

Climbing Shakespeare's Ladder of Ideas

Part of the Shakespeare in the Classroom Series

at ['Let Him Roar Again'](#)

Step by Step Instructions:

1. As a class, with the guidance of the teacher, break down the ideas and changing intentions within the *Henry V* Speech 'Once more unto the breach' (Act III, Scene i).
 2. Ask students 'How much does it matter to Henry that he will be heard? What is at stake here?' Reference the high number of stresses in the first line.
 3. Work in a circle to read the speech. Students should follow the natural ladder of the text, each idea building on and topping the previous one. Enjoy building the tension and importance of what is being said.
 4. Remind students that characters only continue speaking if they need to. Look at the ways in which Henry changes tack within the speech. Identify and mark where each new idea is introduced (ie the beats may be references if the class has worked with Stanislavski and script analysis beforehand but this is not necessary). This marking of new ideas could be done in a physical way rather than seated (eg through a change in stance for each line).
 5. Put the sections together. How can we change tone for each one while still building intensity. Break the class into groups and assign each group a section to speak together. You could experiment with making the groups uneven or adding groups together towards the end.
 6. Focus on creating the arc of the speech (moving from shattered and exhausted soldiers, convincing each other to get up and fight).
 7. Get the class to begin against the back wall. Give them 30 seconds to form a tableau of exhausted soldiers who have given up. Students should then repeat this for a second tableau halfway across the room and a final tableau of all soldiers ready to fight.
 8. Return to the back wall and put together with the text. Include vocal intensity.
 9. Extension Option 1: Students can work in smaller groups to create their own version. Where else might this kind of motivational speech take place? (eg soccer game, board meeting etc).
- Extension Option 2: Some students may wish to try performing this speech on their own.

HENRY V Act III, Scene i

KING HENRY V

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;

Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let pry through the portage of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height.

On, on, you noblest English.
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,

Have in these parts from morn till even fought
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:

Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war.

And you, good yeoman,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start.

The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'

Exeunt. Alarum, and chambers go off