DRAMALLAMA PRESENTS

A Collection of

CLASSIC SCENES

for the

HIGH SCHOOL STAGE

24 SCENES FROM PUBLISHED PLAYS · ANCIENT ATHENS TO 1927

Sophocles · Shakespeare · Jonson · Molière · Congreve · Goldsmith · Sheridan · Hannah Cowley · Ibsen · Chekhov · Shaw · Synge · Lady Gregory · Barrie · Alice Gerstenberg · Susan Glaspell · Georgia Douglas Johnson

scenes for two and three actors, with word lists, beat breakdowns, class games and notes for teachers

EDITED BY SEAN CERCONE



dramallama



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DRAMALLAMA CLASSIC SCENES

High School

24 scenes from published plays,
with rehearsal and teaching support for grades 9 to 12

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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.

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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 playable problems, the word lists, the breakdowns, the language notes, the rehearsal prompts and class games, the teacher boxes, the indexes and the other editorial material are Dramallama's work. © Dramallama. All rights reserved except as set out below.

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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 in context before you perform it, 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 scene in 60 seconds 6
How to use this book 7
Choosing a scene 8
Quick-find table 9
Competition Guide 10

PART ONE: BEFORE 1700

1 **Antigone and Ismene**, *Antigone* 12
Sophocles · 2 women · 3:45

2 **Neoptolemus and Odysseus**, *Philoctetes* 18
Sophocles · 2 men · 3:16

3 **Bianca, Lucentio and Hortensio**, *The Taming of the Shrew* 24
William Shakespeare · 1 woman, 2 men · 4:29

4 **Lady Percy and Hotspur**, *The First Part of Henry the Fourth* 33
William Shakespeare · 1 woman, 1 man · 2:34

5 **Mistress Ford and Mistress Page**, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 39
William Shakespeare · 2 women · 4:04

6 **Hero, Margaret and Beatrice**, *Much Ado About Nothing* 47
William Shakespeare · 3 women · 3:16

7 **Face, Subtle and Dol Common**, *The Alchemist* 55
Ben Jonson · 1 woman, 2 men · 3:37

8 **Dorine and Mariane**, *Tartuffe* 65
Molière · 2 women · 4:12

PART TWO: 1700 TO 1880

9 **Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood**, *The Way of the World* 75
William Congreve · 2 women · 4:04

10 **Kate Hardcastle and Constance Neville**, *She Stoops to Conquer* 81
Oliver Goldsmith · 2 women · 2:50

11 **Dangle and Mrs. Dangle**, *The Critic* 89
Richard Brinsley Sheridan · 1 woman, 1 man · 4:26

12 **Letitia and Mrs. Rackett**, *The Belle's Stratagem* 97
Hannah Cowley · 2 women · 3:10

PART THREE: 1880 TO 1930

13 **Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted**, *Hedda Gabler* 104
Henrik Ibsen · 2 women · 4:23

14 **Raina and Bluntschli**, *Arms and the Man* 113
Bernard Shaw · 1 woman, 1 man · 4:40

15 **Helena and Sonia**, *Uncle Vanya* 121
Anton Chekhov · 2 women · 4:43

16 **Cæsar and Cleopatra**, *Cæsar and Cleopatra* 127
Bernard Shaw · 1 woman, 1 man · 4:30

17 **Olga, Masha and Irina**, *The Three Sisters* 134
Anton Chekhov · 3 women · 4:26

18 **Nora and Cathleen**, *Riders to the Sea* 140
J. M. Synge · 2 women · 3:26

19 **The Sergeant and the Ragged Man**, *The Rising of the Moon* 147
Lady Gregory · 2 men · 3:25

20 **Kate and Sir Harry Sims**, *The Twelve-Pound Look* 154
J. M. Barrie · 1 woman, 1 man · 2:42

21 **Hetty and Harriet**, *Overtones* 163
Alice Gerstenberg · 2 women · 4:40

22 **Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters**, *Trifles* 172
Susan Glaspell · 2 women · 4:08

23 **Enid, Diana and Mrs. Packard**, *He Said and She Said* 180
Alice Gerstenberg · 3 women · 3:06

24 **Charity and Tildy**, *Plumes* 187
Georgia Douglas Johnson · 2 women · 3:41

Note on the Texts 196

Indexes 197

Editions used 200

Quick start: find a scene 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 scene fits and what the rules allow.
2. **Count your actors.** Scenes are for two actors (Two-Person Scene) or three (Ensemble Acting). The **Quick-find table** lists the cast of every scene as the play writes it.
3. **Check the clock.** Every scene shows an estimated time. Festival limits are a maximum, so leave room for pauses.
4. **Match the level.** Developing or Advanced describe the scene, not your students.
5. **Choose the tone.** Comic, serious, or a mix of both.
6. **Teachers read first.** Before you hand out an entry, read its teacher box (section 5 of 5). 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, the situation, what each character wants, the words to know, the time
2 The scene	Students	The text, exactly as printed, with speaker names in capitals
3 Breakdown and language	Students	Beats, what changes, how the language works
4 Rehearsal	Students	Three partner prompts and a class game
5 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 scene fits and what to check before a festival.

