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Interdisciplinary Unit Shakespeare

CHALLENGING



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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Preparing for Shakespeare	6
Setting the Scene — About the Author — Reading Response Journals — Shakespeare’s World — Setting Priorities — Attending Shakespeare’s Theater — Scenery, Stage Properties, and Costumes — Men’s Clothing — Women’s Clothing — Reading Shakespeare Aloud — Elizabethan Times — Shakespeare Survey — Quotation Survey — History of the English Language — Speaking with an English Tongue — Student Generated Vocabulary — Vocabulary Activities — Etymology: Tracing a Word’s Historical Roots	
Romeo and Juliet	29
Summary — Sample Lesson Plans — Overview of Activities — Making a Diorama to Scale — Theater Trivia — What’s in a Name? — Plotting a Story — Sample Story Frames — Plot Plan — Negotiating Peace — Astrology or Astronomy: Which Is It? — Journal Questions — Responses — Objective Test and Essay	
Much Ado About Nothing	46
Summary — Sample Lesson Plans — Overview of Activities — Shakespeare’s Home: Stratford-upon-Avon — English Cottages of Shakespeare’s Time — Write a Letter to Hero — Optical Illusions — Dogberry and Malapropisms — Buying Fabric for Costumes — Update Your Dictionary — Shakespeare and Music — Family and Marriage Counseling — Journal Questions — Responses — Objective Test and Essay	
Richard III	64
Summary — Sample Lesson Plans — Who Was King Richard III? — Elizabethan London — Venn Diagram — The Soliloquy — The Tower of London — Writing About Literature — Step by Step to Good Writing About Literature — Does Conscience Make Cowards? — Of Black Cats and Omens — Witches and Witch Hunts — Male or Female? — The Real Story According to Richard III — Journal Questions for <i>Richard III</i> — Responses — Objective Test and Essay	
Across the Curriculum (Use in any order with any play.).....	92
Language Arts	
Write and Produce a Puppet Play — Puppets: The Actors Therein — Make Your World a Stage — Comedy and Tragedy — Shakespeare Word Search — Using Active Verbs — Active Verb Crossword Puzzle — Produce a Morality Play — Write Like a Pro — Saying It Like Shakespeare	

Table of Contents *(cont.)*

Across the Curriculum <i>(cont.)</i>	92
Math	
Weights and Measures—Theater Math—Elizabethan Money—Noble Budgeting— Plague Percentages	
Science	
Converting Celsius to Fahrenheit — Medicine and the Black Death — Can the Plague Strike Again? — Medicine and the Black Death Questions — An Exciting Time in Which to Live — Investigating Reflections — How Does a Telescope Work?	
Social Studies	
Elizabeth I, the Queen — Making Comparisons — Elizabethan Education — Crime and Punishment — Debate the Question: Will Severe Public Punishment Prevent Crime? — The Great Ships	
Arts and Crafts	
Build a Model Pageant — Improving the Air with Sachets — Elizabethan Half-masques	
Life Skills	
The Food of the People — Refrigerating Foods: a New Invention	
Poetry, Sonnets, and Other Writings	131
Elizabethan Sonnets — The News Ballad — Write a News Ballad — Another Kind of Ballad — The Diary	
Post-reading Activities	146
Questions for Discussion — Shakespeare Scavenger Hunt — Research Projects	
Culminating Activities	149
Build an Elizabethan Museum — Produce a Shakespeare Play — Elizabethan Masque and Feast — Festival of the Arts and High Tea — Tea and Cakes — Chronology of Shakespeare’s Plays	
Unit Management	163
Bulletin Board Ideas — Scroll — The Shakespeare Family Tree — Scenery Frames — Crown Pattern —Theater Map of London	
Bibliography	170
Answer Key	173

Introduction

Although 400 years have passed since William Shakespeare wrote his plays, they are alive and well in the world of theater and film today and loved by millions of people. This unit is designed for the busy English teacher who wants to share the richness of Shakespeare's work with students and relate that work to the world in which he lived, as well as the world of today. It contains activities across the curriculum to be used by the individual teacher or shared in team teaching with instructors of other disciplines around the basic theme of Shakespeare and his works.

