



Overview

This TSM contains information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The material provides many opportunities for revisiting the text.

This play introduces students to the fun of Shakespeare, as well as to his conventions and characters. It features a pompous director whose belittling comments are more than matched by the quick-witted responses of his student actors. The subtle humour, clever plays on language, and funny insults provide rich opportunities for teachers and students to revisit the play several times. It may take some students into reading, viewing, and enjoying some of Shakespeare's more accessible poems or plays.

This play:

- offers a quirky and engaging way of introducing students to Shakespeare
- centres on a pompous, over-blown theatre director and his interactions with a group of students
- includes the standard features of a play
- makes playful use of Shakespearean language
- incorporates quotations from Shakespeare's plays, including insults.

A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme

“Waiting for Toni” SJ L4 May 2016 | “A Real Steal” SJ L4 May 2013

Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

We have retained the links to the National Standards while a new assessment and reporting system is being developed.

For more information on assessing and reporting in the post-National Standards era, see: <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-and-reporting-guide>

JACK PETERSON. I thought you were an accomplished actor?
TASI. I am, just not in front of an audience.
JACK PETERSON (*dryly*). Interesting. Let's try Macbeth's soliloquy. Our hero has been informed of his wife's death. He is a broken man. (*He passes Tasi a script*.) Go.

TASI (*very quietly*). Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

JACK PETERSON. Oh, the irony! You squeak like a mouse.
TASI (*muttering*). Pribbling, ill-nurtured maggot-pie.
JACK PETERSON. What?
TASI. I said: It is a tale, told by an idiot –
JACK PETERSON. Enough!

MS CHEKHOV. I think they're doing very well. Really, Mr Peterson! You're being a little harsh, don't you think?

elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas

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JACK PETERSON. I don't. Children can win Oscars under the right tutelage. (*He points at Bo.*) You – who are you?

JACK PETERSON. Now you're Juliet. (*He points at Isaac.*) And you – Romeo. You're lovers from warring families, acting the famous balcony scene.
BO. But we don't have a balcony.

JACK PETERSON. No doubt you can't act, either, so we'll be working around that too. Bo, stand over there and pretend you're on a balcony. Isaac, stand over

complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments

JACK PETERSON. I think you'll find Shakespeare's wiser. (*He speaks through the loud hailer.*) Now, where are my actors?

CALLUM, OPHELIA, TASI, BO, and ISAAC enter.

MS CHEKHOV. Mr Peterson, meet five very talented drama students.

JACK PETERSON. We'll see, shall we. Let us begin with "Hamlet".

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CALLUM (*muttering*). "Hamlet!" What about a comedy?
JACK PETERSON (*through the loud hailer*). Quiet on stage, please! You're here to learn, not whisper. (*He points to CALLUM.*) Young man, you can be Hamlet. We'll start with his famous soliloquy. (*He passes CALLUM a script.*) A soliloquy

metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation

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illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content



Reading standard: by the end of year 8

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “acclaimed”, “soliloquy”, “recesses”, “nobler”, “cues”, “pivotal”, “courtier’s”, “lamentation”, “accomplished”, “frets”, “irony”, “tutelage”, “surly”
- The use of archaic language, often with letters omitted, including “th”, “o’erthrown”, “’tis”, “Wherefore art thou”, “oft”, “beset”, “thee”, “yonder”, “alas”
- The direct quotes from Shakespeare, most of which contain figurative and/or abstract language, including “All the world’s a stage ...”, “Some are born great ...”, “Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie ...”, “Whether ’tis nobler ...”, “Out, out brief candle! ...”, “It is the east, and Juliet is the sun”, “Arise, fair sun ...”, “If you prick us, do we not bleed?”
- The rich Shakespearean insults, including “Cowards die many times before their deaths, young man”, “Warped tickled-brained varlot”, “Rank onion-eyed minnow”, “Pribbling ill-nurtured maggot-pie”, “Bootless beetle-headed bladder”, “Surly rump-fed puttock”
- An additional literacy allusion in the name of the teacher (though it’s unlikely that many students will pick this up)

Possible supporting strategies

- Explain that a lot of the language in this play is archaic – language that seems unfamiliar now but was in everyday use a long time ago – but most of it is similar enough to everyday English that we can work it out. Explain that the differences include using “thou” or “thee” for “you” and “thine” or “thy” for “yours”.
- Remind the students of effective word-solving strategies, such as slowing down, reading on using context, inferring meaning and rereading, breaking words into syllables and parts, and making connections with their prior knowledge.
- Encourage the students to relax and have fun – they don’t need to understand every word to enjoy this play, and especially not on a first reading. Demonstrate your own enjoyment, and they will enjoy it, too. See this article on the British Council’s site on [How to make Shakespeare easy for English language learners](#) – and others!
- [The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction](#), pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Familiarity with the structure of a conventional play and with the role of the director
- Awareness that writers use words in a certain way for humour and that language can be used in unexpected ways to be funny
- Awareness of the fun that can be had when an apparent novice turns the tables on an expert
- An awareness of Shakespeare and his contribution to language and literature
- Understanding that the English language has changed significantly over the past several hundred years
- Some familiarity with the more famous quotes from Shakespeare’s well-known plays

