



# STUDY GUIDE

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# Before we begin...

We're about to do a deep dive into Shakespeare. Take a moment to check-in about how you feel. Are you curious about all the hype? Are you intimidated by the language? Excited? Bored?

All of these feelings are valid and totally okay. Before proceeding, jot down some answers to the questions below. You don't have to share your answers with anyone so be honest!

- ? What do you know about Shakespeare?
- ? Who likes watching Shakespeare? Do you?
- ? Why do we still perform Shakespeare's plays today?



Illustration by Sara Mizannojehdehi

## Shakespeare: who is that guy?

We won't bore you with a 250-page biography about Shakespeare's life. That's not why we're here! However, if you're interested in learning more about Shakespeare, late 16th C. England, and the birth of capitalism, check out some of the references in our works cited page.

What we know about Shakespeare's life is largely inferred from historical records of the era. Even at the height of his career, Shakespeare wasn't a household name, and the majority of his writing was published after his death (Maguire & Smith, 8).

Shakespeare was born in the small town in Stratford upon Avon, the son of a glove maker. He attended grammar school where he underwent a rigorous education, learning Latin, Greek, and Roman literature. As a grammar school student at age 12, Shakespeare would have achieved the modern day equivalent of an undergraduate degree in classics (Maguire & Smith, 11).

As a literate young man Shakespeare was likely destined for a life as a scribe in a local court, but at age 20 he joined a group of travelling players and became an actor (Ackroyd, 96). He would turn up in London in 1592, where he would attempt to make his fortune as a playwright and actor.

In 1594, he became the resident playwright and co-owner of The Chamberlain's Men. Over the next 20 years, he would perform for the royal court, purchase a home in Stratford, buy the title of "Gentleman", and write 39 plays, 152 sonnets, and 2 epic poems.

# Shakespeare in Practice

London was a rapidly expanding city that grew from a population of 100,000 in 1550 to over 200,000 in 1600 (Gurr, 13). Like Shakespeare, people flocked to London to make their fortune. The city had a growing working class population, and as it expanded, so did the demand for entertainment.

Other than watching dog fights, open air playhouses were the most affordable form of entertainment in the city. With only 30% of men and 10% of women being literate, not only was Netflix not an option, reading wasn't either (Gurr, 266). For half a day's wage, patrons could stand at the foot of the stage and watch a play. Admittance was half the cost of a pipe full of tobacco and the same as a bag of nuts (Gurr, 264).



Illustration by Sara Mizannojehdehi

These spectators are referred to as 'groundlings' by scholars today.

Upper classes occupied the seated sections of London's playhouses. Therefore, theatres became a unique space where lower classes, nobility, and even occasional royalty all gathered in the same space. Imagine showing up at the Mayfair Movie theatre, paying \$15 for a ticket, and watching a rom-com next to Justin Trudeau.

We forget that Shakespeare's plays were written for the working class, who could not read or write, and even by London's standards lived a hard life. Audiences shouted remarks at the actors, got into fist fights, and even threw nuts at the stage in disdain (hence the phrase "peanut gallery"). Shakespeare's famous speeches and soliloquies were not written to be quiet moments of contemplation. Instead they were performed as active conversations with the audience, with the expectation that people would shout advice or judgements.

Shakespeare's comedies were ripe with bawdy humour and to his audiences likely felt like a raunchy late night comedy; his tragedies were slasher flicks, where heroes lost limbs, had eyes poked out, and their children baked into meat pies. We're not kidding!

**But do sex jokes, mutilation, and the working class come to mind when we say "Shakespeare"?**

# Love from Afar

What is *Love from Afar*? Well, it's our gift to you. How could we not acknowledge that this year has been quite a journey for all of us. A lot of questions came up and with those, a lot of feelings and experiences. One thing that is pretty universal, is our need to connect. And theatre has a very special way of doing just that.