This unit is filled with a wide variety of lesson ideas and reproducible pages designed for use with middle and junior high students. The core of the unit consists of three plays written by Shakespeare—one comedy, one history, and one tragedy—and several of his sonnets, as well as other poetry and writings, knowledge of which was considered to be the hallmark of an educated person during the Elizabethan period when Shakespeare was writing and producing his plays. Lessons which cross curriculum boundaries are provided to widen the students' grasp of life as it was for real people in Shakespeare's time, relating it to life today.

The plays have been carefully chosen for their current appropriateness of theme and content for adolescent students; they include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a silly, romantic comedy with likeable characters and an evil villain. *Romeo and Juliet*, the world's most famous love story, is about two teenaged lovers who die tragically because of misunderstanding and miscommunication. *Richard III* is based on the story of a diabolically calculating prince who lies, manipulates, and kills his way to the throne of England. These plays contain some of Shakespeare's most beautiful poetry and most dramatic moments, and they illustrate his ability to reveal the souls of his characters to the audience through words and actions.

Why Interdisciplinary Teaching?

The world in which today's students live is rapidly changing, very diverse, and full of many challenging things for them to learn in a short time. Because of the complexity of modern life and the many distractions provided by the media and social pressures, many students have not acquired the necessary background to totally comprehend all that they read; nor have they learned how to consciously relate what they already know to what they are expected to learn.

Reading is a dynamic process which involves more than just looking at the printed page and taking meaning from it. The reader also puts meaning into what he or she reads while simultaneously taking meaning from it. What the reader already knows goes into the reading, so that there is a constant give-and-take between the reader and the material being read.

Interdisciplinary teaching provides a way to supply the missing links in the student's fund of knowledge, so that the student will be able to better comprehend what he or she reads. It also provides a format for helping the student to acquire new information which is relevant to what is being studied, as well as to what has already been learned.

Interdisciplinary teaching is a way of helping students make connections between what has been and what is and of helping them to see the connections among people, places, events, and ideas. In this way, interdisciplinary teaching helps students achieve a higher degree of mastery of a piece of literature than they otherwise would be able to do.

Introduction *(cont.)*

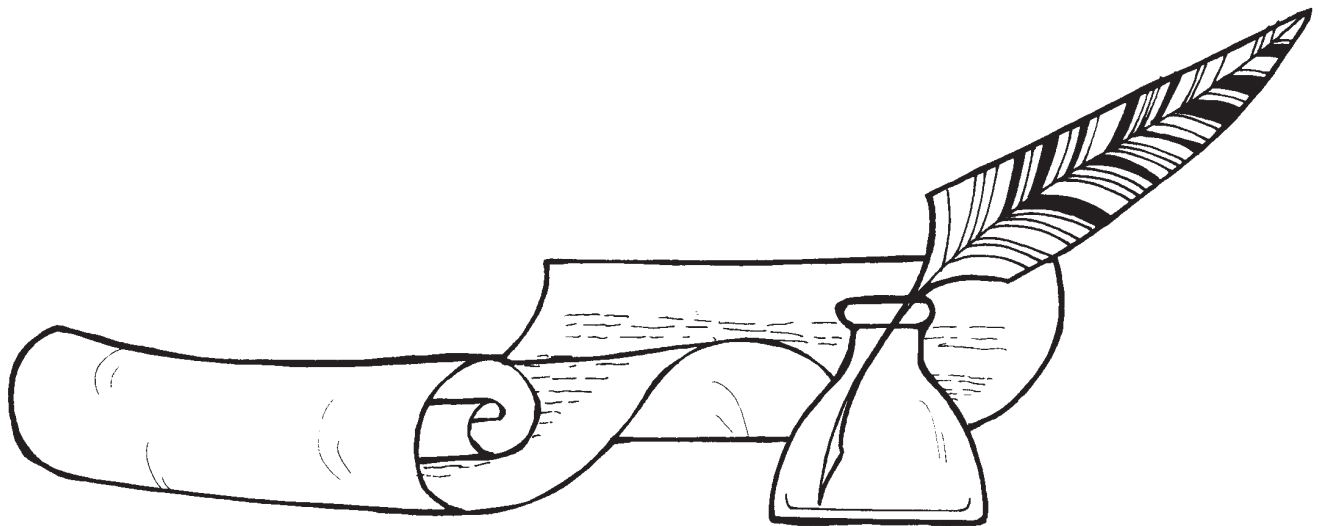
Why Shakespeare?

