

932. What is so great about Shakespeare? 🗣️ (with Mum & Dad) - Episode Worksheet



Episode summary

In this episode I talk to my parents about the topic of William Shakespeare. Enjoy a conversation about this important figure in English language and culture, with two other important figures - my mum and dad!

We discuss the enduring appeal and significance of William Shakespeare's work, biographical details of his life, the key themes in Shakespeare's plays, and the impact of his language on modern English. We try to explain the qualities that make Shakespeare great, using examples from plays like Hamlet, Twelfth Night, and Macbeth.

PDF available with transcript, vocabulary list and vocabulary quiz. Premium listeners - watch out for a language review of this episode coming soon, in P68 "Learn English with Shakespeare" parts 1 & 2.

PDF Contents

1. Comprehension Questions

- Use these questions to check your understanding of the conversation about Shakespeare. Answers are provided below, and you can check the transcript.

2. Vocabulary List

- Lots of words and expressions from the episode with examples, definitions and other comments.

3. Vocabulary Quiz

- Check your understanding and memory of the vocabulary in the list.

4. Full episode transcript

- Every word in the episode, transcribed for your reference.

1. 🎧 Comprehension Questions

- Use these questions to check what you understood in the episode.
- You can also notice vocabulary in the questions and answers.
- Short answers are included below.
- To get full answers and my comments, sign up to LEP Premium and listen to Premium series 68.

1. Where do my parents live in relation to Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford?

2. How much is known about Shakespeare's life?

Choose two of these options below 👉 Dad said one, Mum said another.

- a. Not much
- b. Very little
- c. Relatively little

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- d. A fair amount
 - e. Quite a lot
 - f. A great deal.
3. Why did Shakespeare get married so early, at the age of 18?
4. Why do some people think Shakespeare suddenly moved to London?
5. How did Rick describe Shakespeare's career? Choose one option below.
- a. He was not recognised during his lifetime
 - b. He made slow and steady progress in his career
 - c. He had an incredible rise to fame
6. What kind of work did Shakespeare write? Choose one option.
- a. Novels and poems
 - b. Plays and sonnets
 - c. Speeches and letters
7. Can you complete this line said by theatre director Peter Sellers, quoted by my mum, "The things in your life you don't have the _____ for, this guy has the _____"
- Options:
- a. Time, time
 - b. Words, words
 - c. Time, words

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d. Words, time

8. Can you complete these sentences, said by my Dad

“But the main point is that his characters are incredibly well-d_____. And they expose their d_____, and a_____ and their problems. He has some big t_____ about love, about mortality.

9. True or false?

Some of the plays are set in exotic, far-flung locations, but they are still very English.

10. True or false:

Shakespeare usually wrote plays in one style.

(Can you expand on your answer to this?)

11. Why do I (Luke) like idioms which come from Shakespeare?

12. When I say that some of the plays are complicated, difficult to understand and even boring, how does Gill reply? (pick one option)

a. She disagrees and says that they're easy.

b. She admits that the language is complex and some scenes are a bit boring.

c. She says you don't find it boring when you concentrate and try to understand it.

13. True or false:

a) The plays involve a lot of dramatic battle scenes, with plenty of action.

b) Most of the battle scenes happen off-stage and are described by characters instead.

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14. What is quite funny about the scene in which Ophelia drowns in a river (in Hamlet)?
(Of course, it's a sad and tragic scene, but there *is* something quite funny about it)
15. Why is the play "Measure For Measure" very relevant today, according to Gill? (What about the #MeToo movement?)
16. Why are some of Shakespeare's plays called "problem plays"?
17. Why does Rick like "Twelfth Night"? (Pick the things he said below)
 - a. It's got a good story
 - b. He studied it at school so he understands it
 - c. He has seen it more than any of the other plays
 - d. It has interesting moral themes
 - e. It has great characters
 - f. He associates with the main character
18. How is the theme of gender roles dealt with in the play?
Can you describe any of the things that happen between the characters?
19. What is so great about Hamlet? It gets to the heart of what it is to be *What?*
20. Hamlet is a revenge tragedy. Hamlet's father has been killed, and Hamlet suspects that his uncle did it, and now his mother has married his uncle. Hamlet's father appears to him

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as a ghost, telling him to avenge his death and to kill his uncle. Why doesn't Hamlet take action immediately?

