DRAMALLAMA PRESENTS

A Collection of

CLASSIC SCENES

for the

MIDDLE SCHOOL STAGE

20 SCENES FROM PUBLISHED PLAYS · 405 BC TO 1923

Aristophanes · Kālidāsa · Shakespeare · Molière ·
Holberg · Sheridan · Schiller · Chekhov · Wilde · Barrie ·
Maeterlinck · Lady Gregory · Tagore · Stuart Walker · Milne

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

EDITED BY SEAN CERCONE



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DRAMALLAMA CLASSIC SCENES

Middle School

20 scenes from published plays,
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 scenes, and that includes Dramallama. You may perform them in class, in showcases, at festivals and in auditions without paying a royalty or asking permission.

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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.

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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 or four (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.** Foundational, 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 20 scenes run in rough order of when each play was written or first staged, in three parts: before 1700 (7), 1700 to 1880 (3) and 1880 to 1930 (10).

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 1:52 to about 3:52. 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.

- **Foundational:** a clear situation, plain or quickly learned language, and wants that are easy to find. A good first classical scene. (9 scenes)
- **Developing:** more changes of tactic, older or denser language, verse, or a situation that needs some background. (10 scenes)
- **Advanced:** demanding language, a serious situation that needs careful playing, or a play whose context needs teaching. (1 scene)

Duets and groups. 14 scenes are for two actors and 6 are for three or four. 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. 13 scenes are comic, 6 are serious and 1 mixes 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 one Irish play in this book is 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	Xanthias and Dionysus	*The Frogs*	2 men	2:14	Comic	Developing
2	Anusuya and Priyamvada	*Shakuntala*	2 women	1:52	Serious	Foundational
3	Adriana and Luciana	*The Comedy of Errors*	2 women	2:34	Comic	Developing
4	Celia and Rosalind	*As You Like It*	2 women	2:57	Comic	Developing
5	Guiderius, Arviragus and Belarius	*Cymbeline*	3 men	3:02	Serious	Advanced
6	Gorgibus, Madelon and Cathos	*The Pretentious Young Ladies*	2 women, 1 man	2:44	Comic	Developing
7	The Professor and Mr. Jourdain	*The Shopkeeper Turned Gentleman*	2 men	3:52	Comic	Foundational
8	Montanus, Nille and Jeppe	*Erasmus Montanus*	1 woman, 2 men	3:40	Comic	Developing
9	Lydia and Lucy	*The Rivals*	2 women	2:01	Comic	Foundational
10	Walter and Tell	*William Tell*	1 boy, 1 man	2:49	Serious	Foundational
11	Lomov and Natalia	*A Marriage Proposal*	1 woman, 1 man	3:30	Comic	Foundational
12	Miss Prism, Cecily and Dr. Chasuble	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	2 women, 1 man	3:06	Comic	Developing
13	Phoebe and Miss Susan	*Quality Street*	2 women	2:42	Comic	Foundational
14	Tyltyl and Mytyl	*The Blue Bird*	1 boy, 1 girl	3:21	Comic and serious	Foundational
15	The Child, the Mother and the Travelling Man	*The Travelling Man*	1 woman, 1 boy, 1 man	2:50	Serious	Developing
16	Amal and Sudha	*The Post Office*	1 boy, 1 girl	3:06	Serious	Developing
17	Billie and Lou	*Nevertheless*	1 boy, 1 girl	3:50	Comic	Foundational
18	Margaret and Dearth	*Dear Brutus*	1 girl, 1 man	2:50	Serious	Developing
19	Crawshaw and Richard	*Wurzel-Flummery*	2 men	3:16	Comic	Developing
20	Hero, John, Mary and Heroine	*The Man in the Bowler Hat*	2 women, 2 men	2:31	Comic	Foundational

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: material qualifies**	5:00 maximum; two chairs, no table; no props. Check whether your chapter opens scene events to Junior Thespians
Ensemble Acting (formerly Group Acting)	EdTA Thespys (2026–27)	**Groups: material qualifies**	3 to 16 actors; 5:00 maximum; up to six chairs and one table
State Junior Thespian Duet and Ensemble	State festivals (e.g., Florida)	**Usually, as printed**	Often 5:00; Florida allows integral hand props in Duet; rules vary by state
Duo Interpretation	NSDA Middle School (2026–27)	With re-staging and a longer cutting	Up to 10:00 +0:30 grace; **off-stage focus: no eye contact, no touching**

Short scene. *Shakuntala* runs about 1:52. No event we found sets a minimum time, but check your festival.

