

Choosing a Classical Speech

A Guide to Exploring OSD's Suggested Speeches

You don't need to have studied Shakespeare or classical theatre before to start exploring these speeches. You also don't need to understand every word immediately. Start with the person and the situation: What do they want? Who are they speaking to? Are they in love, angry, frightened, excited or trying to persuade someone? The language may be old, but the emotions aren't.

How to use this guide

Look through the speeches by theme, energy and character. You might choose something familiar, or discover a speech you've never heard before. Below is a key. We have given each speech two emojis that represent its themes, as well as either a ★ or a 💎.

- ★ = familiar favourites: our panel sees these speeches regularly, and you're probably familiar with the plays and characters
- 💎 = hidden gems: these are speeches that are done less regularly but are just as exciting and emotionally rich

Emoji	Theme	Character
❤️	Love, relationships and desire	Romeo • Juliet • Helena • Cressida • Benedick • Portia
🔥	Intensity, conflict and high stakes	Hamlet • Richard II • Juliet • Romeo • Moll
💔	Vulnerability, longing and loss	Hamlet • Helena • Cressida
😂	Wit, comedy and humour	Benedick • Mosca
💪	Strength, defiance and determination	Portia • Moll
👑	Power, status and identity	Richard II • Mosca

The Speeches

A note on character age and gender: These descriptions are intended as a guide to help you explore the characters. They aren't casting rules. If you feel drawn to a character who doesn't share your gender or age range, because you resonate with their journey or emotional state, go for it!

Emoji	Play	Character	Stage of life	Gender	Themes	Energy	What's happening?	Why choose it?
★❤️🔥	Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare	Romeo	Teenager	Male	• Love • Desire • Idealism • Youth	Romantic, excited, imaginative	Romeo secretly watches Juliet at her window and is overwhelmed by his attraction to her.	A great choice if: you love big emotions and romantic language. The challenge: Finding something personal and truthful in one of Shakespeare's most famous speeches.
★💔🔥	Hamlet by William Shakespeare	Hamlet	Young adult	Male	• Grief • Betrayal • Despair • Mortality	Intense, emotional, reflective	Hamlet is grieving his father and struggling with his mother's sudden marriage to his uncle. Alone, he finally says what he really feels.	A great choice if: you're interested in emotionally complex characters. The challenge: Making the thoughts feel immediate rather than simply delivering a famous speech.
💎👑🔥	Richard II by William Shakespeare	Richard II	Adult	Male	• Power • Identity • Loss • Mortality	Reflective, vulnerable, emotional	Richard has received devastating news: his supporters are abandoning him and his grip on the crown is collapsing. He begins to imagine	A great choice if: you want something serious, poetic and emotionally rich that isn't frequently chosen. The challenge: Letting Richard move between kingly authority and very human vulnerability.

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							what it means to lose everything that made him a king.	
★😄❤️	Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare	Benedick	Adult	Male	• Love • Pride • Self-image • Relationships	Witty, playful, energetic	Benedick marvels at how completely love has changed his friend Claudio, and confidently lists all the qualities a woman would need before he could ever fall in love himself.	A great choice if: you enjoy comedy and want a character with plenty of personality. The challenge: Enjoying Benedick's confidence while letting the audience see the irony that he may not know himself quite as well as he thinks.
💎😄👑	Volpone by Ben Jonson	Mosca	Adult	Male	• Ambition • Vanity • Status • Self-interest	Witty, confident, playful	Mosca, a servant who survives by flattering and manipulating others, begins to delight in just how clever and powerful his position has made him feel.	A great choice if: you want something funny, sharp and mischievous with lots of direct connection to the audience. The challenge: Enjoying Mosca's enormous self-confidence without making him simply smug.
★❤️🔥	Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare	Juliet	Teenager	Female	• Love • Desire • Anticipation • Impatience	Passionate, urgent, imaginative	Newly married, Juliet is waiting impatiently for night to arrive so that Romeo can come to her.	A great choice if: you're drawn to urgency and heightened emotion. This speech is about wanting something so badly that waiting feels impossible.

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								The challenge: Keeping the urgency and excitement alive while making Juliet's heightened, poetic language feel spontaneous and immediate.
💎❤️💪	Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare	Portia	Adult	Female	• Love • Trust • Marriage • Equality	Determined, emotional, persuasive	Portia can see that Brutus is hiding something from her. She challenges the distance he has put between them and demands the trust she believes a wife and partner deserves.	A great choice if: you want to play someone intelligent and determined who refuses to be shut out. The challenge: Balancing Portia's strength with the hurt and love underneath her argument.
★❤️💔	A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare	Helena	Young person	Female	• Love • Jealousy • Insecurity • Self-worth	Emotional, witty, vulnerable	Helena cannot understand why Hermia seems effortlessly loved while she is rejected by the man she wants. She compares herself painfully with her friend.	A great choice if: you're interested in a character whose humour and pain sit closely together. The challenge: Balancing the humour in Helena's observations with the genuine hurt and insecurity underneath them.

