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SHAKESPEARE RELOADED

ROBIN GARDEN

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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is non-negotiable in the study of English and Literature at secondary school. The oldness and apparent strangeness of his writing, combined with his compulsory presence in curricula, can make him a daunting proposition for teachers and students alike.

I've stood on the shoulders of giants to write this book. I've tried to cover some recent theories about the man and criticism of his work – information that I found fascinating and I believe will help demystify and broaden the study of Shakespeare in schools.

Chapters 1 and 2 aim to provide the social, political, religious and cultural contexts in which Shakespeare lived and worked. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are devoted to the different genres in which Shakespeare wrote. Chapter 7 considers some of the ways in which, and reasons why, Shakespeare is still such a dominant presence in the world today. Each chapter includes a 'Skill builder' that focuses on a different aspect of the study of English. Across the book the skill builders form the basis for a comprehensive writing folio. Each chapter also has a 'Your turn' task that aims at a freer approach to responding to the subject matter of that chapter.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I've grouped the plays according to the generic conventions of histories, comedies and tragedies. I've chosen three plays from each genre for detailed analysis. Teachers and students will soon discover that the plays frequently escape the neat definitions of the genres, which can open up some fruitful avenues for discussion. Each of the three plays in these three chapters is accompanied by an activity that is usually related to Drama. The study of Shakespeare is enriched when his plays are treated like plays to be performed, and not just books to be read.

Shakespeare is for everyone. This book is intended to reload Shakespeare into the curriculum as a vital, exciting experience and reject the notion that the study of Shakespeare is a chore to be completed. The book also aims to reload Shakespeare into the consciousness of students by giving them a variety of ways to think about him and to give them some control over how they respond to his works.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin Garden has been a secondary school teacher since 2007. He currently teaches at the Malmsbury campus of Parkville College. He has taught Drama and/or English at Bayside College, Elwood College, Princes Hill Secondary College, Fawkner Secondary College, Melbourne High School and Whittlesea Secondary College.

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RELOADED IN THIS CHAPTER

The Elizabethan Era – a Golden Age

The Renaissance

Sixteenth-century people

Politics and religion

Or a not-so-Golden Age ...

Skill builder

Your turn

Read and view more

The Elizabethan Era – a Golden Age

The 'Elizabethan Era' is named after Queen Elizabeth I. She was the queen of England from 1558 to 1603. This reign, of almost 45 years, has been called the 'Golden Age' of English history. Compared to the periods both before and after her rule, the Elizabethan Era was a stable and successful time. Unlike today's royals, Elizabeth had a direct say in how England was governed. There was an English Parliament but a great deal of real political power still rested with the crown. Elizabeth was a highly visible monarch with a genuine concern for her subjects. She used her power to keep England generally peaceful and prosperous. In the early years of her time as queen she kept careful control of how the government spent its money, rescuing England from near-bankruptcy. Although later in her reign she wasted money on costly and failed military ventures, she built up the English navy, which became an important part of the country's strength. England expanded its influence in the world. English explorers claimed territory and established colonies in strange and distant parts of the globe. England's economy grew stronger and the country grew wealthier. The Church of England, England's own church, became established as the official national religion. English artistry and creativity in music, poetry, literature and theatre became increasingly important to the English identity. This surge of cultural activity reflected what had been occurring elsewhere in Europe since the fourteenth century – the Renaissance.

Queen Elizabeth I

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The Renaissance

The French word 'renaissance' literally means 'rebirth'. It refers to a period in European history from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries when there was renewed interest in the art and literature of ancient Greece and ancient Rome. To understand these texts, Renaissance Europeans revived the study of the ancient Greek language and Latin, the language of ancient Rome. The Renaissance began in Italy but did not reach England until over 100 years later. England already had a culture of drama and poetry that was helped by the invention of the printing press. William Shakespeare's own education was strongly shaped by the Renaissance's fascination with Latin grammar, logic and **rhetoric**. As a schoolboy, he studied the work of ancient Roman poets like Virgil, Ovid and Seneca, as well as the drama of playwrights Terence and Plautus. These Roman dramatic and poetic traditions influenced Shakespeare's imagination and writing.

rhetoric
the study of using persuasive speaking or writing to argue a point of view

Renaissance humanism

Renaissance humanism was a cultural movement that tried to change education from being narrowly focused on training doctors, lawyers and priests with the professional knowledge and skills they required. Instead, it sought to broaden education to include studies in rhetoric, history, poetry and philosophy. This education included the study of ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Renaissance humanists approached the world with an open mind, thought freely and expressed themselves strongly. A Renaissance humanist was a well-rounded individual with a commitment to learning and a deep love for the world and humanity.

Education

There was a rapid increase in the number of schools built in England in the sixteenth century. By 1600 there were enough schools to educate 10 per cent of English children. Boys and girls attended 'petty' school together from the ages of four to seven. Formal education was generally unavailable to girls after petty school. Boys could then go on to attend grammar school. Students learned Latin, studied texts from ancient Greece and ancient Rome, and received

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religious instruction in the basis of Christianity. Schools were the means by which values such as duty to God, the queen or the king, and the nobility were transferred to boys and young men. Education was a status symbol. The higher your level of education, the more important your position in society. The prestigious universities at Cambridge and Oxford also expanded and accepted more students during the English Renaissance.

Education was no longer confined to priests and the very highest ranks of nobility. Minor aristocrats, members of Parliament and wealthy merchants became more influential because of the knowledge and skills they acquired through education. Increased literacy made it easier to exchange ideas and find other people with similar values – and to identify potential opponents. Groups of people with shared social, religious and economic goals and interests began to form. We might think of these groups now as political parties. Education strengthened competing political and religious ideologies, which had benefits for the development of English democratic society in Elizabethan times, but would also lead to deep divisions and civil war in the seventeenth century.

Sixteenth-century people

There are a couple of different ways we can look at Elizabethan society. The first is that Elizabethan England was on the rise. An energetic and resourceful people were confidently laying the foundations for what would become the greatest empire the world had ever seen. They were inspired and reassured by a fixed system of beliefs. Although strange to us, these complex beliefs helped English people understand human psychology and the natural world around them.

The elements

From ancient times people believed that everything in the universe was made up of four elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

The 12 signs of the zodiac were divided into four groups based on the elements:

- Earth signs: Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn
- Air signs: Gemini, Libra and Aquarius
- Fire signs: Aries, Leo and Sagittarius
- Water signs: Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces

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Elizabethan understanding of human psychology was based on the ancient theories about the balance of four fluids present in the human body; what they called the four humours: Yellow bile, Blood, Black bile and Phlegm.

The presence of these humours in different proportions in every person created four temperaments, or personalities:

- Yellow bile – Choleric
- Blood – Sanguine
- Black bile – Melancholic
- Phlegm – Phlegmatic

The four temperaments were characterised by four conditions: Hot, Dry, Cold and Moist.

In different combinations, these conditions produced the characteristics of the temperaments in people:

- Hot and dry = Choleric (bad tempered, ambitious and bossy)
- Hot and moist = Sanguine (happy, optimistic and friendly)
- Cold and dry = Melancholic (analytical, quiet and sensitive)
- Cold and moist = Phlegmatic (thoughtful, calm and relaxed)

The four humours relate to the four temperaments, four elements, four conditions and the zodiac.

These temperaments were related to four planets (well, three planets plus the Moon):

- Mars – Choleric
- Jupiter – Sanguine
- Saturn – Melancholic
- The Moon – Phlegmatic

The four seasons were also said to be influential over human behaviour and each one aligned with one of the four temperaments:

- Summer – Choleric
- Autumn – Melancholic
- Winter – Phlegmatic
- Spring – Sanguine

A contemporary of Shakespeare, the great poet and playwright Christopher Marlowe, wrote in his play *Tamburlaine the Great*:

> 'Nature that framed us of four elements
> Warring within our breasts for regiment'

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QUESTIONS 1.1

This worldview that connects people's personalities to the planets, the 'humours', the seasons and so on may seem strange now, but it held sway for a long time. Try to get inside the minds of sixteenth-century people and see if you can think like they did.

1. Choose a few main characters from a Shakespeare play you have read or seen performed or are studying at the moment. How would you describe their personalities in terms of the four humours, the seasons, etc.? Perhaps first list the characters' main personality traits and then fill out a table like the one below.

CHARACTER	ELEMENT	HUMOUR	TEMPERAMENT	CONDITION	PLANET	SEASON
Macbeth						
Banquo						
Lady Macbeth						
Macduff						

2. The way we think about ourselves and our connection to the universe varies across time and across cultures, and we may not be as different from the people in Shakespeare's time as we might think. Research a contemporary belief system that classifies people's personalities; for example, astrology or the Jungian personality types. How do they compare to the four humours?

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The Great Chain of Being

This was a concept that everything in the universe had a place in a planned order – a hierarchy – devised by God. The hierarchy was perfect, so it would never change. Every object, living and inanimate, is made up of a combination of spirit and matter. The more matter something contains, the less spirit it has and so its position in the chain is lower. The more spirit something possesses, the higher up the order it belongs.

Rocks, metals, stones and the elements – all these inanimate things occupy the lowest ranks in the chain. Above them are plants, then animals, then humans, then angels, and finally God at the top of the chain.

Within these classes of objects, there are gradations. Gold is ranked higher than lead because it contains more spirit. The rose is considered the most beautiful, and therefore it is the highest form of flower. Of all trees, the oak contains the most spirit. In *The Tempest*, Prospero reminds the air spirit Ariel that he rescued him from twelve years' imprisonment in a pine tree.

> 'It was mine art,
> When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
> The pine, and let thee out.'
> *The Tempest, Act 1, Scene 2, lines 291–293*

Prospero threatens to trap Ariel in an oak tree, a stronger tree than the pine.

> 'If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
> And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
> Thou hast howled away twelve winters.'
> *The Tempest, Act 1, Scene 2, lines 294–296*

Creatures like some shellfish share the characteristic of immobility with plants, so their position in the chain is similar to trees. But simple organisms like worms are considered to have more spirit than plants.

You've probably heard of the lion described as 'the king of the beasts'. The Great Chain of Being reflects this idea – the lion is the topmost animal in the chain. As Olivia says in *Twelfth Night*:

> 'If one should be a prey, how much better
> To fall before the lion than the wolf!'
> *Twelfth Night, Act 3, Scene 1, lines 113–114*

Olivia would rather be killed by a lion, the most noble of the animals, than the less spiritual wolf.

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But as impressive as the lion is, human beings are better. As Hamlet says:

> 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!'
> *Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 286–289*

Humans can be subdivided into a hierarchy in the chain. Common people are the lowest form of human life, with nobles, princes and the bishops of the Church above them. So long as people accepted their place in the chain, they were assured of ascending to Heaven after death.

Kings form the highest link for mortal humans in the chain. In England this includes superiority over the Church, since the monarch is also the head of the Church of England. A king is a king because God wills it. This belief is known as the Divine Right of Kings. A king has the honour of being chosen by God. Kings and queens don't have to justify themselves to any of their subjects. Monarchs are answerable only to God. The murder of a king or a queen is a great sin against God and the worst kind of disruption to the Great Chain of Being a human could commit. The damage to the natural order is extreme, as described in this conversation that takes place after the murder of King Duncan in *Macbeth*.

> ROSS
> Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
> Threatens his bloody stage. By th'clock 'tis day
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
> Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb
> When living light should kiss it?
>
> OLD MAN
> 'Tis unnatural,
> Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
> A falcon tow'ring in her pride of place
> Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.
>
> ROSS
> And Duncan's horses, a thing most strange and certain,
> Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
> Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
> Contending 'gainst obedience as they would
> Make war with mankind.

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OLD MAN
'Tis said, that they ate each other.

ROSS
They did so, to th'amazement of mine eyes
That looked upon't.
Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 4, lines 6–23

QUESTIONS 1.2

1. List the unnatural phenomena that occurred after Macbeth murdered Duncan that are described in this conversation.
2. Explain the significance of each of these phenomena. What is unnatural about them?
3. How effectively has Shakespeare conveyed the imagery of these unnatural events?

The Divine Right of Kings suited monarchs because it helped ensure people would respect their authority. England became strengthened under a national monarchy and an effective system of government during the Renaissance. But despite the idealism of the Great Chain of Being, where everything and everyone in their proper places ensured a universe in harmony, the reality was that Elizabeth I and her successor James I faced conspiracies, assassination attempts, civil wars and uncertainties over who would succeed them. These were real concerns in Shakespeare's time, and he included these themes in his plays. His writing reflected political realities. He imagined what was possible beyond the limits of the Great Chain of Being. He explored ideas of how rulers ruled their people and what the experience of being ruled was like for the people.

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Rota Fortunae – the Wheel of Fortune

No, not the game show! The Wheel of Fortune is an idea that has its origins in ancient times. 'Fortune' is a variation of the name 'Fortuna', who was the Roman goddess of luck. She was believed to possess a large wheel that was divided into four stages, representing improving or worsening luck. People imagined that each individual had a place on this wheel. As your position on the wheel moved towards the top, your luck improved. If you were at the top, your luck was as good as it was going to get. As the wheel turned, as it inevitably must, you began to move towards the bottom of the wheel, and your luck would worsen. Once you had got as low as you could go, the wheel would start you back on the journey to good luck. Everyone's luck was determined by Fortune turning her wheel. In ancient and mediaeval times, the apparent randomness of life's events – good and bad – could be attributed to luck and chance. Luck and chance were considered powerful forces by people whose understanding of the physical world was limited.

An elaborate Wheel of Fortune allegory. Fortune's wheel is turned by Time, while Death takes the figure at the bottom of the wheel. A selection of society's ranks, including the pope and other religious figures as well as nobles and others, lies fallen beneath the wheel.

Fortune was sometimes depicted as having two faces – one smiling and the other frowning – to indicate that the luck she brought could be good or bad. She was sometimes depicted wearing a blindfold, symbolising her unpredictability. She was also imagined by some to be standing on a spherical stone that rolled dangerously, making her constantly off balance. Shakespeare uses these images in the following dialogue from *King Henry V*:

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PISTOL
Bardolph, a soldier firm and sound of heart, and of buxom valour, hath by cruel fate and giddy Fortune's furious fickle wheel, that goddess blind, that goddess blind that stands upon the rolling restless stone –

LLEWELLYN
By your patience, Anchient Pistol, Fortune is painted plind, with a muffler afore her eyes to signify to you Fortune is plind. And she is painted also with a wheel to signify to you, which is the moral of it, that she is turning and inconstant and mutability and variation. And her foot, look you, is fixed upon a spherical stone, which rolls and rolls and rolls. In good truth, the poet makes a most excellent description of it. Fortune is an excellent moral.

PISTOL
Fortune is Bardolph's foe, and frowns on him.
King Henry V, Act 3, Scene 6, lines 22–33

Blindfolded, balancing on a ball of stone and spinning a wheel – Fortune sounds more like a circus acrobat than a goddess.

The Wheel of Fortune was a cause of pessimism and optimism at the same time. The wheel will eventually turn. You might be experiencing good fortune at any time, but that was its own promise that the good luck couldn't last forever. On the other hand, experiencing tough times could be bearable because there was hope that the wheel would eventually turn again in your favour.

Despite its pagan origins, the Wheel of Fortune was an idea that was still influential in Elizabethan England. The Catholic Church had used the image in mediaeval times to illustrate how temporary worldly riches could be and to encourage people to concentrate on living spiritually rich lives. The wheel also helped kings and princes of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance understand that, no matter how cautious or reckless they were, their power could increase or decline due to circumstances beyond their control.

Frustration at Fortune's unpredictability, though pointless, was understandable:

'Out, out thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods,
In general synod take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends.'
Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 451–455

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1

Politics and religion

In modern democracies, like Australia, there is no 'official' religion, and people are free to practise whatever religion they like, so long as it doesn't break any other laws. In mediaeval and early modern England though, it was impossible to separate religion from government.

The predominant religion in Europe was Christianity and up until the early sixteenth century Roman Catholicism was the predominant Christian faith. But by the early sixteenth century there was widespread dissatisfaction with the corruption in the Catholic Church. In 1517 a German priest Martin Luther protested against the Church and started a massive upheaval in Europe over how religion should be practised. Outraged by Church corruption, he argued that a simplified relationship between God and people would be preferable to the massive apparatus of a wealthy church with a hierarchy of priests and bishops.

At first, Martin Luther's ideas didn't catch on in England. Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, spoke out publicly against Luther. In gratitude, the Pope gave Henry the title 'Defender of the Faith' in 1521. But circumstances would soon change. Henry was married to a Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. Henry wanted a son so that he would have an heir but he and Catherine had been unable to produce one in 24 years of marriage (although their daughter Mary would later become queen). Henry wanted to marry his girlfriend Anne Boleyn (who would go on to be Elizabeth's mother), but the Catholic Church would not let him divorce Catherine. Long story short, Henry decided he needed to take charge of the Church in England so that it would grant him a divorce from Catherine. In 1532 a law was passed that limited the Pope's influence over England and appointed Henry as the head of the Church in England. Henry got his divorce, plus control of the English Church's wealth and property, and he got to marry Anne.

DID YOU KNOW?
Henry VIII is one of the most famous – or infamous – of all the English monarchs. In popular imagination, his name conjures up a morbidly obese, cruel king who married six times. The rhyme 'Divorced, beheaded, died/ Divorced, beheaded, survived!' is a way of remembering what happened to Henry's wives (Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr). On a lighter note, Henry VIII was a keen musician and it's believed he wrote the famous song 'Greensleeves'.

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Eventually Henry had a son with his third wife Jane Seymour in 1537 (Henry accused Anne of adultery and had her executed). The new prince, named Edward, never knew his mother, who died from a fever only days after giving birth to him. Henry died in 1547 and Edward, at the age of nine, became King Edward VI. Obviously a nine-year-old wasn't allowed to run the country by himself, so his uncle became Lord Protector and ruled England in his nephew's name. A powerful group of Protestant nobles in Edward's court was determined to reorganise England into a Protestant country as quickly as possible. But the young king died in 1553 at the age of just 15, probably from tuberculosis. Lady Jane Grey (a Protestant) succeeded Edward VI for a total of nine days, before Edward VI's half-sister Mary, Catherine of Aragon's daughter, raised an army and deposed Lady Jane.

Queen Mary was a Catholic and set about reasserting Catholicism as England's official religion. Protestants who did not convert to Catholicism were regarded as heretics. Heresy was a crime like treason – not believing in the same religion as the monarch was an act of defiance and disloyalty. Her five-year reign was characterised by ruthless suppression and punishment of Protestants. In a three-year period, about 300 Protestants were burned at the stake. Mary earned the nickname 'Bloody Mary' and became increasingly unpopular with her people. She died in November 1558, possibly from cancer, without having produced an heir.

This left the way clear for Elizabeth to succeed to the throne. She was 25 years old, intelligent, well educated, fluent in six languages and a Protestant. The Church of England would become secure under her reign, but she considered the differences between Protestants and Catholics in England to be minor. In 1563 the Church of England's laws were created to accommodate both Protestants and Catholics. Most English people could live with this compromise, which meant that they would not resort to fighting many religious civil wars for the rest of the sixteenth century.

So far it all sounds like smooth sailing, right? Wrong! England faced threats from Catholic powers like Spain and France. Between 1569 and 1570 a Catholic-inspired rebellion raged in northern England. When the rebellion failed, Pope Pius V declared Elizabeth a heretic, and that meant English Catholics didn't need to be loyal to her. Furthermore, the Pope decreed that anyone who killed Elizabeth would not be committing the sin of murder in the eyes of the Catholic Church. This was, in effect, declaring open season on Elizabeth, who faced down several assassination plots during her reign, including one involving her cousin Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth passed new laws that placed more restrictions on Catholics, contradicting her earlier, more tolerant, approach.

In 1588 King Philip II of Spain attempted to invade England with a fleet of 122 ships, called the Armada. The English navy fought bravely and they had luck on their side – strong winds blew the Spanish ships through the eastern end of the English Channel and into the North Sea. At this point a successful invasion

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became impossible. The Spanish had to abandon their plans and concentrate on getting back to Spain. Their only option was to return home by sailing around Scotland and Ireland, then heading south through the Atlantic Ocean. Some ships sank or ran aground on this voyage but most of the fleet made it back to homeport.

Harsher laws against English Catholics left them in a religious twilight zone. It wasn't against the law to be a Catholic layperson but there were no Catholic churches. Every church was a Protestant church. If you were a Catholic and didn't go to church because it was Protestant, you could be fined. Agreeing to pay the fine didn't mean you could then worship as a Catholic. Everyone had to attend church at least once a month and if you kept refusing to go, you kept getting fined.

Being a Catholic priest in England was, however, illegal. Catholic priests went to England from Europe to strengthen the resolve of English Catholics but they did so at great personal risk. It could also be very bad for English people discovered hiding a priest from the authorities.

QUESTIONS 1.3

Knowing what you know about Elizabeth I and her reign, take a closer look at the portrait on page 2.

1. There are two windows over Elizabeth's shoulders. What is happening in the window at the left of the painting? What is happening in the right window? What event is being depicted here and why?
2. Look at Elizabeth's right hand. Why is it resting on a globe? What is the painting trying to say about the extent of Elizabeth's power compared to previous English monarchs?
3. Elizabeth's outfit is outrageous by anyone's standards. By depicting her in this way, what is the painting saying about Elizabeth and the state of her kingdom during her reign?
4. Do you think the painting is a 'realistic' portrait? Why or why not?

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Or a not-so-Golden Age …

> 'All that glisters is not gold …'
> *The Merchant of Venice, Act 2, Scene 7, line 65*

Another way to understand the Elizabethan Era is to think of it as a time of instability, **conflict** and peril. Certainly towards the end of the sixteenth century, as the Elizabethan Era drew to its end, the shine was wearing off this supposed Golden Age. Elizabeth had spent too much money on her failed foreign wars, leaving her government in debt. Most of the 1590s were spent in an economic depression, with widespread poverty. Elizabeth had not produced an heir, meaning that the Tudor dynasty would die with her. There was great uncertainty about who would succeed to the throne after she was gone.

conflict discord of action, feeling, or effect; antagonism or opposition, as of interests or principles: a conflict of ideas

But more broadly, English men and women of the time believed that society had lost its way. During the whole of the sixteenth century, Europe had been undergoing three major revolutions – geographical, religious and cosmological. Shakespeare was born into a society in the midst of great upheaval and change. This would be true of English society for the duration of Shakespeare's entire life.

A map from the fifteenth century depicting the known world as described by the ancient Greek cartographer Ptolemy (1482, Johannes Schnitzer, engraver). England and Ireland are shown in the top left-hand corner of the map, reflecting their relative cultural and historical insignificance compared to ancient Greece and ancient Rome.

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1

Geographical revolution

'That undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller ever returns'
Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1, lines 79–80

The geographical revolution began when Renaissance Europeans discovered the 'New World' – the Americas – in 1492. Before European people could get to grips with the idea of massive continents on the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean, they had to let go of some long-held beliefs. For centuries Europeans had assumed that three continents – Europe, Africa and Asia – were the extent of landmass on the earth, forming a giant island surrounded by great oceans. This view of the world was represented by the 'T and O map'. Europe, Africa and Asia made up the 'T', which was ringed by the 'O' of the oceans. The oceans might contain a few smaller, unknown islands but it was never seriously thought that other continents existed. The city of Jerusalem was the centre of the known world. European civilisation was focused around the Mediterranean Sea. Spain and city-states like Venice were the centres of European power. England, way off on the fringe of Europe, was a backwater.

Accounts of this New World that reached Europe made the importance of this development clear. Plants like tobacco, the tomato and the potato were up until that point unknown in Europe. Animals like the buffalo and the turkey were new discoveries. Most incredible of all was that there were Native American people – human beings who could not possibly be descended from Adam and Eve (as the Europeans believed everyone in the known world was). How could the Native Americans have crossed the Atlantic before the Europeans? The existence of Native American people was therefore very difficult to explain. Politically, economically and religiously the American civilisations were totally different from Europe. North America was so unlike anything the Europeans had experienced that many of their 'Old-World' certainties no longer applied.

Today, the equivalent would be the discovery of another habitable planet in our solar system.

The existence of North America transformed England's position in the world. It was much closer to the east coast of North America than most other European powers. This gave England a competitive advantage when exploiting the new territories. The Mediterranean powers, like Spain and the city-state Venice, who inherited the glories of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, were no longer the unrivalled centres of attention that they had once been.

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Religious revolution

> 'Let not thy mother lose her prayers Hamlet.
> I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg.'
> *Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 2, lines 118–119*

Wittenberg is the town in Germany where Martin Luther protested against the Catholic Church in 1517. He nailed his written complaints – his 95 Theses against the Church's practice of selling indulgences – to a cathedral door. We get the word 'Protestant' from this act of protest. Wittenberg also happens to be the town where Hamlet and his friend Horatio attend university.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates held the belief that a person could gradually become perfect through a process of moral instruction and education. This principle is the basis for education to this day. But the underlying belief of the Church reformers like Luther was that people were so fundamentally and hopelessly flawed that achieving perfection was impossible. The best we could hope for was to become slightly less imperfect.

The Protestants also challenged the idea that one person, like the Pope, and one organisation, like the Roman Catholic Church, could be closer to God than everyone else. For the Protestants, the Bible was all that was needed for spiritual guidance. They believed that every individual should be free to understand and interpret the Bible according to their own conscience. Protestants translated the Bible from Latin into European languages during the sixteenth century so that congregations did not have to rely on priests who read Latin.

All over Europe in the sixteenth century, including England, Christian people were presented with a difficult choice. Should they stick with Catholicism or change to Protestantism? It was an important decision because they believed the salvation of their souls depended on it. If you chose poorly and it turned out the other side was right, your soul could wind up in the eternal torment of Hell. Brutal, violent conflicts erupted all over Europe during the sixteenth century between Catholics and Protestants. By the end of the century, the Catholic monopoly on religious power was gone. Christianity was split into competing churches, each one claiming to be the true faith and denying the validity of the others. Uncertainty about religion was deeply troubling to Europeans.

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Cosmological revolution

> 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'
> *Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5, lines 166–167*

In 1543 the Polish astronomer and mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus published a series of six books called *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres,* in which he argued that the sun was the centre of the solar system and that the planets, including the earth, orbited around it. Furthermore, the earth spun on its axis, giving us days and nights. At the time, most astronomers believed a 1000-year-old theory that the earth was motionless at the centre of the universe and the sun and the planets moved around it. Although this concept of a heliocentric (sun-centred) universe was not new, Copernicus's theory of the universe gradually became widespread during the sixteenth century and forever changed humanity's perception of itself at the centre of the universe. It wasn't easy for everyone to accept, and many still refused to believe it by the end of the century.

Even more confronting was the theory of the infinite universe. As important as the Copernican system was, it still envisaged a closed universe, with the solar system operating within a sphere of fixed stars. In 1584 an Italian astronomer Giordano Bruno suggested that the universe could be infinite, with all the stars being other suns at the centres of countless other solar systems similar to ours. Bruno was tried for heresy against the Catholic Church. When he refused to retract his theories, Pope Clement VIII sentenced him to be burned alive.

The possibility of an infinite universe, without a centre but going on and on and on forever, reduced the earth and all of humanity to a level of insignificance that was disturbing to many people. What were humanity's achievements worth when compared to a limitless cosmos? In a few short decades Europeans had gone from thinking they lived in a predictable universe to feeling quite lost in a universe they no longer recognised. The old certainties, of an ordered, planned, knowable system, were swept away. Large, threatening and chaotic new realities seemed likely to overwhelm European confidence about their ability to understand nature and their place in it.

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Skill builder

Creating an informative text

To successfully create a text, you must:

- understand how to use a variety of language features to create different levels of meaning
- show how the selection of language features can achieve precision and stylistic effect
- explain different viewpoints, attitudes and perspectives through the development of cohesive and logical arguments
- develop your own style by experimenting with language features, stylistic devices, text structures and images
- create texts that respond to issues, interpreting and integrating ideas from other texts
- articulate complex ideas in your text
- edit your text for effect, selecting vocabulary and grammar that contribute to its precision and persuasiveness
- use accurate spelling and punctuation when creating and editing your text.

Have you ever felt that, no matter how hard you were trying, things just weren't going your way? On the other hand, perhaps there have been times when everything seemed to be going right for you for some reason.

1. Write about a time in your life when you seem to be having either:
   a. a run of bad luck, with a succession of unfortunate events, OR
   b. a run of good luck, with a succession of fortunate events.

2. List the events in the order they happened and describe them in detail.

3. Looking back on the situation, think carefully if the events that occurred:
   a. were the results of your own free will
   b. were due to circumstances beyond your control
   c. were a combination of both.

4. Write down the reasons behind the events as best you can.

5. Draw Fortune's Wheel and indicate your position on the wheel at each fortunate or unfortunate event in the sequence you described. Remember that as your luck improves you move towards the top of the wheel. As your luck worsens, you move towards the bottom of the wheel.

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Your turn

Great Chain of Being

In the Great Chain of Being each mammal, bird, fish, plant and mineral had its own 'king' – a superior example of each category. This specimen was known as the 'primate'.

There were variations in the Great Chain of Being.

primate the principal or highest ranked person or thing in its category

1. Usually, the **primate** of all animals was the lion.
   a. Write down what you know about lions.
   b. If you don't think you know enough about lions, do some research.
   c. What do you think are the lion's characteristics that people saw and used to decide that it must be the 'king' of the beasts?

2. In an alternative chain, the primate of all animals was the elephant.
   a. Write down what you know about elephants.
   b. If you don't think you know enough about elephants, do some research.
   c. What do you think are the elephant's characteristics that people saw and used to decide that it must be the primate of all animals?

3. After making notes in response to the above questions about the chains of being, your task is to create your own Chain of Being.
   a. For each category (mammal, bird, reptile, fish, insect, plant and mineral) choose at least five examples.
   b. Nominate your primate for each category and explain why you have ranked it at the top of the category.
   c. Then rank the categories. You might have fish at the top and mammals at the base. Be prepared to justify your decisions.
   d. What is it about this Great Chain of Being that makes it uniquely yours?
   e. What does it say about you?

4. If you wish, draw a diagram or illustration of your Chain of Being.

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Read and view more

Films

Elizabeth (1998) directed by Shekhar Kapur
Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007) directed by Shekhar Kapur
The Other Boleyn Girl (2008) directed by Justin Chadwick
The Princess of Montpensier (2011) directed by Bertrand Tavernier
Luther (2004) directed by Eric Till
Christopher Columbus: The Discovery (1992) directed by John Glen

Books

The Other Boleyn Girl (2001) by Philippa Gregory
A More Perfect Heaven: How Copernicus Revolutionised the Cosmos (2011) by Dava Sobel
Luther: Echoes of the Hammer (2011) written by Susan K. Leigh, illustrated by Dave HIll

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Shakespeare on theatre

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Skill builder

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2

Theatre in Shakespeare's time

Theatre was a very popular pastime in Elizabethan England. Almost all classes of society went to watch plays. Enthusiastic audiences demanded a constant supply of new plays to watch. Only royalty didn't go to theatres, and that was because the theatre would come to them – acting companies were invited to perform for Queen Elizabeth in her palaces.

The acting companies relied upon a wealthy and powerful patron. The patron's title often became the company's name. For example, the company patronised by Charles Howard 1st Earl of Nottingham was known as Lord Howard's Men. When Lord Howard was made England's Lord High Admiral in 1585, the company changed its name to the Admiral's Men. The Lord Chamberlain, the official in charge of the royal household, was the patron of a company that called itself the Chamberlain's Men. This was the company that Shakespeare would join and spend most of his theatrical career working in.

The acting companies that staged the plays were businesses. The senior actors were shareholders, or 'sharers' as they were called, who would each get a slice of any profits that the company made. Actors who didn't own a stake in the company were called 'hirelings' and paid a weekly wage. Teenage boys could join companies as apprentices and were paid a very small amount.

The acting companies were all male. The law forbade women from acting in Elizabethan theatre. Professional women actors did not take to the stage until half a century after Shakespeare died. Men and boys were cast in the roles of women and girls.

Over a period of years, a company could build up a repertoire of between 30 and 40 plays and perform a different play every day of the week. There are records that show the Admiral's Men performed six days a week for 40 weeks. Companies employed their own playwrights to produce new works to add to their repertoire. Actors developed specialisations for the types of roles they played, such as heroes or clowns. The playwrights would write parts with these actors in mind. Hireling actors, who would be required to fill several minor roles in each play, might have to learn as many as 100 individual parts for a season of plays.

One of the Chamberlain's Men, Will Kemp, was very famous in London at the time for playing comic roles. He played clownish roles like Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*. Kemp would improvise rather than recite the lines written in the script. Over time, Shakespeare became more insistent that Kemp keep to the script. Kemp was convinced that audiences came to watch him and his spontaneous antics rather than watch and listen to a play delivered word-for-word. Tensions between Shakespeare and Kemp worsened. They were very different men with different understandings of the role of the clown in professional theatre. Kemp left the company in 1599,

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believing the Chamberlain's Men needed him more than he needed them. Kemp was replaced by another comedian, Robert Armin.

Another of the Chamberlain's Men was Richard Burbage, who was the most famous actor in Shakespeare's day. He was a tragedian – an actor specialising in playing the leading roles of the great tragedy plays, characters like Macbeth and Hamlet. Burbage was regarded as the best actor of tragedies of his day.

DID YOU KNOW?
In 1599, the year of the first performance of Shakespeare's *King Henry V*, one in every three Londoners attended the theatre at least once a month.

A typical Elizabethan theatre showing the balconies and the prestigious 'Lords' rooms' directly behind the stage. This drawing comes from 1596, around the time when Shakespeare was at his most prolific.

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In order to understand how English theatre evolved, let's go back briefly. Audiences were entertained by two kinds of theatre in England at the start of the sixteenth century. Companies of professional actors toured the country and performed in public places like market squares, halls and inns. Amateur companies of university students performed for royalty and nobility in London.

By the second half of the century, with London's population increasing and the public demand for theatre on the rise, the professional touring companies gravitated towards the city. They were becoming successful enough to draw a crowd in permanent venues. In 1576 the first permanent public theatre, called the Theatre, was built in London.

The new permanent theatres were usually built around an open-air courtyard. They required this feature because plays were performed in the afternoon in broad daylight. Most of the audience stood to watch plays in the courtyard or the 'yard'. It cost one penny to stand in the yard, and those who watched theatre this way, usually lower-class people, were referred to as 'penny stinkards', or 'groundlings'.

However, there were benches for people to sit on in multiple levels of galleries that encircled the yard. Seats in the galleries cost two pennies. Some theatres also let members of the audience sit on the stage. But most prestigious of all were the 'Lords' rooms' – balconies overlooking the stage from almost behind it. The people seated there could enjoy being looked at by the audience, as much as they could enjoy watching the play.

The stage in an Elizabethan theatre was usually square in shape with sides about 12 metres long. The groundlings could stand around three sides of the stage in the yard. The stage was raised one or two metres above the level of the yard. Partially sheltering the stage was a roof, called the 'shadow' or the 'heavens', supported by pillars. On top of the shadow, there was sometimes a platform for a small orchestra to play from. Props could be lowered from the shadow, but few props were used in productions of the time and they were usually carried on and off by servants or the actors themselves during scene changes. Elizabethan theatre didn't require much scenery. It was a theatre of poetry and words, of movement and colour in the costumes, but not of set design. Upstage were doors from which actors could enter and exit.

Costumes could be the most expensive items in an acting company's inventory. Audiences expected a high level of detail and **realism** in the costumes actors wore. The company would pay large sums for fine textiles normally reserved for the wealthy and powerful. A company could also buy unwanted clothes second-hand from aristocrats, who had moved on to the next fashion, or their deceased estates. This means that although plays might be set in ancient Rome, or mediaeval England, the characters might be wearing Elizabethan clothing that nevertheless reflected that character's status in society. A tailor was usually employed to make, mend and alter costumes for the actors to wear.

realism in theatre, a movement towards depicting the events of real life

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DID YOU KNOW?
In Elizabethan times sumptuary laws were in effect. These laws dictated the kinds of clothes, fabrics and colours people at different levels of society could wear. Fabric and colour were important indicators of a person's social status. The laws were intended to restrict the amount of foreign cloth imported into England, but also the laws were to remind people of their rank and position in society. For example, purple was a colour that only royalty were allowed to wear. Generally these laws weren't seriously enforced, which isn't surprising – it would be very difficult to regulate what clothes people chose to put on.

People were very conscious of their class status in society. Actors were in the unusual position of being from the middle or the lower classes but pretending to be kings, queens and nobles. This meant wearing costumes that identified their characters as very high status, which, as commoners, they were not allowed to do in the normal course of their lives. Theatre companies had special exemptions from the sumptuary laws that allowed actors to dress up and perform on stage in clothing that was normally limited to only the highest social classes.

Who was Shakespeare?

Even his date of birth is not certain. It's been accepted that Shakespeare was born on 23 April 1564. In England this date has significance. It's St George's Day – the day honouring England's patron saint. The parish register of Stratford-upon-Avon shows that he was baptised on 26 April 1564. His memorial in the Holy Trinity Church contains the words 'OBIIT ANO DOI 1616 ÆTATIS 53 DIE 23 APR', which means that he died in his 53rd year on the 23 April 1616. Shakespeare could only have been born on 21, 22 or 23 April 1564. It was only after Shakespeare's lifetime that admirers of his work agreed that his birthday fell on such a significant date in England's calendar. The coincidence (whether real or made-up) emphasises Shakespeare's national importance to England.

William's parents were John Shakespeare, a glove-maker, and his wife Mary Arden. She was from a wealthy Catholic family. Together they had eight children. Five of these children (William, three of his brothers, and a sister) survived into adulthood. The infant mortality rate was high, and William himself was lucky when he was a baby. Only months after his birth, Stratford-upon-Avon was struck by an outbreak of bubonic plague, the 'Black Death'. Diseases like syphilis, smallpox, tuberculosis, typhus and dysentery also meant that life expectancy was short.

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John Shakespeare was ambitious and took part in local government. He was on the local council and served as the high bailiff (a position similar to a mayor). He was also made a justice of the peace. However, in 1570 John found himself in trouble for breaking money-lending laws. Two years later he was accused of illegally dealing in wool. With debts piling up he began to withdraw from public life. He stopped going to church and he stopped going to council meetings. The council eventually expelled him.

William Shakespeare went to petty school at the age of four. Then, at the age of about seven, he started at the King's New School in Stratford, a local grammar school, which he attended for the next seven or eight years. The grammar school day began at 6 a.m. and finished at 5:30 p.m. During the shorter days of winter, grammar school might begin at 7 a.m. and finish at 4 p.m. The grammar school week ran from Monday to Saturday. Grammar school was for boys only. Grammar school studies focused on Latin. Shakespeare learned to speak and write Latin. He learned to translate from English to Latin and vice versa. He memorised various Latin texts. By the time he reached the senior years of grammar school, he was forbidden to speak any English in class. Rules were strict, and punishments harsh. Students were beaten with birch sticks if they got out of line.

His studies included:

- rhetoric (skills in public speaking for explaining, debating and arguing)
- logic (the study of using the principles of correct reasoning)
- the plays of Roman playwrights like Terence, Plautus and Ovid.

An important part of Shakespeare's education was the humanist principle of being able to understand and argue convincingly on both sides of an argument, no matter what his personal views were.

QUESTIONS 2.1

1. What are some of the differences between the schooling that Shakespeare received compared to your own education? Are there any similarities?
2. What do you think about the subjects that Shakespeare and his classmates had to learn? Considering what you learned in Chapter 1 about Elizabethan society, why do you think these subjects were considered important?

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When his grammar school education was over, William worked in his father's glove-making business for a while. His family did not have enough money to pay for the same university education that some of his rivals and contemporaries benefited from. However, Shakespeare's grammar school training was based on the values of Renaissance humanism. Characters in Shakespeare's plays reflect these values. They are individuals possessing great self-awareness, intelligence and capacity for expressing themselves.

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway when he was 18 and she was 26. Anne was the daughter of a local farmer. Today 26 seems like a reasonable age to be married but most people would think 18 was too young. If we were being unkind we would call it a shotgun wedding – Anne was three months pregnant. Today we place an enormous amount of importance on using our young adulthood to be free and gain experience before 'settling down'. From this point of view, Shakespeare's young adulthood could have been over almost before it really began.

Illustration of William Shakespeare reciting his play *Hamlet* to his family. His wife, Anne Hathaway, is sitting in the chair on the right; his son, Hamnet, is behind him on the left; his two daughters, Susanna and Judith, are on the right and left of him. This image was made in 1866, centuries after everyone depicted in it had died, and shows a scene that never happened. Young Hamnet was dead at the age of 11, three or four years before Shakespeare even wrote the play *Hamlet*.

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In marriages at the time, it was almost always the man who was the older one in the couple. Was Shakespeare an extraordinary man, even as a teenager? Was Anne an extraordinary woman? What does it say about him and Anne that they were attracted to each other, despite an eight-year age difference?

Their first child was a girl, Susannah, born in 1583. Two years later Anne gave birth to twins Judith and Hamnet. The twins were named after the Shakespeares' neighbours Judith and Hamnet Sadler. William Shakespeare was just 20 years old. Later in his career he would explore the comedic and dramatic possibilities that twin characters can present. Plays such as *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* have plots that are constructed around twin characters.

Shakespeare was a talented and ambitious poet. He didn't have much chance of achieving the fame he desired in a small town of 2000 people like Stratford. For that, he would have to move to London.

Because we don't have personal diaries or letters between Anne and William, it's difficult to say how they felt about Shakespeare's decision to leave Stratford and seek his fortune. It's possible that Anne couldn't bear the thought of her husband's talent being wasted and selflessly let him go with her blessing. It's also possible that they argued about it and Shakespeare walked out on his family with their anguished cries ringing in his ears.

A man abandoning his partner and children was nothing new. Shakespeare's abilities as a poet and later as a playwright were extraordinary. That doesn't mean he was an extraordinarily faithful or caring man.

Not much is known about what Shakespeare did between the years 1585 and 1592, a period referred to as the 'lost years'. There is plenty of speculation around what Shakespeare was doing in this period of his life, including:

- that he worked as a teacher in a country school
- that he travelled in Europe and made a pilgrimage to Rome, but that hasn't been proven
- that he was a soldier in the English army and fought in foreign wars
- that he sailed with Sir Francis Drake on a voyage that circumnavigated the world.

We can assume that, if Anne had let William go to London on the understanding that he was going to pursue his dream of becoming a writer, she would have been annoyed to find out he had been having adventures elsewhere.

Between 1589 and 1592, Shakespeare wrote *Henry VI* parts 1, 2 and 3. It's possible that he got his start in the theatre in 1592 by acting in small roles at The Rose Theatre in London, one of the most popular theatres in England.

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Between 1592 and 1595, Shakespeare wrote *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, plus most (if not all) of his 154 **sonnets**, and the poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. He also collaborated with other playwrights on a play called *Sir Thomas More*.

sonnet a poem, properly expressive of a single, complete thought, idea, or sentiment, of fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameter

In 1594 Shakespeare faced a difficult choice. Should he continue seeking wealthy patrons to support his career as a poet, or should he pursue success in the theatre? Since arriving in London in 1592 he had probably been able to do a bit of both, but he was apparently dissatisfied with the rewards he could expect as a poet. He chose the theatre.

Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men in 1594. By 1596 he had written *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost, King John*, *King Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Henry IV*, *Part 1*.

In 1596 Shakespeare's twin son Hamnet died at the age of 11. We have to reach our own conclusions about the impact such a loss had on Shakespeare, the father. Some academics and critics look into the work of Shakespeare (the playwright) for clues that tell us about Shakespeare's (the man's) state of mind. Having Viola in *Twelfth Night* believe her twin brother has died, or naming a tragic hero Hamlet, might be indications of how Shakespeare was feeling. But ultimately it's very difficult to say and it may not be worth worrying about anyway. Shakespeare is influential, so naturally some people want to know all about him. But there is so much about him that we will never know.

To have a son guaranteed the survival of the family name for at least one more generation. Shakespeare knew that if his daughters married, they would give up their family's name for those of their husbands. We don't know if Shakespeare had dreams of creating a long line of heirs to his legacy, but if Hamnet had lived into adulthood and had his own sons, it would have been possible. Any chance of that happening died with Hamnet. Both William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway were past any realistic chance of having more children together.

By 1598 Shakespeare had written *Henry IV*, *Part 2* and (maybe) *Edward III*, another history that has only recently, and controversially, been attributed to him.

The Chamberlain's Men would turn out to be one of the most talented and successful acting companies of the time, and remained important in London for the next 25 years. The company changed its name to the King's Men when James I became king in 1603. Except for the departure of the high-profile clown Will Kemp in 1599, the company seems to have been very stable and purposeful. The stability helped it become successful and influential in the London theatre scene of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

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2

DID YOU KNOW?

At the end of 1598, the Chamberlain's Men were in a difficult situation. They owned the theatre they performed in (called the Theatre) but not the land on which it was built. The Theatre stood in Shoreditch, in London's north. The landowner had refused to renew the company's lease on the land.

The company decided to remove the building and reconstruct it on a new site. They had leased a block of land on the southern bank of the River Thames, in an area called Southwark.

Even though the structure was theirs, they anticipated trouble if the landlord, Giles Allen, tried to stop them. So the actors armed themselves with swords and other weapons from either their own props room or the props room of another theatre, and they hired a team of carpenters to dismantle as much of the building as they could. They arrived at the Theatre in the freezing morning of December 28. As thick snow fell, the workers set about their task, and the armed and dangerous actors kept watch.

Giles Allen himself was out of town but some of his friends arrived to see what was going on. The carpenters refused to stop their work and Allen's associates backed off. By nightfall the main timbers that constituted the frame of the Theatre were loaded onto horse-drawn carts. They carried the heavy timbers to a warehouse near the Thames, where they were stored until summer. Then they were transported to the Southwark site and reassembled. The Chamberlain's Men renamed the relocated theatre the Globe Theatre.

Richard Burbage invited Shakespeare, Will Kemp and three of the other actors in the Chamberlain's Men to pay some of their own money in setting up the Globe Theatre. In addition to being actor-shareholders, they became investors – businessmen with a say in how the theatre would be run and a strong incentive to make it a success. If they failed, not only would they lose their jobs but their money too.

In 1599 Shakespeare became a co-owner of the brand new Globe Theatre. There were 15 or 16 other professional playwrights writing in London at the time, all trying to capture the mood of 1599 – a time of unrest and change.

Between 1598 and 1601, Shakespeare was on fire. He wrote *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and a poem called *The Phoenix and the Turtle*.

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DID YOU KNOW?
In 1601 Shakespeare found himself caught up in a political controversy that could have ended very badly for him. The Earl of Essex, once a favourite of Elizabeth I, had fallen out badly with her and decided he wanted to overthrow her in a coup, replacing her with James VI of Scotland. Essex clumsily tried to build public support for his coup attempt by arranging for the Chamberlain's Men to perform Shakespeare's history *King Richard II*, a play that tells the story of how Richard II of England was deposed by Henry Bolingbroke (who became Henry IV) in 1399. This subject matter was so controversial, dealing with the overthrow of a king, that the scene depicting Richard II's removal was hardly ever performed and even printers refused to print it in editions of the play.

Essex paid the Chamberlain's Men handsomely to stage this risky play, with the offending scene, and the company recklessly agreed to do it. Essex watched the performance at the Globe Theatre and felt the public mood was ripe for a coup. Unfortunately for him he was wrong. He completely failed to win support for his plot. He was captured and executed as a traitor. In a mere 18 months, Elizabeth died from blood poisoning (or cancer, or maybe just old age) and James took the English crown without a shot being fired.

Between 1601 and 1604, Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* and another poem called *A Lover's Complaint*.

In 1603 Elizabeth I died. Having produced no heir to the throne, the crown passed to James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, who Elizabeth had executed in 1587. He became James I of England as well as retaining the Scottish crown. He founded the Stuart dynasty that would last until 1714. Famously, he oversaw a new English translation of the Bible that became known as the *Authorised King James's Version*. James was a keen supporter of the arts. He granted Shakespeare's theatre company the title of The King's Men soon after his coronation. The King's Men were expected to perform for James in his various palaces whenever he commanded them to do so. This amounted to about 12 performances a year.

From 1604 to 1607 Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*. He wrote *Timon*, and probably parts of *Macbeth* too, with another playwright called Thomas Middleton. From now on, as Shakespeare's career drew to an end, there would be more acknowledged joint efforts with other writers.

Between 1607 and 1610 Shakespeare wrote *Pericles* (with George Wilkins), *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*.

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From 1610 to 1614 Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, and three plays with John Fletcher: *Cardenio* (which has since been lost), *King Henry VIII*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

The Globe Theatre burned down in 1613 after an accident with a theatrical cannon during a production of Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*. The Globe was actually rebuilt and reopened soon after the fire. However, the accident effectively drew a line underneath Shakespeare's career. Apart from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, completed in 1614, he wouldn't write any more plays. He returned to Stratford-upon-Avon, retiring from the theatre. He died on 23 April (his birthday, if the St George's Day story is to be believed) in the year 1616, aged 53.

At the time of his death he was a wealthy man, owning a number of valuable properties that he left to his family and his theatre associates. Although famous in London in his lifetime, his reputation as a serious poet and playwright was not as great as that of some of his rivals. However, over the centuries he has been monumentalised into the greatest writer the English language has ever known.

The rebuilt Globe Theatre in London

QUESTIONS 2.2

Just as Shakespeare wrote much of his poetry and plays for dignitaries such as Elizabeth I, James I and the Lord Chamberlain, many of history's great painters, musicians and writers had patrons who both supported and made strict demands on the artist's work.

1. Imagine yourself as an artist in this situation. What would be the benefits of having the backing of a wealthy patron? What would be the drawbacks?
2. Do you think patronage would stifle your creativity or stimulate it?
3. What influence might Shakespeare's patrons have had on his work? Think about the subject matter of his plays and the characters who populate them.

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Aristotelian tragedy and Shakespeare

In 350 BC the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote *Poetics*, one of the earliest known works of literary criticism. In *Poetics*, Aristotle wrote about some of the common features of the tragedies by Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. Aristotle noted that these tragedies centred on a high-status **protagonist** who loses this high status because of a mistake brought on by a character flaw. The action of these tragedies is focused on charting the protagonist's downfall and causing the audience to feel fear, sorrow and pity.

protagonist the main or central character who drives the story forward

The tragedies of the Elizabethan Era echo the idea of a protagonist undone by a moral frailty. But these Renaissance plays differed from the classical tragic form that Aristotle described. Shakespeare's plays have a structure that involves multiple lines of action or subplots. He introduces the subplots separately then gradually merges them together towards the end of the play. Importantly, he includes comedy and tragedy in the same plays, a wide variety of incidents and settings, and creates a sense that life is going on behind and in between the scenes. His plays have large casts of characters, ranging from high status to low status, and most of them are highly individualised, distinct people. He writes in a variety of different styles – poetic and prosaic, elegant and smutty – that help differentiate characters and move the action along. From his earliest plays, Shakespeare demonstrated that he understood how to tell stories on stage.

Shakespeare on theatre

Plays at open-air theatres like the Globe were performed in daylight hours. Unlike today, when artificial light on stages and darkened theatres isolate actors from their audiences, it was possible in Shakespeare's time for actors to have direct eye contact with everyone in the theatre. This helped create a sense that the characters on stage could share their thoughts with members of the audience personally.

As an experienced writer and actor, Shakespeare, no doubt, had strong opinions on how theatre was presented. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* contain direct references to acting styles and in them we can hear Shakespeare's director's voice, instructing actors how to perform scenes.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a group of low-status tradesmen rehearse a play in the hope that they will be chosen to perform for Duke Theseus of Athens and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, on their wedding day. This group of workers (the 'Mechanicals') is obviously from Shakespeare's own time. They are different from the mythical ancient Athenian nobles and the magical fairies.

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Peter Quince, a carpenter who has written this play and will direct it, has trouble getting Nick Bottom, a weaver who will play the tragic hero, and the rest of his cast to learn lines and remember cues. Shakespeare could be making fun of the bad acting in amateur theatre groups, or he could be giving us a comic insight into his own battles as a writer with a sometimes uncooperative cast. Whichever it is, Shakespeare effectively presents the recognisable chaos that will be familiar to anyone who has ever been involved with a theatrical production. If you've ever done a school play or musical, you'll know what I mean.