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; 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 and Molière

1 Xanthias and Dionysus · *The Frogs*
2 Anusuya and Priyamvada · *Shakuntala*
3 Adriana and Luciana · *The Comedy of Errors*
4 Celia and Rosalind · *As You Like It*
5 Guiderius, Arviragus and Belarius · *Cymbeline*
6 Gorgibus, Madelon and Cathos · *The Pretentious Young Ladies*
7 The Professor and Mr. Jourdain · *The Shopkeeper Turned Gentleman*

1

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 5

Xanthias and Dionysus

The Frogs by Aristophanes, translated into English rhyming verse by Gilbert Murray · 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, 405 BCE

TIME 2:14 CAST 2 actors LEVEL Developing TEXT Verse TONE Comic

"Sir, shall I say one of the regular things" *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *The Frogs of Aristophanes*, translated into English rhyming verse by Gilbert Murray, M.A., LL.D., George Allen & Sons, London, 1908, pp. 3–6. Full play: archive.org/details/cu31924026468003

Original dramatic excerpt · a continuous passage from the opening scene, unaltered · Middle School · Challenge: Developing · Verse · 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 (1908). Credit both Aristophanes and the translator wherever your event asks for the source.

- **Thespys Two-Person Scene (2026–27; formerly Duet Acting):** the material qualifies as printed. 5:00 maximum, two chairs, no table, no props. Junior Thespian access to scene events varies; some state Junior Thespian festivals run their own Duet Acting event (Florida's, for example: 5:00 maximum). Check yours.
- **NSDA Middle School Duo Interpretation:** legal source material, but Duo uses off-stage focus (no eye contact, no touching) and runs up to 10 minutes. Re-stage it and build a longer cutting from the full play.

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

Who, where, what just happened. This is the very start of the play. At the back of the stage is the house of Heracles, the strongest hero in Greek stories. Dionysus, the god of wine and theater, walks in dressed up as Heracles, with a lion-skin and a club. He is also wearing the high boots of a tragic actor and a tunic of yellow silk, so the disguise doesn't quite work. His slave, Xanthias, follows him, sitting on a donkey and carrying a huge bundle of luggage on a pole. They walk for a while without a word. Then Xanthias looks round at the load on his back.

The playable problems.

- **XANTHIAS** wants a laugh from the audience and a little sympathy for his sore back; what's in the way: his master has banned every joke he knows.
- **DIONYSUS** wants to arrive at Heracles' door with some dignity; what's in the way: his slave keeps turning the trip into an old comedy routine.

302 words · 36 lines · about 2 minutes 14 seconds (estimated; time it aloud) · Dionysus 56%, Xanthias 44%

Words worth knowing

- Dionysus (die-uh-NIE-sus): the Greek god of wine and theater. Xanthias (ZAN-thee-us): his slave. The edition's notes say this was a common name for slaves. Heracles (HAIR-uh-kleez): the hero who lives in the house. Aristophanes (air-iss-TOFF-uh-neez): the playwright.
- overloaded: carrying too much.
- blisters: sore, puffy spots on the skin, from rubbing.
- luggage pole: a pole carried across the shoulders, with bundles hanging from it.
- lumber: heavy, useless stuff.
- the regular things: the jokes that comic actors use again and again.
- wormwood: a very bitter plant. "That's simply wormwood to me" means "I can't stand it."
- for mercy's sake: please, I'm begging you.
- emetics (ih-MET-iks): medicine that makes you throw up. Dionysus says that joke would make him sick.
- mayn't: may not.

