
Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
THE PROLOGUE	6
ACT ONE	9
SUPERNATURAL SHAKESPEARE	
THE UNEXPLAINED AND THE MYSTERIOUS	10
GHOSTS, FAIRIES, AND SOOTHSAYERS	11
MYSTERIOUS QUOTATIONS	12
PREMONITIONS, FATE, AND STRANGE OCCURRENCES	
13	
CLARENCE'S DREAM	15
WRITTEN IN THE STARS	17
THE "WEIRD SISTERS"	18
WRITING THE SCENERY	25
ACT TWO	27
CRIMES AND CRIMINALS	
MURDER, MAYHEM, AND REVENGE	28
THE REVENGE STORY	29
MORAL DILEMMAS	31
FROM THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	33
FROM MEASURE FOR MEASURE	46
ACT THREE	47
WOMEN OF WORDS	
CHALLENGING CONVENTION	48
FROM ROMEO AND JULIET	49
FROM ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	53
FROM MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	59
THE EPILOGUE	64



Introduction

Recently, there has been renewed interest in introducing the works of Shakespeare to the general public. Film directors and actors from Britain, the United States, and Australia have been jumping on the Bard's bandwagon to re-package, re-interpret, re-shape, and re-invent a broad range of Shakespeare's works for a brand new audience: young people. If Shakespeare is working on the screen, it's up to us to make it work in the classroom.

At school, many of us can recall slogging through a seemingly impenetrable Shakespearean play taught by an uninspired teacher. If we were lucky, we might have come across a teacher who had a lively and enthusiastic approach to the Bard's work that captured our imaginations and laid the foundations for a love affair with Shakespeare's plays. If we were unlucky, we came out of school thinking Shakespeare was a waste of time, irrelevant, and/or too difficult.

Students shouldn't have to have a bad experience when they work with Shakespearean texts. The onus is on you, the teacher, to lay the foundations for that love affair. It's easy to teach Shakespeare badly: just hand out copies of a play and start reading. It's not so easy to teach it well. To teach Shakespeare well takes time for planning. Time is in short supply these days in schools—which is why *Getting to Know Shakespeare* can be a valuable resource.

This book examines a broad range of plays across three high-interest areas:

- The Supernatural
- Crimes and Criminals
- Women in Shakespeare

This book provides interesting and innovative approaches to working with snippets of text and will give you a good springboard from which to launch any in-depth work on specific plays that you might be contemplating. If you are working with younger students, see *Getting to Know Shakespeare* as providing them with a taste of joys to come. If you are working with older students, you will probably find material here that will link into whatever study you are planning; and it will also alert you to some new approaches to dealing with the texts.



The Prologue

To be, or not to be—that is the question.

Get thee to a nunnery.

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.

A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

When shall we three meet again? In thunder,
lightning, or in rain?

Out, damned spot, out I say!

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten
this little hand.

Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,
thou lily-livered boy!

All the world's a stage and all the men and
women merely players.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life.

FIND OUT

• These quotations are some of Shakespeare's most famous lines. Do you know any others? See how many your class can come up with. Your teacher will help you out.

• How many of Shakespeare's play titles or characters do you know? Make another list.

• Prepare a wall display for your classroom during the time you are thinking about using this book, and fill it with things about Shakespeare. Put up the names of characters, plays, lines you like, memorable phrases, jokes, insults, unusual Shakespearean words, and other bits and pieces about the life and times of William Shakespeare. Make a brilliant display of your findings. Keep all this information up in your classroom. As you discover more about Shakespeare, add to your display. Check out film and play reviews, too.



The Unexplained and the Mysterious

Do you have an interest in “the unexplained”—mysteries that no one seems to have found an answer to, like the Bermuda Triangle, poltergeists, or unidentified flying objects? You can probably think of lots more, and you might have your own strange stories to tell.

