

Level: Intermediate

Target age: Teenagers / Young adults

Time needed: Up to 60 minutes

Key skills: Reading, speaking

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Warmer

Hand out the worksheets. Direct your students to the warmer question, and ask them to discuss in pairs what they already know about Shakespeare. Then, feed back as a class.

Activity 1: William Shakespeare: An introduction to his life

Direct your students to the Shakespeare biography, and see if they can fill in any of the gaps. Then ask them to visit www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/z8k2p39 to find the correct information and complete the biography.

Key:

Shakespeare is England's most famous playwright and poet. His plays are known throughout the world, and he introduced up to 300 words and dozens of (well-known) phrases into the English language.

He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in the year 1564. He probably went to the local grammar school, King Edward VI's School, where he learnt Greek and Latin. He didn't go to university.

In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, who was three months pregnant. In total, they had three children.

He left Stratford to go and live in London, working as a playwright and actor. He performed many times for Queen Elizabeth I.

Shakespeare's group built their own theatre called the Globe. By now, Shakespeare was very rich. He bought the second biggest house in Stratford and many other properties as investments. He had a good head for business.

He died in 1616, probably of fever. In his will, he left his second best bed to his wife. Nobody knows for certain why he did this. He is buried in Stratford.

Activity 2: The plot of Romeo and Juliet

Direct your students to the statements about Shakespeare's classic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. Some are true and others are false. Ask your students to work with a partner to predict whether the statements are true or false, then visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_and_Juliet to check their answers and correct the false statements. The statements have been divided into two sections.

Key:

Introduction

1. F – The plot is based on an Italian tale.;
2. T;
3. F – It is believed to have been written between 1591 and 1595.

Synopsis

4. F – The play is set in Verona.;
5. T;
6. F – He sees her first in the Capulet household.;
7. F – They are helped by Friar Laurence.;
8. T;
9. T;
10. T;
11. F – Friar Laurence offers her the drug.;
12. T;
13. F – He buys poison.;
14. T;
15. T;
16. F – She uses Romeo's dagger to kill herself.

Activity 3: Boy players

Explain to your students that when *Romeo and Juliet* was performed at the time it was written, female actors were prohibited on stage and so all female characters, including Juliet, were played by boy actors, also known as boy players.

Ask your students to find out more by looking for answers to the following questions by reading the 'Boys in adult companies' and 'Boys playing female roles' sections on: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy_player.

Key:

1. December, 1661
2. Their unbroken voices sounded more like women.
3. Information is a little unclear, but it seems that children did play some of the complex lead female roles.
4. He played both female roles (up to the age of 17) and male roles (after the age of 17).

5. *We know some audience members were impressed with the quality of the boys' acting.*

Activity 4: Shakespearean language still used today

Tell your students it has been said that Shakespeare contributed more words and sayings to the English language than any other individual, and most of them are still used today. He also popularized many phrases.

Put students in pairs, and tell them to decide who should be Student 1 and who should be Student 2. Then ask them to find out the meanings of the phrases in their list before teaching them to their partner. They should then discuss the meanings of the phrases.

Key:

Hamlet

1. *in my mind's eye* – one's visual memory or imagination
2. *make your hair stand on end* – be frightening
3. *woe is me* – I am distressed, sad, grieved.

Macbeth

4. *a charmed life* – a life of guaranteed good fortune or invulnerability, by virtue of a charm or spell
5. *a sorry sight* – a regrettable and unwelcome aspect or feature. Now also used to mean something or someone of untidy appearance.
6. *be all and end all* – the whole thing; the last word; something that is so entirely suitable as to eliminate the need for a search for an alternative

Finally, ask your students to choose their favourite expression from the full list to perform out loud to the class in a theatrical / Shakespearean manner:

www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/phrases-sayings-shakespeare.html.