

Resources for Classroom Use

A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO WEBSITES, BOOKS, AND FILMS

INTERNET SITES

Here are links to 25 of our favorite Internet sites about Shakespeare and/or doing Shakespeare with kids. They range from beautiful and snazzy sites set up by major organizations such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and PBS to cozy and cluttered sites set up by individual Shakespeare lovers. Some will be interesting to your students; others are a bit dense and are mostly for adults.

It can be frustrating to attempt to figure out how to find these sites – it sometimes is a matter of following links from one site the next, or of typing in odd combinations of key search words (“Shakespeare” and “teaching children,” for example). There are a lot of individuals out there who love Shakespeare and have put a lot of time into their pages. We hope this links listing – just one of many available online – will help in pointing you towards some of the best of the crop out there.

So take your time and see if you can find any useful treasures in these! And if any of the links go dead, please drop us an email to let us know. Thanks.

Tools you can use: Shakespearean texts and word searches

1. Collected Works of Shakespeare online – MIT

<http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/works.html>

With a few clicks you can find a certain scene in any play and print it out – an

amazing resource. A word of warning – some of the texts have the occasional typo, so proof them before making copies to hand out to students. Also, it's always good to compare the editing on these texts to other more recent editions; you may want to tweak the punctuation a bit. As these versions come from old Shakespeare editions, they are copyright-free.

2. RhymeZone Shakespeare Search

<http://www.rhymezone.com/shakespeare/>

In the old days, you needed a hefty and expensive Shakespeare Concordance to find out how many different ways a word was used by Shakespeare, and how many times. Now you can do a quick search for all uses of a certain word and find the links to the text within seconds. It's fun to type in various words and see how many ways they appear in the plays.

General sites about Shakespeare and the Renaissance

3. Internet Shakespeare Editions

<http://ise.uvic.ca/Annex/ShakSites1.html>

You can view gorgeous photos of the First Folio texts of several plays here; read “old spelling” versions of the texts, from the Folio; see a thorough set of pages about Shakespeare's life and times; see photos of stage productions of plays; and find links to other sites.

4. Encyclopedia Britannica – Shakespeare and the Globe: Then and Now

<http://www.search.eb.com/shakespeare/index2.html>
Packed with features, this site is an excellent place to send students who are looking for more information on the plays and Shakespeare's life and times.

5. The English Renaissance in Context:
Multimedia Tours

<http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/eric/teach/index.cfm>

This handsome site by the Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text has all sorts of neat explorations of the original texts, both quartos and folios. It's a great way to learn more about the origin of what we see in our Shakespeare volumes.

6. Elizabethan Costume Page
<http://costume.dm.net>

Everything you might ever want to know about Elizabethan costume can be found on this stunning site by Drea Leed. We doubt that you will have time to make elaborate period costumes, but who knows? In any case, you can learn a lot from these pages.

About Shakespeare's language, the history of the texts

7. Cable in the Classroom – Shakespeare:
Subject to Change

<http://www.ciconline.com/bdp1/>

A very interesting site exploring the mutable nature of the "authentic" text – how it is influenced by printing, editing, and performance. One of the best things about this site is "We are Hamlet," a short film clip taking apart "To be or not to be" and putting it back together in a soulful way. This collage shows a lovely mix of regular folks, including children, doing the speech. Some say the famous lines in another language.

8. British Library – Treasures in Full:
Shakespeare in Quarto

<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html>

The British Library now has the quartos available for Internet view – fascinating to see. This is mostly useful for scholars, but also a rare treat for children interested in where all this text comes from and how it looked to readers 400 years ago.