- wheeze: an old, tired joke.
- choice products: "excellent" work. Dionysus says it sarcastically.
- Airs and insolence (IN-suh-lunss): showing off and being rude.
- Go turns: take turns.
- Then I'd let you have it: then I could say what I really think.
- Porter: the servant who answers the door.
- Phrynichus (FRIN-ih-kus), Ameipsias (uh-MIPE-see-us), Lykis (LIE-kiss): comic playwrights of the time. The edition's notes say Phrynichus was competing against Aristophanes at the same festival.
- a twelvemonth: a year.
- child of the Great Jug: a joke. Dionysus is the god of wine, so he calls himself the child of a big wine jar.
- Arginusae (ar-gih-NOO-see): a sea battle Athens had just won. The edition's notes say every slave who fought in it was set free.
- Dismount: get down off the donkey. rascal: a cheeky, badly behaved person.
- . . . (three spaced dots): the speaker stops in the middle of a sentence.

THE SCENE 2 OF 5

Xanthias and Dionysus · *The Frogs*

XANTHIAS. (*looking round at his burden with a groan*)
Sir, shall I say one of the regular things
That people in a theatre always laugh at?

DIONYSUS.
Say what you like, except "I'm overloaded."
But mind, not that. That's simply wormwood to me.

XANTHIAS. (*disappointed*)
Not anything funny?

DIONYSUS.
Not "Oh, my poor blisters!"

XANTHIAS.
Suppose I made the great joke?

DIONYSUS.
Why, by all means.
Don't be afraid. Only, for mercy's sake,
Don't . . .

XANTHIAS.
Don't do what?

DIONYSUS.
Don't shift your luggage pole
Across, and say, "I want to blow my nose."

XANTHIAS. (*greatly disappointed*)
Nor, that I've got such a weight upon my back
That unless some one helps me quickly I shall sneeze?

DIONYSUS.
Oh, please, no. Keep it till I need emetics.

XANTHIAS.
Then what's the good of carrying all this lumber
If I mayn't make one single good old wheeze
Like Phrynichus, Ameipsias, and Lykis?

DIONYSUS.
Ah no; don't make them.—When I sit down there
[*Pointing to the auditorium.*
And hear some of those choice products, I go home
A twelvemonth older.

XANTHIAS. (*to himself*)
Oh, my poor old neck:
Blistered all round, and mustn't say it's blistered,
Because that's funny!

DIONYSUS.
Airs and insolence!
When I, Dionysus, child of the Great Jug,
Must work and walk myself, and have him riding
Lest he should tire himself or carry things!

XANTHIAS.
Am I not carrying things?

DIONYSUS.
They're carrying you.

XANTHIAS. (*showing the baggage*)
I'm carrying this.

DIONYSUS.
How?

XANTHIAS.
With my back half-broken.

DIONYSUS.
That bag is clearly carried by a donkey.

XANTHIAS.
No donkey carries bags that *I* am carrying.

DIONYSUS.
I suppose you know the donkey's carrying *you.*

XANTHIAS. (*turning cross*)
I don't. I only know my shoulder's sore!

DIONYSUS.
Well, if it does no good to ride the donkey,
Go turns, and let the poor beast ride on you.

XANTHIAS. (*aside*)
Just like my luck.—Why wasn't I on board
At Arginusae? Then I'd let you have it.

DIONYSUS.
Dismount, you rascal.—Here's the door close by
Where I must turn in first—and I on foot! (*Knocking.*
Porter! Hi, porter! Hi!

(The words in italics inside brackets are stage directions, set that way in the edition; they are not counted in the word total. The edition prints a direction after the speaker's name, as in "XANTHIAS (*disappointed*)."; here the period is set after the name instead. Two spoken words are printed in italics for stress, *I* in "bags that *I* am carrying" and *you.* in "carrying *you.*"; they are set in italics here and are counted. Two directions are printed with an opening bracket only, "[*Pointing to the auditorium.*" and "(*Knocking.*", as in the edition. When a speech starts partway across the page, it finishes a line of verse that the other actor began; those lines are set to the right, as the edition sets them. The edition prints no line numbers; the line count treats each shared line as one line. The long dash (—) and the spaced dots (. . .) are the edition's own. Speaker names are not counted.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 3 OF 5

