



Shakespeare Audition Speeches

Below is a collection of speeches you might use for the Classical part of your Acting audition. The speeches have been edited to make them a manageable length – if you’ve learned a version edited in a different way, that’s totally fine, but we’d encourage you to keep to a similar length – depth and detail are far more important than quantity. You are also welcome to use speeches that are not in this collection.

For each speech we’ve given a bit of context, but we would of course, strongly encourage you to read the play in full, so you have a deeper understanding of the character and their situation. We’ve also given a brief suggestions what the character might want – what they’re trying to achieve or change by saying what they’re saying.

We suggest that all speeches are trying to affect someone else – this might be another character onstage, or it might be the audience. In the case of the audience, you might want to imagine that the audience is one person and is your best friend, so that you can land the speech with simplicity and directness.

Where appropriate, we’ve included another character’s line that triggers the speech, to give a sense of why the character says what they say. If you’d like, we can read this line in your audition to give you a thought to springboard off.

For the purposes of your audition, identity is irrelevant – we encourage you to work on material that makes sense to you and fires you up, regardless of the identity of the character in the context of the play.

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Edmund***King Lear, Act 1 Scene 2***

Edmund is alone and has realised that as a 'bastard' (someone born out of wedlock) he is going to be overlooked for his inheritance. His older 'legitimate' brother Edgar stands to inherit all their father's land and money.

He asks the audience how this can possibly be fair, and then comes up with a plan to take back control.

Edmund

Wherefore should I

Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why "bastard"? Wherefore "base,"
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous and my shape as true
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With "base," with "baseness," "bastardy," "base," "base,"
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to th' legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate."
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Joan of Arc***Henry VI Part 1, Act 5 Scene 4***

Joan is a teenager who believes she is being spoken to by God. She's about to be burnt at the stake by the English lords.

She is determined not only to shame them but to remind and threaten them that she is God's chosen one.

York *Take her away, for she hath lived too long
To fill the world with vicious qualities.*

Joan First, let me tell you whom you have condemned:
Not one begotten of a shepherd swain,
But issued from the progeny of kings,
Virtuous and holy, chosen from above
By inspiration of celestial grace
To work exceeding miracles on earth.
I never had to do with wicked spirits.
But you, that are polluted with your lusts,
Stained with the guiltless blood of innocents,
Corrupt and tainted with a thousand vices,
Because you want the grace that others have,
You judge it straight a thing impossible
To compass wonders but by help of devils.
No, misconceived! Joan of Arc hath been
A virgin from her tender infancy,
Chaste and immaculate in very thought,
Whose maiden blood, thus rigorously effused,
Will cry for vengeance at the gates of heaven.

Lady Percy***Henry IV Part 2, Act 2 Scene 3***

Lady Percy's husband, Harry "Hotspur" Percy, has been killed in a war against the reigning king. She asks her father-in-law why he did not go to war when his son needed support, but now intends to go to war to support the lords who surround him now.

She wants him to persuade him not to go to war, by asking the question: why did you abandon your son?

Northumberland *I pray thee, loving wife and gentle daughter,
Give even way unto my rough affairs.*

Lady Percy O yet, for God's sake, go not to these wars.
The time was, father, that you broke your word
When you were more endeared to it than now,
When your own Percy, when my heart's dear Harry,
Threw many a northward look to see his father
Bring up his powers; but he did long in vain.
Who then persuaded you to stay at home?
There were two honours lost, yours and your son's.
O miracle of men!—him did you leave,
Second to none, unseconded by you,
To look upon the hideous god of war
In disadvantage, to abide a field
Where nothing but the sound of Hotspur's name
Did seem defensible. So you left him.
Never, O never, do his ghost the wrong
To hold your honour more precise and nice
With others than with him. Let them alone.
Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,
Today might I, hanging on Hotspur's neck,
Have talked of Monmouth's grave.

Romeo***Romeo and Juliet, Act 3 Scene 3***

Romeo has just discovered that he has been banished by the Prince for murdering Tybalt. Friar Lawrence, not just his priest but his friend, is trying to persuade him that banishment is better than death.

