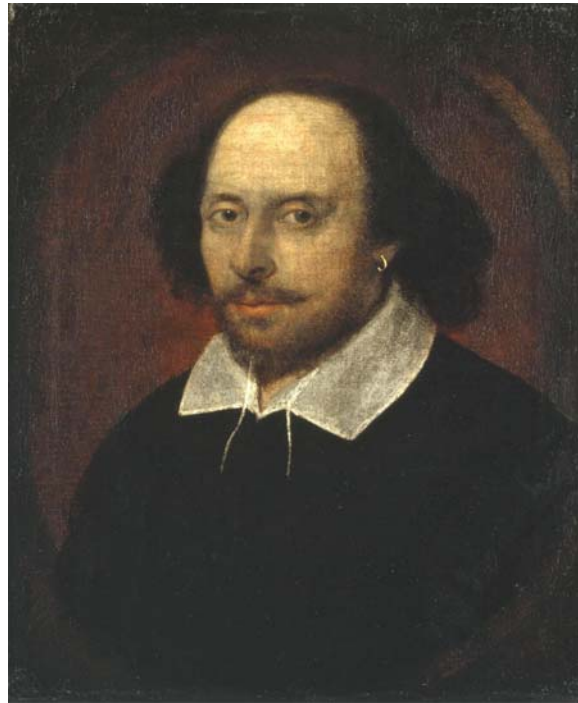




Presents



**BARDS BEST!**  
**STUDY GUIDE**

## The PLAYS

*Hamlet*

*Macbeth*

*Romeo and Juliet*

*Julius Caesar*

*Comedy of Errors*

*Twelfth Night*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## THE PLAYERS

Ann Marie Gideon:	Haley, Viola/ <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Helena/ <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Juliet/ <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Brian Harrison:	Brandon, Malvolio/ <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Demetrius/ <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Dromio of Syracuse/ <i>Comedy of Errors</i> , Antony/ <i>Julius Ceaser</i>
Casey Hoekstra:	Will, Hamlet/ <i>Hamlet</i> , Antipholis of Syracuse/ <i>Comedy of Errors</i> , Lysander/ <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Romeo/ <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Caitlin McWethy	Rachel, Olivia/ <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Hermia/ <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Lady Macbeth/ <i>Macbeth</i>

## BACKGROUND ON THE PLAYS

*Hamlet*-Shakespeare was perhaps drawn to the story of *Hamlet* for personal reasons, his own son, Hamnet drowned in 1596. This play is centered on the relationships of father's and sons and is filled with themes of melancholy, grief, and revenge. *Hamlet* Prince of Denmark sees the ghost of his father *King Hamlet* hovering over the castle of Elsinore. *Hamlet* the senior confides to his son that he was murdered while sleeping in his orchard by the present King his brother and Hamlet's uncle, the clever and duplicitous *Claudius*. *Hamlet* affects an "antic disposition" essentially feigning madness, baffling everyone from his mother *Gertrude* and step-father *King Claudius*, to his former girlfriend *Ophelia*. *Hamlet* delays his revenge on *Claudius* until he is given absolute proof which he

receives in the form of a play entitled *The Murder of Gonzalo*. *Hamlet* an avid dramatist himself, rewrites a few lines from the play which when performed give undeniable proof of *Claudius*' guilt. Rightly fearing for his life *Claudius* ships *Hamlet* off to England intending him to be murdered once aboard ship. *Hamlet* however miraculously escapes and returns to Denmark only to witness the burial of his beloved *Ophelia*. *Laertes*, *Ophelia*'s brother and *Hamlet*'s rival proposes a fencing match with *Hamlet*, however *Laertes* has poisoned the tip of his foil in order to assure *Hamlet*'s death. In the actual fight *Hamlet* is mortally wounded but *Laertes* too is "hoisted by his own petard" and mortally wounded by his own foil. Before he dies, *Hamlet* summons the strength to kill *Claudius* and an amazed *Young Fortinbras* from rival Norway enters the gruesome scene to claim the throne.