21. Hamlet shows his mother and uncle a play, performed by a group of travelling actors.

What happens in this play, and what Hamlet's reason for showing it to his mother and uncle?

22. What is the main difference between Hamlet and his 'foil' Laertes?

23. Why does Laertes want to kill Hamlet?

24. Who are Rosencranz and Guildenstern?

25. Can you describe the film involving their characters?

26. Which game happens in the film, which Rick finds interesting?

That's enough in terms of questions I think!

The rest of the conversation focuses on

- A speech from Hamlet, which also appears in one of my favourite films, *Withnail & I*. Check out episode 497 for more on that film.

<https://teacherluke.co.uk/2017/12/04/497-film-club-withnail-i-with-james-and-will/>

- Film versions of Shakespeare plays including:
 - Hamlet (1948) Laurence Olivier
 - Hamlet (1996) Kenneth Branagh
 - Hamlet (1991) Mel Gibson
 - Much Ado About Nothing (Kenneth Branagh)
 - Macbeth (1971) Roman Polanski

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- Macbeth (2015) Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard
- Richard III (2005) Ian McKellen
- Romeo & Juliet (1997) Baz Luhrmann
- And maybe some others

✓ Short Answers to the Comprehension Questions

1. They live *just down the road* from Stratford.
2. c, d
3. People say he got married to his neighbour (Anne Hathaway - not the actress of course) because he got her pregnant.
4. He went to London because he was charged (sent to the magistrate's court) for *poaching* deer in a nearby estate, and probably made the landowner very angry, so he escaped to London.
5. C
6. B
7. B
8. His characters are incredibly **well-drawn**. And they expose their **dilemmas**, and **anxieties** and their problems. He has some big **themes** about love, about mortality.
9. True
10. False. He wrote different styles including comedies, tragedies, Roman plays. Characters talk in different styles of English.

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11. These idioms are good because they have *a touch of class* about them.
12. B
13. a) false, b) true
14. Gertrude witnesses Ophelia drowning, and then later describes it in a lot of detail, which means she probably stood there for a long time, watching Ophelia in the water, without thinking of rescuing her.
15. One of the characters tries to use his power and influence to persuade/force a female character to sleep with him, and then forces her to stay silent, saying that if she tells anyone, they won't believe her. This is the same as many incidents reported more recently during the #MeToo movement (for example, Harvey Weinstein).
16. Because they don't follow the traditional conventions of those styles of play and are therefore difficult to categorise (e.g. his comedies don't always end in a marriage, or his comedies are also tragic and therefore are difficult to categorise)
17. a, b, d, e
18. Some characters pretend to be a different gender (e.g. a girl pretends to be a boy) and lots of confusion happens as a result, and complicated love stories which involve mixed-up gender roles and this is a comment about gender identities and love.
19. It gets to the heart of what it means to be human.

20. Hamlet is worried. He thinks too much, and questions everything, and he is afraid that his actions will get him killed, and he is worried about death. He overthinks everything.
21. The play mirrors real life, and Hamlet wants to see the reactions of his uncle and mother. In the play, a character murders another character and the widowed wife quickly marries someone else. The reactions of Hamlet's mother and uncle seem to show that a) the uncle is guilty, and b) the mother is shallow and doesn't have deep feelings.
22. Laertes takes direct action, but Hamlet procrastinates and questions everything.
23. Hamlet killed his father (accidentally)
24. Old friends of Hamlet, who Hamlet's uncle Claudius asks to spy on Hamlet
25. It is a modern film starring Gary Oldman and Tom Roth and it follows their story. It is written by Tom Stoppard.
26. The question game. The characters have to communicate only using questions. It's a fun game, and also appropriate because Hamlet is full of questions.

