

# REINTERPRETING SHAKESPEARE with JACKIE FRENCH Education Resources: Grade 9 - 12

The following resources have been developed to take your Word Play experience from festival to classroom. Written and compiled by qualified teacher, Ella Peile, UPLIT's Children & Young Adult Coordinator, the suggested classroom exercises and activities below are designed to reflect key learning content outlined in the QCAA Senior English Syllabus and ACARA National Curriculum.

For more information contact UPLIT.

**T** +61 7 3255 0254

**E** [info@uplit.com.au](mailto:info@uplit.com.au)

**UPLIT.COM.AU**

## Curriculum Links

The following activities are designed to complement the Australian Curriculum in English and History, and the QCAA Senior English Syllabus. Specific curriculum links have been noted at the end of each activity.

## About the Author

Jackie French AM is an award-winning writer, wombat negotiator and was the Australian Children's Laureate for 2014-2015 and the 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. In 2016 Jackie became a Member of the Order of Australia for her contribution to children's literature and her advocacy for youth literacy. She is regarded as one of Australia's most popular children's authors, and writes across all genres - from picture books, history, fantasy, ecology and sci-fi to her much loved historical fiction. 'Share a Story' was the primary philosophy behind Jackie's two-year term as Laureate.

## About the Book

*The Diary Of William Shakespeare, Gentleman* is part comedy, part love story, the threads of Shakespeare's life drawn from his plays.

Could the world's greatest writer truly put down his pen forever to become a gentleman?

He was a boy who escaped small town life to be the most acclaimed playwright of the land. A lover whose sonnets still sing 400 years later; a glover's apprentice who became a gentleman.

But was he happy with his new riches? Who was the woman he truly loved?

The world knows the name of William Shakespeare. This book reveals the man - lover, son and poet.

Based on new documentary evidence, as well as textual examination of his plays, this fascinating book gives a tantalising glimpse at what might have been: the other hands that helped craft those plays, the secrets that must ever be hidden but - just possibly - may now be told.

## Preparatory Activity

### Elizabethan England

Divide the class into five groups. Assign each group one of the following aspects of the Elizabethan period:

- Class, status, and identity
- Daily life
- Relationships, family, gender roles
- The theatre, writing, poetry
- Religion and cultural beliefs

Provide students with access to research materials, and note cards. They are to write a title and brief description, on separate cards, of the topic as relevant to each of the following characters:

- A farm labourer
- A craftsperson
- The daughter of a merchant
- A gentlewoman
- An earl (nobleman)

Collect the cards and group each character's cards together. Assign each group a character and hand them their cards. The group collates the information to develop a profile of their character. They then devise a short story or play describing a day in the life of their character. While the specific events will be imaginary, students should ensure that the situations and relationships presented in their story or performance are plausible given their character and the setting.

Read or present each group's work. Discussion points:

- How was your research evident in the story?
- Describe the status of the character in relation to the other characters in the story
- Overall, which character had the highest status? What factors influenced this?
- What are the biggest differences in the lives of people of the Elizabethan era compared to our lives?
- How would the values and attitudes of the time have informed Shakespeare's work?
- What did it mean to be a "gentleman" in Elizabethan times? Refer to the author's note on page 272.

Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama (ACADRM047)

Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles (ACADRM048)

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)

Create imaginative texts that make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts (ACELT1644)

**Reading Reflection**  
**The World of the Book**

This activity helps students develop their understanding of the historical time and of William Shakespeare’s life. Suggested pages have been included for each topic, though there are many possibilities. In English, the quotes could be used to build a character profile. In History, students could test the accuracy of the historical information by cross-checking against historical sources, considering the narrator’s position in society.

Topic	Quote or event	What it tells us about the time and the character
Class/ Status	(p.18) (p.149) (p.154)	
Work	(p.79) (p.162) (p.207)	
Writing and Theatre	(p.24) (p.46) (p.132) (p.149)	
Daily Life	(p.41) (p.99) (p.271)	
Love and Relationships	(p.29) (p.78) (p.105) (p.169)	
Gender Roles	(p.60) (p.137) (p.204)	
Family	(p.168) (p.204)	
Religion	(p.11) (p.183) (p.208)	

Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633)

Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts (ACELY1744)

Evaluate the reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources (ACHHS171)

Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELY1749)

Identify and analyse the perspectives of people from the past (ACHHS190)

Identify and analyse different historical interpretations (including their own) (ACHHS191)

## Research Activity

### Shakespeare in History and Story

Provide students with a timeline of Shakespeare's life, or ask them to create their own using historical information. Suggested resources:

Pictorial timeline: <http://www.nosweatshakespeare.com/resources/shakespeares-life/timeline/>

Simple text timeline: <http://absoluteshakespeare.com/trivia/timeline/timeline.htm> .

Multimedia resource: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/timeline/>

Ask students to identify the key events of Shakespeare's life as presented in *The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman*. Plot on the timeline using a visual code to differentiate between historical information and the fictional text.

Discussion points:

- What events are contentious? How could we confirm or disprove them?
- What historical sources support the claims made by the story? Are they reliable?
- How does the book support or challenge commonly held beliefs about Shakespeare?
- Were any of your own beliefs or assumptions supported or challenged by the book?

Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELY1749)

Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry (ACHHS184)

Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods (ACHHS186)

## Group Activity

### Character Analysis

Discuss the format of a diary and the way it impacts characterisation. Discussion points:

- What does a diary allow an author to communicate about a character?
- Does a diary necessarily tell every detail of someone's life? What parts would be omitted?
- Who is a diary for? How would this impact its tone and content?
- What is the typical narrative format of a diary? How does the book reflect this, and in what ways does it deviate from it? Consider the use of memory as narrative device.

Divide students into groups and hand each group a sheet of A3 paper. Ask students to draw a basic silhouette of Shakespeare's portrait. Fill the sheet with the following:

- Inside the silhouette, include private thoughts written only in the diary and not shared publicly
- Outside the silhouette, include his behaviours that indicate his outward persona.

Compare the inside and the outside of the silhouette. Which aspects are consistent? Which suggest inner conflict or secrecy?

Ask each group to select the three most important or dominant aspects of Shakespeare's personality, based on *The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman*. For each aspect, find an example in his work (a quote, character, or storyline) that reflects this. Students could then present this to the class and justify their selections with reference to the book and Shakespeare's work. Their evaluations could also be compared to historical information about Shakespeare, such as <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeares-life-and-times>

Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view (ACELT1620)

Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621)

**Group Activity**  
**Literary Devices**

Although *The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman* is a different format to Shakespeare’s work, it nonetheless references some of his works and his use of language generally.

Break the class into groups and provide each group with a sheet, each labelled with a literary device:

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Imagery
- Sound Devices (rhyme, rhythm, repetition)
- Juxtaposition

Have each group find as many examples of the device as they can in five minutes. Rotate the sheets between the groups and repeat, this time giving the groups four minutes. Continue until students have one minute to try to find examples not yet listed. Rotate the sheets a final time and ask each group to choose their favourite examples. Present to the class and explain why these examples were considered the strongest or most interesting. Discuss how these reflect the author’s personal style and/or Shakespeare’s writing style.

Explain how authors creatively use the structures of sentences and clauses for particular effects (ACELA1557)

Identify how vocabulary choices contribute to specificity, abstraction and stylistic effectiveness (ACELA1561)

Compare and evaluate how ‘voice’ as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (ACELT1643)

**Independent Activity**  
**Shakespearean References**

The following handout can be used to identify some of the references to Shakespeare’s works. Some may be found by direct quotation; for others, students will need to research the theme or idea presented.

The author builds a picture of Shakespeare the man through references to Shakespeare the poet. Note how each reference contributes to the characterisation, considering:

- What inspired the quote (in the story).
- The difference between the idea in the story and the published work of Shakespeare.
- What the thought says about the character’s values and personality.

Quote:	Work referenced	Contribution to characterisation
<i>The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman</i>		
<i>Friends, Romans, everyone! Listen to me! I’ve come to bury Caesar ... (p.23)</i>		
<i>...about a tempest and a shipwreck... (p.36)</i>		
<i>My eyes, I fear, are nothing like the sun; (p.60)</i>		

Hamnet, his son		
<i>Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...</i> (p.112)		
<i>My Anne was no shrew to tame.</i> (p.124)		
<i>What must be done is best done quickly.</i> (p.119)		

Compare and evaluate how ‘voice’ as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (ACELT1643)

Analyse and evaluate text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts (ACELT1774)

### Group Activity Understanding Shakespearean Language

Discuss how English has changed over time and explore common words in Shakespeare’s text and their contemporary equivalents. A searchable glossary is available at <http://absoluteshakespeare.com/glossary/a.htm>

Shakespearean insults: Mix and match insults inspired by Shakespeare. This is a fun way to get students using Shakespearean language out loud. Text and suggested structure available at: <https://www.theatrefolk.com/freebies/shakespearean-insults.pdf>

Using <http://nfs.sparknotes.com/>, provide each group with an excerpt of a Shakespearean text and its modern-day translation. In pairs or groups, students prepare a section to perform, with one half presenting the original text (with actions), and the other half reading the “subtitles.” Encourage the use of comic delivery.

Understand that Standard Australian English in its spoken and written forms has a history of evolution and change and continues to evolve (ACELA1563)

Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts (ACELY1744)

### Class Activity Rhythm and Form in Shakespeare’s Language

Discuss how Shakespeare’s use of punctuation helps the reader/actor to follow the rhythm. Put the following instructions on the board:

,	click
; -	clap
. : ?	breath

Provide students with a monologue or soliloquy. Allow them a few minutes to practise using the above instructions. Remind them not to pause between lines, only at punctuation. Read the text aloud as a group, using the appropriate actions. This activity is useful to break the natural habit of pausing at the end of a line.

Shakespeare used different language forms depending on the mood and character. Find examples of iambic pentameter, trochaic tetrameter, and rhyming couplets. Read the texts aloud, emphasizing the rhythmic pattern, and then again using a more natural speech pattern. Note the effect of the meter and use of rhyme on the tone of the speech.

Explain how authors creatively use the structures of sentences and clauses for particular effects (ACELA1557)

Identify how vocabulary choices contribute to specificity, abstraction and stylistic effectiveness (ACELA1561)

Apply an expanding vocabulary to read increasingly complex texts with fluency and comprehension (ACELY1743)