

'Know you the character?'

Exploring Shakespeare's characters

How to use this resource

This resource will introduce you to six of Shakespeare's characters. Check out their profiles and some of the things they say on pages 1, 2, and 3. Then, on page 4, you'll have a chance to explore these characters and create your own interpretations of them, either on your own or with a group.

A note about Shakespeare's characters

It's important to remember that Shakespeare's characters were created to be interpreted by actors, and that every actor's interpretation of their character is unique. There is no "right" or "definitive" way to interpret these characters. We encourage you to consider Shakespeare's characters beyond traditional ideas of age, gender, and cultural background.

We hope you will be inspired by the words and actions of these characters and by your own background, traditions, and creativity, and that ultimately, you'll find inspired ways to make Shakespeare's characters your own.



Meet Viola

Viola is a central character in *Twelfth Night*. After a shipwreck in which Viola's twin Sebastian is lost and Viola is left alone in a strange land, Viola copies Sebastian's appearance, takes on the name Cesario, and delivers messages of love for the duke Orsino. Olivia, the recipient of these messages, falls in love with Cesario, who has in turn fallen in love with Orsino. It's quite a puzzle!

Things Viola says

1 Conceal me what I am.

O you should not rest
2 Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.

3 As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.

4 As I am woman – now alas the day!
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe.

5 O time, thou must untangle this, not I!
'Tis too hard a knot for me t'untie.

Meet Juliet

Juliet is one of the central characters in *Romeo & Juliet*. Juliet is from the Capulet family, which has a violent, deep-seated hatred for the Montague family. In spite of this, Juliet falls in love with Romeo Montague and is willing to risk everything for this new-found passion.

Things Juliet says

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep | 4 | I have a faint, cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life. |
| 2 | Leap to these arms, untalked of and unseen! | 5 | Thy lips are warm. |
| 3 | Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief? | | |

Meet Romeo

Romeo is the other central character in *Romeo & Juliet*. Romeo is from the Montague family, which has a violent, deep-seated hatred for the Capulet family. In spite of this, Romeo falls in love with Juliet Capulet and is willing to risk everything for this new-found passion.

Things Romeo says

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Under love's heavy burden do I sink. | 4 | Fire-eyed fury be my conduct now! |
| 2 | He jests at scars that never felt a wound. | 5 | O I am fortune's fool! |
| 3 | With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls. | | |

Meet Puck

Puck is a mischievous spirit who follows Oberon, one of the rulers of the fairy realm in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck uses a magical flower which makes a sleeping person fall in love with the first person or creature they see upon waking. Puck delights in the mayhem this causes before reversing it with a different magic flower.

Things Puck says

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | I jest to Oberon and make him smile. | 4 | Those things do best please me
That befall preposterously! |
| 2 | My mistress with a monster is in love. | 5 | Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends. |
| 3 | Lord, what fools these mortals be! | | |

Meet Hamlet

Hamlet is the title character in a tragedy called *Hamlet*. Near the beginning of the play, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears and claims to have been murdered by a sibling who has since ascended the throne and married Hamlet's mother. The ghost asks Hamlet to take revenge, but Hamlet doesn't know what to believe.

Things Hamlet says

1 O that this too too solid flesh would melt.

2 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

3 I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth.

4 Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart.

5 The rest is silence.

Meet Margaret

Margaret is an important character in four of Shakespeare's history plays. Margaret is married to the English monarch, Henry the Sixth, whose reign is challenged and whose crown is ultimately taken away. Henry is neither a gifted soldier nor politician, so Margaret leads his faction to try to maintain power and remain queen.

Things Margaret says

1 Margaret my name, and daughter to a king,
The King of Naples, whosoe'er thou art.

2 It made me laugh to see the villain run.

3 Ay me, unhappy!
To be a queen, and crown'd with infamy!

4 Off with the crown, and with the crown his head;
And, whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead.

5 Bear with me; I am hungry for revenge.

Meet Macbeth

Macbeth is the title character in a tragedy called *Macbeth*. Near the beginning of the play, Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters, who prophesy that Macbeth will become king. Tempted by their mysterious words, inspired by ambition, and fueled by the urgings of a spouse, Macbeth sets out on a course of action that has deadly consequences for many people.

Things Macbeth says

1 I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent.

2 I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

3 I am afraid to think what I have done.

4 Blow wind, come wrack,
At least we'll die with harness on our back.

5 Before my body,
I throw my warlike shield.

Explore the characters

1. Choose a character you'd like to explore.
2. Choose lines you'd like to play with. If you're working as a group, each person can choose one. Look up the definitions of any words that are unclear to you.
3. Express your line in a way that interests you. We've listed some suggestions below.
4. Share your creations with someone else. Then repeat this process with other characters!

MOVE

How would your character move? How would they express their thoughts physically? How could you use your voice and/or body to create this character? Based on what you know of your character, create your own movement-based interpretation of their lines.

Create a sculpture or statue using your body to express what your character's lines mean to you. Create a gesture or sculpture for each line, as well as a way to move from one sculpture to the next. If you like, add music for your choreography. You could also speaking the line as you hold each pose. Try it many different ways and notice how each version feels to you.

LISTEN

What would your character's soundtrack be? What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your character? Create a soundscape; if you like, you could include recordings of your character's lines.

WRITE

Create a poem, story, or monologue using one of your character's lines.

MAKE

Create a costume design. What would your character wear? Think about the place your character might have in the society of the play, their daily activities, how they move, what they want others to know or think about them, as well as what your character might simply enjoy wearing.

Gather objects that your character might use or care about. (Just remember to ask before borrowing anything!) Use these props in your other explorations, or create a still life of the objects by drawing or photographing them.

Create an art project inspired by your character's lines.



Reflect

- Why did you choose your character?
- In what ways are you similar to this character? In what ways are you different?
- What feelings came up for you when you were interpreting and expressing your line(s)?
- Why did you make the creative choices that you made?
- What questions did this activity raise for you? What else would you like to know about your character?