Printing. One purchase covers one school. Sections 1 to 4 print as student packets; keep section 5 for yourself.

How to use this book

Every scene here comes from a published play. Each entry names the play, the playwright, the translator where there is one, and the exact edition and pages. Wherever your event asks for the source, name the play and the playwright, never this book. These scenes belong to their playwrights.

Every scene is continuous. Nothing has been cut from inside any scene. Each one starts and stops at a clean point in the play, and only the characters listed speak inside it.

Every entry has five sections.

1. **Student handout.** The play, the edition, who is in the scene, what just happened, each character's playable problem, the words you need, and the word count and time.
2. **The scene.** The text, set apart on its own pages, with speaker names in capitals.
3. **Breakdown and language.** The scene in beats, with who drives each one; what changes; what the play states and what it leaves to you; where the scene starts and stops; and notes on how the language works.
4. **Rehearsal.** Three partner prompts and one class game.
5. **Teacher box.** Skill focus, likely difficulty, a scaffold, a content note, an assessment checklist, festival use and casting.

Sections 1 to 4 are written for students and can be printed and handed out. Section 5 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 24 scenes run in rough order of when each play was written or first staged, in three parts: before 1700 (8), 1700 to 1880 (4) and 1880 to 1930 (12).

Times are estimates. Each entry gives a word count and an estimated time at 135 words a minute for verse and 150 for prose. Stage directions are not counted. The scenes run from about 2:34 to about 4:43. Time your own performance aloud, with your pauses, before a festival.

Check the rules. Each entry's Competition notes box was checked against the official 2026–27 rules on November 3, 2026: a 5-minute maximum, chairs only (two for Two-Person Scene; up to six chairs and one table for Ensemble Acting), no props, and the text performed as printed. Rules change and chapters differ. Confirm the current rules for your festival or audition.

Choosing a scene

Challenge levels. Every entry carries a challenge level. They describe the scene, not the students.

- **Developing:** more changes of tactic, older or denser language, verse, or a situation that needs some background. (16 scenes)
- **Advanced:** demanding language, a serious situation that needs careful playing, or a play whose context needs teaching. (8 scenes)

Duets and groups. 19 scenes are for two actors and 5 are for three actors. Every part has real work to do: in a duet no character has more than about two thirds of the words, and in a group scene every actor has at least about 15 percent.

Comic and serious. 12 scenes are comic, 8 are serious and 4 mix the two.

Casting. Any student may play any role. The Quick-find table lists each scene's characters as the play writes them, and each teacher box says when a character's age, gender, class or culture is part of what the scene means. Festival rules generally don't allow changing pronouns or wording, so the texts stay as printed.

Accents. None is needed for any scene. Several plays print the way their characters talk; say those words in your own voice. The Irish, Southern and rural plays in this book are spoken in the student's own voice, with no accent work.

Props and staging. Festivals allow chairs and no props. Where a scene handles an object, the teacher box says to mime it. Where a scene has a slap, an embrace or a mimed weapon, the teacher box says how to stage it safely.

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

Quick-find table

#	Scene	Play	Characters as written	Time	Tone	Challenge
1	Antigone and Ismene	*Antigone*	2 women	3:45	Serious	Advanced
2	Neoptolemus and Odysseus	*Philoctetes*	2 men	3:16	Serious	Developing
3	Bianca, Lucentio and Hortensio	*The Taming of the Shrew*	1 woman, 2 men	4:29	Comic	Developing
4	Lady Percy and Hotspur	*The First Part of Henry the Fourth*	1 woman, 1 man	2:34	Comic and serious	Developing
5	Mistress Ford and Mistress Page	*The Merry Wives of Windsor*	2 women	4:04	Comic	Developing
6	Hero, Margaret and Beatrice	*Much Ado About Nothing*	3 women	3:16	Comic	Advanced
7	Face, Subtle and Dol Common	*The Alchemist*	1 woman, 2 men	3:37	Comic	Advanced
8	Dorine and Mariane	*Tartuffe*	2 women	4:12	Comic	Developing
9	Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood	*The Way of the World*	2 women	4:04	Comic and serious	Advanced
10	Kate Hardcastle and Constance Neville	*She Stoops to Conquer*	2 women	2:50	Comic	Developing
11	Dangle and Mrs. Dangle	*The Critic*	1 woman, 1 man	4:26	Comic	Developing
12	Letitia and Mrs. Rackett	*The Belle's Stratagem*	2 women	3:10	Comic	Developing
13	Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted	*Hedda Gabler*	2 women	4:23	Serious	Advanced
14	Raina and Bluntschli	*Arms and the Man*	1 woman, 1 man	4:40	Comic	Developing
15	Helena and Sonia	*Uncle Vanya*	2 women	4:43	Serious	Advanced
16	Cæsar and Cleopatra	*Cæsar and Cleopatra*	1 woman, 1 man	4:30	Comic	Developing
17	Olga, Masha and Irina	*The Three Sisters*	3 women	4:26	Serious	Advanced
18	Nora and Cathleen	*Riders to the Sea*	2 women	3:26	Serious	Developing
19	The Sergeant and the Ragged Man	*The Rising of the Moon*	2 men	3:25	Comic and serious	Developing
20	Kate and Sir Harry Sims	*The Twelve-Pound Look*	1 woman, 1 man	2:42	Comic	Developing
21	Hetty and Harriet	*Overtones*	2 women	4:40	Comic and serious	Advanced
22	Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters	*Trifles*	2 women	4:08	Serious	Developing
23	Enid, Diana and Mrs. Packard	*He Said and She Said*	3 women	3:06	Comic	Developing
24	Charity and Tildy	*Plumes*	2 women	3:41	Serious	Developing