Possible supporting strategies

- Review the structure and conventions of a play, including that the stage directions or instructions for the actors are in italics. Check that the students understand the role of a director.
- Remind the students of other humorous texts where the humour comes from the play on words or by having the “weaker” characters turn the tables on their “superiors”. Facilitate a discussion about what makes it humorous or interesting.
- Tell the students that Shakespeare lived almost five hundred years ago but his plays and poems are still read and loved all over the world. Explain that he contributed about two thousand words to the English language and that many of us quote him every day without even realising it. Encourage the students to share what they know about him and his work and what their expectations are of reading or seeing one of his plays. Note that some students may already have experiences they can share. Others may have seen movies based on Shakespeare’s plays and be able to talk about them. If they are unfamiliar with his work, view an animated clip on the plot of one of his plays mentioned in this text. See [How to make Shakespeare easy for English language learners](#)

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- The structure and format of a play script
- Shakespeare references that appear in three main ways: embedded in the characters’ dialogue as they converse with one another (“Get thee to a nunnery”, “Some are born great, Ms Chekhov, some achieve greatness”), performed lines as the students attempt the various soliloquies, and Shakespearean insults (Note: It is not said explicitly that the insults are also lines from Shakespeare.)
- The title of the play “Much Ado” is also an unsupported reference to Shakespeare
- Jack Peterson’s directions, which supply the reader with background information, including an explanation of the term “soliloquy” and introductions to key characters and scenes
- The contrast between the ignorance and timidity of the teacher, the arrogance and sarcasm of the director, and the intelligence of the students
- The use of sarcasm and irony
- The use of the dash and ellipsis to indicate the rude way in which the director interrupts other people

Possible supporting strategies

- Direct the students to the title and invite them to speculate on what it means. Clarify, if necessary, that it refers to the comedy *Much Ado about Nothing*, which is full of foolishness and trickery. *What does it suggest about this text?*
- Have the students preview the play, using the illustrations to understand the setting and extract information about the characters. Have them match the list of characters with the people illustrated at the bottom of pages 22 and 23.
- Have the students share what they discover from the preview, then read the first page to find out more.



Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

Level 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Level 4 – Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

Level 4 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible first reading purpose

- To enjoy reading a play where students use Shakespeare to poke fun at an arrogant adult.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To Identify the humour and irony in the play
- To Identify the language and text features of the play
- To compare Shakespeare's language (from the quotes) with language we use today
- Identify and clarify the stage directions and appropriate tone for reading the characters' parts.

Possible writing purposes

- To write some of the quotes in plain language
- To write a play where the characters use language cleverly and make up words
- To write a review of the play
- To write your response or interpretation of a quote or section of the play
- To write a soliloquy for another character from other stories or novels you have read.



Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences; Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Have the students read pages 22 and 23 and identify the references to Shakespeare. Discuss what they found and how they worked it out.
- Ask the students to identify what is humorous and what is confusing, as well as anything they learn that might help them with reading the rest of the play.
- If necessary, model the pompous way that Jack Peterson calls for quiet on stage and explains what a soliloquy is.
- Have the students read the rest of the play, individually or in pairs.

If the students require more scaffolding

- Refer back to the supporting strategies on the previous page to draw out students' prior knowledge.
- Reassure the students that it doesn't matter if they don't get all the jokes on the first reading. *There are people who have studied Shakespeare all their lives and still think there's something to learn, so we shouldn't expect to get everything on the first go!*
- Students may find the swift changes, from character to character, confusing. Direct them to the consistent format, that is, capitals for the characters' names, a different colour for each, and italics for the stage directions. It may also help for students to number the speakers on paper copies so that they can track them more easily.
- Read parts of the play aloud to model where the humour is found.
- Discuss funny or confusing sections in the rest of the play and examine why they are humorous or why they are difficult to follow. *Why does Jack Peterson get exasperated when Callum asks if he should dodge around a bit? (page 24) What is Callum talking about?*
- English language learners may find this play challenging because of its rapid pace and play on words. Consider providing them with a brief plot summary prior to their first reading. They could also shadow-read the play (reading the text aloud just after you and trying to imitate your speech patterns and pronunciation).

Subsequent readings How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. Where possible, have the students work in pairs to discuss the questions and prompts in this section.

