

Lesson Plans for Key Stage 5 / 11-12th Grade

Lesson plans devised by Emma Smith, Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the University of Oxford.

Designed to accompany the Open Access website [First Folios Compared](#).

This document includes:

- > an introductory session for teachers with a few examples and some suggested further reading
- > plans to adapt for your teaching, which offer a short 'teacher briefing' and then some suggested exercises for students.

References to places within the First Folio are given by either page number or signature mark (or sometimes both). You can search all First Folios on firstfolios.com by page number or browse by signature mark. For more information on signature marks, see the [About page](#).

Introductory session for teachers

Before you start: getting to grips with the First Folio

No one would recommend trying to read a play in its entirety in Shakespeare's First Folio. Instead, here are some things to look out for:

1. **Stage directions** (*see lesson plan 1 below*).
These are often much more limited than in modern editions and can leave more room for theatrical interpretation. Look out in particular for missing or ambiguous exits: perhaps a character has not left the stage but is listening to what follows.
2. **Names of characters**
Sometimes different from the ones we give them, especially when the Folio gives them role names rather than individual ones. Does that have

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an impact on the kinds of character study we might be able to do with these figures?

3. Punctuation

Most punctuation in modern editions is editorial. How might the text read differently without their intervention?

Examples from specific plays

Hamlet

- > Claudius is called 'King' throughout – never Claudius. Is that significant?
- > How would you think about 'To be or not to be' – as a soliloquy (Hamlet is alone on stage), or not? The text is ambiguous at page 265 (mispaginated), signature mark oo5r.

Romeo and Juliet

- > There is no Prologue/Chorus introduction in the First Folio version; it begins with Act 1 scene 1. What difference would that make to a reading of the play as tragedy/inevitable etc.?

Much Ado About Nothing

- > Have a look at the initial entry stage direction for Hero's mother, Innogen – a ghost character who seems to have been forgotten and is left out by most editors. Why do you think Shakespeare might have written her out of the play? What difference would it make to the plot if there were a senior woman in Messina? (*Sig. mark 13r, page 101*).
- > Dogberry's speech prefixes often refer not to the name of the character but to Kemp, the actor (*sig. mark K4v*). There's more about Kemp on the British Library's [Discovering Literature](#) mini-site. At the end of the play, the line – apparently addressed to Beatrice – 'Peace, I'll stop your mouth', is given to Leonato. Most modern editions reallocate it to Benedick and instruct him to kiss her. Are they right to do that? (*Sig. mark L12, page 121*).

Othello

- > The Arden edition reallocates Desdemona's 'That Lodovico's a proper man' to Emilia (*sig. mark vv3r*) – do you agree?

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- > The scene with the Willow Song was not present in the first printed edition of the play. What does its inclusion here bring to the play's conclusion?

King Lear

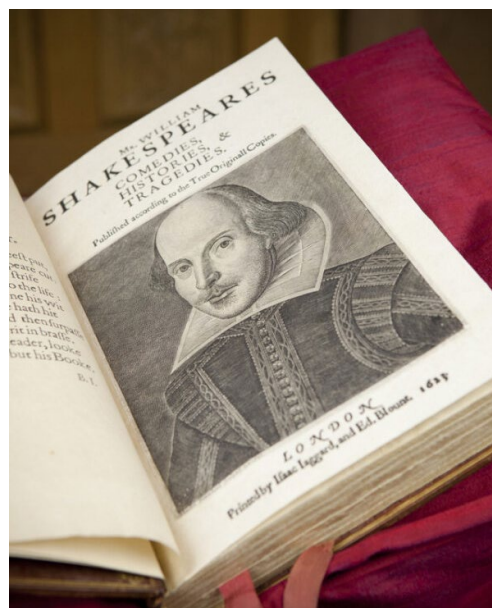
- > Compare the last 30 or so lines of the First Folio version (sig. mark ss3r) with the version published in [Quarto \(individual play form\) in 1608](#) – available on the British Library website. Most scholars now think the two versions represent Shakespeare's own revision of his work (the Folio is probably the revised version of the Quarto). Not all revisions improve things ... which do you think is better? Why?

The Merchant of Venice

- > In the trial scene in Act 4 (sig. mark P5v, page 178), Shylock's speech prefixes toggle between 'Shylock' (the individual man) and 'Jew' (the stereotype). How might that contribute to a discussion about antisemitism in the play?

