers, practitioners, families and young people.

“This is the best, most useful education pack I’ve had in 14 years!” Marc Lewis – Head of Drama at Plasmawr School, Cardiff

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF SHERMAN THEATRE



Based in the heart of Cardiff, Sherman Theatre is a leading producing house which makes and curates theatre for audiences in Wales, across the UK and internationally. Sherman focuses on the development and production of new work particularly the work of Welsh and Wales based artists.

Sherman Theatre opened in 1973 as a University Theatre acting as a receiving house for productions. It began to create its own in-house productions in 1985 when it became independent from the University and began to operate as both a producing and presenting venue.

In 1989 Sherman became one of only two venue based producing theatres in Britain to encompass theatre for young people within its regular artistic output.

In Apr 2007 with the support of Arts Council of Wales and Cardiff County Council, Sherman merged with Sgript Cymru (the national company for contemporary drama in Wales) to form *Sherman Cymru*.

In Feb 2012 the theatre building re-opened following a £6.5 million redevelopment. Public and backstage facilities were transformed to provide audiences and participants with a building that reflects the spirit and energy of Sherman.

In Jan 2018 Sherman Theatre became the first in Wales to win the Regional Theatre of the Year title at The Stage Awards, recognising the Sherman as the most exciting theatre in the UK, outside of London. In April 2018 Rachel O’Riordan’s production of *Killology* by Gary Owen won the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Affiliate Theatre. This was a co-production with London’s Royal Court Theatre.

In July 2019 a new era began with Joe Murphy’s appointment as Artistic Director, leading the Sherman into its next period of growth as an engine room of new Welsh writing, at the heart of Cardiff.

The building has:

- Two auditoria (A 452 seat main house and a 100 seat studio space).
- Rehearsal and production facilities, which include a double-height rehearsal room.
- Excellent accessibility throughout the building.

This picture shows Sherman Theatre’s Main House.

Label the following on the photo:

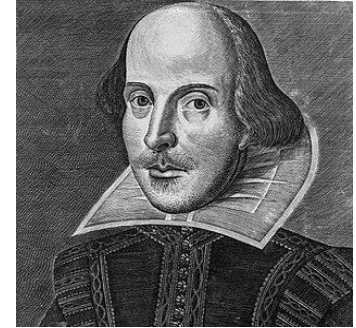
Stage Left Stage Right Stage Centre Proscenium Arch Audience Rake



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – THE MAN

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and is often referred to as the world's greatest dramatist. His understanding of human psyche, his portrayals of character as well as the depth and universality of his themes, are what makes his cannon still relevant in present day. *Cannon is the word used to describe the whole collection of Shakespeare's work.*

Not only was he a playwright, but Shakespeare was also an established poet and actor. His authorship is assigned to 38 plays, 154 sonnets, 2 narrative poems, as well as selection of other poems and writings. *These are also many texts which it is disputed he authored or co-authored.*



Despite this huge range of works none of the original manuscripts of Shakespeare's work remain in existence. The scripts we use today are descendants of those preserved by actors in his own theatre company (*The Lord Chamberlain's Men*, later *The King's Men*), first published in 1623 as the First Folio. Without them we would not be able to re-tell some of the greatest stories ever told; including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Personal Life

Born in Stratford-Upon-Avon on 23 April 1564. William was the son of John Shakespeare (glove-maker) and Mary Arden (daughter of an affluent farmer), he was the third of eight children, and the eldest surviving boy.

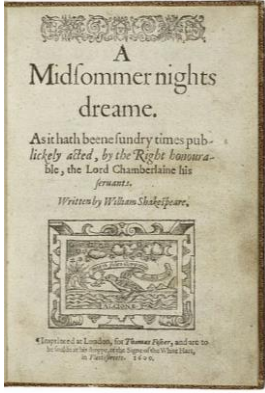



After a relatively uneventful childhood, Shakespeare (aged 18) married Anne Hathaway, then 26, in November 1582. Although this may seem early by today's standards it is worth remembering that the life expectancy in this era was only around 30-35 years old. There were also other pressing concerns around the marriage as Anne was three months pregnant at the time! After this first child (Susanna), came the twins, Hamnet and Judith. Sadly Hamnet passed away in 1596, aged 11. There is still debate surrounding the potential influence that this tragedy had on Shakespeare's writing and particularly the themes of *Hamlet* (given the closeness of the names).

