



Death of Kings is supported in part by the Alice L. Walton Foundation, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and Cardinal Counseling. Mental health support provided in collaboration with Dr. Jason Williams at Arkansas Children's Hospital and Cardinal Counseling.

Children's Theatre and Performing Arts programs are supported in part by the Shubert Foundation and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.

Educator Resources

About the Show

Death of Kings traces the journey of an American soldier, from enlistment and deployment to reintegration into society. Written by a military veteran from Arkansas, this poignant piece explores the profound effects of war, trauma, and mental health, emphasizing how the art of storytelling can serve as a transformative tool for healing and resilience, both for soldiers and civilians. By weaving in moments and rhythms of Shakespearean text and drawing from advancements in neuroscience and drama therapy, he reveals a path to recovery and the true cost of freedom.

Following the performance, an interactive post-show discussion will offer a deeper exploration of techniques designed for healing and coping with trauma. Through guided breathwork to regulate the nervous system and group recitation of iambic pentameter verse, participants will experience the healing nature of Shakespeare's heartbeat rhythm and vivid imagery. These practices—grounded in both theatre and trauma-informed care—have been clinically shown to increase self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional regulation. This will be coupled with a

brief talkback with individuals from the worlds of art and healing, allowing audience members a rich and thought-provoking experience.

"This piece is not just about war—it's about what happens when we don't create space for healing. It's about what we carry, what we bury, and what we lift up." – Ben Grimes

Running Time: 55 minutes + 20-minute panel discussion

Recommended Age: 12 and up

Before the Show

iambic pentameter, the rhythm that Shakespeare uses in his plays, is like a heartbeat, with one soft beat and one strong beat repeated five times.

Listen

- That Shakespeare Life Podcast [Ep 82: Shane Ann Younts on iambic Pentameter - Cassidy Cash](#)

Watch

- [What is iambic Pentameter? | Text Detectives | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)
- Kenneth Branagh demonstrates iambic pentameter through tap-dancing in **LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST**. [iambic tap dancer Cheek to Cheek](#)
- [Act 3, Scene 1 | Henry V | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)

Read

The following excerpts from Shakespeare plays are integral parts of both the development and performance of **DEATH OF KINGS** by Ben Grimes.

- **RICHARD II**, Act 3, scene 2: Death of Kings Monologue
- **HENRY V**, Act 4, scene 3: Saint Crispian's Day speech
- **HENRY V**, Act 3, scene 1: The Breach monologue

Theatre Etiquette

Theatre Standard K-8: RE.7.2 Students will exhibit appropriate audience behavior

Discuss appropriate audience behavior and why it's important.

- **Arrive early** - Arriving 30 minutes early allows time to make a final trip to the restroom and locate your seats.

- **Turn off electronics** - Lights and sounds from phones and other electronic devices are distracting to other patrons as well as the performers. Photography is not allowed during the performance.
- **Be aisle kind** - tuck your belongings under our seat to remove tripping hazards while seated and be sure to take all your belongings with you when you leave. Throw away any rubbish on your way out.
- **Play your part** - Watch and listen; laugh at funny bits; applaud at the spectacular. Be present and in the moment with the performers.

After the Show

Exploring Shakespeare Through Creative Writing

English Language Arts Standard 6-10: V.5 Determine how word/phrase choice contributes to the meaning, style and/or tone of the text.

English Language Arts Standard 11-12: V.6 Examine how word choice impacts the overall meaning, style, tone, or literary merit of a text, including how words affect the reader and/or audience.

Materials

- A printed copy of the selected Shakespearean monologue or sonnet
- Two or three different colored highlighters
- A pen
- A blank sheet of paper

Instructions

1. Begin by reading the monologue slowly two to three times. As you read, imagine the character's voice speaking the words. Pay attention to rhythm, pauses, and emphasis—as though you are preparing to perform the piece.
2. Next, use your highlighters to mark any words that feel especially impactful. These might be words that are unusual, beautiful, emotionally powerful, or that spark a particular feeling or image in your mind.
3. With your pen, **circle** any action-oriented words—verbs or phrases that convey movement or energy.

SHAKESPEARE ACTIVITY

Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

In this sonnet, the speaker compares his love to a summer's day and claims his lovers charms will live eternally.

By William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a **summer's day**?

Thou art more **lovely** and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the **(darling buds)** of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Sometime too **hot** the eye of **heaven** shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every **(fair)** from fair sometime declines,

By chance or **nature's** changing course untrimm'd;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;

