

TIPS TO HELP YOU READ SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

1. Un-Yoda the sentences to find the main subject and verb.
2. Look up the words you do not know, recognize or understand—you cannot count on contextual help.
3. Recognize figurative language and figure out the purpose of the figurative language.
4. Look for intentional stage directions in the lines of the play.
5. Look for sound devices to understand the characters.
6. Read out loud with people.
7. Look for things mentioned three times.
8. Follow the plot triangle for a Shakespearean tragedy.

FUNKY WORDS—COMMON DURING THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

Against:	for; in preparation for
Alack:	alas, an exclamation of sorrow
An, and:	if
Anon:	soon
Aye:	yes
But:	only; except
E'en:	even
E'er:	ever
Haply:	perhaps
Happy:	fortunate
Hence:	away; from here
Hie:	hurry
Hither:	here
Marry:	indeed
Whence:	where
Wilt:	will
Withal:	in addition; not withstanding
Would:	wish

Why was Shakespeare such a deliberate writer?

1. The people in his audience were largely illiterate, so they were great listeners and readers of body language (much like a blind person has a heightened sense of taste, smell, hearing and touch).
2. His actors were given only the pages of the play with their individual lines and word or two cues for each line. They, too, were great listeners.
3. His theatre had no props, minimal costumes and no set design, so the actors' lines had to paint the picture of the set, props and costumes.
4. There really was no director, so the direction had to be in the lines of the text.

What does that mean for us now?

You should know how he wrote and steps you should take in order to be able to enjoy his works. Please note I have given you hints as to when we will learn the tips. Use this as a review.

1. **Modern English:** Understand that he wrote in the same English in which we speak and write now--Modern English. He coined many of the words and phrases we use today
2. **Inversion:** He inverts his sentences (yoda-ing, as I like to call it) in order to maintain his meter and rhyme
3. **Three Times is the Charm:** He shares important information with the audience in the dialogue 3 times. He tells you something is going to happen (sometimes in the form of foreshadowing and sometimes he is more obvious); he shows it happening, and then, he has someone say, "Hey, did you see that just happen?"
4. **"Here" "There" and "I have a Sword in my Hand":** He will give clues as to stage directions and props in the lines. If an actor says something is "here", he should be able to touch it. If an actor says something is "there", he should not be able to touch it. If the actor says I have a sword in my hand, than he would look pretty silly if he didn't have one in his hand
5. **Alliteration/consonance:** He uses the repetition of consonant sounds in order to set the mood of the scene, make the audience feel comfortable or not, and to characterize his characters. Look and listen for the repetition of consonant sound. See if they are hard sounds (cacophony) or soft sounds
6. **Assonance and Emotions:** Shakespeare uses the long "O" to show extreme pain or pleasure. As well, he uses the long "E" sound to either show genuine happiness or insanity
7. **Dovetailing:** An actor's trick to make sure lines from one character to the next move smoothly. It keeps the audience on its feet and paying attention
8. **Figurative Language:** He uses a ton of figurative language. You need to remember to find the subject and the main verb to follow the play, but ask yourself why he uses so much—for what purpose
9. **Get Help/Figure out the Context of the Lines!:** Read footnotes, talk to people and use tools to help you understand the lines and the context of each line. If you get behind, get caught up. Use outside resources to help you understand. You are not cheating if you use those resources to help you understand the text. You are cheating if you use resources in place of the text
10. **Follow the Plot Format for a Tragedy.** Look for the elements as you go along. Anticipate the tragic end