

# HIGHLY THEATRICAL TERMS

A PERFORMANCE PIECE IN ONE ACT

By **C.P. Stancich**

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## HIGHLY THEATRICAL TERMS

By C.P. Stanchich

**A performance piece in one act for young actors, aged 12-18**

**SYNOPSIS:** Assuming various characters in a series of scene-lets and monologues, actors explore concepts and definitions in drama. The result is an exercise in timing and pace that is both funny and audience pleasing.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(An optimum of 15, plus or minus, taking on the various parts)*

### SET:

The stage is bare; actors will bring on what they use.

### PROPS/FURNITURE:

A seat (bench, stool, or crate), a trunk, a card table, several staffs (broomsticks), a heavy book, and a blanket. The trunk will contain all other props discovered in the script. The trunk contains a clipboard and several costume pieces (the cast should decide what pieces will be relevant).

### ACTION:

Continuous.

**PRODUCTION HISTORY**

*Highly Theatrical Terms* premiered at the Lakewood Playhouse Youth Theatre in Lakewood, WA on April 30-May 2, 2010. The original cast was as follows:

*Ensemble:*

Felicia Agrelius  
Emily Anderson  
Sam Courts  
Diana Claybots  
Joshua Dansby  
Coleman Hagerman  
Stephanie Huber

Kaley Kiermeyr  
Ashleigh Kilmer  
A.J. Paul  
Grace Reed  
Gracie Reed  
Greg Slease  
Shawnee Smith  
Maria Vetter

Director .....Jen Davis  
Assistant Director..... Alex Smith

*Lakewood Playhouse Staff:*

Managing Artistic Director .....Marcus Walker  
Education Director .....Maggie Knott  
Youth Director .....Christian Doyle

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*To Donna Jean—indefatigable theatre-goer*

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**PREFACE**

When I was asked to come up with a performance piece for young actors, the term “different” came up a lot: “something different for young actors to act, different for teaching directors to direct, and different for parents to watch. Oh, and if it could be funny, that would be good, too.”

So rather than fretting over plot and character arcs, we used the exploration of theatrical terms to provide a framework for exercises in pace and timing, rhythm and ensemble work, and meeting challenges as a company. For changes of pace and to provide spotlight moments, there are speeches and scenes swiped from Shakespeare; but even these are there to help the actors (and audience) explore theatrical terms.

Thanks to the explorer spirit of the Lakewood Players Youth Theatre students and staff, we realized a durable one-act that combined practice and fun, and education with entertainment. The actors enjoyed the challenges of exploring a term and translating what they learned into performance and the synergy of learning and teaching within the same performance made for tremendous energy. It was a different experience and a fun one for all. Some audience members—who, admittedly, were reacting to a surfeit of adapted children’s classics—reported that the “difference” was the best part.

**AT RISE:**

*The stage is empty. Lights up as the cast gives two sharp raps with staffs, off stage. Enter from various points **A, B, C, D,** and **E,** carrying staffs. They form a chevron with **A** serving as the point downstage and subsequent rows of **B-C** and **D-E.** When they have assembled, each gives two sharp raps.*

**A:** Beginnings.

*There is an awkward pause. **A** develops an expression of fear, and tries to look at the others without turning, then urges the idea again.*

**A:** Beginnings.

*There is another pause. At last **B** sighs.*

**B:** Beginnings are difficult.

**C:** Yeah, but necessary. I mean... we have to begin.

**D:** Not much point in coming out here, otherwise.

**E:** Well we should have thought of that before we did.

**A:** (*Urging, embarrassed.*) Come on!

**C:** (*Ignoring A.*) I suppose you thought of it.

**E:** I never said that.

**B:** Well then don't sound so smug.

*Another pause begins.*

**D:** Nothing is happening.

**E:** I really don't think I sounded smug.

**C:** Yeah, right.

**A:** (*Loud, beginning to panic.*) Beginnings!

*The company composes itself, but there is quickly another awkward pause.*

**D:** (*Shrugging.*) Nothing's coming back here.

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**C:** It's the enormity of the choice, isn't it? When you haven't begun, literally everything is a possibility.

