

THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER
STUDY GUIDE



*Asides and
Audience Contact*

Introduction

Shakespeare often leaves characters onstage by themselves. Sometimes these characters are working through an issue, sometimes they are letting the audience see what they are thinking (but aren't able to talk about in front of other characters), sometimes they are letting the audience in on a secret. These moments in which characters have “no one else to talk to” (except the audience in an early modern theatre) have been interpreted throughout their performance histories in various ways. In modern, proscenium productions, actors and directors bring them to life as an explication of the character's inner thoughts—sort of “thinking aloud” or “to oneself” moments. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some of the speeches were simply cut or re-arranged or staged differently. In Shakespeare's lifetime, though, the speeches would have had a different life. They would have been opportunities for the characters to engage with the audience, to bring them into the story, to ask questions (and possibly, receive answers). In this workshop/activity, your students will examine two conventions of Shakespeare's plays that allow the soliloquys in the dramas to become conversations rather than internal musings: asides and audience contact.

Asides

Every student of Shakespeare who has read a modern edition of his plays will recognize the word “aside,” but not every student will necessarily recognize its meaning.

Brainstorm:

Ask your students: How would you define the word aside?

The Oxford English Dictionary shows that it wasn't until 1727 (more than 100 years past Shakespeare's death) that the word took on these meanings:

- “Words spoken aside or in an undertone, so as to be inaudible to some person present;
- words spoken by an actor, which the other performers, on the stage are supposed not to hear.”

Notice that it doesn't say who *is* supposed to hear. We assume the audience will be the “auditors” but in many playhouses the audience, who is sitting in the dark, in front of the stage, may not be the obvious choice.

While there are over 550 instances of the word “aside” used as a stage direction in early modern drama, only six times (and only twice in Shakespeare — in *Pericles* and in the Quarto version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) does it seem to indicate the delivery of speech, in which the writer (or the prompter) marks that an actor should deliver a speech to the audience as opposed to the other characters onstage. This discrepancy suggests that playwrights simply assumed that actors could address the audience at almost any time. Look at your edition of the plays and note how many more than two they include.

At the ASC, in the setting of the Blackfriars Playhouse, we have found that almost anything a character says can become an opportunity for a character engage the audience in these ways. In this activity, your students will explore how the spaces make this possible.

If the actor is talking to

- a peer,
- a friend, or
- a potential ally,

an aside becomes a shared secret that privileges the knowledge of the hearer—gives them more information than the people onstage now have and engages them in a secret, with the character.

Activity

- Review the conditions of the **Elizabethan Classroom** and consider the configuration of the playhouses for which Shakespeare wrote.
- Give your students **Handout #3:**

- In all of the examples, “A” will be the character speaking the aside, while “B” will be the one who needs to “not hear” what is being said.
- Choose one of the following lines:
 - “I love nothing in the world so much as you, is not that strange?” From *Much Ado About Nothing*. You will need a Beatrice (auditor) and a Benedick (speaker).
 - “Seeming, seeming. I will proclaim you.” From *Measure for Measure*. You will need an Isabella (speaker) and an Angelo (auditor).
 - “You told a lie, an odious, damned lie.” From *Othello*. You will need an Emilia (speaker) and an Iago (auditor).
- First, decide which part of this line could be an aside (correct answer is all of it except for “you”).
- Now, have your students draw arrows which show us how asides would work in a proscenium. How does “A” speak so that “B” doesn’t hear when there is no one else there (because of the fourth wall)?
 - For the first example, the audience is all in front of the stage. How does the actor deliver the aside? (Let participants try it; eventually, the arrow should point downstage) And how does the other actor “not hear it”? (arrow points at “A”)
- Now, look at the other example. At the Blackfriars, where can an actor take an aside?
 - The arrow can go everywhere -- the audience is potentially on all four sides of the stage.
- There are a couple of variations on “asides” you can discuss.
 - In a “Normal,” the other character (our B) clearly doesn’t notice that the speaker is talking to the audience.
 - In a “sophisticated aside” the other character actually comments on the speaker’s “absence” or distraction. This happens in several plays we’ve done at the ASC including *The Changeling*, *Revenger’s Tragedy*, and *Henry VI, Part 1*.

Audience Contact

If a character is engaging the audience often and in “privileging” ways, then the audience can become an ally -- which means the audience can also become a conspirator of sorts, complicit in a villain’s crimes or a lover’s schemes. You will want to look at several scenes to determine when a character is talking to the audience and when s/he might be forging those connections.

