A Note from Southwest Shakespeare Company

Dear Educator,

Welcome to Southwest Shakespeare Company’s 21st season! We are thrilled to continue to provide quality matinee productions to Arizona’s students, and we are excited that you have chosen to bring your students to our performance of The Odyssey. We appreciate that you are dedicated to bringing the classics alive for your students.

In this age of high stakes testing, many schools and educators feel forced to limit their focus in the classroom to test-taking skills, thus eliminating enrichment activities such as attending theatrical performances. But as you know, these experiences often make the learning objectives relevant to students and must be valued as much (if not more!) as high AIMS scores and meeting AYP. You are providing your students with lasting memories and helping to create a new generation of theatre-goers and lovers of Shakespeare. This experience will stay with your students long after the last bubble sheet has been marked and the latest mandate has been met. We applaud your efforts to keep the learning process memorable and meaningful for your students.

This year, we have brought new and exciting study guides for you to use as you and your class embark upon the journey to discover classical theatre. We’ve designed our curriculum guides to encompass information about the play, information on how to prepare your students for the theatrical experience and discussion questions and lesson plans you can use within the classroom before and after the performance; all designed with the Arizona Common Core in mind.

It is our sincere hope that you find our resources helpful and entertaining. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in this study guide, please feel free to contact us at education@swshakespeare.org. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite your students (and you!) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

Happy Teaching!
Before the Odyssey

The Iliad is the prequel to the Odyssey – a tale of war and death between the ancient Greeks (Achaeans) and the Trojans

The Fall of Troy

The Achaeans burn their camps and sail away from Troy, waiting in their ships behind a nearby island.

The next morning, the Trojans peer down from the ramparts of their wall and discover the gigantic, mysterious horse. They also discover a lone Achaean soldier named Sinon, whom they take prisoner. As instructed by Odysseus, Sinon tells the Trojans that the Achaeans have incurred the wrath of Athena for the theft of the Palladium. They have left Sinon as a sacrifice to the goddess and constructed the horse as a gift to sooth her temper. Sinon explains that the Achaeans left the horse before the Trojan gates in the hopes that the Trojans would destroy it and thereby earn the wrath of Athena.

Believing Sinon’s story, the Trojans wheel the massive horse into the city as a tribute to Athena. That night, Odysseus and his men slip out of the horse, kill the Trojan guards, and fling open the gates of Troy to the Achaeans army, which has meanwhile approached the city again. Having at last penetrated the wall, the Achaeans massacre the citizens of Troy, plunder the city’s riches, and burn the buildings to the ground. All of the Trojan men are killed except for a small group led by Aeneas, who escapes. Helen, whose loyalties have shifted back to the Achaeans since Paris’s death, returns to Menelaus, and the Achaeans at last set sail for home.

“...The Achaeans made war on Troy, another tale, best covered separately...”

http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/iliad/context.html
Ten years have passed since the fall of Troy, and the Greek hero Odysseus still has not returned to his kingdom in Ithaca. A large and rowdy mob of suitors who have overrun Odysseus’s palace and pillaged his land continue to court his wife, Penelope. She has remained faithful to Odysseus. Prince Telemachus, Odysseus’s son, wants desperately to throw them out but does not have the confidence or experience to fight them. One of the suitors, Antinous, plans to assassinate the young prince, eliminating the only opposition to their dominion over the palace.

