

De-mystifying Shakespeare's language

Language is constantly evolving!

Examples of present day slang: Cash me outside, howbow da? YOLO! Hundo P.

Shakespeare didn't write in a foreign language, he wrote in modern English for his time (late 1500s - that's over 400 years ago!). If a word didn't exist, he made one up. He introduced approximately 3,000 words to the English language. Some of the most interesting words are used as insults.

Activity: Insult ball game.

Directions: Combine one word or phrase from each of the columns below and add "Thou" to the beginning. If thou knowest the meaning of thy strong words, thou shalt have the perfect insult to fling at the wretched fools thou hatest. Hint: Check a Shakespearian Dictionary Website for the definitions. Let thyself go. Mix and match to find that perfect barb from the bard! After each student has a chance to create their insult, have everyone stand in a circle, then they will take turns throwing a ball while "hurling" their insults at each other.

Column A

bawdy
brazen
churlish
distempered
fitful
gnarling
greasy
grizzled
haughty
hideous
jaded
knavish
lewd
peevish
pernicious
prating
purpled
queasy
rank
reeky
roynish
saucy
sottish
unmuzzled

Column B

bunch-backed
clay-brained
dog-hearted
empty-hearted
evil-eyed
eye-offending
fat-kidneyed
heavy-headed
horn-mad
ill-breeding
ill-composed
ill-nurtured
iron-witted
lean-witted
lily-livered
mad-bread
motley-minded
muddy-mettled
onion-eyed
pale-hearted
paper-faced
pinch-spotted
raw-boned
rug-headed

Column C

canker-blossom
clotpole
crutch
cutpurse
dogfish
egg-shell
gull-catcher
hedge-pig
hempseed
jack-a-nape
malkin
malignancy
malt-worm
manikin
minus
miscreant
moldwarp
nut-hook
pantaloon
rabbit-sucker
rampallion
remnant
rudesby
ruffian

Insult:

Thou _____

Definition:

You _____

Hey, you!

Fear not *thees* and *thous*! They both mean *you*, and they follow a pattern.

thou = you (subject) thee = you (object) ye = you (plural) thy = your thine = yours

The same, just shortened

Shakespeare used a lot of contractions, especially to maintain iambic pentameter (more info to follow).

wi' = with I' = In o' = of
t' = to 't = it 'tis = it is 'twas = it was
e'en = even (sounds like *een*) e'er = ever (sounds like *air*) ne'er = never (sounds like *nair*)

Sayest thou what?!

Verb conjugation also follows a pattern. It's just a little more complicated than English verb conjugation is now.

<u>Now (to speak)</u>	<u>Then (to speak)</u>
I speak	I speak
We speak	We speak
You (s) speak	Thou speakest
You (pl) speak	Ye speak
He/she/it speaks	He/she/it speaketh
They speak	They speak

The rule for conjugating in Elizabethan English is:

2nd Person singular verb adds *-est*, (*you give is thou givest*)

3rd Person singular verb adds *-eth* (*she gives is she giveth*)

Examples of other verbs:

thou – art	hast	wilt	canst	dost	hadst	wouldst	couldst	shouldst	didst
he— is	hath	will	can	doth	had	would	could	should	did

thou – speakest	liest	lovest	thinkest
he— speaketh	lieth	loveth	thinketh
you – speak	lie	love	think

Modern English

you – are have will can do

What do you think?

What dost thou think?

What thinkest thou?

Activity: How to use your Insults

1) Write a short, simple scene, or use the one below.

A: Hey!
B: Hello there.
A: Let me by, I have to cross this bridge.
B: You can't.
A: Why not?
B: Because.
A: Cause why?
B: Cause there's a bear on the other side.
A: Why didn't you say so?

2) Pepper your scene with as many insults as you like.

3) Read them aloud.

Literary Devices

Alliteration: The repetition of the first sound of two or more neighboring words.

Example: From forth the fatal loins of these two foes -Prologue, *Romeo & Juliet*

Onomatopoeia: The use of a word that sounds like what it means.