Using the First 100 Lines

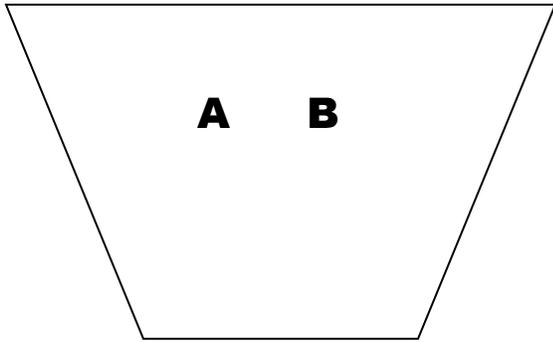
- Place students in groups (as many as there are characters).
- Give them the First 100 Lines of *Much Ado about Nothing*.
- Ask them to go through the scene (or a section of it) and, looking only at their assigned character, mark up the text according to what kinds of asides and audience contact they think are most appropriate, according to the following key:
 - Fill in the brackets:
 - 1=casting the audience
 - Making the audience members into characters who have an implied involvement in the scene or in the greater world of the play. They may be named or unnamed, but must be specific identities.
 - Examples: Henry V casting the audience as his army, Portia and Nerissa (in *The Merchant of Venice*) picking out specific audience members to represent suitors
 - 2=allying with the audience
 - Making audience members colleagues or co-conspirators, looking to the audience for support or affirmation
 - Examples: Iago explaining his schemes to the audience, any character sharing a joke with an audience member rather than with another character (often at the other character’s expense)
 - 3=seeking information from the audience
 - Questions that can be taken to the audience instead of, in addition to, or in the absence of other characters on stage

- Examples: Hamlet asking if he should kill his uncle while Claudius is at prayer, any character asking what time it is or where someone else is could potentially take the question to the audience
- 4=making the audience member the object of the line
 - Often, though not always, making the audience member the butt of a joke. Unlike casting the audience, this type of contact does not make the audience member part of the world of the play; they simply become a helpful illustration for the benefit of another character and/or the rest of the audience.
 - Examples: Benedick (in *Much Ado about Nothing*) finding fair, wise, or virtuous women, Dromio (in *The Comedy of Errors*) making jokes about bald men
- 5=to the other character
 - As regular conversation, intended for the other character to hear
- Select one student from each group to act out the scene.
- Have your representatives act out the scene, directing their lines according to their own determinations. Have the other members of their groups call out “Stop!” if they disagree with the representative’s choice and want to see it tried another way.
- Discuss:
 - How many lines could be taken to the audience in multiple ways?
 - Are there any lines which *must* be directed to another character?
 - Are there any lines which *must* be delivered as asides, so that the other character *cannot* hear?
 - Which aside most surprised you when it worked?
 - What was the aside that seemed the most natural?
 - Which aside most endears the character to the audience?
 - What do asides/audience contact do for the character?
 - Is it better if only one character or all characters use audience contact?

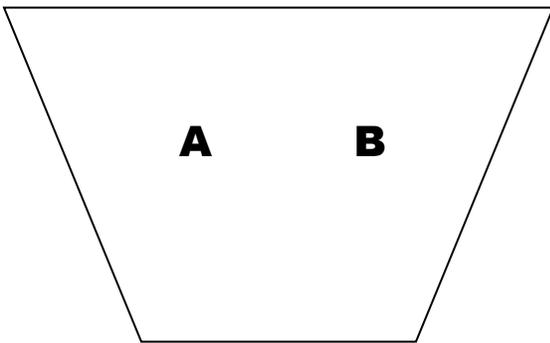
Line Assignments

Your students will mark their Line Assignments according to the method in this activity as homework. They should copy one moment for discussion into their Promptbook, as well as answering the additional questions. On your next class meeting, stage some of your students’ favorite discoveries, or ask who had trouble deciding where a line should be directed, and try to find the best choice through active exploration, as you did with the First 100 Lines.