*Twelfth Night*- The title of this play refers to the feast of the Epiphany the last day of the Christmas season, January 6<sup>th</sup>. The play is also the only one of Shakespeare's to have a double title, *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will*. Two deaths shape the basic plot: *Olivia* grieves over the loss of her brother and has sworn to grieve for seven years and not entertain any proposals of marriage much to the dismay of the loving *Count Orsino*. *Viola* is also in mourning for the loss of her brother *Sebastian* in a shipwreck. *Viola*, disguises herself as a page and secures employment in Illyria at the court of *Count Orsino* and *Olivia* instantly falls in love with *Viola* in her male disguise. *Sebastian*, actually survived the shipwreck, and comes to Illyria creating much confusion because he is the identical twin of *Viola* in her male disguise. Eventually the brother and sister are reunited, *Orsino* marries *Viola* and *Sebastian* marries *Olivia*. *Malvolio*, a pretentious steward in *Olivia*'s household is humorously duped and the drunken *Sir Toby* and the witty *Maria* are also married.

*Comedy of Errors*- *The Comedy of Errors*-This play, the shortest that Shakespeare ever wrote is also his first comedy. The play's direct source is from the Roman playwright Plautus from his play *The Menaechmi*. The action follows the ordeal of a merchant from Syracuse who is on trial for his life because he cannot pay a fine in the enemy city of Ephesus. The merchant, *Aegeon* does not realize his son *Antipholus* and his servant *Dromio* of Syracuse have come to Ephesus in search of their respective identical twins, *Antipholus* and *Dromio* of Ephesus. After many comic mishaps and mistaken identities, the twins are reunited, the father saved, and the family is even re-united with their long lost mother The Abbess, *Amelia* who was separated from her other family members in a shipwreck.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*- One of Shakespeare's few original plots, this popular comedy weaves the world of the court of Athens, Athenian laborers and the fairy world of a nearby wood into humorous relief. The play is basically a love story involving *Hermia* who is forced by her tyrannical father *Egeus*, into marrying *Demetrius*. *Hermia* however loves *Lysander* and the two flee into the wood to elope. *Helena* jealous of *Hermia*'s success in love tells her love *Demetrius* of their flight. All retreat to the wood near Athens where we meet *Puck*, a mischievous fairy who finds himself in the middle of a monumental quarrel between the King of the Fairies, *Oberon*, and his wife, *Titania*.

*Oberon* feels sorry for the rejected *Helena* and orders *Puck* to fetch a flower that will force a sleeping person to “love the next live creature that it sees” when they awake. *Puck* accidentally applies the flower to the wrong Athenian, and now *Lysander* becomes smitten with *Helena*. *Oberon* then tries to set things aright by applying the flower to *Demetrius*’ eyes who then falls in love with *Helena* as well. Now betrayed, *Hermia* enters the scene and chaos follows. *Oberon* has also used the flower on the eyelids of his fairy wife *Titania* in order to get the upper hand in their quarrel. *Titania* awakes and falls instantly in love with *Bottom* who has been transformed into a donkey by *Puck* for his obnoxious behavior. Eventually *Oberon* forces *Puck* to set things right again, restoring *Lysander* to *Hermia* and *Demetrius* to the deserving *Helena*. *Oberon* and *Titania* are lovingly reunited, and *Bottom* sans head returns to his fellow laborers to perform a play they have been rehearsing to honor the wedding of *Duke Theseus* and his bride *Hippolyta*.

*Julius Caesar*- Marcus Brutus, a noble Roman senator and close friend of Julius Caesar is swayed by a fellow senator, Caius Cassius into joining a group of conspirators. These conspirators who are comprised of fellow Roman senators fear that Caesar is gaining too much power and may become a tyrant. Brutus is motivated by love of his country and a strong sense of honor. Cassius and the other conspirators act primarily out of envy and ambition. After a sleepless and tempestuous night, Brutus meets with the conspirators to formulate the strategy for the assassination of Caesar. Caesar too has spent a sleepless night during a terrible storm in Rome. This storm has profoundly affected Caesar’s wife Calpurnia who sees the storm as a premonition of evil and she vainly tries to prevent the proud and haughty Caesar from going to the capitol that morning fearing for his safety. Caesar ignores the Calpurnia’s pleading and proceeds to the Capitol. The conspirators create a superficial motive for the assassination by means of a petition which proud Caesar rejects, then the conspirator Casca strikes Caesar on the back of the neck as the other co-conspirators follow suit. Caesar falls dead with a final “Et tu Brute?” (“You too Brutus”) The conspirators consider themselves heroes and avengers for this act and remain at the Capitol where they are met by a shocked Marc Antony. Brutus grants Marc Antony the opportunity to speak to the citizens gathered at the capitol. In a subtle and moving speech Antony sways the crowd and turns the tide of public opinion against Brutus and the conspirators. This creates turmoil in the streets of Rome and leads to a civil war. The two opposing factions led by the co-conspirators Brutus and Cassius and the loyalists led by Antony and Octavius (Caesar’s adopted son) meet on the plains of Philippi where the forces of Brutus and Cassius are eventually defeated by the new leaders of Rome, Marc Antony and Octavius. Marc Antony recognizes Brutus’ pure intentions and calls him "the noblest Roman of them all".