By the turn of 1592, Shakespeare had firmly established himself as a playwright in London. Despite his popularity amongst theatre-goers and theatre managers and even royalty (Elizabeth I was a fan of his work).

Shakespeare formed an acting troupe to share his work. They were known as *The Lord Chamberlain's Men* – this was because the financial backing they needed came from the Lord Chamberlain (this support is called patronage). Once King James I came to the throne he invited Shakespeare and his company to work for him, in doing so they became known as *The King's Men*.

Aged 49 Shakespeare retired to Stratford and his family and died three years later. It is believed that he was born on the 23 April and died on the same date. A poetic end for one of the world's greatest dramatic poets.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – A BIT OF HISTORY

			
<p>Believed to have been written sometime between 1595 and 1596, the story of <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>, takes some initial inspiration from those that commissioned it (as was the tradition of the day). It was written for the entertainment an aristocratic wedding.</p> <p>Various sources such as Ovid’s <i>Metamorphoses</i> and Chaucer’s <i>The Knight’s Tale</i> can also be seen as inspirations for the play’s action. Shakespeare was well known for taking inspiration from a range of classical and contemporary sources, including the moods, hobbies and interests of the ruling classes who commissioned him to write and perform.</p>	<p>After the Jacobean era <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>, much like a lot of Shakespeare’s work, was rarely performed in its entirety.</p> <p>This was until 1840 when Madame Vestris – who was opera singer and theatre manager well known for her ‘pants roles’ (when she played roles which were male gendered) decided to stage it – in full. With her background in opera she added elaborate and fantastical musical sequences and balletic dances. Vestris herself took the role of Oberon; establishing a tradition that lasted for the next seventy years that Oberon and Puck would always be played by women.</p>	<p>Following in the footsteps of Vestris from the nineteenth century onwards, the play was staged as a spectacle with detailed sets and large casts.</p> <p>That all changed with Peter Brook’s 1970 production. It was staged for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in a blank white box, in which masculine presenting fairies (as above) engaged in circus tricks such as trapeze artistry. Brook also introduced the now common notion of doubling Theseus/Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania, as if to suggest that the world of the fairies is a mirror version of the world of the mortals.</p>	<p><i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> continues to be one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays, performed in theatres and schools around the world.</p> <p>Emma Rice directed, in 2016, a contemporary adaptation in The Globe, which included gender swapping characters and Bollywood influences.</p> <p><i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> is a play to be playful with. Sherman Theatre have stuck to this in their new adaptation, integrating Welsh language and continuing to explore and stretch the gender and identity roles within the play, and it’s worlds.</p>

THE PLOT

Below we give details of the full original plot – but look out for the differences in Sherman’s version.

The play begins amongst the preparations for the marriage of Duke Theseus to the Amazonian Queen Hippolyta. However this is interrupted by Egeus. He asks the Duke to intervene and make his daughter (Hermia), marry the man Egeus has chosen for her – Demetrius. She is refusing this match because she loves a gentleman named Lysander. The Duke orders Hermia to be obedient to her father; offering her the choice of death or to accept life as a nun.

Hermia instead decides that she and Lysander will run away together. She shares these plans with her best friend Helena. Helena is hopeful that this will leave Demetrius for her –as she is desperately in love with him. Later Lysander and Hermia escape from Athens and soon lose their way in the woods. Demetrius and Helena follow them into the woods, each hoping to find their true love. Meanwhile, a group of trades people (the mechanicals) are rehearsing a play to present before the Duke Theseus on his wedding day; the tragic love-story of Pyramus and Thisbe.

The forest is ruled by Oberon – King of the Fairies – and his queen, Titania. However, all is not well as she recently acquired a magical child, and now refuses to share them with Oberon. The King is frustrated by her disobedience and plots his revenge for her. Oberon sends Puck, his fairy servant, to find a flower whose juice makes people fall in love with the next creature they see.