2. Vocabulary List (with examples and definitions)

Here is a selection of expressive and challenging words and phrases used in the episode, perfect for expanding your vocabulary.

Check the vocabulary quiz below to test yourself.

♦ **Descriptive & Literary Language**

1. **Impenetrable** (adj)

"And then they start reading it. And it's really impenetrable and difficult to understand."

Definition: Extremely hard to understand or access.

Comment: Think of a forest so dense you can't get through — Shakespeare's language can sometimes feel like that!

2. **Eloquent** (adj)

"It's a very dramatic symbol of contemplating death. It's eloquent."

Definition: Expressive and fluent in speech or writing.

Comment: "Eloquent" speech sounds elegant — both words have a similar feel.

3. **dimension** (uncountable noun)

"His work draws these characters in such, you know, with so much dimension to them."

Definition: Depth or complexity (especially in characters).

Comment: A "three-dimensional" character feels real, like a person with layers.

4. **timeless** (adj)

"His plays are timeless."

Definition: Not affected by time; always relevant.

Comment: Think of something that never goes out of style, like classic music or stories.

5. **universal** (adj)

"The themes are universal. And you can set these plays in all sorts of different places."

Definition: Relating to everyone, everywhere.

Comment: Universal themes like love and loss work in every culture and era.

6. **sonnets / compact poems**

"He wrote 150-odd sonnets, which are very compact poems."

Definition: Short, tightly structured, and full of meaning.

Comment: Think of a "compact" suitcase — small but full.

7. **evocative** (adj)

"It's a brilliant description of depression, isn't it? Very evocative."

Definition: Creating strong mental images or emotions.

Comment: Related to "evoke" — it brings feelings or pictures to mind.

8. **stoic** (adj)

"It's the kind of stoic thing, you know, we're all going to die. We may as well just accept it."

Definition: Calm and accepting of pain or hardship without showing emotion.

Comment: Think of someone who stays strong and quiet in a crisis.

◆ **Shakespeare Terms & Idioms**

9. **iambic pentameter**

"Iambic pentameter, five beats to the line."

Definition: A poetic rhythm of five pairs of syllables (da-DUM da-DUM...).

Comment: Most of Shakespeare's plays are written in this form.

10. **a soliloquy**

"Perhaps the soliloquy..."

Definition: A speech by a character alone on stage, expressing inner thoughts.

Comment: Like hearing someone's thoughts aloud.

11. **(someone's) foil (character)**

"Laertes is Hamlet's foil."

Definition: A character who contrasts with another to highlight their traits.

Comment: Think of "foil" as a reflective surface that shows contrast.

12. **a tragicomedy**

"The tragi-comedies and things like that..."

Definition: A play that mixes tragic and comedic elements.

Comment: Shows Shakespeare's ability to blend tones.

13. **a revenge tragedy**

"It's ostensibly a revenge tragedy."

Definition: A dramatic genre where the main plot is focused on revenge, often ending in death.

Comment: Hamlet is the most famous example.

14. **a play within a play**

"So you've got a play within a play."

Definition: A scene where characters stage a performance inside the larger play.

Comment: Used by Hamlet to catch the conscience of the king.

15. **“Exit, pursued by a bear”**

"Exit pursued by a bear."

Definition: A famous comic stage direction from *The Winter's Tale*.

Comment: Often quoted as an example of Shakespearean humour and theatrical imagination.

16. **a monologue**

"That piece is almost like a monologue. Very powerful."

Definition: A long speech by one character, often revealing thoughts.

Comment: Different from a soliloquy — a monologue can be spoken to other characters.

17. **stagecraft**

"It's part of Shakespeare's stagecraft."

Definition: The technical and artistic aspects of theatre production.

Comment: Includes lighting, set design, entrances, and even sound effects like "owls".

◆ **Character & Personality Vocabulary**

18. **prudish** (adj)

"He's very upright, very prudish..."

Definition: Easily shocked by sexual matters; overly modest.

Comment: A "prudish" person is like someone who blushes at the mention of romance!

19. **intolerant** (adj)

"[He is] Intolerant of others [and] poses as being very devout."

