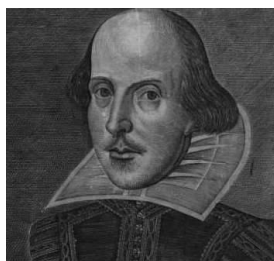


ENGL 145: Shakespeare and Performance | Fall 2025

Class



Classroom: Boccardo Business Center 123
Days/Time: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 9:00–10:15 a.m.
Instructor: Andreas P. Bassett
Email: andreas.bassett@sjsu.edu
Office Location: FOB 128
Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:30–11:30 a.m.

Format

Class will meet in person, twice a week. Additional materials will be available on Canvas. All assignments to be submitted to Canvas.

Description

Welcome to English 145, an introductory course on the dramatic works of William Shakespeare, one of the most revered authors in the English language and literary history. This course is intended for anyone who has a curiosity about Shakespeare and/or a keen interest in studying literature at the college level. No previous experience is required or assumed.

We will start with the basics and progress to broader topics and issues: Who was Shakespeare, and what factors contributed to the enduring popularity of his works? What did Shakespeare's audience expect, find entertaining, and desire in his plays, both on the stage and page? How was Shakespeare's legacy immortalized in the theatre and in print, and passed down to future generations, including our own? Over the semester, we will read and become acquainted with select Shakespeare plays. Our aim will be to develop deeper and well-informed understandings of their content and lasting impact on the world at large. Throughout this process, we will familiarize ourselves with some of the essential tools of literary analysis and humanities-based research.

Objectives

1. Explore several of Shakespeare's plays in textual form and through performance both on stage and screen.
2. Examine Shakespeare's plays by considering their literary form, genre, content, and theatrical and historical contexts.
3. Analyze and evaluate contemporary productions and film adaptations of the plays, assessing how choices in acting, directing, design, etc. inflect interpretation.

NOTE: Reading Shakespeare is challenging. But the difficulty is a big part of what makes it worth doing. This class is designed to be accessible and rewarding for students at any level of skill or prior experience provided that they are willing to treat the material with earnest attention and patience. You will do the most to ensure your success if you read the assigned texts slowly and carefully, stay on schedule, and do not seek shortcuts on the internet or in translations. For a

full list of tips on managing the reading, see Appendix: Shakespeare Survival Guide at the end of the syllabus.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively.
4. Develop and carry out research projects.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Texts

1. Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare: Essential Plays / The Sonnets*. Edited by Stephen

Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. Third edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016. ISBN: 978-0-393-933130.

*Please ensure that you acquire the printed edition.

2. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* will be available on Canvas.

NOTE: Although Shakespeare's plays are available online, those versions often do not include annotations or notes on the language and on the text. This information is essential to successful comprehension, which is crucial to your success in this course. With the exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, you are expected to use the abovementioned assigned textbook.

Performances & Films

At two points in the semester, you will be tasked with watching, interrogating, and writing about a modern Shakespearean stage performance and film. These are mostly available on popular streaming services and the following resources offered by the SJSU Library.

Kanopy Streaming (kanopy.com/en/sjsu): Several full-length films based on Shakespeare's plays are available for free viewing.

Digital Theatre Plus (edu-digitaltheatreplus-com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/): Stagings of Shakespeare's plays performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe are available for free viewing.

Assignments

Essay #1—Literary Analysis: In a 4–6-page, double-spaced close reading, you will assume the role of a literary critic and investigate an under-examined or overlooked aspect in one of Shakespeare's plays. Emphasis will be on improving your understanding of Shakespeare's world-building and meaning-making while developing your skills in close, careful observation.

Essay #2—Groundling for a Day: For this paper, you will take a virtual field trip to the Globe Theatre in London and watch a full, live-recorded production of a play from the syllabus, reporting on the experience in a 4–6-page, double-spaced field memo. Emphasis will be on understanding theatrical performance as an expressive medium and the Shakespearean theatre in particular as a site of meaning-making.

Essay #3—Film Critique: In this 4–6-page, double-spaced paper, you will assume the role of a film critic and judge and evaluate a film adaptation of a Shakespeare play from the syllabus. Emphasis will be on understanding how cinematic adaptations reinterpret and reshape Shakespeare’s plays. Your primary task will be to interrogate some of the interpretive paths a film generates while also considering which original meanings it may alter or foreclose.

Final Exam: An exam covering all lectures, discussions, and readings, to be given in finals week at the university-appointed time. The Final Exam will be a mix of identification, multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. It will be easy if you attended class and did the reading. We will have a short review session in the last class.

Canvas Questions (optional): If you have questions about the plays, lectures, or course material, please feel free to post them on Canvas. I will make time to address them during our class meetings.

Late Work Policy: Keeping in mind the many unforeseen events that can occur in the average SJSU student’s life, I have a generous extension policy. Provided you give me a request in writing (complete with a new deadline) before a paper’s due date, most requests for an extension will be granted. If the original deadline is passed by a student who has not received an extension or an extended deadline has been passed, 10% of the total points possible will be taken off for lateness up to one week. After the first week, 10% will be taken off the top of the paper score for each day late (i.e. 8 days late = -20%, 9 days = -30%, 10 days = -40%, and so on). After 16 calendar days, no paper will be accepted.

