

## **The Importance of Teaching Shakespeare in Education**

William Shakespeare is widely considered to be the greatest playwright of the English language, if not the greatest and most influential writer in Western culture. Over the four centuries since their publication, these works have been performed, read, analyzed, and studied innumerable times. His plays are world-renown, having been translated into dozens of languages, and his stories read and performed in every major culture. Since the publication of these plays, they have garnered the praise of literary circles for their brilliance and elegance, and have consistently worked their way into school curricula seeking to educate about English and famous literature. But why has this one's author's work been so highly regarded over the past few centuries, and why is it still a main focus of the education of literature?

Many of the details of Shakespeare's history are not well known, but his influence in Western culture has been astounding nonetheless. His works, published around the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, set a new level of literary beauty that no author before him had yet achieved, or with such consistency. The total volume of Shakespeare's works numbers is staggering, consisting of dozens of comedies, histories, tragedies, poems, and sonnets. No other author can be said to have written so many varied topics with such a high degree of literary expertise. The breadth of the themes and plots that his plays cover is extensive, yet they all manage to portray a realistic and sympathetic human element. A student would benefit alone from just the wide array of topics and subjects in his works.

Quantity alone does not make an author legendary, but the quality of his work too confirms his place in history. It has been a constant effort in the centuries since his plays'

production to investigate the themes and meanings behind them, which are always deep and beautifully portrayed. The variety of literary styles and elegant imagery he worked into his poems are regarded as some of the greatest expressions of life and beauty. His insight into human behavior is accurate and persuasive, and he used the theater to its full effect in trying to convey, not only a story, but a message to the audience about human life itself.

Even the most beautiful works can be useless, however, if their meaning is lost on their audience. The question remains: why should Shakespeare continue to be taught today? His works are centuries old, and written in a form of old English that many people have trouble with when first reading. There are many contemporary authors who are easier to understand, easier to relate to, and can appeal to modern sensibilities, whether comedic, tragic, or situational. Shakespeare is often included in schools alongside stories of contemporary authors and modern life, and many students cannot see the connection between the two.

The greatest legacy of Shakespeare's works, however, is that the situations and themes he deals with *are* still relevant. If we look at the importance of his works, it is clear that his writing helped define the highest standard of literature in modern Western culture, a legacy that still exists with us today. Not only this, but what he conveys to the reader through his stories is part of the human condition, which we can all relate to and which we all have experienced. While we may not find Shakespeare's "comedies" to be comedic, or his tragedies to be all too shocking, we can find the characters intensely similar to ourselves. The meanings behind Shakespeare's plays are the messages he attempted to convey, and once one can get past the difficulty of reading his works, one can find that these messages, if not the language it was written in, are timeless.