**Maryse Fernandes (left) and Mitchel Rose (right)**  
Illustration by Sara Mizanojehdehi

*Love from Afar* is about three actors' attempt to deliver a love letter to you, their audience. But they quickly ask "Love. What is it?" Despite love being a force that is essential to our existence, there seems to be no satisfying definition. So they turn to Shakespeare, who wrote 152 poems about love -- he must be an expert, right?

We mashed together scenes from six of Shakespeare's plays, which examine love from different perspectives.

The play begins with grand romantic gestures, like the balcony scene in *Romeo & Juliet* (a 1600's equivalent to John Cusack's boombox), and the flirtatious games we play with a crush, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Despite these scenarios being 400 years old, we still do them today. Maybe with a John Cusack GIF instead?

But as things progress, the authors of our love letter start to question their authenticity. Shakespeare also questioned the very existence of love by examining the 'rotten' side of humanity: abusive relationships, the destructive force of pride, and our all-around ability to do crappy things to each other. We question the concept of a 'happy ending', a narrative that may lead us to endure painful experiences in search of happiness.

Our love letter concludes with an attempt to show people that regardless of how you look, sound, or talk, there are people in this world who love you. So, what is love? Well, we think that's really up to you.

From September 21st - 26th, we toured a live production of *Love From Afar* to four non-profit long term care facilities across the Ottawa Region. We performed in parking lots and courtyards outside of facilities, while audiences watched from their windows. But how could audiences hear us, you ask?

We attached wireless microphones to each of our actors, and toured with a portable FM radio transmitter that allowed us to broadcast the production on our own FM frequency. Residents listened to the performance on FM radios, sometimes from the comfort of their own living space or in a common area with friends.

Thanks to our partnership with the Ottawa Public Library, we've transformed this piece of live theatre into an animated comic book. You'll see a combination of original illustrations and short animations created by Sara Mizanojehdehi, as well as photographs of the live production. All accompanied by a voice recording of the production's cast and an original underscore by local musician Alli Harris. So, here's our love letter to you!

# Which of Shakespeare's plays made it into *Love from Afar*?



Illustration by Sara Mizannojehdehi

We're so glad you asked! You'll probably recognize a couple of these:

## **ROMEO & JULIET**

Remember when your parents said, "We hate those guys" and you thought, "Uh oh...I'm in love with one of them." So to see your sweetheart, you did a lot of sneaking around courtyards and hanging out under balconies? You must totally relate to Romeo's plight then. Along with the fancy sword fighting, accidental slayings, secret elopements and sneaky poison, right?

## **AS YOU LIKE IT**

Have you ever been exiled from your home due to a sibling rivalry, tyrannical Duke, and wrestling match gone wrong? Well Orlando has! And unbeknownst to Orlando, so too has the love of his life Rosalind and her cousin Celia. Both groups enter the hippy-dippy, free-loving, Forest of Arden, but it's Rosalind who disguises herself as a man to keep her and her cousin safe. While carving love poems into trees, the love-sick Orlando happens to stumble upon Rosalind (in disguise, of course). So Rosalind does what any of us would do - cures Orlando's love sickness by having him practice courting Rosalind. Well... Rosalind disguised as a man. Confused? Great! Let the love games proceed!

# Which of Shakespeare's plays made it into *Love from Afar*?

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

You know those rom-coms where the two leads start off hating each other and then end up falling in love at the end? Welcome to *Much Ado About Nothing* and meet Beatrice and Benedick, our protagonists. After years of being at war (literally for Benedick), they're both about to surrender their guard, be terrifyingly vulnerable and risk facing complete defeat. All for love. But...there's a catch...you know the one: the ol', "I will totally trust your love if you do me this tiny favour" kinda catch.