Xanthias and Dionysus · *The Frogs*

Beat	Starts at	Who drives it	What each wants now
1	"Sir, shall I say one of the regular things"	Xanthias	Xanthias: get permission for a crowd-pleasing joke. Dionysus: ban the old jokes before they start.
2	"Suppose I made the great joke?"	Xanthias	Xanthias: try his biggest joke instead. Dionysus: stop him one word before he says it.
3	"Nor, that I've got such a weight"	Xanthias	Xanthias: sneak one more joke past him. Dionysus: shut it down for good.
4	"Then what's the good of carrying"	Xanthias, then Dionysus	Xanthias: complain that he gets no fun out of the job. Dionysus: explain how much those old jokes bore him.
5	"Oh, my poor old neck:"	Xanthias	Xanthias: get his complaint in after all, to himself. Dionysus: put him back in his place.
6	"Am I not carrying things?"	both	Xanthias: prove that he is the one carrying the load. Dionysus: prove that the donkey is.
7	"Well, if it does no good"	Dionysus	Dionysus: win the argument with an order. Xanthias: get the last word, quietly.
8	"Dismount, you rascal."	Dionysus	Dionysus: get to business at Heracles' door. Xanthias: climb down.

What changes: At the start Xanthias is begging to do his act, and Dionysus is the bored critic who has heard it all before. By the end Xanthias has done his act anyway: he has complained about his blisters, his neck and his shoulder, which is exactly what he was told not to do. Dionysus wins every argument by being the boss, but he loses the battle about jokes. The scene ends with a knock on the door and someone about to answer it.

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: Xanthias is Dionysus's slave; he rides a donkey and carries the luggage; Dionysus is dressed as Heracles and has come to his door; Dionysus points at the audience when he talks about the jokes that bore him. You decide: does Xanthias talk to his master, or to the audience, when he asks about "the regular things"? Is Dionysus really annoyed, or is he enjoying the game? And in the donkey argument, who do you think is right?

Cut notes: the scene starts with the first spoken line of the play (p. 3), after the opening stage direction, and ends with Dionysus's "Porter! Hi, porter! Hi!" (p. 6). Next, Heracles enters from the house and says "Who's knocking there?", which finishes Dionysus's line of verse. Only Xanthias and Dionysus are on stage and speak inside the scene. Page breaks fall after "Why, by all means." (pp. 3–4), after "child of the Great Jug," (pp. 4–5) and after "Go turns, and let the poor beast ride on you." (pp. 5–6). There are no footnotes on these pages. The edition's commentary at the back of the book has notes on Xanthias, the three comic poets and Arginusae; they are not reproduced.

Talking to the audience. Old Greek comedy was allowed to talk about itself. Xanthias asks about the jokes "people in a theatre always laugh at," and Dionysus points straight at the real audience. Decide how much each of you includes the audience. A look out front on the right line can get a bigger laugh than the line itself.

Shared lines. Many lines here are split between the two of you. "Not anything funny?" and "Not 'Oh, my poor blisters!'" make one line of verse. One line is split three ways: "I'm carrying this." / "How?" / "With my back half-broken." Pick up these cues fast, with no gap, so each line still sounds like one line.

Stress. Murray stresses two words with italics. Lean on them: "No DONkey CARries BAGS that I am CARrying." and "I supPOSE you KNOW the DONkey's CARrying YOU." The argument is a game of "I" and "you," so make the audience hear who each one means.

REHEARSAL 4 OF 5

Xanthias and Dionysus · *The Frogs*

Three partner prompts

1. **Listening and reacting.** Xanthias, every time Dionysus bans a joke, react with your body before you speak again (a slump, a sigh through the nose, a glance at the audience). Dionysus, watch for that reaction and decide whether you enjoy it.
2. **Status and tactics.** Run beats 1 to 3 twice. First, Xanthias asks as politely as possible. Then he asks as if he knows the joke will kill. Which version makes Dionysus's "Don't . . ." funnier? Keep that one.
3. **The turn.** Find the line where Dionysus stops arguing and starts giving orders. Each partner points to the line they think it is. Run the scene both ways and decide together.

Class game: Banned Joke. Pairs sit facing each other on two chairs for 5 minutes. Partner A is a tired traveler who wants to complain about one thing (heavy bag, sore feet, long road). Partner B forbids that exact complaint. Partner A must keep complaining without using the banned word, finding new ways to say it. After 1 minute, swap. Stay playful and keep the complaints silly, never personal.

FOR TEACHERS 5 OF 5

Xanthias and Dionysus · *The Frogs*

READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

SKILL FOCUS: comic duet timing; picking up shared verse lines; master-and-servant status play; direct address to the audience.

