



# Teaching Shakespeare's Language

## *Advanced Placement Summer Institute*

2011

Skip Nicholson

[skip@nicholson.net](mailto:skip@nicholson.net)

[www.skipnicholson.com](http://www.skipnicholson.com)

South Pasadena High School  
South Pasadena, California

University of California, Riverside, Extension

# Decoding Shakespeare's Language

Students need to understand that Shakespeare's language differs from their own partly because of the limitations of their English, partly because of some changes, most of them superficial, in the language since 1600, partly because Shakespeare wrote poetry. Faced with Shakespeare, kids are trying to deal with at least four discrete sets of language problems:

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## 1. CONVENTIONS: *Shakespeare writes for the theater.*

1. Exposition ("atmospheric description")
2. Boy actors
3. Impenetrability of disguises
4. Soliloquy
5. Aside
6. Royal address and reference

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## 2. WORDS: *Shakespeare writes with a rich vocabulary.*

1. modern words kids don't know
2. words whose meanings have shifted
3. words now obsolete
4. words that never gained currency
5. lost idioms

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## 3. INFLECTIONS: *Shakespeare writes in early modern English.*

1. Familiar pronouns & verb inflections (-st)
2. Obsolete third person inflections (-th)
3. Some rare obsolete plural forms (as *eyen* for *eyes*)
4. Question formation

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## 4. POETIC LANGUAGE: *Shakespeare writes poetry.*

1. **meter** [apostrophe • clipping • omitted words • inverted word order]
2. **sound patterns** [rhyme • alliteration • assonance • consonance]
3. **rhetorical devices** [antithesis • apostrophe • oxymoron • paronomasia]
4. **figurative language** [metaphor • simile • personification]
5. **shifts in parts of speech**
6. **playfulness with language** [irony • puns • insults]
7. **allusions and proverbs**
8. **patterns of imagery**

# Early Modern English Grammar<sup>©</sup>

## § The Second Person Familiar

Modern English has dropped a set of pronouns and verbs called the "familiar" or "thee and thou" forms once used among close friends and family and to children, inferiors, animals, and inanimate objects. These old forms did, though, survive into Elizabethan England and appear frequently in Shakespeare. They correspond roughly to the *tu* forms of the Romance languages, the *ty* forms of the Slavic languages, the *su* forms of Greek, and the *kimi* forms of Japanese. Shakespeare will have characters shift from the 'you' to the 'thou' forms with purpose.

	Singular			Plural		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Subject [nominative]	I	<b>thou</b>	he/she/it	we	you	they
Object [accusative]	me	<b>thee</b>	him/her/it	us	you	them
Possessive adjective [genitive]	my <i>mine</i> *	<b>thy</b> <i>thine</i> *	his/her/its	our	your	their
Possessive pronoun	mine	<b>thine</b>	his/hers/its	ours	yours	theirs

\*Substitute forms used before a noun beginning with a vowel

## § Second person familiar verb inflections

Second person singular (familiar): adds the ending **-est**, **-st**, or **-st**.

Examples: thou giv**est**, thou sing'**st**  
irregular example: thou **wilt** hear

### Some irregular verbs:

present:	you	<i>are</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>can</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>do</i>
	<b>thou</b>	<b>art</b>	<b>hast</b>	<b>wilt</b>	<b>canst</b>	<b>shalt</b>	<b>dost</b>
past:	you	<i>were</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>would</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>did</i>
	<b>thou</b>	<b>wast</b>	<b>hadst</b>	<b>wouldst</b>	<b>couldst</b>	<b>shouldst</b>	<b>didst</b>

The negative of the second person familiar is formed by adding the word *not* after the verb.

Examples: thou art not, thou canst not, thou couldst not

## § Third person singular verb inflections

The third person singular often substitutes *-th* for more modern *-s*.

Examples: she giv**eth** (for she gives), it rain**eth** every day (for rains).

## Romeo and Juliet / 2.2

**Juliet** O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore **are you** Romeo?  
Deny **your** father and refuse **your** name;  
Or, if **you will** not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet...  
5 'Tis but **your** name that is my enemy;...  
Romeo, doff **your** name,  
And for **your** name, which is no part of **you**,  
Take all myself.