In *Hamlet*, a group of actors (players) arrives at the Danish palace of Elsinore. Prince Hamlet is a fan of this troupe of players, who have been forced to travel from their city because of the popularity of a company of boy actors. Shakespeare is referring to an event from his own time, the War of the Theatres of 1600, when a new, all-boy company in London became so successful that they dragged audiences away from the established adult companies.

Hamlet asks the actors to perform a play for the royal Danish court, and he asks one of the players to recite a speech that Hamlet himself will write. Act 3, Scene 2 of *Hamlet* begins with the Prince giving very precise instructions to the first player about how he should deliver the speech Hamlet has written for him. Hamlet is very clear that he doesn't want exaggerated gestures or voice in the delivery of the speech. Then Hamlet declares his opinion of what theatre ('playing') is, and what it is for:

> '… the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.'
>
> *Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2, lines 17–20*

In other words, theatre should honestly reflect nature and society, and be prepared to criticise them.

The players perform their play later in the scene first as a mime ('dumb show'), then with speech. The **stage directions** for this part of *Hamlet* are very detailed. Shakespeare is representing what was, even in 1600, an old-fashioned style of theatre. The character Hamlet shows his own preference for traditional theatrical forms over more modern developments. This may be Shakespeare's preference too.

Through his characters, Shakespeare shares the passion he had for his life's work.

stage directions the annotations in a playscript or playtext that can tell the actor how to move with, respond to or deliver lines of dialogue; stage directions may also describe a scene, setting or location

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2

Some of Shakespeare's contemporaries

Robert Greene

Robert Greene (1558–1592) was a London playwright and a **pamphleteer**. He was educated at Cambridge and Oxford universities. He rejected a respectable life and instead chose to live in the squalid slums inhabited by thieves, prostitutes and actors. He managed to support himself with his writing. He wrote a series of pamphlets that lifted the lid on life in London's underworld that gained him fame and popularity among respectable people who were fascinated by that sort of thing. He was also at the centre of a group of writers called the University Wits. Most, though not all, had been educated at either Cambridge or Oxford, or both. These men wrote hard, drank hard and played hard. They fancied themselves as the cultural elite of London, and indeed they were all talented. But although they wrote for the stage, they saw themselves as being better than theatre people, and they had a tendency to look down upon people who weren't quite like them.

Today Greene is perhaps best known for a pamphlet that was published just after his death. In it he lashed out at Shakespeare, calling him an 'upstart crow', accusing him of embellishing the work of other writers rather than being original and disdaining his background as an actor. It's been said that Greene was a snob and was annoyed at Shakespeare's success.

pamphleteer a writer of pamphlets or small books containing information or opinions that may be controversial

Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) was a playwright and a poet, and another University Wit. He had a similar background and upbringing to Shakespeare, but he won a scholarship to Cambridge University. Marlowe also worked as a spy for Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State. Marlowe studied in Paris and Rheims, in France, in 1586. He sent reports back to Walsingham about the activities of English Catholics living there. His spying nearly caused him to miss out on getting his Master of Arts degree at Cambridge University but the **Privy Council** intervened with the university authorities on his behalf, confirming that he had worked in the service of the

Privy Council a powerful group of advisers to English kings and queens

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queen. He wrote a play called *Doctor Faustus*, based on a story about a man who sells his soul to the Devil in return for knowledge of the universe.

In 1587 or 1588 Marlowe wrote a play called *Tamburlaine*, which contained blasphemous themes that angered the authorities. It is almost certain that he avoided prosecution by agreeing to continue spying, this time by seeking out Catholic plots in London and informing Walsingham.

In 1593 Marlowe was murdered in an eating-house in east London. He had been drinking with three other men – Ingram Frizer, Robert Pooley and Nicholas Skeres. On the face of it, four drunken friends got into a fight that quickly got out of hand. There was an argument about the bill, Frizer pulled a knife and stabbed Marlowe in the eye, killing him. However, Marlowe's companions that day were all associated with Walsingham's family and his spy network. Although never proven, it seems likely that Marlowe was killed because he knew too much about Walsingham's espionage operations. This suspicion seems justified when you consider that Queen Elizabeth I pardoned Frizer a fortnight later. The other two men were not even charged. There are many other theories about possible motives to murder Marlowe but they are all impossible to prove.

Marlowe's death was a tragic waste. He was born in the same year as Shakespeare but his career was more advanced. Despite being one of the Wits, Marlowe put aside the snobbish prejudices about Shakespeare's lack of a university education. Marlowe knew talent when he saw it. The two became friends, and Marlowe mentored Shakespeare as the new playwright from Stratford tried to establish himself in London. Marlowe was one of the most talented and famous playwrights of the time. Had he survived, the London literary scene of the 1590s could have been very different.

Ben Jonson

subversive to attempt to undermine the moral principles of (a person, etc.); corrupt

Ben Jonson (1572–1637) was an actor, a poet and a playwright whose popularity rivalled Marlowe and Shakespeare. He performed with the Admiral's Men. He collaborated with other playwrights on **subversive** plays that upset powerful people and as a result he was frequently in trouble with the law during the early part of his career. He was imprisoned on a number of occasions for writing plays that satirised the Privy Council, King James I or Scottish people – the list of people he offended goes on.

Much more seriously for Jonson though was the death of another of the Admiral's Men, an actor called Gabriel Spencer, in 1598. The two fought a duel and Jonson killed Spencer with a dagger. Jonson was sentenced to hang for murder. Shakespeare learned of a bizarre legal technicality that had allowed priests to dodge Crown prosecutions since the twelfth century. Under this

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obscure law, the accused had to read a particular passage from the Bible – in Latin. In the twelfth century, knowledge of Latin was confined largely to the priesthood. However, to an educated sixteenth-century Renaissance man like Jonson who read several languages, this proved not to be a problem. He read the Bible verse and escaped the hangman's noose.

As Shakespeare's career slowed, Jonson's blossomed. He wrote popular plays and more than 20 court **masques** for King James I. In 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, Jonson was named England's first Poet Laureate – a title given to him by King James I, making him the 'official' poet to the crown. If Shakespeare hadn't intervened in Jonson's trial, the history of English literature would have been very different.

masque an elaborate form of entertainment, staged for royalty and nobility, involving acting, music, singing and dancing

Shakespeare FAQs

Here are some of the questions I've been asked most frequently by my students.

Q. What were his inspirations?

A. This is by no means a complete list, but Shakespeare 'borrowed' his stories from many different sources, some going as far back as ancient times, including the:

- Bible
- Roman poet Ovid (43 BC–18 AD)
- Roman philosopher Seneca (5 BC–65 AD)
- Greek historian Plutarch (46–120 AD)
- English poet Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400)
- English historian Raphael Holinshed (1529–1580).

Q. What were his motivations?

A. Shakespeare had some personal and some practical reasons for pursuing his career in the theatre, such as:

- he loved the theatre – as an actor, a writer and an entrepreneur
- to prove to his contemporaries (like Christopher Marlowe and others) that he was a force in London's theatres, even though he wasn't as well educated as those with university degrees
- to make money – he was a businessman as well as an artist. His plays had to be popular with audiences to ensure that he had an income.
- to keep his acting company (the Chamberlain's Men, later called the King's Men) working – if he didn't write anything for them, they couldn't produce plays.

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Q. How did he get started in theatre?

A. No one is totally sure, but:

- it is probable that Shakespeare saw London-based acting companies perform in Stratford
- he could have joined one of these companies and gone to London
- he may, as one story goes, have got his start in the London theatre by minding the horses of audience members.

Q. What was his romantic history?

A. We have very little documentary evidence about Shakespeare's personal life. However:

- there is anecdotal evidence that he had many affairs with women during his years in London
- he wrote a series of sonnets known as the 'Dark Lady Sonnets', addressed to a woman that the poems' narrator desires but should not love – that doesn't make them autobiographical, though
- another series, the 'Fair Youth Sonnets', were dedicated to either Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, or William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, naturally leading to theories that Shakespeare was homosexual, but the reasons for the poems being written is unknown, so they aren't necessarily autobiographical either.

Q. Why didn't he write his plays in 'normal' English?

A. This is one of the most frequently asked questions.

- Elizabethan vocabulary was different from today's English, so he was writing in the 'normal' English of his time.
- Verse written in iambic pentameter was a popular form of poetry at the time.
- It has a basic rhythm that was pleasing to the ear of Shakespeare's audiences.

Q. Why does he write about death so much?

A. There is an awful lot of murdering and dying in Shakespeare's plays. But you have to remember that:

- death is an inevitable part of life, then as it is now, and so much of our popular culture today is concerned with death
- for Elizabethans, death was a much closer reality than most of us can appreciate, with wars, random acts of violence and fatal diseases keeping life expectancy low (an adult would need to be lucky to live beyond his or her mid-40s)

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- in many of the stories he told, especially the histories and the tragedies, violence and death were central to events
- drama can be more involving for an audience when the stakes are high for the characters, and you can't get much more high stakes than life-or-death struggles.

Q. Was he an alcoholic or a drug user?

A. This isn't very kind, but I think people who ask this question believe the only way Shakespeare could have written in the language that he did was because he was a chronic substance abuser. In Shakespeare's time, people consumed large amounts of alcohol, since drinking beer, ale and wine was often safer than drinking water that might contain lethal bacteria.

- On the occasions when Shakespeare does refer to alcohol in his plays, he is ambivalent about alcohol – he clearly understands that people like drinking it but he recognises and dislikes the consequences of drinking too much. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, Olivia asks her jester Feste what a drunken man is like. The clown replies:

> 'Like a drown'd man, a fool, and a madman.
> One draught above heat makes him a fool, the second mads him, and a third drowns him'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 108–110*

- As far as drug use goes, Sonnet 76 contains some puzzling references to 'noted weed' and 'compounds strange', but even if he is referring to drugs, Shakespeare isn't endorsing their use.
- However, in 2001, a South African museum announced that it had tested fragments of a clay smoking-pipe found in Shakespeare's house. The pieces of the pipe showed traces of cannabis, cocaine and hallucinogenic plant extracts. Although it's impossible to say that the pipe was Shakespeare's, the fragments date from the seventeenth century.

Q. Why do we study him?

A. This is the big question that every student demands an answer to, but I'll have a go at answering it here.

- Shakespeare expresses the range of human emotion, psychology and experience in drama and poetry.
- He tells many different types of stories – comedy, tragedy, history, melodrama, adventure, love stories and fairy tales – and tells them well.
- He creates compelling, complex characters for actors and readers alike.
- His impact on English language and English-speaking culture is immense.

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Skill builder

Discussion

The skills you will build are:

- your presentation, discussion and active listening skills
- your ability to contribute to class and group discussions
- your ability to compare and evaluate responses to ideas and issues
- your ability to research information
- your ability to combine the researched information to form your own understanding of Shakespeare's work.

William Shakespeare wrote poetry. He found patrons prepared to pay him to do this. He wrote plays and started working as an actor, filling small roles in productions of other playwrights' works. He identified a well-known acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, that would ensure his plays got an audience, and he joined it. As appreciation of his work grew, so did his influence in the company. He was offered the chance to buy a share in the Globe Theatre, which gave him greater responsibility for his own livelihood. After a career of more than 20 years, he was able to retire in comfort. However, he only got to enjoy his retirement for three years before dying.

1. Think of show business – the entertainment industry today.
   a. Could Shakespeare find a place in it?
   b. Are the themes he wrote about still relevant?
   c. What would he need to do to get control of his own career, instead of relying on others?

2. In groups of four, respond to the question:
   If Shakespeare were alive today, what would he be doing now?
   a. Elect a member of the group to go first. That person should respond to the question by:
      - presenting their suggestion for what Shakespeare could do today
      - justifying their response by linking at least one aspect of Shakespeare's career to a modern-day equivalent
      - giving an example of a present-day entertainer whose career has some parallels with Shakespeare.

      You will need to do some research into at least one aspect of Shakespeare's career, as well as a present-day entertainer in whom you are interested.

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b. Each of the other people in the group listens to the first student and takes it in turn to give their opinion on the first student's response. After all others in the group have spoken, the first student can have the final word.
c. Then it is the second student's turn to present their response to the question. Follow the same protocol for everyone in the group to ensure that each person can share his or her thoughts on the question.
d. Each student has between one and two minutes to respond to the question.

Your turn

Structure of the plays

Shakespeare's plays are structured into five acts. Each act performs a specific function in telling the story.

The acts and their functions proceed like this:

Act 1 – Exposition
Introduces most of the main characters (the protagonists, the **foils**, the **antagonists**), the setting, provides the backstory and foreshadows what the play will be about.

Act 2 – Rising Action
Complications, problems, confrontations and conflicts emerge. There may be one particular event, called the 'inciting incident', which kicks things off. Momentum, **tension** and suspense build through a series of events.

Act 3 – Climax
This is the most intensely dramatic part of the play. Everything in the rising action has built towards this moment. The protagonists and antagonists will be at a crossroads, and whatever they do will determine how the play ends.

Act 4 – Falling Action
The consequences of the climax are played out. Some false hopes or fears may be raised. Generally, if the play overall is a tragedy, there will be a strong possibility of a happy ending. If it's a comedy, the defeat of the protagonist appears the most likely outcome during the falling action.

foil a secondary character who emphasises the traits of a main character

antagonist the adversary of the hero or protagonist of a drama or other literary work

tension mental or emotional strain; intense, suppressed suspense, anxiety or excitement

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2

Act 5 – Resolution

We find out what happens at the end. The conflict is resolved, for better or worse. The play shows how the characters, especially the protagonists, have been changed by the conflict set up in Act 2 and played out before our eyes.

Today, most mainstream films are built around a three-act structure, but if you think about a film's plot, you'll see that it can still be divided into Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Resolution.

1. The concept of stories being built out of five acts goes at least as far back as ancient Greece and the theories of the philosopher Aristotle. Go online and research Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle probably wrote it around 335 BC. It's the earliest known writing the human race has on how drama and literature conforms to certain structures and patterns.

2. Think about a film you have watched recently. Under the headings of Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Resolution, write each of the events from the film where you think they belong. Then, write answers in detailed paragraphs to each of the following questions based on the five parts of the structure.

3. Exposition
   a. Explain what the film's exposition tells you about the characters, the setting and the backstory.
   b. How is this information revealed?
   c. Is it interesting or boring? Why?
   d. Would you have revealed the information differently? If so, how?

4. Rising Action
   a. Explain at least three events that occur during the rising action.
   b. How does the suspense or the tension build in this part of the film?
   c. What does each of these events tell us about the characters?
   d. Are the characters changing or developing in any way? If so, how?

5. Climax

   Some films draw the rising action out over a long time and compress the falling action and resolution into a relatively short amount of time. The climax may be characterised by brilliant flashes, loud explosions and crashing music.
   a. Was it easy for you to identify the climax? What made it easy or difficult to identify?
   b. In your opinion, is this the most dramatically intense, powerful moment of the film? Why or why not?
   c. If not, what is the most powerful?

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6. Falling Action
   a. Explain the immediate effects of the climax on the characters.
   b. Is there anything in the falling action that indicates how the play will resolve itself? If so what is it?
   c. Is there anything in the falling action that leads you to believe that a different outcome is likely? If so, what is it?

7. Resolution
   a. Explain the differences between the start of the film and the end.
   b. How have the characters changed?
   c. Are there any similarities between the exposition and the resolution? If so, why do you think that is?

When you study any of Shakespeare's plays, remember this structure. It may not fit exactly onto every play, but it will help you understand how he planned to lead his audience through the story.

Read and view more

Films

Anonymous (2011) directed by Roland Emmerich
Shakespeare in Love (1998) directed by John Madden
O (2001) directed by Tim Blake Nelson
10 Things I Hate About You (1999) directed by Gil Junger
Much Ado About Nothing (2013) directed by Joss Whedon

Books

The Tragedy of Arthur by Arthur Phillips
Illustrating Shakespeare by Peter Whitfield
Shakespeare Monologues for Young Men
Shakespeare Monologues for Young Women
Shakespeare: A Life by Park Honan

Poems

On Shakespeare (1632) by Milton

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RELOADED IN THIS CHAPTER

Shakespeare the poet

Some poetry ground rules

Shakespeare's narrative poems
Venus and Adonis
Lucrece
The Phoenix and the Turtle
A Lover's Complaint

Shakespeare's sonnets

Skill builder

Your turn

Read and view more

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3

Shakespeare the poet

Before Shakespeare's career as a playwright got going in earnest, he achieved early fame in London as a poet. He had written *Henry VI* parts I, II and III sometime before 1592 and then for a couple of years turned his attention to writing poetry for wealthy patrons.

He wrote two long narrative poems early in his career, *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *Lucrece* in 1594. Shakespeare published them both and he dedicated both poems to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton.

The popularity of *Venus and Adonis* far outstripped the popularity of any of Shakespeare's earlier plays. Even though he had plays like *Richard III* performed in the early 1590s, Londoners knew of him primarily for his poetry. Later he would write *The Phoenix and the Turtle* and *A Lover's Complaint*.

Shakespeare also wrote 154 sonnets over his career. Most were written in the 1590s, but it's believed he kept writing sonnets throughout most of the time he was writing plays.

Many of Shakespeare's poems get pretty raunchy and violent. I'll give you some information about the narrative poems, and include some milder examples of the sonnets, but I'm going to leave it up to your teachers to decide what's appropriate for you to study.

Some poetry ground rules

What is poetry?

Good question. There are many possible answers. I'll try and be brief so we can get on with it. Poetry is a literary form that tries to combine the poet's emotions or passions within a design or a pattern of sounds, words, phrases and lines that has been carefully chosen. That may be oversimplified but let's go with it for now.

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Some poetry terms

Examples have been given for the trickier ones.

Alliteration: A literary device based on the sounds of words – the repetition of consonant sounds in words that are next to each other or close together:

> 'When do I **count** the **clock** that **tells** the **time**'
> *Sonnet 12, line 1*

Assonance: Another sound device – the repetition of vowel sounds in words that are next to each other or close together:

> 'And trouble **deaf heaven** with my bootless cries;'
> *Sonnet 29, line 3*

Blank verse: Poetry written in iambic pentameter without lines that rhyme (most of Shakespeare's plays are written in this form).

Couplet: A pair of lines that has rhyming words at the end of both lines.

Enjambment: A sentence or phrase that continues past a **line break** into the poem's next line:

> 'Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
> Lose all and more by paying too much rent,'
> *Sonnet 125, lines 5–6*

line break the end of a line of poetry, when the reader turns to the start of the next line. Line breaks play an important role in a poem's meaning and how the reader reads that poem; poets choose to make the lines of a poem a certain length, e.g. so that they rhyme

Iambic pentameter: Each line of the verse has a rhythm, or a meter. The word 'iamb' means 'foot', and refers to the pairing of an accented, or stressed, syllable with an unstressed syllable. Pentameter means 'measure of five'. So we have five iambs in a line, for a total of 10 syllables in each line:

weak/STRONG/weak/STRONG/weak/STRONG/weak/STRONG/weak/STRONG

You could think of your heartbeat. It alternates with lighter and heavier pulses.

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Imagery: The use of words and phrases to create pictures in readers' minds:

> **'Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,**
> **And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;**
> **Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,**
> **And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;'**
> *Sonnet 19, lines 1–4*

Meter: The rhythm that the words establish in each line of a poem; the way we measure the sound patterns in a poem.

Metaphor: The description of one thing in terms of something else:

> 'O, no, it [love] is an ever fixèd **mark** [lighthouse]
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> It [love] is the **star** to every wand'ring bark [sailing ship],'
> *Sonnet 116, lines 5–7*

Onomatopoeia: Another sound device – the formation and use of words and phrases that sound like what they are describing:

> 'Which she perus'd, **sigh**'d, tore, and gave the flood,'
> *A Lover's Complaint, line 44*

Personification: A type of metaphor that gives human characteristics or features to something that is not human:

> 'Make war upon this bloody **tyrant, Time**?'
> *Sonnet 16, line 2*

Rhyme: This is the similarity of sounds in words, or the endings of words, in lines of poetry or at the end of lines of poetry.

Simile: The comparison of one thing as another thing using 'like' or 'as':

> 'Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> **Like to the lark at break of day arising**
> **From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;'**
> *Sonnet 29, lines 10–12*

Stanza: This is a grouping of lines within a poem that is separated from other stanzas by space on the page.

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So why don't Shakespeare's poems rhyme all the time?

Another good question! Despite the predictable patterns of **quatrains** and couplets, perhaps as much as two-thirds of the couplets in the sonnets don't seem to rhyme.

quatrain a four-line stanza that usually rhymes

For example, in Sonnet 116, the poem ends with the lines:

> 'If this be error, and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.'

What has changed since Shakespeare wrote the poems is the pronunciation of some words.

In Shakespeare's time, 'proved' would have been pronounced 'pruvved' and 'loved' would have sounded much as we would say it today, so the rhyme would have worked back then, but not so much now.

DID YOU KNOW?
There are many unfamiliar words used in Shakespeare's plays, but the pronunciation of Elizabethan English is another thing altogether. Indeed, most people today would struggle mightily to understand a single sentence if it was performed with the pronunciation used in Shakespeare's time. A few examples: words like 'cup' and 'but' were said more like 'coop' and 'boot'; 'die' and 'lie' were pronounced a bit like 'd-uh-ee' and 'l-uh-ee'; and 'hair' sounded a bit like 'huh-ay-eer'. Lists of Elizabethan pronunciations are available on the internet. For a laugh, try reading a famous passage from a Shakespeare play using the 'correct' pronunciation!

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3

Shakespeare's narrative poems

VENUS AND ADONIS

WRITTEN: 1592–1593

PUBLISHED: 1593

SETTING: Ancient Cyprus

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Venus, Roman goddess of love
- Adonis, a mortal man

EVENTS:

- Venus falls in love with Adonis, the most attractive man on earth.
- She tries to seduce him but he resists.
- She feigns death so he will pay attention to her.
- Adonis kisses Venus to try to revive her.
- Venus thinks the kiss is because he loves her now.
- Adonis rejects her again so he can go hunting.
- Venus begs him not to hunt dangerous animals.
- Adonis ignores the warning and is killed by a boar.
- Venus weeps over his body.
- Adonis' body transforms into a flower.

THEMES: Love, beauty, sexual attraction, obsession, hunting

NUMBER OF LINES: 1194

RHYME PATTERN: Six-line stanzas, ABABCC

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LUCRECE

WRITTEN: 1593–1594

PUBLISHED: 1594

SETTING: Ancient Rome

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Lucrece, wife of Collatine
- Tarquin, son of the king of Rome
- Collatine, a Roman lord, husband of Lucrece

EVENTS:

- The poem begins with what Shakespeare calls an 'argument' – a **prose** introduction that fills in the back story.
- Tarquin and some Roman noblemen take their army to besiege the town of Ardea.
- One night during the siege, each of the Roman lords boasts about how honourable his wife is.
- Collatine praises Lucrece's virtues very highly.
- The lords sneak back to Rome to check up on their wives.
- Only Lucrece is dutifully at home.
- All the other wives are partying.
- The Roman lords compliment Collatine on Lucrece's loyalty and return to the camp.
- Tarquin is jealous of Collatine and decides he must have Lucrece.
- Leaving Collatine at the camp, Tarquin secretly returns to Rome and visits Lucrece on the pretence of telling her how her husband is.
- That night Tarquin sexually assaults Lucrece and flees the scene in shame.
- Lucrece sends for Collatine and her father.
- Before telling them what happened she makes them swear they will avenge her.
- Lucrece explains what Tarquin did, then commits suicide.
- Collatine and other Roman lords carry Lucrece's body through Rome, telling the people about Tarquin's crime.
- Outraged, the Roman people revolt against Tarquin's family, banishing them from the city.

prose written or spoken language in its ordinary form

THEMES: Virtue, jealousy, obsession, lust, guilt, excessive praise invites disaster

NUMBER OF LINES: 1855

RHYME PATTERN: Seven-line stanzas, ABABBCC – a scheme known as 'rhyme royal'

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THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE

WRITTEN: 1600–1601

PUBLISHED: 1601, in an anthology of poems by several other writers

SETTING: Mythological times

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- A female phoenix, a mythical bird that is consumed by fire and reborn from its own ashes
- A male turtle dove ('turtle' in the poem's title refers to a turtle dove, a kind of bird, and not a reptile)
- Reason, a symbolic character

EVENTS:

- In the first part, called the session, a number of birds, including an eagle, a swan and a crow, gather.
- In the second part, the anthem, the birds celebrate the love of the phoenix and the turtle, who have burned together in the phoenix's flames.
- In the third part, the threnody (a kind of funeral song), Reason mourns the death of the phoenix and the turtle, neither of whom have been reborn.

THEMES: Love, truth, fidelity, beauty

NUMBER OF LINES: 67

RHYME PATTERN: 13 four-line stanzas (quatrains) ABBA, then it changes to 5 three-line stanzas that rhyme AAA

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A LOVER'S COMPLAINT

WRITTEN: Probably 1609

PUBLISHED: 1609, with the sonnets

SETTING: English countryside

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- The Poet, who narrates the events
- The Woman, who at first resists and then gives in to the Seducer
- The Old Man, a farmer, who listens to the Woman tell her story
- The Seducer, a good-looking young man who enjoys the company of young women

EVENTS:

- The Poet is walking in the countryside when he sees a young woman crying, ripping up letters and breaking rings.
- The Old Man also sees the woman weeping and asks what is wrong.
- The Woman explains that she was pursued, seduced and then dumped by the handsome Seducer.
- The Woman accuses the Seducer of being completely fake and untrustworthy, but she admits she'd probably do it all again if she got the chance.

THEMES: Humiliation, dishonesty, betrayal of trust, unreliability

NUMBER OF LINES: 328

RHYME PATTERN: Seven-line stanzas, ABABBCC – rhyme royal

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3

Shakespeare's sonnets

lyric poetry a poem that expresses emotions; the most popular form of lyric poetry is the sonnet – other forms include ballads and villanelles

Sonnets are a kind of **lyric poetry**, a literary form that reaches back into ancient times. Lyric poems traditionally express the poet's deepest thoughts and emotions. They are not preoccupied with telling stories in the way that narrative poems are.

The word 'sonnet' originated from the Italian word *sonetto*, which means 'a little song' or 'a little sound'. The Italian poet Petrarch was one of the greatest authors working with this form – so much so that it is referred to by his name.

DID YOU KNOW?
Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch is the anglicised form of his name) was born in 1304 in Italy. Legend has it that in 1327 he met Laura de Noves, the wife of a French nobleman. Petrarch fell in love with her and, between 1327 and 1368, wrote more than 300 sonnets about her, as well as some other poems. Petrarch is sometimes referred to as the 'Father of Humanism' because of his interest in the literature of ancient Rome. He was a European literary celebrity who enjoyed travelling, so he was also known as the 'first tourist'.

Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), who popularised the sonnet form

Structure of the sonnets

Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnets follow the rhyme scheme of:

ABBA/ABBA/CDD/CEE

Or sometimes:

ABBA/ABBA/CDE/CDE

Or at other times:

ABBA/ABBA/CDCDCD

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Here's a translation of one of Petrarch's sonnets, *Gli Occhi Di Ch'Io Parlai:*

OCTAVE
FIRST QUATRAIN

A	Those eyes, 'neath which my passionate rapture rose,
B	The arms, hands, feet, the beauty that erewhile
B	Could my own soul from its own self beguile,
A	And in a separate world of dreams enclose,

SECOND QUATRAIN

A	The hair's bright tresses, full of golden glows,
B	And the soft lightning of the angelic smile
B	That changed this earth to some celestial isle,
A	Are now but dust, poor dust, that nothing knows.

SESTET

C (VOLTA)	And yet I live! Myself I grieve and scorn,
D	Left dark without the light I loved in vain,
C	Adrift in tempest on a bark forlorn;
D	Dead is the source of all my amorous strain,
C	Dry is the channel of my thoughts outworn,
D	And my sad harp can sound but notes of pain.

In this tradition, the first eight lines, called the octave, establish the idea the poem is based on. The octave is divided into two quatrains, stanzas of four lines each. The following six lines, called the sestet, form a response to that idea in the octave. Line 9, the first line of the sestet, is called the **volta**, which means 'turn' and is the point at which the sonnet starts to answer itself. Petrarch's sonnets, and the sonnets of other poets who worked in this form, often dealt with highly idealised romantic love.

volta a 'turn', usually indicating a change in mood or direction in a sonnet; often occurs around the ninth line, although it can come earlier or later

DID YOU KNOW?
When discussing the point of view that Shakespeare's sonnets are written from, you should refer to 'the poet' rather than 'Shakespeare'. If we step back from the idea that William Shakespeare poured his heart, soul and innermost honest emotions into every sonnet, we can think of 'the poet' and the addressees to whom he is writing as characters in a drama. The character, or persona, of the poet does not necessarily represent Shakespeare's point of view. Remember that Shakespeare was educated in the humanist tradition that trained him to think and to imagine from different perspectives. He was also an actor and a playwright, and it makes sense that he would be trying to create dramatic situations in his poetry too.

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English poets began writing in the sonnet form in the early sixteenth century. They used the octave–volta–sestet structure but sonnet writing in English gradually changed to follow its own rules. The resulting adaptation, the English sonnet, which is also called the Shakespearean sonnet, follows the rhyme scheme of: ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/GG

Here's how this scheme looks in Shakespeare's sonnet 130:

OCTAVE

A	My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
B	Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
A	If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
B	If hairs be wires, black wires grow from her head.
C	I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
D	But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
C	And in some perfumes there is more delight
D	Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

SESTET

E (VOLTA)	I love to hear her speak; yet well I know
F	That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
E	I grant I never saw a goddess go;
F	My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
G	And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
G	As any she belied with false compare.

rhyming couplet two successive lines of poetry that rhyme with each other

You'll notice the **rhyming couplet** (the 'GG' lines) at the end. It has the function of summarising, or emphasising, or even completely contradicting, what has gone before in the previous 12 lines. In this case, the poet is making fun of the way mistresses were romanticised as having great physical beauty in Petrarchan sonnets. In lines 1–12, Sonnet 130 lists all the ways the poet's mistress does not live up to the impossible standard of perfection expected in a sonnet. There is a building air of disappointment. However, in the last two lines the poet rejects the idea of romanticised comparisons to natural beauty and goddesses. He declares that his love for his mistress is real and that she is beautiful.

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QUESTIONS 3.1

1. Look up the lyrics to one of your favourite songs. Listen carefully all the way through to get a sense of the song's structure. Have a go at labelling the different sections according to how they repeat (or don't repeat).
2. Next look within each section. Does it have a **rhyming scheme**? See if you can label each line according to the lettering system we've been using in this chapter.
3. Compare the sections to each other. Does the verse have a different number of lines to the chorus? Does the rhyming scheme change?
4. How does the musical context affect how we hear the words, compared to how they might sound if they were read out from a page?
5. Do you think a popular song is a form of poetry? Why or why not?

rhyming scheme the ordered patterns of rhymes at the end of lines in a poem

What's in a word? *Sonnet 130*

Poets seek to use words imaginatively and convey multiple meanings to carry as many messages as the poem's structure will allow. Read Sonnet 130 again. Have a closer look at some of the unfamiliar words and words used in unusual ways:

'dun' (line 3) means 'dark'. The stereotypical mistress in love poetry of the time had snowy white skin. The poet undercuts the stereotype with a realistic image.

'wires' (line 4) refers to the stereotypical image of a mistress with blonde hair that looks like spun gold. In reality, spun gold would be wiry. The poet is saying, 'OK – my mistress's hair is like wire too, only it's black wire.'

'damasked' (line 5) could mean either 'combined' or 'smooth and soft'.

'reeks' (line 8) just means 'emanates' in this instance; it didn't get the negative meaning associated with it until the eighteenth century.

'go' (line 11) means 'walk'. Love poems would elevate women to the status of goddesses. The poet is saying that he's never seen a goddess, so he can't be certain of how one would walk. This is followed up in line 12 when he declares that his mistress 'treads on the ground' as any other normal person does.

'any she' (line 14) means 'any woman'.

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Addressees of the sonnets

Shakespeare started writing sonnets in or around 1590. Some say he began in 1592 when the theatres were all closed due to an outbreak of plague in London and he needed to find an alternative source of income. For a long time he shared these sonnets with only a small number of people. It is not known if being 'shared among his friends' means that they were actually addressed to them. Love poetry in general was rarely for the wider public but rather for a privileged minority of readers. The poems were shared in manuscript (handwritten) form that the fortunate few had to transcribe for themselves from somebody else's copy.

Other poets writing in the last decade of the sixteenth century constructed sequences of sonnets that told overarching stories. The authors intended to publish the poems together in volumes, in a particular order. For many years Shakespeare scholars believed that his sonnets told a story too. Unlike many of his sonnet-writing contemporaries, the people to whom Shakespeare addressed his sonnets are never named, not even with false names. These omissions only frustrate Shakespeare scholars and deepen the mysteries surrounding the sonnets.

Over the centuries, there has been a great deal of effort put into discovering who these supposed addressees really were. The idea that these identities were real people in Shakespeare's life can be traced back at least as far to a man called Edmond Malone. He was a Shakespeare scholar who edited the sonnets in the 1780s. Malone was writing a biography of Shakespeare, which is a very difficult thing to do because there is so little autobiographical evidence of the playwright's life. Malone turned to Shakespeare's plays and poems in the belief that they would hold autobiographical clues. In his study of the sonnets, Malone detected the presence of a 'Rival Poet', the 'Young Man' and the 'Dark Lady'. These individuals are characters, possibly based on real people, and they are also the addressees of the poems. Not everyone agreed with Malone that these three characters were real people with definite identities. Those who did believe Malone argued amongst themselves about who the characters really were. But the idea that these were the people Shakespeare was writing the sonnets to and for has survived to this day. Those who want to know more about Shakespeare the man believe that the sonnets provide insights and information that cannot be found anywhere else.

The story that the sonnets supposedly tell is a soap opera. The story suggests that the 'Dark Lady' had an affair with the 'Young Man'. More scandalously, the poet could have been the lover of both the 'Young Man' and the 'Dark Lady'. But 'Rival Poet', 'Young Man', and 'Dark Lady' are labels that were invented after Shakespeare was dead. The 'Dark Lady', for example, is never called that in any of the sonnets.

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More recently, academics have begun to argue over whether Shakespeare wrote the sonnets to form an actual sequence or whether they are a collection of poems that don't have much of a relationship to each other, written sporadically over maybe as many as 20 years. It's possible that Shakespeare never intended his sonnets be thought of as a collective sequence of work.

In most sonnets there is no clear indication of to whom it is addressed. The gender of the addressee is only certain in a handful of the poems. There is no proof that the sonnets were dedicated to real, particular people. On the other hand, some of the sonnets seem so personal and so particular to unique situations that it seems as if they must be in some way autobiographical and written especially for individuals. Reading such a sonnet can be like intercepting or overhearing one half of a private conversation.

There are connections and relationships between some of the sonnets. Some sonnets form pairs or short sequences and can be grouped together. For example, sonnets 78 to 86 deal with the Rival Poet (or rival poets – not all the sonnets in this sequence necessarily refer to the same writer). Whether it is one rival or many, these sonnets deal with the competition among poets for sponsorship by a wealthy patron.

In Sonnet 86 we get a sense of the poet feeling jealous at a rival poet's talent:

1 Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
2 Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you,
3 That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,
4 Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?
5 Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
6 Above a mortal pitch that struck me dead?
7 No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
8 Giving him aid, my verse astonishèd.
9 He, nor that affable familiar ghost
10 Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
11 As victors, of my silence cannot boast;
12 I was not sick of any fear from thence:
13 But when your countenance filled up his line,
14 Then lacked I matter, that enfeebled mine.

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What's in a word? *Sonnet 86*

This bitter sonnet suggests not just a rivalry between two poets, but also a rivalry between two poets over the same person. The 'you' in the poem is not the rival but the person both poets are fighting over.

metaphor
a phrase where one thing is described in terms of something else

'full sail' (line 1) is a sailing **metaphor**. It creates the image of the rival poet's powerful poetry.

'prize' (line 2) continues the sailing metaphor. Pirates that captured a ship referred to it as a prize.

'ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse' (line 3) means that, just as the poet was ready to reveal his thoughts that were ready to be expressed, his rival's poetry made him feel inferior, so he buried his thoughts before he could speak them.

'spirit' and 'spirits' (line 5) could have several different meanings. The poet could be referring to the soul, or intelligence, or a source of creative inspiration that may even be supernatural.

'compeers' (line 7) refers to the spirits from line 5.

'ghost' (line 9) spirits again.

'nightly gulls him with intelligence' (line 10) means that the 'ghost' is either providing the rival poet with solid information, or rumours and gossip.

'countenance' (line 13) could mean either face or approval. So it could mean that the rival wrote a poem about the face of the person the poets are fighting over, or that the person approved of a poem that the rival poet wrote.

'matter' (line 14) means substance or credibility. The poet who wrote this sonnet feels weakened because the object of his affection is paying so much attention to the rival poet.

Timeline of the sonnets

It's possible that Shakespeare addressed his sonnets to more than just the Young Man, the Rival Poet and the Dark Lady. Recent analysis of the language in the sonnets has suggested that some of the poems were written in the early to

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mid 1590s. Others seem to date from the reign of King James I – 1603 and later. This creates the possibility that if these poems are in any way autobiographical, they reflect that new patrons, new friends and new lovers could have been moving through Shakespeare's life over the years and prompting him to write for them instead.

Sonnet 107 is a good example of the difficulties in establishing the time in which a particular poem was written.

1 Not mine own fears nor the prophetic soul
2 Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
3 Can yet the lease of my true love control,
4 Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
5 The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,
6 And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
7 Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
8 And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
9 Now with the drops of this most balmy time
10 My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
11 Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
12 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
13 And thou in this shalt find thy monument
14 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

What's in a word? *Sonnet 107*

This sonnet is preoccupied with the idea that poetry is a ticket to immortality.

'lease' (line 3) means a limited term, in this case the amount of time the poet's love will last.

'forfeit' (line 4) means 'subject to'.

'confined doom' (line 4) means 'definite end'. Overall the first quatrain means that the poet's love is neither limited by his own fears nor the premonitions dreamed up by everyone else in the world, despite the expectation that the love will end.

Australian actress Cate Blanchett at a press conference to promote *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). Elizabeth was one of the subjects of Shakespeare's sonnets.

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'mortal moon' (line 5) is thought to refer to Queen Elizabeth I, and this is the line that causes debates about when the poem was written. It's thought the line refers to the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. But it could also refer to the Spanish Armada in 1588, or Elizabeth's 'grand climacteric' year (a mystic belief in the significance of the numbers 9 and 7) when she turned 63 in 1595, or an actual lunar eclipse that occurred in 1605.

'sad augurs mock their own presage' (line 6) means that fortune tellers ridicule their own predictions.

'Incertainties' (line 7) is an old form of uncertainties.

symbol something that represents or suggests something else; symbols often take the form of words, visual images or gestures that are used to convey ideas

'olives' (line 8) means olive branches, which were **symbols** of peace.

'balmy time' (line 9) means peaceful time.

'My love' (line 10) refers to the poet's emotion, not the person he loves.

'I'll live' (line 11) is the poet's declaration that the poem guarantees him immortality.

'dull and speechless tribes' (line 12) refers to the many people who don't write poetry to be remembered after they've died.

'spent' (line 14) means falling apart and ruined.

The poet believes that the sonnet will be the addressee's (in this case the elusive Young Man) shrine that will outlast mighty empires.

Publication of the sonnets

The publication of the sonnets in 1609 is mysterious. It's not known how much say Shakespeare actually had in the publication of the book. There's nothing in the volume to demonstrate that he approved of it. The book's publisher, Thomas Thorpe, dedicated it to: 'The Only Begetter of these ensuing Sonnets, Mr W.H.' No one's really sure who W.H. is or what is meant by the term 'begetter'. It could mean the person who inspired the poems, or it could mean the person who went around collecting the manuscripts from various sources.

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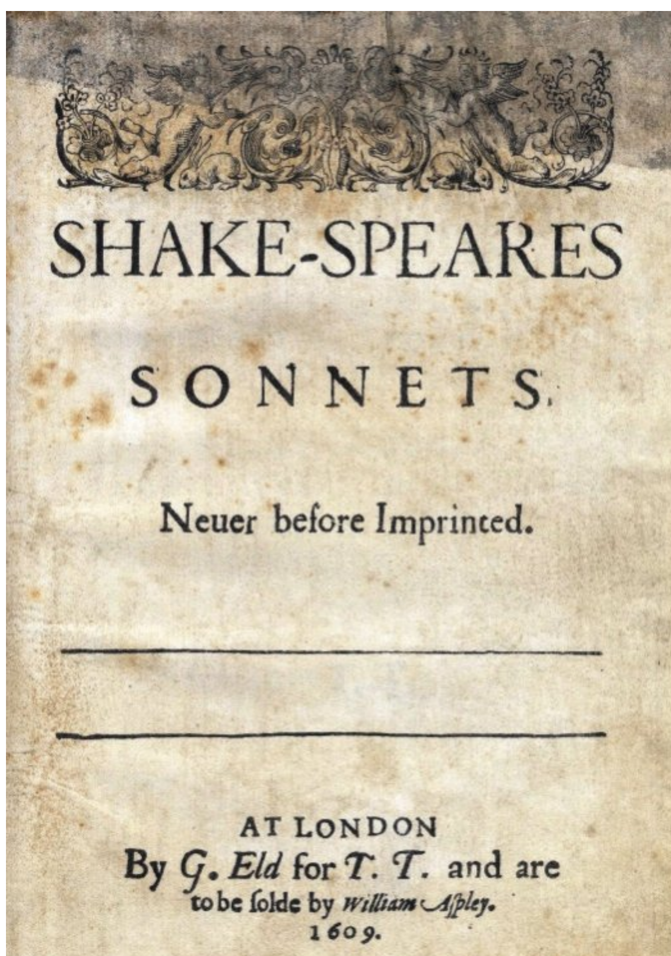
DID YOU KNOW?
W.H.'s identity has been a hotly debated topic for many years. Shakespeare's early patron Henry Wriothesley (pronounced 'Rizzley'), the 3rd Earl of Southampton, has been suggested as a candidate for W.H., with the initials in the dedication reversed. Another possibility is William Herbert, the 3rd Earl of Pembroke, another of Shakespeare's patrons. Both men have been considered the origin of the 'Young Man' figure in the sonnets. It's possible that the 'Young Man' character is a combination of the two earls.

If it's true that the publication was unauthorised, it's likely Thorpe obtained the sonnets to capitalise on Shakespeare's fame and hoped to generate some scandal and, therefore, sales. The subtitle for the book was 'Never Before Imprinted', and there is a sense that Thorpe was trying a tactic that editors of tabloid newspapers and gossip magazines are fond of today: publishing the private or secret communications of famous people.

However, when Thorpe published Shakespeare's sonnets, few people were interested. Sonnets were all the rage as a literary form in the late sixteenth century but by the early seventeenth century they were out of fashion. The book didn't sell many copies. The sonnets reappeared in a revised edition in 1640 released by the London publisher John Benson, long after Shakespeare's death. Benson changed the gender of the 'Young Man' in case any reader thought Shakespeare was homosexual, and he included some poems that were not by Shakespeare at all.

The initial unpopularity of the published sonnets in 1609, the complexity of many of them, and the concern among academics and critics that the sonnets suggested Shakespeare was homosexual, caused the poems to be virtually ignored by academics for almost 200 years. The poems were still read and appreciated, but almost in secret. They were rarely analysed or studied.


SHAKE-SPEARES

SONNETS.

Neuer before Imprinted.

AT LONDON
By G. Eld for T. T. and are
to be solde by William Aspley.
1609.

Title page of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609)

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By the end of the eighteenth century, many critics believed that writers were disguising details of their lives in the fiction they wrote. But some who studied Shakespeare's sonnets refused to believe that he could have dedicated some of these love sonnets to a man. One nineteenth-century scholar, George Stephens, decided that all of the sonnets were addressed to Queen Elizabeth herself. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interest in Shakespeare grew and his sonnets were studied more intensively. Academics and critics who researched Shakespeare's sonnets began to think of them as Shakespeare's coded autobiography.

The 154 sonnets are an important collection of love poems. The sonnets are still valued today because of the way they deal with the experience of love from multiple viewpoints. For readers over the centuries, memorable phrases in the sonnets, such as 'the darling buds of May', 'remembrance of things past' and 'my love is as a fever', have reflected some aspect of their own understanding of love. Through the sonnets there is a struggle between a strong emotional, spiritual bond and a physical, sexual attraction to the addressees. The experience of love as described by the sonnets is not always positive. Love can be a source of guilt, betrayal and heartbreak too.

Sonnet 144

1 Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
2 Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
3 The better angel is a man right fair,
4 The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.
5 To win me soon to hell, my female evil,
6 Tempteth my better angel from my side,
7 And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
8 Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
9 And whether that my angel be turned fiend,
10 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
11 But being both from me, both to each friend,
12 I guess one angel in another's hell.
13 Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
14 Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

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What's in a word? *Sonnet 144*

This sonnet refers to both the Dark Lady and the Young Man, and is the only sonnet of the 154 to clearly do so. The poem describes a love triangle between the poet and the other two, and it's a situation that makes the poet bitter and unhappy. In the poet's eyes, the Young Man is pure and good, and the Dark Lady evil and corrupt.

'Two loves' (line 1) means lovers, the Young Man and the Dark Lady.

'suggest' (line 2) could mean prompt or tempt.

'right fair' (line 3) could mean very attractive or very fair skin.

'coloured ill' (line 4), or dark, contrasts with the fairness of the man described in line 3.

'foul pride' (line 8) means lust.

'both from me, both to each friend' (line 11) means that both the Young Man and the Dark Lady might have abandoned the poet and are now with each other.

'my bad angel fire my good one out.' (line 14) could mean that the Dark Lady drives the Young Man away from the poet or, more scandalously, that the Dark Lady could give the Young Man a sexually transmitted disease ('fire').

The sonnets in which the poet refers to his mistress are full of shame at the sexual attraction that the poet feels. The poet's conscience, his sense of right and wrong, is bothered by the realisation that he can physically want someone but believe that it is morally, or spiritually, wrong to feel that way.

QUESTIONS 3.2

The structural rules of the sonnet can make them seem a very formulaic style of poetry.

1. Having read a few sonnets now, do you think that the requirements of the form can stifle creativity?
2. Are the sonnets clever exercises in a literary form or are they genuinely written from the heart?

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We think that, by Shakespeare's day, the sonnet had very clear rules that poets were expected to follow. That's true to an extent but rules are meant to be broken. Poems of varying lengths were classified 'sonnets' by the Elizabethans and Shakespeare himself stretched the definition to include:

- a sonnet (number 145) written in tetrameter (four accented beats per line, instead of the five accented beats in pentameter) and possibly one of his very earliest surviving poems, despite appearing late in the collection
- a sonnet (number 126) with 12 lines
- a sonnet (number 99) with 15 lines.

chorus the group of actors (sometimes a single actor) that performed the chorus and served as major participants in, commentators on, or as a supplement to the main action of the drama

Shakespeare uses the sonnet form for the lines spoken by the **Chorus** in the Prologue and at the start of Act 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*. He wrote the play at the same time that he was writing many of his sonnets, so it's hardly surprising that the form should creep into his dramatic work as well. And sonnets were so popular at this time that his audience would have been able to tell they were listening to a sonnet in the play without having to see it written on a page.

Shakespeare finds another way to adapt the sonnet in a scene where the characters Romeo and Juliet share a spoken sonnet in the play:

ROMEO
If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this,
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
JULIET
Good pilgrim you do wrong your hands too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
ROMEO
Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
JULIET
Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
ROMEO
O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
JULIET
Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
ROMEO
Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
Act 1, Scene 5, lines 92–105

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Another early play, *Love's Labour's Lost*, also contains sonnets in its text.

Shakespeare's sonnets might be described as 'metaphysical poetry'. Metaphysical poetry uses powerful imagery and philosophical arguments to express states of emotion. Shakespeare wrote some of these poems to demonstrate the conflict between the spiritual needs of the soul and the simpler needs of the body.

DID YOU KNOW?
The metaphysical poets John Donne (1572–1631) and Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) tackled life's big questions in times when doing so could get them into trouble. Donne's early poems were published in a climate of religious oppression. Marvell wrote controversial poetry in secret. The political messages in his poems could have got him thrown in gaol or even executed. His poems were not published until after his death.

Shakespeare's sonnets should be read and appreciated as a collection of poetry that took maybe 20 years to write, in different circumstances and at different times in his career. It's not possible to think of all 154 of them forming a grand sequence in the way that the sonnet cycles of other poets are. This expectation of what sonnet cycles should be has affected how Shakespeare's sonnets have been thought of. Although within the 154 there are smaller sequences and groups of poems that are clearly related, that doesn't mean that they are all part of a continual whole.

Don't be too concerned with the identities of mysterious young men, dark ladies or rival poets. These are entertaining mysteries, and no doubt some of the sonnets were addressed to people who meet those vague descriptions. But Shakespeare wrote sonnets when it suited him, sometimes a lot of them in rapid succession, sometimes not very many, and it's doubtful he was thinking of them as part of a major project in his career. So when you read them, discuss them and write about them, try to think of every sonnet as an individual work to be analysed and appreciated on its own merit.

The poet John Donne (1572–1631)

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Skill builder

Response to literature – poetry analysis

To successfully respond to literature you will need to be able to:

- evaluate and integrate ideas and information from texts to form your own interpretations
- select evidence from texts to analyse and explain how language choices and conventions are used to influence an audience
- explain how language features, imagery and vocabulary contribute to the development of an author's individual style
- develop and justify your own interpretations of texts
- show how selection of language features in works of literature can achieve precision and stylistic effects
- create your own texts to articulate complex ideas
- demonstrate understanding of grammar, vary your own vocabulary choices to maximise the impact of your work
- use accurate spelling and punctuation in your work.

1. Your task is to write a short essay that gives a line-by-line analysis of a poem and an analysis of how each line contributes to the themes of the poem. I have chosen Sonnet 29 for this task but you may choose another one in consultation with your teacher.

> When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

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2. Your analysis will need to explain:
   a. what the poem is about
   b. what the poem's purpose is
   c. what the poem's themes are
   d. what emotions the poem contains
   e. what poetic devices and techniques are in the poem.

3. Your analysis should include:
   a. a first sentence that mentions the sonnet's theme (its main idea) and its title, author and **genre** (in this case, the genre is sonnet)
   b. an analysis of **each** line of the poem; paraphrase each line and identify any literary devices in that line
      - Paraphrase – after quoting the line, explain what it literally means
      - Identification of any poetic devices in the line including similes, metaphors, rhyme, meter, imagery, alliteration and personification
   c. a discussion of how the devices contribute to the meaning of the poem and its theme
   d. transition words – linking words like nevertheless, moreover and however – to give a sense of your own work building an argument or a point of view.

genre a type of text or category of texts that uses particular conventions

4. Pay attention to the writing conventions:
   - Mechanics – grammar, punctuation, spelling and varied vocabulary
   - English-specific – write about the text in the present tense and don't write in the first person (use the pronoun 'I', 'me', 'my', 'myself' or 'mine').

5. Try to be distant and neutral in your analysis. You can analyse the emotion in the poem but don't let your own writing be emotive or emotional.

6. Use colons before a quote. It helps differentiate between your work and the poem. It's important to quote from the poem properly to avoid any confusion.

7. Write about what is happening in the quotation, and then discuss the effect of the line and how devices contribute to the meaning of the sonnet.

8. Use specific nouns when referring to parts of the poem. Don't use vague references like 'This'. Be more specific, e.g. 'This line' or 'This phrase'.

9. Try to capture the complexity of meanings in the poem.

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10. The sonnets will include some unfamiliar words. Make sure you understand their meanings.

11. Try to include a strong closing sentence.

Your turn

Write your own sonnet

1. Compose your own sonnet. Traditionally sonnets are lyric poems that deal with deep emotions. You can write about those if you want, but it could be politics, religion, sport, war, celebrities … you choose.