Romeo pushes back that banishment is unacceptable – it is worse than death – and he won't stop until the Friar agrees to help him.

Friar Lawrence *The kind prince, hath rushed aside the law
And turned that black word "death" to "banishment."
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.*

Romeo 'Tis torture and not mercy. Heaven is here
Where Juliet lives, and every cat and dog
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
Live here in heaven and may look on her,
But Romeo may not. More validity,
More honourable state, more courtship lives
In carrion flies than Romeo. They may seize
On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand
And steal immortal blessing from her lips,
Who even in pure and vestal modesty
Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin;
But Romeo may not; he is banishèd.
Flies may do this, but I from this must fly.
They are free men, but I am banishèd.
And sayest thou yet that exile is not death?
Hadst thou no poison mixed, no sharp-ground knife,
No sudden mean of death, though ne'er so mean,
But "banishèd" to kill me? "Banishèd"?
O friar, the damnèd use that word in hell.
Howling attends it. How hast thou the heart,
Being a divine, a ghostly confessor,
A sin absolver, and my friend professed,
To mangle me with that word "banishèd"?

Lady Anne***Richard III, Act 1 Scene 2***

Lady Anne is at her husband's funeral, the coffin being carried in. Richard – who killed her husband – approaches, and his presence literally causes the corpse's wounds to reopen.

Anne believes that Richard is the devil himself – she violently wants to get rid of him, and to get him take responsibility for his evil deeds.

Richard *Stay, you that bear the corse, and set it down.*

Lady Anne Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell.
Thou hadst but power over his mortal body;
His soul thou canst not have. Therefore begone.
Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble us not,
For thou hast made the happy Earth thy hell,
Filled it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.

She looks at the corpse.

O, gentlemen, see, see dead Henry's wounds
Open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh!—
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells.
Thy deeds, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.—
O God, which this blood mad'st, revenge his death!
O Earth, which this blood drink'st, revenge his death!
Either heaven with lightning strike the murderer dead,
Or Earth gape open wide and eat him quick,
As thou dost swallow up this good king's blood,
Which his hell-governed arm hath butcherèd.

Queen Margaret***Henry VI Part 3, Act 1 Scene 4***

Queen Margaret has led an army into battle and defeated York, who was trying to take the crown from her son.

Now she is in control, Margaret wants to taunt and shame York into feeling the grief and powerlessness she felt when he started his revolution.

Northumberland *What would your Grace have done unto him now?*

Queen Margaret Come, make him stand upon this molehill here.

They put York in place.

What, was it you that would be England's king?
Was 't you that revelled in our parliament
And made a preachment of your high descent?
Where are your mess of sons to back you now,
The wanton Edward and the lusty George?
And where's that valiant crookback prodigy,
Dickie, your boy, that with his grumbling voice
Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies?
Or, with the rest, where is your darling Rutland?
Look, York, I stained this napkin with the blood
That valiant Clifford with his rapier's point
Made issue from the bosom of the boy;
And if thine eyes can water for his death,
I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal.

She gives him a bloody cloth.

I prithee grieve to make me merry, York.
Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad;
And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus.
Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.

Antony***Julius Caesar, Act 3 Scene 1***

After Ceasar's murder at the hands of a group of senators, Mark Antony is left alone with the corpse.

He wants the dead man (and his allies in the audience) that understand he will have his revenge.

Antony O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers.
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
That ever livèd in the tide of times.
Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy –
Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue –
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use
And dreadful objects so familiar
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quartered with the hands of war,
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds;
And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
With carrion men groaning for burial.

Adriana***The Comedy of Errors, Act 2 Scene 1***

Adriana's husband, Antipholus, is late home – again – and she believes he is having an affair. When her sister comments that she looks angry she snaps back.

She wants Luciana to recognise that the fault is Antipholus's – that because she has dutifully stayed at home, his eye has wandered to more exciting 'jewels'.