LIKELY DIFFICULTY: moderate. The vocabulary is light once the names are learned, and the lines are short. The challenge is the timing of the shared lines and the jokes about jokes: students need to understand that Xanthias is not allowed to say the old lines, and that he says them anyway. The scene is short (about 2:14), so it needs pace without rushing the laughs.

SCAFFOLD: read the opening stage direction aloud first and ask the class to picture the costume: a god dressed as a hero, but in the wrong boots. Explain in two sentences that in ancient Athens comic playwrights competed at festivals, and that Aristophanes is making fun of his rivals' tired jokes. Then have pairs read the scene once sitting, marking every shared line.

CONTENT NOTE: in the excerpt, Xanthias is enslaved, and the comedy depends on a master making his slave do the work. His line about Arginusae refers to a battle after which, the edition's notes say, all slaves who had fought were set free. The banned jokes include blowing one's nose, sneezing and Dionysus saying he would need an emetic (vomiting); Murray's 1908 English is gentler here than the Greek: in a more literal modern translation, the banned jokes are about Xanthias needing to relieve himself. "Child of the Great Jug" refers to wine. In the surrounding play, Dionysus tells Heracles he longs for the tragic poet Euripides, who has died, and sets off for the underworld to see him; the play ends with a contest of poets and a procession escorting Aeschylus. Later scenes include master and slave swapping the Heracles costume, and both being beaten to find out which one is the god. None of the later material is needed to perform this scene.

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST:

- The partners pick up shared lines with no gap, and each split line still sounds like one line.
- Xanthias's banned jokes and complaints land as clear, separate attempts, not one long grumble.
- Both actors make clear choices about when they speak to each other and when to the audience.

FESTIVAL AND AUDITION USE: a quick comic duet for classrooms, showcases and Junior Thespys Two-Person Scene, with a fair split of lines (Dionysus 56%, Xanthias 44%). Estimated time about 2:14, inside the 5-minute limit and just above this book's 2-minute guide for Middle School scenes, so don't rush it. Use one chair as the donkey for Xanthias until "Dismount"; mime the luggage pole, the club and the knock on the door. Junior Thespys allow chairs only and no props. End on the knock, with a held moment. For a festival entry, rehearse it to time with your partner.

CASTING: any student may play either role. Dionysus is a god and Xanthias is his slave, and the status gap between them is the engine of the comedy, so keep it, but play the cleverness of Xanthias rather than cruelty from Dionysus. Discuss slavery in ancient Athens as part of the world of the play rather than as a joke. Both characters are men in the play; the names and pronouns stay as written. No accent is needed.

2

STUDENT HANDOUT 1 OF 5

Anusuya and Priyamvada

Shakuntala by Kalidasa, translated by Arthur W. Ryder · the end of Act IV, Scene I; this edition prints no line numbers · written in Sanskrit, probably in the 5th century CE

TIME 1:52 CAST 2 actors LEVEL Foundational TEXT Prose TONE Serious

"Oh, dear! The very thing has happened." *(editor's title, from the first line)*

Text: *Kalidasa: Translations of Shakuntala and Other Works*, by Arthur W. Ryder, London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. (Everyman's Library), first issued 1912, reprinted 1920, pp. 40–41. Full play: archive.org/details/kalidasatranslat00kali

Original dramatic excerpt · the end of Act IV, Scene I, unaltered · Middle School · Challenge: Foundational · 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 (first issued 1912; this printing 1920). Credit both Kalidasa and the translator wherever your event asks for the source. This scene runs about 1 minute 52 seconds, under this book's 2-minute guide for Middle School scenes. It is included because it is complete as written: the sage's curse is heard offstage just before it, and a new scene begins just after it. Time it aloud with your partner; you may take it slower.

- **Thespys Two-Person Scene (2026–27; formerly Duet Acting):** the material qualifies as printed. 5:00 maximum, two chairs, no table, no props. Junior Thespian access to scene events varies; some state Junior Thespian festivals run their own Duet Acting event (Florida's, for example: 5:00 maximum). Check yours.
- **NSDA Middle School Duo Interpretation:** legal source material, but Duo uses off-stage focus (no eye contact, no touching) and runs up to 10 minutes. Re-stage it and build a longer cutting from the full play.