Further reading on the First Folio

- > On the making of the book, see folio400.com.
- > [The Folger Shakespeare library](#) has a good site, and a number of [podcasts on First folios](#).
- > Over 50 digital copies of Shakespeare's First Folio can be viewed and used alongside these lesson plans at [First Folios Compared](#).



Credit Pete Le May

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Lesson Plan 1

Imagining Shakespeare from page to stage

Objective: To understand stage directions in text and practice.

Aim: To experiment with stage directions as an actor and reader, and then apply that knowledge to understand the editors' decision making.

Teacher Briefing

The First Folio includes very limited stage directions. We get entry and (usually) exit directions for characters, but we are never told *how* a character speaks or behaves at a particular point. Nor do the early texts make clear when a character is speaking directly to another one, or speaking to the audience in an aside (which no one on stage can hear). We don't really know why stage directions are so limited, and nor why some of them seem as if they are directions to actors and theatre makers about how to do the play, while others seem as if they are more directed to readers about how to imagine the play.

What modern editors do is to provide stage directions to help readers and students work out what is going on. That's really invaluable – but it also sometimes makes assumptions about how characters behave. In theatre rehearsal rooms, when actors are preparing new Shakespeare productions, they often delete all the stage directions and work out what's happening themselves as they get to know the characters and their interactions.

Sometimes an inserted or editorial stage direction (often marked by being placed in [square brackets]) closes down other possibilities or potential readings. If *King Lear* tells a servant to do something, do we just assume that the servant obeys – or might a play like *King Lear*, where servants sometimes disobey their tyrannical ruler, sometimes be doing something different? Typically, the text in the First Folio will simply give us the command, and no indication of what happens next.

Looking at the First Folio alongside a modern text can raise some really interesting theatrical and interpretative questions. Here are some examples for student activities.

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Student activities

1. Ask the students to look at the scene from the relevant play below – it might be useful to have the scene printed out from a folio text.
2. The students should highlight the stage directions (usually printed in italic).
3. Ask the students to imagine, or act out, the scene, making a note of the activities – entrances, exits, props etc – that might be required.
4. Get the students to annotate their scene with these additional stage directions.
5. Compare the students' acted stage direction with those from the class text edition. What did the editor include, how close was it to the students' annotations, where do they disagree and why?
6. Feedback on learning – reminder that many stage directions are added in by editors.



Macbeth

An early theatregoer, Simon Forman, described the scene of Banquo's ghost in some detail. It clearly made an impression on him:

The next night being at supper with his noblemen, whom he had bid to a feast (to the which also Banquo should have come), he began to speak of noble Banquo and to wish that he were there. And as he thus did, standing up to drink a carouse to him, the ghost of Banquo came and sat down in his chair behind him. And he turning about to sit down again saw the ghost of Banquo which fronted him so that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, uttering many words about his murder, by which when they heard that Banquo was murdered they suspected Macbeth.

Source: [Forman's account of seeing plays at the Globe: Macbeth, Cymbeline, Winter's Tale](#)

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Look at the scene in the First Folio text (*Macbeth* is printed for the first time in this book, so there isn't anything else to go on). Pages 141-2 in the Tragedies section (sig. marks mm5r-v) cover this scene and, as you see, there are limited stage directions.

Othello

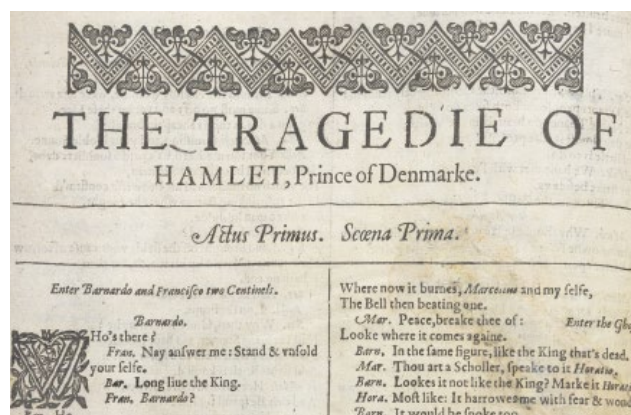
In Act 4 scene 1 of *Othello*, Iago attempts to give Othello 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's infidelity. He lets him overhear a conversation with Cassio about the handkerchief (pages 328-9 in the Tragedies, sig. mark tt6v-vv1r). Again, this scene has limited stage directions. Perhaps with the stage of the Globe Theatre in mind ([a useful virtual tour of the replica in London](#)) add in the stage directions you think are necessary to help readers make sense of the scene.

