

Shakespeare in the 21st-Century Classroom

A Method Guide

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Erasmus+

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Impressum

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Foreword

The present Europe, a space of variety, faces challenges in linguistic and culturally diverse classrooms. With the Erasmus+ project *CultureShake* a transnational team wants to approach these challenges and find solutions. The team consists of different organisations (two schools, two universities and one heritage organisation and educational charity) contributing to the project with complementary expertise: the English School Gothenburg in Sweden is experienced in the field of inclusion and multilingual school environment; the Friedrich-Wöhler Gymnasium in Germany implemented a world class with refugee students; the University of Education Karlsruhe in Germany provides expertise in multilingual didactics, CLIL and transdisciplinarity; the Primorska University in Slovenia joined with a linguist versed in lexicography; the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in the UK offers the expertise on Shakespeare and theatre pedagogy.

Within the three year duration of the project from 2016 to 2019 this transnational team developed together five intellectual outputs which were an integral part of the learning activities where students and experts joined.

The intellectual outputs focus on the following Erasmus+ topics:

- Inclusion – equity
- Integration of refugees
- ICT – new technologies – digital competences.

They meet the following programme priorities:

- Inclusive education, training and youth
- Open and innovative education, training and youth work, embedded in the digital era
- Addressing underachievement in the basic skills of maths, science and literacy through more effective, innovative teaching methods.

Why did the project team choose these topics and priorities?

After the so-called refugee wave in 2015, the need for multilingual teaching material and innovative approaches for schools became prominent. The already existing challenges with plurilingual speakers in a heterogeneous classroom now became more virulent because of the quantity of newly arrived children. At the same time Europe also experienced a new wave of terror attacks, which it was feared would also lead to an increase in hostility against refugees and migrants. As a consequence, the EU ministers of education published the Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom¹, Tolerance and Non-discrimination through Education, where participation is seen as a major aim to foster participation and tolerance. Inclusion here as well as in Julie Ward's report on intercultural dialogue² is seen as central to prevent exclusion and racism, and to empower people to participate. With their expertise the *CultureShake* team intends to follow-up these two European documents with a project where we developed innovative products for use in multilingual classrooms and education.

How did the project team approach the above topics and priorities?

Cultural heritage has the potential to play a central role in promoting active citizenship as well as the fundamental values of the European Union. In this context, the *CultureShake* project decided to work with plurilingual students on Shakespeare and his works as shared European cultural heritage that transcends its national context. As the truly global extent of Shakespeare reception and performances shows, Shakespeare's plays have a worldwide appeal beyond their historical and cultural importance to their country of origin. They are therefore best placed to offer points of connection for plurilingual and pluricultural students to explore experiences we have in common with each other as humans, and that span cultural as well as geographical distances.

As the above mentioned challenges are not restricted to one nation or one national education system, but reach out to all

European states and are a global issue, the project team has a transnational set up. Furthermore, the stakeholders range from regional/national to European and international, because of the global importance. The project is based on a transdisciplinary approach, where the *Lebenswelt* challenge, the real-world problem of multilingual settings is considered beyond disciplinary boundaries bringing together practitioners and researchers from different fields.

What are the major outcomes of the project?

CultureShake was a three year's venture to contribute to the European idea of peace and variety. The project team developed the following five intellectual outputs, which were tested during the learning activities. Stakeholder as well as peer feedback was included into the products.

Intellectual output 1, "Method guide for teachers: Shakespeare in the 21st-century classroom", has been created for teachers who would like to include Shakespeare in their language teaching or in their multilingual classroom, but who do not quite know where to start with this. This method guide makes clear why 'doing' Shakespeare with language learners is a worthwhile undertaking and how all their pupils can profit from it, including those with multilingual backgrounds.

Intellectual Output 2, "CUSHA Online Dictionary Compilation", develops a concept for progressing an online dictionary in the classroom. With this concept teachers familiarise with a student-centred production, process and usage of an online dictionary.

The goal of intellectual Output 3, "Concept for the Development of Peer Teaching Material", was to provide teachers with a concept and step by step instructions as well as further ideas on how to activate pupils to prepare material and lesson plans for their peer groups.

Intellectual output 4, "Exchanging Culture Shakes: A Teacher Manual for Multilingual and Transcultural School Exchanges", is designed for teachers preparing a school exchange focusing on culture and language sensitive learning objectives for learning groups with different mother tongues. This manual is a ready to use

handbook with theory-guided tasks which can be used right away for a multilingual and transcultural school exchange. How can a migrant with a culture and mother tongue different from the national culture and official language be an integral part of a school exchange and not be excluded?

Intellectual output 5, “Module for Further Teacher Education”, summarizes features of the other outputs to develop a module for teacher training.

How can these intellectual outputs be used in educational settings?

The intellectual outputs can be used one after the other or on a modular basis. They are appropriate for parts of lessons, a singular lesson, teaching units or whole school exchanges. All the intellectual outputs correspond but can also be used separately.

We hope you enjoy and try out our material. Feedback is welcome at any time; our contact details are available on our project website www.cultureshake.eu.

The *CultureShake* Team

NOTES

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf (25/06/2019).

² Julie Ward (2015), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0373_EN.html?redirect (25/06/2019).

Introduction

Cultural heritage has the potential to play a central role in promoting active citizenship and the fundamental values of the European Union as well as being an integral part of intercultural learning.³ In this context, the *CultureShake* project decided to work with multilingual secondary school students on Shakespeare and his works as shared European cultural heritage that transcends its national context.⁴ As the truly global extent of Shakespeare performances shows, Shakespeare's plays have a worldwide appeal beyond their historical and cultural importance to their country of origin.

In order to develop and share teaching materials that were innovative and inclusive in terms of multilingual and multicultural classrooms, the *CultureShake* project consortium decided to explore drama pedagogical approaches as well as other more creative and interactive methods of teaching. This method guide introduces a number of activities that make it possible for students in multilingual and multicultural classrooms to discover Shakespeare's stories and poetry for themselves, no matter what their mother tongue or heritage culture. They offer opportunities for the students to bring their languages and cultures into the discussion of topics and themes prevalent in the two plays *CultureShake* set out to explore, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. In addition to already discussing elements of language politics within their plots, these two plays offer points of reference for *CultureShake*'s intended audience that we thought would make for interesting springboards in a teaching environment. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, deals with themes of friendship, growing up, and making your own decisions, as well as with the comedy's overall topic of the tribulations of love and mistaken identity, while *The Tempest* investigates questions of

knowledge and power as well as experiences of exile and notions of 'home'.

Working with English language learners has been one of the many branches of the educational work of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, in Stratford-upon-Avon and around the world for many years. The first part of this method guide, which goes into more detail about how to unlock the potential in Shakespeare's stories for 21st-century school students, is predominantly based on the Trust's expertise and experience of teaching this particular target audience. This will hopefully equip teachers with the tools and the confidence to make the most from working with any of Shakespeare's plays, and also with his language, which still shapes the way we speak English today.

The second part of this method guide goes on to showcase a number of activities that can be used in the classroom to include multilingual students in lessons about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Many of these activities were carried out with the *CultureShake* students during the learning activities of the project in 2017 and 2018, and were shaped with the help of feedback from conference audiences and the *CultureShake* stakeholders, to whom we are grateful for their comments and insights. Any accompanying activity sheets or scripts are freely available for download on the *CultureShake* website as well as on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's education pages, and are linked throughout the text. We hope the activities and exercises in this method guide provide inspiration for including Shakespeare into the language learner classroom and that they prove useful in your teaching.

Linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms are becoming increasingly common but in many cases teacher training does not include ways of dealing with or indeed making the most of the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity prevalent in the student body. Unfortunately, multilingualism is still too often perceived as a drawback rather than an asset for the students. However, amongst others, Gogolin et al. (2005) have shown that including the students' home languages into the classroom can significantly raise self-esteem and support inclusion.⁵ Particularly since the increased

arrival of refugees after 2015, teachers have also been trying to integrate these newly arrived students in their new environments so as to foster inclusion.

Why is it important to include student languages in the classroom? In the field of multilingual studies the positive implications for students and society have been widely demonstrated.⁶ Amongst these are the importance of language diversity as cultural heritage and the appreciation of language as a means of appreciating the individual and their culture. Furthermore, the promotion of language awareness contributes to metalinguistic development in the sense that the students develop a deeper understanding of how languages and communication in general work.⁷ For these reasons amongst others many EU policy documents on education and society, such as the *Report on the Role of Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity and Education in Promoting EU Fundamental Values*⁸, recommend the promotion and appreciation of multilingualism. In these documents inclusion is the paramount objective for successful education and societies, and integrating home languages across the curriculum is one way of contributing to social inclusion.