Afterwards, Oberon hears Demetrius arguing with Helena and tells Puck to put flower juice on 'the Athenian', so Demetrius will fall in love with the first person he sees. Puck mistakes 'the Athenian' and puts juice on Lysander’s eyes while he sleeps. When he is woken by Helena, he immediately falls in love with her and rejects Hermia. Seeing Puck's mistake Oberon puts the juice on Demetrius making him fall in love with Helena as well.

The mechanicals rehearsals in the wood are overheard by Puck, who plays a trick on them by giving Bottom a donkey’s head. After frightening the others away, Bottom is lured towards Titania, whose sleeping eyes have been covered in magic juice by Oberon. When she wakes, the fairy queen falls in love with Bottom.

Meanwhile, Demetrius and Lysander, still under the spell, pursue Helena. Hermia is jealous and confused about their change in affections to her. Oberon commands Puck to put it right again. Puck distracts the two men from their pursuit of Helena by impersonating their voices, and they get lost in the woods. Exhausted, the four lovers fall asleep. Puck places restorative juice on Lysander's eyes.

Oberon restores Titania's sight, as she sleeps next to Bottom, and then wakes her. After expressing her dismay at the sight of Bottom, she reconciles with Oberon. She ends up giving him the magical child. Bottom's donkey head is removed, and he returns to the city to rejoin his friends as they prepare to perform their play. The lovers are woken by Theseus and Hippolyta's hunting party. Lysander sees Hermia and falls in love with her once again.

Happily reunited (Lysander with Hermia and Demetrius with Helena), they agree to share the Duke's wedding day. The play of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is presented before the wedding guests. As the three couples retire to bed, Puck and the fairies return to bless the palace and its people.

WHO WILL YOU CAST?

- Imagine you are casting for a new production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. But which actors will you pick?
- The table below will help us to narrow down our options. *(Either create your own or use ours.)*
- Start by writing in the boxes a series of qualities that you think the actor playing that character should have. This could be to do with how they look (tall, short etc), the kind of role it is (Hero, Villain, Sidekick, Best Friend etc), or the age of the character.
- Once you have your list of qualities it is time to cast! Make a list of actors you think should play the role. Or who the character is like in real life. – *You should try to get at least three names for each just in case your first choice is not available to play the role!*

CHARACTERS	QUALITIES	WHO YOU WILL CAST
<u>The Mortal World</u>		
Theseus – Duke of Athens.		
Hippolyta – Queen of the Amazonians and Theseus’s bride to be.		
Egeus – Hermia’s Father. He wants Hermia to marry Demetrius.		
Hermia – Daughter to Egeus and in love with Lysander.		
Lysander – In Love with Hermia		
Helena – Hermia’s best friend. In Love with Demetrius		
Demetrius – In Love with Hermia. This is who Egeus wants Hermia to marry.		
<u>The Mechanicals</u>		
Peter Quince – A Carpenter. They are the director of <i>Pyramus and Thisbe</i> .		
Nick Bottom – A Weaver. They are to play Pyramus.		
Flute – A Bellows Mender. They are to play Thisbe.		
Snout – A Tinker. They are to play the Wall.		
Starveling – A Tailor. They are to play Moonshine.		
Snug – A Joiner. They are to play the Lion.		
<u>The Fairies</u>		
Oberon – King of the Fairies.		
Titania – Queen of the Fairies.		
Puck / Robin Goodfellow – Oberon’s servant and mischief maker.		

THEMES – LOVE



We might consider *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to be Shakespeare’s version of a romantic comedy (rom-com) film. The plot is centred on a romantic ‘will-they-wont-they’ story line between Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, while also including large amounts of comedy to keep the audience entertained and the story moving along. In this section of activity we will begin to investigate how Shakespeare presents that love, and how we – as a contemporary audience – can interpret it.