Kids doing Shakespeare

9. The Hobart Shakespeareans

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hobart/>

Our heroes! This PBS site for the P.O.V. documentary series has all sorts of features and links related to the new film about Rafe Esquith and his fifth graders in inner-city Los Angeles. You can also link up with the Hobart Shakespeareans website at <http://hobartshakespeareans.org>. There are not many photos of the students in action, but the film, *The Hobart Shakespeareans*, has clips from the class performance of "Hamlet" and it's very impressive. Esquith is a remarkable teacher, but his Shakespeare program truly is one of a kind. Much to learn from here, and from his book, *There Are No Shortcuts*.

10. "We're Making Macbeth!": Teaching
Shakespeare to Children

<http://web.media.mit.edu/~erikb/nethernet/>

This is a funny, unique little site built by university students taking an education course in "Alternative Shakespeare" at the University of Sheffield in England. They went to a local elementary school and did a "Macbeth" project with young children. There are some brief audio and video clips; the kids appear to be in 2nd or 3rd grade and their voices are wonderful and they appear to be loving every minute of the workshops. The activities the university students did with them are a playful mix of performance, games, artwork, and writing (such as new "spells" for the witches and "letters" written by the characters).

11. Shakespeare is Elementary

<http://www.cps.ednet.ns.ca/pageone.htm>

The young students and teachers at Crichton Park School in Nova Scotia clearly love Shakespeare – just visit this site and you’ll see all sorts of features, including suggestions for teachers; recommended plays, films, and books; and photos of the school production of “Midsummer,” which used the Lois Burdett adaptation for children.

12. Shakespeare for Kids – Longwood Middle School, Long Island, New York
<http://www.longwood.k12.ny.us/wmi/wq/collins/>

Another school-created site, this takes you through the schools’ approach to teaching Shakespeare for middle school students.

13. Shakespeare for Kids – Bromwell School, Denver, Colorado
[http://bromwell.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader\\$173](http://bromwell.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader$173)

This site has a useful excellent list of resources for children, parents, and teachers. Denver, by the way, has a large annual festival for elementary-age Shakespeareans from the local schools – look here for more info on that festival: <http://www.coloradoshakes.org/organization/education.cfm#wp%20fest>.

14. Young Shakespeare Players site – Madison, Wisconsin
<http://www.ysp.org/>

On teaching Shakespeare

15. Folger Shakespeare Library & Folger Education department
<http://www.folger.edu/>

An elegant site full of historic images, as well as resources from the Folger’s Education wing, which has long been a leader in Shakespeare-through-performance work at the high school level (the Folger created the Shakespeare Set Free book series for teachers). Follow the links to the sites for teachers and kids; there are all sorts of teacher-cre-

ated lesson plans on file for your perusal, as well as some online activities for children.

16. Royal Shakespeare Company – online education guides

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/home/344.asp>

These are excellent resources for teachers and students alike. The RSC, based out of London and Shakespeare’s hometown in Stratford-upon-Avon, has long been a leader in Shakespeare-through-performance programs for youth. These sites are packed with information, activities, and insights into about a dozen plays; they are built around the company’s current season of offerings, and include background on the plays, photographs from past and current productions, downloadable texts, lesson plans, and descriptions of theater techniques and warm-up exercises. The RSC education department site, at <http://www.rsc.org.uk/home/344.asp>, also has photos of past productions, “behind the scenes” tours of RSC folks in action, and information on Shakespeare’s life.

17. Shakespeare in Education

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/educational.htm>

Since Shakespeare-through-performance has been a growing educational field for the past 20 years or so, it has become an important part of university English departments and of some high school English departments as well. This site by Terry A. Gray has a staggering list of links to every conceivable Shakespeare education site, including many of the ones mentioned here. It is definitely worth the visit; allow plenty of time for browsing.

18. Shakespeare in the Classroom

<http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/ShakesinClass/HomePage.html>

In response to the British government’s decision in the early 1990s to make Shakespeare a mandatory part of the curriculum for 14-year-olds, with the attendant exams, an undergraduate course was begun in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary,

University of London, called “Shakespeare in the Classroom.” This site is a thorough offering of many of the materials created for this course, which focus on how to teach Shakespeare in an interesting way to teens; there is much here that can be adapted by teachers at any level.