**A:** (*Mortified, speaking through teeth.*) Just start!

**B/C/D/E:** (*Incredulous.*) Just start?

**D:** How?

**E:** There has to be a starting point.

**B:** A beginning.

**E:** Even the middle, as long as there's a starting point.

**B, C, D and E** turn, facing each other.

**C:** I hate things that begin in the middle.

**B:** So do I, but right now I'd take anything. I'm sure my parents are out there, rethinking the money they spent on acting lessons.

**B** turns downstage briefly, peers into the lights, smiles and waves.

**D:** So if it doesn't matter where...

**C:** Then there shouldn't be a problem.

**D/E:** But there is.

**E:** Exactly, because it doesn't matter where.

**B:** Ah.

The others look to **B**. **A** sinks to knees.

**E:** Ah?

**B:** Maybe the starting point isn't a where. Maybe it's a what?

The others consider briefly, and begin to nod and murmur in agreement. **A** gives a half-moan/half-growl and raps twice with staff. The others compose and turn back to the audience; **A** stands.

**A:** Beginnings!

Others look briefly to one another.

**C:** (*Helpfully.*) A void? (*Settling on an idea.*) An empty stage.

**C's confidence settles the others.**

**D:** A blank page.

**E:** An inspired author.

**B:** An expectant audience.

**D:** Eager actors.

**E:** An overwrought director.

**C:** A feeling of "here we go again."

**E:** Linked with the clear feeling that we've never been here before.

*A shiver of relief runs through the company. They have a sense that they know where they are going, and confidence grows. A raps two times.*

**A:** Beginnings!

**B:** An author.

**C:** A space.

**D:** A director.

**E:** A player.

**A:** Beginnings!

**ALL:** A catalyst. A spark. A spell!

*The COMPANY gives seven raps: one-two, one-two, one-two-three. Then all move in purposeful chaos, converging briefly on C who accepts all the staffs. They exit left and right. Enter F and G, carrying the trunk.*

**F:** A trunk.

**G:** A container.

**F:** A place to keep things.

**G:** A place to hide behind.

**F:** Or in.

*They set down the trunk, down right.*

**F/G:** Something to sit on.

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*They sit. Enter H, carrying a seat, moving down left.*

**H:** A seat.

**F/G:** Something else to sit on.

*H sets down the seat and steps up on it.*

**H:** Or something to stand on.

*F and G look to each other and stand. They climb atop the trunk.*

**G:** Okay...

**F:** Something to stand on.

**H:** Something to step off... (*Steps down.*) ...for effect.

*Enter I and J carrying a card table, which they set up, up-right. F and G look to one another.*

**G:** Something to hop off... (*Hops off*) ...for greater effect.

**F:** Something to leap off... (*Leaps off*) ...prior to a dramatic exit.

*F turns dramatically and exits. G and H watch F, then look to each other and mimic the turn, scampering after. I and J set the table on edge, top-to-audience, to observe the exits of G and H. As they do so, K enters, sees they aren't paying attention, and ducks behind the tabletop.*

**J:** A table.

**I:** For placing things on.

**J:** Or sitting at.

*They set the table upright over K without noticing.*

**I:** Or playing cards at.

**J:** Or pounding (*Pounds.*) to make a point.

*K springs out from under the table.*

**K:** Or springing out from under to make a completely different kind of point.

*Enter L, with the book open, reading.*

**L:** A book.

*L moves to the trunk, reading.*

**I/J/K:** A book?

**L:** *(Distracted, unconcerned.)* Mmm? *(Looks up briefly, then back to the book.)* Oh, a prop. Very effective for looking distracted.