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

Who, where, what just happened. *Shakuntala* is one of the great plays of ancient India, written in Sanskrit. Shakuntala lives in a forest hermitage, a home for holy people, where she was raised by the hermit Kanva. While Kanva was away on a pilgrimage, she married King Dushyanta, and the king has now gone back to his city. Her two close friends, Anusuya and Priyamvada, are gathering flowers for an offering. A voice called out for a welcome, but Shakuntala, sitting by the cottage, was thinking of the king and did not hear. The guest was the great sage Durvasas. Offstage, he has just cursed her: the one she loves will forget her. The friends heard every word.

The playable problems.

- **PRIYAMVADA** wants to undo the harm before it reaches Shakuntala; the sage is already walking away, and she has to stay behind.
- **ANUSUYA** wants to calm the sage and bring back good news; he is too angry to take the curse back.

281 words · about 1 minute 52 seconds (estimated; time it aloud) · Priyamvada 51%, Anusuya 49%

Words worth knowing

- Kalidasa (KAH-lih-DAH-suh): the playwright. Shakuntala (shuh-KOON-tuh-lah). Priyamvada (pree-YUM-vuh-dah). Anusuya (uh-NOO-soo-yah). Durvasas (door-VAH-sus). Dushyanta (doosh-YUN-tuh): the king. Kanva (KUN-vuh): the hermit who raised Shakuntala. Say each name clearly and with confidence.
- sage (SAYJ): a wise and holy man. The play calls Durvasas "irascible."
- Nothing burns like fire: a saying. Anger like his spreads fast, so act now.
- water to wash his feet: a way of welcoming an honored guest.
- absent-minded: so lost in thought that you don't notice what is around you.
- irascible (ih-RASS-ih-bul): quick to get angry.
- fall at his feet: bow down low to beg.
- anger incarnate (in-KAR-nit): anger in a human body.

• appease (uh-PEEZ): calm someone down.

• My words must be fulfilled: what I said has to come true.
• a gem which he has given her for a token: a jewel the king gave her as a keepsake, a sign to remember him by.
• the sacrifice: here, the offering of flowers the friends are preparing for the gods.
• a painted picture: so still she looks painted.
• jasmine-vine (JAZ-min): a climbing plant with small, sweet white flowers. Scalding water: boiling-hot water.
• —— (a long dash): Priyamvada breaks off, waiting for the rest of the story.

• devotion: faithful respect and service. Pardon this offence: forgive this wrong. ("Offence" and "recognise" are British spellings.)
• the curse shall be lifted: the curse will be taken away.
• engraved (en-GRAYVD): cut into the metal.

• "her check resting": a printer's mistake. Say "cheek."

• delicate: easily hurt.
• to-day: today. Old spelling.

• *Exeunt ambo* (EK-see-unt AM-boh): Latin for "both go out." It is a stage direction, not spoken.

THE SCENE 2 OF 5

Anusuya and Priyamvada · *Shakuntala*

PRIYAMVADA. Oh, dear! The very thing has happened. The dear, absent-minded girl has offended some worthy man.

ANUSUYA. (*looking ahead*) My dear, this is no ordinary somebody. It is the great sage Durvasas, the irascible. See how he strides away!

PRIYAMVADA. Nothing burns like fire. Run, fall at his feet, bring him back, while I am getting water to wash his feet.

ANUSUYA. I will. (*Exit.*)

PRIYAMVADA. (*stumbling*) There! I stumbled in my excitement, and the flower-basket fell out of my hand. (*She collects the scattered flowers.* ANUSUYA *returns.*)

ANUSUYA. My dear, he is anger incarnate. Who could appease him? But I softened him a little.

PRIYAMVADA. Even that is a good deal for him. Tell me about it.

ANUSUYA. When he would not turn back, I fell at his feet and prayed to him. “Holy sir,” I said, “remember her former devotion and pardon this offence. Your daughter did not recognise your great and holy power to-day.”

PRIYAMVADA. And then——

ANUSUYA. Then he said: “My words must be fulfilled. But the curse shall be lifted when her lover sees a gem which he has given her for a token.” And so he vanished.

