

THE WINTER'S TALE | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Winter's Tale is an unusual play: the first three acts take place at one time, and the final two acts take place sixteen years later. To explain this shift, Time itself gets onstage and tells the audience what's happening.

The Shakespeare

Time

I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror
Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,
Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
To use my wings. Impute it not a crime
To me, or my swift passage, that I slide
O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my pow'r
To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom. Let me pass
The same I am, ere ancient'st order was,
Or what is now receiv'd. I witness to
The times that brought them in; so shall I do
To th' freshest things now reigning, and make stale
The glistening of this present, as my tale
Now seems to it. Your patience this allowing,
I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing
As you had slept between.

The Translation

Time

I am taking up my wings, in the name of Time, which pleases some, tests all, brings both joy and terror, makes errors and corrects them. Don't see it as a crime that I pass quickly over sixteen years and leave that wide gap unexamined, as I have the power to overthrow the laws of nature and, in one hour, to establish or topple custom. Let me remain as I've been since before civilization began through what currently is. I saw the times that led to the present, and as I did to the past, I'll make the youngest things old and dim the shine of the present until it, too, is old. If your patience allows, I'll turn my hourglass and move the scene forward as if you had slept through it all.

- 1 Read the Shakespeare.
- 2 Read the translation.
- 3 Read the Shakespeare again!



Where there isn't punctuation at the end of a line, don't stop—take a breath if you need to, but keep the flow of the sentence. Does that change anything about the soliloquy?

This soliloquy is full of opposites (in fancy literature-speak, we call them dichotomies!): joy and terror, good and bad.

- 1) Find all of the dichotomies in the soliloquy. Why does Time speak with so many of them, do you think?
- 2) When you read the soliloquy, try slowing down and emphasizing these dichotomies. Try really explaining them to your imaginary audience.

"dicothotomy" is pronounced "dye-COT-uh-me"



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

- Write
- Draw
- Talk about it
- Think about it



... up to you!

How would you show the passage of sixteen years...

- In a play?
- In a drawing or painting?
- In music?
- In a poem?
- As a dance?

Go ahead: imagine it.

Shakespeare gives us clues in the language to help us figure out a character's attitudes or emotions. The best way to solve these puzzles is to slowly read the text aloud in different ways.

An "open" vowel is a vowel voiced with the mouth wide open and the tongue positioned low. As you speak the words, try lingering on open vowels in words like "slide", "wide gap", "power", and even "I". Really open your mouth as you say each word.

A "clipped" consonant is one that "closes in" a vowel, usually making it a short sound. Try clipping (or emphasizing) the consonants in words like "that makes", "impute", and "plant".

Are there more open vowels or clipped consonants in this speech? What about all those "s" sounds? What does all of it tell you?



After this speech, Time just walks off the stage-- what gives?! If you could, what would you say in reply?

What do you imagine Time looks like? Think about age, gender, clothing, etc.

Shakespeare included this monologue in *The Winter's Tale* to save time in performance. But what do you think: is it a good idea or a bad idea to leave a long period of time unexamined? Does it have to be one or the other? Or is it somewhere in between?