**Romeo** I take **you** at **your** word.  
10 Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd;  
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

**Juliet** What man **are you** that thus bescreen'd in night  
So stumble on my counsel?

**Romeo** By a name  
15 I know not how to tell **you** who I am.  
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,  
Because it is an enemy to **you**;  
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

**Juliet** My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words  
20 Of **your** tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.  
**Are you** not Romeo, and a Montague?

**Romeo** Neither, fair maid, if either *thee* dislike.

**Juliet** How **came you** hither, tell me, and wherefore?  
25 The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,  
And the place death, considering who **you are**,  
If any of my kinsmen find **you** here.

**Romeo** With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,  
For stony limits cannot hold love out,  
And what love can do, that dares love attempt;  
30 Therefore **your** kinsmen are no stop to me.

**Juliet** If they do see **you**, they will murder **you**.

**Romeo** Alack, there lies more peril in **your** eye  
Than twenty of their swords! Look **you** but sweet,  
And I am proof against their enmity.

35 **Juliet** I would not for the world they saw **you** here.

**Romeo** I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes,  
And but **you** love me, let them find me here;  
My life were better ended by their hate,  
Than death proroguèd, wanting of **your** love.

40 **Juliet** By whose direction found **you** out this place?

**Romeo** By love, that first did prompt me to inquire;  
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes.  
I am no pilot, yet, were **you** as far  
As that vast shore [wash'd] with the farthest sea,  
45 I should adventure for such merchandise.

**Juliet** **You** know the mask of night is on my face,  
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek  
For that which **you** have have heard me speak to-night.  
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny  
50 What I have spoke, but farewell compliment!  
Do **you** love me? I know **you** will say, "Ay,"  
And I will take **your** word; yet, if **you** swear,  
**You** may prove false: at lovers' perjuries  
They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,  
55 If **you** do love, pronounce it faithfully;  
Or if **you** think I am too quickly won,  
I'll frown and be perverse, and say **you** nay,  
So **you** will woo, but else not for the world.  
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,  
60 And therefore **you** may think my behavior light,  
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true

Than those that have [more] coying to be strange.  
 I should have been more strange, I must confess,  
 But that **you** overheard, ere I was ware,  
 65 My true-love passion; therefore pardon me,  
 And not impute this yielding to light love,  
 Which the dark night hath so discovered.  
  
**Romeo** Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow,  
 That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops --  
  
 70 **Juliet** O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,  
 That monthly changes in her [circled] orb,  
 Lest that **your** love prove likewise variable.  
  
**Romeo** What shall I swear by?  
  
**Juliet** Do not swear at all;  
 75 Or if **you** will, swear by **your** gracious self,  
 Which is the god of my idolatry,  
 And I'll believe **you**.  
  
**Romeo** If my heart's dear love --  
  
**Juliet** Well, do not swear. Although I joy in **you**,  
 80 I have no joy of this contract to-night,  
 It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,  
 Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
 Ere one can say it lightens. Sweet, good night!  
 This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,  
 85 May prove a beauteous flow'r when next we meet.  
 Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest  
 Come to **your** heart as that within my breast!  
  
**Romeo** O, will **you** leave me so unsatisfied?  
  
**Juliet** What satisfaction can **you** have to-night?  
  
 90 **Romeo** Th' exchange of **your** love's faithful vow for mine.  
  
**Juliet** I gave **you** mine before **you** did request it;  
 And yet I would it were to give again.  
  
**Romeo** Would **you** withdraw it? for what purpose, love?  
  
**Juliet** But to be frank and give it **you** again,  
 95 And yet I wish but for the thing I have.  
 My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
 My love as deep; the more I give to **you**,

The more I have, for both are infinite.  
 [Nurse calls within.]  
 100 I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!  
 Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.  
 Stay but a little, I will come again. [Exit above.]  
  
**Romeo** O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard,  
 105 Being in night, all this is but a dream,  
 Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.  
  
 [Enter JULIET above.]  
  
**Juliet** Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.  
 If that **your** bent of love be honorable,  
**Your** purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,  
 110 By one that I'll procure to come to **you**,  
 Where and what time **you** will perform the rite,  
 And all my fortunes at **your** foot I'll lay,  
 And follow **you** my lord throughout the world.  
  