Showing and Receiving Love

- 1) We suggest that you begin working as a larger group and try to come up with as many different emotions that link to love as possible. How do we feel when someone or something loves us back? Do not forget that not all these will be positive. Consider what happens when we see something happen to someone or something we love? *We are going to call this collection of emotions ‘responses’.*
- 2) Remaining in this larger group and try to come up with as many different physical responses that link to our emotional ‘responses’. Consider if these are conscious (we think about doing them) or subconscious (they are things our body does without thinking). *We are going to call this collection of physical responses ‘reactions’.*

Now that we have gathered our lists of ‘**responses**’ and ‘**reactions**’ we need to consider them within the context of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. We have picked some key moments in the play for you to consider:

- I. “I am your spaniel Demetrius” Act 2 Scene 1 – Line 570 to 613
- II. “What Angel wakes me from my flowery bed?” Act 3 Scene 1 – Line 950 to 1022
- III. “Oh Spite Oh Hell!” Act 3 Scene 2 – Line 1160 to Line 1232

Begin by creating short profile of one of these scenes which lists the following:

- Who is present?
 - o Think about who else is there. Even if they aren’t speaking, they may be present and demonstrating their love.
- Who do they love?
 - o This should be someone or something present within the scene – it may be more than one thing!
- How do they show their love? *Which of your ‘response’ and ‘reactions’ are present?*
 - o Is it in something they say? Their body language? Their proximity to others? *Try to be as detailed as possible with this last point.*

How many different ways can love be seen within each scene Discuss the different ways with someone else and compare your discoveries.

Finally, how would you react in each of these moments? Which character are you closest to in reaction?

THEMES – POWER *Hippolyta and Theseus*

Hippolyta was the Queen of the Amazons, who were an all-female warrior tribe, and was either abducted by Theseus or given to him as a gift. She is a battle trophy for Theseus, and he uses his capture of her to show off his power. However, the mere presence of Hippolyta has the potential to disrupt the order and laws of Athens. In the first scene of Sherman’s play *Hippolyta* realises how the power balance in her life has changed.



Looking at Act 1 Scene 1

Let’s look at the lines spoken in an extract from this scene; Start from the beginning and read until ‘Exeunt all but LYSANDER and HERMIA’.

Firstly create a tally chart of the number of lines spoke by each character, and consider the following:

- i) Who talks the most?
- ii) Who talks the least?
- iii) What does this tell us about who holds the power and control in the scene?

Next we are going to experiment with proxemics (the amount of space between the characters).

- i) Take the first section of the play Start from the beginning and read until Egeus enters.
- ii) Working with a partner decide who will play Hippolyta and who will play Theseus.
- iii) Then mark all the ends of sentences in this exchange (full stops, question marks and exclamation marks).
- iv) Position yourselves on opposite sides of the room and begin to read the scene aloud.
- v) On each sentence spoken Theseus can take a step towards Hippolyta. But Hippolyta can only move on lines when they are speaking.

Once you have finished this exchange discuss the following:

- i) How did it feel for you as a performer?
- ii) What effect does it have on the character?
- iii) Was there a line when Hippolyta wanted to move away but could not?
- iv) What effect does staging the scene like this have on the audience?
- v) What does it teach us about the power in the play?

Make a comparison

In Sherman’s version of this play Oberon and Titania’s roles are (in part) reversed. Try the same treatment to their first scene in the play (Act 2 Scene 1) as you did with Act 1 Scene 1, and after doing this once through swap all the lines so Titania speaks Oberon’s and repeat the process. What difference does this make to the power dynamic?

GENDER SWAPPING CHARACTERS

In Shakespeare’s day the stage was a space exclusive to male performers, this would not be changed until the late 1620s when women started to appear. In contemporary versions of his plays we have seen many incredible performances from women occupying roles such as Hippolyta/Titania, Lady Macbeth and Juliet, but we have also seen equally fantastic claiming of those characters traditionally played as cis gendered men. Often the swapping the gender of a Shakespearean character adds another layer to the story, changes the dynamics of the play, or makes us reexamine the story. When swapping the gender of a character, it is important to consider the consequences this will have on the play as a whole.

Hamlet

Hamlet has been played by many women, but the earliest known example is Charlotte Charke, who lived from 1713 to 1760. Her acting career was not the only job she excelled in she had stints as a pastry chef, sausage maker, landlord and writer. We think Charlotte successfully proved that Hamlet’s assertion that ‘Frailty, thy name is woman’ was ridiculous!

King Lear

Double Academy Award-winning actor Glenda Jackson in one of the most celebrated recent performers of the role of King Lear. Her highly acclaimed performance heralded a return to the stage after a 25-year absence.