Paper Format

Please submit all papers in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Please include a heading in the upper left-hand corner (your full name, my full name, the class name, and the due date of the respective assignment) and page numbers in the top right header of your document. Make sure to add a centered assignment name or a creative title. Papers are to be submitted on Canvas in the Assignments tab.

Participation

“Participating” is defined in this class as *doing the reading* and *being able and willing to respond* to the comments and questions of both the professor and your fellow students on a daily basis. As a large portion of this course involves discussion, active participation will be imperative. In addition, because the exchange of diverse ideas is so important to this class, it is necessary for everyone to be respectful of one another. In our class discussions, it is normal and even

expected that we will disagree. Differences can and should be discussed, but these discussions should maintain the academic spirit of respect. Disrespectful language and behavior will not be tolerated in our classroom.

Evaluation

Your final course grade will be weighted as follows:

Essay #1	20%
Essay #2	20%
Essay #3	20%
Final Exam	20%
Presence and <i>active</i> participation in all class sessions	20%

Department Grading Policy

In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. Grades issued will represent a full range of student performance and will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment:

The “**A**” essay will be well organized and well developed, demonstrating a clear understanding and fulfillment of the assignment. It will show the student’s ability to use language effectively and construct sentences distinguished by syntactic complexity and variety. Such essays will be essentially free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors.

The “**B**” essay will demonstrate competence in the same categories as the “**A**” essay. The chief difference is that the “**B**” essay will show some slight weaknesses in one of those categories. It may slight one of the assigned tasks, show less facility of expression, or contain some minor grammatical, mechanical, or usage flaws.

The “**C**” essay will complete all tasks set by the assignment, but show weakness in fundamentals (usually development), with barely enough specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. The sentence construction may be less mature, and the use of language less effective and correct than the “**B**” essay.

The “**D**” essay will neglect one of the assigned tasks and be noticeably superficial in its treatment of the assignment—that is, too simplistic or short. The essay may reveal some problems in development, with insufficient specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. It will contain grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The “**F**” essay will demonstrate a striking underdevelopment of ideas and insufficient or unfocused organization. It will contain serious grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A= excellent; B= above average; C= average; D= below average; F= failure. Courses graded according to the A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC shall replace D or F. In such cases, NC shall also substitute for W (or Withdrawal) because neither grade (NC or W) affects students' GPA.

Classroom Etiquette

We will be spending a lot of time together in our classroom and engaging each other in thoughtful discussion. With that in mind, we need to be mindful of how we behave and treat each other.

- Please NO phones
- Please come to class with course texts read and be prepared to discuss them
- Please be open-minded and respectful of each other's ideas, opinions, and questions

Recording and Use of Instructional Content

I post lecture slides to Canvas (under Files) after each class. In accordance with the Canvas Terms of Use, I retain ownership of posted content as my intellectual property, and I do not permit its distribution or use outside our class. Except as part of a registered accommodation, I do not permit my lectures to be recorded.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's ideas and writing as long as you cite them. But submitting work from online or other secondary sources without attribution is a form of plagiarism. Any assignment containing plagiarism will receive a failing grade, which may lead to failure of the course. Further disciplinary action may also be taken by the University per policy [F 15-7](#).

AI/LLMs

In many ways, the act of writing is a way to think further on a topic and to organize or clarify those thoughts. The connection between writing and thinking is crucial to your development as a communicator, and it is a skill that will serve you well in all your future endeavors. Using AI to respond to essay prompts is cheating; it is cheating you out of the education you are paying for. If I find that you used AI for any significant percentage of any written assignment, I will not provide feedback, nor will you receive a passing grade for the assignment.

WARNING: Some of our class materials involve depictions of suicide, xenophobia, and antisemitism, among other things you may find troubling. If you would like to be provided with content warnings, please do not hesitate to email me. I am always happy to talk over any concerns you might have about this course.

Course Calendar

This is an outline of the semester which contains some key dates to remember (holidays, readings, assignment due dates, etc.). This calendar is subject to change, but you should consider it to be accurate unless I inform you otherwise. Remember, it is your responsibility to ask me or a classmate about missed assignments if you are absent.

Week 1	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Thu 8/21	Hello, introductions, syllabus, course overview		
Week 2	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 8/26	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Acts 1–II	<i>Midsummer</i> Acts 1–II	
Thu 8/28	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Midsummer</i> Acts 1II–IV	
Week 3	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/2	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Act V	<i>Midsummer</i> Act V	
Thu 9/4	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts I–II	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts I–II	
Week 4	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/9	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts II–III	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts II–III	
Thu 9/11	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act V	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act V	Essay #1 due on Canvas by 11:59pm Friday 9/12
Week 5	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/16	<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> Acts I–II	<i>Merry Wives</i> Acts I–II (Canvas)	
Thu 9/18	<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Merry Wives</i> Acts III–IV (Canvas)	
Week 6	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/23	<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> Act V	<i>Merry Wives</i> Act V (Canvas)	
Thu 9/25	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> Acts I–II	<i>Merchant</i> Acts I–II	
Week 7	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/30	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Merchant</i> Acts III–IV	
Thu 10/2	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> Act V	<i>Merchant</i> Act V	

