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# Teacher's Guide

## What is *Shakespeare Persona*?

Are you looking for another way to spark students' interest while increasing their understanding of Shakespeare? *Shakespeare Persona* provides an alternative approach, different from, but not excluding, traditional literary analysis. It is designed to address the critical issues of theme, character, plot, setting, and the conventions of Elizabethan drama, supplementing the materials you currently use.

*Shakespeare Persona* is an exciting new approach to teaching Shakespeare's plays that allows you to supplement your literature instruction with innovative writing activities. These activities evolve from memorable passages in Shakespeare's plays or from related material.

"Persona" is the Latin word for *mask*. Greek and Roman actors wore masks to represent particular roles. Since the Medieval period, however, rather than donning masks actors have assumed the personalities of the characters they are to portray, absorbing mannerisms of speech, movement, and dress to create the illusion of character. The mask for modern actors is metaphoric, and invisible.

Just as actors assume roles, writers too may make use of different masks. In assuming an identity, writers use the ideas and language of imagined characters, thereby allowing themselves access to a broader range of expression. Writers too become performers who must understand the roles they are portraying. Because *Shakespeare Persona* requires student writers to assume the personalities of various characters from Shakespeare's plays, the assignments stimulate deeper insight into drama, encouraging fuller understanding of all elements of a play.

*Shakespeare Persona* is a collection of 46 reproducible assignment sheets, with a total of 230 separate writing assignments. Each sheet focuses on a significant passage from one of eleven of Shakespeare's plays or from pertinent background material. The assignments require students to adopt various roles, using these personas to create different kinds of writing. The cited passage on each sheet serves as the basis for a series of five writing assignments, progressing in complexity.

One of the most important aspects of *Shakespeare Persona* is its reliance on the reading/writing relationship. Each assignment sheet draws attention to key passages that emphasize theme, character, plot, and setting. Examining these elements strengthens critical thinking skills as students gain insight about the play. At the core of *Shakespeare Persona* is the belief that reading and writing are interdependent. Because a relationship exists between students' understanding of the play and their ability to write effectively about the play, the students' simultaneous involvement in reading and writing improves their achievement in both areas.

Since students must relate the cited passages to the rest of the play, using *Shakespeare Persona* encourages close reading and analysis. Because students are enthusiastically engaged in the writing assignments, they return again and again to the text, increasing their understanding of the plays.

Using a persona gives students the confidence and security to comment about the plays without risking criticism of their own interpretations, which they often feel may be less valid than those of the experts. After all, daring to express a personal opinion about Shakespeare's works can be intimidating for even advanced students. *Shakespeare Persona* offers students a legitimate voice other than their own by using the concept of the mask. Providing this voice—the persona—is especially valuable for students insecure with their own voices. For more confident students, the persona encourages exploration of new perspectives.

## Biography of Shakespeare · 1 ·

**“A stage where every man must play a part.”**

*The Merchant of Venice* I.i.78

1594. DECEMBER 26 and 27. Payment for performances at Court was made to “William Kempe, William Shakespeare, & Richard Burbage, seruantes to the Lord Chamberleyne.” This is the first record which definitely names Shakespeare as a member of the company. Subsequent payments for court performances were made to John Heminges, who seems to have acted as treasurer for the company.

1603. MAY 19. Queen Elizabeth died on March 24. The new King, James I, took over the Lord Chamberlain’s players as the King’s Men. A license was accordingly issued to “our Seruantes Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustyne Phillippes, Iohn Heninges, Henrie Condell, William Sly, Robert Armyne, Richard Cowly, and the rest of theire Assosiates freely to vse and exercise the Arte and faculty of playing Comedies, Tragedies, histories, Enterludes, moralls, pastoralls, Stageplaies

and Suche others like as theie haue already studied or hereafter shall vse or studie aswell for the recreation of our louinge Subjectes as for our Solace and pleasure when wee shall thincke good to see them duringe our pleasure.”

During this year was acted Jonson’s *Sejanus*. In the collected edition of 1616, Jonson stated that the principal tragedians were:

Ric. Burbadge.	Will. Shake-Speare.
Aug. Philips.	Ioh. Hemings.
Will. Sly.	Hen. Condell.
Ioh. Lowin.	Alex. Cooke.

During this year was printed a garbled and pirated version of *Hamlet* entitled: *The Tragical Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke By William Shake-speare. As it hath been diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elsewhere.*

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- Persona **1** Assume the persona of a publicity agent. You write the announcement of the Christmas court performance by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, noting the appearance of young actor and playwright, William Shakespeare.
- Persona **2** As the Lord Chamberlain himself, you are the patron of the actors’ group the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Write a letter congratulating them on their performance. Also remind them of the political and social benefits of appearing at court, while urging them to consider the financial implications of their productions. Court performances are very costly; the Chamberlain’s Men simply must consider the cost of the production when they choose plays for court performances.
- Persona **3** As Queen Elizabeth I, write a letter to the company of players, the Chamberlain’s Men, who so generously entertained you at Christmas. Compliment them for their performance. Mention a specific play and the parts you particularly enjoyed.
- Persona **4** As William Shakespeare, writing your memoirs after many years as a successful actor, playwright, and businessman, write about your strategy of including elements in your plays that flatter the reigning monarchs—Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. Comment on the success of your attempts.
- Persona **5** Assume the role of King James I. When King James ascended the throne in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men became the King’s Men. Compose a dialogue between yourself and the Lord Chamberlain in which you tell him what you want in the proclamation announcing the naming of the King’s Men. Mention the political, moral, and entertainment value of the plays for your subjects.