*Enter A, carrying a blanket. L sits on the trunk, continuing to read. Enter M, N, and O carrying staffs.*

**A:** A blanket.

*There is a pause. I, J, and K regard A.*

**K:** A blanket?

**I/J:** Why a blanket?

**A:** *(Considers and shrugs.)* Because I found one back stage.

*A tosses the blanket on the table. M, N, and O move downstage. As they speak, each adopts a pose to go with his/her line.*

**M/N/O:** A stick.

**O:** A wizard's staff.

*Enter B, who holds and observes up stage.*

**M:** A shepherd's crook.

**N:** An old man's prop.

**O:** A quarterstaff!

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*O and M square off with the staffs, trading and parrying two blows. N stops them, thrusting a staff between.*

**N:** Guardsmen's spears.

*B steps forward, swaggering like an officer.*

**B:** Ten-hut!

*M, N, and O snap to attention, shouldering their spears.*

**B:** Forward-two-three-four.

*M, N and O step forward four paces and halt. L stands.*

**L:** *(Reads.)* Spear-carrier. An actor making up the numbers...one without dialogue.

*B, M, N and O turn toward L.*

**B:** What's that?

**L:** Just something I read.

*B, M, N and O look to each other. B steps aside. The others give a rap and surround L.*

**O:** A stick.

**M:** Or rather rails.

*M, N, and O use the staffs to surround L in a triangular fence.*

**N:** Fence rails.

**B:** As in a stockade.

*L attempts to exit the stockade but is held in. Hastily consults the book.*

**L:** Mob scene: A confused scene in which a lot of actors participate.

**C, D, E, F, G** and **H** enter from several directions, joined by **A, I, J** and **K** in shouting and grumbling as they surround **B, L, M, N** and **O** in a knot of noisy turmoil. The staffs clatter to the ground. **L** uses the confusion to escape downstage, book in hand, looking briefly pleased, then reabsorbed in the text. As **L** sits down on the trunk, the hubbub settles down. The **B, M, N,** and **O** faction are generally intimidated into standing down. **E** leaves the mob, moving down-left. **L** turns to the audience and reads.

**L:** Narrator: An actor whose roll is that of commentator on the dramatic production.

**E:** (As NARRATOR.) It fizzled just at a point that left you at a loss for what to call it. "Near-riot"? An "almost mob-scene"? It lacked the critical energy to turn into something really ugly. There had been just enough mixing and shouting so that everyone forgot how it started, and just enough menace that no one questioned why it ended as soon as it did.

*The COMPANY fragments into clumps of twos and threes, some in high spirits, some confused, some still holding a grudge. They begin a long, slow exit.*

**E:** Some had been sent into a celebratory state of mind.

**A:** Come on! I'm buying!

**E:** Some were ashamed of what they'd almost done, and to deflect that shame, moralized to anyone who would listen.

**J:** This is what happens when you hang around with the wrong crowd.

**E:** Some were as confused as they'd been from the start.

**G:** Does anyone have a clue why this began?

**E:** And some had no intention of letting the bad feeling drift away?

**N:** (Shouting.) If I catch you alone, you're finished!

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*Exit all except L, who reads, C who tries to read over L's shoulder, and E, who moves upstage slowly, picking up the staffs. F and M return, observing, far up.*

**E:** It was all very youthful and energetic, our impersonation of the Montagues and Capulets. No one remembered how it had started way back when, and no one knew who sparked the tinder this very day. We laughed about it and our elders smirked at us. But then, what could we do but laugh and smirk? No one wanted to imagine what might have happened. And certainly, no one would have wanted to recognize that this harmless conflagration had opened the door to the evil that was about to overtake us.

*E moves far up left, and hesitates, looking back with concern, and is observed by F and M. L discovers C and points to something in the book. F and M move down stage.*

**C:** *(Reads.)* Oh...comic relief.

**L:** *(Reads.)* A comic or farcical incident introduced into a tragedy or serious drama to give the audience a respite for emotional stress.