Luciana *Fie, how impatience loureth in your face.*

Adriana His company must do his minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.
Hath homely age th' alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? Then he hath wasted it.
Are my discourses dull? Barren my wit?
I know his eye doth homage elsewhere,
Or else what lets it but he would be here?
Sister, you know he promised me a chain.
Would that alone o' love he would detain,
So he would keep fair quarter with his bed.
I see the jewel best enamelèd
Will lose his beauty. Yet the gold bides still
That others touch, and often touching will
Wear gold; yet no man that hath a name
By falsehood and corruption doth it shame.
Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
I'll weep what's left away, and weeping die.

Iago***Othello, Act 2 Scene 3***

Iago has just sown the seeds of a plan to frame his honest friend Cassio for sleeping with Othello's wife, Desdemona.

After Cassio leaves him, Iago wants to test his plan on the audience and get them to understand that it isn't villainy, but is necessary.

Iago And what's he, then, that says I play the villain,
When this advice is free I give, and honest,
Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now. For whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:
That she repeals him for her body's lust;
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

Richard***Richard III, Act 1 Scene 1***

Richard stands alone on stage and tells the audience that his brother has triumphed in war and made the world a peaceful place. It is a world he hates and he wishes for chaos.

He wants the audience to understand and agree that he is not made for a world of peace, and that he has to disrupt it.

Richard Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York,
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barbèd steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determinèd to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

Othello***Othello, Act 5 Scene 2***

Othello has been tricked into killing his wife and has had his sword removed. When Gratiano returns, Othello lashes out with a weapon he had hidden.

He wants to keep Gratiano at bay, and then tries to figure out how he can have killed Desdemona.

Gratiano *Thou hast no weapon and perforce must suffer.*

Othello Behold, I have a weapon.
A better never did itself sustain
Upon a soldier's thigh. I have seen the day
That with this little arm and this good sword
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop. But—O vain boast!—
Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.
Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed.
Here is my journey's end.

He looks at Desdemona's corpse

Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench,
Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl?
Even like thy chastity.—O cursèd, cursèd slave!—
Whip me, you devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulfur,
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemon! Dead, Desdemon! Dead! O, O!

Macbeth

Macbeth, Act 1 Scene 7

Macbeth, alone and desperate for the crown, tries to convince himself that killing the king is the right decision.

He weighs and tests the idea out on the audience, to try and find the bravery to go through with it.

Macbeth If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence and catch
With his surcease success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor. He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off.

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other—

Aaron***Titus Andronicus, Act 5 Scene 1***

Aaron has been captured by Lucius and his army, who accuse him of committing horrific crimes.

Aaron wants Lucius to understand that instead of repenting, his only regret is not committing a thousand more atrocities.

Lucius *Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?*

Aaron Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.
Even now I curse the day—and yet, I think,
Few come within the compass of my curse—
Wherein I did not some notorious ill,
As kill a man, or else devise his death;
Ravish a maid or plot the way to do it;
Accuse some innocent and forswear myself;
Set deadly enmity between two friends;
Make poor men's cattle break their necks;
Set fire on barns and haystacks in the night,
And bid the owners quench them with their tears.
Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves
And set them upright at their dear friends' door,
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters
"Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead."
But I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly,
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

Juliet***Romeo and Juliet, Act 3 Scene 2***

After their secret marriage, Juliet's husband, Romeo, has killed her cousin, Tybalt, and is now banished.

She needs to figure out whether she should choose her family and mourn Tybalt's death, or choose her love and mourn Romeo's banishment.

Nurse *Will you speak well of him that killed your cousin?*

Juliet Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?
Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name
When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?
But wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?
That villain cousin would have killed my husband.
Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring;
Your tributary drops belong to woe,
Which you, mistaking, offer up to joy.
My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain,
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband.
All this is comfort. Wherefore weep I then?
Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death,
That murdered me. I would forget it fain,
But, O, it presses to my memory
Like damnèd guilty deeds to sinners' minds:
"Tybalt is dead and Romeo banishèd."
That "banishèd," that one word "banishèd,"
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts.
There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,
In that word's death. No words can that woe sound.