**[Nurse.]** Within.] Madam!  
 115 **Juliet** I come, anon. -- But if **you** mean not well,  
 I do beseech **you** --  
  
**[Nurse.]** Within.] Madam!  
  
**Juliet** By and by, I come--  
 120 To cease **your** strife, and leave me to my grief.  
 To-morrow will I send.  
  
**Romeo** So thrive my soul --  
  
**Juliet** A thousand times good night! [Exit above.]  
  
**Romeo** A thousand times the worse, to want **your** light.  
 Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books,  
 But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.  
 [Retiring]

# HAMLET: WORD COUNT

Rank	Occur	Word	Rank	Occur	Word	Rank	Occur	Word	Rank	Occur	Word	Rank	Occur	Word
1	228	lord	58	19	hand	115	14	work	172	9	black	229	7	sorrow
2	123	good	59	19	honor	116	13	face	173	9	confess	230	7	strook
3	83	love	60	19	lie *	117	13	fool *	174	9	custom	231	7	wholesome
4	70	father	61	19	sleep	118	13	gentlemen	175	9	dread	232	7	woman
5	70	man *	62	19	spirit	119	13	kill	176	9	effect	233	6	beauty
6	67	king	63	18	brother	120	13	passion	177	9	excellent	234	6	choice
7	56	time	64	18	Denmark	121	12	brain	178	9	hope	235	6	course
8	52	think	65	18	drink	122	12	Dane	179	9	land	236	6	discourse
9	49	look	66	18	grief	123	12	fine *	180	9	letters	237	6	double
10	45	heaven	67	18	sword	124	12	foul	181	9	mouth	238	6	dull
11	44	mad(ness)	68	18	tongue	125	12	judgment	182	9	patience	239	6	fare
12	42	night	69	17	farewell	126	12	name	183	9	sea	240	6	fat
13	41	mother	70	17	fit *	127	12	Norway	184	9	shame	241	6	fie
14	40	god	71	17	grow	128	12	offense	185	9	sick	242	6	gracious
15	40	soul	72	17	little	129	12	proof/-ve	186	9	sight	243	6	hit
16	39	eye	73	17	player	130	12	strange	187	9	sure	244	6	home
17	38	death	74	17	purpose	131	11	action	188	9	woe	245	6	hot
18	36	play	75	17	remember	132	11	business	189	8	adieu	246	6	laugh
19	36	world	76	17	sound *	133	11	deed	190	8	beast	247	6	moon
20	35	hear	77	17	watch	134	11	draw	191	8	charge	248	6	priethee
21	35	life	78	16	act	135	11	full	192	8	conscienc	249	6	quiet
22	35	nature	79	16	answer	136	11	ground	193	8	dream	250	6	ready
23	33	dear *	80	16	body	137	11	hell	194	8	eat	251	6	slain
24	33	heart	81	16	cause	138	11	help	195	8	fashion	252	6	truth
25	33	pray	82	16	command	139	11	hour	196	8	fault	253	6	wicked
26	33	true	83	16	daughter	140	11	husband	197	8	heavy	254	6	wits
27	33	young/-th	84	16	fortune	141	11	joy	198	8	lack	255	5	choose
28	32	son *	85	16	grace	142	11	maid	199	8	list *	256	5	circumsta
29	32	words	86	16	grave *	143	11	peace	200	8	music	257	5	cock *
30	30	indeed	87	16	honest	144	11	tears *	201	8	note	258	5	color
31	29	dead	88	16	lady	145	11	three	202	8	particular	259	5	commission
32	29	thoughts	89	16	light *	146	11	uncle	203	8	power	260	5	conceit
33	28	call	90	16	majesty	147	10	breath	204	8	secret	261	5	disposition
34	28	fear	91	16	marry *	148	10	buried	205	8	service	262	5	dumb
35	28	follow	92	16	mind	149	10	crown	206	8	soldiers	263	5	figure
36	28	matter	93	16	question	150	10	danger	207	8	sun	264	5	flesh
37	27	blood	94	16	reason	151	10	guilty	208	8	table	265	5	fly *
38	27	day	95	16	revenge	152	10	knave	209	8	violence	266	5	hard
39	27	find	96	16	sense	153	10	late	210	8	wife	267	5	liberty
40	27	part	97	16	virtue	154	10	marriage	211	8	wrong	268	5	mass *
41	26	sweet	98	15	air	155	10	memory	212	8	year *	269	5	methinks
42	25	ear *	99	15	fellow	156	10	news	213	7	angel	270	5	morning
43	25	queen	100	15	free	157	10	obey	214	7	beard	271	5	mortal
44	24	head	101	15	mark *	158	10	phrase	215	7	breathe	272	5	motive
45	23	fire	102	15	please	159	10	place	216	7	cold	273	5	nunn'ry
46	22	live *	103	15	swear	160	10	Phyrrhus	217	7	dare *	274	5	piece
47	21	fair *	104	14	bear*	161	10	rank *	218	7	dust	275	5	read
48	20	believe	105	14	bed	162	10	return	219	7	false	276	5	report
49	20	end	106	14	damned	163	10	seal'd	220	7	feed	277	5	silence
50	20	England	107	14	die *	164	10	second	221	7	fingers	278	5	skull
51	20	lost	108	14	drown	165	10	soft	222	7	foils	279	5	stir
52	20	murther	109	14	duty	166	10	star	223	7	feneral	280	5	sudden
53	20	noble	110	14	friend	167	10	understan	224	7	ghost	281	5	terms
54	20	old	111	14	haste	168	10	wind	225	7	health	282	5	treason
55	20	poor	112	14	right	169	10	wisdom	226	7	noise	283	5	trumpet
56	20	seem	113	14	state	170	9	age	227	7	season *	284	5	vile
57	19	faith	114	14	villain	171	9	arms *	228	7	sister	286	4	snow