The teacher

Get three students to read the section on pages 23–24 from “I'm quoting Shakespeare ...” to “You there”, with you coaching them to follow the stage directions and the signals in the punctuation that show how the lines are delivered.

- *What is so funny about this exchange?*
- *What are we learning about the people?*
- *Why does Callum quote Shakespeare?*
- *How does the writer signal what he wants the actors to do?*
- *Why is there that dash after “question”?*
- *How important is it that actors follow the writer's directions ... and those of the director?*

Give other students the opportunity to repeat this activity with another section that they found particularly funny. This time, any other students can do the coaching.

Give the students paper copies of the play and highlighters or sticky notes and ask them to go through it in pairs to identify what it is that makes this play funny. Ideas might include:

- the way the weaknesses of the adult characters are revealed
- the contrasting cleverness of the students
- the play on language, including the use of sarcasm and irony, and the clever Shakespearean insults.

The students:

- identify particular interactions, enact them, and discuss what makes them funny
- analyse particular features that make the play funny, connecting them to examples in the play
- identify how the weaknesses and strengths of the characters are revealed in their words and actions
- enjoy and appreciate the quality of Shakespeare's insults, identifying the pattern of adjectives and nouns
- compare the rich variety of language revealed in Shakespeare's insults to the far less imaginative language employed in most insults today.

Subsequent readings (cont.)


The teacher

Encourage the students to evaluate the play:

- *What did you think of this play?*
- *What was the author's purpose?*
- *What has the author done to make it funny? How is this similar to or different from how other authors use humour?*
- *Do you think the play would be funny when acted on stage? Why or why not?*

The teacher

Allocate parts to the students and have them read through the script, focusing on the expression and pace required to show Jack Peterson's rude interruptions, the student's muttered asides, and Ms Chekhov's hesitancy and ignorance. Record the students reading and encourage them to coach each other.

 The students could use a cellphone or digital camera, then share the recording using Google Drive.

English language learners might benefit from explicit feedback on their pronunciation and expression.

Discuss how they might perform the play.

- *What will we need to consider?*

Introduce terminology about drama: props, action, script, characterisation, comedy, audience, complication, roles. Lead a discussion about the techniques needed to satisfy an audience, such as maintaining pace and speaking clearly.

If the students wish, take the play through to a performance. Record the performance for self- and peer-review.

METACOGNITION

- *How many of the jokes did you get straight away? How were you able to enjoy the play without understanding every single word?*
- *What helped you to understand the language and the humour?*
- *What helped you to understand some of Shakespeare's language?*
- *What else would help you to feel comfortable about studying Shakespeare when you get to high school?*

The students:

- identify specific examples of how the author has used language to convey humour and irony
- make statements about whether the author was successful in creating a humorous play, backing up their statements with examples from the text
- identify criteria for creating a humorous play or story
- visualise the play's translation to the stage and consider whether that would add to the fun.

The students:

- read their parts aloud, paying attention to expression, tone, and pacing
- work in their group as a production team, making decisions about props, action, script, characterisation, comedy, audience, complication, and roles
- rehearse and perform the play to peers
- view the recording and identify ways their performance could be improved.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *Those were quick exchanges. As you rehearsed, you got better and better at interrupting at just the right moment while staying in character.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences; Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects; Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Text excerpts from “Much Ado”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 25


TASI (*very quietly*). Out, out brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

SHAKESPEAREAN ENGLISH

Shakespeare wrote in early modern English, which is very close to the English we speak today. He had an enormous command of vocabulary and used many words and phrases that we don't use today. He also used a lot of language techniques, like alliteration, assonance, and metaphor to emphasise his points and add drama. Grammar was a lot more flexible in those days, and he would play with word order to make phrases sound more poetic and create rhyme. This makes Shakespeare so interesting ... but also quite tricky!

Explain that Shakespeare was writing at a time before dictionaries and grammar books and that he had very little formal education – yet he had a vocabulary of nearly seventeen thousand words (four times that of most reasonably articulate people today). He introduced nearly three thousand words into the English language. He didn't write straight prose – his plays are written in dramatic poetry. He played with ideas, words, and word order. We need to understand this when working out the meaning of his words.

Have the students select a quote and use a glossary (such as this one from the website [Shakespeare's Words](#)) to rewrite it in modern English. Have them share their quotes and discuss how well they think their rewordings reflect the meaning of the original. Have the students revise their “translations” and then go through another feedback loop, this time focused on infusing them with some of the interest and drama of the original quotations.

DIGITAL TOOLS  Using Google Docs allows for sharing and feedback.

Page 26

JACK PETERSON (*through the loud hailer*). No, no, no!

BO (*muttering*). Surly rump-fed puttock.

JACK PETERSON. I heard that!