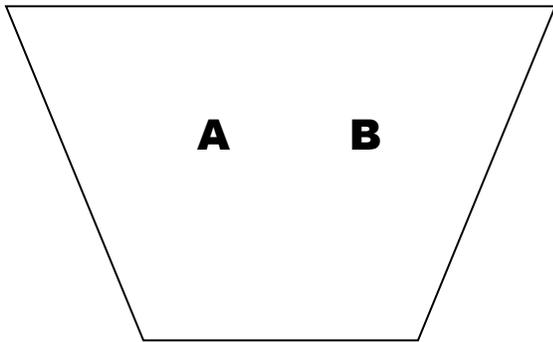
Student Handout – Asides and Audience Contact



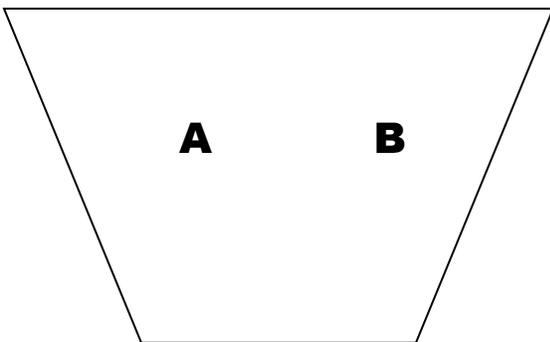
Proscenium



Thrust Stage

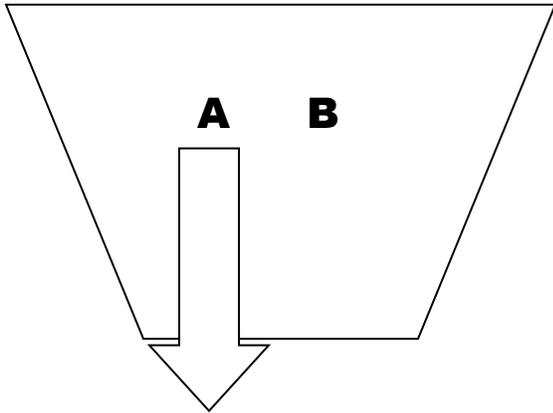


Normal Aside

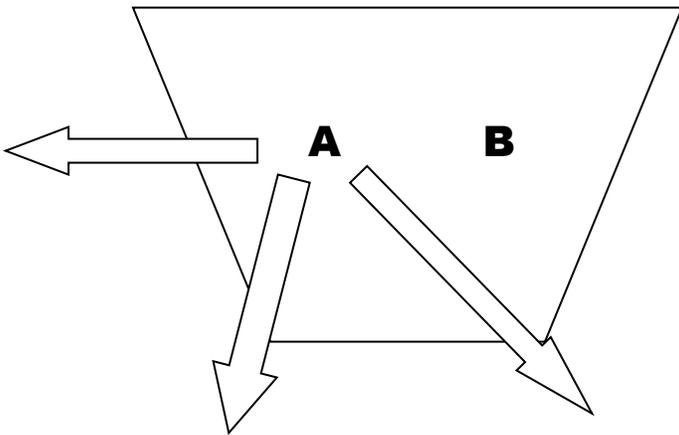


Sophisticated Aside

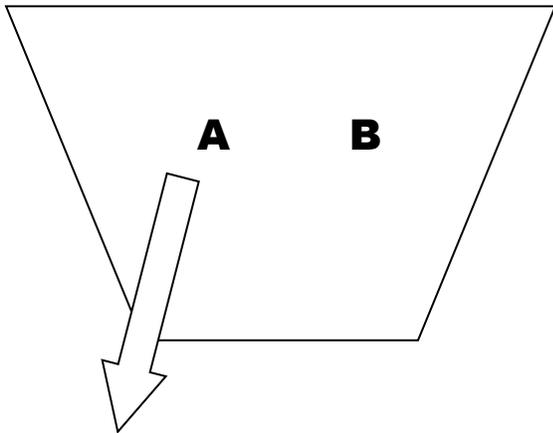
Guide for Teachers: Asides and Audience Contact



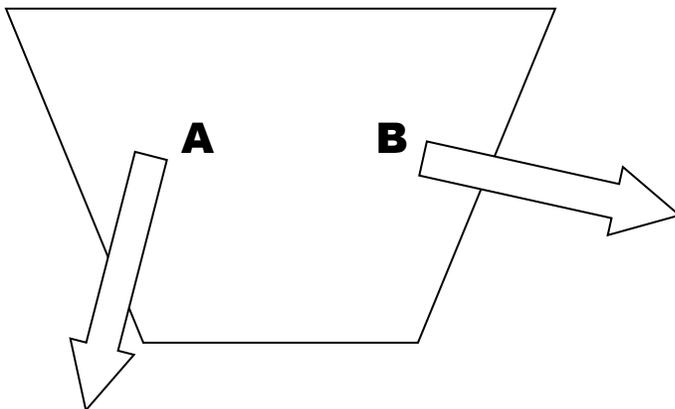
Proscenium



Thrust Stage



Normal Aside



Sophisticated Aside

[1] = casting the audience; [2] = allying; [3] = seeking information;
[4] = making the audience the object; [5] = speaking to another character

Julius Caesar, 1.1

Enter FLAVIUS, MURELLUS, and Commoners over the stage

FLAVIUS

[]Hence: []home, []you idle creatures, []get you home:
[]Is this a holiday? []What, know you not:
[]Being mechanical, []you ought not walk
Upon a labouring day without the sign
Of your profession? []Speak, what trade art thou? 5

CARPENTER

[]Why, sir, a carpenter.