Unknown to the suitors, Odysseus is still alive. The beautiful nymph Calypso, possessed by love for him, has imprisoned him on her island, Ogygia. He longs to return to his wife and son, but he has no ship or crew to help him escape. While the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus debate Odysseus’s future, Athena, Odysseus’s strongest supporter among the gods, resolves to help Telemachus. Disguised as a friend of the prince’s grandfather, Laertes, she convinces the prince at which he reproaches the suitors. Athena also prepares him for a great journey to Pylos and Sparta, where the kings Nestor and Menelaus, Odysseus’s companions during the war, inform him that Odysseus is alive and trapped on Calypso’s island. Telemachus makes plans to return home, while, back in Ithaca, Antinous and the other suitors prepare an ambush to kill him when he reaches port. On Mount Olympus, Zeus sends Hermes to rescue Odysseus from Calypso. Hermes persuades Calypso to let Odysseus build a ship and leave. The homesick hero sets sail, but when Poseidon, god of the sea, finds him sailing home, he sends a storm to wreck Odysseus’s ship. Poseidon has harbored a bitter grudge against Odysseus since the hero blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, earlier in his travels. Athena intervenes to save Odysseus from Poseidon’s wrath, and the beleaguered king lands at Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, shows him to the royal palace, and Odysseus receives a warm welcome from the king and queen. When he identifies himself as Odysseus, his hosts, who have heard of his exploits at Troy, are stunned. They promise to give him safe passage to Ithaca, but first they beg to hear the story of his adventures. Odysseus spends the night describing the fantastic chain of events leading up to his arrival on Calypso’s island.

He recounts his trip to the Land of the Lotus Eaters, his battle with Polyphemus the Cyclops, his love affair with the witch-

Poseidon, the god of water, has harbored a bitter grudge against Odysseus since he blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus goddess Circe, his temptation by the deadly Sirens, his journey into Hades to consult the prophet Tiresias, and his fight with the sea monster Scylla. When he finishes his story, the Phaeacians return Odysseus to Ithaca, where he seeks out the hut of his faithful
swineherd, Eumaeus. Though Athena has disguised Odysseus as a beggar, Eumaeus warmly receives and nourishes him in the hut. He soon encounters Telemachus, who has returned from Pylos and Sparta despite the suitors’ ambush, and reveals to him his true identity. Odysseus and Telemachus devise a plan to massacre the suitors and regain control of Ithaca. When Odysseus arrives at the palace the next day, still disguised as a beggar, he endures abuse and insults from the suitors. The only person who recognizes him is his old nurse, Eurycleia, but she swears not to disclose his secret. Penelope takes an interest in this strange beggar, suspecting that he might be her long-lost husband. Quite crafty herself, Penelope organizes an archery contest the following day and promises to marry any man who can string Odysseus’s great bow and fire an arrow through a row of twelve axes —a feat that only Odysseus has ever been able to accomplish. At the contest, each suitor tries to string the bow and fails. Odysseus steps up to the bow and, with little effort, fires an arrow through all twelve axes. He then turns the bow on the suitors. He and Telemachus, assisted by a with his loving Penelope. He travels to the outskirts of Ithaca to see his aging father, Laertes. They come under attack from the vengeful family members of the dead suitors, but Laertes, reinvigorated by his son’s return, successfully kills Antinous’s father and puts a stop to the attack. Zeus dispatches Athena to restore peace. With his power secure and his family reunited, Odysseus’s long ordeal comes to an end.

Meet the Major Characters

**Human Beings**

**Odysseus** – A hero from Ithaka who fought among the other Greek heroes at Troy and now struggles to return to his kingdom in Ithaca. Odysseus is the husband of Queen Penelope and the father of Prince Telemachus. Though a strong and courageous warrior, he is most renowned for his cunning manner. He is a favorite of the goddess Athena, who often sends him divine aid, but a bitter enemy of Poseidon, who frustrates his journey at every turn.

**Penelope** – Odysseus’s wife who spends her days in the palace pining for the husband who left for Troy twenty years earlier and never returned.

**Telemachus** – son of Odysseus and Penelope. An infant when Odysseus left for Troy, Telemachus is about twenty at the beginning of the story. He is a natural obstacle to the suitors desperately courting his mother, but despite his courage and good heart, he initially lacks the poise and confidence to oppose them.

**Eurymachus** – one of Penelope’s suitors. He’s manipulative, deceitful and charismatic. His duplicity allows him to exert some influence over the other suitors.

**Antinous** – The most arrogant of Penelope’s suitors. The first to die when Odysseus returns

**Gods, Monsters, and Supernatural Beings**

**Ghost of Tierisias** – a Theban prophet who inhabits the underworld. He shows Odysseus how to get back to Ithaca and allows Odysseus to communicate with the other souls in Hades.