Definition: Unwilling to accept views, beliefs, or behaviours different from one's own.

Comment: Think of a closed door — someone who is "intolerant" won't let new ideas in.

20. **pompous** (adj)

"He is the steward of the lady, and he is arrogant, pompous..."

Definition: Self-important and arrogant.

Comment: Imagine someone who speaks as if they're giving a royal speech... all the time.

21. **devout** (adj)

"Intolerant of others, poses as being very devout."

Definition: Deeply religious or committed to a belief.

Comment: Often associated with sincere faith. "A devout Christian". In this case, the character "poses" as being devout, which means he just pretends to be devout, but in reality he isn't.

22. **shallow** (adj)

"Which shows how shallow she is." (Hamlet's mother)

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Definition: Superficial; lacking depth of character or understanding.

Comment: Like a shallow puddle — not deep enough to swim in.

23. **hypocrisy** (noun) / **hypocritical** (adj) / **to be a hypocrite** (person)

"It's about the corruption of authority and politics... and moral hypocrisy."

Definition: Pretending to have beliefs or principles that one does not actually possess.

Comment: "Do as I say, not as I do" is a classic example of hypocrisy.

24. **corruption** / **corrupt**

"Measure for Measure is about the corruption of authority."

Definition: Dishonest or unethical behaviour by those in power.

Comment: "Corrupt" leaders often abuse power for personal gain.

◆ **Theatrical & Critical Vocabulary**

25. **an endurance test**

"That was a real endurance test."

Definition: Something that tests one's patience, energy, or stamina.

Comment: A very long play can be an "endurance test" — especially if it's four hours!

26. **to proposition someone** (verb)

"He ends up propositioning her..."

Definition: To make a sexual or romantic offer, often inappropriate or unexpected.

Comment: Not to be confused with "proposal" (ask someone to marry you) — *proposition* has a more sleazy tone.

27. **Improvised / to improvise / an improvisation**

"I suppose it could've been improvised a bit in those scenes."

Definition: Made up on the spot, without preparation.

Comment: Improvisation is common in comedy — actors respond spontaneously.

28. **an adaptation**

"There's also a modern adaptation of Richard III..."

Definition: A new version of a work adjusted for a different format or audience.

Comment: Film adaptations often set Shakespeare in modern times or different locations.

29. **To subvert expectations**

"He subverts expectations."

Definition: To undermine or challenge what people normally expect.

Comment: Shakespeare liked to twist genre rules and surprise the audience.

◆ **Useful Idioms & Figurative Language (from Shakespeare)**

30. **as luck would have it**

"As luck would have it, the players arrived at just the right time."

Definition: Happening by good or bad fortune, by chance.

Comment: Similar to "by chance" or "coincidentally."

31. **in one fell swoop**

"Not in one fell swoop, obviously."

Definition: All at once, in a single sudden action.

Comment: Sounds dramatic — and it is! Often used in storytelling.

32. **to be hoist by your own petard**

"To be hoist by your own petard."

Definition: To be hurt by your own plan meant to harm someone else.

Comment: A "petard" is an old bomb. It means your trap backfires!

33. **to come full circle**

"Come full circle — that's another one."

Definition: To return to the original position or situation.

Comment: Often used when a story or life experience completes a cycle.

34. **too much of a good thing**

"Too much of a good thing — another idiom from Shakespeare."

Definition: Excess can lead to negative consequences, even with good things.

Comment: Like too much chocolate — sweet, but it can

make you sick!

35. **dead as a doornail**

"Dead as a doornail — that's from Shakespeare too."

Definition: Completely and unquestionably dead.

Comment: A colourful way to say something or someone is definitely gone.

36. **a heart of gold**

"A heart of gold — that's a nice one."

Definition: A kind and generous nature.

Comment: Still commonly used to describe someone genuinely good.

3. Vocabulary Quiz

Instructions: Complete the questions below using your knowledge of the vocabulary list. Each question is based on the words and phrases discussed in the podcast.

◆ **Quiz PART 1: Multiple Choice (1–12)**

Choose the **best definition** for each word or phrase.

