

## 17. LEARNING WORD FOR WORD

"To know a poem by heart is to own a great work of art forever" So said Michael Gove when he was Secretary of State for Education and I have always loved being able to recall favourite poems and pieces of text throughout my life. This was the original reason I had for developing a technique of learning word for word, rather than the old way of just repeating the piece until it was familiar. Even then I found that over time I had forgotten much that I had previously painstakingly committed to memory.

Now I know that it was because I had not retained in my memory any specific clues, so yes, along with most of the population I knew "To be or not to be, that is the question?" just as most of us know "The Battle of Hastings 1066" but after that, very little.

Once I had started to learn about mnemonics I was able to solve the latter problem and learn and remember much more about the Battle of Hastings, when artists were born and died, the periodic table and anything else that took my fancy, but nothing out there could tell me about how to learn word for word which was necessary for poetry, and famous speeches. So I developed my own technique which I then went on to teach actors and for anyone wishing to learn speeches or poetry for pleasure.

I will only cover the first stage here – how to memorize what I call, the scaffolding of a speech – and I will cover how to fill in the extra words in the next podcast. I will also add illustrations in my transcript of the appropriate mind map.

This is a speech by Titania from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by William Shakespeare.

I chose it because so many people think of Shakespeare as 'hard' but it demonstrates how beautifully he constructs his text and you will see how you can build the skeleton or scaffolding of a speech using numbering with no effort at all. It is like a jigsaw puzzle, once you have the corners and the sides done and you have sorted out the main colours, it is so much easier to concentrate on the remaining difficult bits.

In a speech, number the thoughts of the character not the lines because just as in a book - these are the points that are being made, one after the other, hence the value of consecutive numbering. However unsure you may be of the individual words you will not lose your way - you will always know roughly what comes next. Also use this numerical progression as focal points in your chosen journey.

Titania has had a magic potion put on her eyes and wakes from sleep to see Bottom, the weaver. He is unaware that he has been given a donkey's head by Puck and is unimpressed when Titania falls violently in love with him. He just wants to leave the wood, but she is equally determined that he will stay with her.

Titania. Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

Bottom. Not so, neither: but if I had wit enough to get out  
of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.

Titania. *Out of this wood do not desire to go:  
Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.  
I am a spirit of no common rate;*

*The summer still doth tend upon my state;  
And I do love thee: therefore, go with me;  
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,  
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,  
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;  
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so  
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.  
Pease blossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustard seed!*

Search for the KEY words and when you are learning a speech - never, never substitute a word of your own. Looking for the author's key word helps you dissect how he put the speech together in the first place.

*Out of this wood do not desire to go:  
Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.*

### **1 WOOD**

Her first thought is that he is not to leave the wood, the remainder of the sentence is just elaborating on that fact, he is not leaving the wood whether he wants to or not.

Visualise a wood and (if you are using the rhyming numerical technique) a sun or bun, then you could have Titania hang buns on the trees of a wood.

*I am a spirit of no common rate;  
The summer still doth tend upon my state.*

Her second thought is to describe who she is, a spirit, and how important she is, again elaborating on the fact that she is a spirit.

### **2 SPIRIT**

Visualise a shoe for 2 and have Titania pour spirit (vodka, brandy, or whisky) into it for them both to drink. The reason for using the drink for spirit is that your brain may want to substitute 'fairy', and this forces you to get the exact word.

Her third thought is the most important for her, and where Shakespeare strengthens the most important part of the plot.

*And I do love thee:*

### **3 LOVE**

She loves him. I have always found it difficult to fix on a strong image for love and have finally settled a nice solid picture of a heart-shaped box of chocolates.

Visualise a big box of chocolates in the shape of a heart hanging on a tree and have Titania give it to Bottom.

*therefore, go with me;  
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,  
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,*

*And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;*

the most complicated part of the speech, but when you dissect it, it is just about the fairies and then describes what they can do for him.

#### **4 FAIRIES**

Visualise a door (4) and a load of fairies hammering to get in - always exaggerate.

*And I will purge thy mortal grossness so  
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.*

Just like a woman - she immediately wants to change him, and this is a very funny couplet with the idea of Bottom as an airy spirit. Purge is the key word because it describes what she will do to him for him to become an 'airy spirit'. Purge means the removal of something undesirable and is used in medicine to cause a copious evacuation of the bowels. It could be a difficult word to remember as it is a verb and so use a noun that sounds like it such as a large purse which sounds like purge. 5 is HIVE, so fill the purse with honey.

#### **5 PURGE**

*Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustardseed!*

Use acronyms: a PC (personal computer) and chocolate M&Ms. Have the fairies beating the PC with a stick. If you know the play then you will probably remember the names, if not, just cover the PC with peas, blossom and cobwebs, and have a moth feeding on a mountain of M&Ms with generous dollops of mustard.

#### **6 PC, M&M**

I think you will have no trouble in remembering the construction of this speech with no sense of having 'learned' it. Look for your image for 1 and you will see a wood festooned with buns. Then a Titania pours spirit into a shoe (2) and hands a heart shaped (love) box of chocolates to Bottom which she has taken down from a tree (3). Four is door which is being hammered at by fairies who then fill a purse (purge) with honey (hive). Finally, the fairies (who are being called) beat a PC with a stick before covering it with frozen peas and blossom and cobwebs while a moth alights on a mountain of M&Ms liberally covered with mustard.

So our scaffolding or framework of the speech is

1. WOOD
2. SPIRIT
3. LOVE
4. FAIRIES
5. PURGE
6. PC M&M

Now as before, close your eyes and go through the numbers 1 to 6 with the attached images. In the next podcast we will look at how to fill in all the extra words from this speech, until then 'use it or lose it' and well done for getting this far.

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