Competition Guide

Every scene in this book is a continuous, uncut passage from a play published before 1931, with only the listed characters speaking. That meets the strictest material rules we found: no splicing, no combining characters, no text changes.

WHERE THESE SCENES FIT

Event	Organization (season)	Fits?	The rules that matter
Two-Person Scene (formerly Duet Acting)	EdTA Thespys (2026–27)	**Duets, as printed**	5:00 maximum; **two chairs, no table**; no props or costumes
Ensemble Acting (formerly Group Acting)	EdTA Thespys (2026–27)	**Trios, as printed**	3 to 16 actors; 5:00 maximum; up to six chairs and one table
Duet Acting	TFA (Texas)	**Duets, as printed**	Up to 10 minutes; memorized; partners interact; two chairs
Duo Interpretation	NSDA (2026–27); TFA	With re-staging and a longer cutting	Up to 10:00; **off-stage focus: no eye contact, no touching**; no props

Time margin. Our longest scene runs about 4:43. Every entry of 4:30 or longer carries a **Time check** in its Competition notes box.

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. **Chairs only, plus one table for Ensemble Acting.** No props, costumes or other 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; TFA event pages). TFA details come from its event page; check them against the 2026–27 TFA Constitution. Confirm the current rules with your chapter, league or tournament before you enter.

PART ONE

Before 1700

Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, Jonson and Molière

1 Antigone and Ismene · *Antigone*
2 Neoptolemus and Odysseus · *Philoctetes*
3 Bianca, Lucentio and Hortensio · *The Taming of the Shrew*
4 Lady Percy and Hotspur · *The First Part of Henry the Fourth*
5 Mistress Ford and Mistress Page · *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
6 Hero, Margaret and Beatrice · *Much Ado About Nothing*
7 Face, Subtle and Dol Common · *The Alchemist*
8 Dorine and Mariane · *Tartuffe*

1

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 5

Antigone and Ismene

Antigone by Sophocles, translated into English prose by Sir Richard C. Jebb · the opening scene, before the Chorus first enters, lines 21–83 (the edition prints no act or scene divisions; it numbers every tenth line in the margin) · first performed in Athens in the 5th century BC

TIME 3:45 · CAST 2 actors · LEVEL Advanced · TEXT Prose · TONE Serious

"What, hath not Creon destined our brothers" *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, translated into English prose by Sir Richard C. Jebb, Litt.D., Cambridge, At the University Press, 1925 (the back of the title page reads "First Edition, 1904. Reprinted 1905, 1912, 1917, 1925"), pp. 128–129. Full play: archive.org/details/tragediesofsopho00sophuoft

Original dramatic excerpt · a continuous passage from the opening scene, unaltered · High School · Challenge: Advanced · Prose · For 2 actors

★ 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, and don't cut lines. This translation is itself public domain in the United States (1904). Credit both Sophocles and the translator wherever your event asks for the source.

- **Thespys Two-Person Scene (2026–27; formerly Duet Acting):** fits as printed. 5:00 maximum, two chairs, no table, no props or costumes.
- **TFA Duet Acting (Texas):** fits as printed; partners interact, two chairs, up to 10 minutes.
- **NSDA/TFA Duo:** re-stage with off-stage focus and build a longer cutting.

Full rules: Competition Guide, p. 10. Rules change yearly; confirm with your festival.

Who, where, what just happened. We are in front of the royal palace at Thebes. Yesterday the sisters' two brothers killed each other in battle: Polyneices had brought an army from Argos against the city, and Eteocles defended it. In the night the Argive army fled. Creon is now king. Antigone has brought her sister Ismene outside the palace gates so that no one else will hear them. Ismene has just said she knows no news since her brothers died, and asked what is wrong.

The playable problems.

- **ANTIGONE** wants Ismene to help her bury Polyneices, against the king's order; Ismene is afraid, and the punishment is death.
- **ISMENE** wants to keep her sister alive and keep herself out of it; Antigone will not listen to reason, and treats every refusal as betrayal.

