

Handout #1: Stage Directions

A. THREE DIRECTIONS FOR OPHELIA'S ENTRANCE, *HAMLET* 4.5

"Enter Ofelia playing on a Lute, and her haire downe singing."
Hamlet Quarto 1, 1603

"Enter Ophelia, distracted."
First Folio, 1623

"The lowered mirrored door to OPHELIA'S 'cell' is opened and she now lies on the floor. She pushes her squashed face along the floor, unable to get up, still in the straitjacket"
Screenplay—Kenneth Branagh *Hamlet*, 1996

B. STAGE DIRECTIONS

A stage is divided into two major playing areas or directions—upstage and downstage. Away from the audience is considered upstage (U); towards the audience is downstage (D).

The stage is further divided up into Left (L), Center (C), and Right (R), with the directions corresponding to the actor standing on stage's point of view. The stage can therefore be divided up into fifteen playing areas:

Up Right (UR)	Up Right Center (URC)	Up Center (UC)	Up Left Center (ULC)	Up Left (UL)
Right (R)	Right Center (RC)	Center (C)	Left Center (LC)	Left (L)
Down Right (DR)	Down Right Center (DRC)	Down Center (DC)	Down Left Center (DLC)	Down Left (DL)

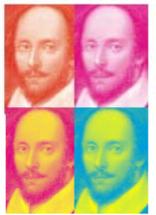
* * * * * AUDIENCE * * * * *

Directors use the shorthand listed on the chart to indicate where actors move on stage; deciding and recording where an actor moves on stage is called *blocking*. For example, if a director wanted an actor to *enter* up right and walk or *cross* down left center, the shorthand symbols for the stage directions would look like: *Enter UR X DL*.

Translate the following stage directions:

Enter L X URC X DL
X C X ULC X UR X DC
Enter DR X UL Exit L
Enter UL X DLC X UC X DR Exit

Get up and move around! Volunteer to move about in the playing area while other students call out these stage directions. Or make up your own!



Handout #2: Promptbooks

The seven pages that appear in this lesson come from a special type of book. A *memorial promptbook* celebrates and records a production after it is over and includes blocking, detailed notes, drawings of costumes or scenery, and/or photographs of the production.

This memorial promptbook was made by the actor Lark Taylor, circa 1911, and records the Sothorn/Marlowe production of *Hamlet* that was directed by Charles Frohman and toured the United States and England during 1901 to 1911. Taylor played Polonius, Guildenstern, and Claudius at different times during the ten years of the tour. The promptbook, stamped “King Claudius Prompt Book” on the spine, includes, in Taylor’s words, “Sevral [sic] amusing anecdotes of an intimate nature not possible to obtain from any other source.” The famous Shakespearean actor E. H. Sothorn played Hamlet; another famous actor Julia Marlowe played Ophelia for much of the tour.

Ophelia’s mad scenes occur in the first scene of Act Four in E. H. Sothorn’s acting edition, which was the text for the Sothorn/Marlowe tour of *Hamlet*. Lark Taylor’s handwriting is often difficult to read, particularly when you try to read the image on a computer screen rather than in the original promptbook. Transcriptions of some of the longer notes and their location in the text are offered below. These notes are transcribed with the spelling and punctuation that appeared in the original. Question marks indicate an educated guess as to the word and spelling when the handwriting proves too difficult to decipher.

Ophelia is dressed in long white robe—Marlowe wore a stone raw [?] crepe-de-chine—which took off the glare of white. with some weeds—wild-flowers and leaves in her hair.—which hung in disarry [sic] about her shoulders.—
(opposite page 97)

Ophelia gives piercing scream off R.—Rushes on to Center. as tho [sic] terrified—stands looking at Laertes—vacantly—smiling.—she has her dress gathered up—and filled with flowers—and weeds—
(opposite page 101)

Oph. walks slowly down C. as she sings.—
(top, page 102)

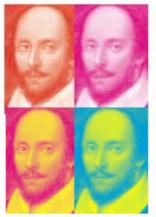
She takes any flower from dress—and offers them to imaginary persons.—letting them fall to floor—
(bottom, page 102)

When she gets to C. arch—she looks wildly about.—gives wild shriek—which goes in to insane laughter—she rushes out L. upper. laughing wildly.—

+—King motions Queen to follow after Ophelia—Laertes has buried face in hands in grief.—King approaches him after Queen’s exit.
(opposite page 103)

One final note—although this doesn’t indicate much about blocking in the scene, Lark Taylor includes an amusing anecdote about the scene in production:

During this scene one night in Brooklyn—when playing King Claudius—I was taken violently ill with nausea - - I had to leave the stage twice while the scene was in progress—and come back—I faked it—as



tho [sic] I was going out to look for an expected attendant—and I am quite certain the audience never knew the difference.—

E.H. was quite alarmed—and had me come into his room and dosed me with medicine. He has remedies for all ills.—

*Virginia Hammond [?] was playing Ophelia—and it happened that Julia Marlowe was in the audience at this performance—and she didn't notice anything wrong with me—or the scene—and said she thot [sic] I gave a very good performance of Claudius.
(opposite page 99)*

Further activities:

1. Investigate the careers and influence of both E. H. Sothorn (1859-1933) and Julia Marlowe (1866-1950).
2. Ask your school drama teacher, or local community or professional theater company if you can look at some of their promptbooks and note the difference between a working promptbook and a memorial one.
3. After you have spent some time with promptbooks, look at screenplays to discover how a whole different vocabulary of terms describing film production and actors' movements needs to be recorded in a film script.
4. Direct a scene and create your own promptbook.

References:

Branagh, Kenneth. Screenplay. *Hamlet: By William Shakespeare*. New York: Norton, 1996.

The First Folio of Shakespeare, 1623.

Hamlet: A Tragedy. The E. H. Sothorn acting version. New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903. A Memorial Promptbook with notes by Lark Taylor, ca. 1911.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, 1603.

Films:

Branagh, Kenneth, dir. *Hamlet*. Columbia Tristar, 1996.

Olivier, Laurence, dir. *Hamlet*. Samuel Goldwyn, 1948.

Zefirelli, Franco, dir. *Hamlet*. Warner, 1990.