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Live Classes

# British Literature: Shakespeare

Whit Jones

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Syllabus

2025-2026



## Personal Note from Instructor:

I'm glad to have you in my Shakespeare course! I've taught literature at the college level for around thirty-eight years—at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Go Tarheels!), where I taught literature courses as a graduate teaching assistant while working on my Ph.D. in English and American literature, and at Bryan College, where I'm completing my thirty-third year as a full-time English professor. I was a Renaissance minor in my Ph.D. program, so I studied a good bit of the literature of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Years ago, however, I taught four years of public high school English, and I've helped my wife homeschool all four of our children (the youngest of whom turns twenty-four this month), so I have a good idea of both what is required for success in college and what it takes to help high school students see the beauty and truth of classic literature and its relevance to their lives and their walk with Christ.

Some students don't like studying literature because they haven't been taught it well. They've been given the impression that they should be really impressed by a story poem, or play just because a famous author wrote it, even though they don't really understand it or see what makes it special. It's particularly for such students that I'm teaching Shakespeare.

In all my teaching I try to help students see the special skill that went into a story, poem, or play and the deep truth about life and human nature that it conveys—truth that helps them better understand themselves and the person sitting next to them. So in the end my students seem to gain a significant understanding of why generations of readers have continued to find a classic literary work worth reading. The students also gain the ability to explain that work of literature—what it means and how it communicates that meaning—to others, and they learn how the work's universal human truth applies practically to their own life, including (and especially) their walk with Christ.

Everyone thinks of Shakespeare as a great author because of his amazing skill with words, but not many people realize how deep and how biblical his insights are into human nature and human life. Shakespeare lived during the first great age of Bible translation, and he was either a believer himself (my opinion) or saw tremendous resources for his dramas in the ideas, images, and characters found in the translations of the Bible into English that were being made during his lifetime for the first time in human history.

I want this course to help you understand not just Shakespeare's basic plots but the rich life truths he communicates and their application to your life as a believer. And at the same time I want you to see how much fun and how satisfying really understanding Shakespeare can be. We'll study examples of the four major dramatic genres represented in his plays—history, comedy, tragedy, and romance. The course will also give you a chance to greatly improve your college writing skills, particularly with regard to textual interpretation. You will also get to develop your skills in research-paper writing. That's why the course can serve as both a [writing credit](#) and a [literature or British literature credit](#).

## Recommended Grade Level:

11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Prerequisites:

None.

## Live Lecture Date & Time:

The class will meet Fridays at 2:00-3:20 pm EST.

## Description:

In British Literature: Shakespeare, we'll begin with *The Merchant of Venice*. It's a fairly early play, it's a comedy, and it contains both romance and attempted murder, so it's a really interesting place in Shakespeare corpus (the body of his work) to begin. It's also a particularly striking example of the way Shakespeare weaves every detail of his plays into a rich fabric that communicates his themes, his complex statements about human nature and human life. From there, we'll go to another comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which makes really colorful statements about the nature of both theater and romantic love. Then we'll tackle a history play, *Henry V*, which is Shakespeare's picture of a particularly faithful, dynamic Christian king. You'll answer questions I'll provide each week as we work through each play, checking your answers against answers I provide and turning in typed versions of a designated subset of these answers. You'll take a test on each of these plays that involves objective answers and an essay. You'll also work on a literary interpretation paper on *The Merchant of Venice*. There will be a first-semester exam on these first three plays that involves objective questions and an essay, just as the tests on the plays did.

Then we'll begin the second semester with *Julius Caesar*, a play written the same year as *Henry V*. It is much like a history play, but it is also one of Shakespeare's tragedies. The main character of *Julius Caesar*—Brutus (not Caesar!)—is a thorough-going Stoic, a pagan moralist. His leadership contrasts in definite and important ways with that of Christian King Henry, revealing a great deal about Shakespeare's vision of both leadership and Christian faith. Then we go to a second tragedy, that of the famous Hamlet, whose values are distorted in ways that relate to the problems displayed by Brutus. So *Julius Caesar* will help throw light for us on the meaning of *Hamlet*. Then we'll finish with *The Tempest*, thought by scholars to be Shakespeare's last play and classified as a romance. It is a play full of miracles that comments in wonderful ways on Shakespeare's career, the transforming power of the theater, the power of God as the ultimate Playwright on the

stage of the world, and what it takes for us to be an audience who learn and grow from the theater they observe. *The Tempest* will help tie together the insights that we've learned in the other plays and think more deeply about the application of those insights to our lives.