**Ghost of Achilles** – Acheas most famous hero

**Athena** – Goddess of Wisdom

**Zeus** – King of gods and men, who mediates the disputes of the gods on Mount Olympus. Zeus is occasionally depicted as weighing men’s fates in his scales. He sometimes helps Odysseus or permits Athena to do the same.

Discussion Questions

1) Was it right for Odysseus to escape the Cyclops by blinding him? Is an eye for an eye a valid reason to harm someone? If not, how else could have Odysseus escaped?

2) Odysseus’ men were so greedy they exposed all the winds. What do you think might have happened had they not been so greedy? Was it fair for Odysseus to keep that to himself in the first place?

3) While Penelope has to stay faithful to Odysseus, Odysseus remains with Calypso for several years and also has sexual encounters with other characters on various occasions. What does this reveal about the Greeks’ concept of fidelity?

Standard: 6-12.SL.1
Polyphemus – a Cyclops (uncivilized one-eyed giant); Poseidon’s son; whose island Odysseus comes to soon after leaving Troy. Polyphemus imprisons Odysseus and his crew and tries to eat them, but Odysseus blinds him through a clever ruse and manages to escape.

Poseidon – God of the sea. He despises Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and constantly hampers his journey home.

Sirens – Nymph like but really dangerous sea creatures

Circe – The beautiful witch-goddess who transforms Odysseus’s crew into swine when he lands on her island. With Hermes’ help, Odysseus resists Circe’s powers and then becomes her lover, living in luxury at her side for a year.

Calypso – The beautiful nymph who falls in love with Odysseus when he lands on her island-home of Ogygia. Calypso holds him prisoner there for seven years until Hermes, the messenger god, persuades her to let him go.

Hermes – messenger god

Odysseus’ Journey

1. Troy – After the victory at Troy, Odysseus and his men begin their journey back to Ithaka.

2. Ismarus – The Island of the Cicones. They land here in search of supplies. They engage in battle and lose 72 men.

3. The land of the Lotus Eaters – Odysseus sends his men out for food but has to track them down after they eat the Lotus Flower and lose their desire to return home.

4. The Land of the Cyclops – Odysseus and his men meet Polyphemus, a Cyclops and Poseidon’s son.

5. Aeolian Island of Aeolus – “The Keeper of the Winds” gave Odysseus a gift of all the winds in a bag to use for his benefit.

6. The Isle of Laestrygonians – Odysseus loses all of his men except for those on his own ship.

7. Island of Aeaea – Home of Circe whom Odysseus lives with for a year.


9. The Island of the Sirens – Odysseus instructed his men to put beeswax in their ears so they don’t get lured in by their beautiful sounds.

10. The channel with Scylla, a six headed monster who takes six of Odysseus’ best men in a matter of minutes, and Charbydis, a whirlpool Odysseus luckily avoided.

11. The Island of Helios – Odysseus told his men not to eat the cattle but they did not listen. After they ate all the sacred cattle of the Sun god – all of Odysseus’ men died.
12. Calypso’s Island – Odysseus was held captive as Calypso’s prisoner and mate for 7 years.

13. Sheria – Athena puts Odysseus in a very deep sleep when he spots this Island. He meets Princess Nausicaa and her father King Alcinous. He finds out who Odysseus is and sends him home by ship.

14. Ithaka – Finally Odysseus reaches his kingdom. Athena disguises him as a beggar so no one can recognize him except his song Telemachus. Together they

**Storyboard Odysseus’ Heroic Journey**

Objective(s): Each student will Analyze how complex characters develop (and relate) over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. (9-12.RL.3)

Each student will analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order of events within it create effects such as mystery, tension, or surprise. (9-12.RL.5)

Directions: Create a cartoon (or storyboard) of Odysseus’ Heroic Journey through the Odyssey.

Consider the following:

- What are the important (main) elements of the scenes?
- What events occurred that struck you as “heroic?”

Spice it up: Have your students create their own Heroic Journey Storyboard on what they can do to become someone’s hero today!

