DRAMALLAMA PRESENTS

A Collection of

CLASSIC MONOLOGUES

for the

MIDDLE SCHOOL STAGE

30 SPEECHES FROM PUBLISHED PLAYS · 423 BC TO 1921

Aristophanes · Kálidása · Shakespeare · Calderón · Molière · Goldoni · Sheridan · Lessing · Browning · Gilbert · Chekhov · Wilde · Barrie · Shaw · Tagore · Lady Gregory · O'Neill · Zona Gale

with word lists, beat breakdowns, class games and notes for teachers

EDITED BY SEAN CERCONE



dramallama



dramallama

DRAMALLAMA CLASSIC MONOLOGUES

Middle School

30 speeches from published plays, 423 BC to 1921,
with rehearsal and teaching support for grades 6 to 8

Edited by Sean Cercone

About the editor

Sean Cercone is the founder and CEO of Dramallama and The Licensing House, which publish and license plays for educational theater. He is the former Artistic Director of the West Virginia Shakespeare Festival and holds an MFA in Acting from West Virginia University. He is also a playwright.

From the editor

These books are built the way a working rehearsal room works. Every entry asks the questions I trained on as an actor and used running a Shakespeare festival: Who is this person talking to? What do they want right now? What is in the way? How do they try to get it, and what changes by the last line? Those questions turn old language into live action, and they work the same way for a Greek tragedy, a Molière comedy or a one-act from 1920.

Running a Shakespeare festival also taught me what classical text needs from a young actor: the words on the page, exactly as the playwright wrote them, and enough help to own them. So every text here is printed as its edition prints it, with no cuts, and every entry gives students the words they need, the situation, a breakdown into beats and rehearsal games that get the piece on its feet. Teachers get a box of their own with the context, the content notes and the competition rules they need before they hand anything out.

Use these pieces in class, in showcases and in competition. Above all, use them to help your students discover that this writing was made to be played.

Sean Cercone

About these texts and your right to use them

THE PLAYS ARE PUBLIC DOMAIN.

Every play and every translation printed in this book was first published in 1930 or earlier and is in the public domain in the United States. No one owns these speeches, and that includes Dramallama. You may perform them in class, in showcases, at festivals and in auditions without paying a royalty or asking permission.

RIGHTS WERE CHECKED FOR THE UNITED STATES ONLY.

If you are outside the United States, the status of a play or translation may be different where you are.

WHAT THIS BOOK ADDS.

The selection, the editor's titles, the who-where-what summaries, the word lists, the breakdowns, the language notes, the rehearsal prompts and class games, the teacher boxes, the Pairing Guide and the other editorial material are Dramallama's work. © Dramallama. All rights reserved except as set out below.

PERMITTED PRINTING.

One purchase covers one school. Teachers, staff and students at the purchasing school may print, copy and reprint any part of this book, as often as they need, for classes, rehearsals, auditions and performances at that school. Please don't post the PDF online or share it with other schools. Each school needs its own copy.

READ THE WHOLE PLAY.

Each entry gives a link to a free scan of the full play. Read the scene before you perform the speech, and ask your teacher before reading the whole play: some of these plays include scenes meant for older readers, and each teacher box says which.

Contents

About the editor 2
About these texts 3
Quick start: find a piece in 60 seconds 7
How to use this book 8
Choosing a piece 9
Quick-find table 10
Competition Guide 12

PART ONE: BEFORE 1700

1 **Strepsiades**, *The Clouds* 14
"Ah me! ah me! O king Jupiter" · Aristophanes (tr. Hickie) · 1:33

2 **Máthavya**, *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring* 19
"Heigh-ho! what an unlucky fellow I am!" · Kálidása (tr. Monier Williams) · 1:18

3 **Julia**, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 24
"Nay, would I were so ang'red with the same!" · Shakespeare · 1:34

4 **Launce**, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 29
"I am but a fool, look you" · Shakespeare · 1:16

5 **Moth**, *Love's Labour's Lost* 34
"No, my complete master" · Shakespeare · 1:00

6 **Imogen**, *Cymbeline* 39
"I did not take my leave of him" · Shakespeare · 0:52

7 **Rosaura**, *Life Is a Dream* 44
"Wild hippogriff swift speeding" · Calderón (tr. MacCarthy) · 1:09

8 **Agnès**, *The School for Wives* 49
"It is very surprising and almost incredible" · Molière (tr. Mathew) · 1:02

PART TWO: 1700 TO 1880

9 **Mirandolina**, *Mine Hostess* 55
"What a thing to say!" · Goldoni (tr. Bax) · 1:27

10 **Polly**, *Polly Honeycombe, A Dramatick Novel of One Act* 60
"Why so I do" · Colman the Elder · 1:08

11 **Mrs. Malaprop**, *The Rivals* 65
"Observe me, Sir Anthony" · Sheridan · 1:21

