

SCOP Shakespeare

Version 3.0

Shakespeare lived from 1564-1616, during the reign of Elizabeth I, who was Shakespeare's most notable patron, and James I. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, and is nicknamed the Bard of Avon. Shakespeare's plays are generally divided into three categories: comedies end well for their heroes, tragedies end badly, and histories tell fictionalized accounts of the lives of English rulers. The plays are listed here in rough order of importance to quizbowl; bolded titles have further details outlined on following pages.

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Romeo and Juliet

Selected characters:

Romeo Montague	Juliet Capulet
Mercutio, his friend	Nurse, her confidante
Friar Lawrence	Tybalt, her cousin
	Paris, Juliet's fiancé

Plot:

In Verona, the Montagues and Capulets are at war. Juliet is to meet her fiancé, Paris, at a ball hosted by the Capulets, but she falls in love with Romeo instead. Romeo courts Juliet from under her balcony later that night. The next day, they are married by Friar Lawrence. Spurred on by his love for Juliet, Romeo attempts to separate Mercutio and Tybalt during a duel, but Mercutio is fatally stabbed under Romeo's outstretched arm. Romeo kills Tybalt in revenge, which Juliet almost immediately forgives. The pair spend a passionate night together. Romeo flees in the morning to escape the Capulet clan, who wish to avenge Tybalt's death. Juliet's parents, unaware of the marriage, pressure her to wed Paris. To escape this fate, Juliet drinks a potion to feign death, and is lying in her family's tomb when Romeo returns. Not knowing that Juliet is drugged and not dead, Romeo goes to her, killing Paris on the way in, and commits suicide with poison over her "body." When she wakes to find Romeo dead, Juliet stabs herself with Romeo's dagger and dies. Lords Montague and Capulet realize the pain their feud has brought, and agree to promote peace within Verona by erecting a golden statue of the pair.

Julius Caesar

Selected characters:

Julius Caesar	Brutus
Calpurnia, his wife	Portia, his wife
Cassius	Marcus Antonius
	Octavius Caesar

Plot:

Caesar returns from victory over Pompey to much excitement, and ignores a warning from a soothsayer to "beware the Ides of March." Cassius convinces Brutus to kill Caesar by writing fake letters from the Roman populace expressing concern that Julius Caesar will become a dictator and subjugate the will of the people. Against Calpurnia's advice, Caesar makes his way to the senate on the Ides of March, and a group of conspirators, including Cassius and Brutus, stab him to death. Brutus gives a speech to the people explaining his actions, but Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) reveals that Caesar's will leaves money to each citizen of Rome, and the tide turns against the conspirators. Marcus Antonius, Octavius Caesar, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus join forces as a triumvirate and go to battle against the conspirators, who are all slain. Marcus Antonius commends the dead Brutus as "the noblest Roman of them all," since he acted for what he felt was best for Rome, rather than from desire for power.

Hamlet

Selected characters:

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark	Laertes, Polonius's son
Claudius, his uncle, King of Denmark	Ophelia, Polonius's daughter, a romantic interest of Hamlet
Gertrude, his mother, Queen of Denmark	Horatio, Hamlet's longtime friend and confidante
The Ghost of Old Hamlet, his father	Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's friends
Polonius, an advisor to King Claudius	Fortinbras, King of Norway

Plot:

Set in Elsinore Castle, Denmark. Gertrude and Claudius have married and are ruling Denmark after the death of Old Hamlet, the previous king and Claudius's brother. Old Hamlet's ghost appears to Hamlet to seek revenge against Claudius, who poisoned Old Hamlet to gain the throne. Hamlet begins to act insane to discover whether this is true. Claudius and Gertrude call in Hamlet's old school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but they fail to discover why Hamlet is mad. A group of traveling actors comes to the castle, and Hamlet asks them to perform a play in which a king's brother kills the king and marries the queen to gain the throne. Convinced by Claudius's reaction to this play that he is guilty of Old Hamlet's murder, Hamlet makes plans to kill his uncle. He confronts Gertrude in her chambers and stabs Polonius through a curtain, thinking he's Claudius. Ophelia goes mad due to her father's death and Hamlet's bizarre behavior toward her, and drowns after falling out of a willow tree. Claudius convinces Laertes to avenge the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia by dueling Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Claudius also prepares a cup of poisoned wine for the duel, in case the sword fails to kill Hamlet. During the duel, Hamlet and Laertes accidentally switch swords, and Laertes is killed when the poisoned blade scratches him. Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Hamlet, slowly dying after also being scratched with the poisoned sword, kills Claudius and dies. Fortinbras arrives and claims the throne, and he and Horatio honor the fallen prince.

