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# Introduction

Although 400 years have passed since William Shakespeare wrote his plays, they are alive and well in the world of theatre and film today and loved by millions of people. This unit is designed for the busy English teacher who wants to share the richness of Shakespeare's work with students and relate that work to the world in which he lived, as well as the world of today. It contains activities across the curriculum to be used by the individual teacher or shared in team teaching with instructors of other disciplines around the basic theme of Shakespeare and his works.

This unit is filled with a wide variety of lesson ideas and reproducible pages designed for use with high school students of all ages. The core of the unit consists of three plays written by Shakespeare—one comedy, one history, and one tragedy—and several of his sonnets, as well as other poetry and writings, knowledge of which was considered to be the hallmark of an educated person during the Elizabethan period when Shakespeare was writing and producing his plays. Lessons which cross curriculum boundaries are provided to widen the students' grasp of life as it was for real people in Shakespeare's time, relating it to life today.

The plays have been carefully chosen for their current appropriateness of theme and content for adolescent students; they include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a silly, romantic comedy with likeable characters and an evil villain. *Romeo and Juliet*, the world's most famous love story, is about two teenaged lovers who die tragically because of misunderstanding and miscommunication. *Richard III* is based on the story of a diabolically calculating prince who lies, manipulates, and kills his way to the throne of England. These plays contain some of Shakespeare's most beautiful poetry and most dramatic moments, and they illustrate his ability to reveal the souls of his characters to the audience through words and actions.

## Why Interdisciplinary Teaching?

The world in which today's students live is rapidly changing, very diverse, and full of many challenging things for them to learn in a short time. Because of the complexity of modern life and the many distractions provided by the media and social pressures, many students have not acquired the necessary background to totally comprehend all that they read; nor have they learned how to consciously relate what they already know to what they are expected to learn.

Reading is a dynamic process which involves more than just looking at the printed page and taking meaning from it. The reader also puts meaning into what he or she reads while simultaneously taking meaning from it. What the reader already knows goes into the reading, so that there is a constant give-and-take between the reader and the material being read.

Interdisciplinary teaching provides a way to supply the missing links in the student's fund of knowledge, so that the student will be able to better comprehend what he or she reads. It also provides a format for helping the student to acquire new information which is relevant to what is being studied, as well as to what has already been learned.

Interdisciplinary teaching is a way of helping students make connections between what has been and what is and of helping them to see the connections among people, places, events, and ideas. In this way, interdisciplinary teaching helps students achieve a higher degree of mastery of a piece of literature than they otherwise would be able to do.

# Introduction *(cont.)*

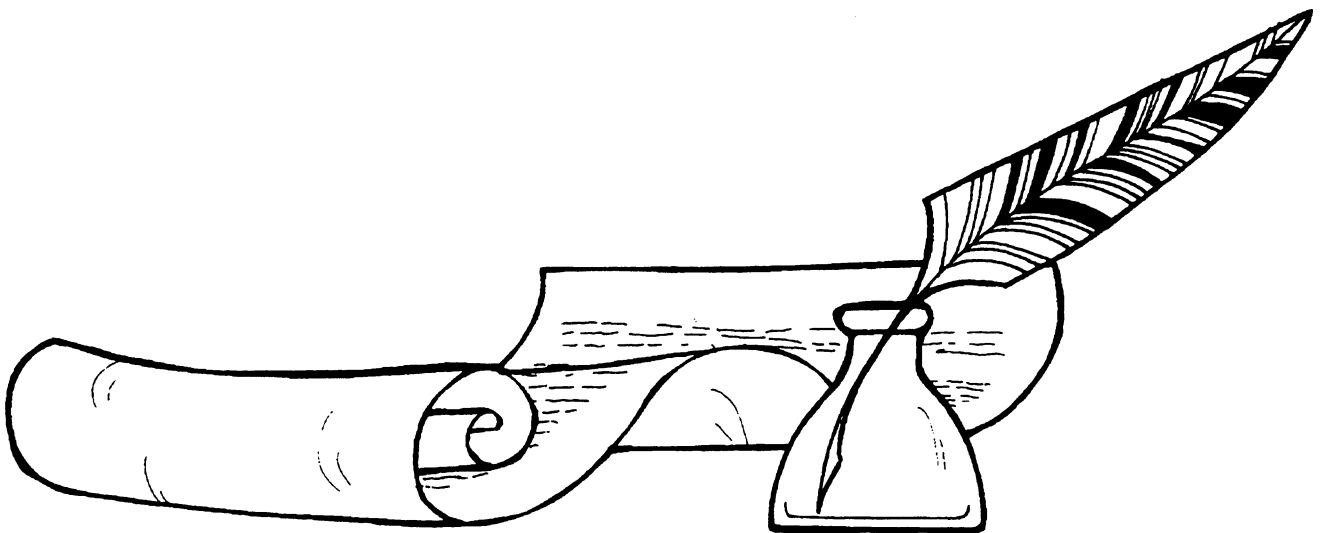
## *Why Shakespeare?*

For 400 years, Shakespeare has been considered the greatest dramatist and poet in the English-speaking world. His plays are produced thousands of times each year in theatres all over the world, and audiences today are as enthralled as the ones who first attended them in London. His plays are filled with action, intrigue, mystery, rollicking humor, and heart-wrenching tragedy, sometimes all within the bounds of the same play. His plays are timeless.

The characters in Shakespeare's plays are complete in all varieties of human experience. Some of them are good people who make bad choices. Some are silly people who do not know they are silly. A few of them are monsters. Some are truly tragic people, good but with flaws in character which lead them to destruction. Some are lovers embracing life with a passion, and others are losers who spend their lives in anger and hate. They represent all the varieties of personality, motivation, and character which exist in humankind.

Shakespeare was a master of our complex English language, and he filled his plays with poetry and prose in a way unequalled by any other writer. He wrote with an incredible vocabulary of over 29,000 words, which is astounding when one considers that the King James Version of the Bible uses slightly over 3,000. Many of those words are used in sophisticated puns and wordplay, yet he wrote for the commoner, as well as for the educated. The language of Shakespeare is rich beyond that of any other writer.

When you communicate a love of Shakespeare to your students, you give them a gift they can enjoy the rest of their lives, a gift which will empower them to see the world in all its manifestations. And when you teach cooperatively with teachers of other disciplines around a common theme, you empower students by showing them how to make connections between themselves and others—in the past and in the present.



**To keep this resource intact so it can be used year after year, you may wish to punch holes in the pages and store them in a three-ring binder.**