



A bard among many

Exploring Shakespeare alongside other storytellers

One challenge when learning about Shakespeare is that he's often referred to as "The Bard," as if he were the only poet or storyteller worth paying attention to. Glorifying Shakespeare does a disservice to Shakespeare, to other writers, and to us, their readers. We believe there are countless poets and storytellers 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 just one bard among many.



What's a bard anyway?

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.



How do we tell stories?

Storytelling can take many forms

- Sometimes stories are written and read in a book
- Sometimes stories are spoken or sung
- 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

Reflect

- 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 (51:42-54:00).



Agnes talks 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 talks about **Sor Juana Inés 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 Acusáis” which translates to ‘Silly Men’.

Andy talks 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 talks 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 talks about **Bob Marley**, a Jamaican singer/songwriter who brought reggae music and ideas to the world in the later part of the 20th century. Bob Marley 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 ideas publicly any chance he got, he conveyed them beautifully through his music.



Reflect

- 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?

Thinking about yourself as a bard

- What are some stories from your life?
- What are some stories that have been passed down to you from your ancestors?
- What are your favourite storytelling forms? Why do you like them?
- How do you nurture and celebrate the bard in yourself?



Make it your own

If you'd like inspiration for some storytelling of your own, choose one of Shakespeare's lines below. Use it to tell a story of your own making, 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

If you would like to know more about who says these lines and in which play, the Folger Shakespeare Library has [an excellent online search tool](https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/). You can find it here:
<https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/>