   Checklist

   - Your sonnet should be 14 lines long
   - It should be written in iambic pentameter – each line containing five iambs, or 'feet', and an iamb is one unstressed and one stressed syllable, and that equals 10 syllables per line
   - It should have an octave – eight lines dealing with the poem's theme or main idea from one point of view
   - It should have a sestet – six lines that contradict, oppose or cast some doubt on the point of view expressed in the octave
   - The ninth line, the volta at the start of the sestet, introduces this new point of view
   - It should follow the Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG
   - Aim to include *at least one* sound device (alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia)
   - Aim to include *at least one* metaphor, personification or simile

2. Include a written explanation (at least 50 words) that details what your poem is about and what effects you want it to have on your reader.

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Read and view more

Television and literature

- BBC television series *A Waste of Shame* (2005) – a dramatisation of Shakespeare's life as he was writing the sonnets
- *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999) by David Foster Wallace – a collection of short stories in which you hear one half of a private conversation, reminiscent of some of Shakespeare's sonnets

Other sonnets

- *Petrarch in English* edited by Thomas Roche
- *Astrophel and Stella* by Sir Philip Sidney (Shakespeare's contemporary)
- *Anthem for Doomed Youth* by Wilfred Owen – a twentieth-century sonnet written during the First World War
- *Sonnet 18 (for Margie)* by Philip Appleman – a modern adaptation of the well-known Sonnet 18
- *Glanmore Sonnets* by Seamus Heaney

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RELOADED IN THIS CHAPTER

Shakespeare's histories

About Shakespeare's histories

Richard III

Henry IV, Part 1

Henry V

Skill builder

Your turn

Read and view more

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4

Shakespeare's histories

King John
King Richard II
King Henry IV, Part 1
King Henry IV, Part 2
King Henry V
King Henry VI, Part 1
King Henry VI, Part 2
King Henry VI, Part 3
King Richard III
King Henry VIII

About Shakespeare's histories

These 10 plays span the period in English history from 1196 to 1533. The middle eight plays form a historical sequence from 1397 to 1485.

However, they were not written chronologically. Even though *Richard III* is set towards the end of the sequence, it was one of Shakespeare's earliest plays.

It's doubtful whether Shakespeare wrote them with the intention of them being seen as an epic, continual sweep of history. They were all written as stand-alone dramatic works to be appreciated on their own merits.

To call these plays 'histories' doesn't mean Shakespeare's other plays were all complete fiction. For example, *Macbeth* is based on a real Scottish king called Macbeth but the play is regarded as a tragedy, not a history.

Were Shakespeare's history plays accurate? Well, no. He was using unreliable source material and he often had to consider what version of past events would please the current monarch. For dramatic effect he would sometimes make real-life events that took place over decades seemingly fit into weeks or even days. So don't believe everything you read in them is historical fact.

The histories present us with another problem. The handful of recurring names given to royal dynasties becomes confusing. Look no further than Act 4, Scene 4 of *Richard III* when Queen Margaret and the Duchess of York commiserate about all the loved ones Richard has murdered:

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QUEEN MARGARET
I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
I had a Harry, till a Richard kill'd him:
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him
Richard III, Act 4, Scene 4, lines 39–42

Who on earth is she talking about? Unfortunately, having so few names to share among so many kings and nobles can make it very difficult for readers and audiences to identify which character is which and their relationships to each other. It's important to follow scripts and notes carefully. Doing some research and finding a family tree for reference is a good idea.

QUESTIONS 4.1

Before the title character commits suicide in *Othello*, he says:

'Speak of me as I am; nothing **extenuate**,
Nor set down aught in malice ...'
Othello, Act 5, Scene 2, lines 392–393

extenuate to make less of something by way of explanation in order to reduce guilt. 'Extenuating circumstances' are circumstances that explain why someone did something that appeared wrong.

1. Othello asks to be remembered truthfully, as he really was, but Shakespeare was less than truthful about all his historical characters! Why might this be so? How might writing a play about a historical figure or an event be different from writing a 'factual' biography or a history?
2. Even if Shakespeare wanted to be as factual as possible in his plays, what difficulties would he face? Where would he find his historical information? For what kinds of details would he need to use his imagination to fill in?
3. Choose a famous historical character that you know something about and find a summary of their life. Imagine you will be writing a play about this person. Where would you begin your play? Would it be possible to tell this person's whole story in the play? What kinds of things would you need to 'make up'?

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4

RICHARD III

WRITTEN: 1591

FIRST PERFORMED: Unknown. The first recorded performance was in 1633, but it was probably performed soon after it was written in 1591 or 1592.

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1597

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: England, 1480s

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Richard, Duke of Gloucester; afterward Richard III (protagonist and antagonist)
- King Edward IV
- George, Duke of Clarence
- Henry, Duke of Buckingham (foil)
- Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond; afterward King Henry VII (foil)
- Queen Margaret, widow of Henry VI
- Elizabeth, Queen to Edward IV
- Lady Anne, widow of Edward, Prince of Wales
- The Duchess of York, mother of King Edward IV
- William, Lord Hastings

EVENTS:

- Richard reveals to the audience that he intends to be a villain and that he will overthrow his brother King Edward IV for the throne.
- He imprisons his other brother, the Duke of Clarence, in the Tower and woos Lady Anne with a brilliant performance.
- Just before Edward IV dies, Richard has Clarence murdered and begins to act quickly to remove the remaining obstacles in his way. With the help of his cousin Lord Buckingham, Richard imprisons the young princes in the Tower and has Elizabeth's brother and son executed.
- Learning that Lord Hastings will not support his bid for the throne, Richard has him beheaded at a dinner party and mock-reluctantly accepts the crown.
- Buckingham refuses to help Richard murder the young princes and Richard denies him a promised earldom.
- Richard plots the death of his wife, Anne.
- Richard sends hired murderers to kill the princes in the tower.

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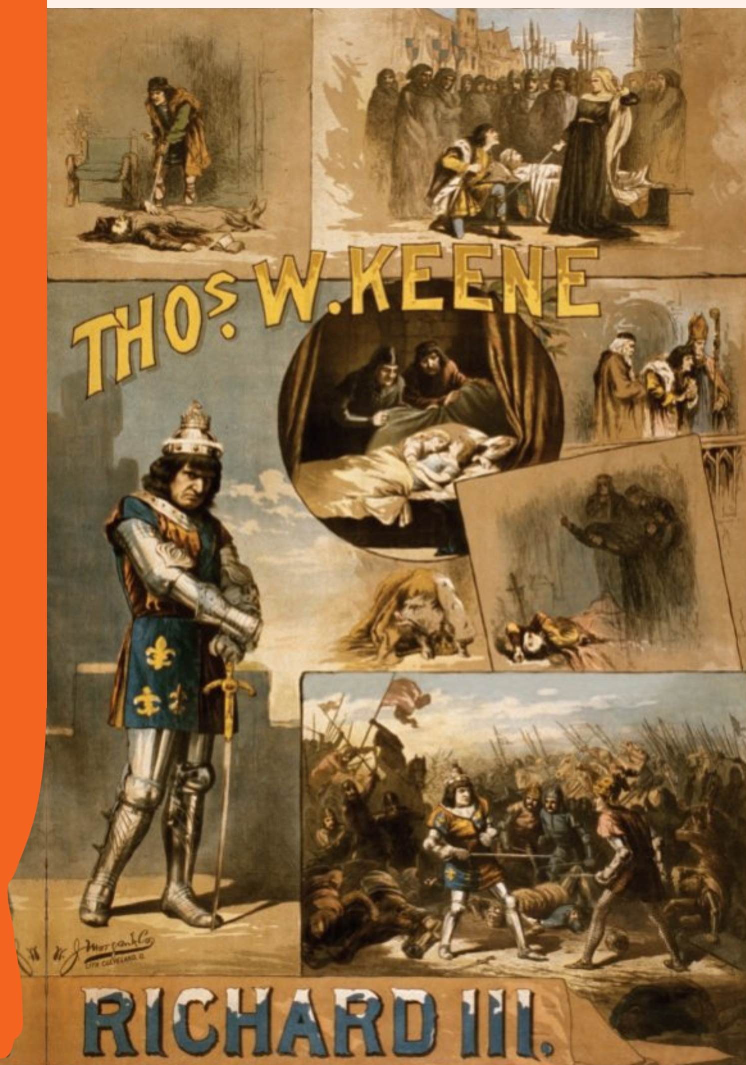
- Richard tries to convince Elizabeth to let him marry her daughter, Richard's niece, and fails.
- Buckingham turns against Richard and tries to join the forces of the Earl of Richmond but is captured and killed.
- The night before Richard is due to meet Richmond's army, the ghosts of his victims appear to him in a nightmare and predict his violent death.
- The next day, Richard's army is defeated by Richmond, who kills Richard and vows to restore peace to England as King Henry VII.

THEMES: The nature of evil; language and deception; sin and punishment; fate versus free will



A circa 1884 poster for William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, starring Thomas W. Keene

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4

Introduction

Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* around 1591. It was one of his most popular plays and printed copies of it sold very well – there were six separate quarto editions of it published. Its original title was *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, which immediately creates a problem for us – if Shakespeare called it a tragedy, why do we consider it a 'history'? The play's story follows a basic pattern that resembles that of a tragedy. The lead character rises to a powerful position from which he falls spectacularly. So 'tragedy' refers to the story's structure and doesn't involve a judgement about how heroic Richard is.

The super villain Shakespeare creates in *Richard III* has its origins in the chronicles written by Tudor historians and Sir Thomas More.

DID YOU KNOW?
Sir Thomas More, born in 1478, was a Catholic English lawyer and politician who became King Henry VIII's most trusted adviser. Some time around 1513–1515 he wrote *The History of Richard III*, a book that cemented Richard's tyrannical reputation. When Henry VIII sought to divorce his first wife and establish the Church of England, More would not support him. In 1534 he refused to swear an oath of succession that would have confirmed his loyalty to Henry above the Pope and his acceptance of the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine. More was arrested, tried for treason and executed on 6 July 1535.

According to the Tudor version of history, Richard (known in the play as the Duke of Gloucester until he becomes king in Act 4, Scene 2) killed Henry VI and Henry's son Prince Edward. He plotted the deaths of his own brother (Clarence), his nephews and his wife. His two-year reign was bloody and tyrannical, ended only by the vengeful Henry Tudor, the rightful heir to the throne who killed Richard and reclaimed the crown.

More recent historians than the Tudor sympathisers of the sixteenth century have discovered that Richard served his eldest brother Edward IV loyally. When Edward IV died suddenly, Richard became the lord protector to the young princes, neither of whom was old enough to rule effectively. Richard's decision to take the crown for himself was to halt the instability caused by Edward's sudden death and the youth of the princes. It's never been established who actually murdered the princes in the Tower. It is true Richard's decision to seize the throne probably ensured that they would not survive, and he probably knew that. But his motives may have been more selfless – to protect his brother's legacy and prevent potential challengers from destroying it – than selfish.

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The Tudors succeeded the Plantagenet family (the royal family Richard was descended from) and sought to blacken his name whenever possible. The image of Richard they concocted would be at home in a fairy tale – a baby that stayed in his mother's womb for two years, to be born with teeth, a hunched back and black hair down to his shoulders.

Instead of a two-year gestation, Shakespeare's Richard was born prematurely:

> 'Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world, scarce half made up …'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 20–21*

Despite these differences, for Shakespeare and the Tudor historians Richard's physical deformities were no barrier to a driving ambition and a malevolent, ruthless desire to destroy whoever got in his way. Of Richard's character, Thomas More wrote:

> 'He was close and secret, a deep dissembler, lowly of countenance, arrogant of heart, outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill, dispiteous and cruel, not for evil will alway, but ofter for ambition, and either for the surety or increase of his estates …'

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2013 a group of Richard III enthusiasts, backed by some archaeologists from the University of Leicester, discovered a skeleton in a car park in the English city of Leicester. They had done some extensive research on Richard's final resting place that led them to this unremarkable location, the site of an old church, demolished long ago. Living descendants of the Plantagenets were located to provide DNA for comparison. The skeleton was tested and proven to be the long-lost remains of Richard III. The archaeologists were able to determine:

- that he really had a severe curvature of the spine
- that a piece of iron found in his spine, thought to be an arrowhead, was in fact an old nail that somehow came to be in his grave
- that he didn't have a withered arm (although his arms were a bit feminine)
- that he suffered severe wounds in the battle of Bosworth Field, including a slice across his scalp, a spike in his skull, a killing blow to the back of the head, and a dagger in his bottom post-mortem.

The investigation clarified many facts about Richard's life and death, but cast more doubt over his role in history.

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Synopsis

The setting is England. The royal family, the House of Plantagenet, has split into two rival factions – the Lancastrians (whose symbol is a red rose) and the Yorkists (whose symbol is a white rose). The civil wars they fought over the English throne lasted from 1455 to 1487 and became known as the Wars of the Roses.

At the play's start Richard is the Duke of Gloucester. He is a Yorkist. He is the youngest of three brothers. His older brother is King Edward IV and his middle brother is George, the Duke of Clarence. By the play's opening, Richard has succeeded in murdering both the Lancastrian King Henry VI and his son, the Prince of Wales, thus removing two immediate rivals to his brother's crown and helping create a period of relative peace in the land. However, Richard rejects this stability and decides to scheme against both his brothers with the aim of winning the crown for himself.

Richard convinces Anne, the Prince of Wales' widow, to marry him, telling her that he was inspired by her beauty to murder her husband and father-in-law. He betrays his own brother Clarence and then sends murderers to kill him in the Tower of London. Edward IV dies soon after hearing the news of Clarence's death. Edward's wife fears for the lives of their two young sons – rightly so, as it turns out. Richard has the two princes removed to the Tower of London, supposedly for their own protection. He prevents the older one from being crowned king and will not allow their mother to visit them. The cunning Duke of Buckingham, Richard's closest ally, stage-manages a public appearance by Richard where he initially refuses, but then 'reluctantly' agrees to be crowned king and end the crisis. The crisis, of course, is entirely false and entirely of his own making.

Richard is crowned king and orders Buckingham to have the princes in the Tower killed. As ruthless as he is, Buckingham cannot bring himself to do it. He loses Richard's confidence, and when Richard refuses to grant Buckingham a promised earldom, Buckingham tries to join a rebellion led by the Earl of Richmond. Richard has the princes murdered by James Tyrell, a thoroughly repulsive character who has no objection to doing the king's dirty work. Lady Anne, Richard's wife, dies suddenly and he decides he should marry his own niece. Fortunately he doesn't get his way on that one. Buckingham is captured and executed but Richmond arrives in England with an army to challenge Richard. The king marches his forces to meet the rebels at Bosworth Field. The night before the battle, the ghosts of all those he has murdered visit Richard in his dreams, cursing him. In the morning he despairs of his chances. The two armies fight. Richard's army is defeated and he is killed by Richmond, who takes the crown and vows to unite the rival factions, bringing peace at last.

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In focus

Richard

For many years, scholars considered that Shakespeare depicted Richard III as a monster, finally defeated by the Earl of Richmond, to please Queen Elizabeth I. Richmond was Elizabeth's grandfather. His victory at Bosworth established the Tudor line of English monarchs. Upon being crowned he became Henry VII. His son would become Henry VIII, and one of Henry VIII's daughters would become Queen Elizabeth I – England's ruler for most of Shakespeare's life. It made sense for the Tudors to portray Richard III as a tyrant so they could justify killing him and taking the crown, restoring (as they saw it) legitimate, lasting and orderly rule to a long-suffering country.

However, by the time Shakespeare wrote *Richard III*, Elizabeth was nearly 60 years old and had not had any children. With no heirs to her throne, it was obvious to everyone that the Tudor dynasty would end when she died. The supposedly glorious era was nearly over and a new period of turmoil was possibly just around the corner. The pessimism and uncertainty about who would be England's next ruler after Elizabeth might be a reason for Shakespeare to write a play that depicts power struggles, treachery and upheaval.

Richard III is Shakespeare's fourth longest play and Richard speaks 32 per cent of the play's lines. Of the play's 22 scenes, Richard appears in 14. Of all Shakespeare's lead roles, Richard is second in size only to Hamlet. Richmond is not even mentioned until Act 4 of the play, does not appear until Act 5 and has only 4 per cent of the play's lines. He is the *Deus ex machina* of this play. Although Richmond is the device necessary for Richard's defeat and death, he is not a character who provokes much interest.

DID YOU KNOW?
Deus ex machina is a Latin translation of an ancient Greek phrase *theos ek mēkhanēs*, literally meaning 'god from the machinery'. In ancient Greek theatre, machines like pulleys and ropes would suspend actors playing gods above the stage. The god characters would intervene and bring the story to a conclusion. Although we rarely see gods depicted in storytelling today, the sudden introduction of a powerful character or event to solve a crisis in a novel, a play, a TV show or a film, is a modern form of the *Deus ex machina*. As a dramatic device, it is sometimes regarded as a lazy way to bring a story to a satisfying conclusion.

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Richmond’s small role and uninteresting lines stand in strong contrast to Richard’s dominant presence, his energy and his wickedness.

Of all Shakespeare’s leading characters in all of the plays, only Richard starts his own play, and he starts it with a soliloquy. Richard establishes a relationship with the audience. Richard takes the audience into his confidence from the first moments of the play, and does so throughout – no Shakespearean character addresses the audience more – strengthening the sense of complicity between him and his spectators. In a strange way, despite his evil ruthlessness, the audience is able to feel some admiration for him. He is clever. He is funny. He seems to be the master of his own destiny, scripting and directing events before the audience’s eyes.

> ‘I am determinèd to prove a villain …’
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 30*

He enjoys being the bad guy.

> ‘Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
> By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
> To set my brother Clarence and the king
> In deadly hate the one against the other.’
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 32–35*

He tells us that he is planning deceptions. He is relying on his ingenuity, not his physical abilities. Words will be his weapons.

Shakespeare’s Richard is a creation that has his origin in the Vice character from mediaeval morality plays.

DID YOU KNOW?
Mediaeval morality plays were still a popular form of entertainment in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These plays were intended to teach their audiences moral or religious lessons. The characters in the plays were often personifications of moral qualities like vice, justice and charity. Other characters were sometimes the living embodiments of abstract concepts like strength, beauty and death. The central character was often a fallible human, who could be tempted by sin or be redeemed by forces for good.

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In the morality plays, Vice was an evil character whose mission was to stalk the earth, corrupting humanity. In Act 3, Scene 1, Richard compares himself to the Vice character from mediaeval drama:

> 'Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity,
> I moralise two meanings in one word.'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, lines 82–83*

However, Richard has much more depth than a two-dimensional character like Vice. Richard is himself an actor. In wooing Anne, he kneels before her and confesses to having killed both her father-in-law (Henry VI) and her husband. He gives her his sword and invites her to kill him:

> 'I did kill King Henry,
> But 'twas thy beauty that provokèd me.
> Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed young Edward,
> But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 184–187*

Apparently it was her beauty that compelled him to murder her loved ones.

After Anne departs and he is left alone once more, Richard gloats about it to the audience. Then he casually informs us that he is just using her. He says, 'I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.'

During Buckingham's staged appearance before the Mayor and the citizens of London in Act 3, Scene 7, Richard appears flanked by two bishops, a picture of Christian humility. Buckingham asks Richard to take the crown for himself but he refuses. Buckingham leaves in mock-exasperation but Richard pretends to change his mind and, with feigned reluctance and creating the impression that he feels he must do this for the good of the country, agrees to become king.

Richard's apparent ability to shape his own future and bend events to his will reflects an important philosophical development in European society. The Renaissance was a time when the idea that God mapped out a plan for everybody was challenged. Individuals could be responsible for changing the direction of their lives. Things turn out badly for Richard in the end, but for most of the play he seems to be controlling the action. There will be more about that in the *What's in a word?* section for this play. But Richard shows us that if people do have the free will to determine their own path, then the risk is that the path may lead to destruction.

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Interpretation

Kathryn Hunter as Richard III

In 2003 Shakespeare's Globe introduced a women-only company of actors. The company performed *Richard III.*

Kathryn Hunter is an American-born actor based in the United Kingdom. She has acted on screen but has worked primarily in theatre. She is best known for her work with the London-based theatre company Complicite. Complicite's productions follow principles of collaboration across all areas of theatre making including the involvement of designers from the beginning of any production. They also focus on the performer's body as central to any production and their rehearsals include improvisation, games and physical exploration. Each production is founded on thorough research.

Kathryn Hunter as Richard in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's production of *Richard III*, 2003

Hunter worked with director Barry Kyle and Shakespeare's Globe's Master of Movement Glynn MacDonald on developing Richard's physicality. Hunter twisted her body into bizarre shapes, allowing the character to be surprised and delighted by some of the grotesque forms she discovered. She moved around the stage with her right arm contorted and a pronounced limp, never allowing her right leg to take all her weight or her right foot to fully rest on the stage. Other characters refer to Richard as 'a bottled spider' and 'a bunch-backed toad' in the play, but some in the audience likened Hunter's physicality to a scavenger bird with a broken wing. Even her husky voice sounded like the raspy call of a crow.

Her enjoyment playing the role was obvious. Her childlike delight at wearing the king's crown and robe was radiant.

Hunter also identified Richard's relationship with Buckingham as central to the portrayal of her character. In discussion with Amanda Harris, the actor playing Buckingham, both women decided that the two characters are very like-minded. There is a clear status relationship between the two – Richard has the higher status and wants to be king, Buckingham has the lower status

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and sees himself as the kingmaker. Yet they depend on each other to realise their ambitions. Richard's wicked sense of fun is infectious – Buckingham also enjoys the murderous game they play. But Hunter's Richard pushes Harris's Buckingham as far as possible. When Richard orders the princes in the Tower executed, Buckingham reaches his limit. When Buckingham refuses to approve the orders, Richard's rejection of his ally is swift, merciless and without regret. In other words, completely consistent with the character she had established.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Improvisation: how far would Buckingham go to help Richard?
This is a game Kathryn Hunter and Amanda Harris played as part of their preparation for playing Richard and Buckingham at Shakespeare's Globe in 2003.

- In pairs – one to play Richard, one to play Buckingham.
- You may use props.
- Richard will ask Buckingham to do something for him. Richard can ask politely, urgently, threateningly or in any way you can think of.
- Buckingham will answer Richard. At what point will he draw the line?

The catch: both of you can only use the word 'OK'. You can use it many times in phrases and complete sentences, or just once. By limiting yourselves to one word, you will focus on expressing emotions in your voices, gestures and actions to make your intentions clear.

What's in a word? *Determined*

In his opening soliloquy, Richard declares:

> 'I am determinèd to prove a villain …'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 30*

Richard could mean this in the sense that: 'I have decided that I will be a villain.' This is an entirely legitimate reading of that line. Richard is usually presented as a character who grabs the situation by the scruff of the neck and squeezes every drop of advantage from it that he can, caring nothing for the consequences.

However, the line could also have the opposite meaning: 'It has been decided for me that I will be a villain.'

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QUESTIONS 4.2

1. If Act 1, Scene 1, line 30 is meant in this way, who (or what) has decided this for Richard?
2. Do you think Shakespeare intended the word 'determined' to be used with a dual meaning?
3. What do you think the point might be of using the possibility of a dual meaning?

Read this last section of Richard Duke of Gloucester's soliloquy:

'I am determinèd to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams
To set my brother Clarence and the king
In deadly hate the one against the other.
And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up
About a prophecy which says that 'G'
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
Dive, thoughts, down to my soul, here Clarence comes.'
Act 1, Scene 1, lines 30–41

4. This part of the soliloquy mentions prophecies. Do you think Richard believes prophecies or not? Explain your answer.
5. The first part of Richard's plan is about to be put into effect – his brother George, the Duke of Clarence, is about to be 'mew'd up' (imprisoned) because of a prophecy that 'G' will murder King Edward IV's heirs. It's convenient for Richard (the Duke of Gloucester) if the king believes 'G' stands for 'George'. Who else might 'G' stand for?

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Sayings originating in this play

… the winter of our discontent …

From the first line of the play, Richard uses the season of winter as a metaphor for the upheaval ('discontent') England has endured through the Wars of the Roses. The first two lines in their entirety,

> 'Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer by this sun of York;'

complete the metaphor – the 'sun of York' (his brother, Edward IV) has turned the winter into summer by the glory of his rule. There is also a pun here on the word 'sun', which could also be interpreted as 'son' of York – the Duke of York was the father of Edward; George, the Duke of Clarence; and Richard.

'The winter of our discontent' is often used to describe troubled political or social situations. It is also the title of a novel by the American writer John Steinbeck.

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse! (Act 5, Scene 4)

Up to his hump in the Battle of Bosworth Field, Richard's horse has been killed and he is fighting on foot. He may be saying, 'I will give my kingdom in return for another horse' (which isn't very likely considering how hard he worked to get the kingdom), or he could be saying, 'I have lost my kingdom because I no longer have a horse.'

These days, people will sometimes say this in desperation if they are unable to find an apparently trivial object that has suddenly become enormously important.

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4

HENRY IV, PART 1

WRITTEN: 1596 or 1597

FIRST PERFORMED: 1597

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1598

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: England and Wales, 1402–1403

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- King Henry IV
- Prince Harry, aka Hal, son of Henry IV (protagonist)
- Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland
- Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester
- Harry Percy, aka Hotspur, son of Northumberland (antagonist)
- Lady Percy, wife of Hotspur
- Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March
- Owen Glendower
- Archibald, Earl of Douglas
- Sir John Falstaff (foil)
- Mistress Quickly
- Bardolph
- Ned Poins

EVENTS:

- King Henry IV receives news that his army in the south has been defeated by the Welsh rebel Glendower, while Hotspur has had a victory in the north. He is simultaneously angered that Hotspur did not send the captured soldiers back to the king and saddened that his own son is not more like the brave Hotspur.
- Meanwhile, Hal is out drinking and partying with Falstaff at the tavern. Poins arrives and puts in place a plan to humiliate Falstaff when they later rob a group of wealthy travellers.
- At this time, Hal reveals to the audience that his persona as an untrustworthy larrikin will soon end, and he will stake his claim as his father's heir.
- For various reasons, Hotspur, Northumberland, Worcester and Glendower hatch a plan to overthrow Henry and install Mortimer on the throne.
- Upset at Hal's extra-curricular activities, the king summons his son to court and strongly admonishes him. Hal promises to redeem himself.

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- At that moment, they learn of the rebellion, and Hal, put in charge of the king's army, vows to defeat Hotspur.
- Though some of the other rebels fail to join him, Hotspur goes on to meet the king's army at the battle of Shrewsbury.
- In the midst of the battle, Douglas attacks King Henry but Hal intervenes, fighting Douglas off and rescuing his father.
- Hal finds Hotspur on another part of the battlefield. They fight one-on-one and Hal kills Hotspur.
- Henry and Hal win the battle of Shrewsbury.
- Hal decides to pardon Douglas.
- The play ends with Henry planning the defeat of the remaining rebels.

THEMES: The ideal qualities of a king; the burden of leadership; courage versus cowardice; patriotism; war

Larger than life: the hilarious, often disgusting Sir John Falstaff

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4

Introduction

Henry IV, Part 1 was written between 1596 and 1597. It was first printed in 1598 and it was the most popular of Shakespeare's works at the time. One reason for the play's popularity was that it introduces Sir John Falstaff, one of Shakespeare's most loved characters who would appear in two more plays – *Henry IV, Part 2* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* (Technically, it would be three more plays if you see a production of *Henry V* that includes his dead body being carried across stage in Act 2, Scene 3.)

Synopsis

King Henry IV has taken the English throne from his cousin, Richard II, and then murdered him. Now Henry rules over a divided kingdom and rival noblemen fighting a civil war. Henry proposes a Crusade to Jerusalem, perhaps to atone for his own sins, and perhaps to unite the warring English factions. Henry learns that Welsh rebels have defeated an English army and that the English commander Mortimer has been taken prisoner. Henry already knows that Hotspur, Northumberland's son, has defeated a Scottish army. Henry wishes that Hotspur were his own son, but is angry that Hotspur will not hand over all the Scottish prisoners so Henry can collect ransom money for them.

In another room of the palace, Henry's son Prince Hal is joking with his friend Sir John Falstaff. Poins, another of Hal's friends, arrives. Poins and Falstaff leave, planning a robbery. In a soliloquy Hal explains that he is deliberately earning a bad reputation for himself. He intends to act more like a prince in future, but he calculates that people will be more impressed by him if his transformation is radical.

At Windsor Castle, Henry argues with the Percy family – Hotspur and his father, Northumberland – over the Scottish prisoners. Hotspur refuses to give the prisoners to Henry and vows to support Mortimer, his brother-in-law. The Percy family feel Henry is ungrateful for their support in deposing Richard II. It is revealed that Richard II named Mortimer as his successor to the throne; meaning Mortimer is a threat to Henry. Hotspur criticises his own father for betraying Richard. Privately Hotspur tells Northumberland and Worcester that they should challenge Henry. Worcester tells Hotspur that there is a rebellion forming against Henry. If Hotspur returns the Scottish prisoners without demanding ransom, the Scots will join the rebels. Worcester knows that they have to act quickly before Henry discovers their plan and has them executed.

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Act 2 begins with the robbery Falstaff and Poins planned. Hal joins in the robbery and then helps Poins chase Falstaff away so they can keep the proceeds for themselves. Back at the Boar's Head Tavern, Falstaff and Hal joke about the robbery when a message arrives from Henry, warning of the rebellion and summoning Hal. Preparing to face his father in this time of crisis, Falstaff and Hal act out the conversation that must happen between the father and son, with Hal pretending to be Henry and Falstaff pretending to be Hal. A sheriff arrives, searching for the robbers. Hal lies to the sheriff to protect Falstaff.

Act 3 opens at the castle of Owen Glendower, leader of the Welsh rebels. Glendower's boasts of the strange events that supposedly accompanied his birth quickly get on Hotspur's nerves. Mortimer explains his plans for dividing England between the three of them if they defeat Henry.

Back in Henry's castle, the king warns Hal that constantly associating with common people like Falstaff and Poins is damaging the prestige of the monarchy. Henry tells his son that Hotspur would be a more worthy heir, and even suggests that Hal could join Hotspur's rebellion. Hal promises to defeat Hotspur and take his honours for himself. Relieved, Henry puts Hal in charge of an army. In the next scene Hal returns to the Boar's Head Tavern. He tells Falstaff that he has made up with his father. Hal also gives Falstaff command of a company of soldiers in the approaching war.

In Act 4 the rebel army is forming at Shrewsbury. Hotspur and Douglas are now allies against Henry IV. Northumberland is seriously ill and cannot join them, but a message arrives from him advising the rebels to attack Henry. News arrives that Henry's army is approaching. Hotspur is then told that Glendower's army isn't ready, but even that bad news doesn't worry him. He reckons there is more glory to share around if they win.

Falstaff has recruited soldiers to his company, but has taken bribes from the wealthier recruits and let them go. He has replaced these deserters with a pathetic bunch of no-hopers. Hal and the Earl of Westmoreland are dismayed when they see the poor quality of Falstaff's soldiers. Falstaff regards his men merely as battle casualties waiting to happen.

In the rebel camp, Hotspur and Douglas argue with their advisers over whether to engage Henry's forces in battle immediately. Sir Walter Blunt arrives with an offer from King Henry to pardon the rebels and grant their wishes. Hotspur asks for more time to consider the king's offer. In the next scene, the action moves to the town of York, where the Archbishop, another of Henry's enemies, is worried that Hotspur and Douglas will lose if they fight now. The Archbishop plots to organise another rebel army to challenge the king.

At the start of Act 5, Henry's army has set up camp at Shrewsbury. Worcester arrives from the rebel camp and attempts to justify joining Hotspur's army. Hal offers to fight Hotspur in single combat instead of both armies fighting each other. Henry tells Worcester to tell the rebels that they can all be friends again if they lay down their weapons. Worcester leaves to take this offer to the

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rebels, and Hal predicts that the offer will be rejected. The king's army prepares for battle.

Worcester decides not to tell Hotspur about Henry's peace offer. He does tell Hotspur that Hal has challenged him to single combat but Hotspur isn't impressed. He predicts that he will kill Hal anyway and orders his army to battle.

The battle begins. Hal is wounded but he fights on, saving his father when Douglas attacks Henry. Hal forces Douglas to retreat and Henry realises that his son loves him. Then Hal and Hotspur meet on the battlefield. While they fight, Douglas attacks Falstaff, who pretends to be killed. Hal kills Hotspur then praises his bravery. He sees Falstaff apparently dead and bids him farewell, then leaves. When Hal exits, Falstaff gets up off the ground and explains that he faked his own death because he didn't see any point in continuing a battle he couldn't win. He decides to claim that he killed Hotspur, hoping for a reward. When Hal returns to find Falstaff alive, he agrees to support Falstaff's story.

Henry's army is victorious. He sentences the traitors Worcester and Sir Richard Vernon to death, but frees the captured Douglas as a reward for his bravery. The play ends with Henry preparing to face his remaining enemies, Mortimer and Glendower.

In focus

Hal and Falstaff's relationship

Falstaff is usually played as a gross, heavy, sweaty drunk who burps and farts his way across the stage. He lives life to the fullest, selfishly enjoying the pleasures of food and drink to excess. The play makes it very clear that Falstaff is a large, overweight man. Not many other Shakespearean characters are given such obvious physical descriptions. Falstaff puts up with many references to his size from other characters and even enjoys poking fun at himself. Plus, Falstaff is not interested in or troubled by the politics and war that involve the other characters, except if they threaten his enjoyment of life. So at first glance it appears that Shakespeare has created him for comedy purposes.

But Falstaff is much more than just an entertaining party animal in Hal's entourage of lowlifes – he is an alternative father figure to Prince Hal. Hal enjoys an easy friendship with Falstaff that he does not have with his father, King Henry.

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DID YOU KNOW?
The character Falstaff is based on a real-life knight, Sir John Oldcastle. How do we know this? Prince Hal calls him 'my old lad of the castle' in the play. Oldcastle was a friend and comrade of the real Prince Hal. Oldcastle became a traitor to the throne because of his religious beliefs. He was captured and hanged. His followers regarded him as a martyr.

Prince Hal is a stark contrast to Falstaff. He is a younger man, usually played by an athletic actor to emphasise the physical differences between the two men. Hal is irresponsible, witty and enjoys a good time – for all appearances, an apprentice Falstaff. But there is a hard edge to Hal. He has his own selfishness. He wants to enjoy the life he has with Falstaff as long as he can, not caring about his duty as a prince or the frustration he causes his father King Henry IV. But Hal knows that when he has to, he will embrace the role of the loyal prince that his father expects him to play. Hal will jettison his old life and friends without looking back.

King Henry IV thinks Hal is a lost cause and wishes that Hotspur was his son instead.

> 'O that it could be proved
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
> In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
> And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!
> Then I would have his Harry, and he mine.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 85–89*

The relationship between Prince Hal and his father King Henry IV is similar to a very old story – the prodigal son – from the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament of the Bible. In that story, a rich man's younger son wastes his inheritance before his father has even died. The son returns to his father, humiliated and expecting to live no better than a servant. Instead his father welcomes him home with open arms.

In *King Henry IV, Part 1*, Prince Hal plans to follow a similar path to the prodigal son. At the end of Act 1, Scene 2, he is left alone on stage after his drinking mates have exited, and he delivers the following soliloquy:

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'I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness:
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
So, when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill;
Redeeming time when men think least I will.'
Act 1, Scene 2, lines 184–206

Hal is entirely aware that he is behaving irresponsibly but he wants to ensure that when he does assume his responsibilities it will be on his terms, when it suits him and in a way that shows him in the best possible light. His partying is an act, intended to cause maximum disappointment to his father, and Hal's 'reformation' will be that much more appreciated by his father as a result.

In Act 2, Scene 4 of *Henry IV, Part 1*, Prince Hal and Falstaff practise a conversation that will take place between King Henry IV and Hal. Falstaff pretends to be the prince in this conversation and Hal takes the role of the king. Falstaff (as the prince) asks the king (played by Hal) not to punish Falstaff: 'banish plump Jack and you banish all the world'. Falstaff is in effect saying that he is the whole world, at least to Prince Hal, which is a blunt reminder that the relationship between Hal and his father is unhappy and dysfunctional.

At the end of Act 5, Scene 1, Hal exits saying to Falstaff that he owes God a death. Left alone, Falstaff speaks this soliloquy:

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> ' 'Tis not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before
> his day. What need I be so forward with him that
> calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks
> me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I
> come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or
> an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no.
> Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is
> honour? a word. What is in that word honour? what
> is that honour? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it?
> he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no.
> Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis insensible, then. Yea,
> to the dead. But will it not live with the living?
> no. Why? detraction will not suffer it. Therefore
> I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so
> ends my **catechism**.'
>
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 127–141*

catechism a question -and-answer ritual or technique

The question and answer form of this soliloquy leads us to think that Falstaff might be about to put his selfish, cowardly ways behind him and behave like a hero. Instead he reinforces his values and refuses to meet the expectations society puts on him.

Hal has been failing to live up to the expectations that society and his father have of him, but Hal believes he can throw a switch whenever he wants and instantly transform into a dutiful son. As the heir to the throne, Hal is supposed to be better than everyone else. Falstaff has no intention of changing. He is unashamedly a slave to his selfish desires.

Society and religion tell us to impose limits and discipline on ourselves. Our minds should control our physical impulses. Falstaff is not interested in that. He rejects the authority that demands self-denial and self-sacrifice. Hal, on the other hand, wants the best of both worlds. Hal ignores his father and his responsibilities for as long as he can. But in a time of crisis, when Prince Hal and King Henry must sort out their differences to secure the kingdom's future, there is no place left for Falstaff in Hal's life. From a dramatic point of view, it seems as though Falstaff must be moved out of the way – killed off – to bring Hal and Henry closer together. Shakespeare apparently couldn't bring himself to write Falstaff out, which instead leaves Falstaff a pathetic, entirely rejected character by the end of *King Henry IV, Part 2*.

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QUESTIONS 4.3

1. What kind of a man is Falstaff? Is he a good influence on Hal (who will eventually become King Henry V) or a bad influence, as Hal's father believes?
2. Without doubt, Falstaff is one of Shakespeare's most beloved characters. What is your personal reaction to him? Despite all his faults – mentioned explicitly by both Falstaff's friends (at his expense) and Falstaff himself – would you like to be him or be one of his close friends?
3. *Henry IV, Part 1* ends with Hal ultimately rejecting Falstaff as part of his growth as the heir to the throne. How do you feel about this, based on their previous relationship? Was it inevitable?

Interpretation

Chimes at Midnight and Orson Welles as Falstaff

Orson Welles was an American actor, writer and director, born in 1915. In 1938 he famously adapted the H.G. Wells science fiction classic *The War of the Worlds* into a radio play. The production was so realistic that some listeners believed they really were under attack from Mars.

In 1941, at the age of 26, he co-wrote, produced, directed and starred in his first film, *Citizen Kane*. Many believe this to be the greatest film ever made.

Welles also had a strong background in theatre and a deep interest in the works of Shakespeare from a young age. In 1939 he combined five of Shakespeare's history plays (*Richard II*, *Henry IV* parts 1 and 2, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) into a stage production called *Five Kings*, casting himself as Falstaff. In its original form *Five Kings* was more than five hours long. The show had many technical problems and was performed only a few times before being cancelled. In 1960 Welles returned to the play, renaming it *Chimes at Midnight*, and staging the production in Ireland. In 1965 he made it into a film, which in some countries was called *Falstaff*.

Welles was fascinated with Falstaff, believing that he was Shakespeare's greatest character. Welles edited these plays into a story where the big man is the focus, not kings or princes. Under Welles's treatment, the sequence of plays is no longer a dramatic chronicle of English history. Instead it explores the triangular relationship between King Henry IV, Prince Hal and Falstaff. Falstaff acts as a father to the prince when the prince's relationship with his own father has apparently failed.

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Welles's Falstaff is a good man who does his best in a treacherous world. Prince Hal succeeds his father and becomes King Henry V. In assuming his royal responsibilities, the new king rejects his former wasted life of partying, and rejects Falstaff too. The two never speak again. Henry V forbids Falstaff from getting any closer to him than 10 miles. Falstaff dies in poverty.

Welles gives Falstaff great **pathos**. He doesn't play Falstaff as a heavy clown to be made fun of. Instead he is more mature and clever. He understands Prince Hal and the role he plays in the younger man's life. He stands by Hal, although Hal does not stand by him. Welles saw Falstaff as representing the kind of country England had been – a relaxed, carefree place of people enjoying simple pleasures in life. King Henry V represents the sort of country it was becoming – powerful, dutiful and responsible.

pathos the quality or power in an actual life experience or in literature, music, speech, or other forms of expression, of evoking a feeling of pity or compassion or a feeling of sympathy

Orson Welles in 1937. With characteristic ambition, he sought to combine five of Shakespeare's history plays (including *Henry IV, Part 1*) into one mega-play, called *Five Kings.*

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What's in a word? *Father*

In Act 2, Scene 4, Falstaff suggests he and Hal perform a role-play at the Boar's Head Tavern so the prince can rehearse what he'll say when he confronts the angry king, his father:

> FALSTAFF
> Well, thou wert be horribly chid tomorrow when thou comest to thy father: if thou love me, practise an answer.
> PRINCE HENRY
> Do thou stand for my father, and examine me upon the particulars of my life.
> *Act 2, Scene 4, lines 308–311*

QUESTIONS 4.4

1. To stage a skit like this, mocking the king, in front of witnesses, is a very rebellious action. Why does Hal let Falstaff get away with showing the king such disrespect?
2. There are other occasions in the play when Hal and Falstaff perform different roles for each other. Why do you think they enjoy acting so much?
3. Hal will eventually have to choose between Falstaff and his father. Why? What is he actually being forced to choose between?

Sayings originating in this play

> 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'
> *Act 2, Scene 3, lines 8–9*

This is like the expressions 'snatching victory from the jaws of defeat', and 'grasping the nettle'. The nettle is a plant whose leaves are covered in stinging hairs. English people believed that the nettle doesn't sting if it is grabbed and held firmly. Touching it tentatively is asking for trouble. Hotspur's metaphor emphasises his philosophy that the best way to meet danger is head-on.

> 'The better part of valour is discretion'
> *Act 5, Scene 4, line 117*

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Falstaff's line has become the proverb 'Discretion is the better part of valour'. When faced with a fight you cannot win, it's better to retreat and live to fight another day. Though it seems cowardly, that is the wiser course of action than taking unnecessary risks, which might be brave but pointless. Of course, Falstaff has made a career out of exercising this discretion to shirk his responsibilities in favour of more enjoyable pursuits.

ACTIVITY 4.2

Stop, go, jump, clap

This starts simply enough …

- Create some space in the room and find a place to stand.
- When your teacher, or whoever is running the game, calls 'go', you walk forward. Don't wander in a circle like a zombie! Keep your eyes and face active. Be purposeful, not automatic.
- When the caller says 'stop', you stop.
- When the caller says 'jump', you jump.
- When the caller says 'clap', you clap your hands.
- The caller may call the actions in any order.

Straightforward? Time to change it up.

- 'Stop' now means 'go'
- 'Go' now means 'stop'
- 'Jump' now means 'clap'
- 'Clap' now means 'jump'

You will have to concentrate. Other actions may be added, such as 'sit' and 'stand'.

The challenge is to follow the meaning of the instruction, and not the literal instruction, which you will instinctively want to do. This is a bit like Prince Hal, who knows he has a duty to perform in a certain way, but is determined not to – until it suits him.

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4

HENRY V

WRITTEN: 1599

FIRST PERFORMED: 1599

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1600

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: England and France, 1415

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- King Henry V (protagonist who was Prince Hal in *Henry IV*)
- Duke of Exeter
- Archbishop of Canterbury
- Bishop of Ely
- Earl of Cambridge
- Scroop
- Grey
- King Charles VI of France
- The Dauphin (Dauphin is the traditional French title given to the heir to the throne) (antagonist)
- Katherine
- Captain Llewellyn
- Pistol
- Bardolph
- Nym
- Chorus

EVENTS:

- The Chorus encourages the audience to use their imaginations to bring the scenes, represented on stage, to life.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely plot together to protect the Church's power and convince Henry to go to war with France.
- The king makes his claim to the French ambassadors, who insultingly refuse. Henry resolves to invade.
- We are introduced to some common soldiers in Henry's army, characters who had been acquaintances of Prince Harry (Hal) in *Henry IV, Part 1*. We also learn of the mortal illness of the king's one-time friend John Falstaff.
- Henry executes the traitors Cambridge, Scroop and Grey.
- In England, Falstaff dies and is lamented by his Eastcheap companions.

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- In France, the French court discusses whether or not to fight Henry. Subsequently, Henry demands that Charles VI hand over the crown at the threat of war.
- Henry lands with a magnificent display of arms at Harfleur on the French coast, causing the French king to offer him a compromise of several dukedoms and the hand of his daughter. Henry refuses and continues to besiege Harfleur. The governor of Harfleur negotiates with Henry and ultimately surrenders the town to the English.
- One of the common soldiers, Bardolph, is sentenced to hang for stealing.
- The English and French armies prepare to fight the Battle of Agincourt. Henry goes in disguise among his troops, and keenly feels his own isolation as king. The French command looks on, confident of victory.
- Henry delivers the St Crispin's Day speech, exhorting the English to victory against a numerically superior foe. The English army prevails at Agincourt, leaving the French in disarray.
- Henry returns to England, where people gather to celebrate, but Henry forbids a parade. Henry goes back to France to sign a peace treaty. Henry marries Katherine of France, and the Chorus ends the play.

THEMES: Leadership and ruthlessness; the glory and the horror of war; friendship, individuality and common purpose; patriotism

John Gilbert, *Morning of the Battle of Agincourt* (1884). This painting shows Henry and his army at prayer on the morning of the battle.

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Introduction

Henry V was written between 1598 and 1599. In March 1599, when *Henry V* was first performed, the English Earl of Essex was raising an army of 16 000 to go to Ireland and defeat a rebellion against English rule. In the **prologue** to Act 5, the Chorus specifically refers to the hope that Essex would be successful:

prologue an introductory scene in which a narrator summarises the main action of the work

> 'Were now the general of our gracious empress,
> As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
> Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 30–32*

The 'general' refers to Essex and 'our gracious empress' refers to Queen Elizabeth I.

Six months later, about 12 000 of the English soldiers would be dead. The campaign failed and Essex returned to London in disgrace. Queen Elizabeth removed most of his titles. He later tried to stage a coup against her, for which he was beheaded in 1601.

Many of the English soldiers sent to fight in Ireland had been forced into the army. High taxes were demanded from the English people to pay for this war. People who went to see *Henry V* had different views on the war in Ireland. Some thought it a just war. Others resented having their brothers, sons and husbands taken from them and sent to fight against their will. Some hated being taxed so heavily to pay for a war they didn't want.

In recent years, theatre directors and academics studying *Henry V* have considered it to be a play with a split personality or two plays in one. On the surface it is a patriotic, pro-war story about an English hero. Beneath that story is a bleak anti-war **satire** that lifts the lid on the ruthless ambitions of the powerful.

satire a novel, a play, an entertainment in which topical issues, folly, vice or evil are held up to scorn by means of ridicule, sarcasm and irony

Before this perspective became popular, the play was almost always thought of as a celebration of English courage and determination. Those who didn't like the play, or like the character of Henry, objected to Shakespeare's presentation of kingship as flawed. But perhaps that is what Shakespeare genuinely believed – that being a king demanded the magnificence and the brutality, warts and all, rolled into one.

Henry V, a play about a war in 1415, had some relevance to Shakespeare's audiences. The play didn't have to be pro-war or anti-war. It was a play about being at war. By attending a play about a past war, people in the audience were able to reflect on their current situation.

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DID YOU KNOW?
At the end of the sixteenth century, England was facing a rebellion in Ireland. The rebellion lasted nine years and in total 100 000 people lost their lives. On 14 August 1598, a rebel Irish army, commanded by Hugh O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, ambushed an English force of 4000 men at the Battle of the Yellow Ford. The English army fled in disarray. The victorious Irish then massacred the prisoners and wounded. There were only 2000 English survivors. It remains, to this day, the worst English defeat on Irish soil.

Synopsis

Young Prince Hal, from *Henry IV* parts 1 and 2, has been crowned king of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely are worried about a proposed law that will confiscate over half the Church's wealth and give it to the king. Canterbury has offered the new king a large amount of money in the hope that he will oppose the law. Canterbury convinces King Henry that he has legal rights to the French crown and territories in France. A fleet of ships prepares to sail across the English Channel. In a London tavern, the news of imminent war in France is greeted enthusiastically by Henry's old drinking companions: Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph. They decide to join Henry's army, hoping to find adventure and fortune. Falstaff's young servant, who is known simply in the script as 'Boy', accompanies them.

Henry's army crosses the English Channel. The French king has offered him the hand of his daughter Katherine in marriage and some French territory but this is not enough for Henry. He besieges the French port of Harfleur. Henry's friends, from his wild youth, fight reluctantly and would prefer to be looting – something Henry has strictly forbidden. Henry demands that Harfleur surrender, threatening to kill all the inhabitants if they do not comply. The townspeople realise that their situation is hopeless and agree to Henry's terms. His army is weakened by disease and he plans to return to the French town of Calais. Meanwhile in the French royal court, Princess Katherine takes English lessons.

The French king sends his much larger, healthier army after Henry's bedraggled forces. In the English camp, Bardolph has been arrested for looting a church. Henry orders him to be executed, disregarding their friendship of earlier times. A French messenger arrives to suggest that Henry allow himself to be ransomed and avoid the unnecessary massacre of his paltry forces. Henry refuses. In the French camp at Agincourt, the nobles boast to one another of their horses, armour and mistresses. In the English camp on the night before the battle, Henry disguises himself and talks to some of his

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soldiers, discovering that not all of them are enthusiastic about the campaign in France or convinced that it is in a just cause.

The next morning, Henry's generals estimate the French strength at 60 000 – five times the English army's size. Overhearing the Earl of Westmoreland wishing that they had more men, Henry delivers one of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare, arguing that the fewer of them there are, the more honour there is to go around when they win. As the French form up for battle, they send their messenger once more to offer Henry the chance to surrender. Again he refuses and orders his army to battle.

The battle begins well for the English and Pistol captures a French prisoner. However, the French regroup and Henry orders his men to kill any prisoners taken. The English learn that some French soldiers launched a surprise attack against the English encampment and killed all the boys (including 'Boy') who were left to guard it. King Henry is enraged and is prepared to continue the battle, showing the French no mercy. However, the English have already won the battle after inflicting massive losses on the French nobles and common soldiers.

Henry, the French king, and both their retinues meet in the French palace. Henry is left alone with Princess Katherine when the noblemen of both countries go to study the terms of a proposed peace treaty. Henry tries to persuade Katherine to marry him, which he succeeds in doing despite the language barrier and his non-existent romantic abilities. The French king returns to announce that he accepts the treaty that allows him to continue ruling until he dies, at which time Henry will become king of France. In the meantime, Henry looks forward to marrying Katherine.

In focus

War

In Act 3, Henry and his army have invaded France and besieged the French port town of Harfleur. In Scene 4, Henry demands that Harfleur surrender, threatening the Governor and the townspeople that if they do not:

> 'The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
> And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
> In liberty of bloody hand shall range
> With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
> Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.'
> *Act 3, Scene 4, lines 10–14*

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The speech has more imagery of sexualised violence; for example:

> 'What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,
> If your pure maidens fall into the hand
> Of hot and forcing violation?'
> *Act 3, Scene 4, lines 19–21*

Henry tries to scare Harfleur into surrendering by declaring that he will lose control of his army and will not be responsible for the atrocities they will commit:

> '… you men of Harfleur,
> Take pity of your town and of your people,
> Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command;'
> *Act 3, Scene 4, lines 27–29*

According to Henry, the responsibility for the destruction will lie with the people who had the chance to surrender but didn't.

