

Reading Shakespeare – from the Page to a Deeper Understanding

I looked around the web for some advice on reading Shakespeare and wasn't very successful. So here are some tips of my own.

1. NEVER use Cliff Notes or Shakespeare Made Easy or anything like that – it will not really help with seeing what is important (more than the plot is important, right?). Using these kinds of tools can be compared to a marathon runner using a car during the race – sure it's easier, sure it's faster – but he really hasn't run a race has he (and the next race he tries to really run will be just as hard [or harder])

2. Only use the notes on the left side of the *Folger Editions* after you've read through the page without using them first. They may explain some things that you had trouble with but 1) you don't want to interrupt the flow of the play, the action 2) you can figure out the important stuff yourself.

3. **DO** read the short summary **before** each scene (before you read the scene) – it gives you enough information to help you figure out what is about to take place, but not enough that you can figure out what is going on without reading the actual text.

4. Remember, this was written as a play – imagine it that way. Try to think in your mind what the characters look like – how they are dressed, where they are entering and exiting from.

5. NOTES, notes, notes. Write down questions, circle words, highlight sections (never just highlight – always write something next to them so you know why you highlighted them). What to take notes on?

- see #3 above
- connections with earlier works we've read (poems, novels, Beowulf, etc.)
- connections with earlier acts
- ideas related to what we've talked about in class during this play or during earlier sections
- lines that stick out to you for one reason or another.
- lines or ideas related to your journal entries

6. Have a conversation with the book – the reason that I make you buy the books is so you can write in them – when you write in your book you are having a conversation with it, with Shakespeare, with Macbeth and his clan for that matter.

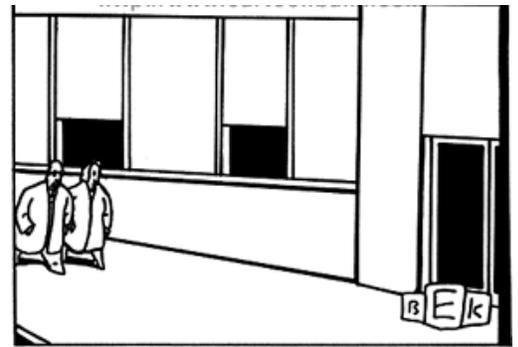
7. Have confidence in yourself – all we do in class is ask questions – you are more than capable of answering them (you do all the time).

8. Read it aloud, especially anything you get stuck at – remember it is a play.

9. Make sure you know the meaning of words (especially the ones NOT listed on the left side of the book – if they're not listed, it is assumed you know what they mean – so you better)

10. Again, read it twice – once for continuity with a minimum of stopping (note taking, getting definitions, etc.). The second time do all the rest.

11. Don't worry about puns, double-entendres, hidden meaning or anything else other than what is happening (the action) and what the characters are saying. If the other stuff comes to you – fine. Literal before figurative (of course).



"I don't mind if something's Shakespearean, just as long as it's not Shakespeare."



"Good, but not immortal."