Romeo

In an extremely bold and progressive casting choice two sisters, Charlotte and Susan Cushman took on the titular roles in a 19th-century production of Romeo and Juliet. Charlotte, who played Romeo, had a history of playing male Shakespeare roles, including Iago and Hamlet.

Reflect and discuss?

What effect do you think these casting choice had on the audiences? Are there any of these choices you would challenge? Why?

Think of your favourite film:

If you swapped the gender of the main character, how would this change the story and the relationships with other characters?

Consider the following:

- 1) As a director what elements of production might be effected by this choice?
(Consider the style / tone / setting of the production).**
- 2) As a designer what elements of production might be effected by this choice?
(Consider the set / costume of the production).**

SHAKESPEAREAN CONVENTIONS

The theatre of Shakespeare’s days was different to that with which we are familiar today. But there are plenty of stylistics and performative elements that are still in common use today (both within and outside of performances of Shakespeare). Below we have included some of these that you may want to consider:



Aside

When one character addresses the audience away from the main action, offering them valuable information in relation to the plot or characters that only the audience is privy to. This often leads to moments of dramatic irony (where the audience know more than the characters).

Boys Performing Female Roles

Women were not permitted on stage until Charles II was crowned in the year 1660. Young boys were cast in the roles of women, with men playing all the other roles.

Dialogue

Plays commonly consisted of poetic, dramatic and heightened dialogue. Generally speaking the lower-class characters’ speech was uncomplicated and colloquial – it would have sounded very familiar to the audience and it lacked poetic rhythm (prose), whilst in contrast higher class characters spoke rhythmically and poetically (verse).

Eavesdropping

This technique is between a soliloquy and an aside. Characters would overhear others on stage, informing both themselves and the audience of the details, whilst those being overheard had no idea.

Presentational Acting Style

Plays were overtly a “performance” with actors being more aware of their audience. Movements and gestures were more stylised and dramatic with speech patterns heightened for dramatic effect. Today we would regard this performance style as melodramatic.

Play Within A Play

This convention involved the staging of a play as part of the action of the play itself. It was not just a convention, it was used by Shakespeare for effect, often to highlight further the themes of the play or indicate a particular plot point.

Soliloquy

This technique allowed a single character to talk aloud their inner thoughts, (but directing them towards God, a higher power or the audience). Typically, a soliloquy is lengthy with a dramatic tone, and was used to show the thought process of the character to illicit understanding (sympathy or empathy) from the audience.

Staging

Elizabethan dramas made use of elaborate costumes. Acting spaces were bare stage with few set pieces (a single tree equalled a forest, a throne for a King’s palace) and minimal use of props. There were no stage lights of any kind, with plays performed only during daylight hours. A simple balcony at the rear of the stage could be used for, Gods or Heaven, while a trap door in the stage floor could also be used to drop characters into Hell or raise characters up from beneath. Entrances and exits were at two doors at the rear (tiring house).

Consider the following in relation to Sherman Theatre’s Version of ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’:

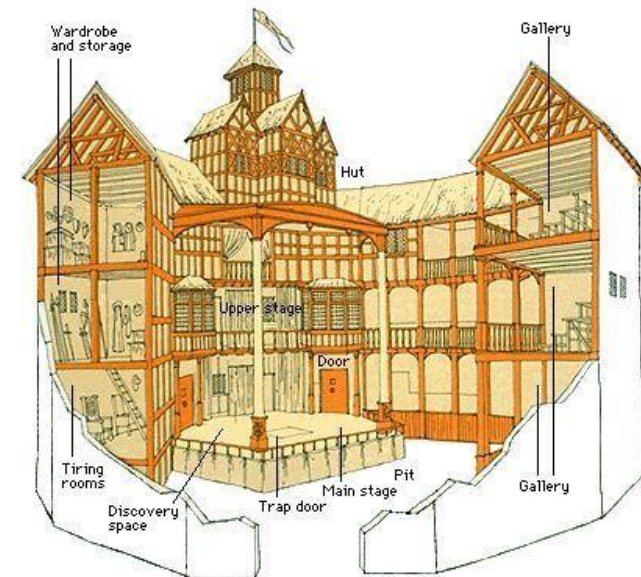
- 1) Which of these conventions would you expect to be present in Sherman’s production?**
- 2) Which of these conventions would you expect to be missing in Sherman’s production?**
- 3) How do you think that these conventions will reflect in the design choices for the play?**