Week 8	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/7	In-class book exhibit		
Thu 10/9	Catch-Up Day (NO CLASS)		Essay #2 due on Canvas by 11:59pm Friday 10/10
Week 9	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/14	<i>Hamlet</i> Acts I–II	<i>Hamlet</i> Acts I–II	
Thu 10/16	<i>Hamlet</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Hamlet</i> Acts III–IV	
Week 10	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/21	<i>Hamlet</i> Act V	<i>Hamlet</i> Act V	
Thu 10/23	<i>Othello</i> Acts I–II	<i>Othello</i> Acts I–II	
Week 11	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/28	<i>Othello</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Othello</i> Acts III–IV	
Thu 10/30	<i>Othello</i> Act V	<i>Othello</i> Act V	
Week 12	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/4	<i>Macbeth</i> Acts I–II	<i>Macbeth</i> Acts I–II	
Thu 11/6	<i>Macbeth</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Macbeth</i> Acts III–IV	
Week 13	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/11	Veteran's Day (NO CLASS)		
Thu 11/13	<i>Macbeth</i> Act V	<i>Macbeth</i> Act V	
Week 14	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/18	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts I–II	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts I–II	
Thu 11/20	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts III–IV	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts III–IV	Essay #3 due on Canvas by 11:59pm Friday 11/21
Week 15	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/25	Catch-Up Day (NO CLASS)		
Thu 11/27	Thanksgiving (NO CLASS)		
Week 16	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 12/2	<i>The Tempest</i> Act V	<i>The Tempest</i> Act V	
Thu 12/4	Final review, evaluations, farewells		
Week 17	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 12/9	Finals Week (NO CLASS)		
Thu 12/11	Final Exam, 8:30–10:30 a.m.		

Appendix—Shakespeare Survival Guide

Here is a set of best practices to make the reading process bearable if you are struggling with Shakespeare (and maximally productive if you are not). Questions? andreas.bassett@sjsu.edu

- 1) **Silence your devices.** Disable notifications. If it has a screen or a speaker, it shouldn't be allowed to bother you. Reading Shakespeare is a discipline of attention, a little like zen or mindfulness meditation. If you can train your mind to stay with something this challenging, it will pay you dividends elsewhere in life. Even with your devices turned off, your brain will want to wander. When it does, try not to worry. Simply take note of the lapse and return your attention to the words on the page.
- 2) **Start from a place of curiosity.** Everyone comes to Shakespeare with preconceptions. Most of these are limiting. Many are wrong. When encountering literature or art from another time period, the best approach is openness and consideration of the unknown. Think of it like studying abroad in a place where you barely grasp the language. At first you struggle to understand things and get around town. But the more you put yourself out there and embrace the difference of it all, the more you will ultimately take from the experience.
- 3) **Lower your expectations about comprehension.** You may not “get it,” and that is okay. Permit yourself to be confused. Some scholars spend their entire careers studying a work and never feel they truly get it. If you understand even 40% of what you read on a first pass, you are doing great!
- 4) **Read or skim the introductions.** Like anything old—say, a silent film, or ancient sculpture—a Shakespeare play will be more accessible to you if you have a little context to guide your attention. The short (≈ 8 pp.) introductions to each play in our textbook are there to give you the essential background information and a working understanding of the major plot points, characters, and themes before you start to read. I cannot recommend them enough.
- 5) **Allow yourself plenty of time.** Seriously. The hardest thing about this class will be doing the reading. In terms of page count, it may not seem like a lot, but if you are really doing the work, it should take you a couple of hours or more to complete the reading assignment before each class session. Please pace yourself accordingly. Try to read the important parts twice. Things always make a little more sense the second time around.
- 6) **Take good notes.** Read actively, not passively. Underline passages, make notes to yourself in the margins or in a notebook, summarize the plot of each scene after you read it—whatever method works for you. The best aid in comprehension (says science!) is physically putting a pen to paper.
- 7) **Watch a performance.** The SJSU Library gives you access to Digital Theatre Plus which allows you to stream full-length filmed productions of nearly all of Shakespeare's plays, some of which include performances that recreate the original staging conditions of the Globe Theatre. This is a brilliant tool for clearing up confusion about the difficult parts of a play, or just generally for supplementing the reading process with a live performance.
- 8) **Try not to look for help on the internet or in translations.** Shakespeare is the most famous English writer of all time, so there are thousands of resources out there promising—dubiously—to help you understand him. If English is not your first language,

you may be tempted to do the reading for this class in a translation. Even if English is your first language, you may be tempted to consult a “plain English” version (e.g. on a website like Sparknotes). But as any scholar of translation will tell you, these are not the same works as the ones in our textbook. Literally. Different things will happen in the plot. The characters and themes will be different. It will be obvious on your exam and essays that you read a different text. If you follow this guide and find yourself in need of additional help, don’t hesitate to email me and I will direct you to a reliable, accurate source!