12 **Recha**, *Nathan the Wise* 70
"And may you not?" · Lessing (tr. Frothingham) · 1:00

13 **Claude Melnotte**, *The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride* 75
"Do the stars think of us?" · Bulwer-Lytton · 1:19

14 **Pippa**, *Pippa Passes* 80
"Day! Faster and more fast" · Browning · 1:23

15 **Galatea**, *Pygmalion and Galatea* 85
"I was a cold, dull stone" · Gilbert · 1:29

PART THREE: 1880 TO 1930

16 **Lomov**, *The Proposal* 91
"It's cold . . . I'm trembling all over" · Chekhov (tr. West) · 1:33

17 **Sylvette**, *The Fantasticks* 96
"And hate can divide." · Rostand (tr. Fleming) · 0:57

18 **Gwendolen**, *The Importance of Being Earnest* 101
"Yes, I am quite aware of the fact" · Wilde · 0:54

19 **Miss Prism**, *The Importance of Being Earnest* 106
"Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know" · Wilde · 0:49

20 **Captain Hook**, *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* 111
"How still the night is" · Barrie · 1:31

21 **The Boy**, *Prunella or Love in a Dutch Garden* 116
"Well,— You see they was going away to-day" · Housman and Granville Barker · 0:57

22 **Jeanne**, *Jeanne d'Arc* 121
"How happily doth all the world go home!" · MacKaye · 1:30

23 **Amal**, *The Post Office* 126
"I can't say; but it's quite clear to me." · Tagore · 1:09

24 **Androcles**, *Androcles and the Lion* 131
"Oh, hes lame, poor old chap!" · Shaw · 1:33

25 **Mis' Ellsworth**, *The Neighbours* 136
"I know, I know" · Gale · 1:18

26 **Alice**, *Alice in Wonderland* 141
"Don't you wish sometimes you could go into looking-glass house?" · Gerstenberg · 0:57

27 **Mrs. Keeney**, *Ile* 146
"I wanted to be with you, David" · O'Neill · 0:49

28 **Princess Nuala**, *The Dragon* 151
"It is that there was a spell put upon me" · Lady Gregory · 0:44

29 **Bobby Wheeler**, *Clarence* 156
"Look; I guess it wouldn't be any harm to *own* one" · Tarkington · 0:45

30 **The Knave**, *The Knave of Hearts* 161
"All my life I have had a craving for tarts" · Saunders · 1:13

The Pairing Guide 166
Teacher rubric 169
Note on the Texts 170
Indexes 171
Editions used 173

Quick start: find a piece in 60 seconds

1. **Know the job.** Class work, a showcase or a competition? For a competition, turn to the **Competition Guide** first: it tells you which events each speech fits and what the rules allow.
2. **Pick a character.** The **Quick-find table** lists every speaker, as the play writes them. Any student may play any role.
3. **Check the clock.** Every speech shows an estimated time. Festival limits are a maximum, so leave room for pauses.
4. **Match the level.** Foundational, Developing or Advanced describe the speech, not your students.
5. **Choose the tone.** Comic or serious.
6. **Teachers read first.** Before you hand out an entry, read its teacher box (the last section). It covers the whole play, content notes and staging.

HOW EVERY ENTRY WORKS

Section	Who it is for	What you get
1 Student handout	Students	The play, who is speaking and to whom, what the character wants, the words to know, the speech itself and its time
2 Breakdown and language	Students	Beats, what changes, where the speech starts and stops, how the language works
3 Rehearsal	Students	Three prompts and a class game
4 For teachers	Teachers	Skill focus, scaffold, content note, assessment checklist, casting, festival use

Look for these on every entry. The colored **at-a-glance strip** under each title shows the time, cast, level, verse or prose, and tone. The highlighted **Competition notes** box shows where the speech fits and what to check before a festival.

Printing. One purchase covers one school. Every section but the teacher box prints as a student packet.

How to use this book

Every speech here comes from a published play. Every entry names the play, the playwright, the translator where the edition names one, and the exact edition and page. That matters at festivals and auditions, where you will be asked where your piece comes from. Wherever your event asks for the source, name the play and the playwright, never this book. None of these is a "Dramallama monologue." They belong to their playwrights.

Every entry has four sections.

1. **Student handout.** The play, the edition, who is speaking, what just happened, the playable problem, the words you need, and the performance text, set apart in its own box.
2. **Breakdown and language.** The speech in beats, what changes, what the play states and what it leaves to you, where the excerpt starts and stops, and two or three notes on how the language works.
3. **Rehearsal.** Three prompts and one class game to get the speech on its feet.
4. **Teacher box.** Skill focus, likely difficulty, a scaffold, a content note, an assessment checklist, festival and audition use, and casting.

Sections 1 to 3 are written for students and can be printed and handed out. Section 4 is for teachers. Some teacher boxes discuss events in the full play that the student pages leave out on purpose. Read the teacher box before you hand out the entry.