The speech paints a horrific picture of Harfleur's immediate future if it doesn't meet Henry's demands. It's so graphic that we could conclude that Henry delivers it with sadistic enjoyment:

> '… look to see
> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
> And their most reverend heads dash'd to the walls,
> Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
> Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
> Do break the clouds …'
> *Act 3, Scene 4, lines 33–40*

The horrific images of this speech contrast with the images of bravery and heroic sacrifice in a speech he delivers to his army at the start of the same act. In Act 3, Scene 1, he exhorts his soldiers to continue the assault on the French port town of Harfleur. Henry's cannon have smashed a hole (a 'breach') in Harfleur's walls:

> 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
> Or close the wall up with our English dead.'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, lines 11–12*

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At the end of the same speech, he shouts:

> 'I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
> Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
> Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
> Cry "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, lines 31–34*

In the next scene Nym, Bardolph, Pistol and Boy enter. Clearly they are not all as motivated as Henry might have hoped.

> BARDOLPH
> On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach!
> NYM
> Pray thee, corporal, stay. The knocks are too hot, and for
> mine own part I have not a case of lives. The humour of it is
> too hot, that is the very plain-song of it.
> PISTOL
> 'The plain-song' is most just, for humours do abound.
> Knocks go and come, God's vassals drop and die,
> [*Sings*] And sword and shield,
> In bloody field,
> Doth win immortal fame.
> BOY
> Would I were in an alehouse in London. I would give
> all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety.
> PISTOL
> And I.
> [*Sings*] If wishes would prevail with me,
> My purpose should not fail with me,
> But thither would I hie.
> BOY
> As duly
> But not as truly
> As bird doth sing on bough.
> *Act 3, Scene 2, lines 1–18*

In other words, Nym is worried that he might get hurt, and sitting safely back in a London pub is much more appealing to Pistol and Boy than facing the immediate danger of the battle. Shakespeare undercuts the magnificence of Henry's speech with the soldiers' lack of enthusiasm for war – a lack of enthusiasm shared by some of his audience, no matter when the play is being staged.

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At the start of Act 4, the Chorus describes the differences between the English and the French armies as they prepare for the Battle of Agincourt. The French, with an army much larger than the English one, are overconfident and boastful about their chances.

> 'Proud of their numbers and secure in soul,
> The confident and over-lusty French
> Do the low-rated English play at dice;
> And chide the cripple tardy-gaited night
> Who, like a foul and ugly witch, doth limp
> So tediously away.'
> *Act 4, Chorus, lines 17–22*

The French can't wait for the night to be over.

Meanwhile, the Chorus tells us, the English are worried and uncertain, with defeat and imminent death very real possibilities.

> 'The poor condemnèd English,
> Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires
> Sit patiently and inly ruminate
> The morning's danger, and their gesture sad
> Investing lank-lean; cheeks and war-worn coats
> Presenteth them unto the gazing moon
> So many horrid ghosts.'
> *Act 4, Chorus, lines 22–28*

The Chorus tells the audience that Henry moves among his men, in good spirits, and gives his soldiers hope.

> '… he goes and visits all his host.
> Bids them good morrow with a modest smile
> And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.'
> *Act 4, Chorus, lines 32–34*

These are the acts of an intelligent general, sensitive to the moods of his soldiers.

Sure enough in Scene 1, Henry does visit his soldiers as they wait for dawn. However, there's a twist. Borrowing a knight's cloak, he disguises himself so he can move about the camp unrecognised and get a true sense of what his men are thinking and feeling before the impending battle. He meets and talks to Pistol. Pistol's a fan of Henry. Thinking he's speaking to a regular comrade, Pistol says:

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> 'The king's a bawcock and a heart of gold, a lad of life, an
> imp of fame, of parents good, of fist most valiant. I kiss his
> dirty shoe, and from heartstring I love the lovely bully.
> What is thy name?'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 44–47*

So far, things are good. Next, Henry overhears a conversation between Llewellyn and Gower. Llewellyn is concerned that, in spite of the overwhelming odds, the English army must conduct itself with a quiet and solemn dignity, rather than throw an all-night, pre-victory party like the French seem to be doing. He points out that the army of the Roman general Pompey never played up on the eve of battle:

> 'If you would take the pains but to
> examine the wars of Pompey the Great, you shall
> find, I warrant you, that there is no tiddle taddle
> nor pibble pabble in Pompey's camp.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 66–69*

Henry is impressed with Llewellyn's belief in proper conduct:

> 'Though it appear a little out of fashion,
> There is much care and valour in this Welshman.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 80–81*

Henry then meets three soldiers: John Bates, Michael Williams and Alexander Court. Shakespeare treats these minor characters with respect by giving them full names.

Here Henry's clever ruse begins to come unstuck. Instead of being able to reassure and inspire his men, the three want to argue with him. Unaware that he is really talking to his king, Bates declares he doesn't think the king is as brave as he makes himself out to be:

> 'He may show what outward courage he will; but I
> believe, as cold a night as 'tis, he could wish
> himself in Thames up to the neck; and so I would he
> were, and I by him, at all adventures, so we were quit here.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 107–110*

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Stung by such lack of faith and an unenthusiastic opinion of the whole English mission in France, Henry continues with his deception:

> 'By my troth, I will speak my conscience of the king. I think he would not wish himself anywhere but where he is.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 111–112*

Unimpressed, Bates replies:

> 'Then I would he were here alone. So should he be sure to be ransomed and a many poor men's lives saved.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 113–114*

Henry's probably angry by now, but he feels the need to justify their presence in France:

> 'I dare say you love him not so ill to wish him here alone, howsoever you speak this to feel other men's minds. Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the king's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honourable.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 115–118*

At this point, Williams cuts in to the conversation:

> 'That's more than we know.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, line 119*

This line emphasises a question at the heart of the play: is the war just? The play's different perspectives mean that it will not conclusively answer the question.

Bates doesn't care to know the answer to that question. He thinks that by being in the service of the king he bears no guilt for his actions in battle, even if the war is unjustified:

> 'Ay, or more than we should seek after, for we know enough if we know we are the king's subjects. If his cause be wrong our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 120–122*

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Williams then explains, in simple terms, why it should also matter to the king if the war being fought is for a just cause:

> 'But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all "We died at such a place", some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything, when blood is their argument? Now if these men do not die well it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it, who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.'
>
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 123–133*

Henry responds with a long speech, arguing that the king is not responsible for the deaths of the soldiers who are killed fighting for him. He says:

> 'The king is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of his son, nor the master of his servant, for they purpose not their death when they purpose their services.'
>
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 141–143*

He acknowledges that all armies (and by implication, his own) contain soldiers who may be robbers, rapists and murderers. Henry declares that no king is responsible for the actions of such men before they join the king's army, but that God will use war to ensure that criminals seeking anonymity in an army receive just punishment.

> 'Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God. War is His beadle, war is His vengeance, so that here men are punished for before-breach of the king's laws in now the king's quarrel. Where they feared the death they have borne life away, and where they would be safe they perish. Then, if they die unprovided, no more is the king guilty of their damnation than he was before guilty of those impieties for the which they are now visited.'
>
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 150–159*

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Henry's reasoning here reveals something about his values in the same way that the threats he made to the besieged people of Harfleur in Act 3 did – Henry argued then that he would not be responsible for any atrocities his soldiers committed if the town didn't surrender. At the end of this speech in Act 4, although Williams agrees that the individual is responsible for whatever crimes they may have committed, not the king, Henry does not convince the men that they are fighting a just war when he has the chance to.

In this exchange Shakespeare has undermined one perspective (the Chorus's ever-positive view) with the sometimes less flattering, embittered view of the common soldier.

Henry's conversations with his soldiers reflect the opposing views, values and beliefs that circulated in Shakespeare's England in a time of war.

QUESTIONS 4.5

1. As we have seen, Henry ruthlessly tells the people of Harfleur that he will not be responsible for atrocities committed by his soldiers should the town not surrender. Later, he argues that God uses war as a way of punishing the sinful and the immoral members of armies. Do you see a contradiction here? Explain.
2. Why might a king like Henry hold these views? (Remember, England was a country often at war and was also deeply religious.)
3. Do you think Henry is a moral and just person? Even if not, is it possible that (as Shakespeare seems to suggest) he might still be a good king?

DID YOU KNOW?

The famous 'two-fingered salute' (not 'V for victory' – the other one) is traditionally associated with English archers of the Hundred Years' War. And by 'traditionally', I mean that it may not actually be true, but it's a good story. According to the tradition, archers believed that if they were captured the French would chop off the index and middle fingers of their drawing hands, so they could not shoot arrows. The long-bowmen took to taunting the approaching French by raising the two fingers.

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Interpretation

Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*, 1944

Laurence (later Sir Laurence) Olivier was one of England's greatest ever actors. He was born in 1907 and showed early interest and ability in acting. He played leading parts in school productions of Shakespeare's plays. In 1926 he joined the Birmingham Repertory Company. As a young man, he acted on London stages and on Broadway in New York. By 1930 he was appearing in films as well. He achieved worldwide fame for his work in British and American cinema. He was nominated for best actor in 1940 and 1941, though he was unsuccessful both times.

In 1940 Olivier was in New York, directing and starring in a Broadway run of *Romeo and Juliet.* However, the production received a negative critical reception and he cut the season short, returning to Britain to help with the war effort against Nazi Germany. He trained as a navy pilot but never flew any combat missions. He spoke at public rallies and made recruitment speeches, appearances that were intended to boost morale and encourage men and women to join the fight against Hitler. In 1943 he was given extended leave from the navy to produce, direct and star in a film of *Henry V.*

The production was intended to be a wartime propaganda film, a patriotic story of a brave, honourable and resourceful English hero prevailing against enormous odds – just what a war-weary country needed four years into the worst conflict it had ever known. In a reflection of contemporary events, it was released five months after the D-Day landings in Normandy, when British and other Allied forces crossed the English Channel to fight the Germans in northern France.

Olivier acknowledges theatrical origins of *Henry V* by starting his film in Elizabethan London in the year 1600. The camera tracks slowly over a delightful model of the city to centre on a miniature Globe Theatre. Then he cuts to an interior of the theatre, now a bustling full-sized set. A trumpeter blows a fanfare, the musicians of the orchestra begin playing, and the camera cranes down from the third level of seating to the yard as an audience assembles for a performance of *Henry V*. Act 1 is performed for us as though we were in the audience of the Globe, although we are allowed a peek at what is happening backstage. The actors are costumed in Elizabethan clothes. We see and hear the audience murmuring and applauding. Act 2 begins, but suddenly after Scene 1 the Chorus reappears to draw back a stage curtain. The camera flies through the opening and we are transported back in time to 1415. The actors from the Globe's 1600 staging of the play are now the 'real' historical figures in Shakespeare's script.

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The production intentionally retains a sense of the theatre. Even in the 1415 settings, two-dimensional painted backdrops are used. The acting with gesture and voice is stylised and non-naturalistic. Only when the English and French armies meet at Agincourt does Olivier use an exterior location.

The problem for Olivier in creating a great English hero was that, as written, Shakespeare's Henry is far from perfect. Sometimes he is cruel and ruthless. How, for example, to reconcile the Henry who makes the inspirational, soaring St Crispin's Day speech with the Henry who threatens the citizens of Harfleur with rape and massacre? For Olivier, the solution is simple – cut the Harfleur speech altogether.

In recognition of his enormous significance in English culture, Sir Laurence Olivier's ashes were interred in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Although Olivier didn't include the Harfleur ultimatum, he did invent a scene in which we see Falstaff die. Speeches from *Henry IV, Part 2* are imported to give full dramatic effect to Henry's cold abandonment of his old friend. Olivier cuts some of the dialogue of the French nobles in Act 3 and edits it into the Chorus's prologue to Act 4 in the lead-up to the Battle of Agincourt. The effect is to create a sense of the French nobility as a class ready to be wiped out.

Olivier spared no expense in staging the battle, taking eight weeks to film a sequence that lasts 17 minutes on the screen. Olivier obtained permission to film on an estate in Ireland. Hundreds of Irish extras played the English and French armies. They were paid extra if they supplied their own horses. Once the battle is over, Olivier brings the film back to studio sets and finally the Globe Theatre in 1600, reversing the transitions at the film's beginning.

After *Henry V*, Olivier went on to direct and star in film versions of *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III*. His acting career continued right up to 1989, the year of his death. But it is perhaps the three Shakespeare films that created the greatest legacy of Olivier's life – popular versions of great literature that were accessible to a vast audience. In recognition of his enormous significance in English culture, his ashes were interred in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

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ACTIVITY 4.3

- Imagine you are a soldier in the English army. You have heard Henry's ultimatum to the people of Harfleur.
- They have been given a night to consider their response. That means you have a night to think about the implications of Henry's threats too.
- If tomorrow dawns and the people of Harfleur have not surrendered, what will you do?
- As a soldier in his army, do you accept the choice Henry has made for you?
- As soldiers you are expected to follow orders. What options do you have?
- In groups of four, imagine yourselves huddled around a fire at night. Improvise the discussion the soldiers have as they await the response from Harfleur.
- Think about the state your army is in. Have you been well led up to this point?
- Imagine if you or your loved ones were in the position that the people of Harfleur find themselves in now. What would you want the soldiers outside the walls to think, say and do?
- Think about King Henry's state of mind. Does he mean to carry out the threats? Did he get caught up in the moment and say some things he now regrets? Was he playing mind games with the people of Harfleur?
- Do you think Henry thought about how you, his soldiers, would react when you heard him deliver the ultimatum?
- Appoint someone in your group to keep notes of the improvised discussion. Or improvise the discussion and then all of you immediately write down what you remember being said. Develop a scripted scene you can rehearse and perform for the rest of your class.

What's in a word? *King*

The play presents the character of Henry V in two ways. The first way is as a hero who leads his country by example, is a just ruler and inspires his army to achieve spectacular victories. At the play's end, he proves himself endearingly hopeless at convincing the French princess Katherine to marry him.

The second way is as a ruthless, reckless warrior who leads his army into dangerous military situations and orders the atrocity of killing prisoners of war. He also coldly turns his back on the companions of his youth.

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QUESTIONS 4.6

1. Can the audience admire King Henry? Why or why not?
2. Should the audience reject King Henry? Why or why not?
3. Henry calls his army his 'band of brothers'. Why would Henry call them that? Can they ever truly be his equals? Why or why not?

Sayings originating in this play

> 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more …'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, line 1*

Henry urges his soldiers to press home their attack on Harfleur and charge through a hole (the 'breach') that their cannon have smashed through the besieged city's walls. 'Once more' implies that the English have been beaten back at least once. When the phrase is used these days (and it really only gets used by people with a grand sense of the theatrical), it means that although we didn't achieve our goal on the previous attempt, one more try ought to do it.

> 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers'
> *Act 4, Scene 3, line 60*

In his St Crispin's Day speech to the English army before the battle of Agincourt, Henry ignores the class barriers between his soldiers, his officers, his nobles and his royal self. Confronting a numerically superior enemy and with the odds stacked against them, Henry wants his men to think of themselves simply as brothers – a family united in the face of a seemingly hopeless situation. Royal Air Force fighter pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain in World War II became known as 'the few' because their fight against the much larger Nazi Luftwaffe recalled the spirit of Henry V's speech to his outnumbered troops.

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Skill builder

Annotating

Annotating (writing notes) in a novel, a play or a poem is an effective way of helping you learn the texts that you need to know thoroughly. It's especially good for marking quotes you can use as the evidence you need to support your ideas when completing projects or essays.

What should you use to annotate?

If you don't mind permanently changing your copy of the text, use a highlighter. Otherwise use grey-lead pencil that you can rub out later. Start highlighting or underlining from the *first* reading. (You will have to read a text *more than once* to study it properly.)

Highlight or underline what you think are the most important parts of the text. You may in fact be highlighting or underlining too much but with practice you will get better at identifying the most valuable information. Use a pencil to annotate the text by writing in the margins on either side of the text printed in your copy. Write words, sure, but you can also develop your own code of symbols for marking what is important, interesting, quotable, questionable, and so forth.

Annotating Henry V, Prologue to Act 1

Although not present in the first published version of the play, *Henry V* uses a Chorus, a character that appears at the start of each act and explains to the audience what will happen next. The Chorus asks the audience to imagine great armies fighting epic battles, even though only a few actors present the play in a theatre.

The Chorus sometimes reminds the audience that it is watching a play, and sometimes the Chorus is helping the audience to make judgements of Henry. The Chorus functions like an official historian, but is it a reliable account of events? Events unfolding after each prologue don't always measure up to the Chorus's poetic idealism.

Read the Prologue and highlight words or phrases that suggest information about the play's plot, setting, characters and imagery.

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'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, and 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?'

muse often described as the artist's inspiration or drive; the inspiration to action

Your notes for the first few lines might look something like this:

Plot:

'A kingdom for a stage, princes to act/And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!' – it suggests a plot concerned with important events

Setting:

'unworthy scaffold', 'cockpit', 'wooden O' – all refer to the theatre itself
'vasty fields of France', 'Agincourt' – research the Hundred Years War and the Battle of Agincourt for background knowledge

Characters:

'gentles all' – referring to the audience
'flat unraised spirits' – the poor actors
'warlike Harry' – this refers to King Henry V. But why does the Chorus refer to him by the informal 'Harry'? The Chorus wants to seem close to the king, and that tells me something about the Chorus's character.

Imagery:

'a Muse of fire' – a muse is a source of artistic inspiration. A muse of fire sounds dramatic and possibly violent.
'Assume the port of Mars' – I know Mars was the Roman god of war, but what does 'port' mean in this **context**? I'll have to check.
'and at his heels,/Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire/ Crouch for employment.' – I get this: famine, sword and fire are crouched like dogs at Harry's heels, waiting to be unleashed.

context the parts of a piece of writing, speech, and the like that precede and follow a word or a passage and contribute to its full meaning

Some rules:

- Make as many annotations as you can, but make them brief.
- If you notice something that you think might be important but you're unsure of why it's significant, don't ignore it. Make the note.

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- Feel free to speculate about meanings, but follow speculation with some research to clear up uncertainty.
- Whether it's preparing for an essay or a performance, brainstorming a text like this will get you thinking.

Your turn

What if … ?

Although Shakespeare's histories are not accurate records of events in absolute detail, he gets the major stuff right. The kings and queens in the histories are based on the actual ones. The victors and vanquished of real-life battles are reflected by the winners and losers in the plays.

Let's pose some 'What if … ?' questions.

- What if Henry IV and Prince Hal had lost the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403?
- What if Henry V had been defeated at Agincourt by the French army in 1415?
- What if Richard III had won the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485?

1. Choose the question relevant to a play you have studied.
   In addition to Shakespeare's play, use history books and the internet to gather information about the battle and the people who fought them.
2. This is the creative part of the task. Imagine you are one of the characters in the play. Remember that if the character you choose is on the winning side in the play, he or she will be a loser now, and vice versa.
   a. You may present this creative response in the form of:
      - a written journal
      - a playscript
      - a video diary
      - something else, negotiated with your teacher.
   b. Describe your thoughts and experiences before, during and after the battle.
   c. Given the result of the battle is different to the one recorded by history:
      - What are the personal implications for your character?
      - What are the historical implications for the kingdom?
   d. You could focus on the immediate future or imagine what will happen in the years ahead.

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3. This is the critical part of the task. Provide a written explanation that:
   a. explains why you chose the character that you did.
   b. fully justifies what you intend to achieve with your response.
   c. explains why you chose to respond in the form that you did.
   d. demonstrates that you understand the significance of the battle.
   e. demonstrates that you understand what the implications of an alternative result to the battle might be.
   f. acknowledges the sources of theories used in your research.

Read and view more

Films

- *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones (the 'Extraordinarily Deluxe Edition' features subtitles taken from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*)
- Holderness, Graham; McCullough, Christopher (2002) [1986]. 'Shakespeare on the Screen: A Selective Filmography'
- *NOW: In the Wings on a World Stage* (2014), a documentary that follows Kevin Spacey's production of *Richard III* on a world tour

Television series

- BBC *An Age of Kings*, a show comprising fifteen 60- and 75-minute episodes that adapted all eight of Shakespeare's sequential history plays
- BBC 1 *The Wars of the Roses* trilogy (*Henry VI, The Rise of Edward IV* and *Richard III*)
- BBC *Shakespeare* series (1978–1985)
- BBC *The Hollow Crown* 2 series

Stage productions

- 2013 Noël Coward Theatre, Jude Law as Henry V (Michael Grandage Company)
- The Royal Shakespeare Company produced the play *Richard II* in 2013, with David Tennant playing the lead role
- In 2004, post-modern choreographer David Gordon created a dance-theatre version of the play called *Dancing Henry Five*

Books

- *Shakespeare's Henry VI and Richard III* by Peter Alexander
- *Henslowe's Diary* edited by R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert
- *The First Quarto of King Richard III* edited by Peter Davison

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Shakespeare's comedies

All's Well That Ends Well
As You Like It
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Cymbeline
Love's Labour's Lost
Measure for Measure
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The Merry Wives of Windsor
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Much Ado About Nothing
Pericles
The Taming of the Shrew
The Tempest
Troilus and Cressida
Twelfth Night
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
The Two Noble Kinsmen
The Winter's Tale

About Shakespeare's comedies

If we saw a play, a TV show or a film that was advertised as a 'comedy', we would hope that it would make us laugh. In Shakespearean terms, a comedy is a play that may start unhappily or in times of trouble but ends happily for the protagonist, often in marriage.

If you haven't read many of Shakespeare's plays, you might assume that his histories and tragedies are his most serious work. You might dismiss his comedies as light entertainments that don't carry as much meaning.

The comedies have a great deal to say about how people manage their relationships in couples, families and communities. Human life is celebrated. There is humour and satisfaction in even the most boring daily details. In the comedies it's easy to see us on stage, reflected in the highs and lows that the characters go through.

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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

WRITTEN: 1595 or 1596

FIRST PERFORMED: Uncertain, but either 1595 or 1596, depending on when it was written

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1600

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: Ancient Athens, and a magical forest nearby

MAIN CHARACTERS: With so many different groups of characters, it is very difficult to identify a single protagonist and antagonist

- Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons
- Theseus, duke of Athens
- Egeus, father of Hermia
- Hermia, in love with Lysander
- Helena, in love with Demetrius
- Lysander, in love with Hermia
- Demetrius, Egeus' choice as a husband for Hermia
- Nick Bottom, a weaver
- Peter Quince, a carpenter
- Puck, Oberon's attendant
- Oberon, king of the fairies
- Titania, queen of the fairies

EVENTS:

- Hermia and Lysander escape the city to the forest to elope.
- Hermia and Lysander are pursued by Demetrius, who is followed by Helena, his dumped ex-girlfriend.
- Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairies, are having their own dispute.
- Bottom and Quince lead a group of tradesmen into the forest to rehearse a play.
- Puck transforms Bottom's head into a donkey's head, and uses the juice from a magical flower to cause Titania to fall in love with Bottom.
- Puck also uses the flower to cause both Lysander and Demetrius to fall in love with Helena.
- Titania and Oberon resolve their quarrel.
- Puck uses the magical flower to ensure Lysander and Hermia love each other again, and Demetrius falls in love with Helena.
- The two couples return to Athens where they are happily married.
- They watch the tradesmen perform their chaotic play.
- Puck closes the play with a speech to the audience.

THEMES: Love, sex, dreams and reality, social class, gender politics

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Introduction

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written in either 1595 or 1596, around the same time that Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. There is a play within *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that is very similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. But whereas the love in *Romeo and Juliet* is deadly serious, Peter Quince's *The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe* is played strictly for laughs.

A scene from a Mariinsky Ballet performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 31 March 2013 in Moscow, Russia

An element of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that is familiar to us is the fight between two men over the same woman. Shakespeare uses the same idea in other plays like *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. This plot device occurs throughout the history of literature in many texts and was hardly new in Shakespeare's day. Lysander and Demetrius both want to marry Hermia. This plot line is complicated in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the use of the magic flower, which causes both men to fight over Helena and forget all about Hermia. Demetrius is left under the influence of the flower so that he stays in love with Helena and so that the four young people can form two happy couples. There isn't much to distinguish the young men from each other – it's

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just that Hermia prefers Lysander. In the same way, the similarities in the names of the young women suggest that there isn't much difference between them, although they do have an argument over each other's physical appearance.

The politics of the marriage between Theseus and Hippolyta in a way mirrors the argument that Titania is having with Oberon. Theseus defeated Hippolyta in battle and wants to marry her to put the war behind them and conclude his victory. Oberon and Titania are arguing over who gets custody of a mortal Indian child. This conflict is creating trouble in the fairy world. The parallels between these two couples, and the convenience of Theseus and Hippolyta appearing only at the beginning and the end of the play, mean that directors frequently cast the same pair of actors to play both couples.

The strangeness of the happenings in the forest, and the doubled casting of Titania/Hippolyta and Oberon/Theseus, creates the possibility for the audience that what happens in the forest is just a dream, a subconscious echo of the 'real world'.

Synopsis

The play opens in the ancient Greek city of Athens. The city's ruler, Theseus, plans to marry Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons, a race of warrior women, in a lavish celebration. They are visited by Egeus, a citizen of Athens, and Hermia, his daughter. Hermia is refusing to marry Demetrius, the husband Egeus has arranged for her. She is in love with another young man, Lysander. Theseus enforces the Athenian law that decrees a father decides who his daughter marries. Hermia is told if she defies Egeus she will be executed or sent to a convent, where she won't get to marry anyone. Lysander argues his case for marrying Hermia but to no avail – she has four days to agree to marry Demetrius, or else! Hermia and Lysander decide to elope. They plan to meet in a wood outside the city walls the next night and flee Athens. Helena, Demetrius' ex-girlfriend, arrives. Demetrius dumped her in readiness for the planned marriage to Hermia, and Helena has never gotten over it. Hermia and Lysander tell her they plan to run away. When they have left Helena alone, she decides to tell Demetrius the plan so he will like her again.

Meanwhile in another part of Athens, the Mechanicals (workers) are meeting to rehearse a play. Perhaps unusually for a group of tradespeople, they have formed their own amateur theatre company and hope to perform their play for Theseus and Hippolyta at their wedding. Quince, a carpenter, will direct the play and gives out the roles. Bottom, a weaver who doesn't mind performing, volunteers to play multiple roles but Quince insists on casting it his way. The group arranges to meet in the wood the next night to rehearse.

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Act 2 starts by introducing us to the fairies inhabiting the wood outside Athens. A conversation between Puck, a servant of Oberon the fairy king, and another fairy, who attends to the fairy queen Titania, helpfully explains a dispute between the king and the queen. Titania has acquired an Indian prince to be her servant and Oberon wants the same boy for his entourage. Oberon and Titania arrive and confront each other over who gets the Indian boy. Titania refuses to hand him over and leaves, sending Oberon into a rage. He instructs Puck to find a magic flower called 'love-in-idleness'. Oberon plans to play a trick on Titania by squeezing the flower's juice onto her eyelids when she is sleeping; causing her to fall in love with the first creature she sees when she wakes up. Oberon hides when he sees Demetrius and Helena. Helena insists on following Demetrius as he searches for Hermia, despite him making it obvious that he doesn't want her around. When they've gone, Oberon feels sorry for Helena. Puck returns with the magic flower and Oberon tells him to use some of the juice on Demetrius's eyes so he falls in love with Helena.

Elsewhere in the wood Titania's attendant fairies sing her off to sleep with a lullaby. Oberon finds her and applies the flower's juice to her eyes, taking care not to wake her. No sooner has he left than Hermia and Lysander arrive. They fall asleep and Puck arrives. Thinking Lysander is Demetrius, Puck drips the flower's juice onto the young man's eyes. Helena, still chasing after Demetrius, finds Lysander sleeping and wakes him up, causing Lysander to fall in love with her. Helena thinks Lysander is joking and leaves. He follows her, leaving Hermia sleeping alone in the forest. She wakes up, and realising she has been abandoned goes off in search of Lysander.

Act 3 begins with the Mechanicals rehearsing in the wood, close to where Titania still sleeps. The amateur actors are trying to solve problems their script presents when Puck appears. Deciding to have some fun at their expense, he changes Bottom's head into a donkey's head. Terrified, the Mechanicals flee into the forest. Bottom, unaware of his transformation, thinks they are playing a joke on him. Titania awakes and, under the influence of the magic flower, falls immediately in love with Bottom and his donkey head. Titania's fairy retinue tend to his every need before Titania takes him to her bed.

Puck finds Oberon and describes what has happened to Titania. Oberon is actually all right with his wife loving a man with a donkey's head, but then Demetrius and Hermia enter. Oberon and Puck realise that Puck must have applied the flower juice to the wrong man. Hermia accuses Demetrius of murdering Lysander, then leaves. Exhausted, Demetrius falls asleep. Oberon tells Puck to find Helena and bring her to where Demetrius sleeps. Oberon tries the trick with the flower juice on Demetrius's eyes. Puck brings Helena, followed by Lysander who is still claiming to love her. On cue, Demetrius awakes and falls in love with Helena, who now has both the young Athenian men falling at her feet. Helena thinks the two men are in league with each other to play a cruel trick on her. Hermia returns and asks Lysander why he left her alone in

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Edwin Henry Lanseer, Scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania and Bottom (1848–1851)

the forest. When Lysander replies that it's because he hates her, Helena thinks Hermia must be in on the joke too. Fed up, Helena is about to walk away when Lysander and Demetrius decide the only way to settle the argument is to fight for Helena. Hermia wants to fight Helena for stealing Lysander away from her, so Helena makes a run for it. Hermia follows.

Oberon and Puck have watched the whole scene. Oberon commands Puck to make things right between the young Athenians once and for all. Oberon intends to persuade Titania to give him the Indian prince while she is still under the flower's magic, and then release her from the spell. Puck leads Lysander and Demetrius around the forest until they are both exhausted and fall asleep. Hermia and Helena arrive separately in the same part of the forest, and also fall asleep. Puck squeezes the flower juice into Lysander's eyes once more so he'll fall back in love with Hermia.

Act 4 opens with Titania fawning over Bottom and Bottom ordering Titania's fairies to find food for him. Bottom and Titania fall asleep. Oberon emerges and Puck arrives. Oberon explains that Titania has surrendered the Indian prince to him, and then he uses a magic herb to remove the spell. The fairy king and queen put aside their differences and Puck removes Bottom's donkey head. The

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fairies leave the four young Athenian lovers and Bottom sleeping on the ground. As dawn breaks, Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus, out in the forest on an early morning hunt, discover the young lovers. The hunters' horns wake them up and they realise that Hermia is in love with Lysander, and Demetrius is in love with Helena. Egeus drops his objection to Hermia's choice of partner. Theseus invites the two couples to be married at the same wedding ceremony that he and Hippolyta will soon hold. The young lovers wonder if they are dreaming before following Theseus. Alone, Bottom wakes up with some dim recollection of what has recently happened to him but deciding it must have been a dream he races off to find the other Mechanicals.

He finds them back in Athens. On the way, he has discovered that their play has been selected for performance at the great wedding feast. They grab their costumes and hurry to Theseus's palace.

Act 5 opens just after wedding ceremonies have been held. The three couples prepare to enjoy the entertainments that have been prepared for them. Theseus chooses the Mechanicals' play from a list of performances. What follows is a chaotic rendition of a tragedy about two lovers Pyramus and Thisbe. Its plot is similar to Romeo and Juliet. The Mechanicals take their acting very seriously but aren't very good at it. The noble Athenians watching them are not very good at being an audience. They patronise the Mechanicals, snigger at their misfortunes and heckle them. At the play's conclusion, Theseus announces that the celebration is over and it is time for bed. Once the Athenians have left, Puck, Oberon, Titania, and all the fairy retinues arrive. Puck remains on stage while the other fairies move off through the palace to bless the three couples in their sleep. Puck ends the play by asking the audience not to take the play too seriously and, if they didn't like it, to think of it as a dream they have shared.

In focus

Gender war

The play presents at least two male-dominated societies. In the noble court of Athens, Theseus asserts his right to marry Hippolyta because he defeated her in battle. What does Hippolyta think about this? We don't know, because she never gets the chance to tell us. Egeus storms in, fuming over Hermia's refusal to obey his wish that she should marry Demetrius. Theseus then supports Egeus's insistence that his daughter Hermia marry Demetrius, who she despises, and forbids her to marry Lysander, who she loves. According to the harsh Athenian law, Hermia risks death or being sent to a convent if she disobeys her father's command.

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In the forest, King Oberon of the fairies reacts angrily to Queen Titania's defiance over who gets to keep the Indian changeling boy. Titania has a solid claim to adopt the child – she and the boy's mother had been friends. Oberon just wants to have the boy in his retinue because he's the king and he assumes it's his right. Oberon's decision to obtain the flower and deceive Titania with trickery, resulting not just in her surrendering her claim to the changeling boy but also in being humiliated with the donkey-headed Bottom, is cruel and vindictive. Oberon will not tolerate any defiance.

The world of the Mechanicals could be thought of as male-dominated too because the characters are all written male, although in casting the Mechanicals, directors often choose both male and female actors for the roles. The Mechanicals, however, have the lowest status of the three societies and are treated disrespectfully by both the Athenian nobles and the fairies.

At the play's end, Demetrius is married to Helena under the influence of the love juice from the flower. The play moves all the couples towards marriage or reconciliation, but for that pattern to be complete Shakespeare requires Demetrius to be under a magic spell.

At the time the play was written, marriages based on romantic love were not common. Families looked for some financial benefit when arranging marriages for their sons and daughters to the sons and daughters of other families. Falling in love was not a new idea. You just couldn't assume that you would be allowed to marry someone you had fallen in love with. Romantic love, as an important force for good in the world, was a new idea.

Thomas Stothard, Oberon and Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 4, Scene 1 (1806)

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Interpretation

Peter Brook, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1970

There is a clichéd image of a stage production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that it should have attractive forest scenery and actors playing fairies with insect wings flitting around the stage. Indeed, stage productions of the play, especially from the nineteenth century onwards, tended to be like that.

In 1970 the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) asked English director Peter Brook to direct a new production of the play. By this time, Brook had already directed a long list of plays and operas. He had a background in experimental theatre and was renowned for creating challenging and unforgettable experiences for his actors and audiences alike.

Brook had seen a touring circus of Chinese acrobats in Europe. He was fascinated by the lightness, energy and spirit of the acrobats. Later he saw a simple production of a ballet in New York that did away with the classical ballet clichés of tutus and painted scenery. He worked with a young company of actors at the RSC who were prepared to follow Brook's belief that combining radically different elements like Chinese-style acrobatics and Shakespeare would create a new form of theatre.

In addition to studying the text, the actors practised acrobatics. Alan Howard, the actor playing Oberon, discovered he could spin plates on sticks and simultaneously swing on a trapeze, while speaking Oberon's lines. John Kane, as Puck, learned to walk on stilts. The company rehearsed in front of school children and random groups of adults to discover how audiences responded to this strange presentation of Shakespeare.

Most surprising was the set. The designer, Sally Jacobs, created a large white box on stage, open to the audience and the theatre's ceiling. Doors were set into the walls, and actors on trapezes could be lowered into the box from above. There were no painted sets. The creation of settings, like the Athenian palace and the forest, were left to the imaginations of the audiences. The play began with a dramatic crash of percussion and all the actors emerging from different doors in the set, then climbing ladders and gantries high above the stage.

Brook was asked if he wanted to film the production. His instinct was to say no. He didn't think filming would capture the true spirit of his company's interpretation of the play. When they toured to Japan, he agreed to have the play recorded so it could be televised on Japanese TV. Brook was given a copy of the recording but the original negative was destroyed. Although Brook was surprised at how good his production of the play looked on video, he thought it was an artificial way of keeping his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alive. He believed that a play really only existed when it was being performed by the actors, live before an audience. After that, it became a memory. Keeping a performance artificially

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alive on film or video can never be the same as being in the presence of the actors, in the same time and space, witnessing the instant when the writer, the director and the actors express their creative vision together.

QUESTIONS 5.1

We have more means of recording live events than ever before. It's usually illegal to record a live theatre performance, but it's becoming more and more common to attend a music gig and see members of the audience holding up their phones, recording.

1. Have you ever done that?
2. If you have done it, have you ever played your recording back to watch? Was it as good as being there in the first place?
3. Have you ever thought, 'I'd rather just experience the live performance and not worry about recording it?'
4. So in your opinion, which is better: being distracted at a live show so you have a recording of it for later or concentrating on the show knowing that once it's finished, it's over for good? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY 5.1

Imagery

Titania has two important speeches in Act 2, Scene 1. In the first one, from lines 81 to 117, she describes how her disagreement with Oberon has affected the natural world. In the second, from lines 122 to 137, she states her case for adopting the Indian boy.

- Both speeches contain strong imagery. Choose one of the speeches and, in groups of four, interpret these images with movement and **tableaux**.
- You may elect one person in the group to read the whole speech, or take it in turns to read different sections. The images should be expressed clearly, but try to capture the emotions Titania feels when speaking these lines.
- The remaining group members find shapes and pictures to form with their bodies. Listen carefully to the words and let the emotion of the lines affect the way you move and the tableaux you create.
- The first of the speeches, being longer, is probably more demanding but don't let that put you off.

tableaux living photographs created by actors positioning themselves in a space and holding motionless long enough to establish an atmosphere, a scene or even a whole story

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What's in a word? *Marry*

The idea of marriage is uppermost on Theseus's mind at the beginning of the play. 'Marry' is a word uppermost in the mind of Egeus and Lysander in Act 1, Scene 1. When insisting to Theseus that Hermia be forced to marry Demetrius, Egeus maintains that:

> 'This man hath my consent to marry her.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 25*

Egeus then gets serious:

> 'And, my gracious Duke,
> Be it so she will not here, before your grace,
> Consent to marry with Demetrius,
> I beg the ancient privilege of Athens;
> As she is mine, I may dispose of her;
> Which shall be either to this gentleman
> Or to her death, according to our law
> Immediately provided in that case.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 38–45*

Egeus is so determined that Hermia marry Demetrius, and no one else, that he is prepared to invoke an ancient law that would allow him to have his own daughter put to death for defying him.

Lysander unleashes on Demetrius, righteously indignant that Demetrius is favoured over him:

> 'You have her father's love, Demetrius;
> Let me have Hermia's – do you marry him.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 93–94*

In other words, why don't you marry Hermia's dad, Demetrius? He loves you enough.

Foolishly Theseus and Egeus leave Lysander and Hermia alone together, and Lysander reveals his plan for the two of them to run away together to his aunt's house:

> 'There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 161*

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But the word ‘marry’ has another meaning, when used in this way:

> ‘Marry, our play is “The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe”.’
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 9–10*

‘Marry’ is a very old expression of surprise or anger, or it could be used to emphasise the seriousness of a statement. Quince is underlining the importance of his new play to his company of actors.

Sayings originating in this play

> ‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 134*

Lysander tells Hermia to get some perspective – young lovers have to deal with obstacles. It’s just the way it is.

> ‘Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!’
> *Act 2, Scene 1, line 60*

Oberon’s less-than-warm greeting to Titania, ‘Ill met’, suggests that he isn’t very pleased to see her. *Ill Met By Moonlight* was used by W. Stanley Moss as the title for a book recounting a daring operation by British commandos against the Nazis on the island of Crete during World War II.

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5

TWELFTH NIGHT

WRITTEN: Probably 1601

FIRST PERFORMED: First known performance in 1602

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: No

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: Illyria, which was the name of a real place on the Adriatic coast near Albania in Shakespeare's day

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Orsino, duke of Illyria
- Olivia, a countess (foil to Viola)
- Sir Toby Belch, her uncle
- Malvolio, her steward (antagonist to almost everyone)
- Feste, her fool (jester)
- Viola, shipwreck survivor, who disguises herself as Cesario (protagonist)
- Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, who she believes drowned in the shipwreck
- Antonio, a sailor and friend to Sebastian

EVENTS:

- Viola is shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria.
- She believes her twin brother Sebastian has drowned.
- Viola disguises herself as a man (Cesario) and begins to work for Orsino, the duke of Illyria, with whom she falls in love, but she cannot reveal her true feelings.
- Orsino thinks he is in love with Olivia, and asks 'Cesario' to plead his case to Olivia.
- Olivia falls in love with 'Cesario'.
- Olivia's household is in disarray, with everyone trying to play a trick on Malvolio, the puritanical steward.
- Malvolio is cruelly humiliated.
- Sebastian turns up alive, Olivia falls in love with him, and they are secretly married.
- The twins are reunited.
- Viola reveals her identity as Sebastian's twin sister, and Orsino realises he is in love with her.

THEMES: Love, gender, social class, rules, deception

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Introduction

Twelfth Night was probably written in 1601 and its first known performance was in 1602. Shakespeare wrote mostly histories and comedies during the 1590s. From about 1601 more of his work could be categorised as tragedies or romances. So *Twelfth Night* was one of his last comedies. But it has a darker side. Death overshadows the play and there is loss, heartache and humiliation in store for some of the characters. Not everyone lives happily ever after.

Two actors on stage during the *Twelfth Night* performance at the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, 2011, at Sand Harbor State Park, Nevada

The name *Twelfth Night* is taken from the Christian tradition of celebrating 12 days of Christmas. In the Elizabethan Era, the 12 days of Christmas were observed from Christmas Day to January 5. It was a festival where society's strict system of class, gender and status could be temporarily reversed. Men dressed as women, and vice versa. Servants became masters. Masters played along, knowing it wouldn't last. Everyone knew that the suspension of the rules was just that – a temporary state, and that normality would resume soon enough. In a way, allowing society to be turned upside down for a strictly limited season emphasised the rigid rules that applied for the rest of the year and reminded everyone of their true rank in life.

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The seriousness of everyday life could be put aside and people feasted, drank and sought entertainment in theatre, music, comedy and practical jokes. The evening of January 5, the twelfth night, was the end of the party. January 6 signalled the return to normality. So when Shakespeare wrote the play *Twelfth Night*, he probably imagined it being performed as the grand finale to the end of the festival.

conventions behaviours that society considers to be acceptable or polite

Viola's cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night* is an example of the social **conventions** that people were so fond of breaking during the festival. Shakespeare also used this plot device in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*.

Although it was viewed as unnatural in wider society, cross-dressing was an everyday fact of life in Elizabethan theatre. When Shakespeare wrote the play, he was writing for an all-male cast. A man would have been cast in the role of Viola and would then have to put on a man's costume to play a woman pretending to be a man. The audience knew that Viola was pretending to be Cesario. But the audience also knew that a man was playing Viola in the first place. Shakespeare's references to men playing women had an extra layer of meaning for the audiences of his time. Here Shakespeare, who would have known the young man who was playing Viola, makes a joke about the actor's masculinity:

> ORSINO
> Diana's lip
> Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
> Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
> And all is semblative the woman's part.
> *Act 1, Scene 4, lines 30–33*

The play's full title is *Twelfth Night or What You Will* and this sums up the throw-caution-to the-wind spirit of the 12 days of Christmas. But it can also be read as a suggestion that each individual member of the audience can make any interpretation of the play they wish.

Shakespeare was writing in a great age of discovery. Illyria, though the name of a real country in Shakespeare's time, is more exotic and dreamlike. It is a place, almost a new world, where strange things happen. Viola's first line in the play, delivered as she struggles ashore after surviving a shipwreck, indicates that she is somewhere unfamiliar, totally lost:

> 'What country, friends, is this?'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, line 1*

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DID YOU KNOW?
Illyria was an ancient name given to an area that takes in parts of modern-day Montenegro, Croatia and Albania.

Act 1 sets up a whole range of problems for Viola. The play relies on the complications and misunderstandings that Viola's new identity causes to create some of its comedy. Because she is alone in a strange place, Viola disguises herself for her own protection. But her new identity also creates new setbacks for her. Having made the decision to disguise herself, she cannot drop the disguise and reveal her deception. She falls in love with Orsino but cannot let him know it. If she did, she would have to drop her disguise or create the possibility in Orsino's mind of a homosexual relationship.

DID YOU KNOW?
Close friendships between adult men in Elizabethan England could involve exchanging poetic messages and expressions of love for each other. These relationships were often thought of as deeper, more important and more rewarding than a man might have with his wife. Friendships between men could involve physical contact, like holding hands, dancing, kissing, and sleeping in the same bed, without the individuals being thought of as homosexual. Homosexuality was believed to be a sin against religion and it was a crime against the law – it was considered unnatural and could be punished very severely, sometimes by death.

However, because she is a stranger, Viola is also free to lose some of her self-consciousness and discover new aspects of her personality. Because she is disguised as a man she is able to talk to Orsino about her thoughts on love much more easily than she would if she was dressed as a woman, in case the duke got the 'wrong' idea about her (which is actually the right idea).

Viola is also the victim of deception. When Viola, dressed as Cesario, visits Olivia at Orsino's instruction, Olivia disguises herself by placing a veil over her face and not immediately admitting her identity to Viola. Viola hints that she also may be masking her true identity:

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OLIVIA
Are you a comedian?
VIOLA
No, my profound heart; and yet, by the very fangs
of malice, I swear, I am not that I play.
Act 1, Scene 5, lines 151–153

Shakespeare chose similar names for the two women deliberately. Olivia is also trapped. Like Viola, Olivia has lost her brother and she has been mourning him in a way that has not allowed her to move on with her life. Olivia rejects Orsino's advances because she cannot get over her brother's death. Her decision to remove her veil and reveal her face to Viola is symbolic of her will to live and love again.

Characters in the play not only deceive others, but themselves as well. At the beginning of the play, Orsino believes he is in love with Olivia. He has very strange ideas about love:

'O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity,
Receiveth as the sea. Nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy,
That it alone is high fantastical.'
Act 1, Scene 1, lines 9–15

In other words, other human experiences pale into insignificance when compared to love. Love is like the ocean, swallowing up and ruining everything that it touches. Instead of being an uplifting force in his life, love is making Orsino miserable. His obsessive belief that he is in love with Olivia and Olivia's flat rejection of him means that Orsino has reached a deadlock. His solution is to send someone else to pledge his love to Olivia, in the hope that Viola–Cesario will have more luck. The person Orsino ends up falling in love with, Viola, is different from Olivia, the sort of person he thinks he loves.

When it happens to us, it's not funny. However, when we see someone pining after someone else that they cannot have, it can be funny. Shakespeare sees the humour in unrequited love and characters falling in love with the 'wrong' people. There is nothing straightforward about the love story in this play. Characters are either determined to prove their love to one another or challenge the authenticity of one another's love. The characters either overcome obstacles or place obstacles in the paths of others. Neither Viola nor Olivia is able to declare love for anyone else as herself – they have to pretend to be someone else.

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Fed up with Orsino's messages of love, Olivia asks Viola–Cesario to tell her what she would do if she loved Olivia the way Orsino says he does.

> VIOLA
> Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
> And call upon my soul within the house;
> Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,
> And sing them aloud even in the dead of night;
> Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!' O you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth
> But you should pity me!
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 223–231*

In making this speech, Viola is inspired by the love she feels for Orsino. She cannot declare her love as herself – she has to pretend to be Cesario and speak the words to Olivia. But the speech has the unintended effect of causing Olivia to fall in love with Viola–Cesario, instead of Orsino.

A tragic outcome of a story like this seems much more likely than a happy ending. Unfortunately we can easily imagine characters, emotionally tortured by hopeless feelings for someone else, resorting to self-harm or harming others. In a comedy, the challenge for the writer is to bring these strands of the story together. No matter how miserable the situation at the beginning of the play and no matter how confused the plots become as the play progresses, the writer needs to devise an ending that is harmonious and leaves everyone (or almost everyone) happy – characters and audiences alike. Age or gender does not have to matter. People can love each other at a deeper level than that.

Synopsis

The play opens in the palace of Orsino, Duke of Illyria. Orsino is preoccupied with the idea of love and believes he is hopelessly in love with Olivia, an Illyrian noblewoman. When told that Olivia has promised to mourn her dead brother for seven years and will not be available to entertain marriage proposals for that time, he is even more convinced of her worthiness. Meanwhile, Viola, a young woman whose name will not be revealed to the audience until much later, walks ashore on the Illyrian coast after surviving a shipwreck. The wreck has separated her from her twin brother, Sebastian. Although the ship's captain reassures her that her brother could also have survived, she fears the worst.

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The captain helpfully explains the state of play between Orsino and Olivia, including the detail about Olivia mourning her dead brother.

Viola has already learned from her father that there are two noble households in Illyria – Duke Orsino's and Olivia's. Viola weighs up which of these two households she should seek refuge in. Although we don't know her name yet, Viola thinks the grief for lost family she shares with Olivia means that Olivia will welcome her into her household as a servant. But when the captain emphasises Olivia's reclusive state, she changes her mind and decides to become an attendant to Orsino.

The action moves to Olivia's house, where her drunken uncle Sir Toby Belch is complaining to Olivia's gentlewoman Maria that Olivia's mourning state is taking all the fun out of life. Maria criticises Sir Toby for his drinking and criticises his foolish friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Toby has brought Sir Andrew to the house supposedly so he can propose marriage to Olivia but really so Sir Toby can spend Sir Andrew's money. Sir Andrew announces he intends to leave since he has had no luck with Olivia. Sir Toby manages to persuade Sir Andrew to stay another month.

Back at Orsino's palace, Viola has disguised herself as a young man and given herself the name Cesario. Viola–Cesario has already won Orsino's confidence. Orsino instructs Viola–Cesario to go to Olivia on his behalf and convince her how much he loves her, but Orsino can't help noticing how feminine his new attendant is. Viola–Cesario tells the audience in an **aside** that she wants to marry Orsino.

aside a part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the audience

Meanwhile at Olivia's house, Maria is trying to convince Feste, Olivia's fool, that he is in trouble for being absent from the house. Olivia enters and engages with Feste in a word game where he attempts to prove that she is a fool. Malvolio, Olivia's puritanical steward, disapproves of Feste but Olivia encourages Malvolio not to take Feste's harmless joking so seriously. Viola–Cesario arrives and insists on conveying Orsino's message to Olivia. Olivia covers her face with a veil and meets Viola–Cesario. Olivia dismisses her servants so they can speak privately and she removes her veil. Olivia is unimpressed by Orsino's message. Viola–Cesario says she cannot understand how Olivia could dismiss Orsino's passionate devotion. Viola–Cesario tells Olivia that if he (she) loved Olivia with a passion like the duke's, everything he (she) did would express love. Olivia remains unmoved, so Viola–Cesario leaves, but Olivia admits to herself that she may be falling for the intriguing messenger. She sends Malvolio after Viola–Cesario with a message of her own.

In Act 2 we meet Sebastian, who has survived the shipwreck after all, along with Antonio, a pirate who saved Sebastian's life. Sebastian reveals to Antonio that he is not Rodrigo, as he has pretended up to now, but that he is Sebastian and that he has a twin, a sister who he believes to be dead. Antonio understands that Sebastian is probably from a higher social status than he originally believed, and so he volunteers to be Sebastian's servant. Sebastian

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refuses but tells Antonio where he is going – to Orsino's court. After Sebastian exits and leaves Antonio alone, Antonio expresses his love for Sebastian in a soliloquy to the audience.

In a street near Olivia's house, Malvolio catches up with Viola–Cesario and delivers the message. In a soliloquy, Viola shows that she understands its significance – Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario. Viola–Cesario realises that her disguise is causing all sorts of complications for people but that these are problems only time can solve.

A late-night drinking session has Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste making too much noise. Maria asks them to be quiet, to no avail, before Malvolio emerges and demands that the party stop. He tells Sir Toby that Olivia will kick him out of her house if he doesn't reform his ways, and then blames Maria for not keeping the drunken men in line. Maria plans to play a joke on Malvolio by forging a love letter to him from Olivia. Maria knows that Malvolio's vanity will have him believe that Olivia is in love with him.

In his palace, Orsino asks to be entertained with music and song. He learns that Feste, who apparently wanders wherever he likes, is on the premises and sends for him to sing. While waiting for Feste to arrive, Orsino explains to Viola–Cesario his belief that men should marry younger women. After Feste has performed, Orsino tells Viola–Cesario to return to Olivia and convince her that Orsino loves her for her beauty, not her wealth. Orsino declares that no woman could love as deeply as he does. Treading a fine line, Viola–Cesario tells him women experience love just as powerfully.

Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, another servant Fabian and Maria place the forged love letter in Olivia's garden where Malvolio will find it. Maria leaves and the others hide to watch the fun. Malvolio appears and, thinking he's alone and before he has even discovered the letter, speaks of his dreams of marrying Olivia. He imagines life as Count Malvolio, enjoying the luxuries of high status and feeling superior to other people. He notices the letter and decides that Olivia wrote it for him to find. He is convinced that Olivia loves him and that he should become a great man. The letter suggests that he wear cross-gartered yellow stockings as a mark of distinction. Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian celebrate the success of their trick.

