

## Unlocking the Language of Shakespeare in *Hamlet*

Jane Hall  
Westside High School

### INTRODUCTION

Westside High School educates almost three thousand students every year, all of whom must take four years of English during their high school tenure. During three of their four years, students are exposed to various works of William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet* as freshmen, *Julius Caesar* as sophomores, and *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* as seniors. One of the biggest hurdles for students to overcome is to understand Elizabethan English, the language of Shakespeare. William Shakespeare was a brilliant, respected, and prolific writer during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, whose extant work includes thirty-eight plays, one hundred fifty-four sonnets, and two long narrative poems. He has been called “the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s preeminent dramatist” (Craig 462). Shakespeare’s language was predominantly written for actors to perform onstage, not for students to read in a classroom. In this unit students will be exposed to Shakespeare’s background as a playwright and poet and learn why the language he used is timeless and as relevant in today’s world as it was during the Elizabethan era. Students will study his use of style, including short lines, trochees, spondees, feminine endings, iambic pentameter, and the significance of prose versus verse in characters’ dialogue. Students will also visit contemporary screenplays where the language and settings have been altered in an effort to satisfy modern audiences while at the same time exposing them to the works of Shakespeare. This unit is specifically designed for high school seniors in both prep and advanced placement classes, focusing on *Hamlet*, but the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) addressed and the assignments and lesson plans can easily be adapted to use with other works at the middle and high school levels.

### OBJECTIVES

#### **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) -- Texas Education Agency Requirements for English IV ELA:**

**Reading/Comprehension Skills:** Students use a flexible range of metacognitive reading skills in both assigned and independent reading to understand an author’s message. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts as they become self-directed, critical readers. The student is expected to: (A) reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension (e.g., asking questions, summarizing and synthesizing, making connections, creating sensory images); and (B) make complex inferences (e.g., inductive and deductive) about text and use textual evidence to support understanding.

Specific skills addressed in this unit are:

**110.45 (2)(C) Writing/writing processes.** The student uses recursive writing processes when appropriate. The student is expected to use vocabulary, organization, and rhetorical devices appropriate to audience and purpose.

**110/45 (3)( B) Writing/grammar/usage/conventions/spelling.** The student relies increasingly on the conventions and mechanics of written English, including the rules of usage and grammar, to write clearly and effectively. The student is expected to demonstrate control over grammatical

elements such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, verb forms, and parallelism. **110.45 (7) (B)** Reading/word identification/vocabulary development. The student acquires an extensive vocabulary through reading and systematic word study. The student is expected to rely on context to determine meanings of words and phrases such as figurative language, idioms, multiple meaning words, and technical vocabulary.

**110.45 (7) (D)** Research word origins as an aid to understanding meanings, derivations, and spellings as well as influences on the English language.

**110.45 (18) (D)** Listening/speaking/evaluation. The student evaluates and critiques oral presentations and performances. The student is expected to identify and analyze the effect of artistic elements within literary texts such as character development, rhyme, imagery, and language.

**110.45 (16) (A)** Listening/speaking/purposes. The student speaks clearly and effectively for a variety of purposes. The student is expected to use conventions of oral language effectively, including word choice, grammar, and diction.

**110.45 (19) (B)** Viewing/representing/interpretation. The student understands and interprets visual representations. The student is expected to analyze relationships, ideas, and cultures as represented in various media.

(Texas Education Agency: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110c.html#110.45>)

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

### **William Shakespeare**

William Shakespeare is often regarded as “England’s national poet” and the “Bard of Avon” (Greenblatt). He was born and raised in Stratford-Upon-Avon, educated in the King’s New School in Stratford, gained acclaim as a preeminent playwright and actor in London’s theatre in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, divided his time between Stratford and London during his career, and is interred in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church in his home town of Stratford. In 1592 at a time when men without a university education – like Shakespeare – were competing as serious dramatists, a one-time successful playwright and “university wit,” Robert Greene, wrote about Shakespeare: “For there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his ‘Tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide’ supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Skake-scene in a country” (qtd. In Lamb 3). Mr. Greene’s comments indicate that Shakespeare’s reputation was such that he provoked envy from established, possibly failing, competitors.

Shakespeare wrote most of his works between 1590 and 1613. After his untimely death in 1616, two of his former colleagues published the *First Folio* in 1623, which included all but two of his plays; this publication is recognized as the most authentic collection of Shakespeare’s work. Although Shakespeare was a well-known and respected poet and playwright in his time, his works really rose to fame during the Victorian era when the Romanticists “hero-worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence George Bernard Shaw called ‘bardolatry’” (Presley). During the twentieth century his work is adapted into various formats by diverse movements in scholarship and performance, and students were given the tasks of analyzing and rediscovering Shakespeare’s works as they were presented in contemporary settings. The works of William Shakespeare have been translated into many languages around the world; monuments and memorials have been erected in locations worldwide to commemorate the great bard.