MURELLUS

[]Where is thy leather apron and thy rule?
[]What dost thou with thy best apparel on?
[]You, []sir, []what trade are you?

COBBLER

[]Truly, sir, []in respect of a fine workman, []I 10
am but, as you would say, a cobbler.

MURELLUS

[]But what trade art thou? [] answer me directly.

COBBLER

[]A trade, sir, that, []I hope, []I may use with a safe
conscience; []which is indeed, []sir, []a mender of
bad soles.

FLAVIUS

[]What trade, thou knave? []thou naughty knave,
[]what trade? 15

COBBLER

[]Nay, I beseech you, []sir, []be not out with me:
[]yet, if you be out, sir, I can mend you.

MURELLUS

[]What meanest thou by that? []mend me, thou saucy
fellow?

COBBLER

[]Why, sir, cobble you.

FLAVIUS

[]Thou art a cobbler, art thou? 20

COBBLER

[]Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the awl: []I
meddle with no tradesman's matters, []nor women's
matters, but withal. []I am indeed, sir, a surgeon
to old shoes: []when they are in great danger, I
recover them. []As proper men as ever trod upon 25
neat's leather have gone upon my handiwork.

FLAVIUS

[]But wherefore art not in thy shop today?
[]Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?

COBBLER

[]Truly, sir, []to wear out their shoes, []to get myself
into more work. []But, indeed, sir, we make holiday, 30
to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph.

MURELLUS

[]Wherefore rejoice? []What conquest brings he
home?
[]What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot-wheels?
[]You blocks, []you stones, []you worse than 35
senseless things:

[]O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
[]Knew you not Pompey? []Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
[]Your infants in your arms, []and there have sat 40
The livelong day, with patient expectation,

[]To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome:
[]And when you saw his chariot but appear,
[]Have you not made an universal shout,
[]That Tiber trembled underneath her banks 45
To hear the replication of your sounds,
Made in her concave shores?

[]And do you now put on your best attire?
[]And do you now cull out a holiday?
[]And do you now strew flowers in his way 50
[]That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
[]Be gone,
[]Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude.

FLAVIUS

[]Go, go, good countrymen, and, for this fault, 55
Assemble all the poor men of your sort;
Draw them to Tiber banks, and weep your tears

[1] = casting the audience; [2] = allying; [3] = seeking information;
[4] = making the audience the object; [5] = speaking to another character

Much Ado about Nothing, 1.1

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

LEONATO

[]I learn [] in this letter that [] Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night to Messina.

MESSENGER

[]He is very near by this: []he was not three leagues off when I left him.

LEONATO

[]How many gentlemen have you lost in this action? 5

MESSENGER

[]But few of any sort, []and none of name.

LEONATO

[]A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. []I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER

[]Much deserved on his part and equally 10
Remembered by Don Pedro: []he hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, []doing, []in the figure of a lamb, []the feats of a lion: []he hath indeed better bettered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

LEONATO

[]He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very 15
much glad of it.

MESSENGER

[]I have already delivered him letters, [] and there appears much joy in him; []even so much that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

LEONATO

[]Did he break out into tears? 20

MESSENGER

[]In great measure.

LEONATO

[]A kind overflow of kindness: []there are no faces truer than those that are so washed. []How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

BEATRICE

[]I pray you, [] is Signior Mountanto returned 25
from the wars or no?

MESSENGER

[]I know none of that name, []lady: []there was none such in the army of any sort.

LEONATO

[]What is he that you ask for, niece?

HERO

[]My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua. 30

MESSENGER

[]O, []he's returned; []and as pleasant as ever he was.

BEATRICE

[]He set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight; []and my uncle's fool, []reading the challenge, []subscribed for Cupid, []and challenged him at the bird-bolt. []I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? []But how many hath he killed? []for indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

LEONATO

[]Faith, []niece, []you tax Signior Benedick too much; []But he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

MESSENGER

[]He hath done good service, []lady, in these wars. 40

BEATRICE

[]You had musty victual, []and he hath help to eat it: []He is a very valiant trencherman; []he hath an excellent stomach.

