



## Shakespeare's Language Lecture Notes

Shakespeare is considered to be a genius. He wrote 37 plays in approximately 21 years and is believed to have coined over 1,000 words, many of which are still in use today.

Despite his genius, it is Shakespeare's language that sometimes makes his plays difficult to understand; however, once readers learn to recognize his techniques, the meaning behind the words begins to shine through.

---

Shakespeare wrote in blank verse, which is unrhymed iambic pentameter (each line equals five iambs). One iamb is called a foot. Each foot contains one unstressed and one stressed syllable.

In order to maintain his meter, Shakespeare sometimes altered standard English in the following ways:

- ◆ He sometimes changed grammar.
- ◆ He sometimes inverted word order.
- ◆ He sometimes omitted words or letters.

In addition to changing standard English to fit his meter, Shakespeare also liked to play with words.

- ◆ He is known for using puns, or words with more than one meaning.
- ◆ He sometimes used the archaic form of the pronoun "you" (thou, thy thine, thee). Shakespeare's characters often use the archaic form of "you" to address a subordinate or an equal.

Shakespeare wrote his plays approximately 400 years ago during which time the English language evolved.

- ◆ Many words used by Shakespeare are now archaic, which means that we no longer use them.
- ◆ Other words used by Shakespeare are now used differently. In other words, the meanings of some words have changed over time.