*Macbeth*-This play is Shakespeare’s shortest tragedy and it is based in part on the chronicles of historian Raphael Holinshed’s *History of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. It was also written to flatter *King James I*, Shakespeare’s patron whose proclaimed ancestor was the character of *Banquo*, *Macbeth*’s fellow general and eventual victim. The play follows the descent of the title character into the depths of evil. Returning from a victorious campaign, the Scottish Generals *Macbeth* and *Banquo* are confronted by three witches who hail *Macbeth* as *Thane of Glamis*, *Thane of Cawdor*, and “King that

shalt be.” *Banquo* is hailed as well but in different terms, the witches tell him that he will not be a King himself, but that his children will be Kings. Two of the prophecies come immediately to fruition, in order for the third prophecy to come true, (“*Thou shalt be King hereafter*”), *Macbeth* must take matters into his own hands and murder the beloved present King of Scotland, *King Duncan*. *Macbeth* balks at this idea until he is compelled to do it by his ambitious and persuasive wife, *Lady Macbeth*. *Macbeth* murders *King Duncan*, has *Banquo* killed, (who was privy to the witch’s prophecies), and proceeds to murder and obliterate all who stand in the way of his security on the throne. Tormented by nightmares, guilt and the false security provided by the double crossing witches, *Macbeth* is defeated and murdered by *Macduff* whose family *Macbeth* had killed. *Lady Macbeth* tormented by guilt commits suicide and *Malcolm* the rightful heir to the throne of Scotland becomes King.

*Romeo and Juliet*-Shakespeare closely followed his source material, a narrative poem by Arthur Brooke, *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet* in the creation of his classic story of love and hate. The feud between *The Montague’s* and *Capulet’s* is at a fever pitch when young *Romeo*, a Montague is persuaded by his friend *Mercutio* to attend a masked ball at the home of the rival *Capulet* family in the hopes of finding another girl for *Romeo* to meet thus ending his tormented pursuit of the unyielding *Rosaline*. Here *Romeo* and *Juliet* meet and fall instantly in love. They are wed by the *Friar Lawrence*, who hopes this union by marriage will end the longstanding feud. *Tybalt*, a Capulet, insulted by *Romeo’s* presence at the party confronts *Romeo* on the streets of Verona. Taking *Romeo’s* side his friend *Mercutio* is killed by *Tybalt*, and in turn an enraged *Romeo* kills *Tybalt* and is banished from Verona. Secretly *Romeo* and *Juliet* are able to spend the night together before *Romeo* flees for Mantua. *Juliet* is forced into marrying The County *Paris* by her father *Capulet* but rather than face this impossible prospect she take a sleeping potion supplied by Friar Lawrence. *Romeo* never gets word that *Juliet* is not really dead and kills himself at her tomb; *Juliet* finding *Romeo* dead also kills herself. In guilt and remorse the feud between the *Capulet’s* and *Montague’s* is ended.

## THE SCENES

### *Hamlet Act III, Scene 2*

Hamlet advises a group of players on how to act as naturally as possible in a scene that will help Hamlet exact his revenge on King Claudius.

### *Twelfth Night Act I, Scene 5*

A male page Cesario (the female Viola in disguise) pleads to the Countess Olivia on behalf of her master Count Orsino. The Countess Olivia instead becomes smitten with young page.

***Comedy of Errors Act III, Scene 2***

Dromio of Syracuse the identical twin of Dromio of Ephesus runs from a kitchen wench who has mistakenly claimed Dromio as her husband.

