



Year 7 English—Spring 1—Introduction to Shakespeare



Overview of topic: In this topic, you will learn about the life, times and works of one of the most famous writers in history: William Shakespeare. You will examine some of his most famous plays, explore the language he used and begin to analyse them for yourselves. This unit is synoptic and will help prepare you for year 8 onwards, where you will study whole plays written by Shakespeare.

Key Contents / ideas / concepts

Keywords / Glossary

Historical Context:

War of the Roses: a series of civil wars fought over control of the English throne in the mid-to-late fifteenth century, fought between supporters of two rival cadet branches of the royal House of Plantagenet: Lancaster and York.

Battle of Agincourt: took place on 25th October 1415 during the Hundred Years War. It was an unexpected victory for the English army and led them to dominate in the war against France. Henry V was king at the time and led this victory.

Queen Elizabeth: daughter of Henry VIII, Elizabeth reigned as Queen of England from 1558 until 1603. She was often known as The Virgin Queen as she never married, and challenged many of the traditional stereotypes of women during this time.

William Shakespeare: Born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, he moved to London to become an actor and playwright. He is famous for writing around 37 plays and over 150 sonnets. He died in 1616.

Globe Theatre: The theatre owned by the Lord Chamberlain's men, where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed. It was burned down during a performance of Henry VIII when a canon misfired, but was rebuilt in the 1990s.

Shakespeare's Plays:

Twelfth Night: Separated from her twin brother Sebastian in a shipwreck, Viola disguises herself as a boy, calls herself Cesario, and becomes a servant to the Duke Orsino. He sends her to woo the Countess Olivia on his behalf, but the Countess falls in love with Cesario instead. Eventually Sebastian turns up and causes even more confusion, chaos and comedy.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, are in the forest before a wedding in Athens. They are fighting, and decide to play tricks on one another. The unsuspecting victims are four young Athenians (Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius and Helena) who are afflicted with love potions, and Bottom the weaver (who is given the head of a donkey by Puck). Chaos and hilarity ensues before the happy wedding at the end.

Hamlet: When the king dies, his brother Claudius takes the throne and marries Queen Gertrude, the king's widow. The king's son, Hamlet, sees his father's ghost and vows revenge when he learns Claudius murdered the king in order to obtain the throne. Hamlet puts on a play for the new king which reveals the truth, and ends with the death of Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet.

Othello: Othello, a general in the army, marries Desdemona. Iago is jealous of Othello and decides to deceive him into thinking Desdemona has been unfaithful with Cassio, one of Othello's officers. 'Evidence' of the affair, in the form of a handkerchief, drives Othello mad with jealousy and he kills Desdemona, before realising the truth and also killing himself.

Richard III: Richard, Duke of Gloucester, wants to be king, so he devises a plan to secure his place on the throne. He is cunning and treacherous, and his schemes include locking the princes away in the tower and marrying his victim's widow. He is eventually defeated by Richmond, who was Elizabeth I's grandfather.

Henry V The new king Henry shortly after his reign begins and the play finishes after the Battle of Agincourt. He is eager to invade France and lay claim to the French throne as well as the English one. The play follows Henry to victory and his eventual seizing of the French throne.

Biography: an account of someone's life, written by somebody else.
Performance: an act of presenting a play, concert, or other form of entertainment

Influence: the ability to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.

Variation: a change or slight difference in condition, amount, or level, typically within certain limits.

Sonnet: a love poem consisting of 14 lines and written in iambic pentameter

Iambic Pentameter: a pattern of unstressed and stressed beats commonly used by Shakespeare. Each line consists of 5 pairs of iambs (or 10 syllables)

Rhythm: a strong, regular repeated pattern of movement or sound

Genre: a type or category of art, music or writing.

Convention: the expected features of a particular genre

Tragedy: a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.

History: the whole series of past events connected with a particular person or thing.

Comedy: a play characterized by its humorous or satirical tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents, in which the characters ultimately triumph over adversity.

Disguise: a different appearance in order to conceal one's identity.

Amateur: a person who engages in a pursuit, especially a sport, on an unpaid rather than a professional basis.

Idealist: a person who is guided more by ideals than by practical considerations.

Hamartia: a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.

Hubris: excessive pride or self-confidence

Supernatural: manifestations or events considered to be of a non-natural origin, such as ghosts.

Remorse: guilt

Propaganda: information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.

Villainous: relating to, constituting, or guilty of wicked or criminal behaviour.

Patriotism: a love or pride for one's country

Rhetoric: the art of persuasion in speech and/or writing.



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Self-Quiz Questions—Bronze	Self-Quiz Questions—Silver	Challenge Questions—Gold
1. When was William Shakespeare born?	1. Which two houses fought in the War of the Roses?	1. How many sonnets did Shakespeare write?
2. What was the name of Shakespeare's theatre?	2. Who led the English army to victory in the Battle of Agincourt?	2. Name the THREE genres of play written by Shakespeare.
3. Which monarch reigned throughout the majority of Shakespeare's life?	3. What accident happened at the Globe Theatre?	3. Why does Hamlet want revenge?
4. What are the names of the twins in 'Twelfth Night'?	4. Why was Elizabeth I known as 'The Virgin Queen'?	4. What is <i>hubris</i> ?
5. What event is celebrated at the end of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'?	5. How many plays did Shakespeare write?	5. How does Twelfth Night make use of <i>disguise</i> ?
6. What leads Othello to kill Desdemona?	6. Who does Olivia fall in love with?	6. Describe Othello's <i>hamartia</i> ?
7. Which famous battle is included in Henry V?	7. List TWO adjectives used to describe Richard III. What do these mean?	7. How does Shakespeare make use of the <i>supernatural</i> in Hamlet?
8. What is a sonnet?	8. What is 'genre'?	8. Why can Richard III be seen as a <i>villainous</i> character?
9. What is genre?	9. Why does Iago decide to deceive Othello?	9. What is <i>rhetoric</i> ?
10. What is a biography?	10. Define performance.	10. What is <i>iambic pentameter</i> ?
TOTAL SCORE: /10	TOTAL SCORE: /10	TOTAL SCORE: /10