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💎❤️💔	Troilus and Cressida by William Shakespeare	Cressida	Young person	Female	• Love • Desire • Vulnerability • Reputation	Complex, thoughtful, conflicted	Cressida has finally admitted her feelings for Troilus — and immediately worries that she has revealed too much. She wants to love openly while also protecting herself from being taken for granted.	A great choice if: you want a speech that shifts quickly between confidence, desire and vulnerability. The challenge: Following Cressida's thoughts as she tries to regain control of what she has revealed.
💎💪🔥	The Roaring Girl by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton	Moll	Adult	Female	• Independence • Defiance • Gender expectations • Judgement	Bold, confrontational, fearless	Moll confronts a man whose insulting assumptions about women have provoked her, refusing to accept the way he judges and mistreats them.	A great choice if: you want to play someone bold, articulate and completely unafraid to challenge another person. The challenge: Using Moll's wit and intelligence as well as her anger. She doesn't just attack, she takes her opponent apart.

Read and explore the speeches

Once you've found a speech that interests you, use the links below to read the whole scene. Reading what happens before and after the speech can help you understand what the character wants and why they are speaking.

Finding the language difficult?

That's completely normal. You don't need to understand every word before you start exploring a speech.

[No Fear Shakespeare](#) - read Shakespeare's original language alongside a modern-English version (not always free to access)

[Shakespeare's Words](#) - look up individual Shakespearean words and phrases that are unfamiliar or have changed meaning.

[Royal Shakespeare Company](#) - explore Shakespeare's language in the way actors do, looking at rhythm, imagery and clues within the text.

[Project Gutenberg](#) - this free online e-book has a detailed glossary of words found specifically in *Volpone*.

[The Folger's Digital Anthology of Early Modern English Drama](#) - great selection of hard to find plays, with two reading versions to help demystify the language.

Try using these resources to unlock things you don't understand, rather than feeling that you need to translate every line before you begin.

Always return to what the character is thinking, feeling and trying to achieve - you won't go far wrong if you do.

Speech	Opening line	Read the scene
Romeo — <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act 2, Scene 2	<i>"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Hamlet — <i>Hamlet</i> Act 1, Scene 2	<i>"O that this too, too solid flesh would melt..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library

Speech	Opening line	Read the scene
Richard II — <i>Richard II</i> Act 3, Scene 2	<i>"No matter where, of comfort no man speak..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Benedick — <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> Act 2, Scene 3	<i>"I do much wonder how one man..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Mosca — <i>Volpone</i> Act 3, Scene 1	<i>"I fear I shall begin to grow in love with my dear self..."</i>	Read Volpone free on Project Gutenberg
Juliet — <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act 3, Scene 2	<i>"Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Portia — <i>Julius Caesar</i> Act 2, Scene 1	<i>"You've ungently, Brutus, stole from my bed..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Helena — <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Act 1, Scene 1	<i>"How happy some o'er others some can be..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library
Cressida — <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> Act 3, Scene 2	<i>"Hard to seem won, but I was won, my lord..."</i>	Read on Folger Shakespeare Library

Speech	Opening line	Read the scene
Moll — <i>The Roaring Girl</i> Act 3, Scene 1	<i>“To teach thy base thoughts manners: th'art one of those...”</i>	Read Moll's speech free at Representative Poetry Online

Don't be afraid to try something new

It's completely understandable to be drawn to a speech, play or character you already know. But some of the most exciting choices are the ones you might not have considered before.

Consider exploring:

Mosca in *Volpone*

Sharp, funny and gloriously self-important. A brilliant choice if you enjoy wit, mischief and playing with status.

Richard II in *Richard II*

A king facing the loss of his power and identity, with huge emotional shifts and rich, expressive language.

Portia in *Julius Caesar*

Intelligent, determined and deeply personal. Portia fights to be trusted and treated as an equal by the person she loves.

Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida*

Funny, thoughtful and vulnerable, as she tries to balance desire with the fear of revealing too much.

Moll in *The Roaring Girl*

Bold, articulate and fiercely independent. A character completely unafraid to challenge the expectations placed on her.

You don't need to know the play already. Read the scene, get curious about the character and see where the speech takes you.