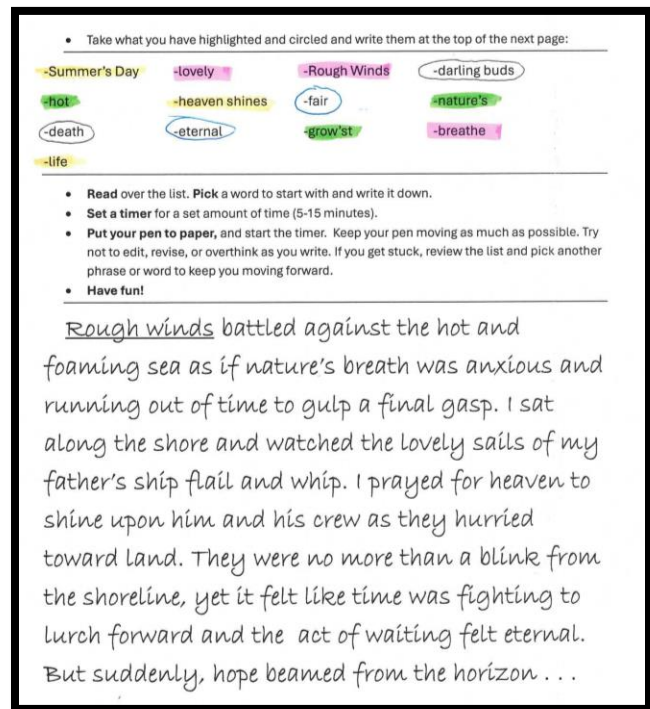
Nor shall **(death)** brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in **eternal** lines to time thou **grow'st**.

So long as men can **breathe** or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives **life** to thee.

4. On a separate sheet of paper, write out all the words you highlighted or circled at the top of the page.
5. Use these words as inspiration to write your own monologue, poem, or short piece of creative writing. You can write from a perspective similar to the original character or invent an entirely new character and voice. Let the language guide your imagination.
6. When you've finished, take a moment to reflect:
 - How did the original text inspire your own writing?
 - In what ways does art give rise to new art?



Just as the playwright of **DEATH OF KINGS** was inspired by Shakespeare, consider how poetry, drama, or storytelling can be adapted into new forms of artistic expression. There are no wrong answers—only your unique creative voice.

Art and Wellness

Expressive Writing

Write about a recent experience that evoked a strong emotional response. During your writing, explore your emotions and thoughts about this life experience. As you write about this topic, you might tie it to your relationships with others. You may relate it to your past, present, or future, or you may connect it with who you may have been, who you would like to be, or who you are now.

- **IMPORTANT:** Write only for yourself. You are writing for yourself and no one else; this writing can be for your eyes only or even disposed of after the activity.
- Write about it continuously for 2 minutes. Once you begin writing, write continuously without stopping. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. If you run out of things to say, simply repeat what you have already written. Keep writing about the topic until the time is up.
- Repeat this activity the next day, writing about the same experience, but from a different perspective.
- **WHAT TO AVOID:** If you feel that you cannot write about a particular event because it would be too upsetting, then don't write about it. Just write about events or situations that you can handle now.

Make an art journal

Instead of writing, use a different type of journaling — your artwork — to tell a story and represent your emotions as events, both positive and negative, take place in your life. The purpose of this exercise is to help deal with your emotions.

Make short-lived art

Using sand, chalk, paper, or water, you can create a piece of art that can easily be destroyed after you've created it. Letting go is not easy; this activity will help you accept that some things are temporary and learn to release those things.

Paint blowing

After adding paint to paper with lots of water, use a thin tube or straw to blow toward the painting to create various color spots and mix the colors. This exercise benefits coordination and helps alleviate stress.

Meet the Playwright



Ben Grimes is a multifaceted theatre artist, administrator, and educator. He earned his BFA in Acting from The Conservatory of Theatre Arts at Webster University and began his career as a professional actor, performing in regional theatre productions across the country and New York City. After more than a decade on stage, feeling disconnected and lost, Ben made the life-altering decision to join the U.S. Army in 2006. He served as an Airborne Infantryman in the 82nd Airborne Division, deploying to Baghdad, Iraq in 2006 and again in 2017.

Following his final deployment, Ben turned to theatre as a means of healing from combat stress. He discovered a deeper connection to his craft and found that working in an ensemble helped alleviate feelings of isolation and depression. These realizations led him to pursue a master's in public service from the Clinton School of Public Service, where his research explored theatre as a vehicle for social impact.

Inspired by his studies, Ben founded Riverside Actors Theatre, a company dedicated to using theatre and storytelling to address trauma and the challenges faced by veterans and other at-risk populations. He has held artistic and administrative leadership roles in theatre companies in Chicago, New York, and Little Rock, earning recognition as both a director and actor from Broadway World and the Arkansas Times. A sought-after teacher and facilitator, Ben is committed to fostering creative communities that empower and uplift. In 2023, Ben was honored as an inaugural Catalyze Fellowship awardee by the Mid-America Arts Alliance and Windgate Foundation. Ben is currently the Managing Artistic Director of Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky.

[Interview with Playwright - Ben Grimes](#)

[Coping Techniques with Ben Grimes](#)

Additional Reading

THE BODY KEEPS SCORE by Bessel van der Kolk

YOUR BRAIN ON ART: HOW THE ARTS TRANSFORM US by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross

Additional Resources

[Shakespeare Learning Zone | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)

[DE-CRUIT: Using Theatre to Treat the Effects of Trauma: Integrating Shakespeare and Science in Healing-Centered Practice \(Collection\) - Trauma Research Foundation](#)

[Arkansas Crisis Center](#) Call, text or chat with 988 to speak with a crisis specialist

Script Library

The Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts has written and produced original, high-quality Children's Theatre productions for over 40 years. If you are looking to produce a new play for a school, group, or theater, AMFA licenses scripts from a selection of original and adapted plays in our archive.

Check us out at this link! [Script Library | Performing Arts | AMFA](#)