563 words · about 3 minutes 45 seconds (estimated; time it aloud) · Antigone 59%, Ismene 41%

Words worth knowing

- Antigone (an-TIG-uh-nee), Ismene (iz-MEE-nee): daughters of Oedipus (ED-ih-pus), once king of Thebes (THEEBZ).
- thou, thee, thy, thine: you, your, yours (speaking to one person). hath, wilt, wouldst, shouldst: has, will, would, should.
- unsepulchred (un-SEP-ul-kerd): unburied.
- base: low, unworthy.
- wrought out with mutual hands their common doom: killed each other.
- the Spirits Infernal: the gods of the dead, below the earth.
- allegiance (uh-LEE-junce): loyalty.
- plea: excuse. aright: rightly.
- Creon (KREE-on): the new king. Eteocles (ee-TEE-oh-kleez) and Polyneices (pol-ih-NY-seez): the two dead brothers.
- destined: set aside for.
- espy: catch sight of. whoso: whoever. aught: anything.
- the mother wife, two names in one: their mother, who was also Oedipus's wife. Oedipus married her without knowing who she was. With twisted noose did despite unto her life: she hanged herself.
- ruled of the stronger: ruled by those who are stronger.
- hearken: listen and obey. witless: foolish. over busy: meddling.
- stablished: established.
- —: the edition sets its dashes closed up ("me,—yes"). Each is a break in thought.

THE SCENE 2 OF 5

Antigone and Ismene · *Antigone*

ANTIGONE. What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honoured burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his honour among the dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polyneices—as rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will. Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for thee and for me,—yes, for *me*,—and is coming hither to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE. Poor sister,—and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE. Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE. In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE. Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE. Thou wouldst bury him,—when 'tis forbidden to Thebes?

ANTIGONE. I will do my part,—and thine, if thou wilt not,—to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE. Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE. Nay, he hath no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE. Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers in one day,—each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood,—wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now *we* in turn—we two left all alone—think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers; for 'tis witless to be over busy.

ANTIGONE. I will not urge thee,—no, nor, if thou yet shouldst have the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with *me*. Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world I shall abide for ever. But if *thou* wilt, be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have stablished in honour.

ISMENE. I do them no dishonour; but to defy the State,—I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE. Such be thy plea:—I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE. Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE. Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

(The words in italics are printed that way in the edition; they mark the words to stress, and they are spoken and counted. There are no stage directions in this passage. The edition prints the speech prefixes as "AN." and "IS." in small capitals; they are expanded here to the names in the edition's list of characters. The edition numbers every tenth line in the margin; this book sets each speech as one paragraph, so the numbers are not shown. For reference: 30 falls at "sepulchred," 40 at "could I help," 50 at Ismene's "Ah me!", 60 at "we brave," 70 at "welcome as," 80 at "heap the." The edition begins a new paragraph inside Antigone's first speech at "Such, 'tis said." The closed-up dashes are the edition's own.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 3 OF 5

Antigone and Ismene · *Antigone*

Beat	Starts at	Who drives it	What each wants now
1	"What, hath not Creon" (line 21)	Antigone	Antigone: lay out the whole order, then test Ismene ("nobly bred, or the base daughter"). Ismene: take in the news.
2	"Poor sister"	Antigone	Ismene: find out what is being asked of her. Antigone: draw her in one step at a time ("share the toil," "aid this hand").
3	"Thou wouldst bury him"	Ismene	Ismene: stop her with the law and with Creon's name. Antigone: claim the dead brother as her own.
4	"Ah me! think, sister" (line 50 in the margin)	Ismene	Ismene: make Antigone see the family's ruin, and their weakness, then refuse. Antigone: hold her ground in silence.
5	"I will not urge thee"	Antigone	Antigone: take back the offer and shame her. Ismene: take the blow.
6	"I do them no dishonour"	Ismene, then Antigone	Ismene: defend her choice without abandoning her sister. Antigone: announce her plan and walk away from the argument.
7	"Alas, unhappy one!"	Ismene	Ismene: show her love before it is too late. Antigone: refuse the pity.

What changes: Antigone starts by asking for help and ends by refusing it. Ismene starts by asking "what is it?" and ends begging her sister to be careful. At the start the two of them stand together against Creon's order; at the end they stand on opposite sides of it, and Antigone has said aloud that she is ready to die. In the lines that follow, Ismene offers to keep the plan secret and Antigone tells her to shout it to the town.

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: Creon has ordered that Polyneices stay unburied, on pain of death by stoning; Antigone will bury him; Ismene refuses to help, because they are women and the king is stronger, and asks the dead to pardon her. You decide: does Antigone expect Ismene to say yes? Is Ismene's long speech an argument she has already made to herself, or one she builds on the spot? And is "Fear not for me" comfort, or a door closing?

Cut notes: no cuts. The passage begins with Antigone's speech "What, hath not Creon destined our brothers" at line 21 (p. 128; the running head reads "21—51"). Just before it, Ismene asks, "What is it? 'Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark tidings." (p. 127). The passage ends with Antigone's "Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright." at line 83, the last line of p. 129 (the running head reads "52—83"). The scene goes on at the top of p. 130 with Ismene's "At least, then, disclose this plan to none" and continues to line 99, where Antigone exits and the Chorus enters. Only the two sisters are on stage; no one else speaks or enters. A page break falls after "when sins bared by his own search" (pp. 128 to 129). The edition sets a space before ? and ! and before some semicolons; these are closed up. A line-end hyphen is rejoined in "un-sepulchred." There are no footnotes.

