

OFF
BOOK

Shakespeare's:
Heroes, Heroines and
Everybody Else



Education Pack 2016



About Off Book

Off Book is a partnership between Fiona Angwin, Dan Jeffery, Ian Mason and Martin Williams. Between us we are proud to have created and produced twelve different shows under the Off Book name since 2012 for events, schools, families and traditional theatre venues. Our work is as creative and diverse as our team. Our work usually employs a variety of props, costumes, masks and puppets to create a vivid and memorable show. Despite this we're always keenly aware that the text is the key to any successful show, and with *Heroes and Heroines* we've been careful to tread a fine line between staying true to Shakespeare's characters and themes and our own energetic approach the theatre in schools.



Dan Jeffery



Fiona Angwin



Martin Williams

About this Ed Pack

This pack has been designed to complement our 2016 production of *Heroes and Heroines* and our production's visit to your school. As we have offered this show to both primary and secondary we've tried to keep the information friendly to a range of ages. We've also done our best to minimise the graphics so that you can easily photocopy pages of this pack to use in class or extra-curricular activities and groups. If you have any suggestions on how we could improve our education packs, or would like any further information, please do not hesitate to send us an e-mail at: info@offbook.co.uk

Regards,

Martin, Dan and Fiona

About Shakespeare

There are about thirty-seven plays which a man we call William Shakespeare either wrote, or co-wrote. Divided into three different types: comedies, histories and tragedies, we call the collection of Shakespeare's plays 'The Canon'.



History's first record of William Shakespeare is the record of his baptism on the 26th of April 1564. We don't know the exact date of Shakespeare's birth, but it is generally accepted that he would have been baptised about three days after he was born, so we celebrate his birthday as the 23rd of April (which is also St. Georges' Day in England).

Born in Stratford to Mary Arden and John Shakespeare, we don't know much about William's early life. It is likely he would have gone to school at the local grammar school, King's New School, but no proof exists. Shakespeare's father was known as a glover, a merchant in leather and hides. John Shakespeare was quite a prominent figure in Stratford being one of their aldermen, then a bailiff and later a chief magistrate.

Not much is known about Williams Shakespeare before his plays started appearing on London stages. We do know that the age of 18 he married Anne Hathaway (not the famous Hollywood actress) and they had three children. A daughter, Suzanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith (perhaps that was why he frequently wrote about twins?). It was around 1591-92 that historical records begin to show mention of Shakespeare and his work.

There is still some debate among Shakespeare scholars as to whether William wrote his plays. Many believe that a grammar school educated boy couldn't have competed with university educated men like Marlowe. According to Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* one of Shakespeare's contemporary writers, Robert Greene, accused Shakespeare of being an upstart reaching beyond his rank so it entirely possible that Shakespeare did indeed write 'The Canon'. Some scholars argue though that it doesn't matter. Peter Brook, a famous theatre director, suggests that whoever wrote the plays, the lessons we learn and the enjoyment we get from them are the same.

If you want to learn more about Shakespeare we'd recommend the following two books:

Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare by Stephen Greenblatt

And *Exploring Shakespeare* by Peter Brook.

About Our Play

Staging a full Shakespeare play is expensive and if we'd staged a full show we might not have been able to bring the show to schools like yours. We're not just actors though, we're also writers so we thought that we could write a play that allowed us to perform some of our favourite Shakespeare speeches and scenes.

Heroes, Heroines & Everybody Else follows three Elizabethan actors who meet up every year at a big festival where groups of actors (known as troupes) meet up and entertain the crowds. Fed up of just being 'spear carriers' and getting the boring roles Mark Ramsbottom, Harry Flowerdew and Kit Hetherington decide to perform the roles they have always wanted to for just themselves and some special guests.

We're going to perform scenes from:

- Henry V – Act 1, Prologue
- Romeo and Juliet – Act 1, Sc. 5
- Taming of the Shrew – Act 2, Sc.1
- Macbeth – Act 4, Sc.1
- Othello – Act 2, Sc.3
- Much Ado About Nothing – Act 4, Sc.1
- The Winter's Tale – Act 3, Sc.2
- As You Like It – Act 3, Sc.5
- Twelfth Night – Act 5, Sc.1
- A Midsummer Night's Dream – Act 1, Sc.2; Act 2, Sc.1
- Hamlet – Act 2, Sc.1; Act 2, Sc.2; Act 3, Sc. 1, Act 3, Sc.2
- The Tempest – Act 4, Sc.1



For the sake of space, we're not going to give you a synopsis of each play, but you can download a document from our website that gives you a really simple synopsis of each play in Shakespeare's canon. What we're going to do here in this Ed Pack we're going to look at the themes, characters and techniques that Shakespeare used in his plays and that we're using in this production.

Themes

Imagination in Henry V – In our first speech we draw upon Shakespeare’s *Henry V* Chorus character. The Chorus instructs the audience to use their imagination.