***A Midsummer Night's Dream Act III, Scene 2***

After being doused with a love potion, Lysander and Demetrius pursue the confused Helena while Hermia, the former object of both men's desire is now left out in the cold.

***Julius Caesar Act III, Scene 2***

Marc Antony, a follower of the recently assassinated Julius Caesar sways a crowd of gathered citizens in a subtle and moving speech.

***Macbeth Act I, Scene 5***

Lady Macbeth enlists the spirits of the underworld to give her the courage it will take to commit murder.

***Romeo and Juliet Act II scene II***

Romeo risks his life by sneaking into the orchard of his sworn enemy if only to catch a glimpse of his beloved Juliet. What follows is one of the most beautiful scenes in all of Shakespeare, the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.

**FAMOUS QUOTES YOU'LL HEAR**

*Speak the speech as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.*  
Hamlet

*Come thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell.*  
Lady Macbeth, *Macbeth*

*To be or not to be, that is the question.*  
Hamlet, *Hamlet*

*We will draw the curtain and show you the picture.*  
Olivia, *Twelfth Night*

*I am amazed and know not what to say!*  
Hermia, *Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Lord, what fools these mortals be!*  
Puck, *Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury  
Caesar, not to praise him*

*Marc Antony, Julius Caesar*

*But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?*

*It is the east and Juliet is the sun*

*Romeo, Romeo and Juliet*

*What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet?*

*Juliet, Romeo and Juliet*

## Pre-Show Activities

Bard's Best! *contains* a feast of language, from the dense language and imagery of Lady Macbeth to the puns of Dromio and Syracuse, to the glorious poetry of Juliet. Perhaps the most fun aspect of Shakespeare's language is the insults! For example from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Oh me, you juggler, you cankerblossom!" Here's an exercise that gets Shakespeare's syllables in the students mouths in a fun, interactive way.

1. Split the class into two groups and have each student compose their own insult from the three columns below. The students should select a word from each one of the columns A, B & C. Have them precede their insult with the word "thou".

**Example:** "thou knavish lily-livered manikin!" Have the "A's" hurl their insult at the "B's" and then switch!

Bawdy  
brazen  
greasy  
queasy  
saucy  
reeky  
waggish  
prating  
wanton  
unmuzzled

bunch-backed  
clay-brained  
fat-kidneyed  
iron-witted  
onion-eyed  
rump-fed  
horn-mad  
sour-faced  
eye-offending  
pale-hearted

canker-blossom  
clot-pole  
dogfish  
malkin  
pantaloon  
waterfly  
gull-catcher  
rudesby  
moldwarp  
scullion

## Post-Show Activities

1. Below is a list of quotes contained in *Bard's Best!*
2. Have group count off. Whatever quote corresponds to their number,

that corresponding quote will be theirs to work with through the entirety of this exercise.

3. Have them get familiar as possible with their quote. (Give them a couple of minutes for this).
4. Once they are familiar with their quotes, have the group form a circle. Participants should then verbally “toss” their quote across the circle to another member of the group. If you would like to accompany this exercise with the “physical” toss of a ball while the quote is being verbally “tossed,” you may do so, have fun!
  1. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action. *Hamlet*
  2. Even so quickly may one catch the plague? *Twelfth Night*
  3. Marry sir, she’s the kitchen and all grease. *Comedy of Errors*
  4. O, spite o hell, now I see you all are bent to set against me for your merriment. *Midsummer*
  5. Lo, she is one of this confederacy! *Midsummer*
  6. I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. *Julius Caesar*
  7. What cause withholds you then to mourn for him? Julius Caesar.
  8. Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts. *Macbeth*
  9. With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls. *Romeo and Juliet*
  10. What shall I swear by? *Romeo and Juliet*.
  11. A thousand times the worse to want thy light. *Romeo and Juliet*
  12. Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? *Sonnet 18*
  13. So long lives this and this gives life to thee. *Sonnet 18*
  14. Be not too tame neither but let your own discretion be your tutor. *Hamlet*
  15. Thou art Dromio, thou art my man, thou art thyself. *Comedy of Errors*
  16. The course of true love never did run smooth. *Midsummer*



**Study Guide Preparation:** Allen O’Reilly, Education Director  
and The Will Power Ensemble.