# Hamlet • Word Study

## RULES OF THE GAME

You will choose one of the topics under the number that ends your school ID number. In each set, the first number is the word's rank (the list includes numbers 1 through 70); the second is the number of times the word occurs in the play. You will want to find specific mentions of your word in the text of the play, although the concrete detail you use in your study certainly need not all be from lines in which your word appears.

### Ending in "1"

rank	no.	word
1	228	lord
11	44	mad(ness)
21	35	life
31	29	dead
41	26	sweet
51	20	lost
61	19	sleep

### Ending in "2"

rank	no.	word
2	123	good
12	42	night
22	35	nature
32	29	thoughts
42	25	ear *
52	20	murther
62	19	spirit

### Ending in "3"

rank	no.	word
3	83	love
13	41	mother
23	33	dear *
33	28	call
43	25	queen
53	20	noble
63	18	brother

### Ending in "4"

rank	no.	word
4	70	father
14	40	god
24	33	heart
34	28	fear
44	24	head
54	20	old
64	18	Denmark

### Ending in "5"

rank	no.	word
5	70	man *
15	40	soul
25	33	pray
35	28	follow
45	23	fire
55	20	poor
65	18	drink

### Ending in "6"

rank	no.	word
6	67	king
16	39	eye
26	33	true
36	28	matter
46	22	live *
56	20	seem
66	18	grief

### Ending in "7"

rank	no.	word
7	56	time
17	38	death
27	33	young/-th
37	27	blood
47	21	fair *
57	19	faith
67	18	sword

### Ending in "8"

rank	no.	word
8	52	think
18	36	play
28	32	son *
38	27	day
48	20	believe
58	19	hand
68	18	tongue

### Ending in "9"

rank	no.	word
9	49	look
19	36	world
29	32	words
39	27	find
49	20	end
59	19	honor
69	17	farewell