19. Triangulating Shakespeare

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~smarx/Shakespeare/triang/index.html>

This ambitious site by Steven Marx in the English Department of Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo has all sorts of interesting stuff, including RealPlayer video clips of student performances. It is an archive of a selection of his teaching materials and an explanation of his approach to teaching the works through performance.

20. Hamlet on Film

<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~acsrrrm/entertext/hamlet/hamlet.htm>

This site from King’s College London provides short excerpts or “quotes” from different film versions of Hamlet, along with academic essays. The clips are on a small screen but are of good quality and worth sampling.

21. PBS Masterpiece Theatre Guides: Othello

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/othello/tguide.html>

Henry V (Kenneth Brannagh film)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/archive/programs/henryv/tguide.html>

Merchant of Venice

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/merchant/tguide.html>

There is plenty to see and read here about these three excellent film adaptations of challenging plays – essays, interviews, plot synopses, photos and more.

22. BBC King Lear guide

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/bookcase/lear/index.shtml>

Like the PBS guides, this site has interviews and background information on a production – this time, the outstanding version of Lear starring Ian Holm.

23. Shakespeare on Film and Video

<http://home.salamander.com/~wmclain/ws-movies.html>

You can find a detailed and thorough list here of almost every film made of a Shakespeare play, along with reviews and comments by site creator Bill McClain.

24. In Search of Shakespeare

<http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/>

Another companion site, this time to the PBS series featuring Michael Wood’s investigation into the life of the mysterious Mr. S. There are all sorts of well-done little pockets of goodies for teachers here, including an entire section on teaching Shakespeare – take your time and check them out.

25. Homeschoolers’ Shakespeare

<http://sandraddodd.com/strew/shakespeare>

A small page, but interesting; this is a place for homeschooling children and parents to write about their experiences with learning Shakespeare.

BOOKS

For your “Shakespeare bookshelf”

Your school librarian is the perfect first stop for gathering a class bookshelf devoted to Shakespeare. Then, check the public library – ransack the Shakespeare section. Look for the odd or unusual volume, such as comic-book versions of the plays. Some good volumes are no longer in circulation, so try the used book stores as well.

One central source for books on Shakespeare for kids, or books on teaching Shakespeare to kids, is the Writing Company. Visit their Shakespeare collection online at: <http://www.writingco.com>. Look for the “Shakespeare” icon; you can request a free catalog.

These books can be fun resources for the students, especially if you decide to do any writing, illustrating, or research projects in class. There are also excellent books out there on Shakespeare’s music (Shakespeare’s Songbook); his invention of words and use of language (Coined by Shakespeare); even about his inventive put-downs (Shakespeare’s Insults: Educating Your Wit)!

We have five suggestions on books to consider for your Shakespeare shelf. But first...

Before our little list, one note on books that rewrite Shakespeare:

We know there are many different edited versions of Shakespeare available for young players out there; some include “simplified” lines for ease of understanding, such as the classic Shake Hands with Shakespeare. We know that many teachers have found these helpful.

We always encourage teachers to sidestep these volumes and form their own relationship to the plays, beginning with the original text. Otherwise, you cheat you and your students of the power and poetry of Shakespeare’s words.

One more note, this time on story versions of the plays:

There are half a dozen or more of these available, starting with the granddaddy and grandma of them all, *Tales from Shakespeare*, published in 1807 by Charles and Mary Lamb (see here for an Internet version: <http://www.eldritchpress.org/cml/tfs>.

[html](#)). Some storybooks are lavishly illustrated. These can be great for getting young students hooked into the stories.

But they can also dictate character interpretations to children before they have had a chance to come up with their own image of Puck, their own image of Hermia, and so forth. We always want the students to return to the idea of an empty and open stage, waiting to be filled by performers – in this case, them – who, with the active help of the audience’s imagination, will create the world of the play. Illustrated storybooks face the demands of a narrative, not the open-endedness of a play text for actors, and so must explain and describe in ways that often take liberties with Shakespeare’s artful ambiguity.

