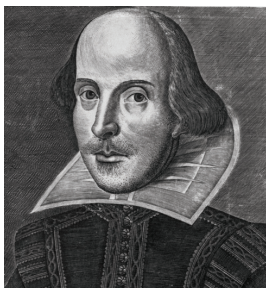


## TODAY YOU WILL...

- > THINK ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT SHAKESPEARE AND HIS POSSIBLE APPEARANCE
- > CONSIDER WHY IT MATTERS AT ALL THAT WE KNOW WHAT SHAKESPEARE LOOKED LIKE AND WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE LIKED ENGLAND'S MOST FAMOUS POET'S APPEARANCE TO BE IN SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS
- > BECOME A BETTER 'READER' OF IMAGES AND ALERT TO SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SHAKESPEARE'S AGE AND OURS

## YOU WILL NEED

- > ACCESS VIA THE WEB TO THE FOLLOWING SUPPOSED IMAGES OF SHAKESPEARE:
  1. EXAMPLES OF SHAKESPEARE'S SIGNATURE: [TINYURL.COM/TSGW2](http://TINYURL.COM/TSGW2)
  2. THE 1600S CHANDOS PORTRAIT FROM THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY: [TINYURL.COM/TSGW3](http://TINYURL.COM/TSGW3)
  3. THE SHAKESPEARE FUNERARY MONUMENT BY GERARD JOHNSON IN HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, STRATFORD [TINYURL.COM/TSGW4](http://TINYURL.COM/TSGW4)
  4. THE DROESHOUT ENGRAVING FROM THE TITLE PAGE OF THE FIRST FOLIO (1623) [TINYURL.COM/TSGW5](http://TINYURL.COM/TSGW5)



# GOOD WILL HUNTING

Before you introduce learners to the works of Shakespeare, it's worth helping them get to know the man himself, suggests **Jerome Monahan**...

You are about to start a Shakespeare set text with your students. It may be the first time they have tackled one of 'The Works' or they could be on familiar ground; his plays having been part of the weft and weave of their primary school days – let's hope! Still, this is a momentous occasion, and so before you crash into the world of Scotland as failed state under Macbeth; the ambiguous Illyria of Twelfth Night; or Verona, the death-trap for star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet... why not allow everyone a short pause – a lesson, at least – to consider the man himself, his world and what makes him special?

Dr Rex Gibson (1932-2005) was a pioneer of 'active approaches' to Shakespeare and the person behind the Cambridge School Shakespeare editions of the plays. He was truly inspiring and used to begin his workshops with everyone in a circle, right hands on heart and copies of the 'play-for-that-day' held aloft, echoing the proclamation: "This is a play – not a book! It is

to be spoken and performed!" Then the day would begin, during which participants continually spoke and played with the text, emerging hours later with lines fixed in their heads and events, themes and concepts embedded as only they can be when they have been enacted.

Some of Rex's techniques became part of my repertoire and have spurred me on to develop my own programme of 'active approaches' workshops – one of the most popular of which is a day-long course introducing Shakespeare. Conscious that you are unlikely to have the luxury of multiple lessons at your disposal, what follows is a brief outline of some of my favourite ways of tackling this potentially formidable subject. I suspect that combined with the resources I've suggested to accompany this subject, you may have to pick and choose, but introducing Shakespeare is not something that can be done effectively in a single lesson and so there's plenty here to enable you to return to this topic from time to time.

## STARTER ACTIVITY+

As this is about Shakespeare himself, rather than beginning your lesson with Rex Gibson's oath relating to a specific play why not get students speaking and sharing comments made about Shakespeare at the start of his career and after it? Here's the pamphleteer Robert Greene complaining about our William in 1592 (and forgetting his apostrophes in the process): "there is an upstart Crow,/ beautified with our feathers,/ that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde [a puzzling reference to a line in Henry VI part 1], supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you:/ and being an absolute Johannes fac totum [Jack of all trades and master of none], is in his owne conceit/ the onely

*Shake-scene in a country"*

And here is Ben Jonson writing about him in the preface to the 1623 First Folio (notice the far from standard spellings despite Jonson being one of the most educated of Jacobean writers):  
*Soule of the Age !/The applause ! delight ! the wonder of our Stage !/ My Shakespeare, rise; ... Thou art a Monument, without a tombe./ And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live./ And we have wits to read, and praise to give.*

Initially recite the whole speeches aloud with the class (call and response). That may be enough before discussing them and considering the attitude of the writer to Shakespeare, but the lines have been broken into segments so that you can share out the bits to pairs of students who then can work on their 'bit' with the goal being to say it

aloud with as much energy and expression as they can muster. As with all such activities, do not let students get away with saying things they don't understand – keep checking, and because they are taking some ownership of the lines they'll probably ask you what things mean anyway.

