



The English-Speaking Union
National Shakespeare Competition
2017 MEMO ON COMPETITION & ENGLISH STANDARDS

To: School Principals and Administrators
From: Education Department, The English-Speaking Union of the United States

ESU National Shakespeare Competition helps Students meet Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

We invite your school to participate in the **English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition**, an education program where high school students nationwide read, analyze, perform and recite Shakespearean monologues and sonnets in as many as three qualifying stages: school, community (ESU Branch) and national levels.

This performance-based teaching program satisfies the nationally adopted Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. According to these standards, by the end of Grade 12 students are expected to proficiently read and comprehend increasing complex texts (including dramas and poems) both in and outside the classroom. They also should have effective speaking and listening skills and an acquired use of language and vocabulary knowledge that serves them both in and beyond the classroom at the college and career levels.

Our program allows students of all levels and abilities to meet these expected goals, helping them develop essential skills required for academic and professional life (critical thinking, close reading and public speaking) and increasing their self-confidence and enjoyment of literature through reading, analysis and performance of Shakespeare.

Here are just some of the ways the Competition fits with these national guidelines for curriculum and instruction:

Reading Standards

Key Ideas and Details: The Competition requires students to closely read and critically think about Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, identifying both what is explicitly stated about characters and events and making logical inferences when needed using textual evidence; they must always use the text to support their conclusions (**CCRA.R.1**).

During their close reading, students identify the central ideas or themes found in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets (such as the complexity of love or the danger of ambition) and note their development and relation to their character. If needed, they chart and summarize the key supporting details and ideas (**CCRA.R.2**).

Students read the entire play where their monologue appears. While reading, students analyze the events, complex characters and intricate themes present in the work. They also pay special attention to their character, including their development over the course of the play and their interaction with other characters (**CCRA.R.3**).

Craft and Structure: Students interpret words and phrases as they are used in their specific monologue and sonnet (including determining technical, connotative and figurative meanings) and analyze how specific word choices shape the meaning or tone of each piece (**CCRA.R.4**). They also analyze the structure of the monologue, including how specific sentences, whole speeches and scenes relate to each other and the whole play (**CCRA.R.5**). Students assess how their character's point-of-view or purpose(s) shapes the content and style of their monologue and use then this knowledge (**CCRA.R.6**).

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: For **CCRA.R.7**: Please see CCRA.SL.2 as both require students to visually, quantitatively and orally integrate and evaluate content from diverse media and formats into their reading and understanding of the monologue or sonnet.

Most monologues include an argument presented by a character (similar to an essay). Students delineate and evaluate the character's argument and the specific claims in the piece, including the validity of the character's reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence presented by the character within the context of the play (**CCRA.R.8**).
NOTE: This standard usually applies to Reading for Informational Text rather than Reading for Literature.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: Shakespeare was both of an age *and* for all time; his timeless works were influenced by the events around him. Students are therefore encouraged to go beyond Shakespeare's

works and research their characters (especially if they are a historical or mythical figure). They independently and proficiently read and comprehend both complex literary texts (play, poem) and informational texts (essays, encyclopedia, etc.) (**CCRA.R.10**). Note: If students choose to look at the source material(s) for their play, they can also meet Standard **CCRA.R.9** by analyzing how the two or more texts address similar themes/topics or by comparing the different approaches the authors take with the same story, characters, etc.

Speaking and Listening Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration: In preparation for the school-wide competition, students practice their monologue in the classroom, modeling it for their teacher, a peer or the whole class and then clearly and persuasively explaining their interpretation of the character when asked. They converse and collaborate with one or more of these partners, building on others' suggested ideas and incorporating them into their presentation if needed (**CCRA.SL.1**).

We encourage teachers to model effective and ineffective performance practices to students by showing various audio and video clips of performances (stage productions, films, etc.). Students then evaluate the skills presented in these diverse media and formats and visually, orally and quantitatively integrate it into their presentation (**CCRA.SL.2**).

Students are encouraged not only be a performer but also an audience member and informal judge. They observe their participating peers in the classroom and evaluate the presenter's point-of-view and reasoning about their character as well as the way they used textual evidence and effective rhetoric to support their claims (**CCRA.SL.3**).

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: When asked to support their interpretation of their monologue or sonnet, students present their information, findings and supporting textual evidence in such a way that listeners can follow their line of reasoning. Since students intimately know and understand the text and their character, they can present an argument whose organization, development and style are appropriate to the task (the Competition), the purpose (supporting their individual interpretation) and the audience (a teacher, peer, judge or the whole class) (**CCRA.SL.4**).

The Competition requires students to adapt their speech to a variety of contexts (speech and poem) and communicative tasks (revealing a character's personality or goals, inciting others into action, setting the scene or closing the action, voicing/embodying a poem) to differing audiences (judges evaluating their work and the audience observing their performance); all this is done while demonstrating a command of formal English (**CCRA.SL.6**).

Language Standards

Conventions of Standard English: Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare wrote in modern English. Therefore, when students understand the words and phrases found in his plays and poems and can effectively convey that understanding in their presentation, they demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when speaking (**CCRA.L.1**).

Knowledge of Language: While studying Shakespeare, students are expected to apply their knowledge of language to understanding how language functions in different contexts (monologues vs. sonnets). They also use this knowledge to make effective choices about meaning and style within Shakespeare's works and to comprehend more fully when reading a Shakespeare play/poem or listening to it being performed/recited (**CCRA.L.3**).

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: During their close reading of Shakespeare's complex works, students must determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues found in the text (monologue or sonnet), analyzing meaningful word parts and independently consulting general and specialized reference materials (dictionary, glossary, thesaurus, OED, etc.) as needed (**CCRA.L.4**).

In their interpretation of their chosen character and sonnet, student must demonstrate a full understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings to advance in the Competition (**CCRA.L.5**).

There are nearly 900,000 words found in Shakespeare's cannon, some of which were invented by Shakespeare and are still used to this day. Reading and studying the Bard's works allows students to acquire a range of words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the college and career levels (**CCRA.L.6**).

We hope this knowledge encourages you to make your school one of the many involved in the Competition and see for yourselves how the Bard's timeless works still have the power to engage, teach and transform your students into more effective readers, better speakers and confident individuals. To learn more about how the Competition meets these and other standards, visit: http://www.esuus.org/esu/programs/shakespeare_competition/standards/.