## HAMLET

You thought the year 2020 was bad? Try returning home from school to attend your father's funeral, when you find out that your mom has already remarried. To your uncle. Your dead dad's brother. And while you're reeling from that, you meet up with your dead dad's ghost, who tells you he was murdered and that he would really appreciate it if you could avenge his death. Oh...and the murderer is your uncle-dad. Or is it dad-uncle? Wouldn't that cause any of us to start questioning the purpose of life? Start questioning everyone and everything around you, including your lover? How could you not desperately feel like the loneliest person in the world?

## KING LEAR

Have you ever fallen victim to the belief that as long as you have everything going for you on the 'outside', then that will take care of your 'inside'? Or if you could just get everyone in your life to behave and act a certain way, then you would finally feel okay? Guess what? Kings make that same mistake too. Lear decided to divvy up his kingdom amongst his daughters depending on how much they said they loved him. What were the consequences to this bright idea, you might ask? Oh, just losing his mind, body and soul.

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Pyramus loves Thisbe. Thisbe loves Pyramus. If only there wasn't a darn wall in between them because Thisbe's dad has got some major control issues. But for a travelling troupe of actors, it is the perfect plot for an over-the-top production. What else happens in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, other than a play within a play? Oh, just four lovers chasing each other through the woods which are full of fairies who turn people into donkeys, try to steal kids and sometimes will drug you if you don't do what they want. The usual.

# Shakespearean Activities

## 1 Draw the Speech, I pray you!

PARTICIPANTS: Solo Activity

TIME: 30-40 mins

Check out this speech:

*"Say 'a day' without the 'ever'. No, no, Orlando,  
men are April when they woo, December when they wed.  
Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky  
changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous  
of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen,  
more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more  
new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires  
than a monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana  
in the fountain, and I will do that when you are  
disposed to be merry. I will laugh like a hyena, and  
that when thou art inclined to sleep."*

This is Rosalind's monologue from *As You Like It*. Here she is describing how women and men change once they have married.

Now, take a look at this speech:

*"For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin."*

Here's Hamlet questioning the purpose of life. Contemplating ending his own, weighing the pros and cons of both choices. Should he accept and put up with life's challenges? Or should he make the decision to escape them?

**Pick one of these monologues.** Whichever one speaks to you at this moment. Do you see all the imagery that is used to convey the message? "Parrot against the rain" "whips and scorns of time" Those words mean exactly what you think they mean, don't overthink this!

**Now, take some of these images, and create your own personal work of art.**

Draw, paint, collage, whatever moves you to take these words and create art from them. When you think of "Parrot against the rain" what comes to mind? For me, it's this squawking, fluttering, angsty bird losing their mind as they're out in a thunderstorm. What appears for you? Cool. Now collage that!

### **DEBRIEF**

This exercise helps make Shakespeare's words less intimidating and more accessible. We use imagination and imagery in our everyday speaking and writing, and Shakespeare is no different! Actors do this exercise when they are working on a Shakespeare show. If we have a clear idea of what the words mean, then saying them is easy peasy.

# Shakespearean Activities

## 2

## You Speak an Infinite Deal of Nothing

PARTICIPANTS: Solo Activity

TIME: 20 minutes

Shakespeare loved the heck outta metaphors and similes. He used them a lot in his writing, so we did the same in ours! But what are those things?

Great question:

**METAPHOR:** A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things.

Here's a super famous metaphor from Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*:

*"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."*

That's Romeo saying that Juliet is the sun. Sweet, huh? Obviously she is not the actual sun, as that would cause a lot of problems for plants and our own vitamin D requirements. But for him, she's as bright and as important to him as the sun.

Here's a few more examples of cool metaphors::

*Books are mirrors of the soul* - Virginia Woolf  
*You sit on a throne of lies.* - The movie 'Elf'  
*Trees are poems the earth writes upon the sky.* - Khalil Gibran

**SIMILIE:** A figure of speech in which two things are compared through the use of "like" or "as."

Here's an example of a simile from *Romeo & Juliet*:

*"Is love a tender thing? It is too rough,  
Too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn."*

Ouch. Love pricks like a thorn? This is Romeo's view on love before he meets Juliet, and he's still nursing a broken heart from a previous breakup. This simile helps us as an audience to get a peek into Romeo's current mental and emotional state about love.