The order is by date. The 30 entries run in rough order of when each play was written or first staged, in three parts: before 1700 (8 entries), 1700 to 1880 (7), and 1880 to 1930 (15). The Indexes at the back sort them by tone, verse or prose, challenge, length, character and playwright.

Times are estimates. Each entry gives a word count and an estimated time at 131 words a minute for verse and 140 for prose. Stage directions are not counted. The pieces run from about 0:44 to about 1:34, and 16 of the 30 are estimated at 1:15 or less. Time your own performance aloud, with your pauses, before a festival or an audition.

Two pieces for one slot. Junior Thespys and many other festivals allow two contrasting pieces in a fixed time. The Pairing Guide at the back suggests partners for every piece.

Check the rules. Each entry's Competition notes box was checked against the official 2026–27 rules on November 3, 2026: one chair, no props, and the text performed as printed. Rules change and chapters differ. Confirm the current rules for your festival or audition.

Choosing a piece

Challenge levels. Every entry carries one of three levels. They describe the piece, not the student.

- **Foundational:** a clear situation, one strong want, and plain or quickly learned language. A good first classical piece. (12 pieces)
- **Developing:** more changes of tactic, older or denser language, verse, or a situation that needs some background. (13 pieces)
- **Advanced:** demanding verse, a serious situation that needs careful playing, or a play whose context needs teaching. (5 pieces)

Comic and serious. 20 pieces are comic and 10 are serious. None of the serious pieces is about death or violence; they are about saying goodbye, homesickness, standing up for someone, wonder, and making a hard choice.

Casting. Any student may play any role in this book. Each teacher box says when a character's age, gender, class or culture is part of what the speech means, so that you and your students can talk about it. Festival rules generally don't allow changing pronouns or wording, so the texts stay as printed.

Accents. None is needed for any piece. Several plays print the way their characters talk ("goin'," "nothin'," "hes"); say those words in your own voice.

Props. Junior Thespys allow one chair and no props. Where a speech handles an object (a letter, a lens, a cap), the teacher box says to mime it at festivals.

Content. Older plays are not automatically suitable for every student. Every teacher box has a content note covering both the excerpt and the play around it.

Quick-find table

#	Speaker	Play	Time	Tone	Verse or prose	Challenge	Character
1	Strepsiades	*The Clouds*	1:33	Comic	Prose	Developing	Man or boy
2	Máthavya	*Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring*	1:18	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy
3	Julia	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*	1:34	Comic	Verse	Developing	Woman or girl
4	Launce	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*	1:16	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy
5	Moth	*Love's Labour's Lost*	1:00	Comic	Prose	Developing	Man or boy
6	Imogen	*Cymbeline*	0:52	Serious	Verse	Advanced	Woman or girl
7	Rosaura	*Life Is a Dream*	1:09	Serious	Verse	Advanced	Woman or girl
8	Agnès	*The School for Wives*	1:02	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Woman or girl
9	Mirandolina	*Mine Hostess*	1:27	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Woman or girl
10	Polly	*Polly Honeycombe, A Dramatick Novel of One Act*	1:08	Comic	Prose	Developing	Woman or girl
11	Mrs. Malaprop	*The Rivals*	1:21	Comic	Prose	Developing	Woman or girl
12	Recha	*Nathan the Wise*	1:00	Serious	Verse	Advanced	Woman or girl
13	Claude Melnotte	*The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride*	1:19	Serious	Prose	Developing	Man or boy
14	Pippa	*Pippa Passes*	1:23	Serious	Verse	Advanced	Woman or girl
15	Galatea	*Pygmalion and Galatea*	1:29	Serious	Verse	Developing	Woman or girl
16	Lomov	*The Proposal*	1:33	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy
17	Sylvette	*The Fantasticks*	0:57	Comic	Verse	Developing	Woman or girl
18	Gwendolen	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	0:54	Comic	Prose	Developing	Woman or girl
19	Miss Prism	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	0:49	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Woman or girl
20	Captain Hook	*Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*	1:31	Comic	Prose	Advanced	Man or boy
21	The Boy	*Prunella or Love in a Dutch Garden*	0:57	Comic	Verse	Foundational	Man or boy
22	Jeanne	*Jeanne d'Arc*	1:30	Serious	Verse	Developing	Woman or girl
23	Amal	*The Post Office*	1:09	Serious	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy
24	Androcles	*Androcles and the Lion*	1:33	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy

25	Mis' Ellsworth	*The Neighbours*	1:18	Serious	Prose	Foundational	Woman or girl
26	Alice	*Alice in Wonderland*	0:57	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Woman or girl
27	Mrs. Keeney	*Ile*	0:49	Serious	Prose	Developing	Woman or girl
28	Princess Nuala	*The Dragon*	0:44	Comic	Prose	Developing	Woman or girl
29	Bobby Wheeler	*Clarence*	0:45	Comic	Prose	Foundational	Man or boy
30	The Knave	*The Knave of Hearts*	1:13	Comic	Prose	Developing	Man or boy

Competition Guide

Every speech in this book is a continuous, uncut passage spoken by one character, from a play published before 1931. That meets the strictest material rules we found: no combining characters, no splicing, no text changes.