King Lear

The scene in which Edgar tricks Gloucester into believing he is jumping off Dover Cliff is a complex mixture of imagination, stage trickery and linguistic persuasion. It also has very few stage directions in the First Folio text. The scene is on pages 302-3 in the Tragedies section (sig. marks rr5v-rr6r).

Hamlet

The final scene of *Hamlet*, with the duel between Laertes and Hamlet and the deaths of Gertrude and Claudius, is short on stage directions. (In the Tragedies this is mispaginated as page 281 – a good reason to use the signature mark, which is qq1r.) What do you think needs to be added?



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Lesson Plan 2

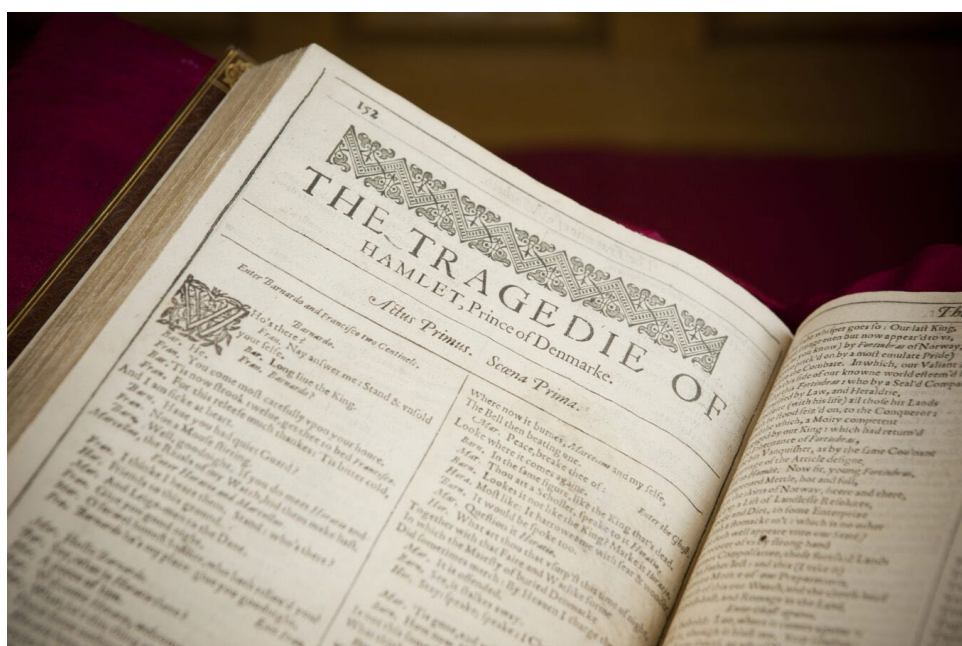
The idea of 'Shakespeare'

Objective: to understand the ways in which William Shakespeare became 'Shakespeare' in part through decisions made in the First Folio.

Aim: to review some of the claims that are made about Shakespeare and his reputation in the material around the plays in the book, and to compare these with the ways Shakespeare is presented by the books in which we encounter his works.

Teacher briefing

The compilers of the First Folio worked hard to establish Shakespeare as a serious writer whose book was worth buying. Focusing on the economics of book production – as much as on the genius of the writer and its contents – reminds us that books are created by lots of different people: from writers to typesetters (called compositors in Early-Modern England), from investors to paper makers, from booksellers to illustrators. Folio400.com has loads of information about the way this book was produced.



Credit Pete Le May

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Student exercises

1. 'To the Great Variety of Readers' (sig. mark ?A3r) is signed by two actor-friends of Shakespeare, John Heminge and Henry Condell. Try to pick out as many elements of this letter that stress buying and money. Now try to pick out the elements that claim Shakespeare was a great writer. What do you think they mean when they say, 'Who, as he was a happy imitator of nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together'? Do you think this is likely to have been true?
2. On sig. marks ?A4-?A4r, Shakespeare's fellow writer Ben Jonson has written an elegy (a funeral poem mourning the dead) for Shakespeare. Read it and see what he says about his rival and friend. What does he suggest is significant about Shakespeare and his legacy?
3. One of Ben Jonson's most famous lines in this poem is the claim that Shakespeare is, 'Not of an age but for all time'. Do you agree? Are there examples of how Shakespeare is 'for all time', or are there aspects of his work that you think are 'of an age'?



