



SHAKESPEARE *for Students*[™]

Key Passages in Shakespeare's Plays

Grades 7-12

Program Overview

Discover some of Shakespeare's most memorable passages from some of his most often-read plays. Why do they leave such a lasting impression? How are we able to connect to them today? Intense exchanges, moving speeches, revealing dialogues and thoughtful soliloquies are discussed from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *As You Like It*. Also included is an overview of the different types of plays that make up Shakespeare's body of work — tragedies, comedies, histories and romances.

Shakespeare for Students is designed as a series of brief 3-5 minute clips that highlight specific topics using thoughtful discussions, clear explanations, carefully chosen examples and the reading of passages. Clips can be viewed individually or in groups. Teachers can also choose to show the clips in an order that works for them and their curriculum.

Vocabulary

tragedies — Intense plays by Shakespeare that hold a magnifying glass to characters struggling with human existence and always end with main characters dying.

comedies — Lighter and more hopeful plays by Shakespeare that are not as intensely focused on one character as many of the tragedies are. These plays usually hinge upon a dilemma that causes chaos but is resolved before disaster can strike.

histories — Plays by Shakespeare that cast a light on England's past. Each play highlights the political challenges confronted by an English king whose name gives the play its title.

romances — Plays by Shakespeare with surreal settings and plots. These plays contain elements of adventure and often feature the fantastic, such as the spirits, magic and monsters of *The Tempest*.

soliloquy — A speech in which the speaker is alone on the stage with his or her private thoughts. These speeches can reveal what that character is really thinking or struggling with.

An Introduction to Shakespeare's Plays

Historically, Shakespeare's plays have been divided into three main categories — tragedies, comedies and histories. More recently, the plays were reorganized to include a category called romances. While not every play fits neatly into just one category, each category has its own distinct characteristics. Within his plays, Shakespeare was especially skilled at his use of the soliloquy.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Shakespeare might never have taken his place as the greatest writer in the English language if the *First Folio* had not been published in 1623, seven years after his death.

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The plays of the *First Folio* have been intensely studied, discussed, debated and performed. Some performances remain true to the text and others are adaptations. In fact, some tragedies were once thought to be more enjoyable to an audience if "happy endings" were added. Thomas Bowdler is remembered for publishing *The Family Shakespeare* in the early 19th century. This was an edition of Shakespeare's plays that omitted content that was considered offensive or inappropriate for children. Visit books.google.com/books?id=ZC4U914O_F4C to see a copy of this text. Select a passage and look at it alongside another edition. How do they compare? Do you agree with the efforts to "bowdlerize" Shakespeare's work? Explain.

- In his history plays, Shakespeare mixed fact with fiction to suit his dramatic needs by keeping the basic story intact while taking other liberties, such as embellishing details or creating new characters. Select a history play to investigate. Read and study the play and then compare it to the actual people and events upon which the play is based.

"All the world's a stage..."

(Passage from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*)

As You Like It (2.7.146-173). A helpful key to understanding this famous speech is the metaphor established in the first five lines, where human life is compared to a play. This play has seven acts, implying that a person goes through seven "ages" in his or her lifetime: infant, schoolboy, lover and so on. Whether you agree with this metaphor or not, this passage remains an intriguing and insightful distillation of the human life cycle.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Visit internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/life/lifesubj+1.html to listen to a dramatic reading of this passage. Then, have students pretend they are Shakespeare's players and plan their own performance of this popular passage.
- Each of the seven "ages" is very distinct with a unique set of characteristics. Have students draw parallels between the different stages and characters from Shakespeare's plays. For example, does Romeo fit the description of the "lover"? Explain.
- Visit www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=1333 to take in the stunning Seven Ages of Man stained glass window located in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. Study each of the seven window panels up-close and then invite students to create their own artistic interpretations of this famous speech (e.g., an illustrated booklet, a blueprint for an updated stained glass window, a response poem, etc).

"Double, double toil and trouble..."

(Dialogue from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*)

Macbeth (4.1.1-148). Early in *Macbeth*, three witches predict the future for the title character. In Act 4, Scene 1, Macbeth meets the witches once again. As they dance around their cauldron, singing of "toil and trouble," you must stop to wonder, who are these witches? And what is their intent for Macbeth? Through a series of apparitions, Macbeth learns of his future.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Act 4, Scene 1 has always stirred the imagination of artists inspired by the presence of the mysterious witches (also known as the Weird Sisters), their strange concoction of ingredients and the images they conjure for Macbeth. Visit www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=392 to see work by John Gregory and check out www.folger.edu/Content/Discover-Shakespeare/ShakespeareWorks/The-Plays/imgdtl.cfm?imageid=100&cid=919 for a piece by Henry Fuseli. Have students revisit this scene of the play to look for passages of text that inspire them and invite them to create their own works of art. Display the work gallery-style with the passages of text that inspired the piece on a note card next to each one.

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- Introduce students to some of the superstitions that surround *Macbeth* in the theater world — the refusal by some to refer to the play by its actual title, the belief that the spells and charms of the witches are real, and the devastation that may come to the people and theaters involved in productions of the play. Visit www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/teachers/superstition.html to learn more about *Macbeth* superstitions. Then, have students discuss their own feelings about superstitions. Are superstitions something they heed or ignore?

