

**lesson title** Shakespearean Verse—Scansion: Meaning and the Actor’s Guide

**subject/course** English/Language Arts

**topic** Blank verse and scansion

**level** Grades 5-12

**duration** 45-50 minutes

### lesson objectives

- define basic scansion terms
- perform scansion on Shakespearean verse lines

### materials/equipment

- [[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/181xei\\_TC\\_G3KAA1bhkZ-DoiaS11N6\\_xeGLHqR81n91MY/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/181xei_TC_G3KAA1bhkZ-DoiaS11N6_xeGLHqR81n91MY/edit?usp=sharing)] Google Slides Presentation
- video display/projector
- 2 verse example handouts (R&J/Ham--double sided; 12th Night)
- ten chairs (5 at minimum)
- space for student movement

### vocabulary (post w/ definitions)

- foot: a multi-syllable chunk of a poetic line, with a defined order of stresses
- meter: the number of feet in a poetic line
- iamb: two-syllable foot with unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one
- trochee: two-syllable foot with stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one

- spondee: two-syllable foot with two stressed syllables
- blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter
- caesura: a pause in the middle of a poetic line
- feminine ending: extra unstressed syllable at end of a poetic line

### opening/warm-up/anticipatory

First 5 slides of presentation: language central to Shakespearean theater; concepts of audience (rather than spectator) and listening.

Slides 6-10: actor concerns (emotion v. memory); memorizing prose v. songs; introduce scansion (reading a poem for meter and rhythm).

Slides 11-14: definition of foot, meter, and foot types; scansion markups; blank verse definition (unrhymed iambic pentameter).

### review agenda/context/launch/mini-lesson

Slide 15: have ten students stand at the front of the class, in five closely spaced pairs. The first student of each pair (left) can sit; her partner is to stand, even if she has a chair.

Choose the quieter students to be seated and the louder ones to stand. Go across the “poetic” line of students, with each saying the syllable “bump”--the seated students saying it softer than the standing one.

Do this multiple times to demonstrate stressed syllables in an iambic pentameter line with sound of the human heartbeat (“bumpBUMP”).

### activities/exploration/check for understanding

Hand out the verse worksheets; have the students read the first line of the Romeo speech (slide 16), one syllable/student at a time across the line/group. Repeat until the line sounds as if spoken by a single speaker. For the second line, note the variances to the iambic pentameter (trochee in first foot, elision in “Juliet” [Jul-yet]).

After two lines, mark up the sheet (slide 17) and discuss how the stressed syllables convey much of the meaning of the lines (soft, light, break, Jul [jewel], sun). Show how stage directions are found in the dialogue and verse (sigh in line 10).

Proceed through the speech (slides 18-19), pointing out the stage direction (line 14) and the antilabe (shared line) at the end of the speech.

### summary/reflection/teach-back/guided practice

Begin the Hamlet soliloquy (slides 21-24). There will be many more variances to the meter in this speech. Note the feminine endings (extra unstressed syllables) at the end of many lines. Point out the more frequent use of trochees and spondees, elisions and caesuras.

Use this speech to reflect on how the verse is different and devise rationale for why. Lead the students to relate this to Hamlet’s mental state (too many ideas, confusion).

### closing/take-home tasks/independent practice

Slide 24: Close by admitting that Shakespearean verse can be difficult, but that through patience and effort, meaning, character and action can be revealed through the scansion.

Use the handout for *Twelfth Night* as a homework assignment for independent practice, with a review the following day. Prepare the students by telling them that these are the first lines of the play. Ask them to take this into consideration as they scan the lines.

### notes

As there are many instances of ambiguity in scansion--particularly in lines composed of mostly (or entirely) monosyllabic words, be prepared for lively discussion and disagreement; allow students to thoughtfully defend their opinions.

### differentiation

Hearing-impaired students will be able to see the poetic feet and meter of the verse lines; sight-impaired students might want to sit directly in front of the student “poetic” line; thus, they will be able to hear the stresses and meter of the line, and mentally visualize the difference in stature (sitting vs. standing) of the syllables in each poetic foot.