*For more examples of storyboards visit www.storyboardthat.com*
Epic Poetry

The Main Epic Poems of Ancient Literature

When we refer to epic poetry in the context of ancient literature, we usually refer to the two Greek poems attributed to

I. Homer, 1. The Iliad (about the role of Achilles in the Trojan War), and 2. The Odyssey (about the misadventures of Odysseus trying to return from the Trojan War and the shenanigans of the suitors trying to usurp his place back in Ithaca), II. and the derivative one in Latin by Vergil,

• The Aeneid (about the travails of the Trojan prince Aeneas on his way from the Trojan War to Italy where he founds a new home for the future Romans).

Epic Features

These book-long poems are unlike most other poems we are familiar with, and not just for their length. They are different in that:

1. they switch around from scene to scene and 2. there is dialogue, like a play. Epic = Drama + Narrative Speeches make up so much of epic poems that Plato called epic poetry a mixture of dramatic and narrative literature, according to classical scholar Albin Lesky.

Oral Tradition of Epic Poetry

Lesky says the speeches might be a throwback to the oral tradition of epic, where the epic story was passed down, from master storyteller to pupil, possibly within a family. The storyteller or “rhapsode” played a lyre as he sang his improvised epic song. The epic song was composed of elements from myth and folklore welded into place by means of the rhapsode’s skilled insertion of formulaic elements.

Epic Hero

The central figure of ancient epic poetry is the hero. In the 3 major ancient classical epics, the heroes are

1. the Greek Achilles, in the Iliad,
2. the Greek Odysseus in the Odyssey, and
3. the Trojan Aeneas in the Aeneid.


Characteristics of Epic Poetry

- Epic heroes come from the heroic era, which precedes the Archaic Age in ancient Greece and the founding of Rome by the legendary king Romulus.
- Epic heroes are typically of great national importance and represent the IDEAL hero.
- The heroes of epic literature are bound by a code of honor.
- The form of the epic is verse -- Dactylic Hexameters (a type of rhythmic scheme) -- marking it immediately as poetry.
- The language of epic poetry is often formulaic.
- The material of epic poetry is elevated; it does not dwell on the banal details of life.
- Epic poetry tends to have catalogues. A catalogue is a long lists of objects, places, or people. (Such as ships).
- Speeches are frequent.
- The setting is worldwide or larger
- Action within the poem involves superhuman deeds in battle
- Gods and supernatural beings take an interest and sometimes an active part in the action

The Greek poet Homer was born sometime between the 12th and 8th centuries BC. He lived before a chronological dating system was established which makes it difficult to nail down an exact date. He is famous for his epic poems the Iliad and The Odyssey, which have had an enormous effect on Western culture, but very little is known about him.

Homer
O Brother, Where Art Thou? Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen and Starring George Clooney, John Turturro, and Tim Blake Nelson is loosely based on Homer's tale The Odyssey with a modern twist.

Discussion:
Compare and contrast the movie, the poem, and the play. Are there similar characters? Themes? Which themes stick out to you the most and why?

Standards: 6.SL.2
S3:C2:PO105
S3:C2:PO 104

Write your own Epic Poem
Grade levels appropriate: 6-12
Objective(s): The student will create a short poem using epic characteristics.

The student will develop imagined experiences, events, and characters. (6-12.W.3)

Students will engage and orient the reader by establishing context and introducing a narrator, characters, and organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. (6-12.W.3a)

Directions: Using the characteristics of Epic Poetry (page 7) – create your own short epic poem.

You may:
1) Create another land and creature for Odysseus to encounter before he makes it home to Ithaka. (Recommended for grades 6-8)

Or...
2) Write your own mini adventure – complete with an epic hero, mythological and supernatural beings, and at least three different events. (Recommended for grades 9-12)

An Epic Class Performance
Grade levels appropriate: 6-12
Objective(s): Each student will collaborate on the creation of a short poem using epic characteristics.