Macbeth

Selected characters:

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis	Fleance, Banquo's son
Lady Macbeth, his wife	Duncan, king of Scotland
Macduff, a nobleman	Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's sons
Banquo, a general	

Plot:

Set in Dunsinane Castle, Scotland. Returning from war, Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches, who tell Macbeth that he will be made Thane of Cawdor and eventually king, and that Banquo's offspring will also rule Scotland. When they reach Dunsinane, Macbeth is indeed made Thane of Cawdor, and Lady Macbeth decides that he must kill King Duncan to gain the throne and fulfill the witches' prophecy. He does so and is made king. Malcolm and Donalbain flee in fear for their lives. To stop Banquo's progeny from fulfilling the witches' prophecy by taking over the throne, Macbeth hires murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance, but Fleance escapes. Macbeth is warned by the three witches to beware of Macduff, and he arranges for Macduff's family to be killed. Fulfilling two predictions made by the witches, "Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane" when Malcolm and Macduff march on the castle, carrying branches from the forest as camouflage, and Macbeth is killed by a man "not of woman born" when Macduff, who was delivered by Caesarian section, kills him. Malcolm is made king.

Othello

Selected characters:

Othello, a Moor	Iago, soldier under Othello's command
Desdemona, his wife	Cassio, a lieutenant under Othello's command
Brabantio, her father	Roderigo, a rich man, Desdemona's suitor

Plot:

Brabantio accuses Othello of using witchcraft to marry Desdemona, but Othello explains before the Venetian senate that Desdemona was attracted by stories of Othello's life. He sails to Cyprus with Iago, Emilia, Roderigo, and Desdemona. Iago, out of hatred for Othello, schemes to destroy him. He gets Cassio drunk and uses Roderigo to provoke him to violence against the local governor. Othello strips Cassio of his title, and Iago tells Cassio to ask Desdemona for help in getting back into Othello's favor. Iago suggests to Othello that Cassio and Desdemona's conversations indicate that they are having an affair. Emilia steals Desdemona's handkerchief, and Iago makes it seem as though Desdemona gave it to Cassio. Consumed by jealousy, Othello asks Iago to help him get revenge on Cassio and Desdemona. Iago wounds Cassio, and Othello murders Desdemona in her bed. Emilia arrives and discovers what Othello has done, reveals the truth, and is killed by Iago. Iago flees, but is brought back. Othello wounds him, then commits suicide. Lodovico announces that Othello's property will be given to Graziano and Iago will be executed.

King Lear

Selected characters:

Lear, King of Britain	King of France
Goneril, his daughter	Gloster
Regan, his daughter	Edmund
Cordelia, his daughter	Edgar
Albany, Goneril's husband	Kent
Cornwall, Regan's husband	

Plot:

Lear sets out to divide his kingdom between his daughters. He asks them to extol their love for him, which Goneril and Regan, desiring power, readily do. Cordelia, who loves her father dearly, refuses to make flowery speeches that could never measure up to her love, and Lear disowns her, revoking her dowry. Despite her poverty, the King of France marries Cordelia. When Kent, Lear's long-time loyal supporter, attempts to defend Cordelia's actions, Lear casts him into exile. Meanwhile, Edmund, bastard son of Gloster, schemes to gain an inheritance at the expense of his legitimate brother, Edgar. Lear realizes too late that only Cordelia truly loves him. As Cordelia leads the French army in an invasion of Britain, Goneril kills Regan and then commits suicide; Edmund dies; Cordelia dies; and Lear dies of grief.