BO (*innocently*). What, Shakespeare?

JACK PETERSON (*sadly to himself*). How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.

SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS

In Elizabethan England, there weren't as many words as there are now, and there weren't any dictionaries, so people often spelt the same word in different ways. When Shakespeare looked for a descriptive word and couldn't find one, he just made one up. He used this talent to good effect when it came to insults.

Have the students go online to explore varieties of Shakespearean insults using one of the many sites devoted to this genre, such as [No Sweat Shakespeare](#).

Have them choose a favourite, identify its source, and decide what it means.

They could then write an extended description of what a “pribbling ill-nurtured maggot-pie” or “bootless beetle-headed bladder” actually is! Working in pairs, the students could also use a Shakespeare insult generator to create their own Shakespeare-inspired insults. They could then write a short dialogue in which they incorporate the insults. The group could then have fun using the dialogue to perform some [Reader's Theatre](#).

Students may have heard of “Talk Like a Pirate Day”. This could be a great model for holding a [Talk like Shakespeare Day!](#)

English language learners can have trouble writing adjectives in the correct order. You could provide them with a chart like the one at the end of these TSMs. Use the chart to model writing descriptive phrases before letting them write their own. Note: They may use more than one adjective of any given type, for example, “You poor, base, rascally, cheating lack-linen mate!”

Text excerpts from
“Much Ado”

Examples of text
characteristics

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 23

JACK PETERSON. A soliloquy is the act of speaking one’s thoughts aloud when one is by oneself, usually when one is being tested in some way.

**SOLILOQUIES,
MONOLOGUES, AND ASIDES**

Both soliloquies and monologues are examples of a prolonged speech by a single character, but in a soliloquy, the person is talking to themselves, letting us know what is on their minds. In an aside, the person speaks two or three sentences, under their breath, straight to the audience.

Revisit Jack Peterson’s definition of a soliloquy. For interest and inspiration, play the students one of the examples on the Guardian website, [Shakespeare Solos](#).

Students may think that a soliloquy is an old-fashioned style. You could play the video clip “Dramatic Aside, Monologue and Soliloquy in Film” to demonstrate that this is not the case and to differentiate soliloquies from dramatic asides and monologues. Encourage them to share other examples from television programmes or movies they have seen. Listening to lengthy speeches is difficult for many English language learners as they don’t get enough time to process what they are hearing. Help them by playing the recording several times or by breaking it up into smaller chunks. Discuss the main idea in each chunk. Alternatively, provide a listening grid or simple information transfer task for them to fill in as they listen. This should prompt them to hear the main ideas being spoken about or to write the key words.

Have the students select a story they have read or a movie they have seen that has a main character they identify with. Then ask them to:

- select a key moment, then write it down or put it on “pause”
- make notes on what the character would be thinking or feeling at that moment. (Not just what was said on the page or in the movie but what they imagine the character’s inner thoughts would be.) *Knowing this character as well as you do, what do you think would be in their mind? How would they feel at this moment? How does your character talk out loud? How do you think they would talk to themselves?*
- make notes on what their character might say if they were to speak to themselves at this point. Initially, they should just brainstorm words and phrases. Some English language learners may prefer to brainstorm in their first language as English words for feelings and emotions are often difficult for them. Allow extra time to provide an English translation.

Have them share their ideas and give each other pointers for shaping them into a soliloquy. *Remember that these are to be spoken. Say them out loud to yourself so that you can test whether they make sense.*

When they have finished, the students should also set the scene with two or three sentences, in the way that Jack Peterson did.

The students could read their scripts to each other or they could write stage directions so that another person can read the soliloquy and use their movements, facial expressions, and tone of voice to convey the meaning to the audience.

METACOGNITION

- *How did you feel when you first encountered these words from Shakespeare? Now that you’ve had a chance to play with some of these words, do you feel any differently?*
- *How did writing a soliloquy help you to gain a better understanding of your main character?*

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *I can get a sense of what your character is feeling, but I’m not quite sure what the problem is. Could you add a clue to help me understand what happened to make her feel this way?*



Writing standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions

Adjective Chart

Noun Group								
Adjectivals								Noun
Article (Which?)	Pointing word (Which?)	Possessive (Whose?)	Quantity adjective (How many? How much?)	Opinion adjective (Qualities?)	Factual adjective (Qualities?)	Comparing adjective (Degree?)	Classifier (What type?)	Noun or pronoun (Who or what?)
	You			base, rascally	cheating		lack-linen	mate
A				surly	rump-fed			puttock
The		Principal's	a	warped			tickled-brained	varlot

The idea for this chart comes from *A Grammar Companion for Primary Teachers*, Beverley Derewianka (1998). Primary English Teaching Association (PETA), Newtown NSW.