

No individual can be considered truly educated who does not know at least the basics of Shakespeare and his plays. In 1600 London had approximately 200,000 residents, and on any given day, at least two of the many playhouses in London offered performances. If those playhouses were half full (a conservative estimate) then between 2 and 3 thousand Londoners saw a play each day. If (on average) the playhouses offered performances only 5 days a week (again being conservative), then 15,000 Londoners saw a play per week. In other words, one third of London saw a play per month. These playgoers were probably the most knowledgeable and understanding theater audience in history. They comprised a very experienced and discriminating audience. And they undeniably adored Shakespeare.

He had what could be described as a sound education at the Stratford Grammar School. Its main difference from other similar schools was that Stratford paid its teachers much better than most other towns, so they were likely to attract and keep better teachers.

Strangely, the fact that Shakespeare had such an unexceptional education is commonly supposed as evidence that he could never have written his plays. Thus a good deal of ink has been spilt over assertions that Edward De Vere or Christopher Marlowe (or some other) actually wrote Shakespeare's plays. These arguments rarely observe that entire bookstores can be filled by authors without advanced degrees, nor do they note that a degree from Oxford or Cambridge is no assurance of becoming a creative writer, much less one with abilities such as Shakespeare's.

On November 27, 1582, at the age of 18, young William married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 and pregnant, eventually to bear him three children. From that time until 1592 when he appears in London as a professional in the theatre, Shakespeare drops from sight. There have been rumors that during the interim he was a schoolmaster in the country or even a sergeant in the army, but none of these ideas has any evidence for support.

Shakespeare's primary genres are history, comedy and tragedy, and though Aristotle regarded tragedy as the highest literary form, clearly either Shakespeare preferred histories and comedies (or his audience was more receptive to those genres) during the first phase of his career. With the plague striking Londoners during 1592-1594, he may have chosen comedies and histories to alleviate the tragedy unfolding all around as much as to entertain his audience.

The histories are largely adaptations from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. All teenagers who have ever rebelled against their parents can find something to relate to in these plays, especially *Henry IV Part I*.

The comedies commonly feature strong female characters who, once they assert themselves in a tense or confused social situation, bring about happy endings. These plays have a broad focus, enveloping an entire community in its activities, and often end in multiple marriages. By looking forward, holding to faith that via love, marriage, and children the achievements of civilization will be passed on to successive generations, hope for the future is maintained.

Shakespeare's great tragic phase began with *Julius Caesar* in 1599. *Macbeth* is unique among tragedies for its lack of a subplot; that simplification can make it more accessible to young readers. With its witches and ghosts, *Macbeth* should be read in October, or as close to Halloween as possible!

Deciding what prompted the change in his writing, a change that produced his greatest plays, is nearly impossible. It could be attributed to a family crisis, as in the death of his son (1596) or his father (1601), or some cumulative effect of both. It could be that with cessation of the plague came a greater interest in tragedy among his ardent playgoers. Perhaps he sought a new challenge and wanted to experiment with tragedy, the highest form. Perhaps his darkening vision reflects the increasing pessimism of his society about politics, economics, and the social structure. Queen Elizabeth was getting old, and her people knew no marriage and certainly no heir was forthcoming. Fears of disputed succession and civil war after her death were inevitable. Any and perhaps in some ways all of these events could have prompted the change to tragedy.

A final note, and one that in another era would have seemed unnecessary to mention, is that Shakespeare was Christian. Many scholars believe that Shakespeare himself was a secret Catholic throughout his life. Scholars of previous generations would have taken his strong Christian faith as fact. Shakespeare's earliest contact with the stage was as a boy viewing the traditional English "morality plays" performed at festivals. It was an influence that never left him.

Brian Blackley, PhD.

English Department, North Carolina State University

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Teacher Tips on Introducing Students to The Bard by Robin Finley

I had the honor and privilege of introducing many, many students to Shakespeare in my 34 years of public school teaching. I had a simple goal in mind, to leave them with this thought: "Oh, so *that's* what all the hoopla has been about this guy for all these years!" In my attempt to do so, I picked up a few techniques over the years which I want to share with you, in hopes that your kids will come away from their first experience with Shakespeare with a similar reaction.

- First of all, always read and thoroughly discuss a synopsis of the plot before reading the play. The students need to know the whole story, including the ending, before they start reading the play. There are plot synopses in this book, and they are also available online.