WHERE THESE SPEECHES FIT

Event	Organization (season)	Fits?	The rules that matter
Monologue (Junior Thespians)	EdTA Thespys (2026–27)	**Yes, as printed**	One piece, 3:00 or less; one chair; no props or costumes
Contrasting Monologues (Junior Thespians)	EdTA Thespys (2026–27)	**Yes, as printed**	Two contrasting pieces, **3:00 or less combined**; every pair in the Pairing Guide fits
State Junior Thespian monologue events	State festivals (e.g., Florida)	**Usually**	Often one piece, 3:00, one chair; rules vary by state
Dramatic / Humorous Interpretation	NSDA Middle School (2026–27)	With your own longer cutting	Up to 10:00 +0:30 grace; one published source; no props, costumes or sets

Names changed in 2026–27. EdTA now calls the acting categories Monologue, Contrasting Monologues, Two-Person Scene and Ensemble Acting. Older handouts may still say Solo Acting.

BEFORE ANY FESTIVAL: THE FIVE-POINT CHECK

1. **Right event, right length.** Time the piece aloud with your pauses. Limits are maximums, and going over can disqualify.
2. **Words exactly as printed.** Thespys forbids changing "pronouns or scripted text" without the rights holder's written permission. Our texts are printed exactly; keep them that way, even when the casting crosses gender.
3. **Nothing but chairs.** No props, costumes or extra furniture at Thespys. Mime every object; each teacher box says how.
4. **Slate correctly.** Thespys: your name(s), troupe number and the title of the play, and nothing else. Never give this book's title.
5. **Bring the source.** Public-domain plays are eligible at Thespys without appearing on the Approved Materials List. NSDA asks for the original source (book or e-book, no photocopies) at district tournaments; confirm with NSDA whether an anthology meets that rule.

Rules change every season. Everything on this page was checked against each organization's official rules on November 3, 2026 (EdTA 2026–27 rulebook; NSDA 2026–27 manuals; Florida State Thespians event pages). Confirm the current rules with your chapter, league or tournament before you enter.

PART ONE

Before 1700

Greek comedy, Sanskrit drama, Shakespeare, the Spanish Golden Age and Molière

1 Strepsiades · *The Clouds*
2 Máthavya · *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring*
3 Julia · *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
4 Launce · *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
5 Moth · *Love's Labour's Lost*
6 Imogen · *Cymbeline*
7 Rosaura · *Life Is a Dream*
8 Agnès · *The School for Wives*

1

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 4

Strepsiades

The Clouds by Aristophanes, translated by William James Hickie · the opening scene of the play; this edition prints no act or scene numbers and no line numbers in the text · first performed in Athens, 423 B.C. (the edition's Argument: "first represented at the Great Festival of Bacchus, (March, B.C. 423,)")

TIME 1:33 CAST Solo LEVEL Developing TEXT Prose TONE Comic

"Ah me! ah me! O king Jupiter" *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *The Comedies of Aristophanes: A New and Literal Translation from the Revised Text of Dindorf, with Notes and Extracts from the Best Metrical Versions*, Vol. I, by William James Hickie, Henry G. Bohn, London, 1853, pp. 117–118. Full play: archive.org/details/comediesnewliter01arisuoft

Original dramatic excerpt · the complete speech, unaltered · Middle School · Challenge: Developing · Prose

★ **COMPETITION NOTES**

Excerpt from a public-domain play. Wherever your event asks for the source, name the play and the playwright, never this book. Perform the text as printed; don't change pronouns or wording. This translation is itself public domain in the United States (1853). Credit both Aristophanes and the translator wherever your event asks for the source.

- **Thespys Monologue / Contrasting Monologues for Junior Thespians (2026–27):** fits as printed. One chair, no props, no costume. Two contrasting pieces must run **3:00 or less combined**; the Pairing Guide pairs are all under 3:00.
- **NSDA Middle School DI or HI:** legal source material, but the event runs up to 10 minutes. Build a longer cutting from the full play.

Full rules: Competition Guide, p. 12. Rules change yearly; confirm with your festival.

Who, where, what just happened. It is midnight in a bedroom in Athens, in ancient Greece. Strepsiades, a farmer who once had money, is lying awake. His son, Phidippides, is asleep in the next bed. So are two servants. Phidippides loves horses and racing, and Strepsiades has borrowed money to pay for them. Now the debts are piling up, and he can't sleep. This is the very first speech of the play.