The quotations mark polar extremes of attitudes to Shakespeare, and much else besides. Greene's complaint that Shakespeare has been grabbing the ideas ('feathers') of other poets and 'beautifying' them is something I often repeat to young people to encourage them to share and use each other's ideas when tackling creative work. The great thing about Jonson's lines is the insistence that we search for Shakespeare in his plays rather than getting hooked up too much on his biography, or relative lack of it.

## INFO BAR

## + ABOUT THE EXPERT



Jerome Monahan has taught for over 20 years. In 1999, after a decade working in London secondary schools – both state and independent, he became a freelance teacher, educational writer and journalist. His background is English, drama, humanities and film/media studies. Borrowing from all these disciplines, he has, since 2000 devised and delivered a broad programme of primary and secondary inset and student workshops across the UK and internationally.



## MAIN ACTIVITIES+

**1** Invite students to draw a picture of Shakespeare – however crude. Underneath, ask them to attempt his signature, making it as flowery and ‘Elizabethan’ as they can.

**2** The idea of the ‘name’ exercise is to point out that you and they have spelt the name in a way that the man himself never did in his lifetime on any of the documents carrying his signature. Our spelling is the one that appeared on early printed ‘quarto’ versions of his poetry and plays, and so

presumably had his authority behind them to be taken as the official version. Ask students why they think Shakespeare spelt his name in so many different ways, often abbreviating it on legal documents? (One excuse is that paper was expensive and so signatures often had to be crammed into tight spaces after all the official terms and conditions on mortgages or contracts or sworn statements.)

**3** Get students to share their ideas of what Shakespeare looked like. Then show them the three portrayals – see links, ‘You Will Need’ – that were created during

his lifetime or immediately after it. How authoritative are these portrayals? Which of them do your students prefer and why?

**4** The earliest of them, the Chandos portrait, is the only image we have that is possibly a portrait Shakespeare may have sat for – but that is highly debatable and unproved. It has been touched up over the years, and the earring, which does date from the picture’s earliest days, was a source of great controversy of the ‘Shakespeare would never have worn such effeminate bodily adornment’ calibre. In fact Elizabethan and Jacobean men did wear such things – especially if they had been to sea. Who knows – was Shakespeare at sea for a time during his lost years in the 1580s?

**5** As for the other images, both date from after Shakespeare’s death, and were created by artists – neither terribly accomplished – who did not know the man. The fact that they passed muster with family and friends to appear where

he was buried or on his Collected Works, certainly gives them some authority, but in a world without photographs, who’s to say Ben Jonson’s recollection of Shakespeare’s precise looks had not faded somewhat in the seven years between the playwright’s death in 1616 and the First Folio of 1623?

## SUMMARY

Shakespeare has also been depicted in art over the last three centuries again and again. Many of these images are variations on the three considered in this lesson, but others are clearly created to reflect contemporary tastes such as the sculpture owned by David Garrick, which shows a Shakespeare in a state of creative undress ([tinyurl.com/tsshakespeare](http://tinyurl.com/tsshakespeare)). For those students that want to, investigating Shakespeare in art is also a hugely fruitful exercise.

## HOME LEARNING

Set your students the task of investigating some of the other images of Shakespeare that have for a while been thought to be genuine 16th or 17th Century portraits. Which do they prefer and why? There is quite a detective story behind each of them – e.g. the ‘Flower’ picture ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower\\_portrait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower_portrait)) was unmasked thanks to some clever analysis of the paint. The backing in 2009 of the Cobbe portrait ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cobbe\\_portrait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cobbe_portrait)) by Shakespeare academic Stanley Wells put another image of the playwright into circulation, but his conclusions have been challenged since.