Where the scene stops, and why. The scene could stop at Ismene's "for 'tis witless to be over busy" (line 68), but that stop leaves out Antigone's answer, the turn of the whole scene. Running on to line 83 keeps the turn and stops at a clean break, just before Ismene tries a new tactic. The full scene to Antigone's exit (line 99) would run about 4 minutes 49 seconds before pauses, too close to the 5-minute limit.

Thou and you. The sisters speak to each other only in "thou" and "thee," the close, private form. Say them as plainly as you would say "you." The difficulty is not the words; it is keeping the thought moving through long sentences.

One sentence, one breath of thought. Ismene's long speech is one list: father, mother, brothers, then "we." Each item is worse than the one before, and each one is aimed at Antigone. Mark where each item starts. The italic *we* is the hinge: everything before it is the past, everything after it is what will happen to the two of them.

The italics. Jebb prints four words in italics to show stress: *me* (twice), *we* and *thou*. Each one points at a person. Find who each one points at, and let the stress land there.

REHEARSAL 4 OF 5

Antigone and Ismene · *Antigone*

Three partner prompts

1. **Listening and reacting.** Antigone sits; Ismene stands. During Ismene's long speech, Antigone may not speak, but she must decide, at each new item in the list (father, mother, brothers, "we"), whether to look at her sister or away. Afterward, Ismene names the moment she felt Antigone stop listening.
2. **Status and tactics.** Play beats 2 and 3 twice. Once, Antigone asks as a younger sister asking a favor. Once, she asks as a leader giving orders. Which version makes Ismene's "Ah, over-bold!" stronger? Keep that one.
3. **The turn.** Find the exact word where Antigone gives up on Ismene. Each partner points to the word they think it is. Run the scene from beat 4 with each choice, and keep the one that gives Ismene the hardest last line.

Class game: Two Sides of the Gate. Pairs, 5 minutes. Set two chairs back to back. Partner A must persuade Partner B to do something harmless but against a made-up rule the teacher reads out (for example, "The rule says no one may water the school garden this week"). B refuses, but must give a different reason each time (safety, loyalty, fear, duty). After 2 minutes, A stops asking and says only what they will do anyway. Switch. Then talk about which reasons made the other person stop asking.

FOR TEACHERS 5 OF 5

Antigone and Ismene · *Antigone*

READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

SKILL FOCUS: sustained argument in heightened prose; playing an objective through a long speech; active listening during a partner's long speech; the shift from persuasion to refusal.

LIKELY DIFFICULTY: high. The vocabulary is manageable once the "thou" forms and a few words are glossed, but the sentences are long and the argument is dense. Students often play both sisters as angry from the first line. The scene works when Antigone begins by recruiting and Ismene begins by not understanding; the conflict should arrive, not start, at full force. Ismene's long speech needs a clear build through its list.

SCAFFOLD: read lines 1–20 aloud first (p. 127), so students hear Antigone bring Ismene outside and hear Ismene say she knows no news. Give a one-paragraph summary of the family history (Oedipus, Jocasta, the two brothers) before rehearsal. Have each actor write one sentence: "I want my sister to ___; she is in the way because ___."

CONTENT NOTE: In the excerpt, Antigone describes the order to leave Polyneices' body for the birds and the punishment of death by stoning; Ismene recalls that Oedipus blinded himself, that their mother hanged herself ("with twisted noose did despite unto her life"), and that the two brothers killed each other; Antigone says "well for me to die in doing that." In the surrounding play: Antigone buries her brother and is caught; Creon orders her shut up alive in a rocky vault; she hangs herself there; Creon's son Haemon, who is to marry her, draws his sword on his father and then kills himself with it; Creon's wife Eurydice then stabs herself. The deaths happen offstage and are reported by a messenger; the bodies of Haemon and Eurydice are then brought before the audience. Frame the family's history and the suicides before rehearsal, and know your school's counseling procedure. None of this needs to be shown to perform the scene.

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST:

- Antigone recruits before she accuses: beats 1 to 3 are a request, and the refusal changes her.
- Ismene's long speech builds through its list and lands on "we," with clear thought changes.
- Both actors listen visibly during the other's long speech, and the final two lines show where each sister now stands.

FESTIVAL AND AUDITION USE: a strong Two-Person Scene piece for two performers, with a fair split (Antigone 59%, Ismene 41%). Estimated time about 3:45, before pauses; the scene has no printed pauses, but long silences will add time, so rehearse with a stopwatch. Two chairs only; there are no props to handle. For a festival entry, rehearse it to time with your partner. Antigone's first speech (line 21 to "a noble line") can be studied alone in class, but it is not offered here as a standalone monologue.