The playable problem. Strepsiades wants to get some sleep. His worries keep waking him up, and when he finally faces the numbers, they are even worse than he feared.

218 words · about 1 minute 33 seconds (estimated; time it aloud)

Words worth knowing

- Strepsiades (strep-SY-uh-deez). Phidippides (fy-DIP-ih-deez): his son. Aristophanes (air-iss-TOFF-uh-neez).
- O king Jupiter (JOO-pih-ter): Jupiter is the Roman name for Zeus, king of the gods. This translation uses the Roman name.
- domestics: household servants. In ancient Athens these servants were enslaved people.
- perish: die. "May you perish then, O war!" is a curse on the war.
- the fashion: what everyone is doing.
- stud of horses: a group of horses kept for racing.
- driven to distraction: driven crazy.
- Ah me!: a groan, like saying "oh no."
- the cock: the rooster, which crows at dawn.
- heretofore (HEER-tuh-for): before now.
- this excellent youth: his son. He doesn't mean "excellent."
- tormented: tortured, bothered without stopping.
- curricles (KUR-ih-kulz): light, fast two-wheeled carriages.
- the moon bringing on the twentieths: the end of the month is coming. In Athens, money owed was paid at the end of the month.

- interest: the extra money you pay for borrowing. It keeps growing.
- indebted (in-DET-id): owing money.
- Pasias (PAY-see-us): a man Strepsiades owes money to.
- would that: I wish that. His last line wishes something had gone wrong with that horse before he ever bought it.
- tablets: writing tablets. Here, his account book.
- minæ (MY-nee): large amounts of money in ancient Athens. One is a mina (MY-nuh).
- blood-horse: an expensive racehorse.

PERFORMANCE TEXT

Ah me! ah me! O king Jupiter, of what a terrible length the nights are! Will it never be day? And yet long since I heard the cock. My domestics are snoring; but they would not have done so heretofore! May you perish then, O war! for many reasons; because I may not even punish my domestics. Neither does this excellent youth awake through the night; but takes his ease, wrapped up in five blankets. Well, if it is the fashion, let us snore wrapped up. [*Lies down, and then almost immediately starts up again.*]

But I am not able, miserable man, to sleep, being tormented by my expenses, and my stud of horses, and my debts, through this son of mine. He with his long hair, is riding horses and driving curricles, and dreaming of horses; while I am driven to distraction, as I see the moon bringing on the twentieths; for the interest is running on.—Boy! light a lamp, and bring forth my tablets, that I may take them and read to how many I am indebted, and calculate the interest. [*Enter boy with a light and tablets.*] Come, let me see; what do I owe? Twelve minæ to Pasias. Why twelve minæ to Pasias? Why did I borrow them? When I bought the blood-horse. Ah me, unhappy! Would that it had had its eye knocked out with a stone first!

(Words in italics are set that way in the edition. The two stage directions are in square brackets and are not counted in the word total. The comma in "He with his long hair, is riding" is the edition's own. The edition has footnotes on both pages, mostly in Latin, Greek and German; they are left out and their number marks removed. The edition starts a new paragraph after Strepsiades lies down; the paragraph break here follows it.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 2 OF 4

Strepsiades · *The Clouds*

Beat	Starts at	What Strepsiades is trying now
1	"Ah me! ah me!"	Complain to the king of the gods about the endless night.
2	"My domestics are snoring"	Blame someone: the servants, then the war.
3	"Neither does this excellent youth"	Glare at his sleeping son, then give up and try to sleep too.
4	"But I am not able"	Name everything keeping him awake, and land the blame on his son.
5	"Boy! light a lamp"	Take charge. Call for the account book and face the numbers.
6	"Come, let me see"	Do the sums, find the horse, and curse it.

What changes: Strepsiades starts by grumbling at the night. He tries to sleep and can't. Then he decides to face his debts, and reading them only makes it worse: he ends cursing the horse that started it all. At that moment his son, still asleep, mutters about a chariot race: "You are acting unfairly, Philo!"

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: it is midnight, the servants and his son are asleep, Strepsiades owes money, and the first debt he reads is twelve minæ to Pasias for a racehorse. You decide: does he truly want to know how much he owes, or is he hoping the tablets will surprise him? And how much does he blame his son, and how much himself?

Cut notes: no cuts. This is Strepsiades' complete first speech, and the first words of the play, spoken "sitting up in his bed" after the opening scene description. It ends just before Phidippides talks in his sleep ("You are acting unfairly, Philo! Drive on your own course."). Two stage directions fall inside the speech: he lies down and starts up again, and a boy enters with a light and the tablets. The boy does not speak. No one else speaks during the speech. The speech crosses a page break after the first stage direction (p. 117 to p. 118). Footnote numbers (three on p. 117, five on p. 118 inside the speech) are removed, and the footnotes are not reproduced. The edition sets a space before each !, ? and semicolon; these are closed up. The first word is printed in capitals ("AH") as the play's opening; set here as "Ah."