Each student will use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters within the poem. (6-12.W.3b)

Each student will collaborate to create a documented script as a team. (S1:C1:PO 201, S1:C1:PO 301)

Each student will construct or locate props to enhance the scene. (S1:C3:PO205)

Each student will evaluate the results of implemented suggestions, ideas, and concepts generated in the collaborative process. (S3:C1:PO301)

Directions: As a class, decide upon the epic hero and themes. Then, break the class into small groups. Have each group write one adventure from the epic journey.

Once the chapters of the poem are complete, have each group prepare and perform their chapter/verse in front of the class – in order.

Record each segment to watch later and enjoy… as a class.

Discussion:
How does an epic differ from other works of literature?

Standard: 8.RL.6, 9-10.RL.6
The One-Person Show


History

We may assume that individuals have told stories in front of other members of their tribe or society for thousands of years. They would have orally passed down many of today's myths and legends in this manner. So it is a style of performance that has been with us for generations developing through theatrical people such as Greek Monologists, the strolling Minstrels of Medieval England and the French Troubadors.

By the 1960s, the term performance art became popular and involved any number of performance acts or happenings, as they were known. Many performers, like Laurie Anderson, developed through these happenings and are still performing today.

A solo theatre piece which foregrounds the abilities of the specific performer in a full-length exploration of character, narrative, or theme. Although the essence of the one-person show may be found in the storytelling traditions of any culture, the form as such hails from eighteenth-century solo entertainments, like those of George Alexander Stevens, and the nineteenth-century 'platform' performance. Charles Dickens, who read publicly from his own work throughout Britain and the United States, epitomized the genre as a packaging of literary material, performative skill, and charismatic presence. In the USA, Chautauqua and Lyceum circuits booked readings from stables of popular performers. By the twentieth century the one-person show had spread to the music hall and theatre, and might feature songs, sketches, and impersonations. Ruth Draper portrayed single characters, evoking a cast of imaginary listeners. In mid-century, Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens and Hal Holbrook as Mark Twain became known for their nightly biographical incarnations.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, John Gielgud revived the 'reading' form of the one-person show, with an acclaimed programme of Shakespearian excerpts. Spalding Gray and Quentin Crisp built shows around autobiographical material, as have touring performers from other countries, including Africa and India; Barry Humphries satirized British life in the guise of Dame Edna Everage. Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg, and Eric Bogosian mounted notable solo productions, each embodying a variety of sharply observed characters. In the 1990s Anna Deavere Smith used the one-person genre to investigate controversial cultural events.

Definition and Distinctive Traits of "Solo-Performance" The term one-man show often referred to comedian, who would stand on stage and entertain an audience. With the advent of feminism, words and phrases such as one-woman show and comedienne have entered the modern-day lexicon.

While a one-person show may be the musings of a comedian on a theme, the form can accommodate a wider scope. In the preface of the book Extreme Exposure, editor Jo Bonney uses the term "solo performance" to encompass those performers who do not necessarily have a comedic history. She suggests that "at the most basic level, despite their limitless backgrounds and performance styles, all solo performers are storytellers."
This assumption is based on her assertion that a number of solo shows have a storyline or a plot. Bonney also suggests that a distinctive trait of solo performance resides in its frequent lack of a fourth wall separating the performer from the audience, stating that a "solo show expects and demands the active involvement of the people in the audience". While this is often the case, as in the shows of performers coming directly from the stand-up comedy tradition, it is not a requirement: some solo shows, such as Krapp's Last Tape by Samuel Beckett, are performed without the performer addressing the audience directly.

When creating a show, a solo performer is not limited to creating and performing the show themselves. They can use directors, writers, designers, and composers. An example of how Eric Bogosian builds a character can be found in the published version of his show Wake Up And Smell the Coffee, by Theatre Communications Group, New York. The backgrounds of solo performers over the decades range from vaudeville, stand-up comedy, poetry, music, the visual arts, magic, cabaret, and dance.