MESSENGER

[]And a good soldier too, lady.

BEATRICE

[]And a good soldier to a lady: []but what is he to a lord?

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Othello, 3.3

EMILIA

[]I am glad I have found this napkin:
 []This was her first remembrance from the Moor:
 []My wayward husband hath a hundred times
 Woo'd me to steal it; []but she so loves the token,
 []For he conjured her she should ever keep it, 5
 []That she reserves it evermore about her
 To kiss and talk to. []I'll have the work ta'en out,
 And give't Iago: []what he will do with it
 Heaven knows, not I;
 []I nothing but to please his fantasy. 10

Re-enter Iago

IAGO

[]How now! []what do you here alone?

EMILIA

[]Do not you chide; []I have a thing for you.

IAGO

[]A thing for me? []it is a common thing--

EMILIA

[]Ha!

IAGO

[]To have a foolish wife. 15

EMILIA

[]O, []is that all? []What will you give me now
 For the same handkerchief?

IAGO

[]What handkerchief?

EMILIA

[]What handkerchief?
 []Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona; 20
 That which so often you did bid me steal.

IAGO

[]Hast stol'n it from her?

EMILIA

[]No, []'faith; []she let it drop by negligence.
 And, []to the advantage, []I, []being here, took't up.
 []Look, here it is. 25

IAGO

[]A good wench; []give it me.

EMILIA

[]What will you do with 't, that you have been
 so earnest
 To have me filch it?

IAGO

[]Why, []what's that to you?

EMILIA

[]If it be not for some purpose of import, 30
 Give't me again: []poor lady, []she'll run mad
 When she shall lack it.

IAGO

[]Be not acknown on 't; []I have use for it.
 []Go, []leave me.

Exit EMILIA

[]I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin, 35
 And let him find it. []Trifles light as air
 Are to the jealous confirmations strong
 As proofs of holy writ: this may do something.
 []The Moor already changes with my poison:
 []Dangerous conceits are, []in their natures, 40
 []poisons.

[]Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
 But with a little act upon the blood.
 Burn like the mines of Sulphur. []I did say so:
 []Look, []where he comes!

Re-enter OTHELLO

[]Not poppy, nor mandragora, 45
 Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
 Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
 Which thou owedst yesterday.

[1] = casting the audience; [2] = allying; [3] = seeking information;
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Macbeth, 1.1

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches

FIRST WITCH

[]When shall we three meet again?
[]In thunder, []lightning, []or in rain?

SECOND WITCH

[]When the hurlyburly's done,
[]When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH

[]That will be ere the set of sun.

FIRST WITCH

[]Where the place?

SECOND WITCH

[]Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH

[]There to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH

[]I come, []Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH

[]Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH

[]Anon.

ALL

[]Fair is foul, []and foul is fair:
[]Hover through the fog and filthy air.

Exeunt

1.2

Alarum within. Enter KING DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding Captain

DUNCAN

[]What bloody man is that? []He can report,
[]As seemeth by his plight, []of the revolt
The newest state.

MALCOLM

[]This is the sergeant
[]Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity. []Hail, []brave friend;
[]Say to the king the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it.

CAPTAIN

[]Doubtful it stood;
[]As two spent swimmers, []that do cling together
And choke their art. []The merciless Macdonwald--
[]Worthy to be a rebel, []for to that 10
The multiplying villainies of nature

Do swarm upon him--[]from the western isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
[]And fortune, []on his damned quarrel smiling,
[]Show'd like a rebel's whore: []but all's too 15
weak:

[]For brave Macbeth--[]well he deserves that name--
[]Disdaining fortune, []with his brandish'd steel,
[]Which smoked with bloody execution,
[]Like valour's minion carved out his passage 20
[]Till he faced the slave;

[]Which ne'er shook hands, []nor bade farewell to
him,
[]Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chops,
[]And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

DUNCAN

[]O []valiant cousin, []worthy gentleman.

CAPTAIN

[]As whence the sun 'gins his reflection 25
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
[]So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come
Discomfort swells. []Mark, []king of Scotland,
[]mark:

[]No sooner justice had with valour arm'd
Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels, 30
[]But the Norweyan lord surveying vantage,

[]With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men
Began a fresh assault.

DUNCAN

[]Dismay'd not this
Our captains, []Macbeth and Banquo?