

Scenario Assignment: A Scene Blocked

This choice, an alternative to writing a traditional research paper, will involve the use of a special computer program to create the staging of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, or *Macbeth* and allow you to comment on your choices. The program allows you to create a series of “frames” by selecting chunks of text from your scene, then choosing the “actors” and props from menus, clicking and dragging them to the positions you want, on a reconstruction of the kind of stage Shakespeare wrote for.

You will proceed by selecting short passages of text for each frame. The texts retain the often cryptic and uninformative stage directions of the originals so that you will be encouraged to **uncover the many hidden clues in the words** as to where actors move, who they are talking to, and so on. The limited number of stage directions in the originals means that the director of Shakespeare has to work harder than the director of many modern plays to figure out what is happening on stage; correspondingly, however, there is greater freedom in interpretation.

The plays have some quite long scenes, so you should select a shorter scene, or choose only a part of a longer scene to block. The actual number of lines you work with will vary according to the amount of detail you personally want to include: I recommend that you deal with short passages and create somewhere in the vicinity of 30 frames, making sure that the sequence you block is reasonably self-contained.

Blocking a Scene

The stage on which the action will take place is a reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, as illustrated in the Internet site *Shakespeare's Life and Times* (See <http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/ShakespeareSuite/scenario.html> and <http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/Scenario/getstart.html>). You should also read the “Scenario: Getting Started” page of the program itself. A brief introduction to the program will be done in class and a handout will be available on Blackboard. As you use the program, you will become familiar with the kinds of actions that were possible on the Elizabethan thrust stage with little change of scene and with consequent opportunity for flowing action. You will realize both the advantages and disadvantages of acting in the small “upper stage,” and the limited possibilities of the stage for “discovery” scenes where actors hide from each other.

One of the first things a director does when working on the production of a play is to “block” the scenes, working out what the text implies in terms of movement across the stage, the groupings of characters, the manipulation of props, stage “business” and so on. By a simple process of selecting characters and props from menus, then dragging them to the places you want on the stage, you can create a series of “frames,” rather like a movie or animation. You can then review or edit the frames you have created. As you work on

your scene, you should select short pieces of the script for each frame you create; use props only when useful, and consider how to get them on and off stage; discuss staging as well as character in the notes for each frame; and think about the mechanics of entrances and exits using the available doors.

Saving Your Work

When you create your own module of the scene you will be working with, you should make sure it is saved to your own floppy disk. If you accidentally save your scene to the hard drive of the computer you are working on you should copy it to your own floppy when you have finished.

Always back up your work by making a second copy of it on a different disk.

Submitting Your Blocking Assignment

If you use an email account other than Hotmail, you should submit the assignment as an attachment to a regular email message. Please call the file something that will distinguish it (YourName Hamlet 2-2.shk for example). Keep the file name short, since not all operating systems understand file names over 30 characters.

What I Will Look for in This Assignment

This is not a conventional assignment, so it is important for you to know what your instructor will be looking for. On the main screen there is a “Comment” button that opens up a text box in which you can explain your overall aim in blocking the scene, and on each frame you create there is a place for you to comment on your reasons for making the individual choices you have made. Here are some suggestions for points of stagecraft you might think about as you build your scene.

1. A director blocking a scene will initially decide which entrances and exits characters will use as they enter and leave the stage; make this clear in your blocking, either by where you place the characters on the stage or by recording details in the comment box.
2. The relationship between characters can frequently be illustrated by the way they are grouped—standing close together, further apart, the most powerful in the centre and so on.
3. The Elizabethan stage was sparse, but quite large. Use it fully.
4. Think of your audience, and how clearly they will be able to see the characters. This is actually quite a challenging point on the Elizabethan stage where the audience was on at least three sides of the actors.
5. Stage directions in Shakespeare are minimal, but often there are implied stage movements or actions in the text: cues for the actors. Read it carefully for hints.

6. Avoid crowding the stage with props. They are fun, but you must think how they would be brought on and removed (there are no curtains).
7. Comment carefully on your decisions. Often actions make words clearer. You cannot “animate” the characters you move around the stage but you can indicate in the comment box, and with the use of props, what is happening. Stage “business” is often important in comedy, where characters rely more on non-verbal signals; indicate any business in the comment box. Note the emphasis in the weighting of the mark below towards the use of comments to explain your choices.
8. Remember that you should try to achieve an overall aim in your sense of the scene and the way you think of its changing dynamics. The comment box on the main card will allow you to sum up what you are attempting in the assignment; **this part of the assignment counts for 20% of your mark. You should probably write this section after you have completed your project. In this Director’s Summary, you MUST comment on 1. The play in general, its reception, and critical assessments or judgments of it, 2. Why you selected this particular scene or portion of a scene for your project, and finally 3. What you learned from doing this assignment, particularly about this play, this scene, performance in general, or Shakespeare in general.**
9. For each frame in your Scenario presentation, you should have two paragraphs of commentary in the **Director’s Notes**. **You should FIRST discuss this particular frame in relationship to this scene and to the play as a whole. THEN you should discuss the choices you have made and what they as performance choices tell us about what is happening in this portion of the scene. These Director’s Notes constitute 50% of your grade for the project.**
10. **Finally, the frames themselves will constitute the remaining 30% of your grade.**
11. **Please note your grade is PRIMARILY derived from you COMMENTARY and not from the content of the slides. The slides or frames provide you the material for your comments and observations.**

You will be graded on your response to these specific points, on your general sense of the text as performance, and on the way your understanding of the text is communicated through staging. You should feel free to be inventive.

There is no set length for the assignment, but you are likely to create in the vicinity of 30 frames for an adequate treatment of your scene. It is probably better to select smaller chunks of text to illustrate and to do only a part of one of the longer scenes than to make one frame cover a long sequence.