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Lesson Plan 3

Introducing 'paratexts'

Objective: to introduce the idea of paratext.

Aim: to explore how paratexts shape what we read and how we understand literary works.

Teacher briefing

The word 'paratext' means all the elements of a book that are not the fictional or authorial content. This heading might include book covers and their illustrations, blurbs, author pictures and biographies, introductions or footnotes or a further reading list. For printed plays, one typical paratext is a list of characters (sometimes listed, in Latin, 'Dramatis Personae').

Student exercise

Compare the First Folio text of the play you are studying with the edition you are using:

1. What elements does your edition have that the First Folio doesn't? (Introduction? Footnotes? Timeline or biography of Shakespeare? List of characters? Picture of the play in performance, or from a historical source?)
2. What difference might this make? (Knowing the characters in advance might give away plot but also make it easier to follow; footnotes can be helpful but also off-putting etc.)
3. Is there anything that we can deduce about early readers of Shakespeare's plays from their presentation in the First Folio (i.e. different requirements from us? Different expectations of what a play would look like? Maybe reading for different things – see 'Commonplacing' below.)

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If you are working on one of these plays: *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Timon of Athens*, *Henry IV Part 2* or *The Winter's Tale*, then there are lists of characters in the First Folio – but take a look: these come after, rather than before, the plays themselves.

4. Take a look at these lists: what do you think about the way the characters are listed [social hierarchy, gender, importance to the play?] and how does that compare with the list in your edited text?



Student exercise: *Othello*

The character list for *Othello* in the First Folio gives a lot of information about the characters and the play world.

Questions:

- > What do you think about the order in which characters are listed?
- > How accurate do you think the descriptions are? (e.g. 'a villaine' for Iago, a 'gull'd gentleman' for Roderigo, a 'courtesan' for Bianca.)
- > What can you find out about the implications of the term 'Moore' as a description of Othello? The discussion on Blackamoor/Moor in the publication [*Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England*](#) is recommended.
- > Can you write a character list that shapes the play in different ways, by defining the characters differently?

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Lesson Plan 4

Commonplacing and early readers

Objective: to understand how Shakespeare's earliest readers appreciated his works.

Aim: to explore particular copies of the First Folio to find out what they tell us about early readers.

Teacher briefing

One way that early seventeenth-century people were taught to read their books was with a pen in hand, to make notes or mark up particular sections. [The page's the thing – take it from Shakespeare's earliest readers](#) is a brief account for background. The practice of 'commonplacing' meant that readers pulled out quotations from their reading to put into a notebook or commonplace book, which they could then use as a store of wisdom or as a resource to improve their own writing style. (Plagiarism was not really a thing in the period.)

Commonplacing readers of Shakespeare tended not to read the play for the story, or for the characters, but for the language. They were looking for bits of the play that could be taken out of the immediate context of the plot and reused in different contexts. In some ways, commonplacing is similar to modern lists of famous quotations – but with one difference. The famous quotations now tend to be very distinctive phrases. If you quoted them, everyone would probably know you were quoting. Commonplacing readers were looking for less obvious quotations that could be incorporated more seamlessly into their own lives and their own writing. Not many people commonplaced the famous line in *Richard III*: 'a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse', probably because they couldn't imagine a situation in which they would ever reuse it.

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Student exercises

1. Lots of the First Folio copies on firstfolios.com have commonplace marks. Sometimes these are underlinings and sometimes crosses or other marginal marks. The [Wurttemberg](#) and [Auckland](#) copies are good places to start. Turn the virtual pages until you find some of the marginal marks or underlining. Have a look at the phrase or speech that has been marked.
 - a. What do you think the reader particularly saw in it?
(Perhaps it was proverbial, or beautiful, or confirmed his (usually) prejudices?)
 - b. How might this compare with the ways in which modern readers might appreciate the play?
2. You could compare this with another online resource, the [Database of Dramatic Extracts](#). This focuses on the other end of the commonplacing process: the handwritten books or papers in which readers recorded these chosen passages. You can view a list of [results for William Shakespeare](#).