PRIYAMVADA. We can breathe again. When the good king went away, he put a ring, engraved with his own name, on Shakuntala’s finger to remember him by. That will save her.

ANUSUYA. Come, we must finish the sacrifice for her. (*They walk about.*)

PRIYAMVADA. (*gazing*) Just look, Anusuya! There is the dear girl, with her check resting on her left hand. She looks like a painted picture. She is thinking about him. How could she notice a guest when she has forgotten herself?

ANUSUYA. Priyamvada, we two must keep this thing to ourselves. We must be careful of the dear girl. You know how delicate she is.

PRIYAMVADA. Would any one sprinkle a jasmine-vine with scalding water? (*Exeunt ambo.*)

(The words in italics inside round brackets are stage directions, set that way in the edition; they are not counted in the word total. In "(*She collects the scattered flowers.* ANUSUYA *returns.*)" the name is printed in small capitals. The edition prints the speech names in italics as "Priyamvada." and "Anusuya."; they are set here in full capitals. The edition prints the names without accent marks, and so does this book. "Her check resting on her left hand" is printed "check"; it is a printer's slip, so say "cheek." The long dash in "And then——" is the edition's own. Anusuya goes out after "I will." and comes back after Priyamvada's next speech, so Priyamvada speaks one speech alone. Durvasas does not speak in this scene; Anusuya quotes him.)

BREAKDOWN AND LANGUAGE 3 OF 5

Anusuya and Priyamvada · *Shakuntala*

Beat	Starts at	Who drives it	What each wants now
1	"Oh, dear! The very thing has happened."	Priyamvada, then Anusuya	Priyamvada: understand what has gone wrong. Anusuya: see who the guest is, and say it.
2	"Nothing burns like fire."	Priyamvada	Priyamvada: send Anusuya after the sage, fast. Anusuya: go at once.
3	"There! I stumbled in my excitement"	Priyamvada, alone	Priyamvada: gather the flowers and gather herself before Anusuya returns.
4	"My dear, he is anger incarnate."	Anusuya	Anusuya: report the trouble, then the small success. Priyamvada: get the whole story.
5	"Then he said"	Anusuya	Anusuya: deliver the sage's way out of the curse. Priyamvada: find the hope in it.
6	"We can breathe again."	Priyamvada	Priyamvada: remember the ring and claim the problem is solved. Anusuya: get back to work.
7	"Just look, Anusuya!"	Priyamvada, then Anusuya	Priyamvada: show why Shakuntala missed the guest. Anusuya: make a pact to keep the secret.

What changes: The scene starts with alarm and ends with a promise. In between, the friends go from panic to action (Anusuya runs after the sage), to news (the curse can be lifted), to a plan (the king's ring will save her). Then they look at Shakuntala, still lost in thought, and make one more decision: she must not know. At the start they react to what has happened. At the end they choose what will happen next.

What the play says, and what you decide. The play says: Durvasas cursed Shakuntala for not welcoming him; Anusuya begged him and he added that the curse will end when her lover sees a gem he gave her; Priyamvada remembers that the king put a ring engraved with his name on Shakuntala's finger; the two friends agree to keep all of this to themselves. You decide: does Anusuya tell the story exactly as it happened, or does she make her own part sound better? When Priyamvada says "We can breathe again," does she believe it? And whose idea is the secret: does Anusuya lead, or do they arrive at it together?

Cut notes: the passage begins with Priyamvada's "Oh, dear! The very thing has happened." (p. 40), right after the offstage voice of Durvasas speaks the curse (four lines of verse) and the direction "(*The two girls listen and show dejection.*)". It ends with Priyamvada's "Would any one sprinkle a jasmine-vine with scalding water? (*Exeunt ambo.*)" (p. 41), the end of Act IV, Scene I. Scene II begins with a new character, a pupil of Kanva. Only Anusuya and Priyamvada speak inside the passage. Priyamvada sees Shakuntala from where they stand, but Shakuntala does not enter or speak. The page break falls after "She looks" (pp. 40–41). The line-end hyphen in "excite-ment" is rejoined. There are no footnotes.

Short speeches, fast cues. Most speeches here are one to three sentences. Pick up each cue quickly, but let the news land. The scene is short, so every pause you choose matters more.

