

# FACTFILE: GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

## Unit 3 THE STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE



### The Study of Shakespeare

#### Unit

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#### Purpose of FactFile?

The purpose of this FactFile is to provide details of the format of this Unit in terms of its structure and assessment. The FactFile also provides a list of suggested websites and further resources.

Controlled Assessment themes and associated tasks for any given year can be found on the CCEA microsite, and should be carefully considered by teachers prior to choosing the text for study to ensure an appropriate play can be selected.

This FactFile is intended as a starting point for further study. It is not exhaustive, and does not refer to any one play in particular; rather it suggests a range of possible approaches that will enable students to build their understanding of the chosen Shakespeare play.

#### Specific Learning Outcomes supported by the FactFile?

This FactFile supports the Learning Outcomes in the aims of the specification:

- read and understand a Shakespeare play;
- respond to the play critically and imaginatively;
- select and evaluate relevant textual material;
- use details from the play to illustrate interpretations;
- explain and evaluate how the dramatist uses dramatic techniques, language, structure and form to present ideas, themes, characters and settings; and
- relate the play to its social, cultural and historical contexts.

#### Target audience? Student? Teacher? Both?

The main target audience for this FactFile is teachers although some sections could be used by students.

**How the FactFile supports development of Key Stage 4 Statutory skills?**

Opportunities for UICT, PS, WO and Comm T&L throughout.

**FactFile Content**

1. General approaches to the text and task
2. Approaches to Assessment Objective 1
3. Approaches to Assessment Objective 2
4. Approaches to Assessment Objective 4
5. Example of how to prepare for the task
6. Additional Resources

**Questions to consider**

Students should remember that marks in this Unit depend on their ability to answer the set task successfully, so it is worthwhile to keep the theme of the set task (love, conflict, etc.) in mind and link all research and planning back to it throughout their study of the play.

- How can I clarify/show I understand the set theme as it relates to the play I'm studying? (e.g. show that love can be familial and platonic as well as romantic; show that conflict could be internal as well as relating to war or similar)
- How can I apply appropriate contextual information succinctly and relevantly to the points I am making?
- Are all the points I'm examining relevant to the question and explored in sufficient detail?
- Have I covered Shakespeare's use of dramatic methods as well as language?
- What is the best way to organise my information and plan for the controlled assessment so I can easily recall the points I wish to make?

**Additional information sources**

Section 6 suggests some additional resources for classroom use.

## 1. General approaches to the text and task

Prior to reading the play itself, students could be given a clear idea of what the controlled assessment task will involve. Initial preparation could also involve:

- exploring the unifying theme of the chosen play (Theme 1: Conflict; Theme 2: Love) by thinking of examples from life or from other texts and why the theme might function well as a basis for studying a drama text;
- drawing on prior knowledge by revising language techniques and any drama terms learned during KS3 (e.g. metaphors, similes, iambic pentameter, blank verse, etc.).

### Note to teachers:

Because context is an important element of the task, it can be studied and supplemented throughout; exercises to assist with this follow in section 4. If there is time, students will greatly benefit from hearing the play read aloud in class; ideally, they will see a production of it also, either in performance or as a film version if one is available.

## 2. Approaches to Assessment Objective 1

### AO1 (Argument)

Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations.

- give each group or pair one important speech, dialogue section or soliloquy from the play and ask them to formulate an idea or make a prediction about it based only on evidence they have been given. This can then be opened up to class discussion and an overall theory developed, with other students building on others' evidence and interpretations.
- as the basis for class debates, the teacher puts forward several ideas/interpretations for one scene (e.g. the resolution of *Measure for Measure* and whether the ending, with many marriages arranged, is as happy as it seems) or character (e.g. whether Iago's campaign to ruin Othello is motivated by racism, jealousy, what Coleridge called 'motiveless malignity', or something else). Students debate/critique each, vote for the most apt and explain why they made that choice.
- students could use the internet to research two or more possible interpretations of a specific scene or character from the studied play, then present these to the class, explaining which one they think is more likely to be right and why.
- using a copy of an important speech/dialogue or a short section of a pivotal scene in the play, students select particular words/phrases/lines from this and list as many possible synonyms, associations and references for each as they can; for example, violent verbs, negative terms and references to heat in Act 3 Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*. Students could then work with a partner to review and discuss which of the identified elements could have an impact on the understanding of the scene or character (and how/why).

### 3. Approaches to Assessment Objective 2

#### A02 (Form and Language)

Explain how, language, structure and form contribute to the writer's presentation of ideas, themes, characters and settings.