For 400 years, Shakespeare has been considered the greatest dramatist and poet in the English-speaking world. His plays are produced thousands of times each year in theaters all over the world, and audiences today are as enthralled as the ones who first attended them in London. His plays are filled with action, intrigue, mystery, rollicking humor, and heart-wrenching tragedy, sometimes all within the bounds of the same play. His plays are timeless.

The characters in Shakespeare's plays are complete in all varieties of human experience. Some of them are good people who make bad choices. Some are silly people who do not know they are silly. A few of them are monsters. Some are truly tragic people, good but with flaws in character which lead them to destruction. Some are lovers embracing life with a passion, and others are losers who spend their lives in anger and hate. They represent all the varieties of personality, motivation, and character which exist in humankind.

Shakespeare was a master of our complex English language, and he filled his plays with poetry and prose in a way unequaled by any other writer. He wrote with an incredible vocabulary of over 29,000 words, which is astounding when one considers that the King James Version of the Bible uses slightly over 3,000. Many of those words are used in sophisticated puns and wordplay, yet he wrote for the commoner, as well as for the educated. The language of Shakespeare is rich beyond that of any other writer.

When you communicate a love of Shakespeare to your students, you give them a gift they can enjoy the rest of their lives, a gift which will empower them to see the world in all its manifestations. And when you teach cooperatively with teachers of other disciplines around a common theme, you empower students by showing them how to make connections between themselves and others—in the past and in the present.



To keep this resource intact so it can be used year after year, you may wish to punch holes in the pages and store them in a three-ring binder.

Men's Clothing

In Elizabethan times men's clothing was as colorful as that of the ladies, but men wanted to look manly, so they wore clothing in the shape of armor with broad shoulders, broad hips, and narrow waists. It could be compared to a suit of armor.

- ❖ *Doublet*: like a breastplate, covers back and chest, ridges down front; wings at shoulders
- ❖ *Sleeves*: separate garments, tight at wrists
- ❖ *Hose*: covered the body from waist down
- ❖ *Ruff*: stiffly starched ruffles at the neck, usually white
- ❖ *Hats*: of many different shapes, usually had a band, worn indoors
- ❖ *Cloaks*: capes
- ❖ *Gowns*: like cloaks but closed in front, fitted at the shoulders