The Merchant of Venice

Selected characters:

Antonio, the titular merchant	Jessica, Shylock's daughter
Bassanio, his friend	Portia
Shylock, a Jewish money-lender	Nerissa, Portia's maid

Plot:

Portia's late father has set a test for any man who wishes to marry Portia; all suitors must try to find her portrait, which is contained in one of three chests, made of gold, silver, and lead. If they choose correctly, they may marry Portia, but an incorrect choice dooms them to a life without women. Bassanio wishes to marry Portia, but lacks the money to travel to her, so he asks for a loan from Antonio, who in turn asks for a loan from Shylock, despite a long-standing enmity between the two. Shylock agrees to lend Bassanio the money on the understanding that, if it is not repaid at the end of three months, he may take the pound of Antonio's flesh closest to his heart. Shylock's daughter, Jessica, runs off with Lorenzo, a Christian, with the help of Antonio and Bassanio, which angers Shylock. When several shipwrecks leave Antonio unable to pay his debt, Shylock demands his pound of flesh. Meanwhile, Bassanio correctly chooses the lead chest and marries Portia, while his friend Gratiano weds Nerissa. He returns to Venice in time for Antonio's trial against Shylock, at which Portia, disguised as a young lawyer named Balthasar, argues that Shylock may not spill any of Antonio's blood while taking his flesh, and must thus forfeit the bond. Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity, effectively destroying his life and livelihood.

Much Ado About Nothing

Selected characters:

Leonato, a nobleman of Messina	Claudio
Hero, his daughter	Don Pedro
Beatrice, his niece	Don John the bastard, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother
Benedick	

Plot:

Don Pedro returns from war to Leonato's home with Don John, Benedick, and Claudio. Claudio and Hero fall in love, and Benedick and Beatrice engage in a battle of witty banter. Claudio and Hero conspire to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love. Their plan succeeds, though the pair refuse to admit their love to each other. Meanwhile, Don John makes Hero's maid dress up like Hero and accept the advances of Borachio at Hero's window, which causes Claudio to reject Hero at the altar. Leonato pretends that Hero has died of shock, and when the local police discover that she is innocent, Claudio mourns his loss. Beatrice and Benedick admit their love, and Claudio is convinced to marry Leonato's "niece," who is nearly identical to Hero. At the double wedding, Hero reveals that she is Leonato's "niece," and the overjoyed couples dance happily.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Selected characters:

Theseus, Duke of Athens	Hermia
Hippolyta, Amazon queen	Helena
Oberon, king of the fairies	Demetrius
Titania, queen of the fairies	Lycaster
Puck, a trickster	

Plot:

Theseus is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta when Egeus, an Athenian noble, asks him to settle a problem with his daughter, Hermia. Hermia loves Lysander and wishes to marry him, but Egeus wants Hermia to marry Demetrius. Helena, Hermia's friend and a former love of Demetrius's, tells Demetrius of Hermia's plan to run away with Lysander. Demetrius follows Lysander and Hermia into the forest, and Helena follows him. A group of fairies, led by Oberon and Titania, are in this forest, traveling to bless Theseus's marriage and arguing over a beautiful young Indian boy, who Oberon wishes to make a knight. Hoping to make Titania appreciate the boy's beauty, he asks Puck to spread a love potion on Titania's sleeping eyelids so that she will fall in love with the first person she sees when she wakes. He also orders Puck to spread some on Demetrius's eyelids to make him fall in love with Helena. Puck mistakenly spreads the potion on Lysander's eyelids, and he falls in love with Helena. Chaos ensues as Puck attempts to rectify his mistake. Meanwhile, Titania awakes and falls in love with Bottom, a buffoonish Athenian with the head of a donkey. Eventually, everything is sorted out. Theseus and Hippolyta find the young lovers and take them back to Athens, where Demetrius marries Helena and Lysander marries Hermia. A group of craftsmen come out of the forest to perform a play after the wedding. Finally, Puck asks the audience to imagine that the play was simply a dream.

