

TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SHAKESPEARE CAN BE FUN SERIES

GOALS: To introduce young students to the life and work of William Shakespeare. This unit can help develop imagination, increase language skills and improve the expression of ideas through drama, writing, art, and oral presentation. This teaching unit concludes with a class performance of one of the plays from the *Shakespeare Can Be Fun!* series.

INTRODUCTION: The four-week unit described here centers around the life and times of William Shakespeare and the study of one of his plays in the verse form written by Lois Burdett. Allow approximately one hour each day. There are four important components that can be included in each lesson:

1. Reading: With younger students, the teacher should read aloud from the *Shakespeare Can Be Fun!* series. For the greatest impact, break the daily readings into small, easily digested segments. With older classes the students can take turns reading aloud. Whet their appetite and they will be eager to come back for more!

2. Discussion: Shakespeare's plays as well as his life story provide a wealth of topics for discussion. Your students will want an opportunity to express their thoughts on what they are studying.

3. Role-playing: Your students will discover new confidence in their own abilities as they come to believe in themselves as storytellers. This, in turn, can have a profound effect on their writing.

4. Writing: Students can begin to write about Shakespeare on the first day of this unit. Sometimes just one line from the play can prompt creative writing.

“William was a hard working man indeed. He spent weeks and years writing his plays. William had a tuff time with the kids climbing on his desk and whining in hid ear. But it was worth it. His plays were spicktakuler.” --- Michael

WEEK 1 - The Life & Times of William Shakespeare

Resource: A Child's Portrait of Shakespeare

This week will be spent exploring who William Shakespeare, the person, was. Your students will probably have no preconceived notions about him and will allow him to become a friend. When it is time to start on one of his plays, the stories will be looked on as exciting adventures.

Day 1

Show pictures of Shakespeare and of the Elizabethan period. Read aloud pages 1-15.

Activity: » Discuss what life was like 400 years ago. What are some of the differences between then and now?
» Draw pictures of Shakespeare.
» Write his birth announcement.

Day 2

Read pages 15 - 23.

Activity: » Discuss how school has changed from Shakespeare's day.
» How has entertainment changed?
» Make a chart showing the changes.

Day 3

Read pages 24 - 37.

Activity: » Write love letters between Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway.
» On a map, trace the route from Stratford-upon-Avon to London.

Day 4

Read pages 37 - 49.

Activity: » Role-play the part of a reporter interviewing Shakespeare after he performed for the Queen.
» Pretend to be Shakespeare and write a diary entry mourning the loss of his son, Hamnet.

Day 5

Read pages 50 - 62.

Activity: » Write Shakespeare's Last Will & Testament. Age the document (stain with tea and burn the edges).
» Write his obituary.
» Draw up Shakespeare's family tree. Then do your own family tree.

“If Shakespeare was alive today I would invite him to sleep in my treefort and we would talk a lot about his plays.”
- Christian

WEEKS 2 & 3 - The Play

Select one of the plays from the Shakespeare Can Be Fun! series. Divide the play into roughly ten equal parts, reading one section each day. A quick review of the characters and plot at the start of each lesson can be helpful.

Involve your students daily in the reading aloud segment through role-playing. Assign character parts to different students each day. Name tags will help them remember who is playing what part. They can act out the roles as you read-aloud by repeating each line after you. Or they can enact each scene using their own words. Quickly they will start to identify with the characters.

After reading aloud and role-playing, the following activities can be done.

WEEK 2

Day 1

Explain context of Shakespeare's plays. How many did he write? What are the categories his plays fall into? (comedy, tragedy, drama, romance).

Activity: » What category does the play you're reading fall into?

» Write why you think it is a comedy, tragedy, etc.

Day 2

Activity: » Place topics in a hat (thatched roofs, Globe Theatre, court fools, Elizabethan gardens etc.). Pick a topic and research it at the school or public library. Each student becomes the class expert on that subject and makes a report back to the class on Day 5.

Day 3

Activity: » Write letters from one character to another. Exchange them with classmates and write responses.

» Using an atlas, find out where some of Shakespeare's plays take place.

» Calculate the cost of going to see a play (tickets, transportation, snacks, souvenirs).

Day 4

Discuss *character* as an aspect of drama.

Activity: » Discuss the story from different characters' points of view.

» Write a diary entry for one of the play's characters.

» Draw a favorite scene from the play.

Day 5

Discuss *plot*.

Activity: » Write in your own words, the story so far.

» The 'experts' make their report to the class on the topic chosen on Day 2.

WEEK 3

Day 1

Discuss *setting*.

Activity: » Make paper cut-outs of the characters and place them on a diagram of the play's setting.

» Write an advice column to one of the characters.

Day 2

Read some very short excerpts from the original play to experience the flavor of Shakespeare's language.

Activity: » Discuss unfamiliar words.

» Write a newspaper article of the events in the play.

» Make a poster advertising the play.

Day 3

Activity: » Create a newspaper using the articles from Day 2. Include general interest news from that time period (advertisements, entertainment, gossip column, sports etc.).

Day 4

Activity: » Research the different types of jobs in the theater (actors, directors, props, lighting, make-up etc.).

» Make a model of the Globe Theatre (using plasticine, popsicle sticks, papier-maché).

Day 5

Activity: » Discuss how the story would be different if it took place today.

» Choreograph a scene from the play (a sword fight, a ship at sea, a banquet).

» Arrange a tableau (students, frozen in action, portraying a moment from the play).

"I act out Shakespeare's plays when I'm supposed to be sleeping. I use my dolls. My mom doesn't hear me."

- Tracy

WEEK 4 - Rehearsal & Performance

Most of this week can be devoted to preparing for a class performance, either for themselves, for another class or perhaps for their parents. Students have acted out each part of the play on a daily basis and will be quite familiar with it by week four. Seat the students on the 'stage'. The whole class can read the play as a chorus. Dialogue can be read by individual students assigned to specific characters and their actions can be choreographed. A few props are all that are needed: a crown, a sword, a witches hat, etc. The teacher can stand in front, as a conductor would, and orchestrate the play, prompting when necessary. A typical performance will run approximately 45 minutes.

"Shakespeare is not an end in itself but a means to an end. When I think of the children I know, their use of oral language has become more fluent and expressive. Their powers of concentration have certainly developed. I see children beginning to experiment and take risks with written language. And most of all I see children expressing a new confidence in their own abilities. I'm not sure what can be more basic than that."

- Lois Burdett