

## COURSE OUTLINE

### SHAKESPEARE

During his remarkable and prolific career, William Shakespeare wrote nearly forty plays and more than one hundred and fifty sonnets. This course guides students through themes and character studies which are as relevant today as they were four hundred years ago and considers the social, political and philosophical issues that influenced and inspired the remarkable “Bard of Avon”. The Shakespeare course is adapted to the individual student's own interests and knowledge of Shakespeare, but students will examine in detail each of the major dramatic genres – tragedy, comedy and history – as well as gaining an insight into the life and times of England's finest dramatist.

1. **Introduction:** Shakespeare's life and times and the theatre of his day.
2. **Tragedy:** Tragic heroes and their fatal flaws – *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.
3. **The Tudor Myth:** Shakespeare at his most subversive – *Richard III* and *Henry IV parts one and two*.
4. **Love and lovers in Shakespearean comedy:** *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
5. **The Bard of Avon:** The influence of Shakespeare's sonnets on English poetry.
6. **Roman Shakespeare:** Revenge and the Roman Ideal – *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.
7. **Women in Shakespeare:** Gender politics – *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.
8. **Shakespeare's Outsiders:** Stereotypes and Scapegoats – *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*.
9. **Fairytales and folklore:** Rough magic and the human condition – *The Tempest*.
10. **Project week**

For each unit, students will be expected to read at least one core text of their choice, which can be linked to a secondary text in class discussion. Students may choose alternative texts to those listed above after discussion with their tutor.

### **Course Aims, Objectives and Outcomes**

There is no single or common aim, objective or outcome in the study of Shakespeare. What is provided is a framework of study in which students may explore, discover or develop an interest in a particular aspect or aspects of the Shakespearean canon.

Whereas the course may be a starting point for some, for others it will offer a chance to deepen and broaden the knowledge and understanding they already possess.

Whichever the case, the course is primarily based on play-readings, textual analysis and theatre or video productions. Individual projects may be selected by the student and need not be confined to a single or conventional academic approach.

Using *Hamlet* as an example, the following is a guide to the type of questions which might be chosen in regard to theme, character or language.

- “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” Discuss the theme of corruption and its significance in the play, paying particular attention to Shakespeare’s use of imagery.
- “Torn between the desire to avenge his father’s death and a fear of punishment from God, Hamlet is justified in delaying his “sweep” to revenge.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- “God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another.” Explore the presentation of women in *Hamlet* in light of this comment.
- Choose any scene, extract or speech from the play which you find particularly interesting or compelling and explain why you have chosen it and what significance it might have for the play as a whole.

### **Assessment Process**

Students will be awarded a final grade based on classroom contribution and attendance, satisfactory completion of reading and research-based homework, and on the submission of at least two written papers on topics of their choice. Critical material may be incorporated into essays by those students who wish.

Written work is assessed on the understanding that there is no right or wrong answer in literature, but each point made should be well-substantiated with appropriate evidence. Essays which score highly will be those which include a coherent and logical argument, detailed textual reference and a firm grasp of, and sensitivity towards, characterisation.

## Assessment criteria

<b>DISTINCTION</b> Grade A	Excellent knowledge, understanding and application of appropriate literary terminology and a clear sense of the ways in which language shapes meaning. Independent judgement and original thinking, together with an ability to make new and convincing connections. Excellent organisation and detailed use of textual evidence. An emerging personal style.
<b>CREDIT</b> Grade B	Good knowledge and understanding, showing ability to analyse and use evidence. Beginnings of independent judgement. Mostly relevant, but some minor lapses and lack of clarity. Good organisation of material and effective sequencing of ideas. Good range of appropriate analysis of relevant sections from the text. Use of appropriate academic language.
<b>MERIT</b> Grade C	Satisfactory knowledge and understanding. Some ability to analyse and use evidence. Attempts to evaluate but treatment often too superficial. Satisfactory organisation of material. Limited range of appropriate analysis or use of relevant terminology.
<b>PASS</b> Grade D	Some knowledge and understanding but significant omissions. Shows limited ability to analyse and use evidence. Some attempt to construct an argument, however lacks ability to argue meaningfully or make significant connections.
<b>FAIL</b>	None of the criteria listed above met.

## Recommended Introductory Reading and Textbooks

We recommend the New Cambridge, Arden or New Swan editions of Shakespeare.

Useful reference books include:

The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare – Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (Oxford University Press: 2005) *ISBN: 9780192806147*

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare – Margeta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge University Press: 2001) *ISBN: 9780521658812*

Shakespeare's Language – Frank Kermode (Penguin Brooks Ltd: 2001) *ISBN: 9780140285925*

If you are unable to obtain books locally, they may be ordered from

<http://www.bookshop.blackwell.co.uk> or [www.Amazon.co.uk](http://www.Amazon.co.uk)