Throughout the course I will use a Homework Reading and Answers Quiz each week to make sure you're keeping up with the reading. You'll pledge that you've read the assigned reading and answer questions on that reading, including some written answers. You'll check your answers against the answers I provide for correction before you turn in the quiz and come to class. In the live Zoom class you'll share some of your written answers and make other comments in the chat box as we discuss that week's reading. Over the course of the year you'll take a test on each play, write an interpretive paper on one of the plays, and write an MLA style research paper on some aspect of Shakespeare's culture.

As I grade your writing over the course of the year, I will comment on both your strengths and weaknesses in such areas as grammar, punctuation, and formatting, clarity and accuracy in your thesis and sub-points, and persuasiveness in the support you provide for them through specific examples from the play and analysis of those examples. By the end of the year, you should know a great deal more not only about Shakespeare and the life truths he communicates but about how to write clearly, correctly, and persuasively for any college course.

Finally, I think it's great to have some of Shakespeare's beautiful words committed to memory, so each semester there will be a recitation assignment in which I'll ask you to memorize a number of lines from one of our plays to recite to one or both of your parents. And connected with this smaller grade, I'm also going to have you read a few Shakespearean sonnets with me and attempt to write your own sonnet.

## Required Class Materials:

I strongly recommend that you buy the Signet Classics paperbacks of these six required plays, most of them labeled “Newly Revised” editions. These editions will have the same act, scene, and line numbers that I will be using. You may easily purchase them at Amazon.com. Here are those six paperbacks:

- *The Merchant of Venice*, Signet Classics, Newly Revised Edition, ISBN 978-0451526809
- *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Signet Classics, Newly Revised Edition 978-0451526960
- *Henry V*, Signet Classics, ISBN 978-0451526908
- *Julius Caesar*, Signet Classics, Newly Revised Edition, ISBN 978-0451526892
- *Hamlet*, Signet Classics, Newly Revised Edition, ISBN 978-0451526922
- *The Tempest*, Signet Classics, Newly Revised Edition, (for some reason Amazon.com gives no ISBN # for this play).

These plays are listed in the order in which we will be going over them. I recommend that you buy all six plays over the summer, but be sure that you have bought *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the beginning of the course in late August.

## Recommended Class Materials:

It would help you to have a pen and highlighter, for marking passages in the plays and taking notes, and a notebook for keeping track of these notes and copies of some of the helpful files I provide in Canvas. A working laptop camera would be helpful—I appreciate being able to see students’

faces when we're sharing prayer requests and praying before the recorded class begins, though this is not required. A working laptop microphone would also be helpful, since I give occasionally students extra class participation credit if they're willing to read a paragraph or poem stanza aloud for the class to hear.

## Course Topics:

We will cover the Shakespeare plays listed above—two comedies, a history play, two tragedies, and a romance—and a few of his sonnets. And we will be consistently addressing how the truths these works teach apply to our lives and our walk with Christ.

## Assignment Structure:

### Class Participation

I'll expect all students to be present every week for our online class Zoom meeting. Be on time. It's best to click on the "Meeting Link for Live Class" link in Canvas ten or so minutes before class begins so that if there's any problem entering, you can solve it before class time. It's better for you come late to class than not come at all, but significant or persistent lateness will hurt your *class participation grade*. Another part of your class participation grade will depend on your using the Chat box to ask at least one question or make one comment during each class meeting. I don't want just to lecture on the works assigned. I also want to respond to questions that you ask about the works and points that you make.

Have the typed answers you turned in for the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz available on your computer during class. I ask students to copy and paste some of these answers into the Chat box as part of our class discussion. I'll also try to activate each student's microphone occasionally and have him or her read a few lines aloud to the class as part of his class participation.