1. *Impenetrable* means:

- a) easy to navigate
- b) too complex or dense to understand
- c) open and transparent

2. *Eloquent* speech is:
 - a) full of errors and slang
 - b) awkward and shy
 - c) fluent, expressive, and persuasive

3. If something has *dimension*, it has:
 - a) complexity and depth
 - b) confusion and randomness
 - c) volume and noise

4. *Timeless* stories are:
 - a) out of date
 - b) always relevant
 - c) based on current events only

5. *Universal* themes are:
 - a) difficult to relate to
 - b) only relevant in one country
 - c) meaningful for all people across time and culture

6. A *sonnet* is best described as:
 - a) a lengthy novel
 - b) a short, structured poem
 - c) a musical score

7. Something *evocative* often:
 - a) confuses people
 - b) creates strong feelings or images
 - c) calms you down with logic

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8. A *stoic* person:
- a) expresses emotions easily
 - b) panics under pressure
 - c) endures hardship calmly without showing emotion
9. *Iambic pentameter* refers to:
- a) the costume style in Shakespeare's time
 - b) a poetic rhythm of five stressed and unstressed syllables
 - c) the stage directions in Elizabethan theatre
10. A *soliloquy* is:
- a) a short exchange of jokes
 - b) a monologue shared by two actors
 - c) a speech expressing a character's inner thoughts while alone
11. A *foil* in a story is:
- a) a hero's weapon
 - b) a contrast character who highlights another's traits
 - c) an object of magical power
12. A *tragicomedy* combines:
- a) music and dance
 - b) tragedy and comedy
 - c) facts and opinions

◆ **Quiz PART 2: Match the Word to the Definition**
(13–22)

Match each term (A–J) to the correct definition (1–10).

- A. Monologue
- B. Adaptation
- C. Subvert expectations
- D. Endurance test
- E. Proposition
- F. Improvised
- G. Stagecraft
- H. Revenge tragedy
- I. "Exit, pursued by a bear"
- J. Play within a play

1. ____ A speech given by a character, possibly to others
2. ____ A scene where characters perform a show inside the story
3. ____ Making something up without preparation
4. ____ A famous comedic stage direction from *The Winter's Tale*
5. ____ A version of a story changed for a new audience or format
6. ____ When a play or moment challenges what the audience expects
7. ____ A dramatic genre where the main theme is vengeance
8. ____ The technical and artistic skills used in theatre

9. ____ Something long or difficult that tests stamina
10. ____ An often inappropriate romantic or sexual offer

◆ **Quiz PART 3: Gap-Fill (23–30)**

Complete each sentence using the correct word from the box.

Box:

prudish – pompous – devout – shallow – corruption – hypocrisy – intolerant – heart of gold

23. He acts like a saint in public, but in private he's completely dishonest — a clear case of _____.
24. She's so _____ that even a love scene in a film makes her blush.
25. The official's _____ was exposed when they accepted bribes in secret.
26. Despite his rough exterior, he really has a _____ and is always helping others.
27. His character is so _____ — no depth at all, just surface-level emotions.

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28. The man seemed _____, always quoting scripture, but his actions said otherwise.
29. The politician came across as _____, delivering long speeches as if addressing royalty.
30. The character is completely _____ of people with different beliefs.

◆ Quiz PART 4: Idioms – Explain the Meaning (31–36)

Write a short definition or explanation for the following idioms. Use examples if you can.

31. **As luck would have it**

→

32. **In one fell swoop**

→

33. **To be hoist by your own petard**

→

34. **To come full circle**

→

35. **Too much of a good thing**

→

36. Dead as a doornail

→

✔ Answer Key – Vocabulary Quiz

◆ Quiz Answers PART 1: Multiple Choice (1–12)

1. **b** – too complex or dense to understand
2. **c** – fluent, expressive, and persuasive
3. **a** – complexity and depth
b – always relevant
4. **c** – meaningful for all people across time and culture
5. **b** – a short, structured poem
b – creates strong feelings or images
6. **c** – endures hardship calmly without showing emotion
7. **b** – a poetic rhythm of five stressed and unstressed syllables
8. **c** – a speech expressing a character’s inner thoughts while alone
9. **b** – a contrast character who highlights another’s traits
10. **b** – tragedy and comedy