CASTING: any student may play either role. Gender is part of the meaning: Ismene's main argument is that they "were born women, as who should not strive with men," and the play turns on two women defying a male ruler. Keep "sister," "she" and "her" as written. The sisters are young and unmarried; the play does not give their ages. No accents.

2

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 5

Neoptolemus and Odysseus

Philoctetes by Sophocles, translated into English prose by Sir Richard C. Jebb · the opening scene, before the Chorus first enters, lines 86–134 (the edition prints no act or scene divisions; it numbers every tenth line in the margin) · first performed in Athens in the 5th century BC

TIME 3:16 CAST 2 actors LEVEL Developing TEXT Prose TONE Serious

"When counsels pain my ear" *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, translated into English prose by Sir Richard C. Jebb, Litt.D., Cambridge, At the University Press, 1925 (the back of the title page reads "First Edition, 1904. Reprinted 1905, 1912, 1917, 1925"), pp. 329–331. Full play: archive.org/details/tragediesofsopho00sophuoft

Original dramatic excerpt · a continuous passage from the opening scene, unaltered · High School · Challenge: Developing · Prose · For 2 actors

★ **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, and don't cut lines. This translation is itself public domain in the United States (1904). Credit both Sophocles and the translator wherever your event asks for the source.

- **Thespys Two-Person Scene (2026–27; formerly Duet Acting):** fits as printed. 5:00 maximum, two chairs, no table, no props or costumes.
- **TFA Duet Acting (Texas):** fits as printed; partners interact, two chairs, up to 10 minutes.
- **NSDA/TFA Duo:** re-stage with off-stage focus and build a longer cutting.

Full rules: Competition Guide, p. 10. Rules change yearly; confirm with your festival.

Who, where, what just happened. We are on the rocky shore of Lemnos, an island where no one lives. Years ago, on his chiefs' orders, Odysseus left the warrior Philoctetes here, with a foot eaten by a festering wound. Now the Greeks fighting at Troy need Philoctetes' bow: Troy cannot be taken without its arrows. Odysseus has come back with Neoptolemus, the young son of the dead hero Achilles. They have found Philoctetes' cave, empty, and sent their attendant to keep watch. Odysseus has just told Neoptolemus the plan: tell Philoctetes a false story, win his trust, and steal the bow. He has called it "one little knavish day."

The playable problems.

- **NEOPTOLEMUS** wants to serve the army without lying; he was sent to obey Odysseus, and every other way to the bow has been closed.
- **ODYSSEUS** wants Neoptolemus to agree to the trick, and fast; the young man's honesty, and his famous father, stand in the way.

491 words · about 3 minutes 16 seconds (estimated; time it aloud) · Odysseus 53%, Neoptolemus 47%

Words worth knowing

- Neoptolemus (nee-op-TOL-uh-mus): son of Achilles (uh-KIL-eez), the greatest Greek fighter at Troy, now dead.
- Philoctetes (fil-ok-TEE-teez): the man they have come for.
- Troy: the city the Greeks are besieging.
- counsels: plans, advice.
- to compass aught by evil arts: to get anything by tricks.
- loth: unwilling.
- shafts inevitable: arrows that never miss.
- deliverance: rescue, a way out of trouble.
- valiant: brave.
- espied: seen. tarrying: taking too long.
- Odysseus (oh-DISS-ee-us): a Greek king, famous for clever plans. Laertes (lay-ER-teez): his father. "Son of Laertes" is a polite way to address him.
- thou, thee, thy: you, your. hath, dost, wilt: has, does, will. ye: you (more than one).
- abhor (ab-HOR): hate.
- sire: father. Neoptolemus means Achilles.
- guile (GILE): clever deceit.
- e'en: even.
- unmeet to shrink: wrong to hold back.
- mindful: remembering.
- artful: cunning. tenor: general meaning.

• Hermes (HER-meez), the lord of stratagem: the god of messengers and tricks.

• Athena Polias (uh-THEE-nuh POH-lee-us): Athena as guardian of cities. —: the edition sets its dashes closed up ("arts,—nor"). Each one is a break in thought.

THE SCENE 2 OF 5

Neoptolemus and Odysseus · *Philoctetes*

NEOPTOLEMUS. When counsels pain my ear, son of Laertes, then I abhor to aid them with my hand. It is not in my nature to compass aught by evil arts,—nor was it, as men say, in my sire's. But I am ready to take the man by force,—not by fraud;—for, having the use of one foot only, he cannot prevail in fight against us who are so many. And yet, having been sent to act with thee, I am loth to be called traitor. But my wish, O King, is to do right and miss my aim, rather than succeed by evil ways.

ODYSSEUS. Son of brave sire, time was when I too, in my youth, had a slow tongue and a ready hand: but now, when I come forth to the proof, I see that words, not deeds, are ever the masters among men.

NEOPTOLEMUS. What, then, is thy command? What, but that I should lie?

ODYSSEUS. I say that thou art to take Philoctetes by guile.

NEOPTOLEMUS. And why by guile rather than by persuasion?

ODYSSEUS. He will never listen; and by force thou canst not take him.