*Exit E. F looks after.*

**F:** What was that all about?

**M:** What?

**F:** Back there? *(Nods up left.)* Bunch of sticks.

**M:** Mmm. Riot.

**F:** *(In disbelief.)* Yeah, right! That was no riot. Those were sticks.

**M:** So?

**F:** Well a riot's got a crossbar at one end with a row of teeth to snag the leaves.

**M:** *(Confused.)* What?

**F:** A riot.

**M:** You mean a rake.

**F:** *(Alarmed.)* A rake! Where!

**M:** *(Rolls eyes.)* Never mind.

**F:** *(Looking about.)* But if there is a rake, shouldn't we get out of harm's way?

*Enter D and H, right; they observe, strolling forward. M displays left hand for F.*

**M:** Look here.

*F looks at M's left hand, M cuffs F with the right hand.*

**F:** Hey!

*M rolls eyes in disgust and looks away. F conceives revenge, pointing down.*

**F:** Look there!

*M looks to the ground. F raises a hand to strike.*

**M:** Oh, money!

**F:** *(Forgetting revenge.)* What?

*M and F bend over at once, knocking heads. They recoil, rub their heads, glare at each other, then resume the search on hands and knees. D and H cross, observing them. M and F will crawl off, still searching.*

**D:** What do you suppose they're up to?

**H:** Probably looking for a third stooge.

**D:** *(In agreement.)* Mmm.

*D and H arrive at the trunk, where L and C stand to greet them. L shows the book and H and D read aloud while C steps to center.*

**H/D:** Sound cue: The cue for the commencement of a sound effect.

**C:** Jeffrey, calm yourself it's a beautiful spring day.

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**L** steps toward **C** as **C** cocks head. A cheerful birdcall sounds.

**C:** Can't you hear the birds?

**L:** I hear them Stephanie, but how can I enjoy them until I know for certain how things stand with Roger!

**C:** You mean he hasn't called?

**L:** No, and he said he would.

*Phone rings. C and L give sighs of "aaah!" L answers imaginary phone.*

**L:** Yes. (*Covers receiver, turns to Stephanie.*) It's Roger. Yes, Roger? (*Pause.*) Are you sure? (*Pause.*) Thank you. (*Hangs up phone.*)

**C:** Tell me, Jeffrey. I can't stand it any more.

**L:** It's all right, Stephanie. Roger said it was just a localized rash, and the ointment doesn't smell too bad.

**C:** Oh, I'm so glad.

*They embrace.*

**L:** Now I'm ready—ready to listen to the birds sing.

*Birdsong starts again. They laugh. D and H look to each other.*

**D:** Sound cue.

**H:** (*Clapping and rubbing hands.*) No-o problem.

*H invades the center stage, causing C and L to return to the trunk.*

**H:** (*Looking back to the others.*) Are you sure this is the right house? (*Pauses for a reply, but gets none.*) Well, I'll just ring the doorbell and make sure. (*Rings imaginary doorbell, but there is no sound.*) I said I'll just ring the DOORBELL... (*Repeats the imaginary ring, still no sound.*) On second thought, maybe I'll just knock.

**H** gives three imaginary raps. On the third rap, a door buzzer sounds.

**H:** I said I'll just knock!

The buzzer sounds again, louder. Causing **C**, **D** and **L** to cover their ears.

**D:** (Annoyed, shouting.) Oh! COME IN!

The buzzer cuts out as the rest of the company floods the stage. Mixing and greeting each other cheerfully, as if arriving for a meeting. **H**, frustrated at the imaginary door, gives a moan of frustration before being swallowed up by the crowd. **C** and **L** join the crowd, while **A** and **O** take on the rolls of hosts, showing people to seats on the floor. The COMPANY assembles as an audience, facing up stage, except for **D**, who comes far down center with the book, and reads.

**D:** Prologue: The speech or scene preceding the first act of a dramatic work.

Two COMPANY members stand as a pair of PROLOGUES, and with dignity move—one to the seat, the other to the trunk. They step up on the seat stands Troilus and Cressida, on the trunk, Henry V. **D** moves to take a seat, but hesitates and speaks in a confiding whisper.

**D:** Alternately, Prologue is the name of the character delivering the prologue.

The two PROLOGUES speak their opening lines at the same instant, causing the COMPANY to swivel its attention.