Example: Hark, hark! **Bow-wow**. The watch-dogs **bark!** **Bow-wow**. Hark, hark! I hear the strain of strutting chanticleer cry '**cock-a-diddle-dow!**' -Ariel, *The Tempest*

Metaphor: The use of a word or a phrase denoting one kind of object or action in place of the one actually being described, to imply likeness or analogy between them.

Example: All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.

-Jaques, *As You Like It*

Simile: A comparison of two essentially unlike things, in which a particular similarity is pointed out by the use of *like* or *as*.

Example: This is the sergeant Who **like** a good and hardy soldier fought 'Gainst my captivity.

-Malcolm, *Macbeth*

Personification: The representation of an inanimate object or abstract idea as a personality or as having human attributes.

Example: My **gashes cry** for help. -Captain, *Macbeth*

Antithesis: The juxtaposition of opposing or contrasting ideas.

Example: To be or not to be. -Hamlet, *Hamlet*

Fair is foul, and foul is fair. -Witches, *Macbeth*

Pun: A play on words.

Example: Mercutio: "Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance."

Romeo: "Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes

With nimble soles; I have a soul of lead

So stakes me to the ground I cannot move."

Context: Romeo is reluctant to attend a party because he is suffering from a broken heart.

Double Entendre: A word, phrase, or passage having a double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué.

Example: And loosed his love-shaft smartly from its bow
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon

Explanation: While Oberon, King of the Fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is telling a story about Cupid shooting one of his arrows, a second, more sexual meaning lies behind his words.

ex. love shaft = Cupid's arrow (literal meaning) or penis (double entendre)

Shakespeare's poetry

Shakespeare was a poet/playwright. He wrote his plays in either prose or verse and often in iambic pentameter.

Prose is just regular writing, like in a paragraph.

-used by lower class characters, for humor, in idle conversation, and by cynical characters (like Mercutio and Iago).

Verse refers to poetry with a constant meter or rhythm. It can be either rhyming or blank (unrhyming).

-used for higher class characters and in important moments.

Iambic Pentameter

10 syllables a line in 5 feet, or iambs (one foot is two syllables or beats)

In each foot, the first syllable is not stressed, the second syllable is stressed

<u>But soft!</u>	<u>What light</u>	<u>through yon-</u>	<u>der win-</u>	<u>dow breaks?</u>
<i>foot</i>	<i>foot</i>	<i>foot</i>	<i>foot</i>	<i>foot</i>

Note:

- One line is often split between two speakers, so the 2nd half starts in the middle of the page, away from the left margin.
- This syllable pattern is why Shakespeare often put words in a weird order (ie. talking backwards) and used words in new ways.
- Sometimes words are skipped ("I'll to England")
- If there's no punctuation at the end of the line, don't pause!
- If there's an accent on the -ed at the end of the word, pronounce it as a syllable; "Romeo is banished" is 7 syllables

Activity: Iambic pentameter name game.

Directions: Have students create a phrase of iambic pentameter as if they were introducing themselves. Ex: My name is Angela and I like dogs. Or: I'm Ang'la and I was born on the 9th.

Activity: Paraphrasing/Translating

Now that you have all of the tools, try and translate or paraphrase the following passage:

CELIA O my poor Rosalind, whither wilt thou go?
Wilt thou change fathers? I will give thee mine.
I charge thee, be not thou more grieved than I am.

ROSALIND I have more cause.

CELIA Thou hast not, cousin.
Prithee, be cheerful. Know'st thou not the duke
Hath banished me, his daughter?

ROSALIND That he hath not.

Last thoughts

- The English language may have changed over the past few hundred years, but the emotions are exactly the same. Every Shakespeare character deals with emotions and themes that are still vibrant today. And THAT is why we still study Shakespeare.
- Always try to make sense of the text on your own first. Often times there are notes along the side of the page to help you. There are also many internet sites if you get stuck. When in doubt, go to **No Fear Shakespeare: nfs.sparknotes.com**