The stone slab covering his grave is inscribed with a curse, warning anyone who might seek to move his remains:

Good frend for lesvs sake forbear,  
To dig the dvst enclosed heare.  
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones,  
And cvrst be he yt moves my bones. (*Absolute Shakespeare*)

Students will see a film (Engel) – a lecture by Professor Eliot Engel – as an introduction to William Shakespeare’s life and times, including Elizabethan theater. They will complete **Assignment #1** while they watch the film. **Assignment #2** is a quiz to assess students’ knowledge on the background information about William Shakespeare to which they were exposed while watching the Engel film.

### Understanding Shakespeare’s Language in *Hamlet*

Although Shakespeare’s language, known as Early Modern English and spoken in England during the Renaissance era (Lamb 6), can be difficult for students to comprehend today, this issue can be resolved if students are taught to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures, for example: “How say you then?” (I.v.121) or “Look you sir, / Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris” (II.i.8) or “He waxes desperate with imagination.” (I.iv.87). Additionally, some words we still use today had different meanings in Shakespeare’s day: for example, in I.i “rivals” means *companions*:

Bernardo:        If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
                          The *rivals* of my watch, bid them make haste.  
(If you meet my *companions*, Horatio and Marcellus, tell them to hurry.)

Later in I.i “still” means *always*, “extravagant” means *wandering*, and “doubt” means *suspect*, and when Hamlet says, “I *doubt* some foul play”, today we would say, “I *suspect* a dangerous act.”

Recognizing and understanding wordplay, such as puns, will guide students in understanding important nuances of Shakespeare’s dialogue, as in Polonius’ words: “Marry, I’ll teach you: think yourself a baby, / That you have ta’en these tenders for true pay, / Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;” (I.iii.105-107). Polonius makes a double pun, first using “*tenders*” to indicate something of value – like poker chips; the second “*Tender*” means to show or to offer. Students must be alert for the sounds of words in order to catch the possibility of double meanings in puns. As an aside, Hamlet expresses his feelings for Claudius when he says, “A little more than kin and less than kind”, where “kind” has the double meaning of *kindred* and *kindhearted* (Greenblatt, 124). When Hamlet is discovered by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern after he has slain Polonius, he responds to them in riddles and puns, which exhibits comic relief in a dire situation (IV.ii.5-28):

Rosencrantz:    What have you done, my lord, with the  
                          dead body?  
Hamlet:         Compounded it with dust, whereto ‘tis kin.  
Rosencrantz:    Tell us where ‘tis, that we may take it thence  
                          and bear it to the chapel.  
Hamlet:         Do not believe it.  
Rosencrantz:    Believe what?  
Hamlet:         That I can keep your counsel and not mine  
                          own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge! Shat  
                          replication should be made by the son of a king?  
Rosencrantz:    Take you me for a sponge, my lord?  
Hamlet:         Ay, sir, that soaks up the king’s countenance,  
                          his rewards, his authorities. But such officers

do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

Rosencrantz: I understand you not, my lord.

Hamlet: I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

Rosencrantz: My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the king.

Hamlet: The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing –

Although Hamlet’s wit is obvious when he speaks with Rosencrantz, his humor is definitely tarnished by the crime of murder he has committed. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not understand that Hamlet is not crazy when he calls them “sponge[s],” but he is indicating that they are nothing but nuts in the mouth of an “ape.” He is trying to tell them that when Claudius no longer needs them, they will be tossed aside and “be dry again.” Since they have already sacrificed their honor, they will be nothing and have nothing to make them worthwhile in polite society. In Act I, scene 2, when Claudius calls Hamlet his “son,” Hamlet replies that he is, rather, “too much in the sun,” punning on son/sun. Students should look for examples of puns throughout the play.

Many phrases coined by Shakespeare are still used today, although some of his words now have meanings quite different from what they meant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries due to the evolution of the English language. Shakespearean phrases that are still used today include: “in a pickle,” “what the dickens,” “short shrift,” “dead as a doornail,” “foot loose and fancy free,” “by jove,” “crack of doom,” “the long and short of it,” “something’s rotten in the state of Denmark,” “woe is me,” and “make your hair stand on end” (*Phrase Finder*). Many teenagers today have never heard and do not understand these phrases; they should list them as they are reading, and research the meanings.