**Categories and Performers**

Since solo shows have long been the domain of comic performers, it should be no surprise that many American comedians, past and present, have come to prominence through this genre. Performers include Lily Tomlin, Andy Kaufman, Rod Maxwell, Lord Buckley, Eric Bogosian, Whoopi Goldberg, Jade Esteban Estrada, Eddie Izzard, John Leguizamo, Anna Deavere Smith, Bill Hicks, Brother Blue and Lenny Bruce. Several performers have presented solo shows in tribute to famous personalities. The blueprint for this type of show may have been drafted by Hal Holbrook, who has performed as Mark Twain in his solo show, Mark Twain Tonight, more than 2,000 times since 1954. Examples since that time include Julie Harris in the Emily Dickinson biography, The Belle of Amherst; Tovah Feldshuh as Golda Meir in Golda's Balcony; Alan Safier as George Burns in Say Goodnight Gracie by Rupert Holmes; Ed Metzger in his solo show, performing since 1978, Albert Einstein, The Practical Boheian; and Ed Metzger in another one-person show Hemingway, On The Edge. In what was possibly the only instance in which an actor adapted an entire novel for the stage, Patrick Stewart played all 43 parts in his version of A Christmas Carol, which played three times on Broadway and at the Old Vic in London, while the actor Gerald Charles Dickens plays 26 characters in his performances from the same work. Jack Aranson starred in a one man 13 character production of Moby Dick.

One-person shows may be personal, autobiographical creations. This ranges from the intensely confessional but comedic work of Spalding Gray, the semi-autobiographical A Bronx Tale by Chaz Palminteri, or Holly Hughes' solo piece World without End, in which she attempts to make sense of her relationship with her mother who had died. Still other shows may rally around a central theme, such as pop culture in Pat Hazel's The Wonderbread Years, relationships in Robert Dubac's The Male Intellect, the history of the New York City transit system in Mike Daisey's Invincible Summer, or fighting the system in Patrick Combs' Man 1, Bank 0. Sometimes, solo shows are simply traditional plays written by playwrights for a cast of one. Examples: Shirley Valentine by Willy Russell, I Am My Own Wife by Doug Wright, The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful

Redhead by Robert Hewett and Topless by Miles Tredinnick. A recent prolific performer of shows of this type is Chris Harris, whose performances in the genre include Kemp's Jig, That's The Way To Do It!, Ally Sloper's Half Holiday, Beemaster, 'Arris Music 'All and A Night At The Pantomime.

There is also room in this genre for the inclusion of other art forms. Poetry pervades the work of Dael Orlandersmith, sleight-of-hand mastery informs Ricky Jay's self-titled Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants, magical and psychic performance skills are part of Neil Tobin's Supernatural Chicago.

North American Fringe festivals have provided platforms for many solo artists, including T.J. Dawe, Charles Ross, Amy Salloway and Susan Jeremy. There have also been many British comedians who have moved away from performing pure stand-up comedy in recent years. The shows that appear annually at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe can involve stories of pathos and the use of technological equipment such as projectors. Examples include Howard Read, who has performed with the animated character Little Howard which was projected with the aid of computers and Dave Gorman, who has performed several shows described as "documentary comedy".
The American one-person show found its roots in the “platform performances” of the late-nineteenth century, in which authors, public speakers, and actors “masquerading” as professional elocutionists gave readings or recitations from published works of literature to polite audiences for their cultivation and edification. These events were purposely held in non-theatrical venues as a way to distinguish them from theater entertainments (such as vaudeville), which, due to the long history of antitheatrical prejudice (i.e., a bias against or hostility toward the theater and those associated with it) were still regarded as immoral amusements created by sinful and degenerate individuals. The lecture, Lyceum, and Chautauqua circuits featured American platform personalities such as Edgar Allen Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Alexander Graham Bell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Daniel Webster, Anna Cora Mowatt and Charlotte Cushman. When Charles Dickens toured both Great Britain and America reading excerpts from his various works, he caused a sensation by embodying his numerous and diverse characters as he read. Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) spent much of his non-writing career appearing on the platform as lecturer and humorist, and he perfected a presentational technique which transformed his literature into performance texts. Lectures and readings eventually metamorphosed into one-person performances on the platform circuit as the focus of the performative material turned from literature to character sketches and monologues written expressly for performance. Eventually one-person showpieces began to appear on both the vaudeville and the legitimate stages, and sketches and monologues gave way to monodramas, or one-character plays. A surge in the number of one-person shows occurred in the American theater in the 1950’s and has never really decreased, owing not only to the popularity of the form, but also to its economical nature—a cast of one and, quite often, no set!

