

### Shakespeare as part of the 'cultural capital'

by Francis Gilbert, author of *Starcrossed: Romeo and Juliet For Teenagers*.

*This resource, part of the 'Shakespeare series' of email newsletters and following on from 'Introducing your students to Shakespeare' [Teachit filename 21854] is designed to help students see Shakespeare as part of their 'cultural capital' and familiarise them with some famous Shakespeare quotes.*

#### The basic idea

Some people think that you're not educated if you don't know certain bits of Shakespeare. Whether you like it or not, Shakespeare has become part of the 'cultural capital' that every student is expected to have. These exercises offer a quick and easy way of covering a lot of ground very quickly. A 'Bluffer's Guide to Shakespeare' if you like!

#### Applying it

The best way to do this is to take the most famous lines from Shakespeare and see if students can match the play, the meaning and line. You can obviously choose your favourite lines – I've chosen mine below. You'll find some good suggestions here:

<http://www.rhymezone.com/shakespeare/toplines/>

Attached is a worksheet I prepared earlier, followed by answers. Photocopy the worksheet and, if you like, the answers too, so students can mark their own work. The quotations are separated from their explanations and the play itself. The students have to read through the worksheet and try and match the play with the quote, and the meaning and context. In the process they should learn about the important lines from Shakespeare. If you have students of lower ability, cut down the number of lines to no more than three or four quotes.

#### What's the point?

This exercise enables students to learn about the most famous lines in Shakespeare by thinking about their meanings and contexts. You can, if you like, leave out my 'meaning and context' section and get them to work out the meanings for themselves, or you could ask them to write their own meanings for the lines; what they mean to them. The 'mix and match' exercise is good for classes which are easily distracted, and possibly not good at writing; students can read the worksheet and draw arrows which connect the quotes, play name and place, and explanations.

### Independent research skills

This is an ideal opportunity for students to use the internet to explore one or more of the quotes in depth, finding out more about it, looking up synopses of the relevant play on the internet, reading the play itself either online, or watching it on YouTube (most Shakespeare plays are there). They could gather all their notes/thoughts/links in a Word document which they email to you, and then do a presentation to the class about what they have found out from their research.

### Putting pen to paper

**Writing to inform, describe and explain:** Students could write an informative leaflet aimed at teenagers about the most famous lines from Shakespeare, explaining why they are famous.

**Writing to entertain, imagine and explore:** Students could write a story based on one of the quotes from Shakespeare, using it as inspiration for their story. Some films are based on the lines already, e.g. *Band of Brothers*, *To Be Or Not To Be*, *Murder Most Foul*.

**Writing to analyse, review and comment:** More able students could research one of the quotes in depth and write a paragraph or two about why the quote has become so famous.

**Writing to argue, persuade and advise:** Write a persuasive speech on any topic which uses at least two or three of these quotes.

### Variations on a theme

Students could do a slideshow illustrating the quotes with clips from YouTube or Google images. Getting students to pick the most fitting Google images in pairs is a good place to start; simply ask your students to type in the main topic of the speech or the key words into the Google search engine and then see what comes up in terms of images. This exercise gets students deploying their summarising skills – boiling down quotes to key words – and also asks them to choose the right image for them; the discussion that results from this should help them see ultimately that good writing is all about choosing the right image.

**Line from play**

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;	To be, or not to be: that is the question:
This above all: to thine own self be true,	All the world's a stage And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages.
Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments	If music be the food of love, play on;
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury Signifying nothing.	

**Play**

<i>Macbeth</i> (Act 5 Scene 5)
<i>As You Like It</i> (Act 2 Scene 7)
<i>King Henry V</i> (Act 4 Scene 3)
Sonnets: XVIII
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Act 2 Scene 2)
Sonnets CXVI
<i>Hamlet</i> (Act I Scene 3)
<i>Twelfth Night</i> (Act 1 Scene 1)
<i>Hamlet</i> (Act 3 Scene 1)

**Explanation/ interpretation**

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To exist on earth, or not to exist; to kill myself or not to kill myself; that's the question that's really gnawing at me.

The whole of the world is like a stage at the theatre and every man and woman are simply actors on this stage who leave and arrive on the stage; and every person over time acts out many parts, which you could say are part of seven phases.

O my God Romeo, Romeo! Why did I have to fall in love with Romeo?

Shall I compare your beauty to a summer's day?

Our army is very small; there are only a few of us. But the small amount of soldiers that are here are happy because we're like brothers to each other.

If music is the thing that encourages people to feel loving towards each other; if it is the thing that feeds love and makes it grow, then please could the band carry on playing.

The most important thing to remember is to do what is right for you.

There are no problems that couples can't overcome if they are true to each other.

The world just goes on and on with each day following another like a snail creeping along the road until everything comes to an end and then we realise we're fools because our past lives have simply been a way of dying and turning into dust. You're dead, snuffed out like a candle that has only burned for a short time! The truth is that life is like an actor who struts around the stage and then is heard no more. Or it's like the story told by an idiot which is full of noises and anger but means absolutely nothing.

## Answers

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:*

To exist on earth, or not to exist; to kill myself or not to kill myself; that's the question that's really gnawing at me.

[\(Hamlet – Act 3 Scene 1\)](#)

*All the world's a stage,*

*And all the men and women merely players:*

*They have their exits and their entrances;*

*And one man in his time plays many parts,*

*His acts being seven ages.*

The whole of the world is like a stage at the theatre and every man and woman are simply actors on this stage who leave and arrive on the stage; and every person over time acts out many parts, which you could say are part of seven phases.

[\(As You Like It – Act 2 Scene 7\)](#)

*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo*

O my God Romeo, Romeo! Why did I have to fall in love with Romeo?

[\(Romeo and Juliet – Act 2 Scene 2\)](#)

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day*

Shall I compare your beauty to a summer's day?

[\(Sonnets – XVIII\)](#)

*We few, we happy few; we band of brothers;*

Our army is very small, there are only a few of us, but the small amount of soldiers that are here are happy because we're like brothers to each other.

[\(King Henry V – Act 4 Scene 3\)](#)

*If music be the food of love, play on;*

If music is the thing that encourages people to feel loving towards each other; if it is the thing that feeds love and makes it grow, then please could the band carry on playing.

([Twelfth Night – Act 1 Scene 1](#))

*This above all: to thine own self be true,*

The most important thing to remember is to do what is right for you.

([Hamlet – Act 1 Scene 3](#))

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds*

*Admit impediments*

There are no problems that couples can't overcome if they are true to each other.

([Sonnets: CXVI](#))

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,*

*Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,*

*To the last syllable of recorded time;*

*And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*

*The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!*

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*

*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*

*And then is heard no more. It is a tale*

*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury*

*Signifying nothing.*

The world just goes on and on with each day following another like a snail creeping along the road until everything comes to an end and then we realise we're fools because our past lives have simply been a way of dying and turning into dust. You're dead, snuffed out like a candle that has only burned for a short time! The truth is that life is like an actor who struts around the stage and then is heard no more. Or it's like the story told by an idiot which is full of noises and anger but means absolutely nothing.

([Macbeth – Act 5 Scene 5](#))