Actors in the theater solve most of the language comprehension difficulties for contemporary audiences because they study Shakespeare’s language and articulate it so that the essential meaning is heard. The actors speak in words and phrases that are memorable, so that, when combined with stage direction, the meaning of the dialogue is “felt” by the audience. However, when a student reads on his own, perhaps for an English class, he must do for himself what each actor does – go over the lines with a dictionary or a folio close at hand until language issues are resolved, and the lines yield their poetic meanings; it helps if the student has a copy of the play to annotate as he reads; for example, in Act III, scene ii, lines 60-63:

Hamlet: Why should the poor be *flattered*?

TAKEN CARE OF

No, let the *candied tongue* lick absurd pomp,

HYPOCRITICAL WORDS

And crook the *pregnant hinges* of the knee

READY TO BEND AT ANY OPPORTUNITY

Where *thrift may follow fawning*. Dost thou hear?

WHERE GAIN WILL FOLLOW FLATTERY

(Annotations are in all caps.)

By annotating appropriately, students can manipulate the language to better understand Elizabethan English and read Hamlet’s words to Horatio as, “Why should I help take care of the

poor? / No, let their hypocritical tongues wag in favor of the king, / and bend to his will at any opportunity / where their gain will follow their shallow flattery. Do you hear me?"

Students will research the methods Shakespeare used to write his plays in order to solve the issues they face of comprehending archaic or obsolete language and words or phrases that may be familiar to them but whose definitions have changed with the evolution of the English language. For instance, in the plays the use of pronouns is archaic: thou (you), thee/ye (objective cases of you), and thy/thine (your/yours); students need to understand these forms when reading Shakespearean plays. They will learn to appreciate wordplay used by Shakespeare: puns, metaphors, and malapropism (*dictionary.com*). The students will discover that when they untangle words in Shakespeare's dialogue and modernize the language, it is not significantly different from what they speak today; for example:

King: How fares our cousin Hamlet?  
Hamlet: Excellent, I' faith; of the chameleon's dish  
I eat the air, promise-crammed; you cannot feed  
capons so.  
King: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet.

Today this exchange may be translated as :

King: How's it goin', cuz?  
Hamlet: Pretty good, I think, but with all the empty promises  
you're dishing out, I can't be sure.  
King: I don't understand what you just said, Hamlet. (III.ii.93-97)

Shakespeare often employed the use of inverted sentences, which afforded him the flexibility to fit his words into the iambic pentameter format and rhythm (Wright 202). By rearranging clauses in the dialogue to coincide with the line's subject, verb, and object – *who* did *what* to *whom* – students will begin to understand the language of Shakespeare. For example:

Horatio: In what particular thought to work I know not  
Modern: I don't know what particular thought to work.

"Shakespeare's stagecraft went hand-in-hand with his wordcraft" (Presley). One of Shakespeare's recognized writing techniques is inversion. By extracting just the subject, verb, and object in the dialogue and putting them in the proper order, students learn that Elizabethan English is no more complicated than the English they hear in music, movies, and on television programs today. They can read independently and comprehend the beautiful language of Shakespeare just as easily as they can read and understand a modern graphic novel.

### **Shakespeare's Style of Writing**

"When Shakespeare, Christopher Marlow, and Ben Jonson sat around the Mermaid Tavern and talked [casually], iambic pentameter was wonderfully new and timely" (Wright). Iambic pentameter is a line of poetry that includes ten syllables with stress placed on every second syllable (i AM i AM i AM i AM i AM); Shakespeare wrote most of his dialogue in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is closest in style to casual speech because of its blank verse form. By adding "a" or "the" to monosyllabic nouns, iambs are formed and sound natural in conversational language. Iambic verse accommodates a wide range of metrical variations to bring the iambic forms nearer to spoken English for purposes of emotional intensification, as when the King tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "I like him not, nor stands it safe with us" when he believes that Hamlet has discovered his dastardly secret and employs the two men to accompany Hamlet to England" (III.iii.1).

Iambic pentameter lines that end in feminine endings usually express indecisiveness or uncertainty, as when the King follows up with, “To let his madness range. Therefore prepare *you*,” (III.iii.2). The feminine ending on this line begs to ask if he is doing the right thing by having Hamlet accompanied to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Could this decision possibly come back to haunt Claudius? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are seen as the parasites they are who “live and feed upon your majesty” (III.iii.10).

### **Prose versus Verse in Dialogue**

*Hamlet* respects the “Doctrine of Decorum,” following Shakespeare’s study of humanistic ideas of self-knowledge, especially as they concerned the virtue of temperance and the obligation of moral decorum (Lamb 24). By containing both prose and verse in the dialogue, this shows Shakespeare’s flexibility with language. Dialogue written in prose indicates that the characters are uneducated or that they do not command respect, while dialogue written in verse indicates that the characters are educated, respected, and usually higher on the social strata.