‘Think that when we talk of horses, that you see them’

In Shakespeare’s day theatre’s didn’t have fancy lighting rigs or huge elaborate sets. Often they had a stage, a handful of props and the costumes they wore. We chose this speech for the exact same reason that Shakespeare wrote it. Off Book will be touring this show and we can’t carry huge sets, fancy lighting rigs or crates of props so we will also need the audience to use their imagination.

Suggested Activity 1: Try to imagine what a stage would look like with all the items, people and places that the Chorus mentions in Act 1 of Henry V. Draw a picture of the stage with all of the items.



Love and relationships in Romeo and Juliet & Taming of the Shrew – Lovers are peppered throughout Shakespeare’s plays. We wanted to show two of the very different types of ‘lover’ that Shakespeare created. We have a pair of ‘star-crossed’ lovers doomed to tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet* and a pair of older lovers who are less suited to each other in *Petruchio* and *Katarina*.

Suggested Activity 2: Take a look at the scripts for these scenes (in the back of this Ed Pack) and try to write down a list of ways the two pairs are similar, and the ways the two pairs are different?

The supernatural in Macbeth – In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* the protagonist meets a trio of old women who are described as ‘witches’ they seem to be able to tell Macbeth his future. Shakespeare never exactly tells us whether the witches do have supernatural powers or not, and leaves it to his audience to work out if magic exists and if these three women are really witches. In Shakespeare’s day some people thought that Macbeth contained real spells. In the Victorian era a superstition emerged among actors that it was bad luck to say the name Macbeth in a Theatre! Perhaps if Macbeth had never met the witches the story would never have happened? What do you think?

What do you think? Was Shakespeare writing about witches?

Revenge in Much Ado About Nothing – The scene we’ve chosen from *Much Ado About Nothing* occurs mid-way through the play. Claudio accused his fiancé, Hero of being unfaithful to her. At the altar! Hero, an innocent young woman collapses, overwhelmed by the accusation, her father’s anger and the very public way that she is shamed. Furious with Claudio for all of this Beatrice, Hero’s cousin, wants to get revenge on him. In Shakespeare’s time a male relative might have challenged Claudio with a sword to ask demand why he shamed Hero, but as a woman, Beatrice wouldn’t have been allowed to. Benedick trying to console Beatrice and desperately in love with her eventually agrees to challenge Claudio and make him answer for shaming and believing that Hero was unfaithful.

What would you do if someone lied or shamed a member of your family? Was Beatrice right to be angry at Claudio for believing the story he’d been told?



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Gender in Twelfth Night – In Shakespeare’s time women were not allowed to act. They weren’t allowed on stage. This meant that the young women were played by young boys and the older women were played by men! Maybe Shakespeare thought that this was funny, silly or unfair, because in many of his plays he writes characters that pretend to be a different gender. He writes men who pretend to be women and women who pretend to be men. In *Twelfth Night* Viola washes up on the shores of Illyria after a shipwreck. Alone and with no other way of earning money, she pretends to be a boy and gets a job as a servant of the Duke of Illyria. Viola’s twin brother Sebastian survived the shipwreck to though and as a result people keep mixing up Viola and Sebastian. We didn’t have any twin actors though so we had to try and make a joke out of how different the two actors playing the twins were.

What would you have done if you didn’t have twins to play Viola and Sebastian?

Actors and Acting in Midsummer Night’s Dream and Hamlet – Shakespeare often wrote about actors in his plays. In *Hamlet*, the title character hires a group of actors and before their performance he gives them instructions in how they can act in the best possible way. Hamlet was careful to point out that actors often reveal truths and elicit emotions which is why he is so keen for them to act really well. In *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a group of local tradesmen (often called the Mechanicals) form an amateur dramatics group and decide to perform a play in front of the Duke at his wedding day. These amateur actors are an extremely enthusiastic group, especially Bottom who is so enthusiastic he wants to perform every part. In Shakespeare’s time it was believed that acting and entertainment was common to all levels of society from workers to royalty. In *Midsummer Night’s Dream* Bottom literally enters different levels of society. He starts as a labourer and commoner, becomes part of the fairy world when he is transformed by Puck into an ass (a Donkey) and then enters the world of royalty when he performs with the group in front of the Duke.

What do you think? Are actors and entertainment important?

Language

Shakespeare used a lot of different types of writing in his plays and poetry. You may not know it but you probably use a lot of the same phrases that appear in his plays.

- Be all and end all
- As [good] luck would have it
- Catch a cold

Of course Shakespeare also used some words that we don't use today. Here's a short list to explain some of the more difficult words that we'll be using in the play:

- **Weeds;** Clothes
- **Puissance:** Strength (of an army)
- **Bodkin:** A type of thin dagger
- **Extempore:** Spoken without preparation
- **Groundlings:** The members of the audience who had to stand.
- **Moor:** A person from North West Africa, usually of Berber and Arabic descent.