One-person shows—or solo performances, as they are often called—of the late-twentieth century to the present are largely artistic vehicles designed to display actor virtuosity and stamina, to highlight an actor’s ability of impersonation (of either one character or a variety of characters), to present a theater-going audience to a larger-than-life historical (or sometimes living) figure, and/or as a means of intimate autobiographical exploration and expression.

There are two modes for one-person shows: monologue and monopolylogue. A monologue features a single character speaking to a silent or unheard listener (most often the audience, who may be ignored or treated as observer, guest, confidant, or as a specific character). A monopolylogue features multiple characters, all performed by one actor; some monopolylogues feature dialogue in which the various characters talk to or converse with one another.

There are many types of one-person shows, and some defy clear classification. The most straightforward forms are biographical or autobiographical in nature. A biographical one-person play involves an actor directly impersonating or presenting his or her interpretation of the essence of a living or historical personage. Examples of this form are Mark Twain Tonight! written and performed by Hal Holbrook, William Luce’s portrait of Emily Dickinson, entitled The Belle of Amherst, which was originally performed by Julie Harris; Golda’s Balcony, in which Tovah Feldshuh first created William Gibson’s dramatic depiction of Golda Meir; and Doug Wright’s I Am My Own Wife in which Jefferson Mays created the role of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and thirty-four other characters with whom she interacts (including the playwright). In an autobiographical one-person play, a writer/performer appears as him or herself and tells sometimes extremely intimate stories about his or her own life. Spalding Gray’s Swimming to Cambodia, Lisa Kron’s 2.5 Minute Ride, and Martin Moran’s The Tricky Part are representative of this form.

Many contemporary solo performance pieces defy broad and clear categorization. For example, Anna Deavere Smith’s Fires in the Mirror and Twilight: Los Angeles 1992, utilize documentary material, such as personally recorded interviews and archival video recordings of public and private persons, which Smith weaves into a tapestry of monologues to tell the stories of and comment upon two dramatically explosive socio-historical events. Jane

“In the world of the theatre, the one-man show is perhaps the closest thing to having it all, a supreme test of assurance and ability, of magnetism and charisma. The format is both seductive and frightening; there’s no one to play against, to lean on, to share the criticism. But, for an actor, the prize at the end of a successful solo performance is not only applause but also acclaim—unshared.”

Wagner’s The Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe, written for and performed by Lily Tomlin, at first glance seems to be a series of largely unconnected, self-contained, whimsical character monologues, but the play slowly reveals itself as a satirical critique and outline of the Women’s Movement in the latter half of the twentieth century. Monopolyloguist Nilaja Sun’s No Child... draws from the playwright-performer’s true-to-life experience as a teaching artist in the Bronx to present a monodrama of Sun’s attempts to mount a production of Our Country’s Good with a group of disaffected high school students. In one scene of the play, Sun embodies at least seven characters in an amazingly animated conversation between a classroom of students, Sun, and their teacher.

Regardless of their mode or form, one-person shows give the solo performer power, control, and complete responsibility over the work in performance. For the artist who is both writer and performer, there is absolute artistic freedom in the creative process and performance of his or her work. Perhaps one of the greatest reliefs for the solo actor is that he or she doesn’t have anyone depending upon him or her in the midst of a live performance, but therein lies the challenge, as he or she has no one but him or herself to depend upon—it is just the actor and the audience. It is a risky and exhilarating proposition for both sides of the theatrical equation.

More Resources on the Odyssey

Film adaptations of the Odyssey by Homer

- Ulysses – 1955, Director: Mario Camerini, Not Rated

Online Teaching Resources for The Odyssey

- http://www.myteacherpages.com/webpages/rspriggs/english_i.cfm?subpage=611957
- http://www.webenglishteacher.com/odyssey-lesson-plans.html

Performance Opportunity: One-Person Show

Objectives: Each student will work individually to create characters for theatre (S1:C2: PO201)

Each student will select/arrange materials such as props, costumes, furniture, or sound to create the setting/environment of the story to be dramatized (S1:C2:PO104)

Each student will use available art materials, tools, and resources to convey the characters through costumes, accessories, and make-up designs the performance (S1:C3:PO108)

Directions: Once you have created your own epic poem (see page 7 for details) prepare and perform your poem as a one-person show in front of the class.