The Taming of the Shrew

Selected characters:

Katherine, the shrew	Petruchio, Katherine's suitor
Bianca, her sister	Christopher Sly
Lucentio, in love with Bianca	

Plot:

[In a framing story, Christopher Sly gets drunk, and a local lord decides to play a trick on him. With the help of some locals, he puts Sly in his bed and convinces him upon waking that he is the lord of the manor, and that he only believes he's a tinker because he has been insane. For his benefit, a group of actors perform "The Taming of the Shrew."] Lucentio arrives in Padua and falls in love with Bianca, but is unable to marry her until her older sister, Katherine, is married. Petruchio arrives, looking for a wife and declaring that he will marry any woman regardless of her disposition. He settles on Katherine, and informs her that he will marry her regardless of her wishes. He shows up to their wedding late and in ridiculous garb, then keeps Katherine from eating or sleeping in several days. He eventually manages to completely bend her to his will, convincing her that the sun is the moon and an old man is a young woman. Lucentio and Bianca fall in love and decide to elope without their fathers' consent, but finally manage to convince the men to accept their marriage. At Hortensio's wedding banquet, Petruchio and Lucentio compete to see whose wife is more obedient. Bianca refuses to obey Lucentio's summons, but Katherine comes immediately.

The Tempest

Selected characters:

Prospero, a wizard	Alonso, the King of Naples
Miranda, his daughter	Ferdinand, his son
Ariel, Prospero's familiar	Antonio, Prospero's brother
Caliban, another of Prospero's servants	

Plot:

A ship containing Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo is wrecked near Prospero's island. Prospero reveals to Miranda that he sank the ship to get revenge on Alonso and Antonio; Prospero had been the Duke of Milan until the Alonso and Antonio left him and his daughter on a raft to die. Ariel appears and tells Prospero that the passengers on the ship have been brought to the island and separated into groups. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love, but Prospero separates them to ensure that their relationship develops at a healthy pace. Meanwhile, Ariel makes a group of noblemen, including Alonso, go to sleep. Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill him, but Ariel makes him wake up before the plot can come to fruition. Prospero makes Ferdinand work for him, and Ferdinand and Miranda agree to marry. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban get drunk and plan to kill Prospero to take over the island. Prospero and Ariel trick everyone on the island to Prospero's home and diffuse all of the plans they've made to kill Alonso and Prospero. Prospero reveals Ferdinand and Miranda and tells everyone his story. He is reinstated as a duke and plans to return to Milan. He releases Ariel from his servitude, asking him to keep the seas calm for the group's return to Italy.

The Comedy of Errors

Selected characters:

Antipholus of Syracuse
Dromio of Syracuse
Antipholus of Ephesus
Dromio of Ephesus

Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus
Egeon, father of the Antipholuses
Emilia, mother of the Antipholuses

Plot:

Egeon of Syracuse is arrested in Ephesus while seeking his son, Antipholus of Ephesus. He reveals that, 25 years before, he was traveling with his wife, twin sons (Antipholus and Antipholus), and his sons' twin servants (Dromio and Dromio), when a shipwreck separated one twin, his servant, and his mother from the other twin, his servant, and his father. Confusion ensues, as Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are visiting Ephesus, and have several run-ins with Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus before Emilia, an abbess in Ephesus, collects everyone together and reveals the truth.

Shakespeare's Poetry

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets (fourteen-line poems), most of which are romantic in nature and dedicated to a Fair Youth (possibly one of his patrons, like the Earl of Southampton) and a Dark Lady. Shakespeare's sonnet style is named for him ("Shakespearean sonnets"). His sonnets use iambic pentameter, meaning each line has ten syllables arranged in pairs, with the first syllable of each pair being unstressed and the second being stressed. The lines are arranged in three sets of quatrains (four lines each) and one ending couplet (two lines). His sonnets are usually named by their first lines.

His two most frequently quoted sonnets are:

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.