If you do introduce the storybooks, they can provide material for an interesting discussion on the question of: How did this author interpret the story? What did they leave out? What did they add that’s not actually in the text?

Five children’s books on Shakespeare to check out

1. **The Bard of Avon: The Story of William Shakespeare**, by Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema, illustrated by Diane Stanley (1992, HarperCollins, ISBN: 0688091083).

This beautifully and simply illustrated biography has just the right images to show the evolution of both the Elizabethan theater and Shakespeare’s career in it. The paintings here are perfect for showing how performances in inn courtyards by traveling players led to the first London theaters and then to Shakespeare’s Globe. The images capture the intimacy and vibrant fun that one must have experienced in the playhouses – the proximity of the performers, the color and light. The style also is cheerfully awkward at times, like Elizabethan woodcuts, which adds to the charm and feeling of authenticity.

The authors tell just enough to keep you interested, without getting bogged down or too cutesy. We have used this book with students from kindergarten to 8th grade and it has been equally well-received by all of them.

This book is perfect for giving a taste of an introduction to Shakespeare's life and work, so we often use sections of it during our first few sessions with a new class, and return to it from time to time. The end includes a list of words and phrases invented by Shakespeare.

2. **Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare**, by Bruce Koscielnak (1998, Houghton Mifflin, ISBN: 0395874955).

This is a charming picture book in which William Shakespeare is gardening one afternoon and is gently accosted by a variety of people (and critters) speaking lines from his plays. This book is whimsical and rich in the musicality of the language. It's good for reading to the younger ones, but the wide variety of quotes are great for kids up through 5th grade.

3. **The Boy, the Bear, the Baron, the Bard**, by Gregory Rogers (2004, Roaring Brook Press, ISBN: 1596430095).

This is a wordless series of funny, vivid images, telling a time-warping story of a young boy who accidentally kicks his soccer ball into the foundation of the old Globe Theater and, following it, goes back in time to Shakespeare's day – in fact, right back into the middle of a performance. Shakespeare is not too happy about the interruption of the soccer ball and gives chase. It gets wilder from there. The best part of this book are the images of the Globe and of Elizabethan London – playful, intriguing, and evocative. This one is fun for younger kids, but probably children up to 5th grade would still get a kick out of its cinematic qualities.

4. The books of **Lois Burdett** and her students – her “Shakespeare Can Be Fun” series – including *A Child's Portrait of Shakespeare* and “For Kids” versions of *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and others (Firefly Press; best to do search on Internet for individual product information).

We don't actually use these books, but we can't deny their popularity. These are fun for kids from kindergarten to 2nd grade; older students are probably ready for actual text or for tory versions that a bit more complex. The books are cheerfully illustrated by Burdett's young students with bright markers and simple lines. Stories are retold in rhyming verse. These are creative responses to the actual stories, as taught by Burdett, who is fortunate enough to teach in Stratford, Ontario, home of the world-famous Stratford Shakespeare Festival. With our emphasis on performance, we would like to see more of Shakespeare's language interwoven; but one cannot argue with the fact that Burdett is a passionate teacher who has a gift for getting young kids fired up about Shakespeare.

5. **William Shakespeare and the Globe**, by Aliko (2000, HarperTrophy, ISBN: 0064437221).

This is a good companion to *Bard of Avon*, above. It is a biography of sorts but has a stronger focus on the Globe Theater, and also has a special section dedicated to Sam Wanamaker, the American whose vision of rebuilding the Globe eventually led to the building of the new Globe in London.

FILMS

Watching Shakespeare films with the kids

We've learned two main things about using Shakespeare films in the classroom, or with our own children at home:

1. watch the films carefully yourself first;
2. a little bit goes a long way.