Polonius reads Hamlet’s letter to Ophelia in II.ii.115-124, which is a conventional poem written in Elizabethan style and expresses his passion for Ophelia:

Doubt thou the stars are fire;  
Doubt that the sun doth move;  
Doubt truth to be a liar;  
But never doubt I love.  
O dear Ophelia! I am ill at these numbers: I have not art  
to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most  
best! Believe it. Adieu.  
Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this  
Machine is to him,  
Hamlet.

The love letter is written in a structured style, beginning with a compliment to Ophelia (Berger). He continues with a declaratory verse, and concludes very humbly and hopefully. His use of the word “machine” to mean the human body reflects that Hamlet reveres the spirit over the body. Shakespeare clearly structured this letter in verse to show Hamlet’s respect and devotion to Ophelia.

When Hamlet is feigning madness, the scenes are written in prose, as in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when Claudius is using them as pawns to draw out the reasons behind Hamlet’s alleged transformation to madness (II.ii.297-314):

Guildenstern: My lord, we were sent for.  
Hamlet: I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation  
prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king  
and queen moult to feather. I have of late, - but  
wherefore I know not, - lost all my mirth, forgone  
all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily  
with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth,  
seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent  
canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging  
firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden  
fire, why, it appears no other thing to me but a foul  
and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece  
of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite  
in faculty! In form, in moving, how express and admirable!

In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, though, by your smiling you seem to say so.

These two men are very transparent in their endeavors to draw Hamlet out, but he skillfully turns the tables on them and succeeds in exposing their insincerity. He knows they do not care about him and are loyal to Claudius, who will turn on them at the first opportunity. Since these two men are portrayed as dolts, they do not warrant a conversation in verse and are addressed in prose as part of Hamlet's display of madness (Berger).

In Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy the language is meditative. Hamlet wonders whether personal revenge is indeed warranted and can be justified. He wonders if life is worth living in a world filled with anguish and despair. He has a moral dilemma about whether it is better to endure evil passively, or it is the human condition to right wrongs committed in society (Bertolini 96). Students will dissect this speech by annotating and translating obsolete language into contemporary language. They will re-write the speech into modern language and share their interpretations with the class (**Lesson Plan #3**).

## LESSON PLANS

The following assignments will be given to students as we study Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. Most of the assignments may be adapted to other plays by using the same concepts.

### Lesson Plan 1

**Objectives:** 110.45 (2)(C), 110.45 (19) (B) - Watch video lecture, complete video quiz; background on Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre

**Materials/Resources:** Engel video, video quiz (below), pen

**Assessment** (video quiz below):

### **Engel Film Summary Video Quiz**

While watching the video (Engel), complete all of the following questions. You may want to take notes on separate paper, and transfer your notes to this page. Be *very specific* in your responses. All answers must be written in complete sentences.

1. How does Professor Engel describe Shakespeare as a writer?
2. Why is Shakespeare's writing different from that of other authors? What is the "problem" with Shakespeare's works?
3. What was it like to attend the theater in Shakespeare's day?
4. Define the origin of the term "box office."
5. What three items were sold at the theater's refreshment stands? What item was most popular? Why?
6. What determined whether or not the play was bad and if the audience got a refund?
7. Why did actors think it was dangerous to be down stage if there were a lot of groundlings in the audience?
8. What is the origin of the phrase "break a leg"?
9. What did Shakespeare change in *Macbeth* when he rewrote the script? Why?
10. Explain why a pig was killed before each performance of *Julius Caesar*.
11. What is Shakespeare's best-loved play? Why?
12. What are the three "opening scene promises" in all of Shakespeare's plays?
13. What is Shakespeare's most difficult play? Why?
14. Cite two reasons why the study of Shakespeare's work is difficult today.

15. Explain the “fairy tale motif” used in the plots of Shakespearean tragedies.
16. Cite two reasons that let you know when you are reading a tragedy.
17. How does “Humpty Dumpty” teach even ignorant people like the groundlings the basic principle of great tragedy.
18. How did Shakespeare use characters’ words to allow all people to understand his plays?
19. Shakespeare was a master of language and coined hundreds of words and phrases that are still used today. List ten that are mentioned in the film.
20. Vocabulary: Write a connotative definition of the following terms as they are explained in the film: price gouge, groundlings, salivate, superstitious, down stage, up stage, dialogue, fairy tale, prompter.