Any students who are taking the class but are not able to come to the live class on any given week may watch the recording of the class that will be posted in “Class Recordings” on Canvas and gain credit for class participation by emailing me the following:

1. The date of class they missed.
2. The legitimate reason they had to miss that class.
3. A statement that they’ve watched all of that week’s recording.
4. Two of their best typed homework answers for that week, with the literary work and number of the question clearly noted along with each answer.

Students are not allowed to gain class participation credit for a missed live class unless they have that “legitimate reason” for missing. If they do have such a reason, however, and follow the directions above, they get full class participation credit for that class. Class participation is a significant part of the course grade.

### **Homework Reading and Answers Quiz**

On the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz for each week, I’ll ask you to pledge on your honor that you’ve read all of this assignment in order to get full credit for your homework for that week. You may read plot summaries of that part of the play found online or elsewhere to help you understand what is going on. Do not, however, read the plot summary instead of reading the actual play—read the assigned acts and scenes in the actual play as well. And do not read interpretations of the play. We’ll be doing the interpretation in class. Each week I’ll also assign you to answer questions on this reading. You may do many of the answers orally or in handwriting, if you prefer, but I will require you to type some of them that I specify and turn them in as part of that week’s Quiz. I require you to pledge on the Quiz that you’ve checked all your answers against the ones I’ve provided, but *only after* you’ve first attempted your own answer.



## Tests on the Plays

On the tests on each play, you'll sometimes answer a number of objective questions from memory and you'll always write an essay on the play. I'll usually give you the essay question on the test in advance, however, and let you prepare notes for it. I'll grade the test essays for clear, accurate, grammatically correct, persuasive writing, but I will take into some account that you have limited time on a test essay.

## Interpretive Paper

The first semester you'll write one paper, apart from the test essays, in which you will do a well-supported interpretation of one of the plays we've studied. You'll use MLA style and support your thesis and topic-sentence points with correctly introduced, punctuated, and documented quotations from the play, along with a Works Cited Entry.

## Research Paper

The second semester you'll do an MLA style research paper on some aspect of Shakespeare's life or culture—anything from scholars' reconstructions of the Globe Theater to the practice of medicine in Shakespeare's day—a study topic that can help you better understand Shakespeare's plays and their context. You'll learn to do correct MLA parenthetical references and a Works Cited list for your source.

## Shakespeare Memorization

I'll require every student to memorize and recite for family or friends at least ten lines of Shakespeare, with higher credit going to students who recite more than ten lines. Shakespeare's language is so beautiful and memorization has become such a forgotten art that memorizing some of his brilliant lines is a worthwhile assignment.

## Grading:

Here are the percentages that show how heavily these parts of the coursework that I've just discussed will be weighted in figuring your final course grade:

- Class Participation Average: 10%
- Homework Reading and Answers Quiz Average: 30%
- Test Average: 30%
- Interpretation Paper: 10%
- Research Paper Prep Assignments: 5%
- Research Paper: 10%
- Recitation of Shakespeare: 5%

All assignments, tests, quizzes, papers, and homework are numerically graded by me and posted in the student's Canvas portal. I do not give letter grades but instead use a 0-100 point percentage-based grading system. This grading system is consistent with Apologia's policy. Canvas recommends a numeric-to-letter-grade conversion that I use, but final letter grades for the course are up to the parents, using a scale that they determine is best for their own homeschool. Parental involvement is very important—parents are still needed to check on completed assignments and if necessary, observe quizzes and test-taking. As the authorized, legal, educational institution, your own homeschool, superintended by your parents, is responsible for converting numeric grades to letter grades and for keeping all records, grades, transcripts, and any other documentation necessary for being accepted by other schools, colleges, or universities.

## Due Dates and Late Policy:

Any homework quiz, survey, chapter test, or paper not turned in on time will be counted as late, and a deduction of up to ten points or a letter grade may be made if it is a full week late. More points may be deducted for

further lateness, assuming that I agree to grade the very late work. I will be sure to specify the day and time every assignment is to be turned in. When truly extenuating circumstances, verified by your parents, are the reason for the lateness, I will provide extra time on the assignment with no late penalty.

