

COURSE OUTLINE

SHAKESPEARE

The course is suitable both for those who are already familiar with Shakespeare texts and for those reading them for the first time. Students are guided through themes and character studies which are as relevant today as they were four hundred years ago and will consider 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. The plays will be placed within their social and historical context, as many of them reflect the fundamental concerns and preoccupations of the Elizabethans.

Group seminars on the key texts will be used to clarify and extend students' critical sense and understanding of the texts through discussion and readings. Reference may also be made to secondary texts in order to encourage students to make meaningful links between the plays. Seminars are complemented by individual tutorials where students' written work is also discussed. Learning will be supplemented by trips to theatre productions. The course requires reading of the core plays plus two written assignments.

Week One

Tragedy

We examine the structure of tragedy, Shakespeare's tragic heroes, and their fatal flaws.

Core Text: *Hamlet*

Secondary Text: *Macbeth*

Week Two

The Tudor Myth

We focus on Shakespeare's treatment of historical and political issues within the history plays.

Core Text: *Richard III*

Secondary Text: *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*

Week Three

Comedy

We examine the role played by love and lovers in Shakespeare's comedies.

Core Text: *Twelfth Night*

Secondary Text: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Week Four

Political and Moral Questions

We look at Shakespeare's treatment of social and moral issues and contemporary attitudes to outsiders in Elizabethan England.

Core Text: *The Merchant of Venice*

Secondary Text: *Othello*

Recommended Introductory Reading and Textbooks

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

The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare

ISBN 9780192806147

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare

ISBN 9780521658812

Shakespeare's Language

ISBN 9780140285925

Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells

Oxford University Press: 2005

Margeta de Grazia and Stanley Wells

Cambridge University Press: 2001

Frank Kermode

Penguin Books Ltd: 2001

Ideally students should have read at least the first two texts of the course before it starts but the priority is *Hamlet*.

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

<http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk> or www.amazon.co.uk