Questions. Strepsiades asks four questions: "Will it never be day?" and three about his money. He answers the money ones himself. Let each answer come a moment late, as if he has to look at the tablets to find it.

Lists. "my expenses, and my stud of horses, and my debts" and "riding horses and driving curricles, and dreaming of horses." Each "and" adds one more weight. Notice that "horses" comes up three times.

The dash. "for the interest is running on.—Boy!" The dash is where the worrying stops and he does something. Let it be a sudden change of energy.

REHEARSAL 3 OF 4

Strepsiades · *The Clouds*

Three rehearsal prompts

1. Use a chair as the bed. Decide exactly when Strepsiades lies down and how quickly he sits up again. Try it once where he almost falls asleep, and once where he never even closes his eyes. Which makes "But I am not able" funnier?
2. Put the sleeping son in one fixed place. Say beat 3 and beat 4 straight to him, as if he could hear. Then say them as if he is the last person you want to wake. Keep whichever gives you more to play.
3. Read "Twelve minæ to Pasias. Why twelve minæ to Pasias?" four times, each time finding something new to be shocked by: the amount, the name, the reason, himself. Then choose one for performance.

Class game: Snore and Groan. Everyone sits on the floor, eyes closed, snoring softly. The teacher taps one player, who sits up and groans one complaint about something invented and silly ("My goat has eaten my left shoe!"), then lies back down. Each round, the snoring gets a little louder. The speaker must be heard over it without shouting: use clear words, timing and energy instead. Play for 5 minutes. This is how Strepsiades speaks in a room full of sleepers.

FOR TEACHERS 4 OF 4

Strepsiades · *The Clouds* READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

Skill focus: comic soliloquy with physical business (lying down, sitting up, reading); finding a build in a list of complaints; being heard in a "sleeping" room without shouting.

Likely difficulty: moderate. The situation (a parent worrying about bills) is easy to grasp, but the language is literal and old-fashioned ("heretofore," "indebted," "the moon bringing on the twentieths") and needs paraphrase. The two stage directions require staging decisions, and students often rush beat 6, which is the punchline.

Scaffold: read the edition's one-page summary, "The Argument" (p. 116), aloud first so students know who Strepsiades is and why he owes money. Then paraphrase the speech beat by beat as a class, and have students mark the two stage directions before anyone stands up.

Content note: the excerpt is mild. The "domestics" and the "boy" are enslaved household servants; Strepsiades complains that the war stops him from punishing them (the edition's notes explain that slaves could run away to the enemy in wartime). The final line wishes the horse had lost an eye before he bought it, played as comic exasperation. In the surrounding play, Strepsiades enrolls with Socrates to learn arguments that will cheat his creditors; he fails, sends his son instead, and the son returns, beats his father, and argues that this is right. Strepsiades then sets fire to Socrates' school, and the play ends in flames. The translator's preface says passages of "extreme indelicacy" were paraphrased rather than translated literally; teachers presenting the whole play should preview it.

Assessment checklist:

- The six beats are distinct, with a clear shift at "But I am not able" and at "Boy!"
- The lying down, sitting up and reading are clear, simple and placed exactly.
- The student is heard without shouting, and the last line lands as a punchline.

Festival and audition use: a strong comic piece for classrooms, showcases and Junior Thespys Monologue events; a good introduction to ancient Greek comedy. Use the chair as the bed. Mime the tablets and the lamp: Junior Thespys allow one chair and no props. Estimated time about 1:33. For two-piece festival slots, see the Pairing Guide at the back of the book.

Casting: any student may play Strepsiades. He is an older father and a farmer in debt because of his son's expensive hobby; the father-and-son relationship is part of the meaning, so keep it, but don't play an "old man" voice. His status as a slave owner is part of the world of the play; discuss it rather than playing the servants for laughs. No accent is needed.

2

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 4

Máthavya

Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring by Kálidása, translated from the Sanskrit by Monier Williams · Act II, opening; this edition prints no line numbers · written in Sanskrit, probably in the 5th century CE; date of first performance unknown

TIME 1:18 CAST Solo LEVEL Foundational TEXT Prose TONE Comic

"Heigh-ho! what an unlucky fellow I am!" *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring; an Indian Drama, Translated into English Prose and Verse, from the Sanskrit of Kálidása*, by Monier Williams, M.A., Boden Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, Fourth Edition, Wm. H. Allen & Co., London, 1872, pp. 34–35. Full play: archive.org/details/sakoontala00kali

Original dramatic excerpt · the opening of a longer speech · Middle School · Challenge: Foundational · Prose

★ **COMPETITION NOTES**

Excerpt from a public-domain play. Wherever your event asks for the source, name the play and the playwright, never this book. Perform the text as printed; don't change pronouns or wording. This translation is itself public domain in the United States (1872). Credit both Kálidása and the translator wherever your event asks for the source.