Consider the following:

- i. Set**
 - ii. Costume**
 - iii. Sound**
 - iv. Lighting**
- 4) How could these conventions be used to further explore the themes of the play?**
 - 5) What other elements of contemporary theatre practice do we owe to Elizabethan practice?**

On the right-hand side of the page we have included a diagram of a theatre similar to The Globe on London’s South Bank.

This is the type of setting in which *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* would have originally been performed.



ACCESSING SHAKESPEARE – A PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Something that can make Shakespeare a challenge is the poetic nature of its language, and how it is laid out on the page; we forget that there are sentences to follow when it is neatly laid out in columns.

Start this exercise by using Demetrius’ line from Act IV, Scene I:
You could use another speech you are working on too.

*Are you sure
 That we are awake? It seems to me
 That yet we sleep, we dream.*

Begin by saying the lines allowed and clapping at the end of each. Like this:

*Are you sure [CLAP]
 That we are awake? It seems to me [CLAP]
 That yet we sleep, we dream. [CLAP]*

Can you hear how this breaks up the line and makes it hard for to us to understand what is going on or what it means?

This exercise will help us explore this and help get even more understanding for ourselves as performers and how we comprehend these lines.

Firstly make sure you have cleared the space around you, and that there is nothing that is likely to cause you injury. Begin by freely saying the words of the speech aloud. *Do not worry about making sense, just speak.*

Next take a journey around the room in straight lines, and change direction at each piece of punctuation. Alternatively, if you cannot journey around the room then turn your head to look somewhere new on each punctuation point. Now say the speech again without the actions but trying to replicate the changes of energy you experienced. **How did that feel? What did you notice about your performance?**

Following on from this we need to decide on a different set of actions which accompany each type of punctuation found in the speech. In this case we need to decide on a question mark, a comma, and a full stop. *In other speeches you may need to consider further actions.* An example of this might be if we had an exclamation mark. We would say the line leading up to it, pause, run to a new point in the room, and then resume speaking. *N.B your actions should be exaggerated action which creates a change in energy for your performance.*

List your own choices below.

Comma = _____ Question Mark = _____

Full Stop = _____

Now perform the speech with these choices. Really focus on the energy changes that the actions will bring. You should consider that each of these energy changes is a change in thought for your character.

Finally perform the speech without any of the additional actions. **Do you notice any differences between your first performances and last ones? What has changed physically and vocally?** *As you reflect on the exercise consider vocabulary such as pitch, tone and stress.*

WHAT NEXT?

If you have found this resource useful then please consider contacting us about our tailor-made educational activity.

We pride ourselves on being able to create bespoke engagement that meets specific curriculum needs, your educational environment, and the unique needs of your group. We run a range of activities for all age groups and abilities and we have many exciting ways we can connect with teachers, students, and community groups.

For further information please email our Creative Engagement Manager Timothy Howe (He/Him): timothy.howe@shermantheatre.co.uk

SUPPORT SHERMAN THEATRE

Sherman Theatre is a registered charity which creates great theatre experiences, nurtures and supports Welsh and Wales-based theatre makers, develops young people and connects with communities across Cardiff.

Here is a reminder of just some of the things we do every year:

- We make award-winning, critically acclaimed theatre in the heart of Cardiff.
- Our Christmas shows have become established as an essential part of the city’s seasonal calendar.
- We are a stage for our national companies and the best touring shows and comedians.
- The engine room of Welsh theatre - we’re committed to nurturing and supporting Welsh and Wales-based artists.
- Our Creative Engagement, Youth Theatre and Education work inspires, develops and connects young people throughout Cardiff and beyond.
- Every week 110 young people participate in our Youth Theatre schemes at the Sherman.
- Sherman Theatre is Wales’ first Theatre of Sanctuary. The status awarded by City of Sanctuary recognises the Sherman as somewhere refugees and asylum seekers can feel safe, welcome and supported.

