

## What's so special about Shakespeare's language?

# English

A series of workshops and resources written and performed by Michael Rosen for Shakespeare Week.

### Workshop One

In this series of workshops I'm going to try and show you what I mean about Shakespeare's language being special. Here are some resources for you to use that will help you explore Shakespeare's words. I hope you will be inspired to create some of your own special writing too.

Let's start with a scene from *The Tempest*. There's been a storm and a shipwreck and a man is washed up on island. Someone who lives on the island, called Ariel, says to him:

**"Full fathom five, thy father lies, of his bones are corals made, those are pearls that were his eyes..."**

I'd like you to think about how Shakespeare has painted a picture with words, rhythm and rhyme.

Write down what you notice or think about this piece of language. You might think about words starting with the same letter (alliteration) and words that rhyme for example. Say it out loud and see if you can notice any rhythms or patterns.



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### Workshop One (continued)

Shakespeare's language may be very special but that doesn't mean we can't have fun with it... and even have a go at trying out some things that Shakespeare tried.

Let's begin with some witches! These witches are not the usual kind you meet in traditional tales such as *Hansel and Gretel* but more like fortune-tellers that know the future, or perhaps they can even control the future. Below are some words that these three witches (they're also known as weird sisters) say as they cook up a spell before they meet a man called Macbeth. Do you think they are doing this so that they can destroy him?

**Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.  
Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,  
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.**

**Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble...**

**...Cool it with a baboon's blood,  
Then the charm is firm and good.**

*(Macbeth Act IV, Scene 1)*



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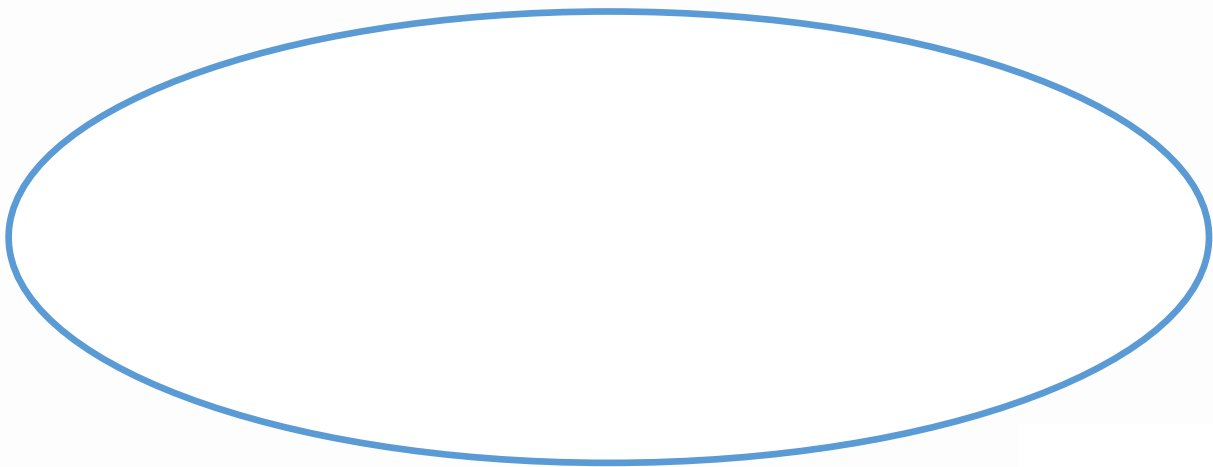
### Workshop One (continued)

What do you notice about the words and language here?

I bet you noticed that it rhymes: 'Eye of newt and toe of FROG, Wool of bat and tongue of DOG'.

When words in a poem rhyme like that it's called 'rhyming couplets' (meaning rhyming pairs).

Write down all the pairs of rhyming words here:



What do you notice about the rhythm of this spell?

Say the words out loud and tap out the rhythm with your finger.

Do you notice that it has a four-beat line pattern?



So Shakespeare wrote this 'spell' with a four-beat line rhyming couplets pattern! He must have thought: 'How can I make my witches sound like they're chanting a spell that sounds magical? I'll think of all the things that go in the pot and put it into this four-beat rhyming chant!'

All this is to do with the sound of the language in the poem or song. A posh word for this is called 'prosody'. You can change the prosody by making it sound a different way. How about trying to say the 'spell' as a rap – some raps are written in four-beat rhyming couplets – have a go!

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### Workshop One (continued)

So we've thought about the prosody of this spell. Let's take a look at the language and see what else we notice. There is some alliteration (sounds that are similar, close together). Write down any that you spot:

Can you see that a lot of the chant is like a list – in a lot of the lines there are two ingredients and each ingredient is something of something else (like 'wool of bat'). That's what we call the structure of the line, like the structure of a building. Only this building is made up of bits of animals!

Wool OF bat AND tongue OF frog

Eye OF newt AND tongue OF dog



### Writing suggestions

- Try to write another spell for these witches, talking in the same way as they do: rhyming couplets, four-beat lines and full of bits of animals! You could include Shakespeare's lines to start you off:

***Double, double, toil and trouble,***

***Fire burn and cauldron bubble.***

- Try setting your chant or spell in the future – instead of using animal bits why not try bits of old machines or bits of technology such as cars, mobile phones, computers etc.
- Work with a partner and say your chant in 'rhythm and bass' style with one of you keeping on saying: 'double double toil and trouble' while the other makes up things to say at the same time such as: 'eye of goat and knee of sloth'.