



What do you mean by that saying?

Unpacking famous quotes from Shakespeare's plays

Below you'll find some of the most famous quotes from Shakespeare's plays. Many of these have been adopted as aphorisms, which are short expressions of wisdom or truth. These ideas are often taken out of context and attributed to Shakespeare himself rather than to his characters. However, each of these quotes has a specific context within its play, which can sometimes bring an unexpected meaning to the phrase.

Explore the quotes

You may or may not recognize some of the quotations below. Without looking up what plays they're from, who speaks these lines, or what's happening when those lines are spoken, consider the phrases below and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do these phrases mean to you on their own, without context?
2. Who might express this? What might be happening to them? What might they be feeling?
3. How do you feel about the ideas expressed in each phrase? Do you agree with them or not?

"We know what we are but
know not what we may be"

"The course of true love never did run smooth"

"Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind"

"There is nothing either good or bad
but thinking makes it so"

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on"

"All the world's a stage"

"All that glisters is not gold"

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown"

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be"

"This above all: to thine own self be true"

"Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none"

"No legacy is so rich as honesty"

"Better three hours too soon
than a minute too late"

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin"

"Better a witty fool than a foolish wit"

"O brave new world that has such people in't"

Reflect

In writing or in conversation, share your thoughts about one (or more) quotation. Why did you choose it? Why might someone say this? Would you ever say this? Why or why not?

Create

Use your selected quotation(s) as inspiration for an original poem, story, piece of music, or work of art.

So, who says that?

Here's who says each of the quotes on page 1, and in which play.

"We know what we are but know not what we may be"	Ophelia in <i>Hamlet</i> , act 4, scene 5
"The course of true love never did run smooth"	Lysander in <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , act 1, scene 1
"Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind"	Helena in <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , act 1, scene 1
"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so"	Hamlet in <i>Hamlet</i> , act 2, scene 2
"We are such stuff as dreams are made on"	Prospero in <i>The Tempest</i> , act 4, scene 1
"All the world's a stage"	Jaques in <i>As You Like It</i> , act 2, scene 7
"All that glisters is not gold"	A scroll in <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> , act 2, scene 7
"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown"	King Henry in <i>Henry the Fourth: Part 2</i> , act 3, scene 1
"Neither a borrower nor a lender be" "This above all: to thine own self be true"	Polonius in <i>Hamlet</i> , act 1, scene 3
"Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none"	Countess in <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i> , act 1, scene 3
"No legacy is so rich as honesty"	Mariana in <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i> , act 3, scene 5
"Better three hours too soon than a minute too late"	Ford in <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> , act 2, scene 2
"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin"	Ulysses in <i>Troilus & Cressida</i> , act 3, scene 3
"Better a witty fool than a foolish wit"	Feste in <i>Twelfth Night</i> , act 1, scene 5
"O brave new world that has such people in't"	Miranda in <i>The Tempest</i> , act 5, scene 1