## Student Conduct:

### Academic Dishonesty

I'll expect you to be truthful in all the pledges you make in this class regarding homework, tests, and papers. Any pledge that I find to be untrue or any assignment that I find that you have cheated on, rather than doing your own work and doing it according to the rules I've set, I will automatically give a grade of *O*. (Even an *F* in my class is fifty points better than a *O*.) Apart from the major effect on your grade, untruthfulness could cause you to learn much less in this course than you are capable of. But being truthful has larger implications than the grade you make or what you learn in a course. Truth is the basis of all relationship, and a habit of untruthfulness can destroy a marriage, a close relationship with a child or a friend, and even eliminate a chance to lead someone to Christ.

Part of this truthfulness means that all of the writing you must be your own—your own words and sentence structures. You are never to copy my answers for your homework, and you are never to use the wording of any other source unless you use quotation marks and attribute the words to that source. Even if you use just the ideas from a published source, not the exact words or sentence structures, you must acknowledge that source. On the research paper you will definitely be using source ideas, and we will go over how to give each source proper credit for both that source writer's words and ideas, using correct MLA documentation. When you are pledging on the Homework Reading and Answers Quizzes that you have read all the assigned reading in the play we're studying, you must really have done that reading in order to answer "True" to that statement. The same is the case with the

statement on the quiz that you have answered all the assigned questions and *then* (and only then) checked them against mine in order to improve your own. Unless I specify that you can use research and you acknowledge that research and give proper credit, you are on your honor to use only your own words and ideas, along with your consideration of my answers and anything you learned in class discussion, when you answer homework questions, take a test, or write a paper. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), including programs such as Grammarly, which complete or rewrite sentences for you, is also prohibited in this course, unless I specifically ask you to use it for some special reason. This class is meant to teach you to do your own good thinking and writing, without leaning on outside crutches.

Ephesians 4:15 asserts the crucial importance of “speaking the truth in love,” and developing a habit of truthfulness is fundamental to our growing close to and pleasing Christ. Remember that upright or sinful behavior in any area of our lives quickly turns into a habit, and habits have tremendous momentum in our lives for good or ill. We all know that hypocritical, dishonest people who call themselves Christians have been a major reason why Christianity has been discredited in America, just as we know that faithful, consistent Christians have been potent witnesses to the truth and love of God by their lives as well as their words. So I urge you for many reasons, only one of which has to do with what you learn in this course, to be truthful in all your work in this course. [If you ever feel tempted to cheat because of time pressures or a sense that you’re incapable of doing the work, please contact me. I will seek to encourage you and calm you, and I will help you get the work done honestly, even if it has to be late.](#)

### **Class Behavior**

Although it is okay for students to communicate with each other informally before class through the Chat box, during the time I’m teaching the class, I expect students to ask meaningful questions and make relevant comments during class in the Chat box. They are not to type anything into

the Chat box during our class discussion that is off topic or flippant. In all your interactions with me as a teacher, I expect to be treated with respect, and I expect you to show Christian kindness and courtesy at all times to each other. If serious enough, misbehavior could result in my asking the student to leave the course. Of course I wouldn't expect ever to have to do this. I've found that my Apologia students tend to be noticeably more mature and godly than most young people their age.

Students should not be directly in contact with one another outside of class unless both students have the knowledge and permission of a parent or guardian. Apologia does not oversee the direct contact between students (as in a study group) and holds no responsibility for the content of these exchanges in the same way that my high school teachers had no control over what my friends and I said to each other after school. It is the responsibility of the student to foster Christlike friendships and the responsibility of the parent/guardian to supervise online activity at home. In short, feel free to be in touch with each other outside of class, but make sure your parents know.

## **Instructor Availability for Questions:**

You may contact me at [DrJones@Apologia.com](mailto:DrJones@Apologia.com) and, if a significant need arises, at (423) 665-9588 (just no calls after 10 pm, please).