- **Thespys Monologue / Contrasting Monologues for Junior Thespians (2026–27):** fits as printed. One chair, no props, no costume. Two contrasting pieces must run **3:00 or less combined**; the Pairing Guide pairs are all under 3:00.
- **NSDA Middle School DI or HI:** legal source material, but the event runs up to 10 minutes. Build a longer cutting from the full play.

Full rules: Competition Guide, p. 12. Rules change yearly; confirm with your festival.

Who, where, what just happened. *Śakoontalá* is a famous play from ancient India, written in Sanskrit. In these court plays, the king's best friend is a comic character, the jester. He is allowed to joke and grumble, and he loves his food. Máthavya is the jester and friend of King Dushyanta. The king has been out hunting in the forest, and Máthavya has had to follow him everywhere. Act II opens on a plain at the edge of the forest. Máthavya comes on alone, sighing.

The playable problem. Máthavya wants someone, anyone, to know how hard his life is. The king isn't there to hear it, and nobody else is either, so he tells the audience instead.

183 words · about 1 minute 18 seconds (estimated; time it aloud)

Words worth knowing

- Máthavya (MAH-tuh-vyuh). Kálidása (KAH-lih-DAH-suh): the playwright. Śakoontalá (shuh-KOON-tuh-lah). Dushyanta (doosh-YUN-tuh): the king.
- worn to a shadow: so tired and thin you are hardly there.
- sporting propensities (pruh-PEN-sih-teez): his love of hunting.
- burden: here, the one thing everyone keeps repeating.
- toil: work hard.
- afford us no shelter: give us no shade.
- pungent (PUN-jent): sharp and strong. Not a compliment here.
- Heigh-ho (HAY-hoh): a tired sigh.
- my royal friend: the king.
- Here's a deer!, There goes a boar!, Yonder's a tiger!: he is copying the king's shouts on the hunt. A boar is a wild pig. Yonder means over there.
- meridian (muh-RID-ee-un) sun: the sun at noon, when it is hottest.
- jungle: here, wild forest.
- foul: dirty.
- roast game: wild animals that were hunted and roasted.

- at odd times: whenever there is a moment, not at proper mealtimes.
- joints all strained: sore knees and elbows.
- doze: fall lightly asleep.
- din: loud noise.
- beaters: people who crash through the bushes to drive animals toward the hunters.
- must needs: just have to, insist on.
- clatter: rattling, banging noise.
- out of the question: impossible.
- dancing attendance upon: following someone around to serve them.
- at the very earliest dawn: at the first light of morning.
- rascally (RAS-kuh-lee): naughty, like a rascal.
- huntsmen: hunters.
- deafen: make so much noise that you can't hear.

PERFORMANCE TEXT

[*Sighing.*] Heigh-ho! what an unlucky fellow I am! worn to a shadow by my royal friend's sporting propensities. 'Here's a deer!' 'There goes a boar!' 'Yonder's a tiger!' This is the only burden of our talk, while in the heat of the meridian sun we toil on from jungle to jungle, wandering about in the paths of the woods, where the trees afford us no shelter. Are we thirsty? We have nothing to drink but the foul water of some mountain stream, filled with dry leaves which give it a most pungent flavour. Are we hungry? We have nothing to eat but roast game, which we must swallow down at odd times, as best we can. Even at night there is no peace to be had. Sleeping is out of the question, with joints all strained by dancing attendance upon my sporting friend; or if I do happen to doze, I am awakened at the very earliest dawn by the horrible din of a lot of rascally beaters and huntsmen, who must needs surround the wood before sunrise, and deafen me with their clatter.

(The word in italics is set that way in the edition, beside Máthavya's name; the edition prints only an opening bracket, and the closing bracket is added here. It is not counted in the word total. The words in single quotation marks are the king's hunting cries, as Máthavya remembers them. The edition prints British spelling ("flavour"); keep it. The edition's note numbers are removed.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 2 OF 4

Máthavya · *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring*

Beat	Starts at	What Máthavya is trying now
1	"Heigh-ho!"	Announce his bad luck. Get the audience on his side.
2	"'Here's a deer!'"	Mock the king's hunting cries, then paint the hot, shadeless days.
3	"Are we thirsty?"	Complain about the drink.
4	"Are we hungry?"	Complain about the food.
5	"Even at night"	Top it all: not even sleep is safe.
6	"or if I do happen to doze"	Tell the last straw: woken at dawn by the noisy beaters.

What changes: Máthavya starts with a sigh and ends in full flow, each complaint bigger than the one before. By the end he is enjoying the list. Then he says, "Nor are these my only troubles," and the speech goes on to a bigger problem: the king has fallen in love.

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: Máthavya is the king's friend, he is tired of hunting, and he dislikes the water, the food and the early mornings. You decide: is he truly miserable, or does he love a good grumble? And how much does he like the king, even while he complains?