Some other examples of similes:

*Ogres are like onions.* - Shrek  
*Like a lamp, dispelling the darkness of ignorance.* - Dalai Lama XIV  
*I just win again, then win again, like Wimbledon I serve.* - Kendrick Lamar from 'DNA'

**On with the exercise, already!** Grab a couple of your favourite songs and see how many metaphors and similes you can find in them. Write down your list!

### DEBRIEF

Again, this exercise is to show that Shakespeare's writing is no different than the writing we experience today. Everybody can write their own prose and verse!

# Shakespearean Activities



## Do you Bite your Thumb at me, Sir?

PARTICIPANTS: Group Activity

TIME: 20 minutes

Have you ever wanted to insult your friend or the entire class? Then do we have the game for you! Attached in the appendix are a few pages of Shakespeare's best insults. Give every student their own insult and then place them into pairs, assigning them person A and person B.

**Let the pairs decipher the insult by putting it into their own words.** After all, how can you insult someone if you don't understand what you're saying? Then let the students rehearse delivering their insult to their partner.

**Now bring the entire class together.** Make one row of 'A's and have the 'B's make a row with each partner facing each other. You now have a team A and a team B. Hype the groups up and get them excited about speaking Shakespeare. Are you ready to ruuuumble?

**Begin with the first person on team 'A'.** They will deliver their insult to the opposing team 'B'. Encourage each team to back each other up with cheering, clapping and egging on. After the first person on 'A' has delivered their insult, have their partner on team 'B' return that insult with their own. Continue down the line, rotating between the two teams. After the teams are done- declare a winner!

If you want to go a step further, use the 'build your own insult' document in the appendix and have the pairs create their own insult. Instruct the pairs to pick one word from each category of the document to customize their Shakespearean diss!

### **DEBRIEF**

This game is actually about an acting exercise about text analysis. Surprise!

When actors receive lines there are two things they need to do:

#1 - What does this mean? This can be done by putting the text into your own words and discussing it with a fellow actor.

#2 ask: why am I saying this? All students were given the same objective to achieve with their line: to insult their acting partner.

# Shakespearean Activities

PARTICIPANTS: Group Activity  
TIME: 20 minutes

## 4 The Play's the Thing - Shakespeare Charades

Everyone loves charades, right? This next game combines the popular party game with iconic text from Shakespeare.

Attached to the appendix are 10 popular lines from Shakespeare. Put the class into groups of 3-4 and randomly distribute a Shakespeare line to each group, and ask the groups to keep their line a secret.

Like the exercise above, first have the groups decipher the meaning of the line. Next, instruct the students to create a physical action for every word in the line. Encourage them to use their entire body and get a little silly!

Next, display all 10 of the lines so the entire class can see them. Have each group perform the physical gestures of their line to the class without speaking any words (like charades). Based on their performance, see if the other students can guess the group's line.

### **DEBRIEF**

This exercise encourages students to think about bringing Shakespeare's text to life. After all, Shakespeare is meant to be seen on the stage and not read on the page.

Actors and directors work together to create a staging of Shakespeare's plays that tells a story with both words and bodies. When working with a 400 year old language, we have to anticipate that the audience won't understand the meaning of every word. Actors use physical actions to reinforce both a word and it's intention.

Who doesn't like pretending to be a hyena?

# Shakespearean Activities

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## Remembrances of yours

PARTICIPANTS: Solo Activity

TIME: 5 minutes

Okay, you've completed your deep dive into Shakespeare. You've tackled six plays, made a college, learned about grammar, insulted your best friend, and became a pro mime.

Revisit the answers you wrote to the questions at the beginning of this study guide. Has anything changed? Stayed the same? Do you have questions you want to answer?