Act 3 begins with Viola–Cesario and Feste talking and playing music in Olivia's orchard. Sir Toby arrives and invites Viola–Cesario inside the house to speak with Olivia, but Olivia arrives in the garden. Left alone, Olivia reveals to Viola-Cesario that she loves him (her). Viola–Cesario again tells Olivia that she is not what she seems to be, and that no woman could ever win his (her) heart.

Sir Andrew has seen the writing on the wall and again announces his intention to leave, since Olivia is obviously more interested in Viola–Cesario than him. Sir Toby and Fabian convince him to stay and to challenge Viola–Cesario to a duel. Such a display of Sir Andrew's bravery, they argue, will impress Olivia. Maria arrives to tell Sir Toby that Malvolio has indeed taken the

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Johann Heinrich Ramberg, Olivia, Maria and Malvolio from *Twelfth Night*, Act 3, Scene 4 (1789)

bait in the forged letter and dressed himself in yellow cross-gartered stockings thinking it will impress Olivia. Sir Toby eagerly follows Maria to see for himself.

Meanwhile, Antonio has followed Sebastian further into Illyria to protect him, even though he is a wanted man in Illyria and risks capture by Orsino's guards. Antonio lends Sebastian some money and arranges to meet him in an hour at an inn called The Elephant.

Back at Olivia's house, Olivia is confronted by Malvolio, who, deluded into thinking Olivia loves him, is dressed in ridiculous yellow stockings and is trying to be cheerful. Olivia thinks he has lost his mind and instructs Sir Toby and the others to take care of him, but they tease him until he leaves. Sir Toby announces he will tie Malvolio up and lock him in a dark room. Sir Andrew returns to challenge Viola–Cesario. Sir Toby decides to trick Viola–Cesario into challenging Sir Andrew. Sir Toby tells both Sir Andrew and Viola–Cesario that the other is a deadly swordsman spoiling for a fight. Both are actually terrified of each other but before either comes to any harm, Antonio chooses that moment to arrive. Thinking Viola–Cesario is Sebastian he stops the fight before it can begin. But Antonio has been followed by Orsino's officers who arrest him. There is a misunderstanding when Antonio, thinking Viola–Cesario is Sebastian, asks for his money back and Viola–Cesario, who has never met Antonio before, doesn't understand what he's talking about. Antonio is led away but calls Viola–Cesario 'Sebastian', which gives her hope that her brother is still alive. Sir Andrew declares he will try to fight Viola–Cesario, believing he can beat him.

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Act 4 begins in a street outside Olivia's house, where Feste sees Sebastian and mistakes him for Viola–Cesario. Sir Andrew arrives and makes the same mistake. He attacks Sebastian but Sebastian beats him down. Sir Toby challenges Sebastian but before things get completely out of hand Olivia arrives. She also mistakes Sebastian for Viola–Cesario. She stops the fighting and invites Sebastian to accompany her back to her house. He follows her obediently inside.

Sir Toby has locked Malvolio in a room and tells Feste to tease him by impersonating Sir Topas the curate (a kind of assistant priest). Sir Toby soon loses interest but Feste cruelly torments the helpless Malvolio by trying to convince him that he has gone mad.

Back in Olivia's garden, Sebastian is wondering at his good luck. He is concerned that he has missed his meeting with Antonio, but he is impressed by the pearl that Olivia has given him and also by the effortless command with which she runs her household. Olivia arrives, conveniently accompanied by a priest. She proposes a secret marriage to Sebastian that will only be made public when he is ready. Sebastian agrees.

Act 5 begins with the arrival of Orsino and his entourage at Olivia's garden. The officers bring Antonio, who Orsino recognises as an enemy and who Viola–Cesario recognises as the man who stopped her fight with Sir Andrew, to Olivia's place. Antonio, seeing Viola–Cesario and mistaking her (him) for Sebastian, recounts how he rescued Sebastian from the shipwreck and how he has helped him since. Orsino doesn't believe him. Olivia enters, sees Viola–Cesario and, thinking he (she) is Sebastian, angrily demands why he (she) is in Orsino's retinue. Olivia flatly rejects Orsino's love. Orsino threatens to kill her, and then threatens to kill Viola–Cesario when Orsino suspects Olivia is in love with his messenger. Orsino is about to leave and Viola–Cesario makes to follow him. Thinking she is watching her husband leave her, Olivia stops everyone with a word – 'husband'. The priest confirms that he did indeed marry Olivia to Viola–Cesario, which is news to Viola–Cesario. Feeling betrayed, Orsino orders 'him' forever out of his sight.

Sebastian chooses this moment to appear. Everyone is stunned. The twins are reunited and Viola's name is spoken aloud in the play for the first time. Viola's identity as a woman is finally revealed, making everything all right for everyone. She reassures Orsino that she is in love with him. Olivia suggests a joint wedding celebration for both couples. Malvolio is brought in and shows Olivia the forged letter that made him behave strangely. Olivia realises that Maria wrote the letter and Fabian confesses the whole plot against Malvolio. Malvolio leaves angrily, threatening to have his revenge, but Orsino sends Fabian after him to calm him down. The stage clears to leave Feste alone, who sings a strange, sad little song about the disappointments and frustrations in life – an unusual way to end a comedy.

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5

In focus

Convention and transgression

Viola believes Sebastian has drowned in the shipwreck. She has lost her protector, so in desperation she disguises herself as a man. In fact, she effectively disguises herself as Sebastian, her own brother, who she believes to be dead. It's a way for her to pretend that her brother is still alive.

> 'I my brother know
> Yet living in my glass; even such and so
> In favour was my brother, and he went
> Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
> For him I imitate.'
> *Act 3, Scene 4, lines 330–334*

Sebastian lives on in her mirror ('glass').

Viola, in her disguise, calls herself Cesario, and that is how all the people of Illyria will know her for almost the entire play. From one point of view, she's a con artist. From another, she's doing what she has to do to survive.

Orsino tells Viola–Cesario to approach Olivia on his behalf. This is not the action of a rational man, but one who is carried away with the idea of courtly love, a conventional belief of aristocratic men that noble, selfless devotion to a woman from afar will make her fall in love with him. Orsino places Olivia on a pedestal to worship her, and he suffers emotional trauma when she continually rejects him.

Viola falls in love with Orsino, but she decides she has to put that to one side, as a loyal and dutiful servant, and try to persuade Olivia to marry the duke. Viola transgresses by assuming a false identity to deceive Orsino, but she draws the line at transgressing further by betraying his trust and going against his instructions. Her conventional adherence to her duty (which is based on the lie of Cesario) forces her to suppress her desire to reveal her true self and her feelings.

The subplot involving Olivia's entourage provides further examples of convention and transgression. Malvolio, Olivia's steward (the manager of her household) is stern, puritanical and self-important. He disapproves of Olivia's jester Feste. Malvolio also secretly likes Olivia, his employer. Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, is usually drunk. He pretends to be friends with the foolish but wealthy Sir Andrew Aguecheek, so he can get his hands on Sir Andrew's money. Sir Toby has promised Sir Andrew to help him marry Olivia. There are all kinds of wrongdoings and offensive behaviour in this dysfunctional household, but the one offence that attracts the most severe retribution by the time the play has ended is Malvolio's desire to marry Olivia.

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The play has a clear sense of morality, based on the transgressions of some of the characters. Some characters are rewarded at the play's end and there are others who do not experience a happy ending. Malvolio, who wants to marry Olivia to gain wealth and importance, has been tricked into thinking she loves him. He believes that the future he fantasises about is within reach and will be granted to him, a common man, by Olivia, a noble woman.

> MALVOLIO [reading the letter]
> In my stars I am above thee but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.
> *Act 2, Scene 5, lines 119–121*

For audiences, the character of Malvolio and his disgrace at the play's end are memorable. For having aspirations of climbing the social ladder he is the victim of a nasty practical joke and is humiliated. He is locked up and told he is insane.

When the play reveals to us that Sebastian has also survived the shipwreck in Act 2, Scene 1, he is accompanied by Antonio, another character who, like Malvolio, will be demeaned at the end of *Twelfth Night*. Antonio – a sailor who saved Sebastian from drowning – is a relatively minor character. Yet when we first meet Antonio he has already formed a strong, passionate bond with Sebastian. Antonio's feelings for Sebastian are so intense that he will try to remain a part of Sebastian's life, even as a servant if necessary, and he will place himself at risk just to be close to his friend.

> ANTONIO
> The gentleness of all the gods go with thee!
> I have many enemies in Orsino's court,
> Else would I very shortly see thee there.
> But come what may, I do adore thee so
> That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.
> *Act 2, Scene 1, lines 32–36*

Sebastian's arrival is important because he is the solution to the Viola–Olivia–Orsino love triangle. He can change the triangle into two pairs, and allow Viola to drop the Cesario disguise and resume her true identity. Sitting in Olivia's garden in Act 4, Scene 3, Sebastian can scarcely believe his good luck. Like the hapless Malvolio, in the previous scene, he knows he is not mad even though his life has taken an unpredictable turn.

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Although Antonio is not a major character, his presence helps explain the problem of the separated identical twins. Just as importantly, his feelings for Sebastian echo the unrequited love of Orsino for Olivia and Olivia for Viola–Cesario. But at the end of the play Antonio isn't lucky enough to share in a happy relationship.

Cross-dressing and the possibility of gay (Orsino and 'Cesario', Sebastian and Antonio) and lesbian (Viola–Cesario and Olivia) relationships are very important themes in this play and they are also important for its comedy. The play wants to challenge ideas about conventional love and relationships. It creates problems for its characters who are seeking predictable, stable, straight relationships between men and women. But because *Twelfth Night* is a comedy, it isn't too much of a threat to socially acceptable behaviour.

The play relies on transgressions like the cross-dressing and the possibility of homosexual relationships for its humour. But it moves gradually towards conventional heterosexual marriage for the two pairings of its main characters – Viola with Orsino and Olivia with Sebastian. Antonio becomes the odd one out. He is conveniently arrested in Act 3, Scene 4, and this effectively removes him from the action, leaving Sebastian free for Olivia to snap up.

In Act 5, Scene 1, Antonio is brought before Orsino. Thinking Viola–Cesario is Sebastian, Antonio makes a speech where he describes how Sebastian betrayed him:

> ANTONIO
> That most ungrateful boy there by your side,
> From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth
> Did I redeem; a wrack past hope he was.
> His life I gave him, and did thereto add
> My love without retention, or restraint,
> All his in dedication. For his sake,
> Did I expose myself, pure for his love,
> Into the danger of this adverse town,
> Drew to defend him when he was beset;
> Where being apprehended, his false cunning
> (Not meaning to partake with me in danger)
> Taught him to face me out of his acquaintance,
> And grew a twenty-years' removèd thing
> While one would wink; denied me my own purse,
> Which I had recommended to his use
> Not half an hour before.
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 66–81*

Unfortunately for Antonio, mistaking Viola for Sebastian robs him of any credibility, no matter how justified his sense of betrayal is. Antonio must then

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remain on stage, with very little left to do except watch the conventional organisation of the four main characters into two couples as the play draws to an end. This is a very public way of humiliating a character. From our modern point of view, it looks like he is being punished for his apparent homosexuality. For Elizabethans, who had a different understanding of male friendships, they might not have assumed Antonio is gay but they still see him excluded, because of the threat he poses to the neat arrangement of the two couples. He is also from a lower social class than Sebastian, and cross-class relationships could upset the established order. Antonio is collateral damage.

Olivia and Orsino's first face-to-face meeting in the play does not occur until Act 5, Scene 1 – the last scene of the play. When Olivia emphatically rejects Orsino's love, he threatens to kill her:

> 'Why should I not – had I the heart to do it –
> Like to the Egyptian thief at the point of death
> Kill what I love – a savage jealousy
> That sometimes savours nobly?'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 106–109*

The time for courtly love has passed, apparently. Orsino's response to Olivia is shocking to us, yet in a time of powerful autocratic rulers, Orsino's rage at not getting his way was probably a typical reaction.

Even though Olivia has been in a state of mourning and her life has apparently stalled, she is an independent woman who runs her own household and has no intention of marrying. Despite England being ruled by a powerful queen, independent women were scarce in England in Shakespeare's time. A representation of such a woman on stage could be seen as a transgression against the roles women were expected to play in society. At the play's end, by choosing conventional marriage to Sebastian, Olivia loses her independence.

Antonio's silent presence on stage during Act 5, Scene 1 casts a shadow over the apparent happiness that the audience should feel at the conventional unions of Viola and Orsino, and Olivia and Sebastian. The joy in the ending is also undermined by Feste's song in the epilogue, which deals with a life's disillusionments and disappointments.

The play teases the audience playfully with suggestions of crossing conventional sexual barriers – Orsino possibly falling in love with an apparent young man, and Olivia falling in love with a young woman disguised as a man. But in the case of Antonio, a man who adores another man, that kind of transgression is apparently unacceptable and Antonio is punished. He has to watch the man of his dreams taken away and he is powerless to stop it.

Compare the resolution for Antonio's character with Viola's. She transgresses by fooling all the Illyrians, including Orsino, into believing that she is a man until the very end of the play. Yet she is not punished for her deception and cross-dressing. She gets to marry the man of her dreams.

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QUESTIONS 5.2

1. What does the contrast of the outcomes for Viola, Antonio and Malvolio tell us about Shakespeare's social values?
2. What does the surrender of Olivia's independence tell us about Shakespeare's social values?
3. After his speech (see page 148), Antonio is on stage watching the rest of the scene, the play's last. He doesn't have much to do – Shakespeare only gives him another four lines and no stage directions. What should Antonio do? Read all of Act 5, Scene 1 and make notes of the emotions he might be feeling. If you were directing the play, where would you place Antonio? What body language should the actor playing Antonio use to convey his emotions?

Interpretation

Twelfth Night, directed by Trevor Nunn, 1996

Trevor Nunn was born in England in 1940. He has a strong background in directing successful stage plays and musicals. He was Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1968 to 1986. Nunn has also directed television adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*. *Twelfth Night* was his first adaptation of a Shakespeare play for cinema.

Nunn wrote the screenplay, transferring the setting to the 1890s, a very repressed time when men and women were expected to hide their emotions and desires. He made some changes to the order of the scenes and clarified some of the lines. He created an opening sequence that introduces Viola (Imogen Stubbs) and Sebastian (Steven Mackintosh) as cross-dressing shipboard entertainers, travelling on an ocean liner that is wrecked in a storm. This effectively establishes the bond between the twins, and gives their traumatic separation real impact. Both are washed up on different shores of Illyria – Nunn chose the atmospheric coast of Cornwall and some impressive houses as his locations. Nunn adds a detail that Messaline, the twins' homeland, has been at war with Illyria.

This gives Viola a strong motivation to disguise herself. Dressing as a cadet helps her fit into Orsino's intimidating, men-only, militaristic administration of Illyria. However, it does mean she has to learn how to ride horses, to fence, to play billiards and to smoke cigars. Learning how to be a soldier, rather than just a man, intensifies the idea of Viola's intrusion into a 'man's world'. Failing at any of these skills could mean her secret gets discovered, so the stakes are high, but these sequences are played for laughs.

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Stubbs brings great intelligence to her scenes with Orsino and Olivia. It's obvious she understands that because Viola can't reveal that she is a woman to either Orsino or Olivia, many of the situations she finds herself in have double meanings.

Toby Stephens forcefully plays Orsino, melodramatically and energetically pursuing his obsession with Olivia (Helena Bonham Carter). Olivia hides in her palace, wearing a black veil. After the symbolic removal of the veil, Bonham Carter beautifully captures Olivia's transformation from bereaved sister and daughter to hopeless romantic upon meeting Viola–Cesario.

Sir Toby Belch (Mel Smith) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Richard E. Grant) create a ridiculous pair of boorish clowns. Ben Kingsley as Feste captures the secret, piercing wisdom of the fool who uses his special status to float between the households of Olivia and Orsino. Nigel Hawthorne plays Malvolio as a very proper and judgemental prude, above anything as distasteful as sexual desire, and trying to hold back the torrent of lust he suspects is about to break out at any moment. That is, he's above it until he is tricked into thinking Olivia loves him. Then he proves he is just as susceptible to making an idiot of himself as everyone else. It must be difficult not to play Malvolio as a caricature of a rigid Puritan. Hawthorne tries to find Malvolio's humanity, and some viewers have found his presentation of the character's rage and humiliation at being deceived tragic and moving.

Antonio (Nicholas Farrell) is a prominent character, wanted by the Illyrian authorities but bravely protecting his friend Sebastian. Sebastian repays this loyalty and affection by treating Antonio distantly. At the film's end, he has apparently escaped punishment from Orsino's government and is free to join in the celebrations, though any emotional hurt he might suffer from losing Sebastian to Olivia is conveniently ignored by the film.

The film's pace quickens in the last half hour when Sebastian arrives at Olivia's house. Nunn cleverly orchestrates the **farce** of missed connections, coincidences and mistaken identities. The eventual reunion of the twins is powerful, reinforced by the memory of their separation in the shipwreck and their mutual belief that the other twin is dead.

farce a light, broadly humorous play in which the plot depends upon a skilfully exploited (improbable) situation rather than upon the development of character

There is not enough of the idealised form of romantic love that all the characters seek to go around. Nunn shows the characters who don't end up happily ever after. Malvolio fumes with embarrassment and wants revenge. Feste is out of a job. Sir Toby and Maria end up together more for convenience than love.

Nunn makes some difficult cinematic choices, such as the adding of dialogue and the reordering of some scenes, but most of them function to enhance the telling of this story as a film. His grasp of Shakespeare's themes enables him to capture the bittersweet, romantic flavour of Shakespeare's original play. His choices of cast, period setting and locations reflect the psychology and frustrated desires of the characters.

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ACTIVITY 5.2

Playbuilding

Below are some dramatic situations and some examples of each situation taken from *Twelfth Night*.

- Self-sacrifice – Antonio puts himself at risk to help Sebastian; Viola–Cesario puts aside her feelings for Orsino to help him win Olivia
- Obstacles to love – Viola loves Orsino but cannot reveal it for fear of what could happen if she drops her disguise
- Mistaken jealousy – Orsino threatens to kill Olivia when she refuses to marry him, even though he's really in love with Viola, Orsino mistakes Viola–Cesario for Sebastian (who has married Olivia) and feels betrayed
- Recovery of someone who was lost – Viola and Sebastian are separated and, each believing the other dead, resolve to live their lives alone until they discover each other has survived and are reunited

In a group of four, build a play around any or all of these situations, in any order you like. Your play can be improvised (unscripted) or scripted. Improvise spontaneously at first if that helps you to get started, but take the time to keep notes about improvisations so that strong characters, situations and lines are not forgotten.

Each member of the group could create their own concept map. Leave space in the middle of the map for the play's title – that might be the last thing you think of. Write down the situations you would like to incorporate and the order in which they should occur. Write down words and phrases that you think of in relation to the situations. Write down ideas about settings, characters, costumes, music and anything else that you want to include.

Compare concept maps with the rest of the group. Discuss each other's ideas and see which ones are similar and which ones are original. Try to agree on which situations you will use and their order. Talk about any ideas your group has about characters, and who would like to play which roles. Think about the settings that have been suggested and their dramatic possibilities.

Get up on your feet and start using the concepts, situations, characters and settings to create scenes. Don't forget to take some notes, as it will be difficult to remember everything. Be open to new ideas as they emerge and try adding them into your play. The play text will emerge (whether it's written down line by line or mostly in your memories) as your group shares ideas.

Try to find time to rehearse your play and, when you're ready, find an audience and perform it! It would be a shame not to.

If you need some further inspiration, go online and search *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. This is a list originally compiled in the nineteenth century

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from the study of classical texts and some more recent ones. Supposedly it covers all possible dramatic situations in written works or performance. If you read it, you'll recognise situations from short stories, poems, novels, plays, TV shows and films. Perhaps you can think of some new ones.

Take some more situations from the list and build a new play, or add them to the one you've already devised.

What's in a word? *Adore*

When Sebastian announces his intention to go to Orsino's court, Antonio puts aside thoughts of his own safety and volunteers to accompany his friend:

> 'But come what may, I do adore thee so
> That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.'
> *Act 2, Scene 1, lines 35–36*

In Shakespeare the word 'adore' is not bandied about lightly. It is reserved for passionate expressions of love, and it is usually associated with heterosexual relationships. This makes Antonio's use of the word more remarkable.

> SIR TOBY
> She's a beagle, true-bred, and one that adores me. What o' that?
> SIR ANDREW
> I was adored once too.
> *Act 2, Scene 3, lines 151–153*

What do we make of Sir Toby's assertion that Maria adores him? Is he saying that casually or wonderingly or passionately? Sir Andrew chimes in that he was adored in the past. Who by? He's not a sympathetic character, but it is possible to feel sorry for him here because he feels some sadness, possibly over a lost love. Maybe he regards marriage to Olivia as his last chance at happiness.

> MALVOLIO [Reads]
> I may command where I adore
> *Act 2, Scene 5, line 88*

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Malvolio's vanity convinces him that the forged letter is from Olivia and that she is referring to him, who she commands. The words in the letter were actually written by Maria.

Consider this complicated set of interlocking but contradictory relationships:

- Malvolio wants to marry Olivia
- Sir Andrew wants to marry Olivia
- Orsino wants to marry Olivia
- Olivia wants to marry Viola–Cesario
- Viola wants to marry Orsino

The addition of Sebastian is necessary to create a viable partner for Olivia and allow Viola to be with Orsino. That leaves Antonio out in the cold, along with Malvolio and Sir Andrew. Those three characters adore others or they believe themselves to be adored. Yet all of them are to be disappointed by the end of the play. Of the five who use the term (including Maria who forged the letter), only Sir Toby and Maria wind up married, and to each other. But is that out of genuine love or convenience? Did Sir Toby agree to marry Maria in return for her writing the letter that tricked Malvolio? Shakespeare does not show the couple together at the end of the play; the announcement is made by Fabian, a minor character. It's a non-event.

Sayings originating in this play

> 'If music be the food of love, play on;'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 1*

Orsino opens the play with this line. People who appreciate the romantic powers of music will understand what he means.

> 'Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, line 16*

Although an extreme way of preventing bad marriages, you can't argue with Feste's logic.

> 'Better a witty fool than a foolish wit'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, line 30*

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Faultless logic again from Feste; interestingly, Feste quotes Quinapalus, a philosopher that he just made up on the spot.

> 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.'
> *Act 2, Scene 5, lines 120–121*

Consider our politicians. First ask yourself, are they great? If so, how did they come by their greatness?

> 'Foolery, sir, does not walk about the orb like the sun; it shines everywhere.'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, lines 32–33*

Feste's right again! Right about foolery being everywhere, that is. He's wrong about the sun going around the orb (the earth) though. Copernican theories of the universe were still not universally accepted.

> 'Music from the spheres'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, line 94*

More pre-Copernican astronomy here: many still believed that the earth was at the centre of a series of concentric spheres. The spheres were believed to be made from a clear crystalline material called aether. The spheres rotated around the earth, carrying the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars, and as they moved, they were supposed to make wondrous, harmonious musical sounds that were beyond the hearing of mortal people.

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5

THE TEMPEST

WRITTEN: 1610 or 1611

FIRST PERFORMED: First known performance in 1611

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: No

THEATRE OR COURT: Court

SETTING: Prospero's island

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Prospero, a magician, the former (and rightful) duke of Milan (protagonist)
- Miranda, Prospero's daughter
- Ariel, a powerful spirit who serves Prospero (foil)
- Caliban, an island native, a 'savage and deformed slave', who serves Prospero (foil)
- Alonso, King of Naples (antagonist)
- Ferdinand, Alonso's son
- Sebastian, Alonso's brother (antagonist)
- Antonio, Prospero's treacherous brother who deposed him as Duke of Milan and banished him (antagonist)
- Gonzalo, Alonso's councillor and friend of Prospero
- Stephano, Alonso's drunken butler
- Trinculo, Alonso's court jester

EVENTS:

- A ship carrying Alonso the King of Naples, Antonio the Duke of Milan, and members of their households, runs aground on an island in a storm.
- The storm was magically summoned by Prospero to deliberately trap the ship's passengers on his island, who are scattered by the storm to different parts of the island.
- Ariel lures Ferdinand to Prospero and Miranda, and the young couple fall in love.
- Alonso believes Ferdinand has drowned, and Sebastian and Antonio start plotting to kill Alonso so Sebastian can become king.
- Caliban meets Stephano and Trinculo, and the trio decide to overthrow Prospero.
- Ariel appears to Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio as a harpy, criticising them for the betrayal of Prospero, and then tricking the men into walking through dangerous territory to where the magician is waiting for them.
- All the characters meet up with Prospero, who forgives their betrayals.

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- Prospero and Alonso agree that Miranda and Ferdinand should marry, uniting Milan and Naples.
- Prospero sets Ariel and Caliban free.
- Prospero announces he will give up magic and resume his life in Milan.

THEMES: Betrayal, magic, parenting, theatre, civilisation, wilderness, freedom, imprisonment, reconciliation, forgiveness, politics

William Rimmer, Scene from *The Tempest* (c. 1850)

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5

Introduction

The Tempest is a dark and philosophical play with themes of treachery and betrayal, leadership and politics. More recent interpretations, especially from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, emphasise themes like the colonisation of territory, of indigenous people, and of their enslavement.

Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* in 1610 or 1611. Its first known performance was on 1 November 1611, in front of King James I at Whitehall Palace in London. It's likely that Shakespeare wrote the play to be performed indoors anyway. The King's Men had taken over the Blackfriars Theatre, situated on the northern bank of the Thames, in 1608. It might have been performed later at the open-air Globe as well, but there are some aspects of the script that suggest Shakespeare had an enclosed theatre in mind. The capacity of Blackfriars was smaller, and the audience could be seated closer to the stage than the Globe audiences who mostly stood. Shakespeare included elements of stagecraft in his script that were experimental for the time, requiring special effects such as actors suspended by wires and appearing to fly over the stage, apparitions, shape-shifting spirits and disappearing tricks. He needed an enclosed space lit by candles and lanterns to achieve these effects. An indoor theatre would also have improved the dramatic impact of using sound effects; for example, during the storm in Act 1, Scene 1.

It is tempting to think of the magician Prospero as a reflection of Shakespeare himself. For many years it was accepted that *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last play. The symbolism of the sorcerer Prospero surrendering his magic powers at the end of the play fitted so well with Shakespeare's decision to retire from writing plays that it proved irresistible to writers, **directors**, academics and critics. *The Tempest* was written somewhere in the period between 1610 and 1611, but *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* could have been written later. Historians have discovered that Shakespeare worked on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII,* as well as a lost play called *Cardenio,* after completing *The Tempest*. So, although it was written near the end of his career, it wasn't actually his 'last' play.

director the person responsible for the interpretive aspects of a stage, a film, or a television production; who supervises the integration of elements, such as acting, staging, and lighting, required to realise the writer's conception

Shakespeare was inspired to write this play by a real-life shipwreck that occurred in 1609. A colonist fleet of nine ships, belonging to the Virginia Company of London and led by Sir Thomas Gates, left England bound for Jamestown, Virginia, a new settlement on the east coast of North America. On arrival, it was intended that Gates would become the colony's new governor. There were a total of 500 people on board those ships intending to resupply the colony and start new lives there. On St James' Day, 24 July, the fleet was scattered by a huge storm. Gates' flagship, the *Sea Venture*, struck rocks on the island of Bermuda in the Atlantic Ocean, over 1200 km from their destination.

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The rest of the fleet arrived in Virginia and sent the news back to England that Gates' ship had been lost with all hands. But a year later, an incredible story of survival emerged. All the crew and passengers of the *Sea Venture* had managed to get off the ship safely and salvage much of the ship's cargo. The island had plentiful food and fresh water. The colonists began building boats that could take them the rest of the way to Jamestown in Virginia.

Before they could leave, an argument broke out between Gates and Sir George Somers, the admiral of the Virginia Company, over who should be in charge. Somers' supporters mutinied against Gates, threatening to kill him. Sanity eventually prevailed and the colonists sailed for Jamestown (except for two mutineers who volunteered to stay on Bermuda and claim it for England).

Written accounts of the adventure were popular in London in 1610 and 1611, and it's almost certain that Shakespeare read them. There are events recounted in those reports that are echoed in *The Tempest*. For example, there is a description of St Elmo's fire around the sails and masts of a ship that is similar to Ariel's account of how he used a display of fire to terrify the sailors and passengers on Alonso's ship (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 195 to 206). The mutiny against Gates is comparable to Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo plotting against Prospero. The promise of a return home for Prospero and Miranda at the play's end reflects the apparently miraculous survival of the colonists and the completion of their voyage.

Prospero provides plenty of exposition for the audience as he relates the characters' backstories. He explains how his brother betrayed him, how he and Miranda were exiled to the island, and how the witch Sycorax trapped Ariel in a pine tree. He places the shipwrecked men in groups on different parts of the island, the combinations of characters prompting dialogue and conversations that create dramatic tension. Prospero controls the survivors' movements, and provokes their treacheries in subplots, like a writer or a director would.

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is an important element of the play. Prospero has had to raise his daughter by himself, without the girl's mother. They are very dependent on each other. Prospero is very protective of his daughter and very controlling. There is no doubt that he loves her, but she is an important part of his plan. The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda in *The Tempest* reflected the way King James I was seeking at the time to unite his own dynasty with others in Europe to guarantee stable relationships between nations.

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DID YOU KNOW?
Forbidden Planet, a 1956 science fiction film directed by Fred M. Wilcox with a screenplay by Cyril Hume, is based on *The Tempest*. Set early in the twenty-third century, a spacecraft from Earth lands on the planet Altair IV, in search of an expedition that was lost 20 years earlier. The ship's crew discover only two survivors, Dr Morbius, a scientist, and his daughter Altaira. Morbius has discovered the remains of an advanced civilisation, the Krell, and their ingenious technology. But soon the rescuers are under attack by a deadly, unseen force and they are forced to fight for their lives.

The complicated arrangement of marriages for political gain is an important theme in the play. The reason Alonso is sailing past Prospero's island in the first place is that he is returning home after attending the wedding of his daughter Claribel to the king of Tunis. It's advantageous for Prospero to marry his daughter Miranda to Alonso's son Ferdinand. In *The Tempest*, the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand will hopefully ensure Prospero's readmission to the club of political leaders. In comedy, the promise of a happy wedding offered a pleasing resolution for the audience. In life, arranged marriages between royal families could guarantee their survival and stability in relations between countries.

Gonzalo's line makes clear the hope for successful marriages between royal families:

> 'Look down, you gods,
> And on this couple drop a blessèd crown;'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 201–202*

The film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) was based on *The Tempest*.

In the months after *The Tempest*, English politics seemed like it would imitate the play. In 1612 James arranged a marriage for his daughter Elizabeth to the Protestant Frederick of Bohemia, although the wedding would not take place until the following year. James wanted a Catholic bride from another European royal house for his older son Henry, the Prince of Wales. Even as a teenager, Henry was admired and regarded as a fine future king. For James, marrying Henry off strategically, uniting his Protestant family with a powerful Catholic one, would create the possibility of alliances with other powers in Europe and reduce the likelihood of becoming embroiled in religious wars.

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DID YOU KNOW?
Prior to James I, three consecutive childless monarchs ruled England. After all the anxiety about the Tudors' failure to produce male heirs, it took a bisexual Scotsman to produce viable male successors to the English throne. Before James' older son Henry, there had not been a Prince of Wales for more than 60 years.

But as James' reign neared the end of its first decade, this promise of 1612 evaporated. The country began a descent into crisis. Tragedy struck in late October 1612, when 18-year-old Henry went swimming in the River Thames. He caught a disease from the polluted water – probably typhoid fever – and he died on November 6. There were enormous hopes and expectations for Henry and England that were suddenly taken away. The nation mourned. Queen Anne locked herself away in her room for days. Afterwards her health deteriorated and she refused to have Henry's death mentioned to her. James was often overwhelmed by the devastating realisation of Henry's death and months later he would be incapable of working, so severe was his grief.

Shakespeare tried to make drama out of real-life situations. Some of his plays could be looked upon as propaganda, praising the ancestors of the monarch of the day, in the hope that he could stay in the good books and keep getting invited back to perform. But within his plays there are references to political crises, plots and scandals that show he was undecided about how power was being exercised. He produced work that wasn't intended to cause offence to people in power, but the plays could ask questions about the problems his society faced. The tensions in *The Tempest* reflect English politics at the time. Shakespeare's play was a work of fiction. But it presented events that would be imitated in the following years by some of the continuing crises that haunted James I throughout his reign.

Prospero's books are an important source of his magical power. His precious library that Gonzalo gave him to take with him into exile helped him hone his skills as he waited for the opportunity to strike at those who betrayed him. In Shakespeare's time, the ability to read and to study written knowledge was still confined to a fortunate few. The knowledge contained in books was mysterious and sometimes worrying for people who couldn't read. People (usually men) who had the luxury of time and the education necessary to understand scientific theories were regarded with a mixture of suspicion and awe. Study, experimentation, trial and error, and observations of the natural world were required to build expertise in, for example, chemistry, mathematics or astronomy.

The combination of interest in the scientific and the supernatural can be exemplified by the life of Dr John Dee. Dee was a mathematician, a scientist and a geographer. In the 1560s, he advised Queen Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis

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Walsingham, on the use of codes and code breaking techniques. Dee advised sea captains before they undertook voyages of exploration, preparing maps for them and instructing them on navigation techniques.

Dee was also believed to be a magician. He thought that the great secrets of the universe could be explained by magical principles and theories. He was Queen Mary's astrologer, and later did horoscopes for Queen Elizabeth I. He believed he could communicate with angels. He earned respect as a scientist in his lifetime but later was ridiculed as a fraud. Dee's career typifies how the border between science and magic was unclear in Renaissance England.

DID YOU KNOW?
Dr John Dee had his own laboratory and collected the largest private library in England of its day – perhaps as many as 4000 books and manuscripts, which he made available to other scholars. His interest in science, mathematics and the occult make him a likely inspiration for Prospero.

With belief in magic widespread, there was a distinction to be made between good magic and bad magic. Just because you can use the power to get your own way, it doesn't mean you should.

At this point in his career, Shakespeare was taking part in more and more acknowledged collaborations with other artists. *The Tempest* is remarkable for the involvement of Robert Johnson, a court musician to King James. Johnson wrote the music for the songs in the play, including *Full Fathom Five*, and Shakespeare wrote the lyrics. Ariel sings *Full Fathom Five* for Ferdinand to calm the grief he feels in the belief that his father is dead.

As time has passed, the play has been interpreted differently, and this is never clearer than when we consider the character of Caliban. When the play was written, it was never intended that Caliban be taken too seriously. He was to be mocked and despised by audiences. Over the centuries he has been played as some weird and wonderful half-human, half-animal hybrids. Although it seems incredible to us now, in Shakespeare's day such creatures were believed to live in far-off corners of the globe. In the early seventeenth century, London was a very busy port, with ships arriving from ever more distant and strange parts of the world. Shakespeare could wander down to the River Thames, go into an inn or tavern, and listen to sailors recount their voyages to the exotic places they had been to and the strange things and people they had seen. These stories were, doubtless, exaggerated by drunken men eager for an audience, but people believed that half-animal, half-human creatures existed in the yet unexplored regions of the earth.

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More recent interpretations of Caliban have focused on his humanity and his oppression by Prospero. Before Prospero arrived, Caliban was free to do as he wished on the island. Caliban's journey from sole indigenous inhabitant of the island, living in harmony with nature, to abused and hated slave reflects the European colonisation of the so-called 'new worlds' of North and South America, South Africa, and Australasia and the resulting harm and destruction of the native peoples.

The Tempest is very deliberately a play about theatre. Shakespeare creates a character in Prospero who controls other characters like a playwright does, but he also pushes the limit of what can be achieved on stage. Shakespeare uses the theatre like a painter, as an orchestrator of illusions, combining drama elements like space, time and movement to create a thrilling experience for his audience.

Synopsis

The play's action will take less than a day to complete. It commences on a ship, at sea, in the middle of a storm. The ship is carrying King Alonso of Naples, his son Ferdinand, his councillor Gonzalo, some other members of his court, and Antonio the usurping Duke of Milan. The crew works to save the ship but an argument breaks out between the Boatswain and the panicky passengers. The ship is wrecked, running aground on an island.

On shore, the magus (magician) Prospero, who is also the rightful Duke of Milan and brother of Antonio, watches the stricken ship with his daughter Miranda. Miranda thinks her father has caused the storm and fears that those aboard have all drowned. Prospero tells her that everyone on board has survived intact. Prospero decides the time has come to explain to Miranda why they are on the island. Prospero tells her that 12 years ago he was the Duke of Milan but that his brother Antonio betrayed him so he could become duke. Antonio conspired with Alonso the King of Naples to overthrow Prospero. Prospero and Miranda were exiled from Milan, set adrift in a small leaky boat. Fortunately, Gonzalo had ensured they had some supplies and some important books from Prospero's library. Their unseaworthy boat brought them safely to the island, where they have lived ever since. Prospero reveals that he knows his enemies were on the wrecked ship. His servant Ariel, a powerful spirit, appears. Ariel relates how he terrorised the ship, causing the passengers to jump overboard. The crew are safely sleeping aboard the crippled vessel and the passengers are scattered around the island.

Ariel wants to be released from Prospero's service. Prospero asks him to wait two more days – there will be more work in the meantime. Prospero

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visits Caliban, a strange and threatening semi-human creature Prospero has enslaved. Caliban recalls being treated well at first by Prospero, but Prospero reminds Caliban he tried to rape Miranda. Prospero orders Caliban to gather firewood, threatening to punish him if he does not obey.

Ariel lures Ferdinand to meet Prospero and Miranda. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love at first sight. He thinks he is now the king of Naples, believing that his father Alonso has drowned in the sea. Ferdinand threatens Prospero and the magician disarms him with a spell. Ferdinand says he would be happily imprisoned if he could see Miranda once a day. Prospero repeats to Ariel that he will be set free.

Act 2 opens on another part of the island. Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo and some others contemplate that they have survived the storm. Alonso grieves for Ferdinand, whom he believes drowned. Sebastian and Antonio distinguish themselves as negative men by constantly sniping at Gonzalo, the noble councillor who helped Prospero. Ariel interrupts the bickering by playing music that sends all but Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio to sleep. Antonio volunteers to stand watch over Alonso, who also falls asleep. Antonio and Sebastian begin plotting how to replace Alonso as king. Ariel awakens the sleepers before Antonio and Sebastian can murder Alonso. The king orders a search for Ferdinand.

In the next scene, Trinculo, Alonso's jester, and Stephano, Alonso's drunken butler, meet Caliban. Stephano forces Caliban to drink alcohol. Caliban decides to be his servant and be his guide on the island. Stephano thinks he will be the king of the island, and Caliban believes he is finally free of Prospero's control.

At the start of Act 3, Prospero has put Ferdinand to work carrying wood, just as he ordered Caliban to do. Ferdinand and Miranda talk about the love they feel for each other and Prospero approves of their wish to be married.

Back at Caliban's cave, 'King' Stephano tries to deal with infighting between Trinculo and Caliban. Invisible to the trio, Ariel provokes a fight between Stephano and Trinculo and hears Caliban ask Stephano to kill Prospero. Stephano agrees and plans to marry Miranda. Ariel lures them away with music.

Meanwhile, Alonso and his wandering group have not found Ferdinand. Alonso gives up hope of finding his son alive. Sebastian and Antonio decide this would be a good time to murder the king, but at that moment Prospero causes a banquet to magically appear, carried by island spirits, for the weary men to eat. As they sit down to the feast, Ariel appears as a mythical harpy and the banquet vanishes before their eyes. Ariel accuses Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian of conspiring against Prospero and deposing him as Duke of Milan. Filled with grief and remorse, Alonso decides to drown himself. Sebastian and Antonio chase uselessly after Ariel and the other spirits. Gonzalo thinks all three men feel guilt for their actions.

The action of Act 4 returns to Prospero's cave, where the magician reassures Ferdinand that Miranda is allowed to marry him, but Prospero makes

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his disapproval of sex before marriage very clear. Prospero magically creates an impressive masque, a kind of theatrical entertainment, for Miranda and Ferdinand to watch. Three goddesses appear and speak to the young couple. The first is Iris, goddess of the rainbow. She symbolises the calm after the storm. The second is Ceres, goddess of the harvest. She symbolises the wealth that will result from the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, uniting Milan and Naples. The third is Juno, goddess of the moon and protector of women. She and Ceres bless Miranda and Ferdinand. The masque continues with spirits dancing until Prospero abruptly ends it, remembering that Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo are planning to kill him.

Ariel tells Prospero that he has led the drunken trio to a stagnant pool close to Prospero's cave. Ariel lures them on by hanging pretty clothes where they will be seen. Caliban, eager to get rid of Prospero, is frustrated when Stephano and Trinculo see the clothes and start trying them on. Prospero sends spirits in the form of dogs to chase his would-be murderers away.

Act 5 opens with Prospero reflecting that his plan is working perfectly. Ariel reports that Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio are losing their minds and that Gonzalo is traumatised. Prospero decides he has prolonged their ordeal enough and shows mercy. Speaking to the island's spirits, he says he will surrender his magic powers. Ariel brings Alonso's group to Prospero, who dresses once more as the Duke of Milan before speaking to the confused men. Alonso asks to be forgiven. Prospero tells Antonio and Sebastian that he knows they conspired to kill Alonso. Prospero reveals to Alonso that Ferdinand has survived after all, and father and son are reunited. Alonso approves of the planned marriage of his son to Prospero's daughter. Ariel brings the sailors who have repaired the ship and are ready to sail for home.

Ariel brings Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, and Prospero explains to the lords that they had plotted to murder him. Exhausted and humiliated, Stephano and Trinculo are in no shape to hurt anyone. Prospero orders Caliban to prepare his cave for the royal party to stay in. Caliban gratefully agrees and admits he was stupid to worship Stephano. Prospero invites his guests to wait for him in his cave, where he will tell them his story. He sets Ariel free and, now alone on stage, declares that he has given up his magic powers. He speaks directly to the audience, asking them to set him free by imagining him off the island. Now that his powers are gone, the audience must perform magic for him.

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5

In focus

Prospero

Prospero completely dominates *The Tempest*. He manipulates almost every action of every character, and nothing on the island escapes his notice for long. This is a reason people have seen a connection between Shakespeare the playwright and his creation, Prospero – the magician writes the script for his own revenge on his enemies. It is even possible that Shakespeare himself performed the role of Prospero.

The first scene of the play shows a ship in an apparently real storm, with a desperate crew and panicky passengers. The second scene reveals that the storm was magically created by Prospero, with the intention of getting the passengers off the ship and onto his island for reasons that will be made clear later, without causing them or the ship's crew any harm. The play presents Prospero like a playwright who creates situations based on a plot that will be gradually revealed as the play goes along.

William Young Ottley,
Prospero Summoning Ariel (c. 1800)

When Prospero creates the storm that brings his enemies to him, he faces a choice. His reputation is that of a powerful man, and he is deeply hurt by betrayal. With Alonso, Antonio and the others at his mercy, should he harm them, or even kill them, for the wrong that was done to him? That would be an understandable reaction. But his reputation is also that of a man who is above petty motives of revenge. He wants to teach those who had wronged him a lesson, but he does so in a way that is constructive and returns life to a harmonious balance.

The Irish poet and critic Edward Dowden, in his 1870s biography of Shakespeare, listed all the virtues he detected in the character Prospero: '… the grave harmony of his character, his self mastery, his calm validity of will, his sensitiveness to wrong, his unfaltering justice and with these, a certain abandonment, a remoteness from the common joys and sorrows of the world.' For Dowden, these qualities he saw in Prospero were proof that Shakespeare must have been the same sort of man. But do these supposed qualities of Prospero's stand up to closer inspection?

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By bringing Ferdinand to the island Prospero provides Miranda with a future husband and the promise of a new life after they leave the island. By testing Ferdinand's sincerity and controlling the amount of time he spends with Miranda, Prospero ensures that Ferdinand will value Miranda and not treat her as another of the many women he has admired but found fault with. But he has another, more selfish, motive. Prospero, we notice, is determined to guarantee Miranda's virginity until after her marriage to Ferdinand. Giving his virgin daughter to the son of the king of Naples will guarantee a new political alliance for Prospero and ensure he regains his dukedom.

Ariel, one of the island's inhabitants who serves Prospero, is an air spirit. Ariel is usually represented as swift, sleek, elegant and intelligent. Prospero freed Ariel from the tree that Sycorax trapped him in, and, ever since, Ariel has been following Prospero's instructions. Prospero has promised Ariel his freedom, but only after he has helped Prospero to carry out his plans. From Ariel's first scene he reminds Prospero of the promise, but it seems Prospero always has just one more task for him to complete.

> ARIEL
> Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,
> Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,
> Which is not yet performed me.
> PROSPERO
> How now? Moody?
> What is't thou canst command?
> ARIEL
> My liberty.
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 242–247*

Prospero then lays down what can only be described as a massive guilt-trip on Ariel. He reminds Ariel at great length who rescued him from the tree that Sycorax imprisoned him in, and he threatens to do worse if Ariel doesn't obey Prospero without further question.

> PROSPERO
> If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
> And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
> Thou hast howled away twelve winters.
> ARIEL
> Pardon, master.
> I will be correspondent to command
> And do my spiriting gently.
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 295–300*

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Prospero is always appreciative of Ariel's efforts, but he will sternly remind the spirit who is boss. We can imagine how Ariel feels when he apologises and agrees to follow yet more of Prospero's instructions.

Compare and contrast Prospero's relationship with Ariel and the relationship he has with Caliban. Prospero's authority is most strongly represented in his relationship with Caliban. Caliban is the complete opposite of Ariel. He is usually covered in filth, living rough like an animal. If Ariel is air, Caliban is earth – the least spiritual of the elements. Prospero and Caliban have known each other for the 12 years that Prospero has been on the island and it is a relationship that has changed over that time. Caliban himself describes the journey he and Prospero have been on:

> 'When thou cam'st first
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
> And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
> The fresh springs, the brine pits, barren place and fertile –
> Cursèd be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax – toads, beetles, bats – light on you!
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' th' island.'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 334–346*

Prospero and Caliban had a relationship that was more like equals. Before Prospero and Miranda arrived, it was Caliban's island. He and Prospero saw that they could learn from each other.

Then Caliban betrayed Prospero by trying to rape Miranda:

> PROSPERO
> Thou most lying slave,
> Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
> Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee
> In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
> The honour of my child.
> CALIBAN
> O ho, O ho! Would't had been done.
> Thou didst prevent me – I had peopled else
> The isle with Calibans.
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 347–354*

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Ever since, Prospero has been punishing Caliban by treating him as a slave. The name 'Caliban' is very like the word 'cannibal'. It's possible that Shakespeare intended the character's name to be an anagram, but bear in mind that 'cannibal' in Shakespeare's day meant 'indigenous', not a human that eats other humans.

At the time he was writing *The Tempest*, England was expanding its colonial empire to North America. Stories of the indigenous people that English explorers and colonists encountered had reached England. The language used to describe Caliban – language like 'most lying slave', 'abhorred slave' – suggest that the indigenous peoples of distant places were seen as less than human. From this perspective, Prospero symbolises a colonising power and Caliban symbolises an oppressed man condemned to a life of abuse and slavery in his own home.

In this modern interpretation, Prospero becomes less benevolent, less of a wise and just ruler, and more of a harsh tyrant, who ruthlessly uses his superior power to guarantee his position and who constantly reminds Caliban of his inferiority. Prospero uses his magic as a weapon of control over the other man. The differences between Prospero and Caliban's mother, the witch Sycorax, are not always easy to see, even though Prospero is supposedly the 'good' wizard, and Sycorax was supposedly the 'evil' witch.

Despite Caliban's reviled status, Shakespeare demonstrates his humanist capacity to see the world from different points of view, by giving the 'abhorrèd slave' one of the most beautiful speeches in the play:

> CALIBAN
> Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
> That if I had then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
> I cried to dream again.
> *Act 3, Scene 2, lines 127–135*

The character of Caliban presents a problem for actors and directors. There have been so many productions depicting him as a dark-skinned slave that the play is now associated with the ideas of empires and colonialism, which the play may or may not be about. Remember that all the geographical references in the play – Milan, Naples, Tunis and Algiers – are strictly Old World, Mediterranean. Shakespeare might have taken some inspiration from the wreck of the *Sea Venture* on Bermuda, but there are no references in the play to the colonial empire England was building in North America and the Atlantic Ocean. Would

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Shakespeare have had any moral questions about whether or not it was right to treat another human being the way Prospero treats Caliban?

The Tempest gives us insights into how a playwright or director could go about creating a theatrical experience. The island is a stage. The shipwreck survivors are groups of actors arranged into specific combinations of people for the purpose of developing subplots. Prospero directs Ariel to conjure baffling illusions to deceive the stranded Neapolitans and Milanese. When Prospero summons the masque to celebrate harmony and fertility for Miranda and Ferdinand, he uses theatre words to describe it:

> PROSPERO
> You do look, my son, in a movèd sort,
> As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful, sir,
> Our revels now are ended; these our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 146–158*

Note the use of 'actors' and 'pageant' in this speech. More powerfully, Prospero is making a link between the temporary illusion of the masque and the passing of our own lives. In that sense, the masque – his theatre – is actually an accurate reflection of reality.

DID YOU KNOW?
The epic poem *Metamorphoses* is an important source of ancient Greek and Roman myths. The great Roman poet Ovid completed it around the year 8 AD. It is a text Shakespeare studied.

One of the myths in *Metamorphoses* is the story of Medea, a powerful witch in Greek mythology, who used her magic to help the hero Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece. In another part of the story, she explains how she uses spirits of nature ('Elves') to help cast her spells, as you can read in this part of a 1567 translation of *Metamorphoses*:

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'Ye Elves of Hilles, of Brookes, of Woods alone,
Of standing Lakes, and of the Night approche ye everychone
Through helpe of whom (the crooked bankes much wondring at the thing)
I have compelled streames to run cleane backward to their spring.
By charmes I make the calme Seas rough, and make the rough Seas plaine,
And cover all the Skie with Cloudes and chase them thence againe.
By charmes I raise and lay the windes, and burst the Vipers jaw.
And from the bowels of the Earth both stones and trees doe draw.
Whole woods and Forestes I remove. I make the Mountaines shake,
And even the Earth it selfe to grone and fearfully to quake.
I call up dead men from their graves …'
Metamorphoses, Book the Seventh

Compare it to this speech of Prospero's in Act 5, Scene 1:

'Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demi-puppets, that
By moon-shine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you, whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear solemn curfew; by whose aid –
Weak masters though ye be – I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth multitudinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war. To the dread rattling thunder
I have given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let them forth
By my so potent art.'
Act 5, Scene 1, lines 33–50

Shakespeare quotes directly from *Metamorphoses*, making a strong link between Prospero and Medea, not Sycorax and Medea. Casting a woman as Prospera, as some productions do, intensifies that similarity. But where Medea's incantation is a powerful statement of her magical abilities, Prospero finishes his speech by declaring he will give his power up:

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> 'But this rough magic
> I here abjure. And when I have required
> Some heavenly music – which even now I do –
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 50–57*

Prospero has been stranded on his island, plotting his revenge for twelve long years. He is enraged and embittered. At the start of Act 5, when his plan is about to succeed and he prepares to confront Alonso, Antonio and the others he has a choice. He can be ruthless and continue to punish them, or he can be merciful and forgive them.

> 'Though with their wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part. The rarer action is
> In virtue, than in vengeance. They being peniteny,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further.'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 25–30*

Alonso asks Prospero for forgiveness, is overjoyed to discover Ferdinand has also survived, and agrees that Miranda and Ferdinand be married.

But are Antonio and Sebastian 'penitent'? They hardly have any lines in the last scene of the play, and when they do speak, it isn't to apologise or express humility. Prospero can't make Antonio and Sebastian apologise or regret what they've done. He doesn't control their human natures. He can make the decision to forgive them, but he only controls his own conscience. Prospero struggles to forgive those who wronged him, but he understands it is necessary, so he does it. Without his magic he is human once more. Letting go of his anger frees him too.