Cut notes: this is the opening of a longer speech. It is the first speech of Act II. Máthavya enters alone "in a melancholy mood" and speaks this whole first part to himself. The speech then goes on: "Nor are these my only troubles." He calls this "a fresh grievance": yesterday the king chased a deer into a hermitage and saw a beautiful girl, Śakoontalá, the hermit's daughter, and has thought of nothing else since. Máthavya decides to wait for the king, sees him coming with his attendants, and decides to pretend his legs are too sore to stand properly, leaning on a staff. Then King Dushyanta enters and speaks. The excerpt stops at "clatter" because the complaint about hunting is complete there, and the rest needs a staff, which festivals don't allow. Nothing inside the excerpt is cut. No one else speaks during it. The speech crosses a page break after "at the very earliest dawn by" (p. 34 to p. 35). One note number (after "roast game,") is removed; the notes themselves are printed at the back of the book and are not reproduced.

Pairs. "Are we thirsty? … Are we hungry?" Máthavya asks a question and answers it himself, twice. Make the second one bigger than the first. The audience will start to expect the pattern.

Quoting the king. The three hunting cries are the king's words, not Máthavya's. Say them as Máthavya imitating his friend. Don't make fun of the king too hard: they are friends.

One long finish. From "Sleeping is out of the question" to "clatter" is one sentence of 58 words. It builds, like someone getting more and more worked up. Plan one breath at the semicolon after "sporting friend."

REHEARSAL 3 OF 4

Máthavya · *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring*

Three rehearsal prompts

1. Talk straight to the audience. Pick three people in different parts of the room and give each of beats 3, 4 and 5 to a different one. Does he want them to agree with him, or feel sorry for him?
2. Choose one small physical problem for each complaint (the heat, the bad water, the sore joints, the noise at dawn). Keep each one small and stop it before the next complaint starts.
3. Say "Heigh-ho!" three ways: a long sigh, a short grumble, and as if he has said it a hundred times this week. Then say the last line the same three ways. Which pair makes the speech feel like a complete story?

Class game: Are We…? Stand in a circle. The first player names a hard situation in the pattern "Are we cold?" and answers it with a complaint: "We have nothing to wear but socks made of paper!" The next player asks a new question ("Are we tired?") and tops it with a bigger complaint. Keep it invented and silly, not about real life. Play for 5 minutes. Then notice that Máthavya does the same thing, twice, in this speech.

FOR TEACHERS 4 OF 4

Máthavya · *Śakoontalá; or, The Lost Ring* READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

Skill focus: direct address to the audience; building a comic list; playing complaint with enjoyment rather than misery; introducing a non-European classical theater tradition.

Likely difficulty: low to moderate. The structure is simple (a series of complaints), and there is no change of listener. The vocabulary list is long ("propensities," "meridian," "pungent," "dancing attendance") and should be pre-taught.

Scaffold: introduce the play in two minutes first: *Śakoontalá* is a Sanskrit drama by Kálidása, one of India's most celebrated poets, about a king who falls in love with a young woman raised in a forest hermitage. Explain the jester (in Sanskrit, the *vidūshaka*): the king's Brahman companion, a comic character allowed to speak freely and fond of food (the edition's introduction, pp. xxi–xxii, describes this convention). Then read the speech aloud as a class, each student taking one sentence.

Content note: the excerpt is mild: hunting, poor food and lack of sleep, all played for comedy. In the rest of this speech Máthavya pretends to have "bruised and crippled limbs" to get out of hunting; it is outside the excerpt. The edition's introduction (p. xxii) describes the stage jester as "grey-haired, hump-backed, lame, and hideously ugly"; do not ask students to play physical disability or ugliness for laughs. In the surrounding play, the king secretly marries Śakoontalá, a curse makes him forget her, and a lost ring restores his memory; teachers presenting the whole play can check the specific scenes before use. Treat Sanskrit names, Hindu terms and the court setting with the same seriousness as any classical source. No accent and no imitation of Indian speech or gesture.

Assessment checklist:

- The student speaks to the audience and keeps them as a listener throughout.
- Each complaint is distinct and the list builds to the last line.
- Names are pronounced as taught, with no accent or caricature.

Festival and audition use: a light comic piece for classrooms, showcases and Junior Thespys Monologue events, and a way to widen a program beyond European plays. The excerpt handles no objects (the staff comes later in the speech). Estimated time about 1:18. Because it is the opening of a longer speech, say so if a festival asks for complete speeches. For two-piece festival slots, see the Pairing Guide at the back of the book.

Casting: any student may play Máthavya. In the play he is a Brahman, a member of the priestly class, and the king's close friend; the joke of a high-status man stuck with the worst of a hunting trip is part of the comedy. Don't play an "old man" or a physical disability. No accent is needed.