Isabella

Measure for Measure, Act 3 Scene 1

Claudio has been sentenced to execution – the one thing that can save him is if his sister, Isabella, agrees to sleep with Angelo; so Claudio asks her to, to save his life.

A disgusted Isabella shames Claudio for asking her to do this, and wants him to accept death rather than bring this dishonour on her.

Claudio *Sweet sister, let me live.*

Isabella

O, you beast!

O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch,
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is 't not a kind of incest to take life
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
Heaven shield my mother played my father fair,
For such a warpèd slip of wilderness
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance;
Die, perish. Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee. O, fie, fie, fie!
Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.
Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd.
'Tis best that thou diest quickly.

Brutus***Julius Caesar, Act 2 Scene 1***

With the clock of an assassination ticking, Brutus tries to decide if Ceasar deserves to die. He wants to do the right thing morally and protect the people of Rome but is Ceasar's best friend.

He urgently tests the idea with the audience, weighing the arguments on both sides.

Brutus It must be by his death. And for my part
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crowned:
How that might change his nature, there's the question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
And then I grant we put a sting in him
That at his will he may do danger with.
Th' abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
Remorse from power. And, to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections swayed
More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
But, when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
Then, lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities.
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

Helena***All's Well That Ends Well, Act 1 Scene 3***

Despite being of low status, Helena wants to marry the Countess's son. She believes a pure and honest love is worth more than money and status.

She wants to persuade the Countess to agree to let them marry.

Countess

*Come, come, disclose
The state of your affection.*

Helen

Then I confess

Here on my knee before high heaven and you

That before you and next unto high heaven

I love your son.

My friends were poor but honest; so 's my love.

Be not offended, for it hurts not him

That he is loved of me. I follow him not

By any token of presumptuous suit,

Nor would I have him till I do deserve him,

Yet never know how that desert should be.

I know I love in vain, strive against hope,

Yet in this captious and intenible sieve

I still pour in the waters of my love

And lack not to lose still. My dearest madam,

Let not your hate encounter with my love

For loving where you do; but if yourself,

Whose agèd honor cites a virtuous youth,

Did ever in so true a flame of liking

Wish chastely and love dearly, that your Dian

Was both herself and Love, O then give pity

To her whose state is such that cannot choose

But lend and give where she is sure to lose;

That seeks not to find that her search implies,

But riddle-like lives sweetly where she dies.

Cassius***Julius Caesar, Act 1 Scene 2***

As the crowd cheers for Caesar, Cassius warns Brutus that Caesar is growing too powerful and must be stopped.

To get him to agree that Ceasar should be replaced, Cassius tries to persuade Brutus that he is just as worthy a man as Ceasar.

Brutus *I do believe that these applauses are
For some new honours that are heaped on Caesar.*

Cassius Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
“Brutus” and “Caesar”—what should be in that “Caesar”?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with ‘em,
“Brutus” will start a spirit as soon as “Caesar.”
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
When went there by an age, since the great flood,
But it was famed with more than with one man?
When could they say, till now, that talked of Rome,
That her wide walks encompassed but one man?
Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough
When there is in it but one only man.
O, you and I have heard our fathers say
There was a Brutus once that would have brooked
Th’ eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.

Luciana***The Comedy of Errors, Act 3 Scene 2***

Luciana thinks her sister's husband, Antipholus, has been cheating on her all over town.

She wants to get him to stop, and if he can't, then at least to do it more discretely.

Luciana And may it be that you have quite forgot
A husband's office? Shall, Antipholus,
Even in the spring of love thy love-springs rot?
Shall love, in building, grow so ruinous?
If you did wed my sister for her wealth,
Then for her wealth's sake use her with more kindness.
Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth —
Muffle your false love with some show of blindness.
Let not my sister read it in your eye;
Be not thy tongue thy own shame's orator;
Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger.
Bear a fair presence, though your heart be tainted.
Teach sin the carriage of a holy saint.
Be secret-false. What need she be acquainted?
What simple thief brags of his own attain?
Alas, poor women, make us but believe,
Being compact of credit, that you love us.
Though others have the arm, show us the sleeve;
We in your motion turn, and you may move us.
Then, gentle brother, get you in again.
Comfort my sister, cheer her, call her wife.
'Tis holy sport to be a little vain
When the sweet breath of flattery conquers strife.