**TROI:** In Troy there lies the scene—

**HENRY:** O for a Muse of fire!

*The PROLOGUES halt. After a brief pause, HENRY gives way to TROI with a polite nod and slight bow. The COMPANY turns to face TROI.*

**TROI:**

In Troy, there lies the scene. From isles of Greece  
The prince orgulous, their high blood chafed,  
Have to the port of Athens sent their ships,  
Fraught with the ministers and instruments  
Of cruel war: sixty and nine, that wore  
Their crownets regal, from the Athenian bay  
Put forth toward Phrygia; and their vow is made  
To ransack Troy, with whose strong immures  
The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,  
With wanton Paris sleeps; and that's the quarrel.  
And hither am I come, a prologue arm'd,  
To tell you, fair beholders, that our play  
Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,  
Beginning in the middle, starting thence away  
To what may be digested in a play;  
Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are:  
Now good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war.

*As TROI finishes, the COMPANY erupts into applause and cheers. Some turn down stage to encourage the audience to join in. As the applause subsides, TROI accepts a nod of respect from HENRY and in return offers a sweeping wave in the other's direction. The COMPANY turns, settling to attend the second speech.*

**HENRY:**

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend  
The brightest heaven of invention,  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!  
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,  
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire

Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that have dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object: can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
'Tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here or there; jumping o'er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history;  
Who, prologue-like your humble patience pray,  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

*The COMPANY erupts into applause as before, this time jumping to its feet and congratulating the two PROLOGUES, who step down and move together to congratulate each other. Downstage, ostensibly to move into the crowd and join the congratulations, D hands the book over to N, who becomes absorbed as D disappears into the crowd. The COMPANY drifts upstage in twos and threes, as do the PROLOGUES, who talk shop as they exit. B and G remain on stage with N as the COMPANY exits severally. B and G develop an interest in the trunk, and open it as N reads.*

**N:** Prop: Short for property.

*B and G pull out some props, including a clipboard and a rubber chicken. B pulls out a seltzer bottle and turns upstage to examine it.*

**N:** Any object used on stage except scenery, lights or costumes.

**N** observes the others, steps to their side, and—fascinated by the rubber chicken—trades the book to **G** for the prop. **G** at first resists, until **N** points out a passage in the book. **G** lets go of the chicken and reads. **N** gives the chicken a few trial swings, as if it were a club. Enter PERSONS 1, 2, and 3. They form a line, facing stage left, standing with resigned impatience, waiting to be served.

**G**: Prop gag: A comic effect depending on property.

With a mischievous grin, **N** raises the chicken like a club and taps **B** on the shoulder. **B** turns with the seltzer bottle ready. The two take a step back from each other, expressing “you don’t bother me, I won’t bother you.” **G** rolls eyes and takes the props away, leaving **B** with the clip board. **G** hands the book to **N** and deposits the other props in the trunk, closing it. **N** hands the book to **B** and takes the clip board. Exit **G**. Enter RECEPTIONIST and ANYWAY, right. **N** hands RECEPTIONIST the clipboard and exits. **B** reads.

**B**: Farce: A broadly humorous composition, or part of one, which is based on improbable situations.

**B** sits on the trunk to observe the scene. RECEPTIONIST and ANYWAY cross slowly.

**RECEPTIONIST**: Right this way mister...uh, mister...

As RECEPTIONIST checks the clipboard, PERSON 1 leaves the back of the line to look at a notice on an imaginary wall.

**ANYWAY**: Anyway.

**RECEPTIONIST**: Pardon? Mister...

**ANYWAY**: Anyway, Mr. Lucius Anyway.

**RECEPTIONIST**: (Checking the board.) Yes, here it is, Lucius Anyway. What an interesting name.

**ANYWAY**: Yes, it was my grandfather’s.

**RECEPTIONIST**: Anyway?

**ANYWAY**: Lucius.

**RECEPTIONIST:** Lucius Anyway.

**ANYWAY:** No, Lucius Smith. Lucius Anyway is my name.

**RECEPTIONIST:** (*Slightly rattled.*) I see.

**ANYWAY:** My father's name, too, of course.

**RECEPTIONIST:** Lucius?

**ANYWAY:** No, Anyway. Frank Anyway. I'm Lucius.

**RECEPTIONIST:** (*Thinks better of pursuing further.*) Of course.  
Right this way, Mr. Anyway.

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