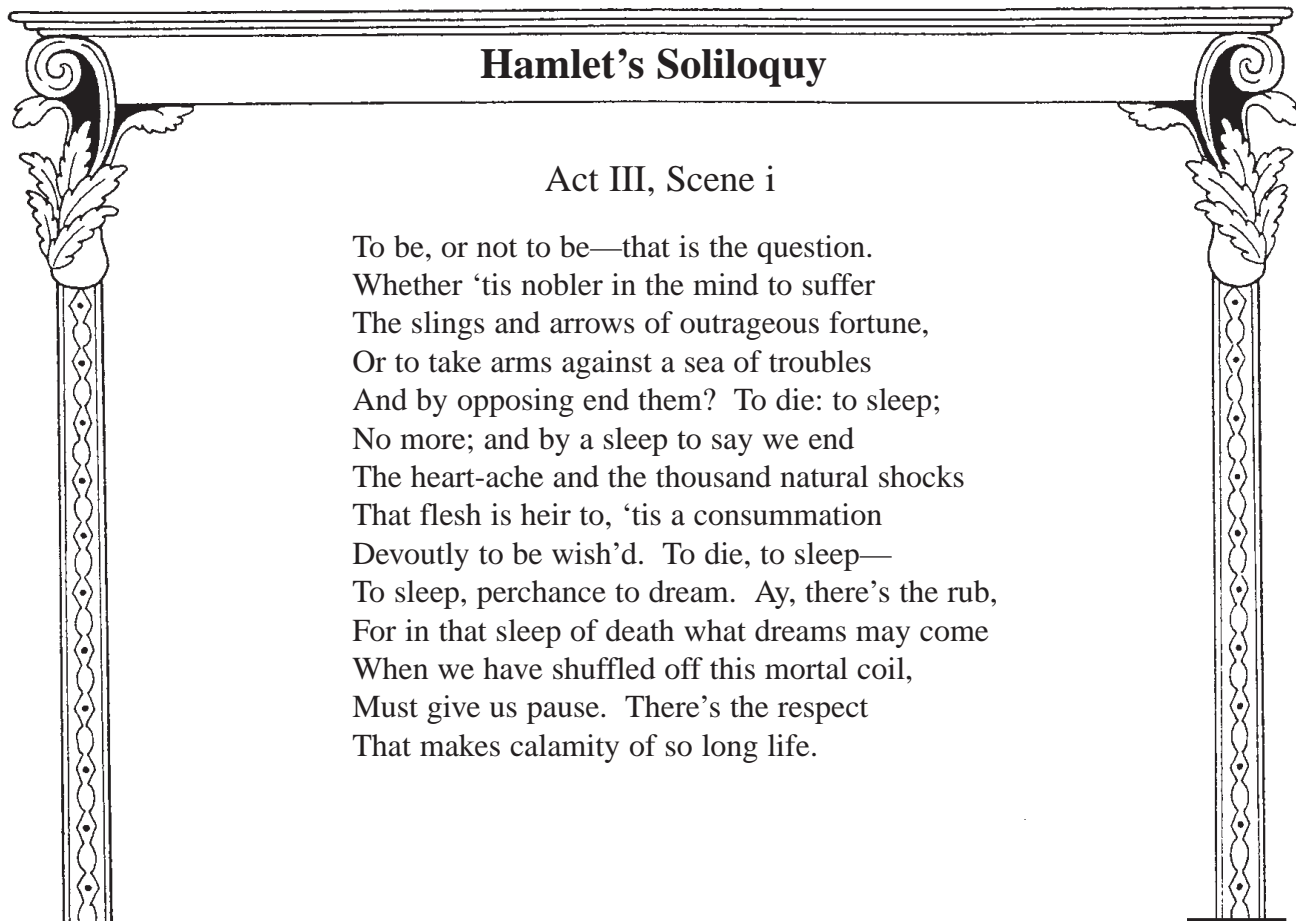
The doublet was stuffed with horsehair, wool, or rags so it would keep its shape. The sleeves were tied to the doublet with laces. The upper parts of the hose were stuffed to make them stick out. Sometimes breeches, or *Venetians*, were worn over the hose. Cloaks, worn over the doublet, were very fashionable and made in different lengths but were usually short. Hats were worn indoors to keep warm.



The Soliloquy

A speech in which a character tells his innermost thoughts is called a *soliloquy*. Read these two famous soliloquies. The first one is from the play *Hamlet*, which the young prince of Denmark (Hamlet) gives when he learns that his uncle has murdered Hamlet's father and then married his mother. The second is given by Richard III, telling the audience what kind of man he is. After reading them, choose one or more of the following activities.

1. Read the soliloquies carefully and then choose one and write a rendition of it in modern English. Do not try to render it word for word, because that might get you totally bogged down. Rather, write what you think the character is really thinking. What is he feeling when he says these words? What is he planning to do or thinking of doing?
2. Choose one of the soliloquies, and write a paragraph description of the character who speaks the lines. Use lines from the soliloquy to support your judgment of the character. What kind of person is he? How can you tell? Is he good or evil? Is he kind or gentle? Given what he says about himself, what do you think he looks like? Do you think his looks have anything to do with his outlook on life? Would you want to have this character for a friend? Why?
3. Memorize one of the soliloquies, or another one from a different play, and present it to the class.



Hamlet's Soliloquy

Act III, Scene i

To be, or not to be—that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep—
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.