- highlighting or underlining particular language features (e.g. adjectives, forceful verbs, appeals to senses, metaphors, puns, etc.) and linking each to a mood or effect; these can then be linked to the scene, the character or the theme being studied across the play as a whole.
- annotating with a view to relating features to the overall set task (e.g. if studying conflict in *Macbeth*, examining contrasting language that shows Macbeth's internal conflict, or conflict between him and Lady Macbeth when it arises).
- reading more well-known or significant speeches aloud in different ways (e.g. angry, sarcastic, sad) and contrasting the effects of each to decide which seems most likely for the situation and the character.
- examining uses of imagery and connotations evoked by language choices, particularly more archaic terms that have changed over time and/or have unfamiliar or double meanings.
- assembling 'moodboards' or collages with pictures found online to visually represent imagery in speeches or regarding characters.
- creating presentations incorporating music, film clips, images and/or performances to illustrate connections suggested by the language.
- highlighting structural features and dramatic techniques (e.g. stage directions such as the famous 'Exit, pursued by a bear' in *The Winter's Tale*, which forms the gruesome but ridiculous turning point at which the play turns from a tragedy to a kind of pastoral romantic comedy) and discuss the effects of these as well as how they might have been staged in Shakespeare's time.
- identifying particular features of plot structure in relation to the order in which events occur, particularly with regard to schemes, disguises or misunderstandings (e.g. the confusion arising from the unknowingly interspersed appearances of Sebastian and Viola/Cesario when the latter is disguised as a boy in *Twelfth Night* – this could be linked to the idea that love is represented as sometimes being confusing or chaotic) and using this as a basis to theorise how these features help the play progress.

## 4. Approaches to Assessment Objective 4

### A04 (Context)

Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts; explain how texts have been influential and significant to self and other readers in different contexts and at different times.

Use the library and/or ICT resources to research various useful topics for contextual information:

- Shakespeare's life and works;
- the theatres in which the plays were first performed;
- the social/historical/cultural settings of the play itself;
- the social/historical/cultural settings of Elizabethan/Jacobean England.

### Note to teachers:

It is strongly advised that students are made aware from the outset that lengthy chunks of contextual information transcribed from memory will not be awarded marks. Simply regurgitating facts about Shakespeare's life without relevance to the question should be avoided. It is more productive if contextual knowledge is appropriately integrated, concisely and meaningfully, to illustrate their points.

## 5. Example of how to prepare for the task

**Text:** *The Winter's Tale*

**Task:** Examine the way Shakespeare presents the theme of love in your chosen play.

- Introduce the task, giving clear guidance of what will be required by the controlled assessment levels of control.
- Research/revise definitions of comedy and tragedy; introduce the idea of 'tragi-comic' subgenre; research Shakespeare's 'last' plays and the challenges of defining the play's genre.
- Contextual research task in small groups; each group covers a different topic and feeds back to class. Topics set could include: England's recent history and political situation at the time; the play's settings (Sicily and Bohemia) and their significance; what attending the theatre was like; how theatres staged particular scenes (e.g. the bear); ideas of romantic/familial/religious love and marriage prevalent in sixteenth century society.
- Introduction of key themes (e.g. nature/seasonal imagery, religion, childhood/innocence, sickness and the body) and dramatic methods so students can 'look out' for these throughout the play as they read and decide how they relate to or show us aspects of love and loving relationships.
- Read the play aloud in class and annotate, discussing developments after each scene and keeping summary notes related to the theme of love set out in the controlled assessment task.
- Interspersed with reading the play, separate annotation exercises in pairs or small groups (e.g. select significant/relevant extract or speech, such as Leontes to Mamilius or Perdita to Florizel, to closely analyse language together and generate ideas about character, themes or plot in keeping with the theme of love set out in the controlled assessment task).
- Groups or individuals assigned to record information on one character/'love' relationship each as the play unfolds – will be responsible for feeding back about these later during whole class revision.
- Class debates on which relationships in the play show the most convincing examples of love and which do not.
- Revision lesson in which groups present their findings from throughout the period of study; class discussion about useful application of contextual information.
- Individually write about love relationship(s), with broad/general oral feedback from teacher to the whole class.
- Students collate their notes in preparation for the controlled assessment with no other guidance or feedback from the teacher.

- Controlled assessment under high level of control/supervision takes place across two hours. This may be divided into more than one session. In this case, all work is collected and stored securely between sessions. Candidates may have access to clean copies of the text throughout; no other material is allowed.

**Note to teachers:**

Please re-read the Controlled Assessment requirements regarding levels of control and ensure all activities are planned in line with these.

## 7. Additional Resources

CCEA GCSE English Literature microsite

BBC Bitesize [http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english\\_literature/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/)

Teachit <https://www.teachit.co.uk/gcse-english-literature>

Times Educational Supplement  
<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/blog/shakespeare-ideas-new-gcse-specs>

English and Media Centre Shakespeare resources  
<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/search?keywords=shakespeare>

Royal Shakespeare Company teaching resources <https://www.rsc.org.uk/education/teacher-resources>

Crossref-it – The world of Shakespeare and the Metaphysical Poets  
<http://crossref-it.info/articles/category/5/the-world-of-shakespeare-and-the-metaphysical-poets-1540-1660>

Sparknotes <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/>