There is a temptation, when we're trying to help students understand a complex story, to say, "Hey, let's get the movie!" Live theater performances of the plays are not always conveniently available, unless you live in Stratford or London.

But the moment we turn on the DVD player or VCR, what are the students doing?

They are sitting and watching a screen. Which is what they do too much of anyway!

Performing Shakespeare is an active and interactive process. We should always be on our feet and working with others, making eye contact with them. Watching a film is a passive experience that is pre-determined; unlike a live performance, the movie is not going to change the second time.

Also, children tend to view any version of a play—even a storybook version, as we mentioned in the previous section—as authoritative. "Oh, that's what Puck's supposed to look like?" The best Shakespearean performances we've taken children to have been those where the actors used minimal props and costumes, and simply became the characters. Watching delightedly, the kids understood immediately the true nature of performance: one person playing another.

A final problem: Many of the Shakespeare films out there are disappointingly uneven in quality. There is not a single version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," for example, that is excellent and inventive all the way through. All five available versions have their fine moments, but they have some clunky and embarrassing ones as well. So here are our basic recommendations on using Shakespeare films:

1. Only use them after your students have learned their lines and have their own concept of their character. Then, a wonderful thing happens: as the kids are watching, and they begin to hear someone say "their" lines, the students begin speaking them along with the actor on the screen! This is a thrill for them, and, frankly, for us too.

2. If possible, show only small sections—up to 15 minutes each. The energy goes out of a class after they stare at a TV for too long, and we want them to get back to their own performing!

3. If possible, bring in several versions of the same film, and use the viewing period as an opportunity to discuss the idea of interpretation. Cue the films up to the same scene, and show two or three versions of it. How are the versions different? What works and what doesn't? What ideas can we borrow to inspire our own performance?

4. Take the time at some point to do a "sampler" Shakespeare movie party, near the end of your project. Get popcorn and bring in some different films of plays the students might not know. Find 5-minute clips of great scenes from each one, and preface it with a brief introduction. This gives students a sense of the breadth of what's out there.

Our favorites: Henry V with Kenneth Branagh, Zeffirelli's classic Romeo and Juliet from the 1960s, the Royal Shakespeare Company's Macbeth with Ian McKellan and Judy Dench, Trevor Nunn's version of Twelfth Night with Ben Kingsley, and anything by Orson Welles (Chimes at Midnight, the Falstaff story; Macbeth, even though Orson wears headgear that looks like a colinder; and the gripping Othello). Also great for the kids to see: foreign versions of the stories, such as Akira Kurosawa's Throne of Blood (a version of Macbeth).

Film versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The first challenge is to see how many versions you can round up. You may have to find an offbeat rental shop to get beyond what Blockbuster might have.

The 1999 American version with Kevin Kline and Calista Flockhart is okay, and has some decent moments, but there is some partial nudity with the four lovers near the end, so watch out! The 1968 Royal Shakespeare version with Judi Dench has terrific performers, but moves slowly at times – use this sparingly. Puck (Ian Holm) is great. Another warning here – for some reason, director Peter Hall filmed Titania (Dench) as painted green and topless! So no “Oberon vs. Titania” scene for the kids in this one, most likely!

There is another Royal Shakespeare version

directed by Adrian Noble with Alex Jennings and Lindsay Duncan, which is useful for variety’s sake, but is a bit odd and stagey, heavy on “concept.” And another “beware” – for some reason, Oberon kisses Puck, which might turn the boys off to these parts for good, so skip over that part! The old black and white spectacle from 1935, with Mickey Rooney and Jimmy Cagney, is a hoot, but the language is a mishmash at times and some of the acting is pure 1930s ham.

There are also versions from the BBC Shakespeare series, probably available from the library, and from Joe Papp’s *Shakespeare in the Park*. These two are spotty as well, and best used only for comparison purposes in a discussion on interpretation.