Antipholus***The Comedy of Errors, Act 3 Scene 2***

In a case of mistaken identity, Luciana has just accused Antipholus of cheating on 'his wife', her sister. He doesn't understand what she's talking about, and to make matters worse, has fallen for Luciana.

Antipholus offers himself to Luciana, and wants her to stop batting him away and fall for him.

Luciana *And may it be that you have quite forgot
A husband's office... Antipholus?*

Antipholous Sweet mistress—what your name is else I know not,
Nor by what wonder you do hit of mine—
Less in your knowledge and your grace you show not
Than our Earth's wonder, more than Earth divine.
Teach me, dear creature, how to think and speak.
Lay open to my earthy gross conceit,
Smothered in errors, feeble, shallow, weak,
The folded meaning of your words' deceit.
Against my soul's pure truth why labour you
To make it wander in an unknown field?
Are you a god? Would you create me new?
Transform me, then, and to your power I'll yield.
But if that I am I, then well I know
Your weeping sister is no wife of mine,
Nor to her bed no homage do I owe.
Far more, far more, to you do I decline.
O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note
To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears.
Sing, Siren, for thyself, and I will dote.
Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs,
And as a bed I'll take them and there lie,
And in that glorious supposition think
He gains by death that hath such means to die.
Let love, being light, be drownèd if she sink.

Emilia***Othello, Act 4 Scene 3***

Desdemona can't believe that wives might cheat on their husbands. Emilia explains there are times when it's the only power women have.

Emilia wants Desdemona to understand women deserve the same level of desire and respect as men.

Desdemona *Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong for the whole world!*

Emilia But I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us. Or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite.
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them. They see, and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is 't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well. Else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

Romeo***Romeo and Juliet, Act 2 Scene 2***

At risk of death, Romeo has snuck to Juliet's garden in the middle of the night. He spies a light from a balcony and realises it is Juliet.

He tries to figure out the mad feelings he's having – testing ideas and images on the audience, and trying to get them to understand how he's feeling.

Romeo But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.
Be not her maid since she is envious.
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off.
It is my lady. O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold. 'Tis not to me she speaks.
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
As daylight doth a lamp; her eye in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand.
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!

Lady Percy***Henry IV Part 1, Act 2 Scene 3***

Hotspur is involved in a secret rebellion against the King.

Annoyed that he's keeping things to himself, his wife, Lady Percy, wants to know what he is hiding and to help him solve his dilemma.

Hotspur *How now, Kate? I must leave you within these two hours.*

Lady Percy O my good lord, why are you thus alone?
For what offense have I this fortnight been
A banished woman from my Harry's bed?
Tell me, sweet lord, what is 't that takes from thee
Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?
In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watched,
And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars,
Speak terms of manage to thy bounding steed,
Cry "Courage! To the field!" And thou hast talked
Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,
Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,
Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,
Of prisoners' ransom, and of soldiers slain,
And all the currents of a heady fight.
Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war,
And thus hath so bestirred thee in thy sleep,
That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow
Like bubbles in a late-disturbèd stream,
And in thy face strange motions have appeared,
Such as we see when men restrain their breath
On some great sudden hest. O, what portents are these?
Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not.

Ariel***The Tempest, Act 1 Scene 2***

Prospero has tasked his spirit servant, Ariel, to conjure up a storm to direct a ship to their isolated island.

Ariel wants to impress Prospero with the invention and scale with which they have performed the task.

Prospero

*Hast thou, spirit,
Performed to point the tempest that I bade thee?*

Ariel

I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement: sometime I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake. All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,
Then all afire with me: the king's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up-staring,—then like reeds, not hair,—
Was the first man that leap'd; cried, 'Hell is empty
And all the devils are here.'