To continue your Shakespeare journey check out some of the resources on our Works Cited page. If that's not enough, then talk to your local librarian!

# Appendix

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## Do you Bite your Thumb at me, Sir? - INSULTS

His brain is as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage. - *As You Like It*

Let's meet as little as we can - *As You Like It*

Such bugs and goblins in my life! - *Hamlet*

Caterpillar! Bacon-Fed Knave! - *Henry IV, pt 1*

You leathern-jerkin, crystal-button, knot-pated, agate-ring, puke-stocking, smooth-tongue Spanish pouch! - *Henry IV, pt 1*

You viperous worm that gnaws the bowels. - *Henry VI, pt 1*

This is the foul Flibbertigibbet. - *King Lear*

King-Urinal. - *Merry Wives of Windsor*

You have such a February face, full of frost, of storm, and cloudiness. - *Much Ado About Nothing*

You are a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen. - *Taming of the Shrew*

A pox of your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog. - *The Tempest*

Foot-licker! - *The Tempest*

Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself. - *Timon of Athens*

# Appendix

## Do you Bite your Thumb at me, Sir? - INSULTS continued

Methink'st thou art a general offence, and every man should beat thee. - *All's Well That Ends Well*

More of your conversation would infect my brain. - *Coriolanus*

You are the scarecrow that afrights our children so. - *Henry VI, pt 1*

Your wit's as thick as Tewkesbury mustard. - *Henry IV, pt 2*

Hear you this Triton of the minnows? - *Coriolanus*

By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you. - *As You Like It*

You ape of idleness! - *Henry IV, pt 2*

Unworthy though thou art, I'll cope with thee. - *Henry VI, pt 2*

Thou are a good scab. - *Henry IV, pt 2*

You are he that made the air unwholesome when you cast your stinking greasy cap  
in hooting. - *Coriolanus*

You mad mustachio purple-hued maltworm! - *Henry IV, pt1*

That bottled spider, that foul bunch-backed toad! - *Richard III*

That bottled spider, that foul bunch-backed toad! - *Coriolanus*

# Appendix

## Do you Bite your Thumb at me, Sir? - INSULT GENERATOR

Pick one word from each category to customize your Shakespearean diss:

### A

artless  
goatish  
churlish  
knavish  
errant  
fitful

### A

goatish  
greasy  
hideous  
jaded  
knavish  
lumpish

### A

mewling  
murderous  
peevish  
puking  
roguish  
saucy

### A

tottering  
unmuzzled  
vacant  
wayward  
wretched  
saucy

### B

beef-witted  
beetle-headed  
clay-brained  
dizzy-eyed  
elvish-marked  
empty-headed

### B

evil-eyed  
fat-witted  
fool-born  
guts-gripping  
half-faced  
horn-mad

### B

idle-headed  
ill-natured  
knotty-pated  
lily-livered  
logger-headed  
muddy-mettled

### B

onion-eyed  
paper-faced  
pigeon-livered  
rump-fed  
shag-eared  
fat-witted

### C

boar-pig  
canker-blossom  
clotpole  
coward  
dogfish  
harpy

### C

jack-a-nape  
lout  
malignancy  
miscreant  
ninny  
pidgeon-egg

### C

puke-socking  
rooting hog  
ruffian  
scullion  
spider  
boar-pig

### C

toad  
varlet  
wagtail  
waterfly  
yunker  
puke-stocking

# Appendix

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## The Play's the Thing - Shakespeare Charades

- 1) Two households both alike in dignity.
- 2) I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.
- 3) I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
- 4) He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie and swears it.
- 5) To grunt and sweat under a weary life.
- 6) Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
- 7) For wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them.
- 8) Blow winds, and crack your cheeks; rage, blow you cataracts.
- 9) My cherry lips have often kiss'd thy stones.
- 10) When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.

# Appendix

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## WORKS CITED

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Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.

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## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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