◆ Quiz Answers PART 2: Match the Word to the Definition (13–22)

1. **A** – Monologue
2. **J** – Play within a play
3. **F** – Improvised
4. **I** – “Exit, pursued by a bear”

5. **B** – Adaptation
 6. **C** – Subvert expectations
 7. **H** – Revenge tragedy
 8. **G** – Stagecraft
 9. **D** – Endurance test
 10. **E** – Proposition
-

◆ **Quiz Answers PART 3: Gap-Fill (23–30)**

23. **hypocrisy**
 24. **prudish**
 25. **corruption**
 26. **heart of gold**
 27. **shallow**
 28. **devout**
 29. **pompous**
 30. **intolerant**
-

◆ **Quiz Answers PART 4: Idioms – Sample Answers (31–36)**

31. **As luck would have it**

→ By chance or fortune — e.g., “As luck would have it, the train was just arriving.”

32. **In one fell swoop**

→ All at once, in one sudden action — e.g., “She lost her job, her flat, and her cat in one fell swoop.”

33. **To be hoist by your own petard**

→ To be hurt by your own plan — e.g., “He tried to get his rival fired, but ended up getting fired himself.”

34. **To come full circle**

→ To return to the original situation — e.g., “He started in theatre and, years later, returned to direct a Shakespeare play — he came full circle.”

35. **Too much of a good thing**

→ Even good things can become bad if overdone — e.g., “Chocolate is great, but too much of a good thing can make you sick.”

36. **Dead as a doornail**

→ Completely and unquestionably dead — e.g., “That battery is dead as a doornail.”

4. EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction]

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine and that you are ready for some more English listening practise in this episode.

This one is all about William Shakespeare. Yes, Shakespeare. It's taken me a long time to finally get to this subject in an episode.

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Over 930 episodes and 15 years, is it even 16 years, of doing this podcast and finally I get to the subject of William Shakespeare. I've been meaning to talk about this for a long time. How could I do a podcast, a British English podcast, without dealing with Shakespeare in any sort of proper way?

Well finally we're doing it here. You know Shakespeare, don't you? William Shakespeare.

Yes, of course you do. He's a great name, one of the great names in art, culture and literature. His work is famous all around the world.

It's been translated into so many different languages. How could you not know Shakespeare? His plays and his poems or sonnets are described in the highest terms because of their complex characters, their compelling storylines, the deep themes, the insights into the human condition and into society.

Shakespeare, Shakespeare's work has had a lasting impact on art, the art of storytelling, theatre, acting, literature and the spoken word. And of course Shakespeare has had a lasting influence on the English language that we use today. So many phrases, idioms, expressions that we commonly use in English these days were first introduced into the language through the texts of Shakespeare's plays.

And you know, so Shakespeare is a huge figure in life, culture and language. And so finally it's great to be talking about it. This episode coincides in fact with Shakespeare's birthday, which is the 23rd of April.

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He was born on the 23rd of April in 1564. That is 461 years ago. So why not commemorate 461 years since Shakespeare was born with this episode?

Now there are loads of things I could do and loads of episodes I would like to do about Shakespeare, different ways that we could focus on Shakespeare. One of them would be teaching you expressions, phrases, idioms that came from Shakespeare's work. And I'm planning to do that.

I've got episodes in the pipeline about those things, teaching you expressions from Shakespeare. Then there's actually the text of Shakespeare, the English of Shakespeare. So that would mean reading out some scenes from his plays and analysing the language and getting into the complex, rich language of Shakespeare.

So those are two things I would definitely like to do. But as a starting point with this episode, I thought it would be a good idea just to have a conversation about the subject and who better to talk to about William Shakespeare than my mum and dad, my parents. They are both Shakespeare fans, they're Shakespeare enthusiasts.