Apart from phrases there are a few different writing techniques that Shakespeare used. We're going to take a quick look at just a few of them.

Rhyme

You probably already know what rhyme is, but Shakespeare used rhyme for effect quite frequently. One of the most common uses that Shakespeare had for rhyme was the couplet. A couplet was when the ends of two lines rhyme at the end of a scene or big speech. It is said that the couplet was often used as an audible cue so that the actors backstage knew that the scene was nearly over and could prepare to enter/exit the stage. This was especially important in Shakespeare's time because actors often weren't given the whole play, but just the pages with their lines on, so the actors needed some kind of cue to know when the scene was coming to an end.

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Rhymes easily stand out in a piece of writing; this allowed Shakespeare to use rhyme to lighten the mood or to relieve the tension in a scene. It was a very clear break with the rest of the text. Shakespeare also used rhyme as a way of reminding us that the fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the witches in *Macbeth* aren't like everyone else. People don't normally go about talking in rhyme, is not usual. By having the fairies and the witches speak in rhyme Shakespeare is reminding us that neither are normal or usual. They are, in fact, unusual. They are supernatural.

Sonnets

A type of poem that Shakespeare used a lot, we haven't included any sonnets in our play sadly. A Shakespearean sonnet is a very particular thing. It is fourteen-line poem divided into three stanzas (poetry speak for verse). A sonnet will have a system of rhymes where the first and third lines will rhyme, the second and fourth line will rhyme, the fifth and seventh line will rhyme, the sixth and eighth line will rhyme, ninth and eleventh line will rhyme, the tenth and twelfth line will rhyme, and finally the thirteenth and fourteenth lines will rhyme.

If you listened closely you might think that the fairies Oberon and Puck from *Midsummer Night's Dream* were speaking in sonnets. The speeches of theirs that we chose for this play have more than fourteen lines and don't follow the rhyme system we mentioned above.

Talking to the Audience

In theatre there are a few different people a character can be talking to. Often when we see theatre the characters don't know that the audience exists. In many of Shakespeare's plays though there are what we call **soliloquies**. These are moments where just one character is talking. Usually they are talking either directly to, or for the sole benefit of the audience. Hamlet does this in his 'To Be Or Not To Be' speech.

Shakespeare also has characters talk to the audience in plays like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Henry V* where there is a narrator called a Chorus in Shakespeare. The job of Chorus is to set the scene or to give the audience information that they might not have. In *Henry V* a lot of time passes between scenes and acts so the Chorus tells the audience to imagine all the wonderful things that have happened.

Other Techniques

Shakespeare often used what was called Iambic Pentameter. It sounds like a really complex idea, but Iambic Pentameter is just a term for the number stresses in a sentence. In Shakespeare you often find that each line has ten parts, five of which will be stressed.

And what's he then that says I play the villain?

In the line above from *Othello* you can see that there are ten parts with five of those parts being stressed. When there is no rhyme in speeches written like this, the writing is called blank verse.

Speeches and other writing not using rhyme or pentameter are referred to as prose. Prose is a more conversational style. Much like the way you'd talk to your friends or in everyday life. The scene in our play from *Much Ado About Nothing* with Beatrice and Benedick is written in prose.

Shakespeare often wrote the more realistic and natural bits of dialogue and speech in a play.





Shakespeare Quiz

There's a lot more information about Shakespeare and the time he lived and wrote in that we put into our play. If you'd like to challenge yourself perhaps you can take our quiz and see how much you can remember about our play and what you might have learnt about Shakespeare.

1. What was the name of the three characters in the play?
2. Why was Meg pretending to be a man?
3. Where is *Romeo and Juliet* based?
4. What was Shakespeare's Dad's job?
5. Finish this line from *Macbeth*: 'Double, double, toil and...'
6. What were the sumptuary laws?
7. What is the name of Beatrice's cousin in *Much Ado About Nothing*?
8. What was the relationship between Sebastian and Viola in *Twelfth Night*?
9. What play were Quince, Bottom and the other Mechanicals rehearsing in *Midsummer Night's Dream*?
10. What does Oberon tell Puck to fetch in *Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Bonus Questions (for if you've read the Education Pack!)

1. What was the name of Shakespeare's wife?
2. Who accused Hero of being unfaithful?
3. What is the narrator in *Henry V* called?
4. How many lines are in a sonnet?
5. What is a rhyme on the last two lines of a scene sometimes called?

Answers are on the next page.



Answers for the Shakespeare quiz

1. Meg, Harry and Kit
2. Women weren't allowed to act in Shakespeare's time.
3. Verona
4. Shakespeare's Dad, John, was a Glover.
5. Trouble
6. Laws that stopped people from dressing above their station (laws telling people how to dress)
7. Hero
8. Twins
9. Pyramus and Thisbe
10. A flower

Bonus Answers

1. Anne Hathaway
2. Claudio
3. Chorus
4. Fourteen
5. A Rhyming Couplet

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