



Discovery Zone

The Case for Shakespeare:

Enhancing Learning through Inquiry

Some people say there's no longer room in the curriculum for the plays of William Shakespeare. They consider the subject only through the lens of social history and therefore view the plays as solely representative of the culture of their origin, i.e. the perspective of a land-owning white man of late 16th century England. However, Shakespeare didn't write essays or memoirs or political tracts. He wrote plays, which are meant to be interpreted in an infinite variety of ways.

Plays require interpretation, most often through performance

Although some people choose to read Shakespeare, it was written for performance. Every artist approaching a play will interpret it in unique ways. That's why Shakespeare's plays work when set in any place and any time period. They've been used as a lens to examine a tremendous range of social movements and cultural phenomena by artists all over the world.

Shakespeare's plays include poetry

Shakespeare's language transcends realism to resonate for us on many levels. When Juliet says, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep..." or when Hamlet says "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space were it not that I have bad dreams," we identify with them. Shakespeare explores so many experiences and emotions in his plays and gives us language to express them.

Drama is the ultimate democratic literary form

There's no authorial voice in a play. Rather, the characters all speak for themselves with their unique voices from their unique perspectives. As a result, the audience is not told by any single authority what to think or how to react. Instead, they're free to draw their own conclusions.

Theatre is the ultimate democratic art form

There are as many different Hamlets as there are actors who've played the role. The same can be said of every character in Shakespeare. In fact, it can be said that Hamlet doesn't even exist until inhabited by an actor, either in the theatre or in the reader's imagination.

Theatre is inherently collaborative

It is impossible for theatre to be created solo. Even a one-person show must have an audience, and will often have a director, designers, a production team and others who help create the artwork and support the event. Because theatrical performance happens in person and in real time, it depends on the collaboration of everyone present, and this applies equally to a simple presentation in a classroom as to a full professional production. Theatrical performance, by its very nature, both requires and nurtures community.

Shakespeare provides questions rather than answers

Many people look to Shakespeare for answers, but he doesn't provide them. Instead, Shakespeare's plays give us something much more valuable: questions. Through the plays, Shakespeare raises questions that resonate for us with the same urgency they had centuries ago. Presenting these questions to our students prompts them to think for themselves and grapple with what it means to be human.

Shakespeare's plays are full of complexity and nuance

In our increasingly polarized world, it's invaluable to expose students to complexity and nuance. Shakespeare created characters who defy categorization as 'heroes' and 'villains': they're complex people in challenging situations who make choices that we can interrogate and to which we can relate.

Exploring Shakespeare can support social and emotional learning

When students explore Shakespeare actively and from their own perspectives, they engage on multiple levels: physically, intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively. Engaging in creative explorations connects students with their thoughts, feelings, and sense of self. Mastering complex material through student-centred inquiry in a supportive environment helps students achieve personal and collective goals. Witnessing one another's efforts and collaborating with each other nurtures empathy and builds community.

Bard Education's **Discovery Zone** approaches Shakespeare with these principles in mind. Rather than seeing Shakespeare's plays as attached to the culture of their origin, we invite students and teachers to explore the language, characters, and stories through the lens of their own cultures, their own ideas, and their own experiences. We believe that students of all ages, cultural backgrounds, neighbourhoods, genders, abilities and personalities can express themselves through playing Shakespeare. We believe that this approach can inspire creativity, community, and joy while students learn about Shakespeare, about themselves, and about one another.