Portia***The Merchant of Venice, Act 3 Scene 2***

Bassanio has passed a test which means he can marry Portia, but unbeknownst to him, she also wants to marry him.

Because their match has been about negotiation, rather than love, she wants to give himself to her on her own terms, to get him to understand the depth and seriousness of her feelings, and to test his intentions.

Bassanio *I stand doubtful whether what I see be true,
Until confirmed, signed, ratified by you.*

Portia You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am. But the full sum of me
Is sum of something, which, to term in gross,
Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpracticed;
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed
As from her lord, her governor, her king.
Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
Which, when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love,
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.

Cressida***Troilus and Cressida, Act 3 Scene 2***

Having spent a long time not giving into it, and still wary of what his response might be, Cressida can't stop herself, and finally confesses her love to Troilus.

She wants to tell him the truth, and to get him to say he loves her back.

Troilus *Why was my Cressid then so hard to win?*

Cressida Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever—pardon me;
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
I love you now, but till now not so much
But I might master it. In faith, I lie;
My thoughts were like unbridled children grown
Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fools!
Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us
When we are so unsecret to ourselves?
But though I loved you well, I wooed you not;
And yet, good faith, I wished myself a man;
Or that we women had men's privilege
Of speaking first. Sweet, bid me hold my tongue,
For in this rapture I shall surely speak
The thing I shall repent. See, see, your silence,
Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
My very soul of counsel! Stop my mouth.

Phoebe***As You Like It, Act 3 Scene 5***

Phoebe has got the hots for Ganymede, but since he was rude to her, she wants to convince Sylvius (who's got the hots for *her*) that she's not interested.

She tries to convince Sylvius she's not interested, but can't help getting caught up in how she's actually feeling, and weighs both sides up.

Phoebe Think not I love him, though I ask for him.
'Tis but a peevish boy—yet he talks well—
But what care I for words? Yet words do well
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
It is a pretty youth—not very pretty—
But sure he's proud—and yet his pride becomes him.
He'll make a proper man. The best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offense, his eye did heal it up.
He is not very tall—yet for his years he's tall.
His leg is but so-so—and yet 'tis well.
There was a pretty redness in his lip,
A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mixed in his cheek: 'twas just the difference
Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they marked him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him; but for my part
I love him not nor hate him not; and yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him.
For what had he to do to chide at me?
He said mine eyes were black and my hair black,
And now I am remembered, scorned at me.
I marvel why I answered not again.
But that's all one: omittance is no quittance.
I'll write to him a very taunting letter,
And thou shalt bear it. Wilt thou, Silvius?

Helena***A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 1 Scene 1***

Helena is in love with Demetrius, but Demetrius loves her best friend Hermia – which makes no sense, because Helena is great and everyone normally fancies her.

She asks the audience for help to figure out what is going on, and what she's going to do to get Demetrius to love her.

Helena How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
And, as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind;
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste.
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste.
And therefore is Love said to be a child
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For, ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and show'rs of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her. And, for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

Viola***Twelfth Night, Act 2 Scene 2***

Viola (currently disguised as a man) has just delivered a declaration of love from her boss to Olivia. Unfortunately Olivia has fallen for Viola instead, and has 'returned' a ring to her, which she claims Viola left, via her aide, Malvolio.

She tries to solve what's going on, and when she realises Olivia likes her, what to do next.

Malvolio *She returns this ring to you, sir. Receive it so.*

Viola I left no ring with her. What means this lady?
Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!
She made good view of me, indeed so much
That methought her eyes had lost her tongue,
For she did speak in starts distractedly.
She loves me, sure! The cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger.
None of my lord's ring? Why, he sent her none!
I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman – now, alas the day!
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O Time, thou must untangle this, not I.
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

Juliet***Romeo and Juliet, Act 2 Scene 5***

Juliet is impatiently waiting for the Nurse to return with news from Romeo about whether they're going to get married.