The question that we are dealing with here is not to be or not to be, although we do talk about that a bit. But the question is, what is so great about Shakespeare? That is the question in this case.

So without any further ado, let's get into the conversation. Oh, one thing, there is a PDF for this episode with an episode transcript and some other stuff on it that you can use to help you learn English from the episode. You'll find a link in the description.

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But yes, without any further ado, let's get into this conversation with my mum and dad about William Shakespeare. And here we go.

[Luke]

So hello, you two. How are you doing today?

[Gill]

Hello, Luke. Fine, thank you. How are you?

[Luke]

I'm very well, thanks. I'm looking forward to this.

[Gill]

Yeah, good.

[Luke]

Because it's been ages that I've wanted to do an episode about Shakespeare, and I thought, will I do it on my own? Will I have a certain guest? Who shall I talk to about it?

I think you're actually, you're both the best people to talk to.

[Gill]

Oh, I don't know.

[Luke]

On the subject. So are you up for this? Are you up for it?

[Rick]

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Oh, absolutely. You know, we live just down the road from where Shakespeare was born, remember? And we both studied Shakespeare in the past.

And he is a phenomenon, or was.

[Gill]

Well, still is.

[Luke]

Still is, was, and yeah, and will be. Exactly.

[Gill]

Is, was, and will forever be.

[Luke]

So how much do you know about Shakespeare? I mean, there's probably, there's no end to how much you can research the subject and study his work and stuff.

Let me just move my camera. There's no end to how much you can study his work, and there are experts out there and stuff. How about you two?

To what extent do you know about Shakespeare?

[Rick]

Well, Shakespeare, the man, there's relatively little known about him. It comes from some quite obscure records, letters, and things like that. And you can work out, you know, quite a lot about his life, which is quite interesting.

[Gill]

We know where he lived. We know who his father was. We know how many children he had.

We know who he married. We know where he went to school. We know, we know a fair amount about him, really.

[Rick]

And then he went off to London and made his name. He was the son of a glove maker. And he, he got Anne Hathaway, one of his neighbours, pregnant.

She was eight years older than him. So he got married at the age of 18, kind of shotgun wedding. And then he had three children with her.

And people speculate quite a lot about his life. You know, why did he rush off to London? There's a story that he was facing charges in the magistrate's court for poaching deer at the nearby estate.

But there's no evidence for that apart from a few little clues. And what he wrote about the Lord of the Manor there, making disparaging remarks about him. So people have sort of thought that might be the case.

Anyway, in London, there isn't all that much info. But he had an incredible rise to fame as a playwright and a poet and an actor. And he helped form an acting troupe called the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

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And later on, he and some of the other actors actually built their own theatre called the Globe Theatre. And he wrote 39 plays, which is a hell of a lot. Imagine him sitting in the dark with his candle in his quill pen.

And I think 150-odd sonnets, which are very compact poems, and some long narrative poems, classical style. He was very, very productive. So we know a bit about him.

[Luke]

It's his work, though, isn't it really that is the interesting part of this?

[Gill]

It is.

[Luke]

Yeah. Okay. So well, what's so special about his work, then?

What's so great about Shakespeare? Mum?

[Gill]

Well, there's one quote, which I remembered that I'd written down by Peter Sellers, the director, not the actor, theatre and film director, American. And he said, "The things in your life you don't have the words for, this guy has the words", which I think is quite good.

[Luke]

"The things in your life you don't have the words for, this guy has the words." Yeah.

[Gill]

He understood the human condition, just, you know, like no one else really, didn't he?

[Rick]

Yes. Obviously, there have been millions, hundreds of thousands of books written about Shakespeare. And people have poured over it.

But the main point is that his characters are incredibly well drawn. And they expose their dilemmas, and anxieties and their problems. He has some big themes about love, about mortality.

And he set the plays in exotic places.

[Gill]

War and power.

[Rick]

And they are incredibly action packed.

Every scene has a drama in it.

[Gill]

You say he set his plays in exotic places. But he didn't really, because, you know, he would say this play was in Verona. But the way, where the play people were, was in an English place.