Epilogues in plays were common in Shakespeare's time. One of the characters will remain behind to remind the audience that they have been watching a play and to ask for their applause. If you have read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you will remember that Puck ends that play by addressing the audience directly. Feste does the same thing in his song at the end of *Twelfth Night*. In both those plays, the epilogue characters are in some sort of twilight zone between the world of the play and the world of the audience. They are simultaneously in character but also aware of having performed a play in front of an audience.

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Prospero is more in character than out of it for his epilogue:

> EPILOGUE, spoken by PROSPERO
> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's my own –
> Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
> I must be here confined by you,
> Or sent to Naples, let me not,
> Since I have my dukedom got
> And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
> In this bare island, by your spell;
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands.
> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill, or else my project fails,
> Which was to please. Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer
> Which pierces it so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all its faults.
> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
> Let your indulgences set me free.
> *EPILOGUE, lines 1–20*

Prospero's epilogue is different in that he asks the audience to complete the character's journey in their imaginations. Showing their appreciation by applause ('good hands') and favourable word-of-mouth ('gentle breath') will speed Prospero on his way.

QUESTIONS 5.3

1. Judge Prospero by today's standards. Would he be considered:
   - a loving father?
   - an approachable father-in-law?
   - a considerate employer?
   - a wise and just leader?
2. Prospero waits 12 years for the chance to have his revenge. Is that the behaviour of an angry man? Why or why not?
3. When he has achieved victory over his enemies, Prospero forgives Antonio, his treacherous brother, and he surrenders his magic powers. Are these the acts of a dangerous, vengeful and embittered man? Give reasons for your answer.

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5

Interpretation

The Tempest, directed by Julie Taymor, 2010

Julie Taymor is an American film and theatre director. She was born in Massachusetts in 1952. Her background and training is in physical theatre, mask and puppetry. She is most famous for directing the hugely successful stage musical, *The Lion* King. She has directed many plays and operas all over the world, including productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1994) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2013). In 1999 she made a film called *Titus*, based on *Titus Andronicus*.

The island in Taymor's film is a new world being born. Volcanic rocks and towering cliffs overlooking the ocean create the impression of a prehistoric place. The director uses some dramatic Hawaiian locations for the landscapes but shoots other parts of the film on soundstages. Taymor really tries to make a movie, rather than just film a stage play. She uses close-ups of the actors' faces, visual effects and powerful sound design to create a cinematic experience for the audience.

The most important element of Taymor's film is the decision to cast Helen Mirren as 'Prospera', a female Prospero. When you consider that educated, powerful women were vulnerable to being accused of witchcraft, it makes sense to have the Duchess of Milan betrayed and banished by her male rivals. Mirren gives Prospera intensity and a strong sense of purpose, as well as a sense of humour.

Julie Taymor, director

One of the most remarkable effects of casting Mirren as Prospera, is that it changes the nature of the relationship between Prospero/Prospera and Miranda (Felicity Jones). Mirren brings maternal concern to the relationship with Miranda. Mirren's Prospera is a protective, reassuring observer of the love that grows between Miranda and Ferdinand. There are moments when Mirren conveys a sense that Prospera envies her daughter as Miranda falls in love with Ferdinand.

Male actors usually play Prospero as not merely protective but possessive – a controlling father who prevents Miranda and Ferdinand from getting together until he's good and ready for them to do so. Prospero, when played by men, can be a jealous, competitive older male keen to assert dominance over the younger Ferdinand. This film is free of that kind of battle of wills.

The introduction of the shipwreck survivors to the island's blank-slate environment demonstrates the battle humans

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fight over, and against, the natural world. The uncivilised landscape of the island poses a basic question about human nature. Are different people born good and bad, or do their life circumstances determine how they will turn out? On the island there are no castles, palaces, royal courts or minions to do their bidding. But even in this wilderness, Antonio (Chris Cooper) and Sebastian (Alan Cumming) revert to their true natures, and they begin to conspire against Alonso (David Strathairn). Their escape from the storm and the strangeness of the island don't cause them to stop and think. As always, their aim is to gain more wealth and power. The experience doesn't change them.

Stephano (Alfred Molina) and Trinculo (Russel Brand) play a pair of 'downstairs', or low-status, characters who can't stand each other and yet who rely on each other. The meeting with Caliban (Djimon Hounsou) changes that relationship and creates a political subplot different from the high-status intrigues of Prospera and the noblemen. Caliban is an angry rebel, and Trinculo is a jester who understands the inequality of political power. Stephano gets ambitions wildly above his capacity to fulfil. Taymor uses this group of characters to tackle the real presence of racism, both in the time the play was set and as it exists today.

The film doesn't have the sense of a gradual slowing down and letting go the way that many interpretations of the play do. Through the performance of Helen Mirren, Taymor's *The Tempest* is defiant, energetic and colourful. This may be different to what Shakespeare meant when he wrote it. You'll have to watch it to see if you can work out what the play means to Julie Taymor.

ACTIVITY 5.3

Fill in the gaps

The Tempest relies upon **exposition** to bring the audience up to speed on what has happened prior to the start of the play. Prospero delivers these lengthy explanations of various characters' backstories. Events of the past leading up to the events of the play are told only from Prospero's point of view.

exposition a comprehensive description and explanation of background information, explained through dialogue

- Add to the play by devising a scene based on one of these three events:
  - Prospero banished from Milan
  - Ariel imprisoned by Sycorax
  - The death of Sycorax, leaving Caliban alone
- Use the process of playbuilding described at the end of the section on *Twelfth Night* for some ideas on how to do this.
- Or, go beyond the end of *The Tempest* to explore what happens to Prospero when he leaves the island.

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Older actors are usually cast to play Prospero. By the end of the play, the feeling is that Prospero is old. Any vitality he might have drawn from his magical powers is gone. He is ageing before our eyes. He's returning home to die. But in some productions, an actor in his 40s plays Prospero. That's justifiable when we remember that Miranda was 3 when they were banished, they've been on the island 12 years and Prospero tells Ferdinand this:

> '… for I
> Have given you here a third of mine own life,
> Or that for which I live …'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 2–4*

The 'third of mine own life' he has given to Ferdinand he refers to is Miranda – at 15 years old, she represents a third of his life. Therefore he is 45 years old, which really isn't that old. The question for Prospero that then arises is how will he cope with returning to civilisation after being stranded on the strange island for so long.

- Brainstorm some of the adjustments Prospero/Prospera will have to make when he or she tries to return to his or her old life. Devise a scene where he or she has to readjust to a normal life.

What's in a word? *Art*

Shakespeare's use of the word 'art' to describe Prospero's magical ability in *The Tempest* gives us another way to think about writing and the theatre as magic and illusion. Events on the island transpire as Prospero plans them, arranging scenarios and dialogues as a playwright controls characters in a drama.

> 'If by your art, dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 1–2*

Miranda knows about her father's 'art' – his magical ability – and has witnessed the storm wreck Alonso's ship.

> 'Lie there, my art. Wipe thou thine eyes; have comfort.'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, line 25*

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Prospero says, 'Lie there my art' after taking off his magical cloak and putting it down. Then he says, 'Wipe thou thine eyes' to the upset Miranda, who later sits to listen to Prospero's story. Is he referring to the cloak or Miranda as his 'art'?

> 'I have with such provision in mine art'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, line 28*

Prospero reassures Miranda that he has had the foresight to cast his magic in such a way that none of the ship's passengers or crew was hurt.

> 'It was mine art,
> When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
> The pine, and let thee out.'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, lines 291–293*

Prospero reminds Ariel that the spirit has Prospero's magic to thank for being released from the pine tree.

> 'I must obey. His art is of such power'
> *Act 1, Scene 2, line 373*

Caliban, in an aside, explains why he has no choice but to do what Prospero tells him: fear.

> 'My master through his art foresees the danger'
> *Act 2, Scene 1, line 294*

Prospero's magic enables him to know what his enemies are up to. He has sent Ariel to wake Gonzalo just before Antonio and Sebastian try to murder Alonso and Gonzalo in their sleep, thus saving their lives.

> 'Some vanity of mine art.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, line 41*

Prospero refers to the masque he is going to create – a magical illusion show for Miranda and Ferdinand to enjoy.

> 'Spirits, which by mine art'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, line 120*

Prospero tells Ferdinand that his magic is controlling the spirits to create the illusions of the masque.

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‘By my so potent art.’
Act 5, Scene 1, line 50

Prospero has listed a series of astounding feats that his magic and the island’s spirits, have achieved together (including raising the dead from their graves).

‘Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant’
Act 5, Scene 1, Epilogue line 14

Prospero has given up his magic powers. ‘Want’ doesn’t mean he wants them back. It just means he doesn’t have them any more. Now he has to appeal to a higher power. In his case, it’s us – the audience.

Sayings originating in this play

‘Your tale, sir, would cure deafness’
Act 1, Scene 2, line 106

Miranda might genuinely be enthralled by Prospero’s complicated story or maybe she’s just being polite.

‘… what’s past is prologue …’
Act 2, Scene 1, line 249

Antonio is at work persuading Sebastian to kill Alonso (his own brother) and take the throne of Naples. What’s in the past is history and cannot be changed. Antonio is telling Sebastian the future is his to control. People who like to ignore the past and concentrate on future opportunities might appreciate this realistic approach to life.

‘Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.’
Act 2, Scene 2, line 35

Trinculo crawls under Caliban’s cloak to take shelter from the rain – and Caliban is already under it! Trinculo’s intended meaning of ‘bedfellows’ is ‘friends’. Today ‘strange bedfellows’ would mean some kind of alliance or association of convenience between people, groups or organisations that you normally wouldn’t expect to have anything to do with one another.

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'… into thin air.'
Act 4, Scene 1, line 150

Prospero reassures Ferdinand that the masque was never real but simply an illusion. Interestingly, 'thin air' is also the destination of vanishing homework.

'We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.'
Act 4, Scene 1, lines 156–158

Prospero's philosophy – life is fleeting! Actual people are like dreams too – we live our unremarkable lives, we die, and the world goes on without us. We're on a relentless cycle of life and death.

'O brave new world,
That has such people in it!'
Act 5, Scene 1, lines 183–184

Miranda expresses wonder at the sight of the king and the courtiers. The English author Aldous Huxley wrote a science fiction novel in 1931 called *Brave New World*. It's set in a future when people are genetically engineered to fulfil predetermined roles in society. When people say 'brave new world' these days, it's usually meant ironically. Any vision of the future where the human race sacrifices its humanity is to be feared, not embraced.

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5

Skill builder

Response to literature – women in Shakespeare's comedies

To successfully respond to literature you will need to be able to:

- analyse the ways that text structures can be manipulated for effect
- evaluate and integrate ideas and information from texts to form your own interpretations
- select evidence from texts to analyse and explain how language choices and conventions are used to influence an audience
- understand how interpretations can vary by comparing your responses to the texts to the responses of others
- create your own texts that respond to issues, interpreting and integrating ideas from other texts
- edit your work for effect
- select vocabulary and grammar that contributes to the precision and persuasiveness of your work
- use accurate spelling and punctuation.

1. Write an essay response to one of the following topics:
   Does Shakespeare question or reinforce the role of women in his society? Refer in particular to the roles of female characters in at least one of Shakespeare's comedies.
   OR
   Discuss the ways in which a modern audience could take different meanings from Shakespeare's plays compared to audiences when the plays were first written. Refer in particular to the roles of female characters in at least one of Shakespeare's comedies.

2. Think about how Shakespeare represents female characters in at least one of the comedies.

3. Choose any of these characters:
   Titania, Hippolyta, Hermia, Helena, Viola, Olivia, Maria, Miranda

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4. If you decide to write about *The Tempest*, where Miranda is the only female character (apart from the goddesses in the masque), think about the women who are part of the story but not part of the play:
   Sycorax (Caliban's mother)
   Claribel (Alonso's daughter)
   Miranda's mother (Prospero's wife – she is barely mentioned and we assume she died before Prospero and Miranda were exiled from Milan)

5. You will need to have read the plays closely to find out what information they contain about these women.

6. How has Shakespeare structured the play or plays to present the female characters? Think about the scenes these characters are in, what the characters do and what happens to them, their relationships with other characters, what happens in the story, and so on.

7. Use quotes from the play to support your ideas.

8. You can use examples from the text you've studied in class, as well as any live performances and film versions you have seen.

9. You should research what others have written about the female characters too. Go online or find books that have been written about Shakespeare and his plays. Do not rely on just one source, though. Try and find three or four different ones so you get different perspectives. Think about whether your response to the text is the same or different to the responses that you find in your research.

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5

Your turn

Relationship counselling

The characters in Shakespeare's comedies are very good at making complete messes of their love lives. It's time they received some professional help.

1. Working in groups of three or four, write the script for either:
   A relationship counselling session for one of the couples in one of the comedies with a psychologist
   OR
   A TV talk show where the guests discuss their relationship problems in front of an audience of millions.

2. Imagine the relationship counselling and talk show formats transported back to Elizabethan times, or imagine the characters from the plays brought forward to our time.

3. The choice of couples, characters and combinations is entirely up to you.

4. If you choose the relationship counselling session, try to end it with some advice from the counsellor to the characters, or have the characters arrive at a decision by talking their issues through.
   When submitting your response, provide:
   - the script
   - the counsellor's case notes from the session
   - questionnaires, completed by the characters being counselled, that describe the dissatisfactions each has with their relationship and what they would like to change about themselves, the other person (or people), and the relationship overall.

5. If you choose the talk show, try to end it with a sense of where the relationship is headed, even if the problems aren't fully resolved.
   When submitting your response, provide:
   - the script
   - the talk show host's background notes on each of the characters participating in the show
   - questionnaires, completed by the characters before the show, that describe the dissatisfactions each has with their relationship and what they would like to change about themselves, the other person (or people), and the relationship overall.

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6. You will be assessed on how authentically your chosen characters respond to these unfamiliar scenarios, so a thorough understanding of each character is essential.

7. If you like you can act the script in front of your class, or video record it and screen it.

Read and view more

Films

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream/Sen noci svatojánské* (1969) by Czech animator Jiri Trnka. This was a stop-motion puppet film that followed Shakespeare's story with a narrator.
- *Dead Poets Society* (1989) features *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a production for which Neil Perry tries out for and wins the role of Puck, in spite of his father's disapproval of his acting aspirations.
- *Forbidden Planet* (1956) – a science fiction film loosely based on *The Tempest*
- *The Tempest* (2010) directed by Julie Taymor – in this version, starring Helen Mirren, Prospero is a woman named Prospera
- *The Tempest* (2010) directed by Des McAnuff – a hi-definition filming of a stage production by The Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada

Books

- *Shakespeare the Illusionist: Filming the Supernatural* by Neil Forsyth
- *The Arden Shakespeare A Midsummer Night's Dream* edited by Harold F. Brooks
- *Shakespeare in Production: The Tempest* edited by Christine Dymkowski
- *Twelfth Night or What You Will* edited by Elizabeth Story Donno

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6

Shakespeare's tragedies

Antony and Cleopatra
Coriolanus
Hamlet
Julius Caesar
King Lear
Macbeth
Othello
Romeo and Juliet
Timon of Athens
Titus Andronicus

About Shakespeare's tragedies

If a play by Shakespeare is named after its protagonist, then there's a very good chance that the play is a tragedy. Traditionally, a tragedy is a play that ends with a funeral or, at least, a death. There is plenty of death in Shakespeare's tragedies. For most people, the downfall of a great leader is synonymous with tragedy. A terrible accident may cause the downfall or an unavoidable flaw in the protagonist's character or an inescapable destiny reserved for the hero. The downfall must be dreadful, possibly even supernatural, and engulf innocent bystanders too. The death and destruction is sometimes so severe that it can leave readers or the audience wondering if life is worth living at all.

However, in the case of a play like *Romeo and Juliet*, where the protagonists are not that great and powerful but the ending is obviously tragic, the genre needs to be subdivided to include the category 'domestic tragedy'.

Whether on a grand or small scale, Shakespeare's tragedies usually pose important questions about humanity, such as:

- What causes human suffering?
- What is the source of evil in humankind?
- Does humanity determine its own future, or is it determined for us?

Importantly though, and in contrast to many tragedies that predate his, Shakespeare did not try to educate his audiences. His tragedies will ask the questions but do not try to answer them. He leaves that up to us.

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ROMEO AND JULIET

WRITTEN: Between 1594 and 1596

FIRST PERFORMED: Between 1594 and 1596

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1597 and 1599

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: The Italian city-state of Verona

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Juliet, a Capulet, a 13-year-old girl (protagonist)
- Romeo, a Montague, a boy in his mid- to late teens (protagonist)
- Capulet, Juliet's father (antagonist)
- Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother (antagonist)
- Tybalt, Juliet's cousin (antagonist)
- Benvolio, Romeo's friend
- Nurse, Juliet's servant
- Escales, Prince of Verona
- Mercutio, Romeo's friend
- Paris, Juliet's suitor (foil)
- Friar Lawrence, Romeo's friend

EVENTS:

- Two powerful families, the Capulets and the Montagues, fight an increasingly dangerous and violent gang war.
- Romeo and his Montague friends crash a party at the Capulet mansion, where he meets Juliet. They fall in love, despite the rivalry of their families, and decide to marry.
- Romeo asks Friar Lawrence for help, and the friar thinks this will end the feud between the families.
- Romeo and Juliet are married in secret.
- Tybalt, enraged that Romeo was at the party, challenges him to a fight. Mercutio intervenes and Tybalt kills him, but Romeo kills Tybalt. Escales banishes Romeo from Verona.
- Juliet is torn between her grief for Tybalt and her love for Romeo, but she sides with her husband.
- Unaware that she is already married, Juliet's parents insist that she marry Paris.

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- Friar Lawrence gives Juliet a powerful drug that will allow her to feign death so she can escape her parents and Paris. Friar Lawrence tries to get word to Romeo explaining his plan but Romeo doesn't receive the letter.
- Instead, Romeo is told that Juliet has died and decides he will die at her side.
- Romeo returns to Verona. Friar Lawrence tries to intercept Romeo at Juliet's tomb. Romeo gets there first and kills Paris, who is mourning Juliet.
- Romeo breaks into the tomb, finds Juliet in it apparently dead, and poisons himself, dying beside her.
- Juliet wakes from death-like trance, sees Romeo dead, and stabs herself with his dagger.
- Escales arrives at the tomb and Friar Lawrence explains what has happened.

THEMES: Love; hate; fate and free will; life and death; youth

A plate with verse from *Romeo and Juliet* in Verona, Italy

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6

Introduction

The exact date when *Romeo and Juliet* was written is unknown, but is usually dated around 1594 and 1596. Shakespeare based his play on a 1562 poem called *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, written by Arthur Brooke. Brooke's poem was a translation of a French poem that in turn was a translation of an Italian one, stretching back 200 years before Shakespeare's time. Brooke's poem was intended to be didactic, or educational – it demonstrated what would happen to reckless young people who ignored their parents and acted impulsively.

The story has some basis in historical fact – two Italian families called the Capelletti and the Montecchi were involved in a feud in the thirteenth century – but stories of two young lovers kept apart by their warring families have been popular since well before then. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* confirms one truth – forbidden love and tragic romance continue to have enormous appeal to audiences. *Romeo and Juliet* remains one of Shakespeare's most performed and most popular plays.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare created a tragedy out of unusual subject matter – two young people in love with each other. Juliet is 13 years old and Romeo is probably 16. Tragedies had traditionally been concerned with the rise and fall of very powerful people, brought down by their own failings. And usually just one character was the subject of a tragedy, not a couple as in *Romeo and Juliet*. Not only was there usually one main character in a tragedy but also that main character was often isolated because of their high status and authority. Romeo and Juliet, on the other hand, start the play surrounded by a community of family, friends and servants. It is not until the play's last scene that Juliet is isolated, abandoned in the family crypt with Romeo's dead body.

Tragic heroes often have a fatal character flaw, something in their personality that guarantees their destruction. Romeo and Juliet take risks and display bad judgement. But what's remarkable about that? They are very young and lack maturity. All teenagers are told that they are too impulsive. Beyond their simple recklessness, the play conveys a sense that Romeo and Juliet are at the mercy of forces they cannot control.

The play presents many questions of fate and destiny. The first spoken words of the play belong to the Chorus. The prologue to Act 1 is in the form of a sonnet and contains references to fate and destiny:

> 'From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;'
> *Prologue, lines 5–6*

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And:

> 'The fearful passage of their death-marked love,'
> *Prologue, line 10*

Characters have a sense of foreboding at different points in the play. This is what Romeo says to himself just before entering the Capulet mansion to secretly attend the party:

> '… for my mind misgives
> Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
> Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
> With this night's revels, and expire the term
> Of a despisèd life closed in my breast,
> By some forfeit of untimely death.'
> *Act 1, Scene 4, lines 106–111*

When Romeo leaves Juliet's bedroom after spending their only night together, Juliet watches him leave. She says to him:

> 'O God, I have an ill-divining soul!
> Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low,
> As one dead in the bottom of the tomb.
> Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.'
> *Act 3, Scene 5, lines 54–57*

These are the last words Romeo will hear Juliet speak. Although Romeo will see her alive once more, in the Capulet tomb, at the time he will believe she is dead. When Juliet wakes, Romeo will have killed himself seconds beforehand. On occasions like these mentioned above, it seems they see into their own futures.

Looked at in another way, the plot turns on a sequence of accidents and episodes of ridiculously bad luck. For example:

- If Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo, containing information about the drug Juliet had taken to simulate death, had been delivered any time between Act 4, Scene 1 and Act 5, Scene 1, Romeo would have known that Juliet was still alive.
- If Romeo had not tried to break up the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt in Act 3, Scene 1, allowing Tybalt to mortally wound Mercutio, Romeo would not have killed Tybalt in retaliation and would not have been banished from Verona, which separated him from Juliet.

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- If Capulet's illiterate servant hadn't asked Romeo, of all people, to read the names of people invited to the party in Act 1, Scene 2, Romeo would never have realised his ex-girlfriend Rosaline would be there, would not have decided to invite himself, and so not met Juliet in the first place.

Despite its tragic outcome, *Romeo and Juliet* has many comic moments. There is a huge party and there are preparations for a wedding. Many characters engage in witty, highly sexualised dialogue. But almost everything that could go wrong does go wrong, and on an extreme scale. An aggressive, angry character like Tybalt could be a figure of fun. Instead his anger and hate drive him to murder Mercutio, the most appealing (and the funniest) character in the whole play. The simple failure of a letter to arrive could have created an amusing misunderstanding. Instead it becomes a matter of life and death.

Productions of the play are often set in periods of social or political unrest that we would recognise from history or our own present. These settings can be used by a director to justify the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, to help an audience to find relevance in the story, and to create an emotional impact with the waste of young lives.

For Shakespeare it was not important to explain the reasons for the conflict between the families, or perhaps it was important that he *didn't* explain it. The Chorus in the Prologue tells us the Capulets and the Montagues are similar: 'Two households, both alike in dignity' – they are both as influential, rich and respected as each other. Social divisions did not create the feud. It's the other way around – the feud created the social division. The futility of the violence and of the tragedy of young lives lost is underlined by the lack of an explanation for the feud.

The hatred between the two families is intense and irrational, just like the love between Romeo and Juliet – in the sense that it makes people act in ways that are dangerous. But love is also rational in the sense that it sees past the irrationality of the hatred between the two families.

Juliet loved Romeo before she realised he was a Montague, and Romeo loved Juliet before he discovered she was a Capulet. *Romeo and Juliet* shows that love can defeat hate, because the enemy is lovable – if you're unaware that the one you love is your enemy.

QUESTIONS 6.1

1. Tragic characters have a flaw that causes their undoing. Do Romeo and Juliet have tragic flaws? If so, what are they? Or are they like most teenagers?
2. Mercutio's death in Act 3, Scene 1 signals the end of the fun. Tybalt, Paris, Romeo and Juliet will all die shortly afterwards, and die violently. With so many young people gone, where is the hope for the future?

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Synopsis

The play is set in the Italian city of Verona and the action takes a mere four days to complete.

Two of the most powerful families in the city of Verona, the Capulets and the Montagues, have been feuding with each other for years. The play opens on a Sunday morning with a confrontation between servants of the two families. The Prince of Verona intervenes and threatens Lord Capulet and Lord Montague, the heads of both families, with execution if there are any more violent outbreaks. Paris, a relative of the Prince, speaks to Capulet about marrying his daughter Juliet. Romeo, a Montague, learns of a great party to be held in the Capulet house that night and decides to gatecrash it with his friends so he can be close to Rosaline, his ex-girlfriend. Lady Capulet tells Juliet, as she gets ready for the party, that she will marry Paris.

Located in Verona is the famous balcony of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Romeo and Juliet meet at the party and fall in love, without knowing at first that they are from opposite sides of the conflict between their families. Both realise that their love overwhelms family loyalty. At dawn on Monday, Romeo races to the home of his friend Friar Lawrence, a priest. Romeo persuades Friar Lawrence to conduct a wedding ceremony for Romeo and Juliet.

Juliet sends her servant and companion, Nurse, to find Romeo. They arrange for the wedding to be held that afternoon. Nurse brings Juliet to Friar Lawrence's home where Romeo is waiting. The two are secretly married.

Juliet's cousin Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel. Tybalt doesn't know that Romeo and Juliet are married – he's just angry that Romeo turned up at the Capulet party uninvited. Romeo refuses to fight but his friend Mercutio takes up Tybalt's challenge. Mercutio is killed in the duel. In a rage, Romeo seeks out and kills Tybalt. The Prince arrives, and is conflicted – Mercutio was a relative of his. He orders Romeo to be banished from Verona, and he promises Romeo will be executed if he ever tries to return.

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Juliet learns that Romeo has killed Tybalt, her cousin. She wrestles with the conflict between her loyalty to her family and her love for her new husband. However, the news that Romeo is to be banished devastates her. Nurse promises to find Romeo and bring her to him. Nurse goes to Friar Lawrence's home and finds Romeo there. She smuggles Romeo back to the Capulet house. Romeo and Juliet spend the night (Monday night) together as Capulet, Juliet's father, arranges for her to marry Paris on Thursday.

At dawn on Tuesday, Romeo leaves for the nearby city of Mantua to begin his exile. Juliet enrages her parents by refusing to marry Paris. Nurse changes her tune and encourages Juliet to do as her parents say. Juliet decides never to trust Nurse again and instead turns to Friar Lawrence for help.

Friar Lawrence supplies Juliet with a potion that, when taken, will make her seem dead for twenty-four hours. When she is taken to her family tomb, Friar Lawrence intends to notify Romeo of his plans by letters sent to Mantua. Romeo can be at the Capulet vault in time for Juliet to wake up and then they can make their escape together. Juliet agrees to the plan.

When Juliet returns home that evening, she apologises to her father for disobeying him, promising never to do so again. Triumphantly, Capulet decides to bring the wedding of Paris and Juliet forward to the next day – Wednesday. Juliet drinks the potion in her bedroom. Juliet's apparently dead body is discovered in the morning. Friar Lawrence arrives and tells the distraught Capulets to arrange Juliet's funeral.

Romeo's servant Balthasar arrives in Mantua to tell Romeo that Juliet is dead. Friar Lawrence's letters explaining the plan have not arrived, so Romeo doesn't know the death has been faked. Romeo buys poison before he leaves for Verona, determined to kill himself by his wife's side.

In Verona, Friar Lawrence discovers that his letters did not reach Romeo. It is now Wednesday night as he heads to the Capulet vault to be present when Juliet wakes. Paris arrives at the vault to mourn Juliet, and shortly afterwards so does Romeo. Paris challenges Romeo and Romeo lashes out, killing Paris before he realises who he has murdered. Romeo enters the tomb and, believing Juliet to be dead, drinks the poison, dying by Juliet's side.

Friar Lawrence arrives in time to find Romeo dead and Juliet waking up. He urges her to leave with him but she refuses. Scared of being caught, Friar Lawrence abandons Juliet in the tomb. She stabs herself with Romeo's dagger and dies lying across Romeo's body. The Capulets, the Montagues and the Prince arrive at the vault. Friar Lawrence explains the secret marriage and his plan to safely reunite Romeo and Juliet that went horribly wrong, but does not explain his motive for helping Romeo and Juliet. The Prince orders Capulet and Montague to look at their dead children. The leaders of both houses agree to end their feud. As Thursday morning dawns, the Prince speaks the play's last words, announcing that he will pardon some and punish others for their part in this series of unfortunate events.

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6

In focus

Friar Lawrence

We first meet Friar Lawrence in Act 2, Scene 3. He is in his herb garden at dawn of the play's second day. The Friar describes the herbs and the flowers he grows as possessing both the power to heal and the power to poison. He uses the herbs as a metaphor for people, who simultaneously contain virtue and passion. An excess of passion will lead to a destructive imbalance.

Romeo has important friendships with other men in the play. His cousin Benvolio is solid and dependable, if unimaginative. Mercutio is flashy and captivating, but volatile. Both are about the same age as Romeo. Friar Lawrence is a mature and supposedly wise influence on Romeo. There isn't much in the play that suggests Romeo has a functional relationship with his father, Montague. Friar Lawrence has filled that role in Romeo's life.

Romeo and Juliet are caught up in passion and they lack the maturity to deal with the consequences of their headlong rush into marriage. Friar Lawrence advises Romeo and Juliet to exercise caution and restraint, but he is an ineffective brake on the runaway tragedy that destroys them. Friar Lawrence tells Romeo:

> 'Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast.'
> *Act 2, Scene 3, line 94*

This line will be echoed in the play's final scene, when, in a hurry to reach Juliet in the Capulet tomb, Friar Lawrence stumbles over the graves in the cemetery.

One interpretation of Friar Lawrence's character is that he is sensible and reasonable. He is exasperated by Romeo's sudden switch from Rosaline to Juliet. He doesn't believe Romeo could be serious about marrying Juliet, after Romeo's supposed love for Rosaline evaporated so quickly. But Friar Lawrence sees the opportunity to end the Capulet–Montague feud and restore peace to Verona, which would benefit all its citizens. As a reasonable person, Friar Lawrence takes the utilitarian view, that the good of the many (peace for the people of Verona) outweighs the good of the few (Juliet and Romeo being prevented from rushing into a potentially unhappy marriage because of, as Friar Lawrence suspects, a passing teenage crush).

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DID YOU KNOW?
Utilitarianism is a philosophical principle. The principle states that in any situation the morally right course of action is the one that produces the most good for the most people. It is best known through the work of nineteenth-century philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, but its principles date back to some philosophers of the seventeenth century. Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in the late sixteenth century, well before the time of those philosophers. However, it is clear that Shakespeare, through Friar Lawrence's actions, understood the utilitarian moral calculation involved when making important choices.

Friar Lawrence may well be motivated by the best of intentions to work for the greater good, but he doesn't control the details very well. Hurrying through the cemetery at night, hoping to reach Juliet before she wakes from her death-like sleep, Friar Lawrence mutters:

> 'Saint Francis be my speed! how oft tonight
> Have my old feet stumbled at graves!'
> *Act 5, Scene 3, lines 121–122*

He literally does stumble over unseen obstacles in the dark in his haste. But he also trips up in carrying out his plans. For an Elizabethan, a stumble would be a bad omen. We can imagine Friar Lawrence being aware of the superstition concerning stumbling, worried that something has gone wrong.

Another criticism of Friar Lawrence is that he becomes so consumed by his desire to interfere in the civil strife that he goes against his Christian beliefs. He suffers from the imbalance between virtue and passion that he speaks of in the herb garden. Friar Lawrence initially agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet even though he believes their relationship to be based on lust. He is prepared to ask God to bless a dishonest act.

Friar Lawrence breaks Church law by marrying Romeo and Juliet in secret and again when he helps Juliet fake her own death. But when Capulet promises Juliet to Paris, Friar Lawrence suddenly becomes concerned about the prospect of Juliet being illegally married twice. His solution is to give Juliet the sleeping drug to prevent her marriage to Paris.

Friar Lawrence deceives the grief-stricken Capulets when they find Juliet apparently dead in her room. He effectively tells them it is God's will that Juliet be buried quickly, blaming them for their daughter's supposed death:

> 'The heavens do low'r upon you for some ill;
> Move them no more by crossing their high will.'
> *Act 4, Scene 5, lines 94–95*

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When he finds Juliet with Romeo's body in the Capulet tomb, his nerve fails him. His instinct for self-preservation takes hold. Fearing capture by the Watch, he deserts Juliet in her time of greatest need. Surely, as a religious man, he would want to help her.

After Romeo and Juliet are both dead, in his long explanation to the Prince, the Capulets and the Montagues in Act 5, Scene 3, Friar Lawrence does not say he agreed to marry Romeo and Juliet because he wanted to end the feud between the families. Perhaps this is an indication that he is trying not to incriminate himself.

Friar Lawrence is a complex character, whose methods and possibly motives are questionable. It's a mistake to simply dismiss him as a kindly old man.

Sir Frank Dicksee's 1884 painting, representing the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*

QUESTIONS 6.2

After reading the play, consider the role of Friar Lawrence.

1. Does 'Fate' defeat Friar Lawrence? Or is he in fact the source of the 'Fate' that destroys Romeo and Juliet?
2. Does Friar Lawrence think he deserves to die?
3. Does Friar Lawrence lose faith in God?
4. Does Friar Lawrence hope God will support him just because his actions are well intentioned?
5. By giving his blessing to a marriage he believes to be based on lust and not on love, does Friar Lawrence deal with the Devil?
6. By supporting a marriage he thinks is based on lust, is Friar Lawrence knowingly sacrificing Romeo and Juliet? Does he believe God will be appeased by a sacrifice and end the feud?
7. Is Friar Lawrence playing God?

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Interpretation

William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, directed by Baz Luhrmann, 1996

When thinking about memorable versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, it is impossible to overlook this interpretation by Australian director Baz Luhrmann. At the time some critics thought using Shakespeare's name in the film's full title was false advertising. Luhrmann's use of rapid-moving cameras, visual tricks, brilliant colours, stylish costumes, noisy violence and pop songs from the 1980s and 1990s seemed to push Shakespeare way into the background. However, the actors speak Shakespeare's lines. The Prologue is spoken by a TV newsreader in a way that is easy to make sense of and firmly sets the film in a world that we can recognise as modern, but different to ours. It's the sort of world where the intense, passionate and tragic action of *Romeo and Juliet* could believably happen.

Verona becomes Verona Beach, an American city being torn apart by gang warfare. The Capulet and the Montague lords are organised crime bosses. The Prince of Verona is the police captain trying to maintain law and order. Gregory, Sampson, Tybalt, Benvolio and Abram are run-and-gun gangsters who cruise around in fast cars, shooting cool-looking automatic pistols and causing mayhem. Mercutio is a cross-dressing, disco lip-syncing party animal. Tybalt looks and moves like a bullfighter.

Though dressed like the other Montague 'soldiers' in brightly coloured shirts, Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) keeps himself separate from the Montague crew, preferring to slouch around in a decaying amusement park beside the beach, writing poetry to Rosaline, the girl who dumped him.

Juliet (Claire Danes) is eager and fragile at the same time. She is almost always dressed in white, and doesn't fit into the dangerous, grotesque world of her volatile parents.

Friar Lawrence (actually 'Father Laurence' in the credits, played by Pete Postlethwaite) imagines becoming famous for ending the Capulet–Montague gang war. Nurse (Miriam Margolyes) is all bustling energy as Juliet's stern but adoring confidante – until she inexplicably sells Juliet out and sides with the Capulets over their insistence that their daughter marry Paris.

The film uses different styles that you might not associate with Shakespeare but that you would recognise from movies. Some sequences are like musicals and others are like action films. The locations, sets and costumes were carefully chosen so they would make the meaning of Shakespeare's lines clearer. Luhrmann said he intended to make clear associations between the text and the images for the audience. He believed he would be able to set the language free 'from its cage of obscurity'.

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Luhrmann's film ignores the inconvenience of Romeo killing Paris by simply leaving it out. Such an immoral act has the effect of making Romeo no better than the psychotic Tybalt, and that makes it difficult for the film's audience to like him. Instead Romeo evades capture by the police and shoots his way into the church where the not-yet-dead Juliet lies, surrounded by candles and neon crosses.

Contradicting Shakespeare's script, Luhrmann chooses to show Juliet waking up before Romeo drinks the poison. This is not the director's original idea – productions going back at least as far as the eighteenth century included the same twist – but it can have a tantalising effect on the audience. No matter how many times you watch it, there is a fleeting moment when, despite knowing what must happen, it seems that there could actually be a happy ending. If only Juliet had said something to Romeo before he drank the poison, instead of just gazing at him adoringly!

This film remains one of the most popular screen adaptations of any of Shakespeare's plays. Luhrmann insisted that he had been true to the spirit of Shakespeare, and that he had tried to make the kind of film that Shakespeare himself would have made if he were alive in the 1990s. That may seem hard to believe at first, but Luhrmann reasoned that Shakespeare always used whatever devices, inventions and tricks he could to entertain his audiences, and at the same time he maintained his focus on telling a story. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* is certainly an entertaining feast for the eyes and ears, where all the appealing elements help tell the story, rather than get in its way.

ACTIVITY 6.1

Verona is awash with civil blood and the public is demanding that the chaos be stopped!

Your task:

- Complete the front page of a newspaper reporting on an aspect of these events. (Topics appear below.)
- The bulk of the page will be made up of ONE news article that should incorporate the following elements:
  - a headline
  - a by-line
  - formal language
  - quotes
  - interviews with characters (you can use actual lines from the play as quotes or make some up)
  - evidence
  - photographs/illustrations/cartoons

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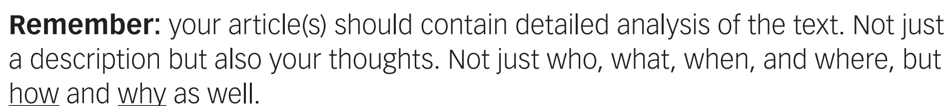
- Remember – details such as the following will create a greater sense of authenticity.
  - the newspaper's name
  - its masthead design
  - a weather forecast
  - advertisements

Topics

a. At the end of *Romeo and Juliet* the Prince says: 'Some shall be pardoned and some punished' (Act 5, Scene 3, line 308). Write an article that takes into account different points of view on who should be pardoned and who should be punished.
b. The Nurse effectively fills the role of Juliet's mother and Friar Lawrence acts as Romeo's father. Write an article that explores the absence of solid parental influence from the lovers' lives and the possible effects.
c. *Romeo and Juliet* is a story of revolt against authority. Discuss, using interviews with teenagers AND adults giving their thoughts.
d. 'A plague o' both your houses!' (Act 3, Scene 1, line 90) Mercutio's dying curse reminds us that, in the end, it is the adults who must be condemned and punished for their senseless feuding. Romeo and Juliet are merely innocent victims of their parents' rage. Discuss with interviews of key players on both sides, as well as neutral witnesses.

Remember: your article(s) should contain detailed analysis of the text. Not just a description but also your thoughts. Not just who, what, when, and where, but how and why as well.



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What's in a word? *Love*

Love in this play is an uncontrollable force. It transforms the lives of the two protagonists and then destroys them. Romeo's early poetry in the play is often criticised as being clichéd and unimaginative. It's seen as symbolic of his immature infatuation with Rosaline – a love that is not genuine.

> 'Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;
> Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
> Being vex'd a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears:
> What is it else? A madness most discreet,
> A choking gall and a preserving sweet.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 181–185*

Sighs/eyes; discreet/sweet – the rhyming pattern of 'sighs/eyes' and 'discreet/sweet', is conventional and uninspired.

This might even be worse.

> 'Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit
> With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit;
> And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,
> From love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd.'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, lines 199–202*

Romeo's poetry is so bad that Mercutio teases him about it:

> 'Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in. Laura to his lady was a kitchen wench …'
> *Act 2, Scene 4, lines 34–35*

Mercutio is also referring to the formulaic nature of Petrarchan sonnets that were popular in Shakespeare's time. Petrarchan sonnets were usually concerned with love and inspired by a mysterious woman called Laura. See Chapter 3 for more on Petrarca and Petrarchan sonnets.

What Mercutio doesn't hear is how Romeo's poetic ability has been transformed after meeting Juliet. Consider this startling and surreal line:

> 'It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 44–45*

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It's difficult to believe that this is the same person who bashed out the mechanical Rosaline rhymes. The soaring intensity of Romeo's poetry after he meets Juliet is what just might prove that his love for her is the real thing.

In the fourteen lines when Romeo and Juliet first speak, love is likened to religion. If you've studied sonnets, you'll understand the importance of fourteen lines – the first twelve lines end in alternating rhymes, and the last two lines are a rhyming couplet. This conversation is a shared sonnet, spoken by two people.

> ROMEO
> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
> JULIET
> Good pilgrim you do wrong your hands too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this,
> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
> ROMEO
> Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
> JULIET
> Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
> ROMEO
> O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:
> They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
> JULIET
> Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
> ROMEO
> Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 92–105*

Among the religious imagery, Romeo calls Juliet a 'holy shrine' and Juliet calls him a 'pilgrim' and a 'palmer'. A pilgrim is a person who journeys to shrines and other sacred religious sites to demonstrate faith. Palmer is a synonym for pilgrim – Christian pilgrims visiting the holy places in the Middle East would return home carrying palm leaves to prove where they had been.

Love makes Romeo and Juliet defy their entire social world:

- Their friends: in Act 2, Scene 1, Romeo abandons Mercutio and Benvolio after the feast in order to go to Juliet's garden
- Their government: in Act 5, Scene 1, Romeo decides to return to Verona for Juliet's sake, despite being exiled by the Prince on pain of death

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- Their families:

> JULIET
> O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
> Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
> Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
> And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
> *Act 2, Scene 2, lines 33–36*

QUESTION 6.3

Write an essay discussing love and hate in this play. Is love always a positive force, opposing the negativity of the hate? Or is the love brutal, and fatal – just as fatal as the hate?

Sayings originating in this play

There are so many well-known sayings from this play it's difficult to decide where to begin:

> 'Star-cross'd lovers'
> *The Prologue, line 6*

Shakespeare meant 'star cross'd' in the sense that Romeo and Juliet's fate was predetermined in the stars, in the way astrologers believe they can read our futures in our horoscopes. These days we refer to a couple as 'star-cross'd' if it seems that they are meant to be together.

> 'Did my heart love till now?'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, line 51*

Romeo has met Juliet and suddenly all the agonising over Rosaline is in the past.

> 'My only love sprung from my only hate!'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, line 137*

Wouldn't you know it? Juliet, a Capulet, has fallen in love with Romeo, a Montague – just about the worst person she could have fallen in love with,

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since their families are at war with each other. Love springing from hate is a **paradox**, one of many in the play.

paradox
a situation, person or thing that should be impossible because it contradicts itself, yet somehow it's real

'He jests at scars that never felt a wound.'
Act 2, Scene 2, line 1

Romeo has had about enough of Mercutio's smutty jokes that end the previous scene. Just because Mercutio's never been in love, doesn't make it right for him to make fun of Romeo's feelings for Juliet.

'What's in a name?'
Act 2, Scene 2, line 43

Juliet sees past the superficiality of her family 'duty' to hate Romeo because he happened to be born into a family named Montague.

'Parting is such sweet sorrow'
Act 2, Scene 2, line 184

Has anyone ever said this to you and you can't get over the nagging thought that they really aren't all that sorry to part with you? Now you know who first used it – Juliet.

'… wild-goose chase …'
Act 2, Scene 4, line 59

Mercutio is punning with Romeo about hunting. The word 'goose' could mean the bird, a prostitute, or an idiot. We recognise a 'wild-goose chase' as the pointless quest for something we'll never get.

'… if ye should lead her in a fool's paradise …'
Act 2, Scene 4, lines 136–137

The Nurse is warning Romeo not to seduce Juliet. Today fool's paradise means a state of complacency that ignores unpleasant realities that are about to crash in on the fool.

'A plague o' both your houses!'
Act 3, Scene 1, line 97

Dying and realising he's just the latest victim in the feud between the houses of Capulet and Montague, Mercutio bitterly curses both families. Even in less fatal circumstances, we've all found ourselves caught in the middle of arguments that we don't want any further part in.

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6

MACBETH

WRITTEN: 1606

FIRST PERFORMED: 1606

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: No

THEATRE OR COURT: Court

SETTING: Eleventh-century Scotland

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Duncan, King of Scotland (foil)
- Malcolm, his older son
- Macbeth, Thane of Glamis (protagonist and antagonist)
- Lady Macbeth, his wife
- Banquo, Macbeth's friend (foil)
- Fleance, Banquo's son
- Macduff, the Thane of Fife (foil)
- Three witches

EVENTS:

- King Duncan survives a rebellion, thanks to the bravery of Macbeth and Banquo.
- After the battle, Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches who tell them Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and then king, and Banquo's descendants will be kings. Duncan grants Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor.
- Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth about the witches' prophecies, and they decide to murder Duncan when he stays at their castle and take the throne for themselves.
- While Duncan sleeps, Macbeth sees a hallucination of a dagger floating before his eyes, and he murders the king. Macduff arrives at the castle and discovers Duncan dead. Fearing for their lives, Duncan's sons flee the country.
- Macbeth is crowned king. He decides to have Banquo and Fleance murdered to prevent the witches' prophecy about future kings being fulfilled.
- Macbeth's henchmen kill Banquo but Fleance escapes.
- Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth at a banquet, terrorising him in front of the other Scottish thanes.

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- Macduff suspects Macbeth and flees to England where Malcolm is preparing an army to invade Scotland.
- Macbeth visits the witches again, who tell him some more double-edged prophecies, including that he will be king so long as Birnam Wood does not come to Dunsinane, that he cannot be killed by any man 'of woman born', but that he should beware of Macduff.
- Macbeth sends murderers to kill Macduff's wife and family. On hearing the news that his wife and children are dead, Macduff swears vengeance and Malcolm decides the time to attack Macbeth has come.
- Lady Macbeth is driven mad by her guilt and dies, probably by suicide.
- Malcolm, Macduff and their army arrive at Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane, cutting branches from the trees of Birnam Wood to conceal their numbers. Macbeth confronts Macduff, who reveals that he was delivered by caesarean section, and so not 'born' in the conventional sense. Macduff kills Macbeth and Malcolm claims the Scottish throne.

THEMES: Ambition, masculinity, evil, order and disorder, violence, tyranny, guilt, equivocation

A painting of Birnam Woods, Scotland, where Macbeth first encounters the Three Witches

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6

Introduction

Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606. His source was Raphael Holinshed's 1574 book *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, which is not an accurate historical account. *The Chronicles* includes references to witches and their prophecies, elements that are important to Shakespeare's play.

Eleventh-century Scotland was a barbaric and violent place. War and ruthless slaughter were facts of life. Survival depended on having a strong and capable local ruler or chieftain. Such rulers were depended upon to protect life and property. They were expected to provide strong leadership, guarding family, community and land from all enemies. When the leaders became too old or weak to lead effectively, they could expect to be replaced, and replaced violently.

Shakespeare imposes the value of 'divine right of kings' on this brutal culture. The elevation of King Duncan to almost holy status, and the great upheaval in the natural world that occurs after his murder, are examples of Shakespeare superimposing values and beliefs from his time and place onto a story from a very different time and place.

There is a historical basis for the character and the play. There was a Scottish king, whose full name was Macbethad (a name of Irish origin, meaning 'son of life'), who ruled for 17 years from 1040 AD. He had a legitimate claim to the throne – he wasn't a usurper, as Shakespeare depicts him. Macbethad defeated and killed King Duncan I at Bothgowanan. Records suggest that Macbethad was a capable king and that Scotland was relatively prosperous and stable under his rule. It is even possible that he went on a religious pilgrimage to Rome in 1050. In 1054 Duncan's son, Malcolm, challenged Macbethad for the throne of Scotland. In 1057, Macbethad was defeated and killed at the Battle of Lumphanan. Malcolm became king a few months later.

Macbeth was thought to have been written to be performed in honour of a visit to King James I of England by the King of Denmark in 1606. King James I of England had been King James VI of Scotland, succeeding to the English throne in 1603 after Queen Elizabeth I died.

DID YOU KNOW?
King James I was a keen scholar and very interested in witchcraft. In 1597, when he was still James VI of Scotland, he wrote a book about witchcraft called *Daemonologie*. In the book he recommended that witches be dealt with severely. When writing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare appears to have set out to please James I by telling a Scottish story and including elements of witchcraft. James believed that a man called Banquo was his ancestor, and he would have appreciated Shakespeare's sympathetic portrayal of the Banquo character. In fact, there has never been any proof that Banquo ever existed in the first place.

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The play begins and ends with battles. The first is fought between Macbeth's army, loyal to King Duncan, and Macdonald, a rebelling Scottish lord who has sided with an invading Norwegian army. The battle at the play's end promises to be an epic confrontation, but focuses down to a game of cat and mouse between Macbeth, fighting alone, and an army that intends to destroy him. Although these violent conflicts frame the play, the treacherous murders committed by Macbeth or in his name are the most shocking events in the work.

It is a very dark play. Some believe it to be Shakespeare's darkest. It is preoccupied with violence and evil. The character Macbeth commits some of the lowest acts possible for a man – treachery, regicide, turning to witchcraft, murder of friends and allies, murder of women and children, choosing to be a tyrannical ruler instead of a fair and just one. His love for his wife grows cold and dies within him as the weight of his atrocities smothers his humanity.

The major tragedies in this play are the killing of Duncan and the loss of Macbeth's honour. All the other terrible events stem from these calamities. Macbeth begins the play as a hero, a loyal subject to King Duncan and a brave warrior who saves the kingdom. He ends the play as a despised, disgraced tyrant, mocked in death by his enemies. Macbeth's death at the end is justifiable and reestablishes the law and order that he destroyed.

'That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' Earth'. The witches in *Macbeth* set the tone for Shakespeare's darkest play. (Johann Heinrich Füssli, *The Weird Sisters* or *The Three Witches*, 1783)

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6

Synopsis

Three witches meet amidst a storm in a desolate place. They plan to meet someone called Macbeth after a battle. In the next scene that battle is already under way. A wounded captain reports to King Duncan of Scotland that Macbeth and his friend Banquo, loyal commanders of Duncan's army, have fought mightily to put down a Scottish rebellion against Duncan and, simultaneously, an invasion from Norway.

After the battle, Macbeth and Banquo meet the three witches who tell them that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and then king, whereas Banquo's descendants will become kings in the future. Almost immediately after receiving this incredible glimpse of his future, Macbeth receives news that the current Thane of Cawdor will be executed as a traitor and Duncan has awarded him the title.

Macbeth writes to his wife, Lady Macbeth, about the witches' prophecies. Duncan arrives to stay at their castle and together they plot Duncan's murder so they can be king and queen. Prompted by his wife, Macbeth kills Duncan in his sleep and frames the king's bodyguards for his murder. He also kills the guards so they cannot protest their innocence. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee Scotland in fear for their own lives, but suspicion for their father's murder falls on them. In their absence, Macbeth becomes king, fulfilling the second part of the witches' predictions.

Now Macbeth has reason to believe the third part of the prophecy – that Banquo's sons would become kings. Macbeth tries to stop that from happening by sending murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. Banquo dies but Fleance escapes. Macbeth is haunted by Banquo's ghost at a banquet. Macbeth seeks out the witches to demand any other prophecies they might have for him. First they tell him to beware of Macduff, the Thane of Fife. But then they reassure him, telling him that no man 'of woman born' can defeat him, and that he will be safe unless the trees of Birnam Wood reach the walls of Dunsinane Castle. This should allow Macbeth to feel more confident, but next the witches show him a vision of eight generations of Banquo's male descendants, each one a king of Scotland.

Macbeth sends murderers to Fife to deal with Macduff. Macduff has already fled to the north of England, leaving his wife and children behind. The murderers kill his wife and children, sparing no one. Ross also flees to England and tells Macduff that his family has been murdered. Macduff and Malcolm resolve to march their army into Scotland and attack Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth, driven insane by her guilt, dies, apparently by suicide. Malcolm's approaching army cut branches from the trees of Birnam Wood and hold them up to camouflage their true numbers as they approach Macbeth's position in Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth sees something he never thought

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possible – Birnam Wood reaching Dunsinane. Macbeth's army deserts, leaving their king to fend for himself. A young English nobleman Siward confronts Macbeth, who kills him. Macduff tracks Macbeth down and they fight a duel. Macduff reveals that he was delivered by caesarean section, rather than 'born' in the generally accepted meaning of the word. Macduff kills Macbeth, cutting off his head, which is paraded around the stage. Malcolm becomes the new king of Scotland.

