

There is one more type of YA fiction that is worth considering: the novel that does not have a Shakespeare-related focus, but incorporates references to the writer or quotations from his plays in a way that is likely to appeal to teens and spike their curiosity. Janet MacDonald is an example of an author who wrote this kind of text. Her young adult novels include references to the classics alongside pop culture quotes. Her goal was to write what she called unibrow literature (as opposed to high-brow or low-brow), for “the union of academy and street into a work that enlightens and entertains – is a thing of beauty. It has the power to bring into the literary fold young adults who are not merely *reluctant* readers but those who are downright averse to the written word” (2005, p. 747).

In conclusion, a young adult collection that includes an assortment of all of these types of resources will provide a strong foundation for teens in their studies, as well as an enticing window into the world of Shakespeare.

### References

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## Programming: Shakespeare for Teens

By Jeanna Greene



There are a number of ways to help teens get creative with Shakespeare, and to foster their understanding of his language and their ability to interpret his work. Many of the ideas below were originally presented as teaching strategies, but could be applied

to library programming for teens with equally fruitful and fun results.

### **Comparison and Context: Movie Clubs and Book Clubs**

Tiffany A. Conroy (whose arguments for why teens often fail to connect with Shakespeare are discussed in the Shakespeare in School section of this issue) believes that movies are making a difference. She asks why, in recent decades, Shakespeare has re-emerged in North American pop culture, coming to the conclusion: “Most visibly, movies are repackaging Shakespeare, his era, and his works” (2003, p. 239). She observes that movies – a medium with which teens are comfortable and confident – can provide a good starting point for them to begin to develop skills in analyzing and interpreting Shakespeare’s plays. Starting with movies, anything is possible, for “this is their comfort zone; once they get excited about the connections between film and text it is only a small jump to get them on their feet performing and, perhaps someday, into the theatre as well” (p. 240).

Thus movie clubs are a great way for libraries to get teens involved with Shakespeare, and are a good choice as the first program to offer if a library is

considering a series of related young adult programs. Following Conroy’s advice, hook them with movies, and go from there! In the last decade or so, there have been a number of movies made for teens that reinterpret Shakespeare’s plays. Some preserve his language, some translate his words into modern vernacular – all are valuable as points of comparison. Public or school libraries could create a Shakespearean movie club, inviting teens to meet once every few weeks to view a modern adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s plays. Teens would be provided with a printed copy of a scene or two from the original play to peruse before and after viewing the movie. After the viewing, a discussion would ensue with a library staff member posing questions and engaging the teens. Broad questions provide good starting points for discussion. Here are a few to consider, although often the best conversation starters will focus on the specific play and movie being discussed:

1. How did the movie alter the original play?
2. Did the movie help you enjoy the play more?
3. Do you think the characters in the movie are like the characters Shakespeare had in mind?

4. What do you think of the language in the movie? If the language was changed from the original, do you think this was a good decision?

A more traditional book club is another great option for libraries. There are lots of young adult books available that re-imagine Shakespearean plays. The approach taken could be similar to that described above. Teens could meet to discuss a contemporary novel along with selected scenes from the related play, with a staff person fostering and leading the discussion.

### **Cutting and Pasting Shakespeare**

Art is a great way for teens to respond to Shakespeare. Caroline McManus points out that while teens can benefit from professional adaptations of Shakespearean plays, they can also get a lot out of making their own. Her ideas focus on Shakespeare in the classroom, but can easily be applied to library programming. She suggests, “Students could . . . be asked to create new adaptations of Shakespearean texts (poems, short stories, screenplays, illustrations), drawing, if they wished, on their own cultural backgrounds or incorporating their first languages” (2003, p. 261). This is a

great way to bring Shakespeare down from the lofty heights. By reinterpreting the plays in the context of their own 21<sup>st</sup> Century lives and cultural backgrounds, teens are likely to recognize the aspects of the plays that are timeless and relevant, leading them to connect with Shakespeare’s work on an emotional level. As well, it is an opportunity for teens to have fun and to learn methods of working with intertextuality in their own creative projects.

A library program based on teaching teens to create new adaptations of Shakespearean plays would be perfect in conjunction with a Shakespearean movie club. Teens could meet one week to watch and discuss the movie, then the next week they could meet to begin creating their own adaptations of the work.

For the library program, one or more mediums should be selected for the teens to work with. A play must be selected as well – likely something that is well known and has teen-friendly themes – *Romeo and Juliet*, for example. The library should have lots of copies of the play on hand for the teens to flip through as they work. As well, materials will be necessary. Costs will vary depending upon the chosen mediums. Materials could be as simple as glue, scissors, and a pile of

magazines for making collages, or could include high-tech cameras and electronics if the goal is to have teens create a film adaptation. For added benefit and appeal, the library could arrange to have a professional artist who works with the chosen medium come in to give a demonstration and provide instruction. Alternately, this role could be taken on by a creative member of the library staff.

One more idea on the creation of unique adaptations: In her book, *Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults*, Mary Ellen Dakin recounts her successful use of photography as a tool to help teens connect with Shakespeare. She argues that “photography opens another window into Shakespeare’s words,” and goes on to describe an experience in which “assisted by a cast of neighbourhood extras, they [the teens] posed and photographed the sequence of events in the mad scene in Hamlet, using dialogue as captions” (2009, p. 153). This is a multimedia approach, incorporating the written word into photography. Encouraging teens to use more than one medium in their adaptations is a way to further foster creativity and thinking outside the box.

### **Playing Around with Words**

Shakespeare’s language, if approached deliberately, can be fun for teens rather than a barrier or a burden. Dakin sees the potential in engaging teens through language, recommending “encouraging students to play with ‘weird words’ . . . and to rediscover the joy of word-making that every child inherits” (2009, p. 13). She selects archaic words from Shakespeare’s plays and, using an overhead projector, she presents the words to students and asks them to guess what they mean (p. 14). This is a way of transforming the difficult language from frustrating to fun, and it is an idea that libraries could incorporate into young adult Shakespeare programs.

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival’s website has a page devoted to teaching materials (<http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/education/teachers.aspx?id=1096>), which includes a number of language-based ideas that are aimed at teachers but could be used by program coordinators as well. One example is The Shakespearean Insult Game. This game is aimed at grades four and up, but could work with teens as well. The purpose of the game is to get teens (or children) spouting Shakespearean insults. Insult cards must be prepared in advance, each listing an insult pulled from one of Shakespeare’s

plays. The Stratford website gives a lists of insults to choose from, organized by play. These include, “Out, you green-sickness carrion!” from *Romeo and Juliet*, and “Your horrid image does unfix my hair” from *Macbeth*. Teens assemble in a large space, each is given an insult card, and they are then instructed to mingle. A library staff member (or a teen volunteer) blows a whistle at random intervals, signalling that the teens should address the person closest to them with their given insult (vehemently!). There are two additional stages of The Insult Game included on the website, each a variation on the basic premise of encouraging teens to insult each other with Shakespeare. A language game like this is most useful not as the focus of a program, but as an introductory tension-breaker to any type of young adult program with a Shakespearean theme.

These are just a few of the ways that Shakespeare can be incorporated into young adult programming in public or school libraries. Shakespeare’s works are full of insight, humanity, and truly beautiful language. A library program can be an essential tool to help teens discover all the riches Shakespeare has to offer.

## References

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