



elcome to Shakespeare Honors. This course is a challenging semester-long honors elective in which Students will deepen their close reading and analysis skills through concentrated study of multiple works of Shakespeare as well as material on his life, the culture and history of the period, and the characteristics of the Elizabethan stage while grappling with complex text and delving into critical literary theory.

The English Department Summer Reading Assignment asks that each student reads two books (fiction or nonfiction). The purpose of reading in preparation for Honors-level Shakespeare is to familiarize yourself with the world of Shakespeare’s England or the playwright himself. With some stronger historical background than you have now, you will be better able to understand the plays and uncover their more subtle aspects. Therefore, thou must read **at least ONE** text dedicated to this purpose. The purpose of *viewing* is to “read” a play and familiarize yourself with Shakespeare’s stage and its conventions.

PART I: CHOOSING A BOOK and READING EXPECTATIONS

Here are the basic parameters for text selection:

What to read:

- You can read from fiction or nonfiction genres, but fiction texts must be realistic (no sci-fi or fantasy, but historical fiction and mystery, for example, would be fine).
- DO NOT read the plays as part of your summer reading/prep work

Where/Setting: England

When:

- 1564-1616, roughly (that’s Shakespeare’s life)
 - the rule of Queen Elizabeth 1
 - the “Elizabethan era”
 - the rule of King James1 (who was also King James 6 of Scotland)
 - the beginning of the “Stuart era”

Satisfy thyself! If you are interested in history, follow that. If you love to read mysteries, find a way to do that. If you love science, look for a book about developments in science. If you love fashion; do the same.

Some examples of genres that would work are listed below:

fiction	nonfiction
historical fiction novel mystery novel romance novel novel based on one of his plays	history biography essays narrative nonfiction

Here are some websites with lists of historical fiction novels that take place in Shakespeare's times. You can shop the lists:

https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/7731.Shakespearean_Historical_Fiction

<https://shepherd.com/best-books/relating-to-shakespeare>


<https://www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/shakespeare-inspired-novels-excerpts/>

https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/books/historical-fiction/elizabethan-era-historical-fiction/_/N-29Z8q8Z10o9

Here is a [Destiny Collection](#) created by our library team to support this assignment. You can search here and check a book out from the SHS library or get ideas for titles you might want to purchase.

READING Assignment Expectations:

***Before you read:* Create a “KWL” chart and complete the K and W portions**

( KWL chart for pre-course reading)

***As you read:* take original notes, paying particular attention to:**

- social norms
- the theater/ acting in Shakespeare's time
- knowledge of Shakespeare's own life
- political conflicts of the time
- religious conflicts of the time
- the economy
- major historical events with deep impact on the time (such as the plague pandemics)
- real people who lived in his time
- daily life in this time

Below, you'll find additional notes specific to the type of book you chose:

Reading a novel?

Be prepared with notes on the plot line, central characters and conflicts; details of setting that made this distant time come alive to you.

Reading a nonfiction book by a single author?

Be prepared with notes on the main argument the book makes and the central points or ideas of the chapters or sections.

Reading a nonfiction collection or anthology?

Be prepared with notes (see “nonfiction book by a single author”) on each piece in the collection.

Keep reading for Part II

PART II: CHOOSING A PLAY TO WATCH AND WATCHING EXPECTATIONS

Go to this link: <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/shakespeares-globe-on-screen>

Click LOGIN (top right):

Where Prompted for Institutional Login (on left)

Enter the Username: StaplesBloomsbury
and Password: StaplesGlobe

Select one of the following plays to watch:

Henry V

Antony and Cleopatra

As You Like It

Julius Caesar

WATCHING Assignment Expectations:

Make notes about:

- how the theater seems to “work”
- unexpected elements of theater?
- the plot of the play
 - the characters -- have analytical ideas about the main characters
 - the settings -- how do they create settings onstage? how does setting connect to character and conflict?
 - thematic ideas -- what about the human condition do you think Shakespeare sought to convey?
- connections to other Shakespeare plays you may know/know of?
- connections to characters you’ve met in ANY other books or movies from after Shakespeare?

How will we use our experiences with the books and the plays?

In your first few weeks back, you will be asked to:

- Participate in various reflective activities
- Independently write about the content of the book and your experience reading it/ the content of the play and your experience watching it
- Participate in small group or whole-class activities using the texts/performances to set up some expectations and questions for the plays.