“Friends, Romans, countrymen...” (Speech from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*)

Julius Caesar (3.2.82-117). Following Brutus’s speech to the Roman people defending his actions, Mark Antony delivers a powerful eulogy skillfully undermining Brutus’s position. Antony’s speech is full of emotional appeal, veiled intent and repetition, which effectively sway the crowd.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- It has been said that Shakespeare gave Brutus the best speech he ever wrote and then gave Antony and even better one. Do you agree? Compare the two speeches given by Brutus and Mark Antony in Act 3, Scene 2. How do they appeal to the people of Rome? Are there any similarities? Then, visit www.rsc.org.uk/explore/plays/caesar.htm to view a dramatic performance of each speech. Have students debate which speech is more compelling or persuasive.
- Mark Antony’s speech is moving because of what he says and how he says it. Consider how Antony closes his speech. He says, “And I must pause till it come back to me” (3.2.117). He sets himself up for a dramatic pause, which allows for his words and emotions to sink in with the crowd. After that, the stage directions instruct the actor playing Antony to weep. Challenge students to give their own dramatic readings of this speech. Have them study the language and think about what they can do to breathe emotion and passion into it. How can they be dramatic but believable?

Iago Plants Doubt in Othello’s Mind (Dialogue from Shakespeare’s *Othello*)

Othello (3.3.100-298). In Act 3, Scene 3 of *Othello*, Shakespeare shows us why the character of Iago is considered one of the most dastardly villains of all time. Iago masterfully uses subtle innuendo to plant seeds of doubt in Othello’s mind about the relationship between his wife Desdemona and Michael Cassio.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- How is Iago able to say so much by revealing so little? Discuss how manipulation and jealousy can drive people to false conclusions.
- It is never fully clear why Iago hates Othello so much that he would want to bring Othello down at the expense of others. However, we do know that Iago is passed over on a military promotion. In addition, he briefly mentions a vague, unfounded suspicion that Othello may have seduced his wife. Still, are these reasons enough motive for him to try to falsely convince Othello that his wife has been unfaithful? Explain.

Romeo and Juliet Meet (Dialogue from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*)

Romeo and Juliet (1.5.104-122). When Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time at a masquerade ball hosted by the Capulet family, it is more than love at first sight. It is love at first sonnet! In their very first exchange, they compose a beautiful 14-line sonnet that concludes with their first kiss. They begin a second sonnet but that is interrupted before they can finish it. The context, structure and symbolism of this passage reveal a lot about the two young lovers and the nature of their feelings for each other.

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Discussion Questions & Activities

- Staging this scene can be challenging, since Romeo and Juliet fall in love while masked. Some productions of this play have eliminated the masks. In others, Romeo may lift his mask when he spots Juliet. Discuss with students how they would stage this scene. Then, have them work in small groups to reenact it.
- The only other times a sonnet is used in this play are in the Prologue and in the opening chorus of Act 2. Have students read these sonnets and then compare them to the one Romeo and Juliet compose together during their first meeting. Is there a relationship between these sonnets?
- The last thing Juliet says to Romeo before the Nurse interrupts them is, “You kiss by th’ book” (1.5.122). How should this be interpreted? Remember, the two kisses they share are Juliet’s first. Is Juliet expressing this line with a look of wonder, implying that Romeo is an incredible kisser? Or, is Juliet expressing this line with a bit of sarcasm, implying that Romeo’s kisses lack originality?

“To be or not to be...” (Soliloquy from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*)

Hamlet (3.1.64-98). Of all the memorable passages written by Shakespeare, perhaps none is as famous as the soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, where the title character openly questions his own existence. This soliloquy is not only a window into Hamlet’s soul but is also a provocative examination of questions concerning life and death.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Throughout this soliloquy, Hamlet is consumed by thoughts of death. But why? Is it death that he is consumed with? Or are his words symbolic of something else, such as the difference between action and inaction? Or is he just getting lost in his thoughts?
- A soliloquy is an introspective speech delivered when the speaker is alone on stage. This soliloquy is one of several that Hamlet gives throughout the course of the play. While it is true that Hamlet is quite a thinker, it is hard to take anything in this play at face value, as appearances are frequently deceptive. Is Hamlet deceiving the audience during his soliloquies? Split the class into groups and assign each group a soliloquy by Hamlet. Have them read the soliloquy and examine the language and the context around it. Which soliloquies seem genuine? Which are questionable?

Suggested Resources

- www.folger.edu/
The Folger Shakespeare Library web site provides detailed information on the life and works of William Shakespeare. Visit the “Teach and Learn” section for a variety of resources that can be used with a number of Shakespeare’s plays.
- www.bardweb.net/index.html
The Shakespeare Resource Center provides a collection of information and links to aid in understanding Shakespeare and his works. Visit the section on “Shakespeare’s Language” to see an analysis of selected readings.
- www.rsc.org.uk/explore/
This site, by the Royal Shakespeare Company, is a great resource for both teachers and students on the performance of Shakespeare’s plays. Synopses, performance histories, interviews, picture galleries and video clips are included.
- Dobson, Michael & Stanley Wells. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY; 2009.
- Dunton-Downing, Leslie & Alan Riding. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. DK Publishing, New York, NY; 2004.
- Silverbush, Rhona & Sami Plotkin. *Speak the Speech! Shakespeare’s Monologues Illuminated*. Faber and Faber, New York, NY; 2002.

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Selected Works Featured in this Show

- Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 2004.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1992.
- Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1992.
- Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1993.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1992.
- Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1993.
- Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Folger Shakespeare Library. Washington Square Press, New York, NY; 1992.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

The Characters of Shakespeare

The Language of Shakespeare

Key Passages in Shakespeare's Plays