As a consequence of this understanding, a re-design of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) became necessary in order to adapt to multilingual classrooms in schools, no longer putting the native speaker at the centre but instead using the plurilingual speaker as its reference point.⁹ In addition to the need to educate students for a globalised world and multilingual workspace, the integration of mother tongues supports students' linguistic and cognitive development.¹⁰ Code-switching between languages, for example, is no longer regarded as a linguistic deficiency but considered an asset because students display the ability to connect different languages to each other and thereby add deeper meaning to their utterances by making conscious use of different connotations of words in their respective languages.¹¹

These new developments and research results confront education systems with the task of implementing EU strategies into national curricula and finding new approaches for teaching English

as a foreign language (TEFL). Intertwining TEFL and multilingual didactics may offer a new twist, for example, to teaching Shakespeare's plays in a multilingual classroom.

Shakespeare in the 21st-century Classroom: A Method Guide for Teachers



The following proposes a number of approaches to Shakespeare in the classroom from different perspectives. Some of these approaches can be used in all teaching settings, while others are special to the multilingual classroom. They draw extensively on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's experience with language learners and on the work carried out with the *CultureShake* participants between 2016 and 2019.

Shakespeare, our Contemporary: The Relevance of his Plays

One of the biggest challenges we encounter in the classroom are the students' preconceptions about Shakespeare, i.e. that he is boring, old-fashioned, long-winded, irrelevant and 'not for them'. Particularly in the UK, where Shakespeare's impact on the English curriculum has increased since the last curriculum reform in 2013, many students connect Shakespeare predominantly to exams. If this is paired with Romantic or Victorian ideas of Shakespeare as the genius, the national poet, the world's most famous playwright, in short, as a writer that must be admired, worshipped even, then a real and meaningful exploration of Shakespeare turns almost into an impossibility. How are your students to approach the works of a genius or understand the work of a genius, if they are not geniuses themselves?

Get the Poet off the Plinth

Shakespeare has unfortunately been put on a pedestal ever since the erection of his statue in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey in 1741, and the 'Bardolatry', particularly of the Romantics, has cemented his position 'up there'. While this is not a problem for the literary pilgrim or tourist, it is deadly for the classroom. As a consequence, the first act of teaching Shakespeare is one of iconoclasm: get the poet off the plinth! Shakespeare can speak to us and to your students more easily when he is close to us. Your students will find his plays and poetry much more fascinating when

they understand that they were written by a school drop-out who didn't go to university, got his girlfriend pregnant and found himself with a family of four to support before he celebrated his twenty-first birthday. The plays will inspire your students to creative responses in a much easier way when they understand that using Shakespeare's work as a quarry to mine for their own creations is exactly what he did with the literary materials available to him: instead of admiring Shakespeare the genius, present Shakespeare the magpie. That Shakespeare was the most creative magpie of all times remains unchallenged, but your students will walk away with a deeper understanding of his craft in adapting pre-existing material for the theatre of the time.

Reveal the Emotional Core

The second preconception is that Shakespeare writes about things which no longer matter to us, which have nothing to do with our world, not to speak of the world of your students. The argument against this notion that is usually offered is Shakespeare is timeless, that he wrote not for "an age but for all time", as Ben Jonson suggested in his dedicatory poem to the *Collected Histories, Tragedies and Comedies* in 1623. However, for every play or poem that is taught this assertion needs to be challenged. How exactly is this text timeless? How can I as a teacher identify this timelessness and highlight it? How can I guide my students towards realising how relevant the play or poem is?

This is a task that needs to be done before teaching begins, as it is a crucial step towards devising lesson plans and individual activities as well as setting the tone of your lessons. In order to get to a level where you and your students see how the play relates to your own world, focus on the emotional core of the play. Forget about the language and the shape of the play for a moment, or about the historical context in which it was written or how it was interpreted in later centuries. These are questions that can be dealt with later. For now, try to focus on what the characters are going through in terms of their emotions. Do they make comprehensible decisions? Are their actions credible? Are they overreacting? Then

in a second step, can *you* draw parallels with your students' reality? Can they? Is it possible to use pop cultural references to understand a certain character? And if not, then discuss why this is the case.

To exemplify this point let's have a look at one of the *CultureShake* focus plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Why would any contemporary student care about some fairies in a magical wood near Athens, where a bunch of lovers with issues try to leave their previous life behind and undergo surreal transformative experiences? As this play deals with four different plot lines it might be a good idea to treat them separately in order to strip the play back to its emotional core. The following list offers some topics and related questions that might help in finding common ground between the world of the play and the world of the 21st century. Trying to identify a well-known popular song suitable for the characters is sometimes also a good exercise to get to the essence of their emotional journey.

The lovers

Friendship and what love can do to it:

Hermia and Helena are best friends, who end up being torn apart by boyfriends. Compare Helena's complaint in Act III Scene 2, when she thinks Hermia is in on the joke of the two boys now 'in love' with her instead of her friend:

"So we grow together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition;
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem"

This is indeed a perennial theme for teenagers who are still learning how to negotiate friendships alongside developing romantic partnerships.

Gender relations:

"We cannot fight for love, as men may do;
We should be wooed and were not made to woo."
(Act II Scene 1)

Look at Helena's complaint here: Who is supposed to profess his or her love to whom? Is it that only men are supposed to pursue their love interest, or is this ok for women too?

Generational conflict:

"[Demetrius] hath my love,
And what is mine my love shall render him.
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius."
(Act I Scene 1)

Egeus has a very clear idea of who his daughter is supposed to marry, and he cannot understand that Hermia might want to have a say in this. What about obedience to your parents' will? Is Egeus right in insisting that he is the one to decide who Hermia is going to marry? What about the Athenian law that states that Hermia either has to obey her father or die, or become a virgin priest?

The Lovers' song: Quit Playing Games With My Heart

The fairies

Using **power and influence** wisely:

If you happen to have supernatural powers that influence world climate, would you be a bit more careful going to emotional extremes and risk ruining everybody else's food supply?

Can you imagine being so mad at somebody that you want to humiliate them in public to get your revenge on them?

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (Act III Scene 2)

Puck keeps playing tricks on innocent people, by turning a man into a donkey just because he can, or by mixing up the lovers – was this really a mistake or is he making more mischief? Does he understand how much trouble and grief he causes the humans?

Theseus and Hippolyta

Gender relations:

"I wooed thee with my sword" (Act I Scene 1)

Does Hippolyta, the Queen of Amazons, suffer from Stockholm Syndrome after having been defeated in battle by Theseus? Or is she going to get married against her will? How could this influence the tone of the frame narrative of the play?

Law and order:

"For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up—
Which by no means we may extenuate—
To death, or to a vow of single life."

(Act I Scene 1)

"Egeus, I will overbear your will"

(Act IV Scene 1)

How come Theseus chooses to follow the harsh Athenian law at the beginning of the play, only to brush it aside in one line and without any discernible consequences at the end? What kind of a ruler does he seem to be?

**The
Mechanicals**

The hard life of amateur dramatists:

Have you ever put on a play yourself? How do you go about the casting? Who gets to play which role and why? What do you think makes a good actor? What do you think makes a really bad one?

How do you want your audience to receive your amateur production? What could be terrifying for actors on stage?

Bottom's transformation:

How would you feel if somebody entirely 'out of your league' made romantic advances towards you?

Bottom's song: Uptown Girl

Stripping everything away except the emotional core of the play reveals the characters and their behaviour in a much clearer light, and this is where contemporary audiences usually connect to the plays. If you want to come back to the play as a whole, make your students think about the variety of romantic relationships we are confronted with in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Most of them appear fairly problematic in our modern understanding. Given that the play might have been written for a wedding, what does *A Midsummer Night's Dream* tell us about love and marriage? That it is foolish? Magical? Will love last in the four relationships we are privy to? For example, will Demetrius' love potion wear off at some point? Can Helena be truly happy with a husband who has been put under a spell to make him love her? How voluntary is Hippolyta's marriage to Theseus, and how might this influence the future of Athens? And what is going to happen when Titania finds out that

her husband drugged her into desiring a donkey, just to have a laugh at her expense as revenge for her disobedience? Does Shakespeare present us with a critical view of love and marriage here, or with a nice, pink and fluffy one?

Getting the poet off the plinth and exploring the relevance of the plays are two ways of breaking down barriers towards Shakespeare in the classroom. But what about the language? How is it possible to make students understand and appreciate a form of English that is more than 400 years old?

Shakespeare' English

Our own teaching experience at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust as well as conversations with school teachers tell us that this is the biggest obstacle to students enjoying Shakespeare in their studies. Students of English feel daunted by the 'old-fashioned' English and are reluctant to invest time and energy in learning vocabulary they are unlikely to use outside the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, often fear that they might not be knowledgeable enough to explain the text to their students. However, the beauty and energy of Shakespeare's language is an integral part in the experience of the plays and is one of the reasons we still care about these works.

With a bit of help it is possible to significantly reduce the foreignness of Early Modern English. The following gives teachers and students some pointers to understanding some of the more common characteristics of Shakespeare's English.¹²

Early Modern English is not Medieval English

First of all, while Early Modern English, the kind of language Shakespeare wrote in, is different from Modern English we use today, the differences are not insurmountable. Most modern English speakers are able to understand Early Modern English with a bit of support and practice. Although it might be 'old', Early Modern English is not 'medieval' English – this was spoken from around 1100 till about 1500 and is much more difficult to understand. During the time Shakespeare wrote, the English language was in a state of flux, moving away from the medieval English and towards the kind of English we speak and write today.



It is not necessary to go into too much detail about the characteristics of Early Modern English in order to understand excerpts from a play or a speech, but a number of differences should be highlighted. This will save your students the time and frustration of trying to understand certain words supported by a learner's dictionary that is unlikely to include historical word forms.

Grammatical Change: *you* vs *thou*

Early Modern English still had a second person singular, *thou*, much as most other European languages still do, for example, the French *tu*, or the German *du*. The verb *to be* therefore conjugated in a slightly different way during Shakespeare's lifetime: I am, *thou art*, he/she/it is, we are, you are, they are.

In Modern English, this personal pronoun with its possessive form *thine* and its objective *thee* has been replaced by the second person plural *you*, not only eliminating their corresponding verb endings but also removing the usual connotations around the differences between addressing somebody with *thou* instead of *you*. *Thou* was normally reserved either for those the speaker knows very well and who are socially on the same level, or it was used towards social inferiors, for example servants. *You*, on the other hand, was the more polite form, predominantly used when addressing people who are as yet unknown to the speaker, or clearly on a higher social level.

Take a look at the following passage from Act I of *Macbeth*, when Lady Macbeth has just received her husband's letter telling her of his strange encounter with the three witches and their prophecies concerning him.

Lady Macbeth

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;

It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it [...]
(*Macbeth*, Act I, scene 5)

Lady Macbeth does not only display the whole range of second person singular verb endings here - *art*, *shalt*, *wouldst* – but she also gives us an insight into how familiar the Macbeths are, addressing each other with the more intimate *thou*. They make an intimate and formidable, if ruthless, couple throughout the play.

Another good example of the uses of *you* or *thou* and the implications of this can be found in the opening scene of *King Lear*. When Lear commands his youngest daughter Cordelia to speak in his very public love competition – he has assembled his entire court to witness his three daughters confess their love to him in order to receive the biggest share in his kingdom – he addresses her as *you*:

| | |
|---|---------------|
| King Lear | Now, our joy, |
| Although the last, not least; to whose young love | |
| The vines of France and milk of Burgundy | |
| Strive to be interest; what can you say to draw | |
| A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak. | |

When Cordelia refuses to play this game and vows to love him as a daughter according to custom, “no more nor less”, Lear at first remains in his public voice: “How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little, / Lest it may mar your fortunes.” But quickly after, his rage breaks through and he leaves all addresses of politeness and public conversation behind:

Let it be so! thy truth then be thy dower!
[...] Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this forever.

What a difference a *thou* makes in this instance.

Grammatical Change: Variations in 3rd Person Singular Verb Endings

The other grammatical difference that sometimes causes confusion for language learners and native speakers alike is the fact that Early Modern English still allows for variations of verb endings in the 3rd person singular. During Shakespeare's lifetime, both the older versions using *-th*, *-eth* as in *doth* or *maketh*, were still in use as well as the more modern *-s* and *-es* ones we recognise today, *does* and *makes*. Their usage is almost entirely interchangeable and frequently happens within the same line. As Shakespeare often wrote in verse using a recognisable metre, a two-syllable verb form might sometimes fit the verse better than a monosyllabic one.

Semantics: Shifts in Meaning, False Friends and Obsolete Words

Overall there aren't many words in Shakespeare's works that have changed their meaning completely, but a number of words had broader or more extreme meanings. As an example, *naughty* was much more negative at the time compared to today. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, you might wonder what Oberon might mean by "welkin" when he instructs Puck to conjure up fog to stop Lysander and Demetrius from fighting over Helena with the following line: "The starry *welkin* cover thou anon" (Act III Scene 2). Similarly, the ship's captain's "fall to't, *yarely*, / or we run ourselves aground" at the beginning of *The Tempest* (Act I Scene 1) might need some explanation. Both of these words are no longer in use and will require looking up in a glossary. Miranda's use of "bootless" in Act I Scene 2 ("You have often / Begun to tell me what I am, but stopped / And left me to a *bootless* inquisition, / Concluding 'Stay: not yet.'") is confusing to a modern reader who understands "bootless" as meaning "without boots" instead of "pointless, unsuccessful".

Should you or your students identify a word whose modern meaning does not seem to fit the context of the sentence, it will be

worth checking in a Shakespeare glossary whether this word had a different or additional meaning 400 years ago.¹³ These glossaries are also helpful in the case of those few words that have truly fallen out of use. Thankfully, linguist David Crystal reckons that only about five per cent of all the words Shakespeare used in his works are no longer comprehensible to a modern reader.¹⁴

Shakespeare's Language Legacy

Important as it is to explain some of the general differences between Early Modern English and Modern English, it is also crucial to point out how close Shakespeare's language is to ours, or indeed, how much we owe this particular wordsmith for the way we speak today.

Shakespeare has been credited as the most creative writer in the English language in terms of popularising new words and phrases. It is estimated that between 800 and 3,000 words originate in his work. It might be wise, however, to take this with a pinch of salt as it is very hard to know whether Shakespeare actually coined all these words himself, or whether his First Folio simply happens to be the first printed work in which they appear. With the ongoing digitisation of early printed books, we might well discover earlier instances of words that were originally attributed to Shakespeare. Be that as it may, it is still astonishing how many of the words we use on a daily basis seem to have originated around that time and were at least popularised through Shakespeare's works.

For example, the word *apostrophe* (which we use rather a lot in language teaching) is mentioned for the first time in the play with the most apostrophes in the title, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Or, take some words that are more pedestrian – *downstairs*, or *to gossip*. Even if you try to get as far away from Shakespeare as possible and



spend a Saturday afternoon at the football, you might hear the fat knight Falstaff in the crowd's chant, *Send them packing!*

There are a number of ways your students can explore Shakespeare's language legacy. If they are familiar with some of his famous quotes, why not play a round of 'I spy Shakespeare', using an English newspaper? Or if you are looking for some video material to accompany your exploration of Shakespeare's language, BBC Learning English produced [Shakespeare Speaks](#), a series of animated videos for the 2016 anniversary year that introduces twenty phrases we owe to Shakespeare to language learners on a lower intermediate level. A couple of other short activities can also be found on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website.¹⁵

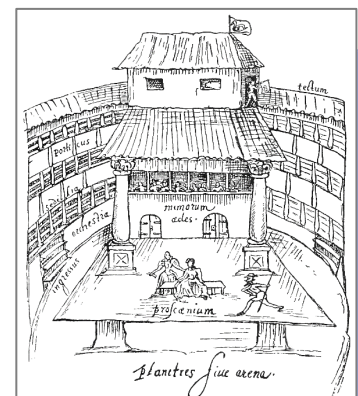
How to Approach a Play

You may now feel confident that you would like to focus on one of Shakespeare's plays. In which case, go for it! One thing to keep in mind, alongside the textual basis of your Shakespeare teaching (i.e. the question of whether to stick to the original play text¹⁶ or whether to try a graded reader instead), is how to break up the study of these texts. It is astonishing how often plays are still taught by reading them aloud around the classroom, line by line, scene by scene. While this ensures that all students will have 'done' all the play, it also makes for rather uniform and predictable classes – not exactly the kind of classroom setting that will foster an appreciation of Shakespeare and his works. So let's have a look at alternatives: how is it possible to bring these plays to life?

Beginnings

This might sound obvious: begin at the beginning. Shakespeare's opening scenes have to be immensely theatrical in order to work, and this theatricality can be used to get the students in the right frame of mind to understand that this is a script meant for performance.

Imagine the shape and size of an Elizabethan playhouse: big enough for several thousand audience members (estimates vary from 2,300 to 3,000 spectators for the Globe Theatre on Bankside), most of whom would have already had a couple of pints of ale by the time performances started in the early afternoon.¹⁷ As the area around the stage, called the pit or the yard, was reserved for those standing, you can imagine the jostling and shouting in the attempt to get



a decent view of the stage. All in all this is a fairly difficult environment if you want audiences to focus on what is about to happen on stage. In a modern theatre, the fact that people sit on reserved seats, that the house lights go down and a curtain rises, makes this a good deal easier. Shakespeare and his players had no such help. They had only their opening scenes to arrest attention of the crowd.

It is fascinating to see the sheer range of possibilities used by Shakespeare. His opening scenes range from formal prologues, as in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Henry V*, protagonist soliloquising to the audience, as in *Richard III*, characters posing questions, as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, to attention-grabbing action scenes using special effects, as in the shipwreck at the start of *The Tempest*.

Prologues

Prologues are strange but still fairly common devices in the theatrical world of Shakespeare's day. They are part of the play, yet not entirely: usually spoken by one of the actors but not 'in character'; part of the story world and yet not. They often introduce the play in terms of setting, personnel and topic, and sometimes comment on the action, but they are not part of the story on stage *per se*.

A sign of a really good prologue is that it manages to bridge the world of the audience and the world of the play. It occupies an imaginary space between the stage and the audience. The prologue in *Henry V* is a case in point. It is, spoken by the Chorus, who will return throughout the play to tell us where we are now and what has happened in the meantime. Here it is:

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention:
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,

The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cock-pit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon: since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million,
And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
Into a thousand parts divide on man,
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,
Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning th' accomplishment of many years
Into an hourglass - for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history,
Who Prologue-like your humble patience pray
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

What the Chorus does here is deliver a self-deprecating note on staging theatre: the first few lines, until the 'but' in line 8, create a mental image full of pomp and circumstance, of military success and historical *grandesse* – only to then face up to the reality of the make-believe at the heart of the theatre: “No, dear audience, you won't see the real king. No, no armies either, not even horses. Sorry. Oh, by the way, we're also not really going to France.”

The question here is why on earth would you have someone step up and talk about all the shortcomings of theatre at the beginning of a play? It can't be just to manage audience expectations, who after all have come to be thrilled by the spectacle. Instead, what Shakespeare does here is establish a rapport between the audience and the actors. The Chorus is part of

their world as well as the world of the theatre and he (it would have been a he in Shakespeare's day) tries to get their support in making the play work. They are signing a contract: without much by way of set or properties and with limited space and budget, the theatre relies on the audience's imagination to fill the gaps, to "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts".

The prologue at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* works differently. It is famously in the form of a sonnet:¹⁸

Two households, both alike in dignity
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love
And the continuance of their parents' rage -
Which but their children's end, nought could remove -
Is now the two-hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

What is striking about this prologue is that it clearly gives away the ending of the play. After line 8, no one in the audience can say they did not see it coming for Romeo and Juliet. And Shakespeare makes doubly sure that you get it: "death-marked love" in line 9, and "their children's end" in line 11.¹⁹ Why would you give away the ending like this in your opening speech? Why should the audience want to stay and watch? First of all, the story of Romeo and Juliet wasn't new, so many people would have been already familiar with the plot.²⁰ And secondly, the play's full title was *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, and for Elizabethan audiences that meant one thing above all: that by the end of the play there would be a pile of dead bodies, including those of our hero and heroine. But more importantly, what this spoiler does is shift our focus away from wondering about what is going to happen to other things, for example, *how* this is going to

happen. After all, the play starts pretty much in the tone of a romantic comedy, so how on earth can everything go so wrong so quickly?²¹ While we know that it will happen we still don't quite want to believe it. So, this prologue has not only given us the key facts of the play, but it has adjusted our expectations about what is to come.

Soliloquies

Only once in his writing career does Shakespeare use a proper soliloquy by a main character as an opening scene, but to what effect! The opening monologue by Richard III, who is still only the Duke of Gloucester at the beginning of the play, is as rare as it is effective:

Now is the winter of our discontent
made glorious summer by this son of York. [...]
But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity:
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the king
In deadly hate the one against the other:
And if King Edward be as true and just

As I am subtle, false and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mewed up [...]

The soliloquy starts pleasantly enough, talking about how Richard's brother, King Edward, has finally brought peace to war-torn England. So far, so good and useful as a bit of exposition in a play that is quite closely linked to the three preceding ones in Shakespeare's cycle of history plays, all dealing with the Wars of the Roses. But what happens then is pure theatre gold: Richard uses his prime moment on stage, all alone with the audience, to share deep insights into his character. He presents himself as the outsider, deformed and unfit for courtly pastimes. And therefore, he reveals, he hates everyone around him and will plot to get rid of them. Does this sound like a Batman villain? It so does.



But why does he share his plotting with the audience? This spider in the web of the play completes his first act of manipulation within those first few lines: he has drawn us onto his side. We now want to see him outwit everybody else in the play; we root for him, however horrendous he is going to turn out to be. Right from the start, Shakespeare makes us confidantes of his arch villain.

Questions

A slightly more direct way of jumping into the action is to open the play with direct questions, and this is a technique Shakespeare employs on a couple of occasions. The opening scene of *Hamlet* manages to immediately create an atmosphere of unease; something is rotten in the state of Denmark:

Enter Francisco and Bernardo, two sentinels [from two sides]

Bernardo. Who's there?

Francisco. Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

Bernardo. Long live the King!

Francisco. Bernardo?

Bernardo. He.

Francisco. You come most carefully upon your hour.

Bernardo. 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

Francisco. For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.

The first two lines already give us the impression that the guards on the battlements of the castle are jumpy, which is strange given that Denmark is currently at peace. What is it that the castle guards fear in the middle of the night? And Francisco's "And I am sick at heart" should make the audience listen up.

The opening of possibly the most taught of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Macbeth*, uses a similar device:

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches

First Witch. When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch. When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

Third Witch. That will be ere the set of sun.

First Witch. Where the place?

Second Witch. Upon the heath.

Third Witch. There to meet with Macbeth.

First Witch. I come, Grimalkin.

Second Witch. Paddock calls.

Third Witch. Anon.

All. Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

What on earth are these three creatures? Interestingly enough, the Weird Sisters are never directly addressed as witches in the play: Shakespeare does not make it that easy for us. And, furthermore, what are they talking about? Give it a try, read the scene without mentioning from which play they are and then ask your audience what the characters were talking about. If they haven't got a clue that might possibly be exactly what Shakespeare wanted. Throughout the play, the witches' style of speaking is paradoxical, where foul and fair become indistinguishable. In the opening scene, they make us curious to find out more about this world. What is this world like where at least some of the characters are so strange? What has all of this to do with Macbeth, the guy on the poster? Why do they want to meet him? Where are we going from here?

Crash, Boom, Bang

The most attention-catching way Shakespeare opens a play must surely be the shipwreck at the beginning of *The Tempest*. The sailors on the ship carrying the rulers of Milan and Naples find themselves bang in the middle of a massive storm. They fear for their ship and for their lives, so at the very beginning of the play, the stakes couldn't be higher.

A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard.

Enter a Shipmaster and a Boatswain

Master. Boatswain!

Boatswain. Here, master. What cheer?

Master. Good, speak to th' mariners. Fall to't yarely, or we run ourselves aground. Bestir, bestir.

Exit

Enter Mariners

Boatswain. Heigh, my hearts! Cheerly, cheerly, my hearts!

Yare, yare! Take in the topsail. Tend to th' Master's histle! Blow, till thou burst thy wind, if room enough!

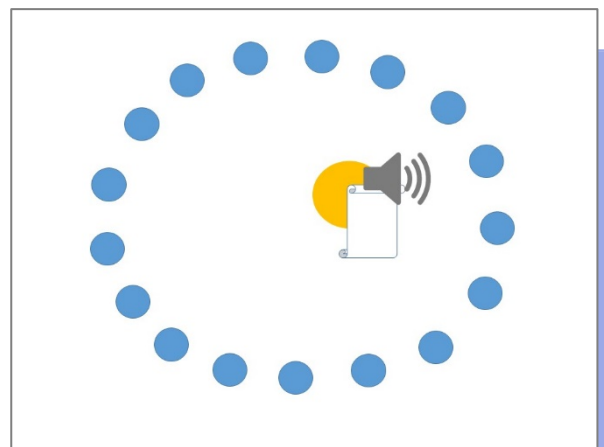
This opening needs to be imagined visually to fully unfold its appeal. Give it a go and try to stage the mariners' actions, complete with a soundscape²² and special effects (as much as that is possible in a classroom). And then have your students try and find out what this play might be about: what do they think is going to happen to the ship and its passengers?

Exploring the Story

A lot of the opening scenes give audiences enough clues to then want to further explore the stories and the characters. So at this point, a quick overview of the plot of the play might be useful. This is also going to be valuable groundwork for any more detailed work on the play in the future, allowing your students to have the necessary background knowledge of dramatic moments or key scenes in context.

Plot summaries of the plays are obviously one way of doing this and plenty of these are available online. There are, however, other methods you could use in your classroom. One of these methods is an interactive and very playful way of introducing the story, with the teacher as the narrator and leader of the exercise and all students as actors. Since the students don't necessarily have to say anything (although they can if you think they are confident enough), this exercise is a great leveller in terms of ability – nobody needs any particular presenting or acting talent to take part in this activity.

Here is how it works: Sit all students in a circle in the classroom. As the teacher you are the storyteller and the whole class should sit around you for this activity, with enough space in the middle for a group of students to enact parts of the story. A particular action word or perhaps a particular sound like a whistle or a drum will be used as a command, which signifies a change in the action and controls the pace of the storytelling. It is used to quickly return the students who are currently enacting a scene from the play in the middle of the circle to their places. Everyone will have the opportunity to join in with the telling of the story, by becoming a character or an object in the tale.



Start telling the story and as soon as a character or an object is mentioned, indicate the first student to step into the circle. Encourage the student to strike a pose or make a shape. If two or more characters are introduced then they can step in at the same time to act their part of the story. When you call out the action word or blow the whistle/beat the drum the students should sit down again. Continue telling the story with the next student from the circle.

As more characters or objects are introduced, move around the circle so that all the students are given a chance to take part. Explain

to them that it does not matter if the character they have been chosen to be is male or female. Using this technique means that different students get to play the same character at various times and everyone gets a chance at acting several roles, regardless of gender. Continue telling the story, introducing more characters or actions, making sure all students are given a chance to take part. Props can also be introduced, although this is not essential.

To make this clear, let's take a look at an example from the beginning of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²³ Whenever you encounter a character name in bold, you will need to call a new student into the circle to take on this role for the moment. Encourage them to express the emotions you talk about in your narration, in this case, for example, Egeus' anger. Whenever you see the action word – in this instance we chose 'skip hence' – it is time for all the students to sit down again and make space for the next round of characters:

*This story begins in Athens with a duke, **Theseus**, his **guards** (choose as many as you wish) and his **wise men**.*

*Duke Theseus is very rich and powerful and he's engaged to marry **Hippolyta**.*

Theseus says, 'Fair Hippolyta, we will soon be married.'

Hippolyta says, 'Four nights will quickly dream away the time.'

*Into the palace scene enters an old man called **Egeus**. Egeus is angry:*

*'Full of vexation I come with complaint,
Against my child, my daughter Hermia'*

*Egeus wants **Hermia** to marry **Demetrius** but she wants to marry **Lysander**!*

Egeus says, 'She is mine and all my right of her do I estate unto Demetrius.'

Theseus agrees and says, 'Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.'

But Hermia is in love with Lysander and so she says, 'So is Lysander!'

Egeus wants Theseus to settle the argument. So Theseus offers her three choices, 'By the next new moon either prepare to die, wed Demetrius, or live a nun.'

Skip hence

This is not only a fun way of getting to know the story and the characters, but it can also be a way into discussing the central conflicts in the play or the characters' motivations – in short, the 'emotional core' of the play. If you want to make sure that your students remember the plot for your future lessons, you can always fall back on some simple exercises like plot cards with production photographs or quotes that need to be arranged in order to jog memories. Familiarity with the plot will help your students whenever you dive into the details and intricacies of the text.

Key Scenes and Talking Points

There is a strange notion that it is absolutely crucial to plough through every scene in a Shakespeare play, in the original language, and employ the utmost scrutiny of character and language even to the most functional of scenes in order to appreciate its value. However, there really is no need to do all this, and your students will have more appetite and stamina for the 'meat' of the play if they haven't been frustrated with scenes that serve predominantly theatrical necessities, for example, when character A needs to get to location B, or a messenger arrives to trigger the action. It is perfectly acceptable to turn the attention to the important moments and fill in the bits in between with modern language summaries. Reserve your own and your students' energy and curiosity for the important speeches and scenes, as they are very often the ones that push the story forward.²⁴ They are often also the scenes that provide the best talking points for further discussion.

Regarding the two focus plays we chose for the *CultureShake* project, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, the following lists suggest some good approaches. They are by no means exhaustive, and undoubtedly will have to be adapted

according to your teaching circumstances and the approach to the play you've chosen.

Key Scenes and Talking Points in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

"She is mine, and all my right of her / I do estate unto Demetrius" - The conflict between Egeus and Hermia in the opening scene

This scene makes a perfect talking point to kick off a discussion whether it is more important to be obedient to your parents' wishes or whether you should follow your heart. The tone in this passage turns rather dark for a comedy when Duke Theseus lays down Hermia's options of either agreeing to marry Demetrius, getting herself to a nunnery, or being killed, proving the point that the world of this play is not exclusively only one of cute fairies and romantic love.

"Is all our company here?" - The Mechanicals' rehearsal for the wedding performance in Act 1, Scene 2

This scene is an excellent starting point to talk about the politics of language and class in relation to the play, as well as in a more general sense. How annoying is Bottom with his overconfidence in his acting skills in this scene? And how much fun is he to watch? This is a great scene through which to analyse how Shakespeare characterises his comic characters through language: Peter Quince and Bottom's frequent malapropisms, Bottom's exaggeration in his acting, as well as the comparative silence of the other Mechanicals tell us a lot about the group dynamics of this amateur acting troupe. The way they employ language also gives us a good idea of how they will fare in direct comparison with the privileged world of the Athenian court. Is it ok to laugh at the lower classes because they speak in a funny way and because they are trying to sound educated?

"Ill met by moonlight" - The quarrelling fairies at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 1

This introduction to the world of the fairies shows us that not all is pink and fluffy when we enter the realm of magic in this play. These fairies are moody and volatile, and powerful enough to make the world around them suffer because of their moods.

"We cannot fight for love, as men may do." - Helena following Demetrius into the woods in Act 2, Scene 2

Demetrius treats poor Helena, who he was in love with before he met Hermia, with nothing but disdain, yet she insists on following him wherever he goes, whether he loves her or not. She is very aware of the fact that women are not supposed to be so open in their affections and that they "should be wooed, and were not made to woo" themselves. Is this still the case today, are we still expecting the men in a relationship to do the wooing (or flirting)? Is it any different if the woman takes the initiative?

"Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful." - Titania falling in love with Bottom at the end of Act 3, Scene 1

Short enough to enjoy some acting to tease out the elements of surprise at Titania's sudden (and love-potion induced) attraction to a weaver with a donkey's head, this scene is comedy gold. Bottom's reaction to this amazing woman who is about to seduce him is as interesting as the reaction of the other fairies – how willing are they really to tend to this mortal?

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" - The lovers' fight in Act 3, Scene 2

This is a long scene that usually works better when seen in performance as well as read (perhaps in excerpts). However, it allows for a detailed discussion of the friendship between Hermia and Helena, and how this is suddenly endangered by the men coming between them. What does love do to people, how unreasonable do people sometimes become when they are newly in love?

"A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth" - The performance of Pyramus and Thisbe in Act 5, Scene 1

The culmination of the Mechanicals' subplot is a scene not to be missed. The staging of Pyramus and Thisbe can be done very easily in the classroom. There's even a prologue that can serve as the script for a dumb show if you want to do it without words for the actors.

Key Scenes and Talking Points in *The Tempest*

"'Tis time I should inform thee further." - Prospero's background story in Act 1, Scene 2

This is one of the longest exposition scenes in Shakespeare but it is very successful in setting up the theme of revenge as the driving force of the play. In addition, the two encounters with the other inhabitants of the island, Ariel and Caliban, establish the pervading topic of power, manipulation and domination; in short the master/servant relationships between Prospero and Caliban as well as Ariel. Is it morally right that Prospero took control of the island with his magical powers?

"This isle is full of noises" in Act 3, Scene 2

This is one of the most poetic passages in the play but spoken by the character who is repeatedly referred to as 'devil', 'monster', 'mooncalf', 'half man, half fish', and who is strongly associated with the comical subplot of the play. However, this subplot comes close to turning very dark indeed on a number of occasions. Shakespeare creates a complex creature in Caliban: neglected child, attempted rapist, enslaved, tortured, plotting murder and treason – and capable of the most beautiful language and sentiment about his home.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on" in Act 4, Scene 1

The marriage masque that Prospero creates in order to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda's engagement is one of the stranger scenes in the play. Suffice it to say that masques of this kind, i.e. sumptuous spectacles of music, dance and high verse speaking, were very popular with court audiences when *The Tempest* was first performed. What is special about Prospero's speech, during which he remembers that he still needs to sort out the plot against him by Caliban and the drunken servants, is that all of a sudden he becomes quite philosophical. He muses about the fleeting nature of human existence, suggesting that in the great scheme of things it is as temporary as any theatrical performance - and all this at a moment when he really needs to focus on fairly practical matters.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And – like the baseless fabric of this vision –
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
(Act 4, Scene 1)

*“The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance.” - Prospero and Ariel
talking about taking pity in Act 5, Scene 1*

Although Prospero’s revenge is the driving force behind the entire plot and although we have encountered him as a manipulative and domineering character who does not endure disobedience and is capable of losing his temper quickly, he is moved by Ariel’s pity for the shipwrecked. This is the key moment in Prospero’s character development in the play: he needs to move on from the revenge he has harboured for twelve years and build his – and Miranda’s – future on forgiveness.

*“I’ll deliver all.” - The final reconciliation in Act 5, Scene 1 and Prospero’s
epilogue*

This scene needs to tie up all the loose ends in the play: the shipwrecked noblemen, the ship’s crew, Caliban and the drunken servants, Ferdinand and Miranda’s future, and the final promise of Ariel’s freedom after all the magical toil and trouble. However, this reconciliation dominated by forgiveness curiously does not give Prospero’s brother Antonio any lines at all. How does he react to his brother magnanimously forgiving his usurpation? What is Antonio doing throughout this scene? How would you portray him or what tips would you give the actor on how to play Antonio in this scene?

Beyond the Text: Getting Creative

Performing Shakespeare is not the only way for students to be creative but it is certainly a useful way to engage the more outgoing students with the text. There are many publications available on how to workshop Shakespeare's plays in educational settings. However, for language learners on an intermediate level, staging a shorter version of the plays might be preferable to working through the entire play. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has developed [20-minute versions](#) of a number of plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. These have now been adapted for language learners and provided the basis for all the workshop work we carried out as part of the *CultureShake* project. They are available for free download from The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website.

For less extrovert students there are other ways of bringing the stories to life. For example, design and sound are elements that are worth exploring, particularly if you keep in mind that Elizabethan playhouses had to be inventive when it came to set design and sound effects. Why not have some students create a design collage for the setting(s) of the play, or have them think of costumes for the characters? What does a fairy wood look like, and how does it differ from the Athenian court? How alien and threatening does Prospero's island feel to the shipwrecked, and how could this be translated into a stage design? Sound creates atmosphere in a play, so finding the right soundscape for a certain scene is another way of creatively working with the play while engaging with the text. In the next section, we will introduce an activity around sound that works well with multicultural and multilingual backgrounds.

For the more visual learners, creating infographics, i.e. a visual representation of information or data, for example a chart or diagram for the play they are studying, is a good way to stimulate textual analysis and to develop an overview of the plot, in addition to enhancing digital and design skills. Contextual knowledge in the shape of fun facts about the play and its historical context, or a visual representation of dominant imagery in the play connected to key quotes, or the manners of death in one of the tragedies, are not only fun to design but can also be used as a springboard for discussion and further research into certain topics.

There is, however, an additional way students can express their own creativity in the context of studying Shakespeare – by taking a leaf out of Shakespeare’s own book of creative methods. Shakespeare’s creative process – as far as we can reconstruct it – seems to have been one influenced by prolific collecting of other people’s ideas. His use of already existing material would get him into serious trouble with copyright laws today, but extensive borrowing amongst writers was common in the 16th and 17th centuries. What made Shakespeare’s versions of the stories often more memorable than the originals is the way he shapes and hones the material for the stage.

Using Shakespeare’s methods as a model for the students’ own creativity means they can make the plays their own by re-working, adapting, sampling and translating. This ‘talking back’ to Shakespeare ensures his plays are still in conversation with audiences – vital if he is going to be taken off his plinth and given relevance to students. Whether this happens through more playful activities for younger age groups²⁵ or through more thoughtful exercises for young adults, this will take your students’ engagement and enjoyment of Shakespeare to another level.

Transposing a play, for example by casting the characters with the Muppets or the Simpsons, is a very popular exercise that again requires quite a bit of groundwork from the students in terms of understanding the text and the characters of the play. In addition, this exercise makes that important connection between an ‘old’ text and the immediate world of your students. For the less

adventurous students, a table top re-telling of the plot or of individual scenes using whatever items of stationery are available as stand-ins for the characters, or stop-motion videos using readily available plastic figurines will give them the opportunity to discuss the characters (which character will be represented by the eraser in the table-top re-telling, which one by the pencil sharpener?) and help to identify the key scenes in the play (which are the moments we need to focus on?).

In addition, these methods cater for different learner types and offer various ways of including students of varying abilities, including different language skills. If you would like to combine their textual analysis with writing exercises, how about setting some small creative writing tasks – for example, does Puck really mix up the Athenian youths the first time he administers Oberon's love potion, or is he simply careless, or perhaps even reckless and fully aware of how much chaos he creates? Why not explore this question with the help of a point-of-view story written in the first person, using Puck's own voice? Or if you would like to work on vocabulary, how about a writing exercise that describes Prospero's island or spells out his magic charm that creates the tempest at the beginning of the play? More about these later.

Sample Activities

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Getting Started

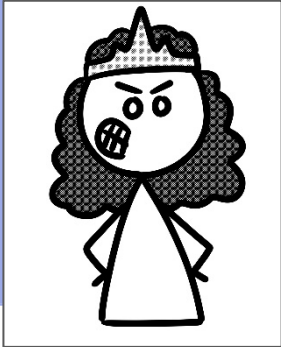
As mentioned in the section on how to approach a play, it is a good idea to familiarise your students with the story and the central characters before you start to dive deeper into the play and its themes and language. We have created a [script](#) for the interactive storytelling technique introduced earlier.

Off the Page

If you are interested in exploring the play and some more of its themes with the help of more interactive exercises, there is a selection of possibilities.

Shakespeare's original audiences would have understood fairies as very powerful and occasionally dangerous creatures. So it isn't very surprising that Shakespeare starts the fairy subplot with Oberon and Titania's fight over a changeling boy and the dire consequences this has had for the climate:

“the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension”
(Act II, Scene 1)



This dispute between the temperamental rulers of the supernatural world is genuinely frightening, and “all their elves for fear / Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there” (Act II, Scene 1). What, however, would happen if Titania and Oberon’s fairies were to join in with the argument, taking their leaders’ positions? [Staging a fairy battle](#) like this is a good way to start talking about how comedies work in terms of their structure: they fundamentally go from disharmony in the beginning towards harmony at the end. This is one of the guiding principles of comedies, where initial obstacles are overcome and the foundations are laid for a prosperous future.

Staying within the world of the fairies, the woods in which most of the action takes place significantly influence the characters and their state of mind as well as the overall atmosphere of the play. They are a dreamy and slightly otherworldly place as well as alien, unfamiliar and occasionally frightening. Re-create the sounds of these woods together with your students and experience the changing noises of the woods at day and night time by creating a [soundscape](#). A ‘soundscape’ is basically the sum of all the sounds and noises that are discernible in a certain landscape or space, for example, the soundscape of a busy pub would be made up of chatter, laughter, clinking glasses, perhaps some music in the background etc. You do not need musical instruments for this exercise, the human body will give you and your students plenty of sounds to experiment with.

And finally, should you and your students feel up for some more acting and for the feel of Shakespeare’s language without having to stage the entire play, we have developed a [snappy 20-minute version of the play](#) that uses only Shakespeare’s own lines.

Wondrous Creatures around the World

In order to include a multicultural element into teaching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, how about looking at [magical creatures](#) around the world? Little supernatural creatures like fairies, trolls, or gnomes populate legends and fairy tales in many cultures, and

many of them can be benevolent as well as malevolent, depending on whether they have been treated respectfully by the mortals that share their world. The fairies could form a great opportunity to share stories about these creatures, which will include your multilingual students in the discussion while stretching their storytelling and language skills too.

Language Politics

Shakespeare shapes his characters as much by how they speak as through what they say and do. For example, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* is known for regularly using the wrong words, often ending up saying the opposite of what he intended without being aware of it. He wants to sound educated and tries to use 'educated' words like *apprehend* in the meaning of *arrest* but instead comes out with *comprehend*:

"One word, sir. Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship." (*Much Ado About Nothing*, Act III, Scene 5)

He also mixes up *auspicious* (promising) and *suspicious* in this line. The pedant Holofernes in another of Shakespeare's comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost*, is on the other end of the linguistic spectrum: he is so uber-educated that his over-reliance on synonyms makes him sound like a thesaurus. Similarly, tragic characters like Othello are also shaped by their language: Othello is known to be a great storyteller at the beginning of the play, highly lyrical in his choice of words, but after he starts to suspect that his wife has been unfaithful to him, his sentences become short and fragmented; Othello loses his way with words as he loses his sense of self towards the end of the play.

This way of characterising dramatic personnel opens up opportunities to explore the language politics of the play as well as the language politics inherent in our societies today: is there a certain language that is considered to be more prestigious than others? Do you speak certain languages or dialects only in particular contexts, for example at home, or to grandparents, or on special occasions?

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the four different groups of characters (lovers, fairies, the Court and the Mechanicals) are all as much characterised by how they speak as through how they behave, so this play is perfect to explore how languages and dialects are associated with certain social constructs around education, class and social standing. For example, the Mechanicals' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* at the wedding is greeted with much derision from the Athenian court because of the Mechanicals' use of what is considered inappropriate language. Their way of public speaking is considered comic because it is 'wrong' and deficient, but at the same time the Mechanicals are probably the most authentic and upright characters in the whole play.²⁶ This scene is an excellent opportunity to raise language awareness and to discuss why we consider a certain language or a certain way of speaking and expressing oneself to be more prestigious than others. If you would like to take this a bit further, how about having your students discuss which language they would allocate to which character group in the play, and then invite your multilingual students to roughly translate 'their' lines into their home language and perform the extract? You can find the worksheet that includes a shortened version of this scene with vocabulary [here](#).

Acting in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



Shakespeare's original actors were probably never given a full script of the play they were rehearsing - copying out the entire play by hand for each of the 18 players or thereabouts would have simply taken too long. Instead, each actor was given their 'cue script'. A cue script is a shortened script that contains just one actor's lines and their speaking cues, normally the final part of line immediately preceding their own next lines. This means that before the start of rehearsals none of the actors would have understood the full context in which their lines were spoken.

The logistics of putting on a play is obviously very central to the Mechanicals' subplot in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Peter Quince distributes the roles of his "tedious brief scene" of Pyramus and

Thisbe among his players in pretty much the same way actors in Shakespeare's England would have received theirs. Working on a scene with the help of a cue script is not only a great way to understand the historical context of rehearsing and acting in Shakespeare's time, it also forces students and actors alike to listen attentively to what the other characters are saying in order not to miss their cue. In addition, Shakespeare's plays contain very few explicit stage directions, as most of the clues are in the lines they speak, so they would have been clear to his actors.

So how about using cue scripts for a two-stage exercise that requires focus, concentration and close reading while also getting the scene off the page. In a first step, allocate the roles to your students (split them into several groups if you have more students than roles). Have them read the script in their roles; they must listen out for their cues in order to piece the scene together. They can then start to think about the characters and their relationships to each other, plus their mood: does it change over the course of the scene, or does it stay the same? In a second step, have your students think about inserting the stage directions – what do the characters do at which point in the scene? Do they enter the stage at some point, or do they go off? Do they need any props at any point? The students can explore all these questions while rehearsing the scene a number of times to try out different options, for example, when exactly one of the characters leaves the scene.

Cue scripts are fairly easy to create from any scene in the play but if you would like to get started, we have created an [info sheet on cue scripts](#) and [scripts from an extract of Act 2, Scene 1](#), when Oberon overhears Demetrius' angry rebuttal of Helena in the woods.

Characterisation and Creative Responses

The cue script exercise is useful to explore these two characters early on in the play: why does Helena stubbornly follow her former boyfriend, even though he is exceptionally mean to her? On the other hand, is it possible to understand Demetrius' behaviour to her and perhaps even sympathise with him in this scene?

Another way to explore Shakespeare's characters is to write from their perspective. These point-of-view retellings can be useful to check understanding of what a scene was about, for example, when one of the characters on the margin of the story is chosen as the narrator of the retelling, or they can offer speculative insight into a character's motivation and feelings in a given moment in the play. It is not always possible in Shakespeare's plays to tell exactly why a character behaves the way they do; Shakespeare notoriously leaves some central questions about his characters unanswered: what happens to Hamlet while he is away in England? Why does Iago hate Othello so much?

In relation to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck is a similar case in point: does he really mix up the Athenian lovers by mistake, or is he simply unable to resist a good joke at somebody else's expense? After all, he turns Bottom into a donkey mainly because he can and because it sounds like a good bit of fun to him, so something similar could have motivated him earlier too. This slightly speculative exercise combines character analysis with a creative writing exercise and might be something for learners that are less enthusiastic about acting themselves. A worksheet for this with a writing prompt can be found [here](#).

The Tempest

Some of the activities and exercises we carried out for *The Tempest* are essentially the same as for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, the [interactive storytelling exercise](#) and the [snappy 20-minute script](#) for performance. Others, however, were obviously closer tailored to the themes and topics that are central to this story and its characters.

Sounds and Sweet Airs

The Tempest is another play where creating a soundscape can be a helpful exercise to get a sense of where the play is set and how these strange surroundings affect the characters. In contrast to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the noises and eerie sounds of the

island are actually mentioned directly in the dialogue, above all in the famous “this isle is full of noises” speech by Caliban in Act 3.

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again.
(Act III, Scene 2)

This passage offers a number of approaches that are useful in the classroom, and we shall get back to some of them later for understanding the language politics of the play and the notions of home that can be gleaned from it. For now, let’s return to the idea of creating a [soundscape](#) of the island. The activity can be carried out in pretty much the same way as we did for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but in order to include the heritage languages in the classroom how about adding a discussion about different musical styles and instruments that would sound strange to ears that are not familiar with them. With the help of the internet, the soundscape can be extended to include musical instruments from around the world to create the “sounds and sweet airs” Caliban talks about.

Prospero’s Island and Ideas of Home

Creative writing exercises are, as we discussed with Puck’s point of view story earlier, great for vocabulary work and textual understanding of the play. Prospero’s magic drives this play forward in a more sinister way than in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the very first scene, in which a ship is about to sink in a dreadful storm just off the island, is a reminder that Prospero is full of thoughts of revenge. The spell that creates this storm, however, is something that happens offstage, Shakespeare never lets the audience hear how Prospero manages to summon it up. This gap in the text can be filled by the students writing their own [spell](#), and if you want them

to start thinking about poetical language too they can try to make it sound extra magical when read out loud. The multilingual students in the class can create a version of the spell in their home languages - is there a language that sounds particularly 'magical'? If so, why might that be?

[Prospero's island](#) is a place that evokes in many readers and audience members visions of either lush tropical islands or barren rocks bathed in boiling sunshine. However, theatre designers have created a much wider variety of islands for productions of *The Tempest* than that. For example, in 2006, Rupert Goold's production starring Patrick Stewart as Prospero was set in the Antarctic. Your students might have a similar range of ideas about what the setting for *The Tempest* looks and feels like, so how about creating a collage and a description about their island?

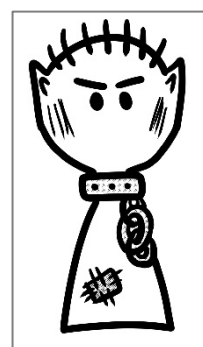
Another interesting thing about the island is that apart from Caliban and the spirit Ariel, none of the characters are native inhabitants. All the other characters probably consider other places their home. This includes Prospero, who even after twelve years is still angry enough about his brother's betrayal that he wants to carry out his revenge and get back to Milan, as well as those who are shipwrecked, who fear that they may never make their way back to Naples. During the second learning activity in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2017, we used this constellation of exiled and oppressed characters to explore different ideas of home, whether it was the place where we were born, or the place where we spent most of our lives. We gave out character cards to some of the students that briefly outlined the characters' back story and how they felt at the beginning of the play about their home. These students familiarised themselves with 'their' character and were then put in 'hot seats' in front of the rest of the group. It is possible to do this with each character individually, but we decided to lower the pressure for the individual students by having them answer questions about their characters while surrounded by a group. In a second step, the students then reflected on their own notions of what 'home' means to them. A worksheet for this activity that includes the character cards can be found [here](#).

“You taught me language”

Nowadays, *The Tempest* is often read in a post-colonial context, and with good reason: the conflict between Prospero and Miranda on the one hand, and with their slave Caliban on the other, is fraught with discourses around colonising the island, taking over control of the land from the native inhabitants through the power of knowledge, in this case Prospero’s magic. Wrapped up in this conflict are the language politics of the play: while Caliban, the “brute” and “devil”, confesses that the only profit he gained from learning Prospero and Miranda’s language is that he now knows how to curse, he nevertheless utters the most sublime poetry of the play when he describes his feelings about his home in Act 3, Scene 2.

Yet, for most of the play, Prospero’s English in particular is the language of domination and oppression: all his relationships on the island – from his own daughter to his other servant Ariel and finally to the shipwrecked Ferdinand – are characterised by manipulation, threat and emotional blackmail, until Ariel teaches him forgiveness in Act 4. As problematic as this is within the play, it obviously opens up opportunities for discussion in the language classroom: how can language (and the teaching thereof) become embroiled in power politics and misused in order to oppress? Are there ways to avoid this? Thinking about how language can reinforce and sustain power, and how majorities and minorities influence language politics is an immensely important aspect of cross-cultural understanding, particularly in a European context where the representation and protection of regional languages alongside the mainstream ones is one of the pillars of the community.

“You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to curse” (Act I, Scene 2) is therefore one of the key moments in *The Tempest*, and makes for a perfect springboard for discussions around power and language. Some suggestions about how to guide the discussion and how to flip the negative instance of language learning in the play into a positive one in your classroom can be found in this [worksheet](#).



Conclusion

This method guide has been compiled in order to share approaches, methodologies and individual activities based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* that make it possible for multilingual students to bring their heritage into the mix. Tried and tested in the *CultureShake* project, these activities will raise awareness not only of how Shakespeare employs language but also about our current assumptions around language use, 'standard' language as well as language and prestige, and help the students to interrogate the status quo as well as respect each other's languages more. We hope that they will inspire teachers across Europe and beyond to employ cultural or literary heritage like Shakespeare's works to foster a mutual understanding and respect for each other's cultural and linguistic diversity.

NOTES

³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2016). *Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Through Education: Overview of Education Policy Developments in Europe Following the Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Compare also UNESCO Section of Education for Peace and Human Rights, Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, Education Sector (2006). *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Learning*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁴ Even though the language of instruction in this project was English the project partners were very careful to avoid giving the impression that the English language or indeed Shakespeare were of any superior cultural value compared to the other languages and cultures in the project.

⁵ Gogolin, Ingrid/ Neumann, Ursula/ Reuter, Lutz Rainer (2005). *Schulbildung für Kinder von Minderheiten in Deutschland 1989-1999: Schulrecht, Schulorganisation, curriculare Fragen, sprachliche Bildung*. Münster/New York: Waxmann.

⁶ Tracy, Rosemary (2011). "Mehrsprachigkeit: Realität, Irrtümer, Visionen." In: Eichinger, Ludwig M./ Plewnia, Albrecht/ Steinle Melanie (eds.). *Sprache und Integration: Über Mehrsprachigkeit und Migration*. Tübingen: Narr, 69–100.

⁷ Nicola Küpelikilinc und Meryem Taşan, eds. (2012). *Mehrsprachigkeit: Aktionen und Projekte in der Schule*. Frankfurt a.M.: Der Magistrat der Stadt Frankfurt am Main.

⁸ European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education (2015). *Report on the Role of Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity and Education in Promoting EU Fundamental Values* (2015/2139(INI)). http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0373_EN.pdf

⁹ Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment: Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>; comp. also Camerer, Rudi/ Mader, Judith (2019). "Language – Culture – Identity: A Paradigm for Teaching English as a Lingua Franca." In: Pattison, Tania (ed.). *IATEFL: Brighton Conference Selections*. Kent: IATEFL, 42-45.

¹⁰ Cummins, James (1980). "The Construct of Language Proficiency in Bilingual Education." In: Alatis, James E. (ed.). *Current Issues in Bilingual Education*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 81-103. And Butzkamm, Wolfgang (2000). "Über die planvolle Mitbenutzung der Muttersprache im bilingualen Sachfachunterricht." In: Bach, Gerhard/ Niemeier, Susanne (eds.). *Bilingualer Unterricht: Grundlagen, Methoden, Praxis, Perspektiven*. Berlin/ Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 97–113.

¹¹ Baetens Beardsmore, Hugo (2010). "Le problème de l'unilinguisme dans la formation bilingue." In: Erhart, Sabine/ Hélot, Christine/ Le Nevez, Adam (eds.). *Plurilinguisme et formation des enseignants. Plurilingualism and Teacher Education*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 103-113.

¹² This worksheet with exercises that [compares Early Modern English to Modern English](#) might come in useful.

¹³ David and Ben Crystal's *Shakespeare's Words* is a very useful companion for this.

¹⁴ Compare his excellent overview of Shakespeare's language in 'Think on my words' *Exploring Shakespeare's Language*. Cambridge: CUP, 2008.

¹⁵ Among them [Shakespeare's Invented Words](#) (CEFR level B1), [Shakespeare's Idioms](#) (B2), and [Shakespeare's Interesting Idioms](#) (C1).

¹⁶ Of course it is very hard to call any text of Shakespeare's plays 'original' as no manuscript versions survive and quite a few plays have come down to us in several, sometimes contradictory, versions. For the sake of readability in this guide, I shall use the term to identify the text in Shakespeare's original language without going into further detail of editorial issues and practices here.

¹⁷ This is not because the English have a peculiar relationship to midday drinking but because drinking ale was the healthiest thing to do in a city without clean

water supplies. Even children would drink 'small ale', very weak ale, rather than water from the wells.

¹⁸ If you would like to explore sonnets in *Romeo and Juliet* in more detail, here is a classroom activity about the ballroom scene, where the protagonists meet for the first time and immediately launch into a piece of dialogue in the shape of a shared sonnet.

¹⁹ "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life", however, is syntactically linked to "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes", so does not directly refer to their double suicide at the end of the play. Still, the allusion to their tragic end hangs over these lines.

²⁰ *Julius Caesar* is a similar case in point. If his assassination on the Ides of March 44 BC came as a surprise to any audience member at the time, they must have led a very sheltered life indeed.

²¹ Shakespeare very cleverly condenses the time between Romeo first meeting Juliet and the two of them dying to a mere four and a half days, in contrast to his main source text, Arthur Brooke's poem from 1568, where Romeo and Juliet enjoy several months as a couple before they die. Shakespeare also manages to cram in a wedding night, two deaths, exile, and more deaths (some pretend). People are busy in Verona.

²² An activity about how to create a soundscape will be introduced later in this guide.

²³ These active introductions for both focus plays (and a selection of other plays) can be found on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's resources website: [An Active Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*](#) and [An Active Introduction to *The Tempest*](#).

²⁴ They also happen to be the ones that are often most useful to your students as examples to quote in their exams, should they have to write any.

²⁵ A multitude of crafty Shakespeare-themed activities tailored for children of primary school age are available for free on the Shakespeare Week website www.shakespeareweek.com.

²⁶ In fact, this play-within-the-play very often strikes a much more serious note in performance once Thisbe takes over from the overly dramatic Pyramus and kills herself, as she does not believe her life possible without her lover. One wonders whether any of the other lovers in this play would go as far as her to die for their love.

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