Lady Macbeth receiving the dagger in an 1812 painting by Johann Heinrich Füssli

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In focus

Is the play a story about Macbeth controlling his own destiny, do other people control him or is he manipulated by supernatural forces beyond his understanding?

The witches – are they in control?

The play is strange and disturbing because of its depiction of witchcraft and the supernatural. The witches embody many different beliefs and superstitions that Elizabethans held about witchcraft and its practitioners. King James I had written a book about witches.

The witches may have the ability to see into the future but not necessarily the power to influence events. Elizabethans from different parts of England would have different understandings of what witches were and what they could do. But people would agree that witches could access terrifying, dangerous power. In the play, the witches might be able to read Macbeth's mind and give voice to his thoughts and ambitions. They might also detect in him a fear of witchcraft. He certainly takes their prophecies literally.

When the witches tell Macbeth he will be Thane of Cawdor and then king, Shakespeare does not give him a line. Banquo describes his reaction for us:

> 'Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
> Things that sound so fair?'
> *Act 1, Scene 3, lines 49–50*

The witches have apparently struck a raw nerve in Macbeth. Shortly afterwards in the same scene, he is told he is the new Thane of Cawdor. In an aside, he mutters:

> 'This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me the earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature?'
> *Act 1, Scene 3, lines 129–136*

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This gives us the explanation for Macbeth's startled reaction to what the witches told him. He has already thought of taking the crown for himself, even though he knows what a dreadful crime that would be. The witches have drawn back a curtain and allowed Macbeth to clearly see a future that he has already considered.

In Act 1, Scene 3, Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches after the battle. Is this a coincidence? Is it intentional? If it's intended, how did the witches know where the two men would be?

In these early scenes Shakespeare uses **dramatic irony** – the audience and the witches know that Macbeth has been made Thane of Cawdor before Macbeth does. Are the witches taking advantage of human actions (Duncan's decision about Cawdor) or are they magically directing events? The apparent power of the witches is clear to Macbeth when messengers from Duncan ride up and greet him as Thane of Cawdor, just as the witches foretold he would be.

dramatic irony
a narrative device in which the audience knows more than the characters do

The extent to which the witches are in control depends upon your point of view. From Macbeth's point of view, they seem to know exactly what is going to happen. But the nature of the witches' power varies in different productions of the play. Whether the witches can see the future, or somehow control events through sorcery, depends upon the interpretation we watch.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hecate's speech in Act 3, Scene 5 was not originally included in *Macbeth*. Instead it is believed to have originated in a play called *The Witch*, written by playwright Thomas Middleton sometime between 1609 and 1616. The King's Men included *The Witch* in their repertoire and at some point incorporated Hecate's speech into the script of *Macbeth*. The witch scenes were a hit with audiences and the company sought to include extra witch-related scenes as the opportunities arose.

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Lady Macbeth – is she in control?

Lady Macbeth is often portrayed as the person who most manipulates Macbeth into murdering Duncan and taking over Scotland. When she reads a letter from Macbeth describing his encounter with the witches, she suspects that Macbeth will not have the stomach to take the throne for himself:

> 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor and shalt be
> What thou art promised; yet I do fear thy nature,
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way.'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 14–17*

'To catch the nearest way' means 'to cotton on to the easiest path to becoming what you were promised'; that is, becoming the king, as the witches told him he would. Lady Macbeth calls on evil powers to give her the strength to act ruthlessly and support her husband:

> 'Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
> And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
> Of direst cruelty;'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 38–41*

When Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to 'unsex' her, she is asking that the qualities traditionally thought of as feminine – compassion, caring, love – be destroyed and replaced with the cruelty she needs to murder Duncan.

In Act 1, Scene 7, when Macbeth announces he will not go through with Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth ridicules her husband:

> 'What beast was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man.'
> *Act 1, Scene 7, lines 48–50*

In this scene she is clearly capable of making her own decisions and reveals a strong influence over her husband.

When Macbeth stupidly re-emerges, after stabbing Duncan to death, covered in incriminating blood and carrying the murder weapons, Lady Macbeth coolly directs him to take the daggers back and place them near Duncan's drugged guards, and to wash the blood off himself. Macbeth is not thinking like a criminal, but Lady Macbeth is cunning enough to think of framing others for their crime:

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'Go get some water
And wash this filthy witness from your hands.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them
And smear the sleepy grooms with blood.'
Act 2, Scene 2, lines 49–53

Lady Macbeth loses her ability to control events not long after she becomes queen. Her influence fades from the point of Banquo's murder onwards, as her presence fades from the play altogether. She intervenes once more to protect her husband's reputation in Act 3, Scene 4, when he sees Banquo's ghost and makes a fool of himself in front of the assembled Scottish lords. But this is the last scene in which the Macbeths appear together in the play. Lady Macbeth is not on stage again until the first scene of Act 5, by which time she has descended into madness, the burden of her crimes too great to bear. In Act 5, Scene 5, she dies, apparently by suicide – which could be interpreted as a final act of self-control – but Shakespeare does not show this to the audience. Not seeing her death creates the possibility she is murdered too.

What does Lady Macbeth want? Although the actors playing her often interpret her as a social climber, she does not declare an ambition to be queen in the way that Macbeth makes it obvious that he wants to be king. Nor does Shakespeare provide a reason for her to hate Duncan. Perhaps love and loyalty to her husband are her motivations. She simply wants what is best for him.

Macbeth – is he in control?

In Scene 2, King Duncan awaits news of a battle against the rebelling thane Macdonald. A wounded captain reports to King Duncan describing Macbeth as a courageous warrior, deciding to take enormous risks on the battlefield, determining the course of the battle by his own skill and daring.

'But all's too weak,
For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name –
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave,
Which ne'er shook his hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps
And fixed his head on our battlements.'
Act 1, Scene 2, lines 15–23

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Macbeth is apparently in control and controlling the fate of others too, personally ending the lives of many men. In gratitude, King Duncan rewards Macbeth and punishes the original Thane of Cawdor. Later, Macbeth will turn the same capacity for violence against his king, rather than use it in the king's service.

Macbeth seems to surrender self-control immediately after murdering Duncan. He appears on stage as a paralysed, bumbling, regretful man who nearly made a complete mess of murdering his king, needing his wife's steely resolve to save him. But having taken the crown, Macbeth soon hits his stride. He has no hesitation in sending murderers to kill his best friend and his best friend's child, and without any intention of taking Lady Macbeth into his confidence. He patronisingly tells her not to concern herself:

> 'Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed.'
> *Act 3, Scene 2, lines 45–46*

The witches' double-edged prophecies in Act 4, Scene 1 simultaneously convince Macbeth of his invincibility but also warn him about Macduff. Macbeth feels himself to be in a race against time, so he resolves to be more ruthless, reckless and brutal than before. He is determined to act on instinct before his enemies can react.

> 'Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits;
> The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
> Unless the deed go with it. From this moment,
> The very firstlings of my heart shall be
> The very firstlings of my hand.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, lines 143–147*

Macbeth honours his newfound resolve. Even though Macduff has already fled to England, Macbeth sends murderers to Fife to kill Macduff's entire family. Macbeth makes choices about committing evil acts. He is capable of thinking through a course of action and anticipating the consequences.

In one sense he makes easy choices – murdering Duncan seems like a direct way of getting the crown. But the decision to murder Duncan is actually very difficult. In a sense it is brave for a man like Macbeth, who has achieved a reputation for honour and integrity, to throw that away by committing an act of great treachery. He values his reputation and does not throw it away lightly.

As Act 5 proceeds, Macbeth finds himself wifeless, friendless and with his enemies' army bearing down on him. He is forced to reflect on what life ultimately means, and does so in one of Shakespeare's most famous soliloquies.

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'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
Their ways to dusty death. Out, out brief candle,
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.'
Act 5, Scene 5, lines 18–27

At the end of the play, Macbeth resolves to fight on and to duel with Macduff. He has already realised that the witches' prophecies are empty promises and devious tricks.

'And be these juggling fiends no more believed
That palter with us in a double sense,
That keep the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope.'
Act 5, Scene 8, lines 19–22

The Macbeths are a duo, attempting to act in a coordinated way. They reflect on their actions before, during and after the events. We also know the justifications that they tell themselves. This makes us part of the process of rationalising their behaviour. For most of the play they are actually communicating their deepest thoughts directly with each other. As individuals they respond differently to the consequences of their actions.

The two act together in the murder of Duncan and covering it up afterwards. Shakespeare carefully presents the couple's conversations in ways that make their teamwork clear. Neither can get what they want by acting alone. They must collaborate to achieve their aims and so both bear a share of the guilt for their crimes. Is it necessary to weigh the crimes and find who, out of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, deserves more of the blame? Shakespeare seems to be making the point that their cooperation brings a greater disaster than either of them working in isolation could have.

All of us are confronted with making moral choices every day. They're not usually life-and-death choices fortunately but when our ambitions for ourselves are in conflict with our principles we face decisions that define who we are. On any kind of moral basis, a choice between right and wrong, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fail in their obligations.

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QUESTIONS 6.4

1. Why does Macbeth meet the witches in the first place?
2. Do the witches know where to find Macbeth, or do they use magic somehow to bring him to them?
3. Between them, Lady Macbeth and the witches often attract the blame for what Macbeth does. Do they represent women's capacity for evil?
4. Is *Macbeth* a misogynist play?
5. Is Macbeth a man or a monster?

Ballou's drawing of *Macbeth* at the Boston Theatre, 1855

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Interpretation

Macbeth (1971) directed by Roman Polanski

If you're studying *Macbeth* at school, chances are that your teacher will show you Roman Polanski's 1971 filmed version.

For Polanski, it is the human characters who are in control. Well before Macbeth murders Duncan, the director establishes a violent, bloody world. Polanski's film starts violently and the violence is human in origin. The sorcery of the witches isn't really required to move the character Macbeth towards his decision to murder Duncan and claim the Scottish throne.

The deaths in the film are all gory and Polanski was strongly criticised for the violence and buckets of blood. However, the violent action the film shows is faithful to the way Shakespeare describes it in the script. In an interview the director said he was determined 'to show the [play's] violence the way it is. If you don't show it realistically then that's immoral and harmful.'

The film's locations are spectacular and atmospheric. Polanski uses desolate landscapes in Wales, real castles in the north of England at Lindisfarne and Bamburgh for exteriors and some interiors, as well as highly detailed studio sets.

The music, performed by the Third Ear Band, is weird and discordant. The band plays acoustic string, wind and percussion instruments that create a jarring but unforgettable sound, which fits the mood created by the film's imagery.

Polanski places Act 1, Scene 1 before the credits. The witches meet on a beach and perform a bizarre ritual, burying a severed human arm and a dagger in the sand before pouring blood over it. The witches leave and a mist closes in. We hear the sound of a savage battle but the fog obscures the battlefield. When the fog lifts, we see the battle's bloody aftermath. When Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches, the witches don't pay much attention to them. The three hags deliver their prophecies and disappear.

Jon Finch plays Macbeth as a brooding man who lacks confidence at the start, but becomes a ruthless, arrogant tyrant once he takes the crown. Finch speaks some of Macbeth's soliloquies aloud but others are heard in voiceover, meaning Finch has to convey doubt, frustration and resolve just with facial expressions.

Francesca Annis as Lady Macbeth is beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside. However, she makes Lady Macbeth a fragile, pitiful woman who loses her grip on her sanity.

Martin Shaw plays Banquo as a loyal friend who quickly notices changes in his friend Macbeth. Shaw went on to a long and successful career on British TV. Some of his better moments in Polanski's film do not involve him speaking any lines at all. When Duncan announces that his son Malcolm will succeed him as king, Shaw

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as Banquo looks sidelong but intently at a jealous Macbeth. When Banquo and his son Fleance are ambushed by Macbeth's hired goons, Shaw unmistakeably conveys Banquo's relief at seeing his son's escape with a simple but effective sigh of relaxation – just before the murderer's axe thuds into his back.

When Macbeth drinks the witches' potion, Polanski creates a mind-bending sequence of hallucinations that reveals Macbeth's future. Macbeth rages pointlessly as he is thrown headlong into a future of Banquo's descendants, one after the other, mocking him. He collapses and when he regains consciousness, the witches have abandoned him.

DID YOU KNOW?

Roman Polanski was born in France in 1933. His parents moved him to their native Poland three years later. Polanski was separated from his parents during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Both his mother and father were imprisoned in concentration camps. His mother was murdered in Auschwitz, the most infamous Nazi camp of all. He was reunited with his father in 1944 and both of them survived the war. As a young man, Polanski trained as an actor and a director, making a number of films in Poland before moving to London in 1963 and the US in 1968 to continue his directing career. In 1969 his pregnant wife, actress Sharon Tate, was murdered, a victim of a home invasion by members of the Charles Manson cult. Eight months later Polanski was in London, working on his script for his film of *Macbeth*. Watching the murder of Macduff's family in Polanski's *Macbeth* is difficult enough, but it's impossible to watch it and not think of the director's own personal tragedies.

Polanski includes a strong subplot involving the character Ross, played as a grinning, self-serving psychopath by John Stride. This interpretation of the character was not Polanski's creation, but it adds yet another sinister layer to the film. Even when Ross doesn't have any lines, his appearance in a scene is often loaded with meaning. Polanski includes scenes that give Ross increased significance as Macbeth's loyal henchman. He appears as the third murderer in the ambush of Banquo and Fleance. After Fleance escapes, Ross tries to tie up other loose ends for his boss by killing the two men who murdered Banquo. No sooner has Ross warned Lady Macduff about the grave danger she is in, than Polanski shows him wordlessly making way for the murderers to enter Macduff's castle and kill everyone. The words of comfort he has just offered to Lady Macduff are made hollow. When Ross later meets up with Macduff in England, Macduff asks if his wife and children are safe. Ross replies, '… they were well at peace when I did leave 'em.' (Act 4, Scene 3, line 180) Ross's involvement in the murders gives that line a sickening double meaning. At

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the end of the film, Ross picks up the crown and hands it to Malcolm – a loyal servant of the new king.

If the survival of Ross isn't unsettling enough, Polanski leaves his audience with another disturbing image. Donalbain, King Malcolm's brother, visits the witches to learn what the future has in store for him. Rather than give hope for the future, Polanski chooses to end the story as it begins and imply that the cycle of murder and betrayal will repeat itself.

DID YOU KNOW?

Two superstitions surround *Macbeth*. One is that the name of the play is supposedly a curse. For people in the theatre, there has long been a superstition that to speak the name 'Macbeth' is unlucky.

Another superstition is that staging a production of the play is to risk disaster. From the very first performance of the play, where legend has it that the actor playing Lady Macbeth died backstage, history is littered with stories of injuries, riots and deaths of people associated with productions of the play.

ACTIVITY 6.2

On 16 May 2010, a mock trial of the Macbeths was conducted at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, using actors and real lawyers. Macbeth pleaded diminished responsibility and Lady Macbeth claimed she had been coerced. Both were acquitted.

- Conduct your own trial of the Macbeths. Over the page is an outline of how your class could do it.

MACDUFF
Not in the legions
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damn'd
In evils to top Macbeth.
Act 4, Scene 3, lines 55–57

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1. Choose roles. (Suggested roles are below. It may be possible to put both Macbeths on trial simultaneously, or conduct two separate trials.)
   - Judge(s) (teacher OR student); a panel of three judges is an option worth considering
   - Prosecutors (3)
   - Defence counsel (3)
   - Macbeth
   - Lady Macbeth
   - Banquo
   - Servant
   - Witches (3)
   - Malcolm
   - Murderer
   - Jury (optional)

2. Preparation
   - Judge considers how the court will be run, the order of proceedings, and what sentence will be appropriate if the jury finds the defendant/s guilty.
   - Defenders must choose which of the witnesses they want to have to testify for them. They prepare questions for their own witnesses and cross-examination questions for the prosecutors' witnesses.
   - Prosecutors must draft the charges and communicate these to the judge and defence counsel. They choose which of the witnesses they want to have testify for them.
   - Witnesses must prepare a 200-word statement of their version of events and work with either defenders or prosecutors to get their stories straight.
   - Share workload – each prosecutor and defender prepares his or her own witness.
   - Each prosecutor and defender is responsible for a cross-examination.

3. Conduct the trial in class
   - Work out how many lessons you will need.
   - Get costume items.
   - Judge introduces case, lists charges. May ask questions of witnesses, counsel.
   - Prosecution presents case first, defenders cross-examine witnesses.
   - Defence presents their case second, prosecutors cross-examine witnesses.
   - Judge sums up, directs jury to consider their verdict.
   - Jury deliberates and returns verdict.
   - Judge pronounces sentence or dismisses.

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What's in a word? *Equivocation*

A theme of the play is **equivocation**. In one sense of the word, characters convince themselves that it is justifiable to lie. They say one thing but mean another, and they will tell half-truths with the intention to mislead others. In the play the witches, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Ross all equivocate.

equivocation to evade or conceal the truth

Lady Macbeth tries to wash the imaginary blood from her hands. Even though it's not really there, she believes she can't get rid of it. This inability to wash the blood away is what drives her to madness. She realises that what she has done and what she has told herself she was doing are two different things. She has equivocated with herself.

Ross is at least a witness to many of the play's dreadful events but he doesn't say much about it. Meeting up with Malcolm and Macduff in England, Ross knows that Macduff's family has been murdered, but when Macduff asks about them, Ross replies:

> '... they were well at peace when I did leave 'em.'
> *Act 4, Scene 3, line 181*

There is a terrible double meaning to this line – Macduff's family, being dead, is indeed 'at peace', although Macduff initially takes Ross's line to mean that they are alive and well. Ross is complicit in what happens because he sets his own interests above any moral consideration to do what's right.

Appearances in *Macbeth* can be misleading. Things are not always as they seem. For example, Duncan is impressed by the outward peacefulness of Macbeth's castle:

> 'This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.'
> *Act 1, Scene 6, lines 1–3*

Little does Duncan know that within the castle's walls the Macbeths are evilly plotting his violent death.

Towards the play's end, Macbeth realises that the Apparition who told him he'd be safe so long as Birnam Wood didn't reach the walls of Dunsinane had been feeding him some pure doubletalk:

> 'I pull in resolution and begin
> To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth.'
> *Act 5, Scene 5, lines 41–43*

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DID YOU KNOW?

Equivocation was a word with a special meaning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Catholics were persecuted at the command of Protestant monarchs like Elizabeth I and James I. To avoid punishment, Catholics were encouraged by some of their priests to 'equivocate' – to phrase answers to Protestant interrogators that were confusing, misleading or straight-out lies, while at the same time secretly thinking answers that were the truth.

In November 1605 a group of Catholics who opposed King James I attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London with barrels of gunpowder. The Gunpowder Plot, as it became known, was intended to kill members of Parliament and the king himself, who would be visiting Westminster at the time of the planned explosion. Guy Fawkes is the best known of the plotters, although there were others. A Catholic priest, Father Henry Garnet, heard the confessions of some of the plotters in the lead-up to the attempt and so he had knowledge of what they planned to do. But the Catholic Church does not allow priests to reveal what they are told in the confessional, so Garnet did not report what he knew to the authorities. Catholicism was illegal in England at the time, which as far as the king and the English government were concerned, meant that the rules governing the confessional didn't apply anyway.

After the plot was foiled, Fawkes and the other plotters were rounded up and put on trial. Garnet was also arrested. At his trial he defended the confessional, and the doctrine of equivocation. He was called the Great Equivocator – someone who concealed the truth and would have allowed the plot to proceed. Garnet was executed on 3 May 1606.

The Porter's speech at the start of Act 2, Scene 3 refers directly to Garnet and to the testimony he gave at his trial:

> 'Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.'
>
> *Act 2, Scene 3, lines 7–9*

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Sayings originating in this play

The memorable lines fly thick and fast in *Macbeth*, right from the first scene, when the witches cackle:

> 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'
> *Act 1, Scene 1, line 12*

Reality may not be real at all. It may be completely opposite from what's expected.

> '… th' milk of human kindness …'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, line 15*

'Milk of human kindness' is the quality of decency that Lady Macbeth fears her husband may possess too much of. If she's right, she worries he won't have the courage to murder Duncan. There are other occasions in the play when she alludes to milk and breastfeeding – Shakespeare clearly associates her character with these images.

> 'Something wicked this way comes.'
> *Act 4, Scene 1, line 45*

Macbeth returns to demand the witches reveal everything they know about his future. Before he's even arrived, the Second Witch senses that he's on his way.

> 'Out damned spot!'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, line 30*

Lady Macbeth tries in vain to wash imaginary blood from her hands. Her guilt is preying on her decaying mind, causing the imaginary stains to remain obstinately there.

> 'It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing.'
> *Act 5, Scene 5, lines 25–27*

Macbeth reflects that 'it' (life), as his appears to him now, may be futile.

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HAMLET

WRITTEN: 1599–1600

FIRST PERFORMED: 1600

PUBLISHED IN QUARTO: 1603 and 1604

THEATRE OR COURT: Theatre

SETTING: Elsinore, twelfth-century Denmark

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (protagonist)
- Claudius, King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle (antagonist)
- Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother
- Ghost of King Hamlet, Hamlet's father
- Polonius, Counsellor to the king
- Ophelia, his daughter (foil)
- Laertes, his son
- Horatio, Hamlet's friend
- Fortinbras, Prince of Norway (foil)
- Clown, the gravedigger

EVENTS:

- Prince Hamlet's father, the old king, has recently died. His brother Claudius has assumed the throne and married Gertrude, his brother's widow. Hamlet is consumed by grief.
- King Hamlet's ghost appears to his son and tells him that Claudius murdered him. The Ghost demands that Hamlet avenge him.
- Hamlet behaves erratically to cover his true feelings from his uncle and mother. Polonius thinks Hamlet is behaving strangely because he is in love with Ophelia, but Hamlet rejects Ophelia and insults her.
- A group of travelling actors arrives at Elsinore. Hamlet arranges for them to perform a play that depicts a king's murder similar to the way Claudius murdered King Hamlet. When the play is performed, Claudius storms out, overcome by guilt and rage. Hamlet has the proof he needs. He tells his mother what he knows, but accidentally kills Polonius who is in the room eavesdropping.
- Claudius sends Hamlet to England, planning to have Hamlet killed when he gets there.
- Laertes returns to Denmark, wanting to kill Hamlet as revenge for him killing Polonius.

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- Ophelia is driven mad with grief at her father's death and kills herself.
- Hamlet returns from his sea voyage and meets Horatio in a graveyard. The Clown-gravedigger exhumes the skull of Yorick, the former court jester.
- Hamlet learns of Ophelia's death. He encounters a doubly grief-stricken and enraged Laertes.
- Claudius, surprised that Hamlet has survived, plots with Laertes to kill Hamlet in a rigged fencing match with a poisoned sword and poisoned wine. Both Hamlet and Laertes are wounded by the poisoned blade. Gertrude accidentally drinks from the poisoned cup and dies.
- Laertes, dying, tells Hamlet that he only has minutes to live. Hamlet kills Claudius, and then dies in Horatio's arms.
- Fortinbras arrives to find the entire Danish royal family dead, and takes the throne of Denmark for himself.

THEMES: Identity; power; ambition; fathers and sons; duty; revenge; madness; sadness

A statue of Hamlet in the Gower Memorial, located in Stratford-upon-Avon, South Warwickshire, England

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Introduction

Hamlet was first performed in 1600. Yet, if we believe teachers, actors, directors and academics, *Hamlet* is still relevant to audiences today. At first glance it's not obvious why. *Hamlet*'s plot centres on monarchy, madness, murder and suicide.

Hamlet also deals with themes of politics and family, just like the history plays do. There are overheard conversations, layers of surveillance, spying and palace intrigues. It is not clear who is on whose side. Shakespeare wrote about situations that reflected the uncertainty surrounding the impending death of Elizabeth I and the question of who would succeed her as England's monarch. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents a young, clever, articulate, fictional heir to the throne – just what England needed in real life to take over from Elizabeth. Political uncertainty can lead to anxiety in the community, and this continues to be the case in our time.

QUESTION 6.5

After the death of his father, the character Hamlet does not inherit his father's throne. Why not? Why does Claudius become king instead?

Hamlet also contains a strong supernatural element in the form of the ghost of Hamlet's father. Elizabethan audiences were used to the idea of ghosts. The audience assumed that the spirit world unavoidably overlapped with the physical world. These are not everyday concerns for most of us. However, Hamlet's grief, indecision and introspection are familiar to modern audiences, as they have been to audiences for centuries.

Is it Shakespeare's greatest play? If it is, it means he spent the last 11 or 12 years of his career striving in vain to produce another work to rival it. *Hamlet* is probably his best-known play. It is so well known that almost every line is familiar somehow. The line 'To be or not to be …' and the image of Hamlet holding a skull are powerful symbols of English-speaking theatre.

We know of three different versions of the text for Shakespeare's play. The so-called 'bad' quarto of 1603 is much quicker paced than what we would expect of a performance of *Hamlet*. It is half the length of the other versions, but includes curious elements, such as Ophelia singing and playing a lute, that don't appear in either of the other two.

At the time he was writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's own father was ageing. Shakespeare's son Hamnet died in 1596 at the age of 11. Literary critics and academics look for clues in Shakespeare's work that might indicate what was going on in his life at the time. It's understandable that a traumatic event like the

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death of one of his children would have an effect on his writing. But in 1599, the year he began writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare also wrote a bright comedy called *As You Like It*. It's difficult to accept that the author of that play was in the grip of grief and depression.

The play is said to affect the actors who take on the character of Hamlet. Playing Hamlet is the Mount Everest of acting for young actors. There is a huge number of lines to learn – over 1000 of them, the most of any of Shakespeare's characters. It is a responsibility that many of the actors who have accepted the role have taken very seriously. The audience gets insights into Hamlet's deepest thoughts – Hamlet confides in the audience by speaking seven soliloquies. The actors will reveal something personal and private about themselves in playing this role.

Hamlet is not Shakespeare's most original play. Shakespeare used the story from another play called *Hamlet* that no longer exists. It was written by an unknown author, possibly a playwright called Thomas Kyd, in the 1580s. Some academics doubt it ever existed at all. There are others who believe that Shakespeare himself was the author of the 1580s version. Whatever the truth is, the Chamberlain's Men performed a play called *Hamlet* in the 1590s, and so Shakespeare would have known the story well.

The story is Danish in origin and goes all the way back to the twelfth century. A Danish historian called Saxo Grammaticus (1150–1220) recounts the legend of Amleth, a Danish prince whose father is murdered by his own brother to claim the crown. Amleth initially pretends to be mad to protect himself before taking his chance and killing his uncle. Amleth survives and becomes king. He acts ruthlessly, upholding the principles of honour and revenge.

In 1570 the French author Francois de Belleforest (1530–1583) retold the story, adding some new elements such as Hamlet's unhappiness.

It's likely that elements such as the Ghost character and the bleak ending were already in the 1580s, pre-Shakespeare play. Shakespeare's only contributions to the actual story were probably the decision to use the name Hamlet for both the play's hero and his murdered father, the Ghost, and the creation of the Fortinbras character (who shares his name with his own dead father). As he did with *Henry V* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare rewrote an earlier play, using essentially the same characters and events as were contained in his source material.

He also borrowed heavily from a very popular Elizabethan play called *The Spanish Tragedy*, which definitely was by Thomas Kyd. First performed in 1587, *The Spanish Tragedy* includes a ghost, a character called Horatio and a play within the play.

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Synopsis

At the beginning of the play, the king of Denmark has recently died. Hamlet, the dead king's son, is consumed by grief. The king's brother Claudius has assumed the throne and married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. This has only deepened Hamlet's anguish. Hamlet's father returns as a ghost to tell his son that Claudius murdered him and to command his son to avenge his murder by killing Claudius.

Not surprisingly Hamlet finds it even more difficult to look his mother and stepfather in the eye. He begins to behave erratically. Worried, Claudius and Gertrude ask Hamlet's childhood friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to speak to Hamlet about and find out why he is behaving so strangely around them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern aren't too bright and they aren't very subtle. Hamlet realises they are spying on him for Claudius and reveals nothing.

Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain (the head of the royal household), thinks Hamlet's behaviour is because Hamlet is in love with Ophelia, Polonius's daughter. Polonius and Claudius spy on Hamlet and observe him telling a distressed Ophelia that he never loved her.

Hamlet tests the Ghost's claim that the king was murdered. He invites some travelling actors to perform for Claudius, and he instructs them to play a scene that resembles the way in which Hamlet's father was supposedly murdered. Claudius is clearly rattled by the play and rushes out during the performance. This is enough to convince Hamlet that Claudius is guilty. He finds Claudius praying and has the chance to kill him but chooses not to – there is a chance Claudius's soul could still go to heaven if he is murdered at prayer.

Hamlet confronts his mother with his knowledge about Claudius. While speaking with Gertrude, he hears a noise from behind a nearby curtain. Hamlet stabs blindly through the curtain, thinking it might be Claudius. Instead he accidentally kills Polonius, who is hiding there to spy on Hamlet. This mistake irrevocably alters Hamlet's life. Claudius now understands that Hamlet wants to kill him and moves to defend himself.

Claudius sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, planning to have him executed by the English authorities on arrival.

In Hamlet's absence, Laertes returns from France wanting revenge for Polonius's death. Ophelia drowns herself, grief-stricken at the death of her father and not understanding why Hamlet rejected her.

Hamlet anticipates Claudius's plot and jumps ship, returning to Denmark with pirates. He leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to continue to sail on to England with a letter he forged, instructing the English to execute Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead. He arrives back at Elsinore to find a freshly dug-up grave and the exhumed skull of Yorick, his father's court jester. Then he sees Ophelia's funeral procession and realises the grave is for her. Laertes blames Hamlet for the death of both his father and sister.

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Claudius enlists Laertes to rid him of Hamlet once and for all. Pretending that he wants to see Hamlet's skill as a duellist, Claudius arranges a supposedly friendly fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet. Laertes, burning with his own vengeful thoughts, agrees and raises the stakes: he will use a poisoned blade in the supposedly non-lethal fight with Hamlet. To make certain, Claudius plans to put poison in a cup of wine he will offer to Hamlet.

The end of the play is a colossal mess. Laertes cuts Hamlet with the poisoned blade, ensuring Hamlet has only minutes left to live. Unaware of the poison in his body, Hamlet grabs Laertes' poisoned blade by mistake and wounds Laertes in their next bout. Now Laertes' death is certain. Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Dying, Laertes reveals the plot to Hamlet. Hamlet kills Claudius and then dies shortly afterwards. Hamlet has succeeded in revenge but in a chaotic way.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian prince Fortinbras is marching his army through Denmark. Fortinbras wanted his own revenge – his father, Old Fortinbras, the king of Norway, was killed by Hamlet's father in single combat. But the new king of Norway had forbidden Fortinbras to seek revenge. Returning from a successful invasion of Poland, Fortinbras arrives at Elsinore to find the entire Danish royal family dead and claims the crown of Denmark for himself.

Ophelia is perhaps one of Shakespeare's most tragic characters.
(John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1852, Tate Gallery, London)

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In focus

Past, present and future

In Act 5, Scene 1, set in a graveyard near the castle, two gravediggers (identified in the text as 'Clown' and 'Other') prepare Ophelia's grave. In doing so, two skulls are exhumed. When Hamlet arrives in the graveyard, he takes a skull and holds it. It is one of the best-known images in theatre. The skull symbolises death. As Hamlet gazes into the skull's empty sockets, he looks at his own imminent death. But in life the skull belonged to Yorick, Elsinore's court jester, someone Hamlet knew when he was a boy. When he looks into the skull, Hamlet also looks into his own past – a happier time than the present:

> 'Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, lines 156–157*

It is one of the play's most famous lines. Hamlet is drawn back into boyhood memories, a time before the troubles of his adulthood.

There are times in the play when Hamlet appears certain to follow tradition. After all, he is named after his father. The Ghost – the enraged spirit of Hamlet's murdered father, 'Old' Hamlet – looms over the whole play. It demands that Hamlet perform a son's duty, according to ancient codes of family and honour, and seek retribution for the murder. But this insistence on being avenged is young Hamlet's death warrant. Following through with vengeance will rob Hamlet of his own future. Claudius forbids Hamlet from returning to university, forcing him to remain in the claustrophobic walls of Elsinore. Hamlet turns away from or sabotages events from happening in the play that could change his situation. He breaks up with Ophelia, removing any chance of developing a romantic relationship that will help him grow as a human being. Later, Claudius sends Hamlet to England with the intention of betraying Hamlet and having him executed. Hamlet escapes this conspiracy but he returns to the palace. He is unwilling to escape Elsinore and the past miseries that it represents.

Thinking about Hamlet's plight in a different way, his doubts in his ability to avenge his father and kill his uncle keep Hamlet locked in a frozen present. He spends much of the play being paralysed by indecision. Hamlet is in mourning and depressed, so he is psychologically unable to make any personal progress. Losing a parent changes people forever. The grief can be overwhelming, threatening the griever's sanity. Hamlet doubts his own ability to do his dead father's bidding. He is limited by his own morality. He struggles with the notion of revenge as a legitimate way of squaring the moral ledger.

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In the famous soliloquy of Act 3, Scene 1, 'To be or not to be …', Hamlet asks questions that really need to be answered before he can make any sense of his life. What's the point of everything? What's the point of anything? Why are we here? What should I do? These are questions we may all ask ourselves at some stage in our lives. We can question the purposes of our lives like this now. It was risky to do it in Shakespeare's day – a young man considering whether or not to kill himself, threatened Christian beliefs. Suicide was a terrible sin. Hamlet doesn't know what he wants to do. He's not even sure that he wants to go on living.

Those of us who have experienced moments of crisis in our lives may be able to identify with Hamlet's inability to take action. None of the available options seems like the right course to take. Having doubted the point of living, he also doubts the legitimacy of his revenge mission. Killing his own uncle – his father's murderer – seems pointless when Hamlet can't even decide that his own life is worth living.

DID YOU KNOW?
In the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2008 production of *Hamlet*, a real human skull was used in Act 5, Scene 1 to represent the mortal remains of the court jester Yorick. The skull belonged to Polish-born classical pianist and composer Andre Tchaikowsky. Tchaikowsky had died of cancer in 1982. In his will, Tchaikowsky asked that his skull be given to the RSC so they could use it in their performances. Productions of *Hamlet* in 1984 and 1989 had used the skull in publicity photos and rehearsals but no one wanted to take it on stage in front of an audience. After 1989 the skull was left in an RSC props room for 19 years until Greg Doran, the 2008 production's director, took Tchaikowsky's skull down from its shelf, dusted it off and handed it to actor David Tennant who was playing Hamlet. In August 2008, Tennant spoke the immortal line, 'Alas, poor Yorick …' to Andre Tchaikowsky's skull in front of a live audience, fulfilling the musician's wish 26 years after his death.

Some philosophers and psychologists who studied *Hamlet* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found the character Hamlet useful for explaining how modern people had begun thinking of themselves. Some ideas of psychology in *Hamlet* and questions Hamlet asks of himself are interpreted as very modern. He is such a self-aware, inward looking character that he seems at home in our world and quite alien to Elizabethan times, let alone the Middle Ages when the play is set. It was not a popular play at the time of its first performances and critics often suggest this is because Shakespeare was ahead of his time – his audiences simply didn't get *Hamlet* (and Hamlet the character) the way audiences do now.

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Both the character Hamlet and the play as a whole are preoccupied with death and the dead. This is made most obvious by the presence of the Ghost. The Ghost is one reason why the character Hamlet is obsessed with the past. But Hamlet also brings death. He is connected to the deaths he directly or indirectly causes himself: Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and finally his own. The skull of Yorick, the dead court jester and a childhood friend of Hamlet, has an important symbolic function. Yorick's silent skull confronts Hamlet with the deaths that have gone before and those that will happen in the future.

Near the end of the play, Hamlet finds himself about to fight a duel with Laertes. As he considers his immediate future, Hamlet accepts that he might be about to die. Of his own death, Hamlet says:

> 'If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all.'
> *Act 5, Scene 2, lines 193–194*

This is very different from the anguished young man who gave us the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. Towards the play's end, Hamlet has accepted the inevitability of his own death. He might have even foreseen that to pursue revenge, as the Ghost wants him to, would be his own death sentence. He is about to fight Laertes, someone he might have called a friend, except for the fact that Hamlet caused the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, Laertes's father and sister. The knowledge that Hamlet is not the only one who has been wronged, that he has in fact caused someone else grief similar to his own, has given him a new perspective.

By the play's end, the Danish royal family has self-destructed. Fortinbras arrives in time to assume leadership of Denmark without having to fight for it. Fortinbras is often cut from productions of the play because he seems so irrelevant to the play's major themes. To some directors, the apparent unimportance of Fortinbras has implied that Shakespeare didn't really care about the political subplot concerning Denmark's future.

QUESTION 6.6

Fortinbras may be a minor character in *Hamlet*, with little to do. But Shakespeare nevertheless included him for a reason. What future do you think Fortinbras presents for Denmark?

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Interpretation

Hamlet (1996) directed by Kenneth Branagh

At just over four hours, Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* is one of the longest English-language films ever made. As you can imagine, it is almost impossible to watch from beginning to end in one sitting, and is usually screened with an intermission. Branagh uses a script based on the First Folio and Second Quarto texts, and includes every line. Often directors and screenwriters of Shakespeare adaptations will edit the plays to keep films to a manageable length. Branagh was determined to be faithful to the original. His film attempts to encompass all the themes of *Hamlet* – individual identity, love and family relationships, the broad sweep of politics, and profound moral questions.

In addition to directing this epic, Branagh himself plays Hamlet, a role he had already played in three different productions. He makes Hamlet likeable and sympathetic. He speaks the verse and the prose very clearly and with great confidence, although his delivery of some of the soliloquies is sometimes shouty as though he is thinking he is back on stage in a theatre, trying to overwhelm a live audience. Even so, Branagh's decision to film the soliloquies in single takes with minimal editing makes the soliloquies easier to understand.

Branagh casts accomplished actors from Britain and the US in every role, even the minor ones. It's enjoyable, but also distracting, to be watching a scene and realising that Robin Williams is playing Osric, or that Billy Crystal is one of the gravediggers. The overall effect is to give every character a sense of importance.

Kate Winslet heartbreakingly depicts Ophelia's descent from a vivacious young woman into madness. Julie Christie is flirtatious and lusty with her first husband's brother. Richard Briers brings a quality of ambition to Polonius, which makes a change from the usual portrayal of the character as a waffling old fool. What's best about this film is the performance of Derek Jacobi as Claudius. The full text gives him more lines and more opportunities to develop Claudius as a subtle, intelligent and malevolent force to be reckoned with.

The actors' costumes place the film in the nineteenth century, not the thirteenth. The exteriors were filmed in winter at a magnificent English mansion called Blenheim Palace, which was built in the early eighteenth century. The interiors take place in a large studio set, which includes an impressively large and ornate grand hall that serves as Denmark's throne room. The floor is tiled in black and white squares, like a chessboard. Full-length mirrors are set into the walls around the hall. Concealed doors lead to a network of rooms and corridors, allowing surveillance and conspiracy.

Branagh imaginatively includes flashbacks to develop some of the play's themes. We see Hamlet as a boy with his parents and the jester Yorick, Claudius

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and Gertrude getting married, Fortinbras planning for war, and even a sex scene between Hamlet and Ophelia. Shakespeare didn't write these scenes but Branagh, by adding them, is using the film medium to add drama and depth to the story.

The directors of other film versions have chosen to omit characters and scenes in order to reduce the film to a conventional length and focus on what they believed were the most important themes. Often it's characters like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or Fortinbras, or Reynaldo who miss the cut. By leaving nothing out, and including some extra elements, Kenneth Branagh has attempted to bring a complete *Hamlet*, true to its many competing themes. Its length makes it challenging to watch, but ultimately it is a rewarding experience.

ACTIVITY 6.3

The play within the play – *The Murder of Gonzago*

A travelling company of actors has arrived at Elsinore to perform for the royal court. Hamlet sets a trap for Claudius, asking the actors to perform a play called *The Murder of Gonzago*, which depicts a murder similar to his father's. By surprising Claudius in this way, Hamlet hopes to provoke a guilty reaction from his uncle and confirm what the Ghost has told him.

Shakespeare scripts very specific stage directions for *The Murder of Gonzago*, starting with a 'dumb-show' (a mime).

- Perform the mimed scene, then the conversation between the Player King and the Player Queen, and then the murder of the Player King by Lucianus.
- Experiment with ways of presenting this scene. Edit the Player King–Player Queen dialogue and have them recite the lines at the same time as performing the actions described by Shakespeare in the dumb-show.
- Then experiment with the dumb-show proceeding with three silent actors and being narrated at the same time by three more actors playing the Player King, Player Queen and Lucianus with some edited dialogue.
- Think about Hamlet's understanding of his father's death. What does it say about him that he can catch Claudius out in such a calculating way?

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Edwin Austin Abbey, *The Play Scene in Hamlet*, 1897

What's in a word? *Rest*

The rest is silence. (Hamlet's last words)

> 'The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
> I cannot live to hear the news from England.
> But I do prophesy th' election lights
> On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.
> So tell him, with th' occurrents more and less
> Which have solicited – the rest is silence.'
> *Act 5, Scene 2, lines 333–338*

- Is it 'rest' in the sense of 'the rest – everything that remains'?
- Does Hamlet believe that after he dies there is no afterlife?
- Or is it rest in the sense of the ultimate motionless state of 'rest' – death, in other words?

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Hamlet may be looking into his own future and seeing himself finally at rest, at peace, and not surrounded by his nagging doubts anymore.

Dying, Hamlet may be looking into the afterlife – and seeing that there's nothing there. He may be relieved to discover that.

But remember, Hamlet has already told Horatio:

> 'And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story.'
> *Act 5, Scene 2, lines 327–328*

It does not end in silence – the story will be told.

Sayings originating in this play

There are so many notable lines in this play that it's hard to know where to begin. Here are a few:

> 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be'
> *Act 1, Scene 3, line 75*

Wise words from Polonius to his son Laertes! Polonius is very good at offering advice.

> 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.'
> *Act 1, Scene 4, line 90*

Classic understatement! Marcellus's line has been used through the centuries by people who observe that something (usually not Denmark) is not quite right.

> 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'
> *Act 1, Scene 5, lines 166–167*

By 'philosophy' Hamlet means science, and he's telling his friend that science can't explain everything.

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> 'Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,'
> *Act 2, Scene 2, line 90*

Very true, but this line is delivered by Polonius, ironically the least brief and most waffling character in the play.

> 'To be or not to be, that is the question'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, line 56*

We've all heard this one. Weighing up whether life or death is preferable is confronting.

> 'When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,'
> *Act 3, Scene 1, line 67*

Think about this metaphor for life. What image do you see in your mind's eye – a gradually unwinding spring? A spiral staircase we slowly ascend before reaching the top and falling off? Or is life coiled around us and we must shake ('shuffle') it off?

> 'Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, line 156*

Not 'I knew him well', as it is often misquoted.

> 'Dog will have his day'
> *Act 5, Scene 1, line 259*

This has come to mean that everyone gets a chance to do something important, but I think Hamlet snobbishly means the full line 'The cat will mew, and dog will have his day' in the sense that common, unremarkable people will continue to lead common, unremarkable lives.

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Skill builder

Response to literature – analysis of a soliloquy

To successfully respond to literature you will need to be able to:

- evaluate and integrate ideas and information from texts to form your own interpretations
- select evidence from texts to analyse and explain how language choices and conventions are used to influence an audience
- explain how language features, imagery and vocabulary contribute to the development of an author's individual style
- develop and justify your own interpretations of texts
- show how selection of language features in works of literature can achieve precision and stylistic effects
- create your own texts to articulate complex ideas
- demonstrate understanding of grammar by varying your own vocabulary choices to maximise the impact of your work
- use accurate spelling and punctuation in your work.

1. Your task is to read a soliloquy and write an analysis of it. I have chosen one from *Hamlet* but you could choose one from a different play. After watching Fortinbras's Norwegian army march towards a pointless war in Poland, Hamlet confronts the fact that, up to this point, he has been unable to fulfil his mission to revenge his father's death.

   'How all occasions do inform against me,
   And spur my dull revenge! What is a man
   If his chief good and market of his time
   Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
   Sure he that made us with such a large discourse,
   Looking before and after, gave us not
   That capability and god-like reason
   To fust in us unused. Now whether it be
   Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
   Of thinking too precisely on th' event –
   A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom
   And ever three parts coward – I do not know
   Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
   Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
   To do't. Examples gross as earth, exhort me.

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Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain. Oh from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.'
Hamlet, Act 4, Scene 4, lines 32–66

2. In your analysis, identify:
   - the speaker's thoughts, emotions and difficulties
   - the speaker's values
   - what the speaker thinks of himself or herself
   - what the speaker thinks of others and the world around him or her
   - if the speaker is fighting an inner conflict
   - if the speaker is thinking through two sides of an argument
   - the imagery the speaker uses
   - any poetic techniques you notice
   - the imagery the speaker uses
   - if there is a clear logic to the speaker's thoughts or if they are confused. For example, in the case of this soliloquy you could explain the relevance of the recent sight of the Norwegian army to Hamlet's thinking in this soliloquy.

Your teacher will advise you of the length the analysis should be, but you should aim to be thorough. People are complicated, and soliloquies reveal the innermost workings of the characters' minds.

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Your turn

Write your own soliloquy

1. Pretend you are a character from one of the tragedies you have studied. Imagine yourself in that character's circumstances at a particular point in the play and write the soliloquy from his or her point of view. Imagine what he or she is going through and write a soliloquy that reveals his or her reactions to the situation. Your teacher will advise you how many lines the soliloquy should be.

   Checklist

   - Write the soliloquy in the first person – I, me, my, myself, mine
   - It should be written in blank verse – unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter. Each line contains 5 iambs, or 'feet', and an iamb is one unstressed and one stressed syllable, and that equals 10 syllables per line.
   - Use imagery – as much as you can
   - Use poetic techniques – the more the merrier

2. Provide a written explanation of your soliloquy. The explanation should include:
   - a description of where the soliloquy occurs in the play and how it relates to what has already happened
   - how your soliloquy relates to the play's themes
   - how your soliloquy suits what is already known about the character
   - what emotions the character is experiencing at the time
   - descriptions of the poetic techniques you use
   - how the poetic techniques you use contribute to the atmosphere of the soliloquy
   - any ideas you have for a location where you would set the soliloquy.

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6

Read and view more

Films

- *Macbeth* (2006) directed by Geoffrey Wright – an Australian adaptation that is set (and filmed) in modern-day Melbourne that explores gang violence
- *Wuthering Heights* (2011) directed by Andrea Arnold

Literature

The following novels are all examples of tragedies in literature (in the sense used in this chapter) and many parallels have been drawn between them and Shakespeare's tragedies:

- *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Anna Karenina* (1878) by Leo Tolstoy
- *Les Misérables* (1862) by Victor Hugo
- *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 BC) by Sophocles
- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) by Ken Kesey and the 1975 film adaptation directed by Milos Forman have often been compared to *Hamlet* in terms of the major themes and the character of McMurphy (played in the film by Jack Nicholson)
- *Madame Bovary* (1856) by Gustave Flaubert
- *The Lovely Bones* (2002) by Alice Sebold

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RELOADED IN THIS CHAPTER

The scoreboard

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A follow-up burning question – why is Shakespeare still taught in schools?

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Skill builder

Your turn

Read and view more

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7

The scoreboard

From around 1590 to 1614, Shakespeare wrote:

- 38 plays (maybe more)
- 154 sonnets (14-line poems)
- 5 other poems
- 1200 characters in all the plays
- 154 different personas in the sonnets.

And he had:

- invented approximately 2000 words, including 'eyeball' and 'lacklustre'
- an estimated vocabulary of 20 000 words.

The burning question – why study Shakespeare?

Shakespeare is still all around us, nearly 400 years after his death. His contemporary, English poet Ben Jonson, declared that Shakespeare 'was not for an age but for all time'.

Not only are Shakespeare's plays still performed on stages around the world but are also the most performed dramatic works in the world. Directors are still adapting his plays into films. New operas and musicals based on his works are constantly being devised.

Some academics rank Shakespeare as the most important author of all time. Owen Barfield, a twentieth-century philosopher and author, suggested that we owe our ability to express joy, anxiety, fear, love, hate and the whole range of human emotion to Shakespeare himself, or to the poets and writers who followed him. These later writers, so the theory goes, would not be able to write as they did without having read Shakespeare first, or at least read writers who had. Shakespeare's plays and poetry have somehow worked themselves into the DNA of not only our language but also our hearts and minds. We're not thinking or feeling anything new or original. Shakespeare already put it into words for us.

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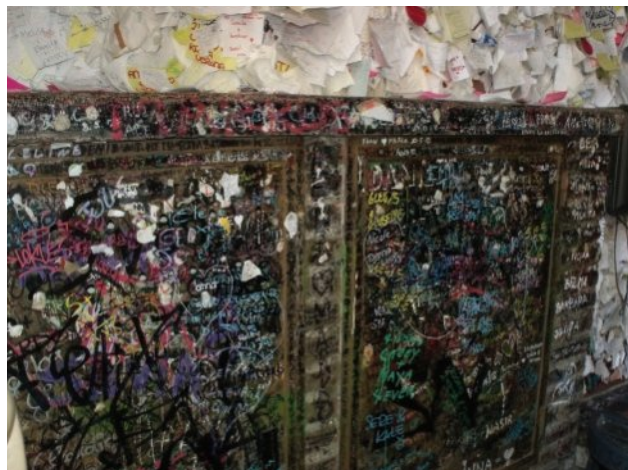
You might think it's a stretch to rate Shakespeare's impact so highly. But when you consider that he is rated so highly by some, it's easier to understand why Shakespeare is continually put in front of you at school. You don't even have a choice in the matter!

The process of turning Shakespeare into a cultural icon for England, and the English-speaking world, has taken centuries. But Shakespeare's reputation as the greatest playwright the English-speaking world has known was well on the way to being accepted by the late eighteenth century. Scholars, academics and critics still argue over whether Shakespeare and his works have something special about them that make them so important or whether society and culture have evolved over the centuries to look favourably upon the work of a particular dead English man.



Juliet's House on Via Cappello in Verona, complete with love notes and tributes from Shakespeare fans. It is the site that inspired the balcony scene from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

A follow-up burning question – why is Shakespeare still taught in schools?

Whenever I, or any of my classmates, asked my English teachers at school why Shakespeare was so difficult to understand, they would always become misty-eyed and start carrying on dreamily about 'the beauty of his language'. I didn't find this helpful and eventually I even began to hate the word 'language'. The 'gwidge' sound the second syllable makes is particularly irritating.

I'm not going to assume that you hate Shakespeare's work. Some of you might really love studying and acting in his plays or reading his poetry. But usually young people encounter Shakespeare in some form because they have had to and that's usually by reading his works at school. You read the texts, printed words in books, (because that's what you do in English) and then analyse their meanings. Shakespeare isn't easy to understand at first, so we all need some help. These first steps are important to how and what we will think of Shakespeare for the rest of our lives.

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Reading the work is important. We can discover Shakespeare's meanings with the words in front of us to read and reread. But Shakespeare was an actor and a playwright. He wrote so his work could be performed in theatres. If you can memorise some lines and move around, putting some actions to the words as you speak them, you might find the play more meaningful. By casting ourselves in the roles of Shakespeare's characters, we start to understand the situations in the plays. We start to find the plays' relevance to us.

Shakespeare puts us in the minds of multiple characters in all his plays, enabling us to appreciate events in the story from multiple points of view. His writing for the characters follows rhetorical principles. By that I mean that Shakespeare's characters are using verbal argument to impress or persuade others – other characters, the audience, or both. The major characters in the plays and the personas in the poems, speak about big ideas, profound questions. In speeches and soliloquies they search these big ideas, these themes, for meaning. Then the characters arrive at conclusions about what these big ideas mean. These characters think and speak in verbal essays. Ideas and images follow each other rapidly, propelling us along the characters' trains of thought. Analysis of these characters and their words is an important part of responding to literature in the study of English. When teachers ask you to analyse these characters and their words, it's because they want you to form your own interpretations and use evidence from the texts to back up your opinions.

