

A BARD AMONG MANY

One challenge when learning about Shakespeare is that he's often referred to as "**The Bard**," as if he were the only poet/storyteller worth paying attention to. Placing Shakespeare on a pedestal does a disservice to Shakespeare, to other writers, and to us. We believe there are many poet/storytellers who we can learn about and admire. They come from all over the world, and have shared their stories in many forms throughout history. In this broader context, Shakespeare is one bard among many.

What's a bard anyway?

The meaning of a word can change over time. The earliest use of the word 'bard' was in Scottish Gaelic. It was originally a disrespectful term for a travelling musician. Later, in Irish Gaelic, bards were part of an ancient Celtic order of poets who would compose and sing epic verses, often accompanied by a harp. The word evolved to refer to poets who would tell epic stories, often of great courage. The word 'bard' is still the word for 'poet' in modern Celtic languages and in Welsh. For our purposes, we like to think of a bard as a storyteller.

EXPLORE

How do we tell stories?

Storytelling can take many forms:

Sometimes stories are read in a book.

Sometimes a story is spoken or sung to us.

A photograph or work of visual art can tell a story, as can a piece of music.

Sometimes we tell stories through movement or gesture, and sometimes we combine many forms to tell stories through theatre or film.



Stories from your life

- What are your favourite stories?
- How were they shared with you?
- How do you like to tell stories?



MANY BARDS FROM MANY LANDS

In *A Shakesperience*, each of the performers identifies a bard from the culture of their own ancestors.

Agnes talked about **Li Bai**, a Chinese poet from the Tang Dynasty (about 1300 years ago). His poems were part of “The Three Wonders” of expression along with Mei Pin’s swordplay and Zhang Xu’s calligraphy. His poems explored the pleasures of friendship, the depth of nature, solitude, and the joys of drinking wine.

Alexandra talked about **Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz**, a poet, playwright, writer, philosopher, and feminist nun living in what we now know as Mexico in the 1600s. She was hugely critical of misogyny and turned her nun’s quarters into a salon for intellectual discussion and conversation. Her most famous poem is “Hombres Necios que Acusais” which translates to ‘Silly Men’

Andy talked about **Hazrat Peelu**, considered the father of Punjabi literature. He lived around the same time as Shakespeare, and his story of Mirza Sahiban is a classic story of young lovers defying their families to be together, something they have in common with Romeo and Juliet.

Arggy talked about **Mowlānā**, known to the western world as Rumi. He lived in the 1200s in Persia and remains one of the most celebrated and beloved poets in the world today. The fundamental message behind the majority of Mowlānā’s poems and ghazals is love and finding divinity through abandoning the ego and seeking the truth of love.

Isaac talked about **Bob Marley**, a Jamaican singer/songwriter who brought reggae music and ideas to the world in the later part of the 20th century. He had the courage to share his anger at the tyranny he saw around him, while spreading the idea that love is the path to unity for all of humanity. Not only did he share his ideals publicly any chance he got, he conveyed them beautifully through his music.

REFLECT

Consider more bards with the questions below.

- Who are the bards from the culture(s) of your own ancestors?
- What are their preferred storytelling forms?
- Who are the bards of today?
- What are their preferred storytelling forms?
- In your opinion, what makes someone a bard?



YOURSELF AS A BARD

- What are some stories from your life?
- What are some stories that have come from your ancestors?
- What are your preferred storytelling forms?
- How do you nurture and celebrate the bard in yourself?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

If you'd like inspiration for some storytelling, select one of Shakespeare's lines below to tell your own story, using your favourite storytelling form.

In simple and pure soul I come to you	'Tis wonder that enwraps me thus
I can swim like a duck, I'll be sworn	Under love's heavy burden do I sink
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh	With a passion would I shake the world
I am that merry wanderer of the night	My money is almost spent
I will move storms	I do not without danger walk these streets
Dive, thoughts, down to my soul	Now cracks a noble heart
'Tis bitter cold and I am sick at heart	Chain me with roaring bears
My soul is full of discord and dismay	I am a feather for each wind that blows

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