- Shakespeare did not write his plays to be read but to be *heard*. So it is imperative that they be read OUT LOUD. I always found that students who swore the Shakespearean language was totally incomprehensible to them found that they could get the gist of it if they read it aloud. I strongly suggest that, as you read each scene, choose parts before you read and read together. This might pose a real problem if there are only two of you and you're reading a scene with ten characters in it. One way to overcome that problem is to find a way to visually represent each character and point to that character as you read his or her speech. You might cut pictures of people out of magazines, or buy a Shakespearean coloring book with pictures of Renaissance men and women. Put these pictures on a board and point to each character as you read his or her speech. Or, better yet, see if you can move the characters around, almost like puppets, as you read the scene.

- One of Shakespeare's devices in writing for his extremely class-conscious Elizabethan audience was to differentiate the type of language used by the different social classes.

The speeches of the aristocratic members of the cast (usually the main characters) are written in poetry called "blank verse." "Blank verse" usually doesn't rhyme, but it has a certain *beat*, or meter, called "iambic pentameter." That meter means that each line has ten syllables put into sets of two (feet) called "iamb." An iambic "foot" has one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, so it goes "ta-DAH." There are five "feet" to each line, thus the word "pentameter" from the same Greek word root that gives us the word pentagon, meaning a five-sided figure. An example of a line of iambic pentameter can be seen in Marc Antony's line at the end of *Julius Caesar*, as he gazes at Brutus' corpse: "Here lies the noblest Roman of them all." If you exaggerate the stressed syllables in this line, it reads: "Here LIES the NO-blest RO-man OF them ALL."

Shakespeare often put secondary, lower-class characters in his plays to provide "comic relief" to the audience. Their speeches are almost always in prose, which is straight talk, no poetry. If you read the conversations of Bottom, Quince, Flute, Starveling, etc. in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you'll find that it sounds pretty much like regular conversation.

- THEE, THOU, and THY: There is a lot of misunderstanding about these no-longer-used pronouns. To a modern ear, their use makes the conversation sound very formal and "high-falutin," but actually the opposite is the case. These pronouns were used by Elizabethans to speak to someone with whom they were very intimate or to someone who was of a lower class than they. So an aristocrat would address a maid as "thee" or "thou"; whereas the maid would definitely address her

with whom they were very intimate or to someone who was of a lower class than they. So an aristocrat would address a maid as “thee” or “thou”; whereas the maid would definitely address her employer as “you.”

Similarly, when you wished to insult someone, even if they were of the same social class as you, you would suddenly employ the “thee” or “thou.” In reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it's interesting to observe this when the four “lovers” are falling in and out of love with each other. When one of them is expressing his undying devotion for a young lady, for example, he wants to “put her on a pedestal,” so he addresses her as “you.” But when he no longer loves her and wants to tell her to leave him alone and “go take a hike,” suddenly she's “thee” and “thou”! A modern audience is largely unaware of the pronoun switches taking place, but the Elizabethan audience would have noticed immediately if the incorrect pronoun were used.

- Speaking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is an excellent play to start students out with. It's funny and goofy and, using the techniques I've outlined above, not hard for student to “get.” There is an excellent video of it, by the way, which was a “Shakespeare in the Park” production in the late 1970's, directed by Joseph Papp, which I recommend you show your student after the play has been read. It's always a treat to see excellent professional actors in the parts! If at all possible, it's a good idea to show a film of the play after it's been read, but you need to be careful as to which versions you show. There are no doubt reviews on the internet and in chat rooms which will be helpful here.

- One of my favorite activities when I taught Shakespeare was to have the student(s) write a paraphrase of one or more scenes from the play. In other words, keep the characters the same, and give them the same number of speeches, but re-write their words in the students' everyday language. My students would type their effort up in script form. Then, getting as many people involved as you have available, read the play in front of an audience (even if it's only an audience of one!). It's helpful to have signs (which you can write on posterboard and hang around people's necks with string) saying which character is speaking. You will almost certainly have to double up (or more) with your actors, but be sure the actor has the right sign showing when that speaker is speaking. The results are usually hilarious and a lot of fun, but it's also an excellent way to make sure that the student truly understands what's going on and to prove that Shakespeare, even though our language has changed a great deal, is still accessible to kids today.

I wish you good luck and many blessings in bringing this astonishing playwright to the attention of your student(s). I sincerely hope you will have the joy I often had of hearing my ex-students say, “Oh, I just *love* Shakespeare!”

DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF THIS BOOK

This book consists of 18 reinforcement exercises. This will give you enough to do one exercise every two weeks for a school year.