She shares with the audience how frustrating it is when old people are sent to do an important job.

Juliet

The clock struck nine when I did send the Nurse.
In half an hour she promised to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him. That's not so.
O, she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glides than the sun's beams,
Driving back shadows over louring hills.
Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw Love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the highmost hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
She would be as swift in motion as a ball;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me.
But old folks, many feign as they were dead,
Unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead.

Enter Nurse

O God, she comes!—O, honey nurse, what news?
Hast thou met with him?

Helena***A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 3 Scene 2***

Helena believes Hermia is teaming up with the boys to trick her.

She shares this horror with the audience, and then wants Hermia to admit that she is doing wrong by reminding her of their friendship.

Helena Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive they have conjoined all three
To fashion this false sport in spite of me.—
Injurious Hermia, most ungrateful maid,
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived,
To bait me with this foul derision?
Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us—O, is all forgot?
All schooldays' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds
Had been incorporate. So we grew together
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries molded on one stem;
So with two seeming bodies but one heart,
Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,
Due but to one, and crownèd with one crest.
And will you rent our ancient love asunder,
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?

Malvolio***Twelfth Night, Act 5 Scene 1***

Malvolio has been tricked into behaving like a fool, and has been humiliated and locked up.

He wants Olivia to admit the 'truth', that she has been part of the trick and to return his dignity to him.

Olivia *Have I done you wrong, Malvolio? No.*

Malvolio Madam, you have done me wrong,
Notorious wrong. Pray you peruse that letter.
You must not now deny it is your hand.
Write from it if you can, in hand or phrase,
Or say 'tis not your seal, not your invention.
You can say none of this. Well, grant it then,
And tell me, in the modesty of honour,
Why you have given me such clear lights of favour?
Bade me come smiling and cross-gartered to you,
To put on yellow stockings, and to frown
Upon Sir Toby and the lighter people?
And, acting this in an obedient hope,
Why have you suffered me to be imprisoned,
Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest,
And made the most notorious geck and gull
That e'er invention played on? Tell me why.

Proteus***Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act 2 Scene 3***

Proteus has sworn his love for Julia – but when his best friend, Valentine, shows him a picture of the woman *he* fancies, Sylvia, Proteus also falls for her.

Proteus tries to figure out what to do next by weighing ideas with the audience, and then trying to justify that he's not doing anything wrong.

Proteus Even as one heat another heat expels,
Or as one nail by strength drives out another,
So the remembrance of my former love
Is by a newer object quite forgotten.
Is it mine eye, or Valentine's praise,
Her true perfection, or my false transgression,
That makes me reasonless to reason thus?
She is fair, and so is Julia that I love—
That I did love, for now my love is thawed,
Which like a waxen image 'gainst a fire
Bears no impression of the thing it was.
Methinks my zeal to Valentine is cold,
And that I love him not as I was wont.
O, but I love his lady too too much,
And that's the reason I love him so little.
How shall I dote on her with more advice
That thus without advice begin to love her?
'Tis but her picture I have yet beheld,
And that hath dazzled my reason's light;
But when I look on her perfections,
There is no reason but I shall be blind.
If I can check my erring love, I will;
If not, to compass her I'll use my skill.

Portia

Julius Caesar, Act 2 Scene 1

Brutus is involved in a secret plot to murder Caesar and has been out of bed for several nights.

Annoyed that he's keeping things to himself and not showing her the respect she deserves, his wife, Portia, wants to know what he is hiding and to help him solve his dilemma.

Brutus *Portia! What mean you? Wherefore rise you now?*

Portia

You've ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed. Dear my lord,
Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.
Is Brutus sick? And is it physical
To walk unbracèd and suck up the humours
Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick,
And will he steal out of his wholesome bed
To dare the vile contagion of the night
And tempt the rheumy and unpurgèd air
To add unto his sickness? No, my Brutus,
You have some sick offense within your mind,
Which by the right and virtue of my place
I ought to know of. Tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I your self
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.
I grant I am a woman, but withal
A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife.