

## Shakespeare's Plays Lesson Plan

**Learning Objectives:** To develop and practise academic reading skills: skimming, reading for specific information

**Preparation Time:** 0 minutes

**Completion Time:** 45 minutes

**Skill/Grammar:** Reading, Speaking

**Age/Level:** Tertiary/Intermediate

**Resources:** Shakespeare's Plays Worksheet, Shakespeare's Plays Answer Key

### Warm-Up (10 minutes)

- 1 Most students will have heard something about Shakespeare. If students are very knowledgeable, allow them to contribute more than three things.
- 2 Elicit or pre-teach the meaning of 'don't judge a book by its cover'.

**Key:**

- 2 **Don't make decisions about how valuable or important something is based on its appearance.**

### Reading (25 minutes)

- 3 Elicit that we can get the gist of a text often by only reading the first sentence in each paragraph. Elicit that this is because the first sentence is often the topic sentence and that this often carries the main idea of the paragraph. Tell students that they are going to look at the topic sentences only to answer the questions in 3. Question 4 requires students to infer. Tell them to read sentence 2. The phrasing 'another problem for the doubters' suggests that the writer is building an argument against them.

**Key:**

- 3
  - a **whether or not Shakespeare wrote the plays that we believe he did**
  - b **the mid-nineteenth century**
  - c **They believe that Shakespeare wrote the plays.**
  - d **He probably believes Shakespeare wrote the plays.**

- 4 Students skim the paragraphs to complete the task. Introduce a competitive element or set a time limit of six minutes to ensure that students are skimming and not reading carefully.

**Key:**

- 4 **A – 5, B – 4, C – 6, D – 1, E – 3, F – 2**

## Shakespeare's Plays Lesson Plan

5 Students read more carefully to answer the questions.

**Key:**

5

- a The names of his characters are famous; people can quote from his plays; modern stories and films are based on his plays.
- b Stephen Greenbalt has the most authority as a professor at Harvard and an academic specialising in Shakespeare.
- c
  - i John Shakespeare: a glove maker, little education, could not read or write
  - ii Stratford-upon-Avon: a small provincial town in England
  - iii the local grammar school: provided education in Latin and classical studies about the history and philosophies of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome
- d His plays contain descriptions of things he would not have known much about, such as court life, aristocratic sport, the speech, behaviour and manners of the upper classes and the exotic settings for many of the plays. They also doubted that someone without a university education could be such a brilliant writer.
- e mention of his plays (and records that he owned books or wrote letters)
- f His plays were not recognised as great literary works of art until the nineteenth century. He is a literary genius. His name appeared on the cover of some of the plays. People at the time believed he wrote the plays.
- g a nobleman with a university education
- h none
- i We should not judge someone's abilities based on their background.

### Closure (10 minutes)

- 6 Allow time for students to fully discuss the questions in small groups, especially questions 2 and 3.

## Shakespeare's Plays Worksheet

### Warm-Up

- 1 **Write down three things you know about William Shakespeare. Share your list with your classmates.**
- 2 **What does the expression 'don't judge a book by its cover' mean?**

### Reading

- 3 **Read the following topic sentences which are not in the correct order.**

- a What is the argument being discussed in this text?
- b When did people start discussing this issue?
- c Which side are most academics on?
- d Which side is the writer of the text on?

Topic sentences:

- 1 Another argument put forward by the doubters relates to the evidence, or lack of evidence, contained in written documents.
- 2 Another problem for the doubters is that if Shakespeare did not write these plays, then someone else must have done.
- 3 Despite the persistence of the theories that Shakespeare did not write any of the famous plays, poems and sonnets, the majority of scholars and academics believe that he did.
- 4 However, ever since the mid-nineteenth century, his authorship of these great works of art has been called into question.
- 5 Shakespeare is one of the most famous literary figures in history.
- 6 The principle reason behind most of the suspicions is that his plays, poems and sonnets are just too good.

- 4 **Match the topic sentences to the paragraphs in the text on pages 2 and 3.**

- 5 **Read the text more carefully and answer the questions.**

- a What evidence does the writer provide to show that Shakespeare's plays are still famous today?
- b Underline the names of all the people mentioned on both sides of the argument. Which of these people do you think has the most authority to give an opinion about this topic?
- c Describe the following:
  - i John Shakespeare
  - ii Stratford-upon-Avon
  - iii the local grammar school

## Shakespeare's Plays Worksheet

- d Why is it surprising that someone with this background wrote the plays?
- e What do doubters claim is missing from the written documents relating to Shakespeare's life?
- f How do Shakespeare's supporters defend him against the arguments put forward by the doubters?
- g Who do the doubters think wrote the plays?
- h What evidence do they have to support this?
- i What do you think the writer means by the title of the text?

### Closure

6 ***Discuss the following questions in small groups.***

- 1 What is your opinion about who wrote the plays? Why?
- 2 Is it important that we know who wrote the plays? Why?
- 3 If Shakespeare did write the plays, what does that tell us about the importance of a formal education?

#### **Don't judge a book by its cover**

A \_\_\_\_\_

He has made Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet familiar names throughout the world. Many people can quote lines from his plays, from the famous 'to be, or not to be' to 'all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players'. Many modern stories and films are based on the tales he told us through his plays.

B \_\_\_\_\_

Such famous names as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, and Malcolm X have all refused to believe Shakespeare is the bard. As recently as April 2009, the justices of the Supreme Court examined the issue of Shakespeare's authorship and concluded that there was 'beyond a reasonable doubt'.

C \_\_\_\_\_

Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, a glove maker who had very little education and could not read or write. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small provincial town in England, in the spring of 1564. There is no evidence that he attended the local grammar school but if he did, he would have gained some education in Latin and taken classical studies about the history and philosophies of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. By 1592, he was established as a popular London playwright but there are no records which show how he achieved this. The doubters point to the insightful descriptions of court life that the plays contain, the inclusion of information

## Shakespeare's Plays Worksheet

about the aristocratic sports of hunting, hawking and royal tennis, the accurate portrayal of the speech, behaviour and manners of the upper classes as well as the exotic settings for many of the plays. They do not believe that the son of a middle-class tradesman who did not benefit from private schooling and a university education could be such a brilliant writer. They argue that only a nobleman could have written such great works.

D \_\_\_\_\_

Seventy-two documents relating to his life have been discovered. They describe his business dealings and a small number of acting roles, but there is no mention of any of his plays. Neither is there any record of him owning any books or even that he ever wrote any letters. This is very unusual for a writer at that time, especially such a famous writer.

E \_\_\_\_\_

One of his greatest supporters is Stephen Greenbalt, a professor at Harvard and author of a best-selling biography about Shakespeare, *Will in the World*. He has studied the evidence and agrees that the fact that the plays are not mentioned in Shakespeare's own documents is puzzling. He explains this by pointing to the fact that these plays were not recognised as great literary works of art until the nineteenth century. He also agrees that the quality of writing produced by this middle-class villager is almost unbelievable. However, he claims that Shakespeare did not need any formal education because he was, quite simply, a literary genius. The only proof necessary, he claims, is the fact that William Shakespeare's name appeared on the cover of some of the plays that were published during his lifetime. Most academics and scholars agree with Greenbalt. They also point to the fact that, during his lifetime, Shakespeare was accepted as the author of the plays. Not a single suspicion appears to have been raised at the time. He was criticised and praised in equal measure by his contemporaries for the plays they believed that he had written.

F \_\_\_\_\_

Although the names of many noblemen with university educations have been put forward as the true authors of Shakespeare's work, no evidence whatsoever exists to support these claims.

## Shakespeare's Plays Answer Key

### Warm-Up

- 2 Don't make decisions about how valuable or important something is based on its appearance.

### Reading

3

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