### **Lesson Plan 2 – Shakespeare’s Background QUIZ**

**Objective:** 110.45 (7)(B - Review/study background materials pertaining to William Shakespeare, Shakespeare's England, The Globe Theatre, and Elizabethan theatre.

**Materials:** Background materials presented to students on overhead or Elmo.

**Assessment:** Go to the website below and download the quiz to test students' knowledge of Shakespeare and his theatre.

**Procedure:** Since students are acquainted with Shakespeare by the time they are seniors in high school, this assignment is mainly for a review of facts. After viewing the film by Engel and studying additional background, students can take a quiz over this information. You can find a very good handout to test your students on Shakespeare’s background at the following website: [http://www.argo217.k12.il.us/departs/English/blettiere/shakeback\\_beg.htm](http://www.argo217.k12.il.us/departs/English/blettiere/shakeback_beg.htm).

### **Lesson Plan 3**

**Objectives:** 110/45 (3)( B), 110.45 (2)(C), 110.45 (7)(D), 110.45 (18)( D), 110.45 (16) (A) - Students will annotate, research obsolete language, re-write material, and present orally in class.

**Materials:** Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” speech below, dictionary, computer access to Internet for research

**Assignment:** Annotate the following speech of Hamlet’s. Research words/phrases that are unfamiliar to you. Re-write the speech using contemporary language on separate paper. Your final paper should be typed, double-spaced, 12-pt. Times font, 1” margins. You will deliver your speech in class. PRACTICE!!! (III, i, 64-98)

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
 Must give us pause: there's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life;  
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,



The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action. - Soft you now!  
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd.

**Assessment:** Student's final oral presentation and written work

#### **Lesson Plan 4** – Culminating Project

**Objectives:** 110/45 (3)( B), 110.45 (18)( D) - Students will choose one option below and prepare a final project; each student will prepare an oral presentation to accompany his/her project and deliver to the class.

**Materials:** depends on the student's choice of project

**Project:** Students have a choice of completing one of the following options as a culminating project for their study of William Shakespeare and *Hamlet*:

1) Write a one-act play – **SATIRE/PARODY** – about *Hamlet*. The work will have a maximum of five characters. You will design the setting, write stage directions for the actors, design costumes, cast your play, and direct it. You have two options for presenting your play to the class:

- \* Film the production on a DVD to show to the class, or
- \* Present a live performance in class

Your final presentation/production must be very well prepared and show effort and professionalism. You will give the instructor a copy of your script before you present.

2) Construct a model of The Globe. Your model must be to scale of the current Globe in London.

You will write a paper (minimum four pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-pt. Times font, 1: margins, separate page listing references in MLA format) about the history of the theater in Elizabethan/Shakespearean times. Be sure to label all parts of your model appropriately. You are required to make an oral presentation – 3-5 minutes.

3) Write a research paper about the life and times of William Shakespeare. The paper will be a minimum of 15 pages long; you must have a minimum of six verifiable references, three of which will be from books; you may have three Internet sources. The paper will be typed, double spaced, 12 pt. Times font, 1” margins. References should be cited appropriately in the text and listed in MLA format on the “References” page.

**Assessment:** Students will receive two grades, one for the creativity/creation/amount of effort and/or research put into the project and one for the oral presentation.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS (Source: *dictionary.com*)

### MALAPROPISM

A humorous confusion of words that sound vaguely similar, as in “We have just ended our *physical* year” instead of “We have just ended our *fiscal* year.” [From Mrs. Malaprop, a character in Sheridan's drama, *The Rivals*, who makes amusing blunders in her use of words.]

### IAMBIC

The stress patterns of a line of unrhymed blank verse; an iamb consists of two beats, the first unstressed and the second stressed, as in “To **be** or **not** to **be**.”

### PENTAMETER

The meter or number of stressed syllables in a line of poetry; *penta*-meter has five stressed syllables, as in “O! **that** this **too** too **solid** **flesh** would **melt**.”

### BLANK VERSE

Unrhymed verse, esp. the unrhymed iambic pentameter most frequently used in English dramatic, epic, and reflective verse; unrhymed verse having a regular meter, usually of iambic pentameter.

### PUN

The humorous use of a word or phrase so as to emphasize or suggest its different meanings or applications, or the use of words that are alike or nearly alike in sound but different in meaning; a play on words.

### DRAMATIC IRONY

A plot device in which the audience's or reader's knowledge of events or individuals surpasses that of the characters. The words and actions of the characters therefore take on a different meaning for the audience or reader than they have for the play's characters. This may happen when, for example, a character reacts in an inappropriate or foolish way or when a character lacks self-awareness and thus acts under false assumptions.

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