It is strongly suggested that you use your Analytical Grammar Notebook as your guide when you need help doing an exercise and when you correct it.

Each exercise is set up the same way. The first two sentences are to be parsed (all parts of speech marked) and diagrammed. Since these sentences are somewhat complex, you should do your diagrams on a separate sheet of paper, so you have plenty of room.

Sentences 3 through 5 are for you to practice your grammar analysis skills. Without first diagramming the sentences, see if you can pick out the phrases and clauses in them. If you get stuck, then you should diagram the sentence in question. Just answer the questions on the answer sheet following the exercise. Always write down the first two and last two words of each phrase, with three periods in between, rather than the entire phrase. Example: don't write, "When Herkimer McGillicuddy was a mere child of six." Write instead, "When Herkimer...of six." (... is called an ellipsis)

The next section is for you to copy edit. This is a great way for you to use and apply your knowledge of punctuation, capitalization, and usage. It might be helpful for you to review your season three notes before attempting this part of the exercise.

When you see an error, correct it using the copy-editing marks below:

insert comma = however this next ...
 insert period = the end
 capitalize this letter = Eiffel tower
 lower case this letter = pen and Paper
 insert semicolon = story however
 insert question mark = do you

delete this = deletee
 insert colon = list one, two
 insert quotes = "quotes
 underline = Title
 insert apostrophe = sisters party
 change word = give it to he

Some sentences in this section are not parallel and you are asked to re-write them. There is usually more than one way to correct an unparallel sentence, but we have provided one version in the answer key. For your answer to be correct it needs to have all the original information in it and it needs to be made up of grammatical equals (all gerunds, all prepositional phrases, etc.) For example:

Wrong:
 I like to ski, eating, and lemonade.

Correct:
 I like to ski, to eat, and to drink lemonade.
 I like to ski, eat, and drink lemonade.
 I like skiing, eating, and drinking lemonade.

We have given you the number of errors in each exercise. Things that come in pairs (quotes, switching one thing for another) and unparallel sentences are considered one error. Each comma is counted separately. If you miss something in the copy-editing section, look at the answer key, figure out the rule being used, and go back to that section in your grammar notebook and refresh your memory.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Parse and Diagram:

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies, has three storylines which are connected by the celebration of the Duke of Athens' wedding.
2. Before the celebration of the wedding, Hermia comes before the Duke, pleading to be allowed to marry Lysander, although her father wants her to marry Demetrius.

Grammar Analysis:

3. The Duke decrees that she must marry either Demetrius, die, or enter a nunnery, a place where disgraced gentlewomen could retire from the world.
4. Hermia and Lysander decide to elope, and Hermia confides her plan to her friend Helena, who is in love with Demetrius.
5. Thinking of Demetrius' gratitude to her, Helena tells him of Hermia and Lysander's plan, but Demetrius responds by chasing off after the two lovers in the forest.

Punctuation, Capitalization, and Usage: Using the editing marks described in the front of this book, mark all the errors that you find below. There are 16 errors.

In the forest outside of town the king and queen of fairyland, Oberon and Titania, are feuding. In a plan for revenge against Titania Oberon tells his fairy assistant, Puck, to fetch a certain magic flower. When the juice of the flower is sprinkled in a sleeping person's eyes that person will fall in love with the first living creature they see when they awake. Titania will fall asleep, be sprinkled, and made to fall in love with something horrible when awake.

A group of workmen from Athens, called "rude mechanicals," are in the forest rehearsing a play which they plan to present at the Duke's wedding so they can win a prize. Puck, a rather mean malicious imp, seeing Bottom rehearsing the lead, decides to turn his head into that of a donkey! The other "hempen homespuns" see Bottom and run screaming back to Athens. Titania has been sleeping in the background and she awakes and falls madly in love with Bottom!

Demetrius who has been chasing after Hermia and Lysander in the forest is mistakenly sprinkled with the love juice. He awakes and, seeing Helena, falls in love with her. In time both men, having been sprinkled, fall in love with Helena. There is a tremendous quarrel among the four lovers but Shakespeare brings happiness to everybody in the end.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Answer Sheet for Grammar Analysis:

Sentence 3: - Write the noun clause in this sentence:

- What job is that noun clause doing?

- "a place...the world" is a(n)

Sentence 4: - Write the infinitive in this sentence:

- What job is that infinitive doing?

- "who is...with Demetrius" is a(n)

Sentence 5: - "Thinking of...to her" is a(n)

- Write the gerund phrase in this sentence:

- What job is that gerund phrase doing?