### Ending in "0"

rank	no.	word
10	45	heaven
20	35	hear

rank	no.	word
30	30	indeed
40	27	part
50	20	England

rank	no.	word
60	19	lie *
70	17	fit *

# Shakespeare's Plays

*Plays ranked by length*

	<i>Play</i>	<i>Lines</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Spchs</i>
1	HAMLET	4042	29551	1136
2	CORIOLANUS	3752	26579	1107
3	CYMBELINE	3707	26778	856
4	RICHARD III	3667	28309	1086
5	OTHELLO	3551	25884	1185
6	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	3531	25516	1139
7	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	3522	23742	1177
8	KING LEAR	3487	25221	1067
9	WINTER'S TALE	3348	24543	746
10	HENRY IV, PART TWO	3326	25706	904
11	HENRY V	3297	25577	741
12	TWO NOBLE KINSMEN	3261	23403	838
13	HENRY VIII	3221	23325	711
14	HENRY VI, PART TWO	3130	24450	794
15	ROMEO AND JULIET	3099	23913	840
16	HENRY IV, PART ONE	3081	23955	776
17	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	3013	22550	936
18	HENRY VI, PART THREE	2915	23295	813
19	MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	2891	21119	1022
20	MEASURE FOR MEASURE	2891	21269	899
21	LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST	2829	21033	1050
22	AS YOU LIKE IT	2810	21305	815
23	RICHARD II	2796	21809	554
24	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	2787	20768	979
25	MERCHANT OF VENICE	2701	20921	636
26	HENRY VI, PART ONE	2695	20515	662
27	TAMING OF THE SHREW	2676	20411	893
28	KING JOHN	2638	20386	549
29	TWELFTH NIGHT	2591	19041	925
30	JULIUS CAESAR	2591	19110	794
31	TITUS ANDRONICUS	2538	19790	567
32	TIMON OF ATHENS	2488	12748	802
33	PERICLES	2459	17723	638
34	MACBETH	2349	16436	649
35	TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA	2288	16883	858
36	TEMPEST	2283	16036	653
37	MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	2192	16087	504
38	COMEDY OF ERRORS	1787	14369	608

Total: 112230 830056 31909  
Average: 2953 21844 840  
High: 4042 29551 1185  
Low: 1787 12748 504

*Plays ranked by unique words*

	<i>Play</i>	<i>Unique words</i>
1	HAMLET	4700
2	HENRY V	4562
3	CYMBELINE	4260
4	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	4251
5	KING LEAR	4166
6	HENRY IV, PART TWO	4122
7	HENRY IV, PART ONE	4122
8	RICHARD III	4092
9	HENRY VI, PART TWO	4058
10	HENRY VI, PART ONE	4058
11	CORIOLANUS	4015
12	WINTER'S TALE	3913
13	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	3906
14	TWO NOBLE KINSMEN	3895
15	OTHELLO	3783
16	LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST	3772
17	ROMEO AND JULIET	3707
18	RICHARD II	3671
19	HENRY VI, PART THREE	3581
20	KING JOHN	3567
21	HENRY VIII	3558
22	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	3513
23	TITUS ANDRONICUS	3397
24	MEASURE FOR MEASURE	3325
25	MACBETH	3306
26	PERICLES	3270
27	TIMON OF ATHENS	3269
28	MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	3267
29	MERCHANT OF VENICE	3265
30	AS YOU LIKE IT	3248
31	TAMING OF THE SHREW	3240
32	TEMPEST	3149
33	TWELFTH NIGHT	3096
34	MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	2984
35	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	2954
36	JULIUS CAESAR	2867
37	TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA	2718
38	COMEDY OF ERRORS	2522

Total: 137149  
Average: 3609  
High: 4700  
Low: 2522

# Some Ideas for Shakespeare Compilations

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## FATHERS AND SONS

The Comedy of Errors  
Hamlet  
*Polonius & Laertes*  
1 Henry IV  
Julius Caesar  
*Brutus & Lucius*  
King Lear  
*'Gloucester & Sons'*  
Romeo and Juliet  
The Winter's Tale

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## MOTHERS AND SONS

Coriolanus  
*Volumnia & Coriolanus*  
Hamlet  
Macbeth  
*Lady Macduff & son*  
Richard III  
*Margaret & Richard*  
Titus Andronicus

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## MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Romeo and Juliet  
The Winter's Tale

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## SIBLINGS

The Comedy of Errors  
Hamlet  
Measure for Measure  
Twelfth Night  
The Taming of the Shrew

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## FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

As You Like It  
Hamlet  
Henry VIII  
King Lear  
The Merchant of Venice  
Midsummer Night's Dream  
Much Ado About Nothing  
Othello  
Pericles  
Romeo and Juliet  
The Taming of the Shrew  
The Tempest  
Titus Andronicus  
The Winter's Tale

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## FRIENDS

As You Like It  
*Rosalind & Celia*  
King Lear  
*Kent to Lear*  
Merry Wives of Windsor  
*Mrs Ford & Mrs Page*  
A Midsummer Night's Dream  
*Helena & Hermia*  
Much Ado about Nothing  
*Beatrice & Hero; Benedick & Claudio*  
Othello  
*Emilia & Desdemona*  
Twelfth Night  
*Antonio to Sebastian; Sir Toby & Aguecheek*