



Welcome to Animated Shakespeare!

The Language of Shakespeare

We think you'll find these teaching resources – created by professional theatre actors and educators – very valuable supports to your classroom explorations of Shakespeare. The following pages include lesson plans that can stand alone or be used to accompany our video series.

In each Module, you will have three or four Units that deepen students' understanding of various aspects of Shakespeare's work or a particular play. Each video is accompanied by several pages of in-class activities for teachers to prepare, as well as Class Handout sheets to reproduce for your students.

No matter which play you are studying, these activities can supplement your regular class work to enliven the text that has become so influential, not only in theatre, but in the common speech of Western society. Enjoy!


– *The team at KDOONS and WYRD Productions*


NOTE: In the following activities and handouts, you may see references to a few terms:

The First Folio: This is the common name for the collection of Shakespeare's plays, entitled 'Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies', published in 1623. This is the text favored by most professional actors, and the scenes used in the activities will come straight from the Folio. Many of the Folio plays, however, are not broken down into scenes, just five long acts. For ease of reference, therefore, we will include the standardized line numbers from modern editions of Shakespeare.

Puke Books: This term was not created by Shakespeare! We recommend each student have a small notepad – or "Puke Book" – in which she can do timed writing. Students are never forced to share this writing. They will be asked to read it over, highlight the phrase that resonates most strongly and, if they choose, share this tidbit with the class. 'Puking' allows students to personalize their experience of Shakespeare by reflecting on themes from the plays. In their Puke Books, they may discover connections between the stories and their own lives. Optional **Puke Topics** are suggested in an inset many of the Units for students' personal reflections.

MacHomer: The videos are performed by Rick Miller, creator of MacHomer (The Simpsons do Macbeth), a solo play that has been performed in 175 cities over 17 years. Prior knowledge of MacHomer is not a pre-requisite to using these videos, but the DVD and/or script are often used as additional teaching tools, and can be purchased as part of the full Outreach bundle at animatedshakespeare.com



Puke Topic 

Students are given a topic, usually a reflective question that they are to consider with pen in hand. We suggest 2 - 3 minutes for students who are new to timed writing, 5 - 10 minutes for a class who is comfortable with it. Their pens are to move constantly through the timed writing period, even if just to repeat 'blah blah blah', because this movement is preferable to both the inertia of thinking and the self-critique of editing. The stream of consciousness that is produced may be ugly – like puke – but it comes whether we like it or not. Students are never forced to share this personal writing. When time is up, everyone should read over his/her own words and underline the phrase that resonates most for him/her.



The Language of Shakespeare

Video Transcript

Shakespeare. The name strikes fear in the hearts of students all over the world. I have been to many, many high schools in many, many countries, and the question I ask first is: “Who here hates Shakespeare?” and inevitably a sea of student hands rises up, much to the dismay of the English teachers standing at the back. And then the next question I ask is: “Why?” and I always get the same 2 answers:

- “Because he’s boring”
- “Because I can’t understand the language”

And the reason he’s boring IS because you don’t understand the language. So it’s all about the language, really. And the first thing I want you to remember today is: ***Don’t worry about the language.***

Don’t worry about it. It wasn’t meant for you. It was meant for an audience of theatregoers at the Globe Theatre in London, England, 400 years ago. Shakespeare filled his plays with lots of topical stuff: historical references, political in-jokes, stuff that they ‘got’ but we just don’t ‘get’. So for example, when Shakespeare first describes Macbeth as “Bellona’s Bridegroom”, people back then might know that Bellona was an ancient Roman war goddess, and they might recognize that Shakespeare was trying to say he was a pretty intense guy. Nowadays, we hear “Bellona’s Bridegroom” and we go “Huh?”

Language changes; it evolves with time. And those references pleased people. Because that’s what Shakespeare was trying to do, please the audience of the time. He was a businessman. He was an entertainer. He was the pop culture of the time: so he wasn’t writing for posterity, he was writing for his dinner. So don’t worry about the language. Again, it wasn’t meant for you. It changes... it evolves.

400 years from now, a team of archeologists might uncover one of Jay Z’s song lyrics for “Show me what you got”:

“Words is slurring, engine purring
Mami frontin’ but I’m so determined
Shots of Patrón now she in the zone
I ain’t talking about the 2-3, Mami in the zone
like the homie 2-3, Jordan or James
Makes no difference
Boo I’m ballin’ the same”

“Huh?” “What?” It doesn’t matter. Don’t worry about the language, language changes. So don’t try and **understand every word** in Shakespeare’s text. Instead, let it wash over you, like music. T.S Eliot, the great poet, once said: ***“Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.”***

In other words, you can “get” Shakespeare, before you actually understand the words, just like music.

The Language of Shakespeare

Video Recap and Discussion Starter:

Shakespeare is difficult because:

- It's boring
- People don't understand the language

We don't understand the language because:

- Shakespeare wrote about topical subjects and current events of his own time (the 1600's)
- Shakespeare made historical and political references today's average person knows little about
- The English language has evolved and changed in the last 400 years
- Grammar and vocabulary have changed
- Shakespeare made up some of his own words

Shakespeare's audience consisted of:

- Theatregoers in the 1600's
- People of all levels of education and wealth

T. S. Eliot said of poetry that

"Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."

- This is a lot like music
- Let the poetry of Shakespeare wash over you like music

Like a song you will get the feeling of what it's about even before you read the lyrics



The Language of Shakespeare

Activity 1: Feeling the Language

Objective:

Getting the students used to feeling out and speaking the language.

“Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.”

- T.S. Eliot

Introduction:

The difficulty with reading Shakespeare is that it was meant to be performed, and spoken aloud. On the page it can all wash together, but when you find the emotion of the story, it helps the reading – and the meaning



Instructions:

Have students read out the following famous quotes from Shakespeare.

Ask the student to read it aloud once (with no direction from you).

Then give the italicized stage direction and ask the student to re-read the same quote, with the emotion.

Macbeth

ACT II, Sc. i, lines 34-40

MACBETH

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

This is an intense, almost crazy speech. Macbeth is having a vision of King Duncan sleeps in the next room, Macbeth actually thinks he sees a dagger, leading him to the room where the King sleeps.



Macbeth

ACT IV, Sc. i, lines 10-21

ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

SECOND WITCH

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.



This is a supernatural scene. The characters are three witches around a bubbling cauldron. They are casting a spell, as they throw disgusting ingredients into the cauldron.

Note: You can try this 3 times:

- 1) With one student reading the whole excerpt
- 2) With one student as SECOND WITCH, joined by 2 other students for ALL
- 3) Try this again a third time, with 3 students as the 3 witches, all reading the lines at the same time – the musical rhythm of the spell actually helps this.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

ACT III, Sc. ii, lines 282-298

HERMIA

O me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!
You thief of love! what, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?

HELENA

Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA

Puppet? why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures; she hath urged her height;
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem;
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak; How low am I?
I am not yet so low but that my nails can reach unto thine eyes!

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy, not a tragedy.

It's about a love potion gone crazy. This scene is a funny fight between two girls. Hermia and Helena are best friends. Hermia's boyfriend is under the spell of the love potion, and is chasing her friend Helena. Hermia accuses Helena of stealing her boyfriend. Helena is taller, and responds by insulting Hermia for being short, her "stature". It ends with Hermia threatening to scratch Helena's eyes out!



The Language of Shakespeare

Activity 2: Shakespearean Insults

Objective:

To have fun with Shakespeare's words by taking them out of the traditional classroom context (like a pillow fight with words!)

Introduction:

The words in the 3 columns (see Class Handout) come from Shakespeare's body of work. The first two columns list adjectives and the third lists nouns. By putting them together in various combinations, they provide some richly descriptive insults.

Note: Notice how many words in the second column end with 'headed', 'brained', 'minded', 'witted' or 'pated' (one's 'pate' is one's head.) It seems Shakespeare was preoccupied with intellect or 'wit', judging people to be sharp or dense, scattered, or maybe even crazy.

These insults also provide a great starting point for creating characters or for understanding Shakespearean characters. If you wanted to describe someone lazy, s/he might be a 'spongy, tardy-gaited barnacle.' If you wanted to play someone nasty, you could consider yourself a 'churlish, motley-minded death-token.'


Instructions:

Ask your students to work **with a partner**, selecting one word from each of the three columns and starting the insult with 'Thou'.


For example, "Thou mammering, milk-livered moldwarp!"

They go back and forth, trying out different combinations, and allowing their argument to grow. Perhaps it mounts in volume or perhaps it fades away in exhaustion. Perhaps the insulter is searching for the perfect insult or has been preparing herself all day to sling this zinger. Perhaps the insulted person is hurt by the accusation or is fueled to sling meanness right back at him. Since it cannot escalate into physical violence, how might this exchange of insults end?

Now that they've had a chance to try out a few insults, gather **in a circle** and send them from one person to another. This can go around the circle in order or get tossed from one person to anyone else across the circle. Be sure to make eye contact with the recipient and don't stop till everyone has had a chance to toss at least one doozy.



Puke Topic



Ask students to think of a time when they heard someone being insulted. Was the insult yelled across a crowded room? Was it growled in an angry whisper into a person's ear? Was it said with a laugh? Now think of a time when you yourself wanted to insult someone. How did you feel as you chose the ugly words to describe that person?



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Feeling the Language

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low am I?
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thine eyes!

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Shakespearean Insults

Thou...

Column A	Column B	Column C
artless	bat-fowling	baggage
bawdy	beef-witted	barnacle
beslubbering	beetle-headed	bladder
churlish	boil-brained	boar-pig
clouted	clapper-clawed	bugbear
craven	common-kissing	canker-blossom
currish	dismal-dreaming	clotpole
dankish	dizzy-eyed	coxcomb
dissembling	doghearted	codpiece
droning	elf-skinned	death-token
errant	fat-kidneyed	flap-dragon
fawning	fen-sucked	flax-wench
fobbing	flap-mouthed	foot-licker
gleeking	guts-gripping	harpy
goatish	half-faced	hedge-pig
gorbellied	hedge-born	horn-beast
impertinent	hell-hated	hugger-mugger
infectious	idle-headed	jolthead
loggerheaded	ill-nurtured	lewdster
lumpish	milk-livered	maggot-pie
mammering	motley-minded	malt-worm
mangled	onion-eyed	moldwarp
mewling	pox-marked	nut-hook
paunchy	rude-growing	pigeon-egg
pribbling	rump-fed	pignut
puking	sheep-biting	ratsbane
puny	swag-bellied	strumpet
rank	tardy-gaited	varlet
surly	tickle-brained	vassal
villainous	toad-spotted	whey-face
warped	urchin-snouted	wagtail

