

# Shakespeare Synopses

**Disclaimer:** While *I Hate Shakespeare* is a comedy that highlights the humor and relevancy of his plays in a modern way, the show still contains mentions of murder, unfaithfulness, insanity, and farcical depictions of murder and witches, in keeping with the common themes and tropes of Shakespeare's work. In each of the recreations of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, there is a brief mention of suicide, and there is a farcical recreation of Juliet's death scene.

Below, you can find some basic information on the plays that are depicted in the show. While any knowledge of Shakespeare and his work is not necessary for enjoying the show, it may help to understand more of the jokes and the basic plot lines.

## Basic Shakespeare history

- April 23, 1564 - April 23, 1616, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England.
- He married Anne Hathaway when he was 18 and together they had 3 children - Susanna, and the twins Hamnet and Judith.
- He wrote 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and other poems.
- He helped to found the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors, and he wrote most of their plays, about 2 per year, for 20 years.
- William Shakespeare is one of the most important literary figures of the English language due to the enduring presence of his work.
- He is credited with the invention of 1700 new words/phrases.

## Hamlet - Tragedy

Hamlet's father, the King of Denmark, has recently been murdered (by Hamlet's uncle Claudius), and as Hamlet contemplates life, death, and revenge, he decides he will pretend to be crazy and then kill Claudius. Claudius is paranoid and plots to kill Hamlet. Hamlet's girlfriend, Ophelia, truly believes he has gone mad, despairs of her life, and drowns. Hamlet also accidentally kills Ophelia's father, Polonius, believing he was Hamlet's uncle, Claudius. The play ends with a duel, during which the King, Queen, Hamlet's opponent (Laertes - Ophelia's brother who wants revenge for his sister and father), and Hamlet himself are all killed.

## Romeo and Juliet - Tragedy

An age-old vendetta between two powerful families erupts into bloodshed. Romeo Montague crashes a Capulet party, sees Juliet, and they fall in love with each other. They try to plan to see each other the next day, but Romeo gets involved in a street fight where Juliet's cousin dies, and Romeo is banished. In a desperate attempt to be reunited with Romeo, Juliet fakes her own death, but the message fails to reach Romeo. Believing Juliet dead, he takes his life in her tomb. Juliet wakes to find Romeo's corpse beside her and kills herself. The grieving families agree to end their feud.

## Richard III - History

Jealous and crippled, Richard of Gloucester wants to be King of England and uses manipulation and deceit to achieve his goal. He murders his brothers, nephews, and any opposition to

become King Richard III. In the end, Henry of Richmond raises an army, kills Richard in battle, and becomes King Henry VII.

### **Othello - Tragedy**

Iago is furious about being overlooked for promotion and plots to take revenge against his General, Othello, the Moor of Venice. Iago manipulates Othello into believing his wife Desdemona is unfaithful, stirring Othello's jealousy. Othello allows jealousy to consume him, murders Desdemona, and then kills himself.

### **Timon of Athens - Tragedy**

Wealthy and popular, Timon of Athens helps his friends, gives many gifts, and holds a feast. After ignoring his true friends' warnings, Timon runs out of money, and none of his "friends" will help him. He runs away to a cave where he curses humanity, finds gold, funds someone to destroy Athens, and dies.

### **Macbeth - Tragedy**

Three witches tell the Scottish general Macbeth that he will be King of Scotland. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth kills the king, becomes the new king, and kills more people out of paranoia. Civil war erupts to overthrow Macbeth, resulting in more death.

Macbeth is considered to be "the cursed play". According to folklore, Macbeth was cursed from the beginning. A coven of witches objected to Shakespeare using real incantations, so they put a curse on the play. Legend has it the play's first performance (around 1606) was riddled with disaster. Ever since then, many productions of *Macbeth* have been plagued with problems, accidents, and mysterious deaths.

If you say "Macbeth" in a theater, it is considered bad luck and is believed bad things will happen. So how can you avoid catastrophe if you utter the play that shall not be named? Exit the theatre, spin around three times, spit, curse, and then knock on the theatre door to be allowed back in.

### **Titus Andronicus - Tragedy**

Death. Mutilation. Cannibalism. This show has lots of dark moments. There is no "good guy" - only lots and lots of bad guys trying to one-up each other.

### **Julius Caesar - History**

Jealous conspirators convince Caesar's friend Brutus to join their assassination plot against Caesar to stop him from gaining too much power. Mark Antony drives the conspirators out of Rome and fights them in a battle. He wins and rules Rome.

### **A Midsummer Night's Dream - Comedy**

This play ends with a monologue by Puck, asking the audience for their forgiveness if they felt offended by what they have just seen, and suggests that it all might have been a dream...