The curiosity that people have about these kinds of phenomena is not a new thing. For centuries, across all cultures, people have been fascinated by the possibility that there are elements of the world that cannot be explained by science or rational thought. This was certainly true in Shakespeare’s day—although Shakespeare was living at a time when science and discovery were making great leaps forward (for example, the first ships left England for America, the “New World”). It was a time when many people still looked at the world through fearful and superstitious eyes.

The infant mortality rate was high, the “Black Death” was still abounding in Europe, and people’s lives were short and often brutal. Most people were very religious, with a strong belief in heaven and hell. They felt that they had little control over their own destiny; they placed themselves in the hands of fate and fortune. They looked to fortune tellers, sought out “signs,” followed astrology, and heeded stories about the supernatural to help them make sense of their lives. You might think that not much has changed!



As an Elizabethan, the unexplained, the mysterious, and the supernatural were certainly part of Shakespeare’s life. He was knowledgeable about and interested in the supernatural world and the ways in which that world had an effect on both ordinary people and people of rank, like kings and queens. It’s possible that he had his own superstitions and beliefs about the workings of the supernatural world that we would find surprising today.

ACT ONE



Supernatural Shakespeare

THINK

Do you know people who read the “stars” in magazines or who visit palm readers? Are you interested in that kind of thing yourself? If you are, do you know why?



ACT ONE

Ghosts, Fairies, and Soothsayers



Supernatural Shakespeare

GROUP WORK

In a small group, talk about what uses these sorts of characters might have in a play. You don't need to know anything about the plays, you just need to keep in mind that Shakespeare included them for a purpose. Why might some have names and others not?

Elements of the unexplained, the mysterious, and the supernatural certainly found their way into many of Shakespeare's plays. To give you an idea, here is a selection of plays and some of the supernatural characters that appear in them:

<i>Macbeth</i>	three witches and a ghost
<i>The Tempest</i>	a magician and a spirit
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	a fortune teller
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	fairies and spirits
<i>Hamlet</i>	a ghost
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	a fortune teller
<i>Richard III</i>	ghosts
<i>Henry VIII</i>	spirits
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	a prophetess
<i>Cymbeline</i>	a fortune teller

You'll notice that these characters mostly fall into three categories: ghosts, fairies, and fortune tellers (or soothsayers). The ghosts and fairies (and also the witches in this case) belong in the realm of the supernatural; the fortune tellers (and the magician) can be classified as people with extraordinary powers. Some are named in the plays, like Cobweb, Moth, Peasebottom, and Mustardseed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; other characters are not.

What kinds of thoughts did you have in your discussion group? You might have decided that the main purpose of the ghosts was to scare the living daylights out of the audience or the other characters in the play—and you wouldn't be far wrong! However, many of these supernatural and mysterious characters also serve to provide other-worldly warnings to the play's main characters, like the soothsayer in *Julius Caesar*.

Sometimes they alert characters to wrongs that have been committed and that need to be put right, like the ghost in *Hamlet*. At other times, they play tricks on characters to make them look foolish and teach them a lesson or to give the audience a laugh, like the fairies and spirits in

A Midsummer Night's Dream.



Mysterious Quotations

Below you will find some quotations that are related to the supernatural or mysterious from some of the plays we mentioned. In pairs, read them aloud and see if you can work out if what is said is:

—a warning to someone

—said by someone who feels afraid

—to make someone feel guilty

—to stir someone into revenge

—to make someone look silly

- Fetch me that flower, the herb I show'd thee once:

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
... Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes;
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.

(from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

- Hence, horrible shadow!

Unreal mockery, hence!

(from *Macbeth*)

- Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow!

Think how thou stabb'dst me in my prime of youth
At Tewkesbury; despair, therefore and die!

(from *Richard III*)

- If thou dost play with him at any game,

Thou are sure to lose;

(from *Antony and Cleopatra*)

- The serpent that did sting thy father's life

Now wears his crown.

(from *Hamlet*)

ACT ONE



Supernatural
Shakespeare



ACT OUT

Speak the lines in a way that helps convey the meaning of the words. So, for example, if you decide one of the examples is meant as a warning, you might speak the words slowly and deliberately.