Another valuable aspect of studying Shakespeare in schools is that his works provide opportunities for students to discuss issues that are relevant to them. Many of you have studied or will study *Romeo and Juliet*. This play provides a path to tackle questions such as family loyalty, parental authority, conflict, violence, peer pressure and suicide. Studying the play can be much more rewarding if we make use of the chance it gives us to start talking about its themes and how they relate to us today.

QUESTIONS 7.1

1. We fear or dislike things that we are unfamiliar with. Choose a play that you have studied in class such as *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*. What perception did you have of the work before actually reading it? Did that perception make you reluctant?
2. Was the play anything like how you pictured it? How was it like you thought it might be? How was it different?
3. Has going through the play in depth changed your perception of Shakespeare? Is his reputation justified?

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What is the secret to Shakespeare's longevity?

Shakespeare was 53 when he died. He had been an actor, the principal writer for a theatre company and a part owner of the Globe Theatre. As a professional playwright for nearly 25 years, he was a favourite of a queen and a king, and had achieved both fame and wealth in his lifetime. However, Shakespeare the man remains a mysterious figure in history. We only have his works to go on.

No complete, original manuscript exists for any of his plays. There are a few handwritten pages of a play called *Sir Thomas More* that have been identified as Shakespeare's own handwriting. But that identification is not conclusive, and there is no record of the play having ever been performed. In fact, it has been difficult to accurately date when many of Shakespeare's plays were written.

There were 15–20 other professional playwrights who were contemporaries of Shakespeare. These writers collaborated on each other's plays and most wrote anonymously. All up they wrote about 3000 plays. Only about 600 of those plays survive to this day, and Shakespeare wrote at least 38 of those plays.

There are, however, printed versions of his plays, some of which date back to Shakespeare's lifetime. These early editions were a style of book called a quarto.

Shakespeare's sonnets and his narrative poems were published in this format. But during his lifetime, only about half of his plays were actually published. Those 20 plays that were published in quarto didn't include *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*. Had it not been for the intervention of two of Shakespeare's former associates, these classics might not have survived to this day.

The year was 1623, seven years after Shakespeare died. Two actors from the King's Men, John Heminges and Henry Condell, arranged to publish 36 plays together in one volume. This volume became known as the 'First Folio'. It was claimed to be a complete set of Shakespeare's works for the stage, but we know now that it wasn't the true number. However, it was the efforts of Heminges and Condell that helped ensure Shakespeare's work lived on. So few plays, from any playwright, survived from that time that Shakespeare's could easily have been lost as well.

Academics, researchers and directors have usually preferred First Folio texts over the quarto editions, even though the folio was produced long after Shakespeare's death. There will be differences in character names and stage directions between the quartos, the First Folio and the modern editions we use now. Most importantly though are some variations between some of the lines in the different editions. Putting together an edition of any Shakespeare play requires intense academic and historical detective work to arrive at the most accurate version possible of the text.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Quarto is the Latin word for 'four'. Books in quarto format were made by printing text onto a sheet of paper and then folding the paper into four, creating eight double-sided pages. Sets of these pages were then bound into books. The actual size of the paper varied, but the books were usually small. They didn't cost much to produce and they were cheap for people to buy.

The folio format was created by folding the sheets of paper just once. Books published in folio were larger and more impressive than the quartos. The format was usually reserved for significant works of science, theology, philosophy or literature. Publishing a collection of Shakespeare's plays in folio was a statement about how important the playwright was.

In the letter to readers that accompanied the folio, the two actors claimed they were presenting the plays as originally written. Previous quarto editions had been unreliable, inferior and inaccurate versions of the plays.

Although his plays became unfashionable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were never completely ignored. Beginning in the 1740s, an English actor-manager called David Garrick presented some of Shakespeare's plays that he had altered, some of them radically, that nevertheless proved popular with London audiences at the Drury Lane Theatre. Garrick's staging of the Shakespeare Jubilee, a celebration of Shakespeare's life at Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1769, was the beginning of a Shakespeare industry, with Stratford-Upon-Avon becoming a tourist destination. Serious research into Shakespeare began with Edmond Malone, an Irish literary historian, in the second half of the eighteenth century. His work established many of the personal details of Shakespeare's life that we now regard as proven fact. Other scholars followed Malone with their own efforts. Malone and some of the other Shakespeare hunters who came after him were not always professional in their methods. They hoarded information, destroyed it in their efforts to souvenir it or simply made stuff up when they couldn't find what they wanted. But they contributed to a rebuilding of interest in Shakespeare in the minds of the English public. Shakespeare scholarship is a massive industry today, which is remarkable considering how little we supposedly know about the man.

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Shakespeare was writing at a time of social and political uncertainty in his own country. But history shows us that uncertainty and upheaval are natural states of being for societies. There are hardly ever times when societies are free of uncertainty. *King Henry V* is often staged in times of war because thematically it deals with a society at war. Each generation that studies Shakespeare recreates Shakespeare for themselves. For the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, lecturing in 1808, Hamlet was a character caught between a vivid, romantic poetic imagination and the dull misery of his reality. Today's Hamlet might be an idealistic young man facing a corrupt political system, wondering if violence is a justifiable way of righting an injustice. As students, as actors, as directors and as an audience, Shakespeare's plays give us the chance of seeing a text through the lens of our own values.

A drawing of David Garrick as King Lear, from 1761. Garrick was instrumental in re-popularising Shakespeare in the eighteenth century. If you're tired of hearing about Shakespeare, Garrick has a lot to answer for!

Our impression of the relevance of a Shakespeare production will be influenced by the director's decision to set it in a different period or in the present day. Details in a production that do not make sense can jolt the audience out of its suspension of disbelief. Modern-day interpretations update the settings of Shakespeare's plays but that does not mean that the play's meaning or story must be changed too. It is possible for modern versions of the plays to be faithful to the spirit and intent of the play. Some conventions should be established beforehand to make the story appear consistent with its new setting. For example, in Baz Lurhmann's *Romeo + Juliet* he cleverly named the handguns the young men carried 'Daggers' and 'Swords'. Having guns made sense in a modern setting and retaining the words dagger and sword kept the film faithful to the text.

By reading and studying Shakespeare's works we find meanings and relevance for our own time, as people have done over the centuries since Shakespeare lived. The stories he told and the characters in the stories reflect his deep understanding of human emotions, human psychology and human experience. Studying Shakespeare helps us to understand ourselves.

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The magic – and business – of theatre

Shakespeare first and foremost wrote scripts. Although some plays were bound up in neat little books for sale, he was not writing 'texts' as we understand them today, to be sold in bookshops or studied in schools. The primary reason for each script's existence was to be performed. In his early days as a playwright, Shakespeare didn't have much say in how his play was presented. The theatre company employed him to write scripts. The script was the property of the company, not Shakespeare. The company's shareholders had the real power to commission the kinds of plays they wanted to perform. Shakespeare had to rewrite and revise, and edit and draft to please his audiences and the company's leading actors. It wasn't until later in his career that Shakespeare's influence in the Lord Chamberlain's Men grew. He became a shareholder and helped guide the company in its artistic and business decisions, to the point where he was his own boss.

There is plenty of evidence that Shakespeare regarded his plays as subject to change as circumstances required or as he had new ideas for them. He didn't necessarily think of them as 'finished'. He revised his own work continually. His death and the appearance of the First Folio meant that the plays became more or less 'official', with no more major changes. However, for some plays there are several surviving versions. Editors through the years have had to invent a 'definitive' text based on different sources.

Theatre remains important to us because audiences and performers are in the same place at the same time. Cinema can be very powerful but films obviously lack the presence of the performer in front of the audience. Audiences witnessing a live performance respond differently to the presence of the actors. Being able to see and hear another human being performing a role in the same shared space as us can be thrilling, alarming, confronting, moving and joyous. In the theatre, there is definite presence and force of emotion and thought generated by and between the actors and the audience.

When watching a play in a theatre or another performance space, we expect, and we are expected, to follow some rules such as who may speak and move at certain times. This is very different to the experience of a day at the theatre for an Elizabethan theatregoer. Believe it or not, going to see a play in Shakespeare's London was much more like going to a game of football. Most of the audience was packed into standing room. Cheering for heroes, booing and hissing at villains, and heckling actors were all acceptable behaviours at the theatre. If you tried to do that in a modern theatre at a professional production of a Shakespeare play, you'd be asked to leave.

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A modern audience watching Shakespeare at the rebuilt Globe. Notice how close they are to the stage. Instead of being quiet and respectful, the audience here is expected to engage with the performers and even shout loudly if they feel like it.

In general, theatre audiences today should remain quiet and still. However, there are times in the theatre when members of the audience find it impossible to be quiet and still. The effect of the forceful emotions and ideas being presented on stage may cause some in the audience to break the accepted rules. They may shift and make some remark to the person next to them. They may even respond directly to the actors.

DID YOU KNOW?

At a performance of *Othello*, Desdemona pleads for her life as her husband Othello, believing her to have been unfaithful, smothers her with a pillow. A woman in the audience stood up and shouted, 'Don't believe her – she did it …'

At another performance of the same play in nineteenth-century America, during the same scene, a cowboy in the audience shot the actor playing Othello, then shot himself.

We may be shocked at the level of involvement some people have with a live performance, with the actors present in the same room as the audience, but it can have such an effect.

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When we spectate at events, each one of us gives up some of our own personalities. We become part of a larger consciousness. It can be thrilling, but also frightening to surrender some of our self-control. Elizabethan authorities were also alarmed by the mob mentality that could develop in a theatre. Plays were subject to censorship. Theatres could be shut down. Playwrights and actors could be locked up if the play was too political, controversial or subversive.

These days our expectation of (most but not all) theatre set in modern times is that it will resemble real life. The costumes the actors wear are styles and fashions of the day. The sets they act in are meant to look like real places. The props they hold are familiar items. The lines they speak sound like everyday speech.

Shakespeare created plays and characters that define how we relate to live performance and one another as audience members. Productions staged in modern costume and cast with actors from multicultural backgrounds help audiences today to feel engaged with the play and reinforce the relevance of Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's day, plays set in Rome, like *Julius Caesar,* were sometimes performed by actors in Elizabethan costumes. If the cast of a play resembles its audience, there is a chance that the audience will see itself on stage.

Lord Washizu (Toshiro Mifune) just before he meets his demise in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957). To help him give an authentic performance in the scene, Mifune insisted on real arrows being fired at him by real archers.

Shakespeare reaches deep into world culture, not just English-speaking culture. For example, Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa adapted *Macbeth* to a Japanese setting in his 1957 film *Throne of Blood* ('*Kumonosu-jô*'). The themes of power, betrayal and psychological obsession are relevant to societies around the world. People all over the world can appropriate Shakespeare's writing for themselves, changing it in the process but finding truth in how his characters deal with one another and the world around them.

Shakespeare rarely includes any instructions to actors on how to speak their lines, where to stand or what to do. There is freedom for actors and directors to make their own interpretations. If you're in an English lesson, sitting at a table and reading a Shakespeare play aloud, you don't have much creative input. If you decide you're going to act a scene out, suddenly you have much more control over Shakespeare.

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Original practices

Around the world there are theatre companies, directors and actors who stage Shakespeare's plays in a way that is as close as possible to the way they were originally performed. There is enough surviving information from Elizabethan times to make that kind of authenticity possible.

The stage of the New Fortune Theatre at the University of Western Australia in Perth is a replica of the original Fortune Theatre's stage in London. It is one of very few, if not the only, replica Elizabethan theatres in the Southern Hemisphere.

The most famous original practices theatre is Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. It was built only a few hundred metres from the site of the original Globe Theatre that was assembled from the timbers of the Theatre in 1599, burned down in 1613, rebuilt, closed down in 1642 and demolished in 1644.

In 1970 Sam Wanamaker, an American actor, began a long campaign to build a replica of the Globe Theatre in London. In addition to a theatre, the project was designed to include an education centre and a museum. The philosophy of being true to the original Globe was taken very seriously. Research was undertaken to discover what the interior and the exterior of the Globe looked like. As much as possible, authentic building materials and building techniques were used in the theatre's construction. Although the building complies with modern health and safety requirements, Shakespeare's Globe is as close to the original as it possibly could be. It is an open-air theatre, so most productions are staged during the daytime. The audience can stand in the yard close to the stage or sit on wooden benches in three levels of balconies. Actors and audience have a strong sense of the relationship that develops between them during a performance. Characters can directly address the audience and see their reactions.

The view from the stage inside the New Fortune Theatre in Perth, including the theatre's famous resident peacocks

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DID YOU KNOW?
Philip Henslowe, an important London theatre owner of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, built the Fortune Theatre in the north of London in 1600. The contract for the construction of the Fortune, dated 8 February 1600, specifies its proposed dimensions. The Fortune was one of the first theatres to be built after The Globe in 1599. The survival of the contract is important because it provides detailed information about the design features of Elizabethan theatres.

Shakespeare's Globe opened in 1997 under the artistic directorship of Mark Rylance, one of the great Shakespearean actors of modern times. Rylance, and artistic directors since, honoured Elizabethan traditions by staging some all-male productions with boys, adolescents and young men playing the female roles.

Maintaining the heritage values of Elizabethan theatre extended beyond Shakespeare's Globe's architecture. Recreated props, weapons and armour are used in productions. Actors wear costumes that have been hand-sewn as faithfully as possible according to traditional methods of clothes making. Actors do not rely on microphones but use the natural power of their voices. Performances are accompanied by live music, played on period instruments or replicas of period instruments.

Shakespeare's Globe does not only stage original practice plays. Most productions have men and women in the cast. There have been all-female versions of some plays. The theatre also invites performing companies from all over the world to take part in new interpretations of Shakespeare.

The original practices philosophy can give the impression that Shakespeare is stranded in his own time – some elements in his plays are well and truly from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and it's difficult to make sense of them in a modern context. But Shakespeare's Globe and other companies that produce original practices work do it to explore and better understand Shakespeare's plays. Audiences have a part to play too, because they can imagine what it would have been like to watch a Shakespeare play in Shakespeare's lifetime. When the plays are performed in the manner for which they were written, modern actors and audiences share a surprising, enriching and thrilling experience.

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QUESTIONS 7.2

1. The original practices philosophy, discussed in this section, is in stark contrast to the radical approach to Shakespeare taken by people such as Kathryn Hunter, whose interpretation of *Richard III* we looked at in Chapter 4, and Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann. Which approach do you prefer and why? Is it possible for an interpretation to be both radical and faithful to the original work?
2. Choose a favourite novel or film and imagine you have been chosen to remake it. Would you choose a traditional or an experimental approach? Why?
3. List some reasons why it might be a good idea for an audience to see both an 'original practices' version of a Shakespeare play and an experimental interpretation. What kinds of things can we learn from each?

Was he a genius?

The word 'genius' is bandied around freely when describing William Shakespeare. People do get carried away when writing or talking about Shakespeare. Some regard him as the impossible standard against which all other writers must be judged and will inevitably be found inferior. He is revered above every other writer in the English language. For anyone who goes to high school, Shakespeare is an inevitable, gigantic feature on our literary landscape that is impossible to ignore. Shakespeare is 'good', so we have to study him. There is no escape! But in our introduction to Shakespeare at school, we don't necessarily see or read any criticism of his work that gives us different perspectives on his importance to us today.

William Shakespeare was fortunate to be born when and where he was. He was born at a time when education was just accessible enough to a boy of his social status to give him a high standard of instruction in classical literature and history. He was born in England at a time when it was transforming itself from a European backwater to one of the most important countries in the world. He wrote at a time when the English language was developing into a highly accurate means of expressing complex thoughts and emotions, creating a surge in literary activity in his lifetime. He worked in the theatre in London at a time when the theatre was an important part of public life, allowing a man of his talents to achieve success and fame. He was part of a theatre company at a time when it boasted some of the finest actors alive. After he died, former colleagues took action to preserve his work. Without that intervention, all of

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Shakespeare's plays and poems could easily have disappeared from history, the way the work of many of his contemporaries did.

Shakespeare wasn't always as revered as he is today. Although famous in his own lifetime, other playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, were thought better than him. Theatre increased in popularity after Shakespeare's death but between 1642 and 1660, performing plays was illegal and theatres were closed or demolished. When the theatres reopened in the Restoration after 1660, Shakespeare's plays were not necessarily the ones immediately rushed back into production. Shakespeare's works occasionally came in for harsh criticism from people who thought some of his plays were rubbish. Writing in 1662, the English diarist Samuel Pepys (pronounced 'peeps') declared that a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he saw at the King's Theatre was 'the most insipid ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life'. When they were staged, the scripts were often extensively revised.

Discussion of whether or not Shakespeare was a genius is only worthwhile if people can understand his poetry and plays. And indeed, the problem for audiences has been that they find it difficult to comprehend Shakespeare on the stage. If you've read the play and studied it at school, you'll have a good chance of following what's going on when you go to see it. If your first experience of Shakespeare is in the theatre, you might struggle to understand it. The problem when watching a performance is that sometimes words are not in the order we would expect, or that the literary techniques are piled on top of each other, so that we need time to review what was said. Unfortunately when watching a play or a film we don't have that reviewing time. In the time spent working out what one line means we've missed the next five lines.

Shakespeare eventually became famous in his day, but many of his contemporary writers and poets, such as Ben Jonson, were more famous and respected than he was. This painting depicts (from left in back) Joshua Sylvester, John Selden, Francis Beaumont, (seated at table from left) William Camden, Thomas Sackville, John Fletcher, Sir Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Samuel Daniel, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Southampton, Sir Robert Cotton, and Thomas Dekker.

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DID YOU KNOW?
England was engulfed in civil wars between 1642 and 1649. The wars were fought between Royalist armies loyal to King Charles I and the armies of the English Parliament. The wars ended in victory for the Parliamentarians and in 1649 they executed Charles I. Between 1649 and 1660 England did not have a monarch, a period known as the Interregnum. The ruling Parliamentarians were dominated by Puritans, very strict Protestants who believed entertainment like plays represented a moral threat to society. They ordered that all theatres be shut down. In 1660 the exiled son of Charles I was invited to return and become the new king. He was crowned King Charles II in 1661. This became known as the Restoration, because the monarchy was restored. The harsh Puritan morality laws were relaxed and theatres were allowed to reopen.

For example:

> MACBETH
> Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more:
> Macbeth does murder sleep', the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast.
> *Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 38–43*

What's confusing here is that Macbeth thinks that he has heard a voice accusing him of murdering sleep. In other words, he will never be able to relax or to rest easy again after murdering Duncan. But then there is a succession of images of sleep, each one apparently simple yet laden with meaning that is impossible to fully appreciate when an actor speaks these lines in character. On top of that, we have to suspend our disbelief and accept that Macbeth heard a phantom voice reel off a series of complicated metaphors about sleep and that he remembered them all so he could recite them to Lady Macbeth.

Later in the same scene:

> MACBETH
> What hands are here? Ha: they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No: this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.
> *Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 62–66*

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Shakespeare may well have been the first writer to use the words 'multitudinous' and 'incarnadine' ever. To use them both in the same sentence is showing off. 'Multitudinous' we can probably grasp but 'incarnadine' is harder to get hold of. As a noun it means a crimson colour, but here it is being used as a verb, in the sense that Macbeth's bloodstained hands will turn the green sea crimson. But as listeners today we can get caught on complicated words that distract us from what follows, leaving us trailing further and further behind.

So what's changed in the 400 years since the plays were written? For one thing, we, the audiences, have. People back then didn't – or couldn't – rely on receiving information visually, via pages of text or on screens the way we do now. Elizabethans and Jacobeans were very good at listening. Information was shared verbally, at public gatherings or in conversations. They were expected to attend church every week, where priests would deliver hour-long sermons. They were well prepared to be attentive, comprehending theatre audiences.

Shakespeare's skill and talent lay in his ability to construct detailed plots and to express thoughts and emotions precisely and poetically. The creations of a complex character like Hamlet, or the intricacies of a plot like *Twelfth Night*, are not accidental. You have to be a gifted artist with brilliant imaginative flair to achieve those feats. But Shakespeare had some luck too. A range of social, political, religious and cultural factors meant that he was in the right place at the right time.

Jana Klinge as Rosalind (left) and Laura Lo Zito as Celia during a dress rehearsal for a production of *Wie Es Euch Gefaellt* (*As You Like It*) in Berlin in 2009. Rosalind is the largest female part in any Shakespeare play.

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Did Shakespeare do the right thing by women?

We can arrive at our own conclusions, based on limited evidence, about Shakespeare's treatment of his wife. We might be able to draw conclusions about his attitudes to women from the way he writes his women characters. But the relative emphasis Shakespeare places on male characters over female characters has ramifications for drama even today.

At one level it seems strange to be writing about Shakespeare's treatment of women characters, since he wrote at a time when women weren't even allowed to act women's roles on stage. Remember though that Elizabeth I was queen of England for most of Shakespeare's life. A powerful woman was a reality. But Elizabeth didn't think of herself as a queen. In a speech to her army in 1588, she is believed to have said:

> 'I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too …'

She thought of her strength and determination as male, king-like qualities, not qualities that would be associated with a woman. Remember also that, as Shakespeare's career was getting started, Elizabeth was nearing the end of a long reign. Her power was fading, she had no children to succeed her and England was entering a period of uncertainty. Long years of war and a bad economy added to the sense of gloom. English people were worried about who their next ruler would be. Some preferred the idea of a king replacing Elizabeth when she died, instead of another queen.

There are some very strong women characters in Shakespeare's plays, such as Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Lady Macbeth and Hamlet's mother Gertrude start as powerful and intriguing roles but fade into relative insignificance in their respective plays. The problem is that these characters are often written into plays that have a large gender imbalance – in other words, there are more important roles, with more lines, in the plays for male characters than female characters. In an extreme example, Prospero's daughter Miranda plays almost a lone hand as a female character in *The Tempest*, apart from the appearances of the goddesses Iris, Ceres and Juno in Act 4, Scene 1.

Shakespeare shows sympathy for many of the very distinctive women characters he created for the stage. At nearly 700 lines, Rosalind has the largest role of any of Shakespeare's women characters. That is substantial but it is dwarfed by the role of Hamlet, which has over 1000 lines. Characters like Titania, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Viola and Lady Macbeth carry

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tremendous dramatic importance in their plays but with fewer lines than their male counterparts. Ophelia (in *Hamlet*), Juliet and Miranda are wise characters, despite their youth and innocence. Yet all three are swept along in their respective plays by events they cannot control.

Shakespeare's pattern of writing plays with a larger number of important male roles and relatively few important female ones has helped create a problem in English-speaking theatre that is still present today. Very few, if any, of Shakespeare's women characters attract the level of academic analysis that Hamlet or Macbeth do. Modern directors and female actors have noticed that playwrights are still writing plays with the same gender imbalance, which is an example of some unwelcome influence that Shakespeare is still having.

One solution for directors has been to cast women actors in male roles. This is not a new idea but it has given actors and audiences new ways to approach these characters. However, many of the women characters Shakespeare created, though not enjoying as many lines or stage time as the famous male roles, are presented as complex, believable individuals with real depth.

Shakespeare wrote some strong roles for women but it wasn't until nearly 50 years after his death that women actors were allowed to play them. Many of the women characters in the comedies are clever, capable of expressing themselves well, and intent upon controlling their own destinies and acting on their own romantic and sexual desires. They demonstrate greater loyalty and common sense than many of their male counterparts.

Autobiography?

Many of Shakespeare's plays provoke speculation about how events in his life might be connected to characters and situations in his work. For the most part, it has to remain speculation because there is so much we don't know about what Shakespeare was thinking and feeling when he was writing. And who's to say he's making links from his life to his writing anyway? The idea that writers put themselves into their work is an idea that came along well after Shakespeare's death – in the literary movement known as Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Shakespeare's younger daughter Judith died in 1662 at the age of 77. She was the last best hope for any seventeenth-century Shakespeare biographers who might have been hunting around for first-hand information about the man himself. Unfortunately, no one thought to write down what Judith thought

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about the kind of man her father was, nor what she remembered of his life. She left no diaries or journals that offered any insights either.

Should we be looking for encoded references to Shakespeare's own life, values and beliefs in his plays? His 'lost years' are an enticing prospect for people seeking to understand the man. What happened to him? Did he experience a religious, sexual or family crisis? Any one of which could have inspired him to write his poems and plays.

Maybe he had all three. That so little is known about parts of Shakespeare's life is not remarkable – records of Elizabethan lives were not kept the way that details of our lives are stored today. Appearing as a playwright, apparently suddenly, after a few years of probably working as an actor in theatre companies, is how other playwrights at the time got started.

We're probably lucky to know as much about Shakespeare as we do. The information we have comes from what other people wrote about him, as well as some church, tax and legal documents. But we don't know enough to be able to read the plays and the poems and definitively make conclusions about what Shakespeare was doing, thinking and feeling at the time of writing.

The Irish literary historian Edmond Malone (1741–1812) wanted to write a biography of Shakespeare but his research didn't uncover enough information for a birth-to-death record of Shakespeare's life. The years and the details of Shakespeare's life that are 'lost', with no paper trail of evidence explaining what the playwright was up to, proved a problem. Malone turned to the plays and the poems for help. Perhaps they would provide clues to this mysterious life.

Sonnet 93, which begins 'Like a deceived husband …', led Malone to conclude that Anne Hathaway had been unfaithful to her husband. Looking elsewhere, Malone remembered Shakespeare's play *Othello*, where the title character is tricked into believing that his wife is cheating on him and kills her in a jealous rage. Malone also recalled that Shakespeare had left his second-best bed to Anne in his will – surely it was a final insult to an untrustworthy wife from beyond the grave.

When Malone published his work, other writers, poets and academics followed his lead and started to look for evidence of Shakespeare's life in his work. This fascination has increased in the last 150 years. Do all of Shakespeare's plays contain autobiographical information? If not, which ones do? How would we know?

Do we think that we should always reveal what goes on in our minds and our emotions? Most of us are good at covering our thoughts and emotions from others.

No doubt there are some parallels between events in some of the plays and the events in Shakespeare's life. But over the centuries scholars have made mistaken assumptions about Shakespeare's life based on events in his plays. For example, *Hamlet* was believed to have been written in 1601, the year Shakespeare's father died, and for a long time people who studied

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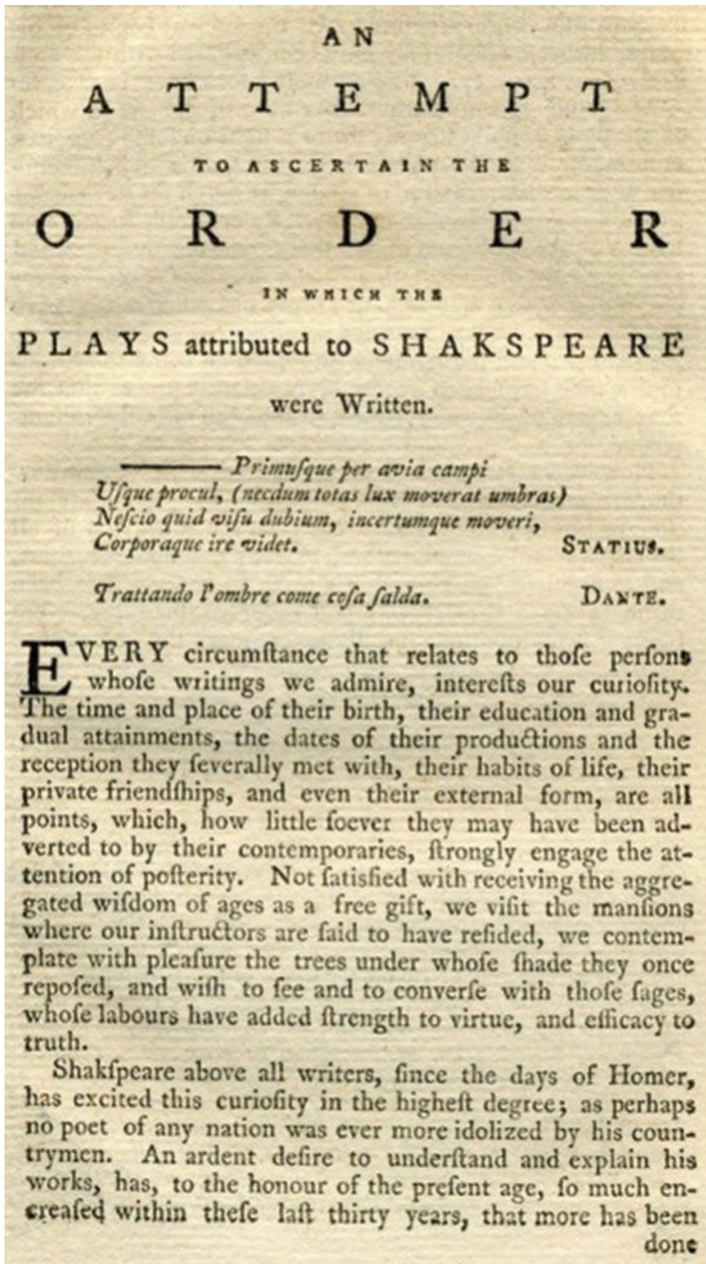

AN

ATTEMPT

TO ASCERTAIN THE

ORDER

IN WHICH THE

PLAYS attributed to SHAKSPEARE

were Written.

——— *Primuſque per avia campi*
Uſque procul, (necdum totas lux moverat umbras)
Neſcio quid viſu dubium, incertumque moveri,
Corporaque ire videt. STATIUS.

Trattando l'ombre come coſa ſalda. DANTE.

EVERY circumſtance that relates to thoſe perſons whoſe writings we admire, intereſts our curioſity. The time and place of their birth, their education and gradual attainments, the dates of their productions and the reception they ſeverally met with, their habits of life, their private friendſhips, and even their external form, are all points, which, how little ſoever they may have been adverted to by their contemporaries, ſtrongly engage the attention of poſterity. Not ſatisfied with receiving the aggregated wiſdom of ages as a free gift, we viſit the manſions where our inſtructors are ſaid to have reſided, we contemplate with pleaſure the trees under whoſe ſhade they once repoſed, and wiſh to ſee and to converſe with thoſe ſages, whoſe labours have added ſtrength to virtue, and efficacy to truth.

Shakſpeare above all writers, ſince the days of Homer, has excited this curioſity in the higheſt degree; as perhaps no poet of any nation was ever more idolized by his countrymen. An ardent deſire to underſtand and explain his works, has, to the honour of the preſent age, ſo much encreaſed within theſe laſt thirty years, that more has been done

In 1778 Edmond Malone published 'An attempt to ascertain the order in which the plays attributed to Shakespeare were written'. He was the first scholar to construct a tentative chronology of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare thought that the play was Shakespeare's very public way of coming to terms with his grief. However, more recent research has proven that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* in 1599, when John Shakespeare was still alive.

Another example is *The Tempest*. At the play's end, the wizard Prospero declares he will have no more to do with magic and breaks the staff that is the source of his power. For many years it was believed that *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last play and that Prospero's actions were Shakespeare's way of telling his audience he would write no more. As it turns out, Shakespeare went on to write *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Cardenio* (for which no text survives) after *The Tempest.* If the Globe Theatre hadn't been destroyed by fire in 1613, he may well have written more.

Shakespeare writes from such a wide range of perspectives that it's difficult to identify what he really thinks about everything. But each reader might be able to find a point of view that she or he agrees with. Think about *The Tempest*. Just because it feels right that Prospero's epilogue is really Shakespeare's way of saying goodbye to his fans, doesn't make it true.

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Authorship

The question of how much autobiographical information is in Shakespeare's plays has led to another fascinating question: did William Shakespeare write Shakespeare's plays? This search for Shakespeare's life in his works has helped the people who argue that Shakespeare himself did not write the plays and the poems that have been credited to him.

First, let me be absolutely clear about this. There is no evidence connecting any writer other than Shakespeare – not Christopher Marlowe, or the Earl of Oxford, or anyone else – to the writing of his poems and plays.

Having got that out of the way, here are some of the suggested reasons why Shakespeare could not have written Shakespeare.

- Many of his plays do not indicate an author – there is no author's name on the title pages of some of the plays, making them effectively anonymous. In fact, that was normal for plays written by anybody before 1600.
- There are very few surviving examples of his handwriting. Most of those examples are of his signature, so authenticating what fragments of his manuscripts survive is very difficult. It's true that, unfortunately, we don't have Shakespeare's handwritten originals of his plays and poems – the manuscripts – but he would not have had much interest in keeping them, and handwritten paper documents are vulnerable to being lost or destroyed.
- In each of the surviving signatures, his name is spelt differently and not one of those spellings is the one that we use for his name now. Actually, spelling of names and words in Elizabethan times was highly individualised and very inconsistent. Standardised spelling did not develop until later.
- Shakespeare's grammar-school education in a small town of 2000 or 3000 people could not possibly have prepared him intellectually for his writing career. This criticism misunderstands the sort of education he received at the King Edward VI School for Boys. Shakespeare was taught to read, to write and to speak Latin from the age of seven. Part of the training included reading and memorising great classical literature, from which he learned many of the myths that would surface in his poetry and plays. It's possible that he acted in Latin plays at school too. This schooling lasted for seven or eight years. It was a very thorough education, and it would have equipped him perfectly for his work as a poet, an actor and a playwright.

Roland Emmerich's 2011 film *Anonymous* tells the story of an English nobleman Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. In the film, de Vere is depicted as a worldly, sophisticated aristocrat with a burning literary talent that compels him to write obsessively. He secretly ghost writes Shakespeare's plays to manipulate political events. William Shakespeare is an opportunistic actor who is happy to

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take the accolades for someone else's work. Although it's an interesting story, Emmerich is not giving us a new theory about authorship.

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, has been suggested as a candidate for the authorship since 1920. A schoolteacher from the north of England called J. Thomas Looney (unfortunate name, although he probably pronounced it 'Loney') identified de Vere as the true author of Shakespeare's works. After studying Shakespeare's writings, Looney decided they were the work of a nobleman who supported the Tudor royal family, who had Catholic sympathies, and who was very familiar with Europe, especially Italy. Looney was convinced that the great literature attributed to Shakespeare could not possibly have been written by a common man with a mere grammar school education. Only someone of noble birth could have created the plays and the poetry. Unfortunately for this theory, de Vere died in 1604, so he would have had to write many of the plays in advance to be released years after his death. Not only that, but he would have had to anticipate events like the Gunpowder Plot that *Macbeth*, written in 1606, refers to. Of course, it's possible that he faked his own death. People who believe that de Vere was the true author are referred to as 'Oxfordians'.

Portrait of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. De Vere is sometimes put forward as the 'real' author of Shakespeare's plays.

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In addition to de Vere, there have been so many candidates put forward as the 'real' authors of Shakespeare's plays that it has become difficult to keep track of them all. Here are some of the most frequently suggested ones:

- Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626): English scientist, philosopher and lord chancellor.
- Christopher Marlowe: Shakespeare's contemporary and rival playwright in the early 1590s. Some believe that he wasn't actually killed in the fight in Deptford, but that he faked his own death and fled to Italy or Kent in southern England.
- Roger Manners, 5th Earl of Rutland (1576–1612): A friend to artists and writers of the time, and an ally of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, who led a failed rebellion against Elizabeth I in 1601.
- William Nugent (1550–1625): A strongly Catholic Irish rebel who escaped English authorities and spent time in Scotland, France and Italy.
- Sir Henry Neville (c. 1562–1615): Member of the English Parliament, English Ambassador to France and another supporter of the Earl of Essex.
- Emilia Lanier (1570–1654): The first English woman poet to publish a book of her own poetry. She was the mistress of Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain and patron of Shakespeare's theatre company. Some researchers have suggested that she was the 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets.

In most cases, the alternative authors are members of the aristocracy or members of a privileged class who had the benefit of the best education money and status could buy at the time. People who favour the alternatives usually argue that a man of Shakespeare's average background and relatively modest education could never have been so imaginative, creative or knowledgeable. For a start that doesn't do justice to the quality of sixteenth-century English grammar school education, which was very thorough in its study of ancient Greek and Latin. Overall it's a very snobbish, stuck-up attitude that doesn't take into account how society has been changing over hundreds of years. It looks back to a time when society was formed strictly along class lines, when wealth and power were passed along as birth rights among a privileged few.

The idea that Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare's plays began for a few reasons. First, it had been discovered in the late eighteenth century that the great classical Greek poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were not written by a poet called Homer but had actually been written over a period of hundreds of years by different authors.

Scholars studying the Bible's New Testament realised that many of the stories were not supposed to be accepted as the literal truth of real events but understood on a symbolic level. In the 1840s scholars began wondering if Shakespeare's works were created in the same way.

Since about 1850, the authorship of Shakespeare's plays has been seriously questioned. The people who favour other possible authors of Shakespeare's works have based their beliefs on one of two ideas:

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- The first is that the plays refer to events happening when they were written and first performed, and that the plays make public the secret struggles of the playwright's true identity.
- The second is that the poems and the plays are all autobiographical, based on the actual lived experiences of the author.

Increasingly, readers have become sceptical of an author's credibility unless the author has lived experiences similar to the events described in the text – even if the work is fiction. We look back at Shakespeare and wonder if it is possible that one man could portray the range of emotional and psychological insights that he does, as well as the apparent expertise his plays demonstrate in diverse matters like history, warfare, the law, sailing, philosophy, religion and so on.

It is unlikely that Shakespeare ever left England, yet his plays are set in countries all over Europe. Sometimes he gets geographical details about those locations wrong. For example, he sets *A Winter's Tale* on the coast of Bohemia, despite the fact that Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic, is entirely landlocked with no seacoast whatsoever. Sceptics who assert that Shakespeare didn't have the education to write all the plays point to this geographical ignorance as evidence that supports their view.

On the other hand, this arguably shows Shakespeare's ability to invent when his knowledge is lacking. He made stuff up – that's what creative people do. It doesn't matter that Shakespeare imagined Bohemia to have beaches when in reality it doesn't.

Shakespeare's source material was everywhere. He kept reading and learning throughout his life, and paid attention to what was happening around him. Shakespeare imagined an array of characters: heroes, villains, kings, queens, pimps, bards, murderers, liars, cheats, witches, thugs, racists, psychopaths and drunks. There are about 100 major characters and about 1000 minor characters in the plays, each of them an individual with a unique voice.

Shakespeare used the information that was available to him in London at the time he was writing. He got some details about his settings wrong. Some of his depictions of historical events and characters are wrong, which may or may not have been intentional.

People who support William Shakespeare as the real author are called 'Stratfordians', after Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon. Shakespeare scholars who tried to ignore the authorship questions in the hope that they will go away have been frustrated because this hasn't happened. Speculation has continued to grow. It's only recently that many academics defending the Stratfordian position have decided to tackle the alternative theories about the authorship head-on.

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QUESTIONS 7.3

1. Do you believe there's anything to the claim that Shakespeare was not the author of the works attributed to him? If so, who do you think is the most likely author?
2. Like conspiracy theories such as the faked moon landing and the crash of an alien spacecraft at 'Area 51' in the 1950s, the Shakespeare conspiracy endures despite strong evidence to the contrary. What do you think explains the appeal of this idea? Discuss with your classmates.
3. Imagine for a moment that we discovered definitively that Shakespeare was a fraud and that the conspiracy was true. How might it change our understanding and evaluation of the works?

Is there anything left to learn about Shakespeare?

Part of Shakespeare's legacy is mystery. The desperation of researchers who want to learn more about him is met by the inescapable reality that despite having written close to a million words of text, Shakespeare left very little information about himself for us to find.

That's not to say that there may not be a few surprises waiting to be discovered. As recently as 2013, computer analysis of other surviving English plays from Shakespeare's time has revealed the likelihood that Shakespeare helped write or added new scenes to other playwrights' work. The use of particular words and imagery in these plays has been identified as Shakespeare's literary fingerprints in the following plays:

- *Arden of Faversham*, a tragedy from the 1590s
- *The Spanish Tragedy*, a revenge play originally written in the 1580s by Thomas Kyd, had scenes added later which were probably written by Shakespeare.
- *Mucedorus*, a tragicomedy from the 1590s

Some academics are arguing that a 1596 play *King Edward III* was, at least, co-written by William Shakespeare. A play called *Cardenio* has been attributed to Shakespeare but to this day it is believed lost. If a quarto version or a

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manuscript of it were to suddenly turn up somewhere, then that would be a literary discovery of huge importance.

As long as people keep reading his work and performing his plays, each new generation will find something that appeals to them or challenges them.

You have a choice – choose wisely

Some students don't like studying Shakespeare because they don't see the relevance of 400-year-old poetry and plays. Some students don't like studying Shakespeare because it can be very difficult to understand his writing. Some students are resigned to studying Shakespeare because their schools say it's good for them, like eating green vegetables. That's just what we do in English at secondary school – we study Shakespeare. We might as well get on with it, but when we're finished, there is no way I'll ever look at another word he wrote.

There's no law that says you have to like Shakespeare. But you can't avoid him. His impact on culture and the English language is immense, profound and continuing. So when you're studying one of his plays or poems, whether you love it or hate it, you are (as much as I hate having to write this) doing something that is good for you. Shakespeare casts a long shadow. But from over 400 years in the past he holds up a mirror in which our psychology, our emotions and our sense of right and wrong are reflected. Anyone who has been in love, or hated someone, or suffered injustice, or grieved over a piercing loss, or won a great victory, or sunk to the depths of despair, will find their experiences reflected in the speech and thoughts of Shakespeare's characters.

Remember that, although you may not have much choice at school about whether or not you study him, you do have choices about how you respond to his plays and poetry. Through his characters and stories, we're not just confined to the classroom. We're investigating people, the world and our place in it.

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7

Skill builder

Response to literature – oral presentation

To make a successful presentation, you will need to:

- analyse and evaluate how text structures can be manipulated for effect and used in innovative ways by different authors
- explain how the choice of language features, imagery and vocabulary contribute to an author's individual style
- evaluate and integrate ideas and information from texts to form your own interpretations
- develop and justify your own interpretations of texts
- understand how to use a variety of language features to create different levels of meaning
- show how the selection of language features can achieve precision and stylistic effect
- explain different viewpoints, attitudes and perspectives through the development of logical arguments
- create a text that responds to issues, and interprets and integrates ideas from other texts
- create text that articulates complex ideas
- demonstrate understanding of grammar
- vary your vocabulary choices for impact.

Your task is to choose one of Shakespeare's plays and make a presentation to the rest of your class about it.

Your prompt is:
Shakespeare is relevant today (refer in detail to one of Shakespeare's plays)
OR
Shakespeare is not relevant today (refer in detail to one of Shakespeare's plays)

- It could be a play you have studied as a class, or you could choose one that you haven't studied.
- Your presentation must present a reasoned point of view in response to your chosen prompt.
- Your teacher will determine the duration of the presentation.

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Follow these steps:

1. **Select one Shakespeare text** as your main source.
2. Develop a list of arguments **both For and Against** the prompt, no matter which prompt you are supporting.
3. Think carefully about your research to **reach your own informed point of view.**
4. **State** your point of view clearly in a **main contention** – this makes clear what you are arguing for or against.
5. Decide on your **strongest points,** your **reasons** and your **main arguments.**
6. Collect **support for your points.** This can include evidence, reasons, facts, examples and causes with explanations.
7. Think about how an opponent could attack your points and how you could **counter** (rebut) some of these to make your case more convincing.
8. Plan for how you will **rebut** viewpoints opposed to your contention.
9. Use **logically constructed arguments** so that the audience can see the reasoning, the facts and the evidence behind the point of view.

Presentation checklist

☐ **Shakespeare play**
Have you seen a production of the play that you intend to be your main source?

☐ **Plan and write your first draft of your presentation**.
Review and organise your material, like an essay, into three sections as follows:

1. **The introduction –** introduces the prompt and clearly expresses your main contention. It gives your viewpoint on the prompt. Open with an attention-grabbing statement or question. Your audience should be thinking, 'What next…?' *do not* open with a dull, non-descript phrase such as 'Um, so like, here's like what I'm going to be talking about today, like, you know, whatever …'
2. **The body** – contains 3–5 points. Each point advances the case that you are arguing. Each point has:
   - a topic sentence clearly expressing the main idea for that section; usually the first sentence
   - evidence (cite examples/quotes from your chosen Shakespeare text or something that was written or said *about* the text)
   - explanations and reasons that develop and support the idea in the topic sentence
   - one rebuttal point to show the weaknesses of opposing viewpoints.

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3. **The conclusion** – should be convincing. Justify your position again and emphasise your main contention.

☐ **Edit and re-write**
Read it through or read it to someone. How does it sound? Were they persuaded to share your point of view?
Is your argument reasoned and logical? How do you know this?
Can you improve your persuasive language? What techniques have you used? Do they work? Edit to strengthen your presentation.
Edit for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
Write a final version.

☐ **Cue cards**
Write out cue cards with main points only.

☐ **Inclusion of visual aids/audio/written material to enhance the presentation**
Have you considered using visual/audio or written aids to strengthen your presentation?
At what stage in your presentation will you present these to the audience?

☐ **Hard copy of your presentation ready to submit to your teacher**

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Your turn

Shakespeare film outline and pitch to the class

pitch to attempt to sell or win approval for; promote; advertise: to pitch a new film or play to the producers

storyboard illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of visualising how a film will look

1. In a group of four, you will become a production team developing ideas for a new film version of a Shakespeare play.
2. You will need to present an outline (a synopsis) of the film as you envision it. This must be written in the present tense. It can be read out to the class but must be submitted to your teacher.
3. In addition, your group will present your ideas to your class in a **pitch**, as though your classmates were potential investors in the film.
4. The pitch should include:
   - Setting (time and place)
   - Locations
   - Who will direct it?
   - Who will write the adaptation of the play?
   - Casting – which actors do you intend to cast in which roles?
   - Any changes you propose making to the play for your film version
   - Remember to JUSTIFY each of your choices.
5. Explain what sort of audience your film is aimed at and in what ways it will appeal to them.
6. You could prepare a short scene to act out to demonstrate ideas you have for the script or characters.
7. You could prepare a **storyboard** for a scene to show the class.
8. Your pitch could include concept artwork for:
   - characters
   - costumes
   - makeup
   - locations
   - sets
   - advertising and promotional material
   - a trailer for the film
   - merchandise.
9. Think about what the film could sound like. You could include ideas for:
   - music
   - sound design
   - sound effects ideas.

The better prepared the pitch, the more money your backers will invest. This is a chance for you to remake Shakespeare in your own image.

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Read and view more

Film
Muse of Fire (2013), a documentary road movie made by two English actors, Dan Poole and Giles Terera. The film features interviews with some of the most famous actors and directors in the world, who speak about their experiences of performing Shakespeare on stage and screen.

Books
Many famous, and not-so-famous, books have been named after lines of Shakespeare:

- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (*The Tempest*)
- *Something Wicked this Way Comes* by Ray Bradbury (*Macbeth*)

Shakespeare has had an enormous influence on English poetry, and has been paid tribute by:

- his fellow Elizabethan Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare and What He Hath Left Us'
- the Restoration poet John Milton in 'On Shakespeare'
- in the critical writings of the Romantic poets John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in particular *Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare & Some Other Old Poets & Dramatists* by Coleridge.

He has been used as a great authority on the English language. The first modern English dictionary, *A Dictionary of the English Language* edited by Samuel Johnson, used Shakespeare more than any other author as evidence for the meaning of words.

- David Crystal has also written an excellent book on Shakespeare's language called *Think On My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*

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Glossary

A

alliteration the repetition of consonant sounds in words that are close together

antagonist the adversary of the hero or protagonist of a drama or other literary work

aside a part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the audience

assonance the repetition of vowel sounds in words that are near each other

B

blank verse a poem written in unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter that are more like normal speech patterns than a strict poetic form, i.e. a regular metre but no rhyme

C

catechism a question-and-answer ritual or technique

chorus the group of actors (sometimes a single actor) that performed the chorus and served as major participants in, commentators on, or as a supplement to the main action of the drama

conflict discord of action, feeling, or effect; antagonism or opposition, as of interests or principles: a conflict of ideas

context the parts of a piece of writing, speech, and the like that precede and follow a word or passage and contribute to its full meaning

conventions behaviours that society considers to be acceptable or polite

couplet two lines of poetry that may or may not rhyme

D

director the person responsible for the interpretive aspects of a stage, a film, or a television production; who supervises the integration of elements, such as acting, staging, and lighting, required to realise the writer's conception

dramatic irony a narrative device in which the audience knows more than the characters do

E

enjambment the continuation of a sentence across lines in a poem without a pause

equivocation to evade or conceal the truth

exposition a comprehensive description and explanation of background information, explained through dialogue

extenuate to make less of something by way of explanation in order to reduce guilt. 'Extenuating circumstances' are circumstances that explain why someone did something that appeared wrong.

F

farce a light, broadly humorous play in which the plot depends upon a skilfully exploited (improbable) situation rather than upon the development of character

foil a secondary character who emphasises the traits of a main character

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G

genre a type of text or category of texts that uses particular conventions

I

iambic pentameter the rhythm of the words in a line of poetry

imagery a poetic technique used to shape visual ideas and create pictures in our heads when we read; refers to all the elements of a poem that inspire the senses, not only visual; metaphors, similes and personification all help to create imagery

L

line break the end of a line of poetry, when the reader turns to the start of the next line. Line breaks play an important role in a poem's meaning and how the reader reads that poem; poets choose to make the lines of a poem a certain length, e.g. so that they rhyme

lyric poetry a poem that expresses emotions; the most popular form of lyric poetry is the sonnet – other forms include ballads and villanelles

M

masque an elaborate form of entertainment, staged for royalty and nobility, involving acting, music, singing and dancing

metaphor a phrase where one thing is described in terms of something else

meter the particular rhythm that the words establish in each line; the way we measure the sound patterns of a poem. The most common measurement for Western poetry is iambic pentameter

muse often described as the artist's inspiration or drive; the inspiration to action

O

onomatopoeia the formation and use of words and phrases that sound like the item they are describing, or that sound like they look, e.g. *fizz*, *splash*, *pop* and *hiss*

P

pamphleteer a writer of pamphlets or small books containing information or opinions that may be controversial

paradox a situation, person or thing that should be impossible because it contradicts itself, yet somehow it's real

pathos the quality or power in an actual life experience or in literature, music, speech, or other forms of expression, of evoking a feeling of pity or compassion or a feeling of sympathy

personification a type of metaphor that gives human characteristics or features to something that is not human

pitch to attempt to sell or win approval for; promote; advertise: to pitch a new film or play to the producers

primate the principal or highest ranked person or thing in its category

Privy Council a powerful group of advisers to English kings and queens

prologue an introductory scene in which a narrator summarises the main action of the work

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prose written or spoken language in its ordinary form

protagonist the main or central character who drives the story forward

Q

quatrain a four-line stanza that usually rhymes

R

realism in theatre, a movement towards depicting the events of real life

rhetoric the study of using persuasive speaking or writing to argue a point of view

rhyme the correspondence of sounds between words or word endings, especially at the end of a line of poetry

rhyming couplet two successive lines of poetry that rhyme with each other

rhyming scheme the ordered patterns of rhymes at the end of lines in a poem

S

satire a novel, a play, an entertainment in which topical issues, folly, vice or evil are held up to scorn by means of ridicule, sarcasm and irony

simile to compare one thing with another using *like* or *as*

sonnet a poem, properly expressive of a single, complete thought, idea, or sentiment, of fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameter

stage directions the annotations in a playscript or playtext that can tell the actor how to move with, respond to or deliver lines of dialogue; stage directions may also describe a scene, a setting or a location

stanza a grouping of lines within a poem, usually separated by a space

storyboard illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of visualising how a film will look

subversive to attempt to undermine the moral principles of (a person, etc.); corrupt

symbol something that represents or suggests something else; symbols often take the form of words, visual images or gestures that are used to convey ideas

T

tableaux living photographs created by actors positioning themselves in a space and holding motionless long enough to establish an atmosphere, a scene or even a whole story

tension mental or emotional strain; intense, suppressed suspense, anxiety or excitement

V

volta a 'turn', usually indicating a change in mood or direction in a sonnet; often occurs around the ninth line, although it can come earlier or later

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