NEOPTOLEMUS. Hath he such dread strength to make him bold?

ODYSSEUS. Shafts inevitable, and winged with death.

NEOPTOLEMUS. None may dare, then, e'en to approach that foe?

ODYSSEUS. No, unless thou take him by guile, as I say.

NEOPTOLEMUS. Thou thinkest it no shame, then, to speak falsehoods?

ODYSSEUS. No, if the falsehood brings deliverance.

NEOPTOLEMUS. And how shall one have the face to speak those words?

ODYSSEUS. When thy deed promises gain, 'tis unmeet to shrink.

NEOPTOLEMUS. And what gain is it for me, that he should come to Troy?

ODYSSEUS. With these shafts alone can Troy be taken.

NEOPTOLEMUS. Then *I* am not to be the conqueror, as ye said?

ODYSSEUS. Neither thou apart from these, nor these from thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS. 'Twould seem that we must try to win them, if it stands thus.

ODYSSEUS. Know that, if thou dost this thing, two prizes are thine.

NEOPTOLEMUS. What are they? Tell me, and I will not refuse the deed.

ODYSSEUS. Thou wilt be called at once wise and valiant.

NEOPTOLEMUS. Come what may, I'll do it, and cast off all shame.

ODYSSEUS. Art thou mindful; then, of the counsels that I gave?

NEOPTOLEMUS. Be sure of it,—now that once I have consented.

ODYSSEUS. Do thou, then, stay here, in wait for him; but I will go away, lest I be espied with thee, and will send our watcher back to the ship. And, if ye seem to be tarrying at all beyond the due time, I will send that same man hither again, disguised as the captain of a merchant-ship, that secrecy may aid us; and then, my son, as he tells his artful story, take such hints as may help thee from the tenor of his words. Now I will go to the ship, having left this charge with thee; and may speeding Hermes, the lord of stratagem, lead us on, and Victory, even Athena Polias, who saves me ever!

(The word in italics is printed that way in the edition, to show stress; it is spoken and counted. There are no stage directions inside the passage; the edition's direction "[*Exit* ODYSSEUS, *on the spectators' left*." follows the last line. The edition prints the speech prefixes as "NE." and "OD." in small capitals; they are expanded here to the names in the edition's list of characters. The semicolon in "Art thou mindful; then," is printed that way; say it as "Art thou mindful, then." The edition numbers every tenth line in the margin; this book sets each speech as one paragraph, so the numbers are not shown. For reference: 90 falls at "take the man," 100 at "What, but that I should lie?", 110 at "And how shall one," 120 at "Come what may," 130 at "and then, my son." The edition begins a new paragraph inside Odysseus's last speech at "Now I will go." The closed-up dashes are the edition's own.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 3 OF 5

Neoptolemus and Odysseus · *Philoctetes*

Beat	Starts at	Who drives it	What each wants now
1	"When counsels pain my ear"	Neoptolemus	Neoptolemus: refuse the lie without refusing the mission; offer force instead. Odysseus: let him finish.
2	"Son of brave sire"	Odysseus	Odysseus: change the question from right and wrong to how the world works. Neoptolemus: make him say the word "lie."
3	"I say that thou art to take"	Odysseus	Neoptolemus: find another way (persuasion, force). Odysseus: close each door as fast as it opens.
4	"Thou thinkest it no shame"	Neoptolemus	Neoptolemus: put Odysseus on trial. Odysseus: answer each charge with a profit.
5	"And what gain is it for me"	Neoptolemus	Neoptolemus: find out what is in it for him. Odysseus: make him need the bow, not just obey.
6	"Know that, if thou dost this thing"	Odysseus	Odysseus: close the deal with fame. Neoptolemus: agree, all at once.
7	"Art thou mindful"	Odysseus	Odysseus: lock in the promise, give the last orders, and get away before he is seen. Neoptolemus: show he means it.

What changes: The scene starts with Neoptolemus saying he would rather fail honestly than win by evil ways. It ends with him promising to "cast off all shame" and standing alone, waiting to lie to a wounded man. Odysseus never raises his voice. He asks no question he doesn't already know the answer to, and the young man walks into each one. The last thing Odysseus does is pray to the god of tricks.

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: Neoptolemus would rather use force than fraud; Odysseus says words rule the world; Troy cannot be taken without the bow; Neoptolemus agrees once he hears he will be called "wise and valiant." You decide: is Odysseus telling the truth when he says he too once had "a slow tongue and a ready hand"? When does Neoptolemus actually change his mind: at the gain, at the prize, or before either? And does "cast off all shame" sound like a vow, or like a young man jumping before he can think again?

Cut notes: no cuts. The passage begins with Neoptolemus's reply "When counsels pain my ear, son of Laertes" (p. 329), directly after Odysseus's long speech of instructions ending "be called the most righteous of mankind." It ends with Odysseus's prayer, "Athena Polias, who saves me ever!" (p. 331), followed by the direction "[*Exit* ODYSSEUS, *on the spectators' left.*" and the Chorus of sailors, who enter singing. Only Odysseus and Neoptolemus are on stage; the attendant left on p. 328, and no one else speaks or enters inside the passage. Page breaks fall after "not take him." (pp. 329 to 330) and after "of the counsels that I gave?" (pp. 330 to 331). The edition sets a space before ? and ! and before some semicolons; these are closed up. There are no footnotes.

