



THE REASON TO PLAY *THE PLAY'S THE THING* IN CLASS

Teachers love to introduce students to the great works of Shakespeare but often find their enthusiasm for his work unshared by their pupils. Fortunately, Magpie Games has created a storytelling experience that is sure to interest students in The Bard by dropping them right into the drama of rehearsing and retelling a Shakespearean play. *The Play's the Thing* allows students to tinker with Shakespeare's precious thoughts and plots in a way that is safe and fun and full of educational possibilities.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to be used alongside *The Play's The Thing*, a storytelling game from Magpie Games (www.magpiegames.com). Any hesitation an educator might have about using games in class will find that this one encourages deep student engagement in the reading and study of Shakespeare's masterpieces.

This guide takes the approach that the game will be played at least once as a whole class experience, allowing students to become familiar enough with the rules of the game to eventually play it independently in small groups. It also takes a decidedly unhurried approach to the whole class game. Such a measured approach will comfort

students inexperienced with this type of game and allow teachers to take full advantage of the many lessons it inspires.

The guide is organized in the chronological order that the rules prescribe for preparing and playing the game. Each part of the game holds within itself learning opportunities just waiting to be discovered, so the intention of this guide is to suggest teaching and learning ideas for each step of the process.

This guide also assumes that the students have already read or watched the play they will be using with *The Play's the Thing*.



❧ PRACTICAL ADVICE ❧

Games like *The Play's the Thing* are usually played around a table populated by under ten people, so it is easy in those situations to refer to one another's character sheets. In a whole class session of such a game, easy access to information must be consciously fostered for optimal and smooth game play.

Here are some tips for accommodating an entire class playing the game as a group.

- The teacher should be the Playwright, the rules expert and referee. The game will be stopped for related lessons, so the teacher should be in charge.
- Students should be grouped. Four groups is optimal, and each group should play one Actor.
- Nameplates, Actor roles, and any information that needs to be referenced should be visible across the classroom. Posters displaying the Actors' role, Parts, and Plots could be taped on the front of student desks. A Cast List could also be projected for all to see using a document camera and a projector. Simply making a cast list for all students will also suffice.
- The Invoke, Compel, and Direction details of the Actors' Parts and Plots should be made visible at all times to all players. Posters or individual handouts are both good ways to ensure the accessibility of this important information and will encourage more exciting game play.
- The game suggests using poker chips as one of the ways of representing Story Points. This is an important suggestion. Tangible representations of success help students conceptualize and participate in the economy of games like *The Play's the Thing*, accentuating the moments when students are rewarded for good game play.
- Dice rolls are always fun. Students love to be part of the drama of the dice. Rolls can be made right at students' desks or projected on the wall from a specified rolling area. Online dice rolling programs are also an option. The goal is to allow students to enjoy the anticipation and the payoff of gathering dice in hopes of success.
- Student desks should be arranged to make all of the above suggestions possible.



GAME PHASES

WITH SUGGESTED TEACHING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EACH



❧ A PREGAME RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY ❧

Consider having students do some reading about the Shakespearean Era. This will add to the richness of play and certainly to the students' knowledge of the play's context.

❧ ACTOR CREATION ❧

WHEN THE STUDENTS ARE...	CONSIDER...
choosing a character name...	having them choose from Shakespearean or Elizabethan names. You might even encourage an inquiry into the history of the names.
stating their Actors' abilities...	discussing adjectival descriptors versus numerical ones. How would they verbally express a one? A two? A three? This could also lead to a lesson about comparative and superlative adjectives.
stating their Actors' abilities...	teaching logos, ethos, and pathos as these modes are defined in rhetoric and drama. You could assign an essay in one of these modes.
choosing their Actors' types...	having students categorize Shakespeare's characters according to the games' default Actor types. This step can provide some of the most spirited and pointed discussion about the original play.
choosing their Actors' types...	assigning research about why males played females in Shakespeare's plays. The game states that all types are gender-neutral with this historical knowledge in mind.
learning the Actors' Abilities and Direction...	leading a discussing about free will and determinism. How much control do we really have over our lives?
coming up with their Actors' backgrounds and relationships...	using a relationship web to clarify relationships among Actors and as a springboard for teaching the use of related charts, such as cluster webs, as effective ways of prewriting and brainstorming.



CASTING THE PLAY

WHEN THE GAME ASKS...	CONSIDER...
the Playwright to summarize the play...	having the students summarize the play.
the Playwright to provide each role with a PART and PLOT...	discussing which PART and PLOT best fits the characters in the play that students have studied.
Actors to add PLOTS and PARTS to roles...	using this as a springboard into a study of Shakespeare's source material. How does the source material differ from Shakespeare's dramatic rendering of its story? How could the source material help add PARTS and PLOTS to characters?
the Playwright to provide lines for each role...	assigning this task to students as a way for them to demonstrate a deep understanding of characters and plot by choosing lines that really reflect the soul of the characters, or by choosing quotes that are essential to the play's storyline.
the Playwright to provide lines for each role...	having students memorize their lines.

SETTING THE ACT

WHEN THE GAME ASKS...	CONSIDER...
for the Playwright to set the Act...	having the students summarize each individual Act's scenes into one scene as a way of determining the most important plot points of the play.
for Actors to read their lines during play...	insisting that the lines make sense in the present context of the game in order for students to be rewarded maximum Story Points.
for Actors to read their lines during play...	encouraging students to memorize their lines.
for Actors to read their lines during play...	teaching a lesson about effectively making Shakespearean allusions in modern conversation.
for players to work toward a cohesive story...	teaching plot structure, especially as it relates to the type of play you are retelling.
players to play their parts...	teaching about first and third person points of view and having students play their roles in one or both of them.
dying characters to give a monologue before passing...	assigning the monologue as a creative writing assignment.
the Playwright to set the ending of the play...	teaching the traditional endings of different types of Shakespearean plays.



∞ AFTER THE GAME: SOME MORE SUGGESTIONS ∞

Consider the unfinished plots threads, and have students compose stories that imagine the resolution of these loose ends.

Assign an essay that compares and contrasts the game's version of the play with the original.

Discuss how the game's version of the story stayed true or strayed from the play's originally intended type of play.

Ask students how the Actor's backgrounds and relationships affected the plot of the play.

Ask students to identify the themes that their version of the play attempts to explore as opposed to Shakespeare's vision.

How does the plot bring these themes to light?

Pete Figtree is a teacher and a gamer.

*He blogs and podcasts about gaming and learning at ruthlessdee.com
and can be reached at ruthlessdiastema@gmail.com.*