When preparing your poem for performance - please consider the following:

- Distinguish the different characters within the poem through body movement and tone of voice.
- Use props and costumes to help enforce the action and create the different characters your hero encounters.
The Theatrical Experience

How to act and react during a performance

When you come to the theatre:

Arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the show in order to:

- Pick up your ticket from the box office.
- Go to the bathroom prior to the show – so you don’t have to excuse yourself in the middle of the production.
- Find your seat without bothering anyone or interrupting the show.
- Read the program.

Note: If the show has already started when you arrive - Some theatres will make you wait for a break in the scene or performance before letting you into the theatre to find your seat. This is so you don’t disturb the viewing experience for other patrons as you find your seat.

A program will have information regarding the show, the actors in the show, and any notes from the director the audience will need in order to understand the show. Take time before the play begins to look through this information. Once the show starts, the lights will dim, and it will be very hard to read.

During the show:

- Turn off all media devices such as cell phones, ipods, ipads, etc.
- Refrain from speaking during the performance.
- Feel free to laugh if something is funny and applaud at the end of the scene or show if you enjoyed the performance. Actors enjoy the physical feedback.
- Please stay in your seat during the entire show. Only use the restroom during intermission or after the performance UNLESS it is an emergency.

Note: No food or drink is allowed in the theatre. Be sure to dispose of such items in the lobby before the show or during intermission.
The Playwright writes the script. Sometimes it is from an original idea and sometimes it is adapted from a book or story. The Playwright decides what the characters say, and gives the Designers guidelines on how the play should look.

The Director creates the vision for the production and works closely with the actors, costume, set and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

The Actors use their bodies and voices to bring the author’s words and the director’s ideas to life on the stage.

The Designers imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes and sound that will compliment and complete the director’s vision.

The Shop and Stage Crew builds the set, props and costumes according to the designer’s plans. The Stage Crew sets the stage with props and furniture, assists the actors with costume changes and operates sound, lighting and stage machinery during each performance.

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by recording their instructions and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. The Stage Manager then runs the show during each performance by calling cues for lights and sound, as well as entrances and exits.

The Front of House Staff welcomes you to the theater, takes your tickets, helps you find your seat and answers any question you may have on the day of performance.

The Theater is where it all takes place.

Charlie Bethel is an actor/writer with four critically acclaimed solo shows to his credit: Beowulf, Gilgamesh, Seven Poor Travellers, and Tom Thumb, or, The Tragedy of Tragedies. He has also worked as a stage manager, producer, electrician, milliner, director, and properties and set dressing artist.


In addition to the theater work, Charlie has worked as a creative consultant for the Diamond-Star /Mitsubishi Motors Company (Normal, IL), as a writer for Red Farm Films (Seattle), and as a filthy joke generator for the Innovisions Greeting Card Company (Chicago). He’s also, naturally, been a barista at Starbucks, a beggar in Daley Plaza, a cleaner of baby poo, an angry sonneteer, and a propagandist for the Shedd Aquarium.

His solo performances have been presented all over the US: from The Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences (Charleston, WV), to Cincinnati Playhouse, and a couple of Fringe Festivals, to Joseph Campbell’s Centenary Celebration at the Esalen Institute (Big Sur, CA—which was a total blast), to the Mythic Journeys Conference in Atlanta.

Charlie’s solo work delights audiences large and small, educated and not, well-heeled and plain spun.

He’s currently working on a solo version of The Odyssey to premiere at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre in March, 2013.

Charlie is a graduate of the North Carolina School of the Arts, and he comes from a long line of talkers. Recently he was featured on the History Channel’s series, Clash of the Gods as a commentator on, you guessed it, Beowulf.