Where the scene starts, and why. Starting earlier, at line 50 ("Son of Achilles, thou must be loyal"), and stopping at "cast off all shame" would give Odysseus 68% of the words, mostly in one long speech of instructions, which is over this book's two-thirds limit for a duet; it would also run close to the 5-minute limit. Starting at Neoptolemus's answer, and running on to Odysseus's exit, keeps the whole argument and gives both actors an even share. The plan itself is summed up in "Who, where, what just happened."

Short lines, fast cues. From "I say that thou art to take Philoctetes by guile" to "cast off all shame," every speech is one line. This is a quick back-and-forth in the original Greek too. Pick up each cue with no gap, and let the speed itself become Odysseus's weapon.

The italic I. In "Then *I* am not to be the conqueror," the stress tells you what Neoptolemus has just understood: the bow matters more than he does. It is the first time in the scene he speaks of himself as a prize.

REHEARSAL 4 OF 5

Neoptolemus and Odysseus · *Philoctetes*

Three partner prompts

1. **Listening and reacting.** During Neoptolemus's first speech, Odysseus may not speak or move his feet. Afterward, he tells his partner which sentence he plans to answer. Then run beat 2 and see if his first line answers that sentence or ignores the whole speech.
2. **Status and tactics.** Play beats 3 to 6 twice. Once, Odysseus is a commander giving orders to a junior. Once, he is a patient older friend. Which version makes "Come what may, I'll do it" feel like Neoptolemus's own choice? Keep that one.
3. **The turn.** Each partner marks the line where Neoptolemus stops arguing and starts negotiating. Run the scene with the turn on each partner's line and keep the one that makes the last speech hardest for Neoptolemus to hear.

Class game: Every Door Closed. Pairs, 5 minutes. Partner A has a harmless goal (for example, "get your partner to trade lunch seats"). Partner B must suggest a different way each time ("Ask the teacher," "Wait till Friday," "Just ask them nicely"). A must close each door with one short reason, as Odysseus does, in one sentence each. After 2 minutes, B must agree, in the words "Come what may, I'll do it." Switch. Then talk about which closed door made the other person give in.

FOR TEACHERS 5 OF 5

Neoptolemus and Odysseus · *Philoctetes*

READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

SKILL FOCUS: argument through short, fast exchanges; playing status in a mentor-and-student relationship; tactics that change without volume; the moment a character gives in.

LIKELY DIFFICULTY: moderate. The single-line exchanges are easy to learn but hard to pace; students tend to leave gaps or rush without listening. Neoptolemus's opening speech and Odysseus's exit speech are long, formal sentences that need clear thought units. The challenge is making Neoptolemus's change believable within about three minutes.

SCAFFOLD: read Odysseus's instructions just before this passage aloud as a class (pp. 328–329, from "Son of Achilles, thou must be loyal to thy mission" to "the most righteous of mankind"), so students hear the plan and the false story. Explain in two sentences who Philoctetes is and why the Greeks need his bow. Have each actor write one sentence: "I want ___ from the other person; the one thing I will not give up is ___."

CONTENT NOTE: In the excerpt, the two men plan to deceive a disabled man ("having the use of one foot only") and speak of taking him by force; Odysseus describes Philoctetes' arrows as "winged with death." In the surrounding play: Philoctetes has lived alone for years with an open, festering wound from a snake bite, and suffers attacks of pain on stage; Neoptolemus wins his trust and the bow by lying, then gives the bow back; Philoctetes aims the bow at Odysseus; the hero Heracles, now a god, appears and tells Philoctetes to go to Troy, where he will be healed. No one dies on stage. None of this needs to be shown to perform the scene.

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST:

- Neoptolemus's first speech is a real refusal, with a clear alternative (force), not a complaint.
- The one-line exchanges are paced with fast cues, and each answer clearly closes the door the question opened.
- The actors show a specific moment when Neoptolemus gives in, and Odysseus's last speech plays the result.

FESTIVAL AND AUDITION USE: a good Two-Person Scene piece for two performers, with an even split (Odysseus 53%, Neoptolemus 47%). Estimated time about 3:16, inside the 5-minute limit, with room for pauses. Two chairs only; the bow is talked about but never handled. For a festival entry, rehearse it to time with your partner. Odysseus's last speech is too short to stand alone; Neoptolemus's first speech can be studied alone in class.

CASTING: any student may play either role. Age and rank are part of the meaning: Odysseus is an older king and an experienced commander, and Neoptolemus is "the youthful son of Achilles" (the edition's introduction), on his first mission, whom Odysseus calls "my son." Neither character needs an older or younger voice; play the gap through status and tactics. The characters are men and soldiers, and the play refers to them as men; keep the words as written. No accents.