Quoting other people. Anusuya quotes herself ("Holy sir," I said) and then the sage ("My words must be fulfilled."). You don't need a different voice for him. Change something smaller: your pace, your stillness, or where you look.

One speech alone. After "I will." Anusuya leaves, and Priyamvada is alone for one speech. She stumbles and picks up the scattered flowers. Mime the basket and the flowers simply and clearly, and make Anusuya's return a real moment: Priyamvada needs her news.

REHEARSAL 4 OF 5

Anusuya and Priyamvada · *Shakuntala*

Three partner prompts

1. **Listening and reacting.** Run beats 4 and 5 with Priyamvada silent except for her written lines. Each time Anusuya gives a new piece of news, Priyamvada reacts with her body first (a step closer, a breath, a hand to her face), then speaks. Keep the reactions small and clear.
2. **Status and tactics.** At the start, Priyamvada gives the orders ("Run, fall at his feet, bring him back"). At the end, Anusuya sets the rule ("we two must keep this thing to ourselves"). Play the scene once with Priyamvada in charge all the way through, and once with Anusuya taking charge at the end. Which version tells the clearer story?
3. **The turn.** Find the line where fear turns into hope. Each partner points to the line they think it is. Run the scene and make that change as clear as you can.

Class game: Bad News, Good News. Pairs, 5 minutes. Partner A has just come back from somewhere and reports a small made-up problem (the bus was late, the picnic got rained out), then one piece of good news that makes it better. Partner B asks only short questions, like Priyamvada's "Tell me about it" and "And then?", and reacts to each piece of news. Switch after each story. Keep the stories invented and low-stakes. Notice how the listener's reactions make the story worth hearing.

FOR TEACHERS 5 OF 5

Anusuya and Priyamvada · *Shakuntala*

READ BEFORE HANDING OUT THE ENTRY

SKILL FOCUS: duet scene work with fast cues; reporting offstage events so the audience can follow them; an exit and a return; a clear turn from alarm to hope to decision; simple, clear mime.

LIKELY DIFFICULTY: low. The language is plain and the speeches are short. The main challenges are the names, which need a practice round, and pace: the scene is short, and students tend to rush it. Encourage them to take the time each discovery needs. The 1:52 figure is an estimate at 150 words a minute; a thoughtful pace may run longer.

SCAFFOLD: read Act IV, Scene I aloud from its start (p. 39) with a third reader for the offstage voice, so students hear Shakuntala missing the guest and the curse itself. Introduce the play as a classic of world drama: Kalidasa is one of the great poets of Sanskrit literature, and this is among his best-known plays. Practice the names together before rehearsal.

CONTENT NOTE: in the excerpt, an angry holy man has cursed Shakuntala, and the friends try to soften the harm. There is no violence. In the surrounding play (as read in this edition), the curse says that her lover "shall forget you though reminded." Later, when Shakuntala comes to the king's court, he does not know her, and she finds that the ring is lost (Act V). A fisherman is then caught with the king's ring, and the king remembers her (Act VI). The two are reunited in the last act, where the king also meets their young son (Act VII). Present the play with the same respect you would give Shakespeare: as great drama, not as something strange or exotic. No costumes, accents or invented gestures are needed.

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST:

- The partners pick up cues quickly and still let each piece of news land.
- Anusuya's exit and return are clear, and Priyamvada's speech alone has a purpose.
- The change from alarm to hope to the final decision is easy to follow.

FESTIVAL AND AUDITION USE: a gentle duet for classrooms, showcases and Junior Thespys Two-Person Scene, with an even split of lines (Priyamvada 51%, Anusuya 49%). Estimated time about 1:52, which is under this book's 2-minute guide for Middle School scenes and well inside the 5-minute limit. It is included because it is complete as written: the sage's curse comes just before it, offstage, and a new scene begins just after it. Have students time it aloud; they may take it slower. Two chairs only; the flower basket and the flowers are mimed. For a festival entry, rehearse it to time with your partner.

CASTING: any student may play either role. Anusuya and Priyamvada are young women, Shakuntala's closest friends, and their loyalty to her is the heart of the scene, so keep the names and pronouns as written. The play is set in a forest hermitage in ancient India; it does not need costumes or an accent. Play two friends trying to protect someone they love.