Everything was English. He just said it was Verona. He didn't bring the Italian city into the play at all.

[Rick]

No, it must have, you know, helped to get the audiences in, to say it's two gentlemen *Verona*, or it's the Merchant of *Venice*. Or, you know, we are in *Illyria*, which is actually Albania. And he'd never been to these places.

So as Gill says, they were just kind of portrayed as being a bit like the Forest of Arden in the middle of England.

[Gill]

Yeah, places really.

[Luke]

Yeah. Despite these far flung locations, there were never that many overt references to the locations they were supposed to be set in. It's just a dramatic, romantic kind of exotic backdrop.

But then, yeah, the actual details could be anywhere. It's probably just somewhere in England. Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Okay, so it touches on all these huge themes, central to the human condition, as you said, love, and grief, and mortality, and power, and war, and politics, and [Rick: guilt], jealousy, and guilt, and shame, and just name an emotion or name one of those things. And yeah, there's a play that deals with it. Yeah, okay.

So is it that then? Is that the main thing, that it seems to describe the human condition? And his work draws these characters in such, you know, with so much dimension to them?

[Gill]

I'd say so, yeah.

[Luke]

Okay.

[Rick]

I think they're great stories. I mean, they are really great stories.

[Gill]

Are they?

[Rick]

With fantastic characters in them. Yes. And a lot of them were drawn from previous works.

I mean, he adapted quite a few established tales. Like, you know, King Lear, which is set somewhere mysteriously in the past, in the Dark Ages, was based on an earlier story, which is much, much simpler. But this one is developed fantastically well.

And the plays tend to be grouped. People, you know, talk about the comedies, and then the tragedies, and then the Roman plays, and the tragi-comedies and things like that. Obviously, he wrote them, he didn't write them in blocks.

He was just able to do different styles. So he could do some really great romantic comedy, and then do some really grim stuff like, you know, Titus Andronicus or Coriolanus from Roman times. And the language suited what he was writing about.

So sometimes the language is in poetry, nearly all the way through the play. Iambic pentameter, five beats to the line. And it gives it a kind of style of class of, you know, the kings tend to speak in Iambic pentameter, gives it a kind of gravitas.

Whereas the other, you know, plays like the tavern scenes in Henry V and everything else, that is completely natural, mixed up, you know, with lots of teasing and everything else. But his language has had a huge impact on modern English, because he's seen as very much one of the early modern English writers. And a lot of his vocabulary lives now, words he made up, and phrases he used have come into our language.

[Luke]

It particularly phrases, we talk about Shakespeare making up words, but I think it's multi word phrases, really, that have impacted English so much. And, you know, because we have lots of idioms, lots of idiomatic expressions in English, that, you know, I've got dictionaries full of them. But the best ones, the best idioms can be found in Shakespeare's plays.

And they, I say they're the best ones, because they carry just a certain bit of class to them. Some idioms, you kind of feel like, oh, it's a bit informal. It sort of expresses something, but it's a bit cheap or something like that.

But all of the Shakespeare ones have got a touch of class to them. And they're idioms that I would gladly teach my learners of English and recommend that they use, because they are very expressive and wonderful. For example, we have just, I've got a list of them here.

And I'm planning to do other episodes with this, because there's so much to be done. I think our conversation can just be what's great about Shakespeare and maybe talk about one or two of his plays, Hamlet, probably. But then there are other things I can do, which I'd like to do, including go through loads of the idioms from his plays, and also maybe explore some of the text from one of his plays as well, and break it down, read it out, and break it down and explain it and look at it and stuff.

But anyway, we've got things like, phrases like, *dead as a doornail*, and *as luck would have it*, and *in one fell swoop*, and *the be-all and end-all*, *to break the ice*, *to fight fire with fire*, *to come full circle*, *too much of a good thing*, *a heart of gold*, *to be hoist by your own petard*.

[Rick]

That's obviously a slightly antiquated phrase, but the others are...

[Luke]

It's good though. It's fun.

[Rick]

Yeah, yeah. But the others are... what do you call it when you you, you make an idea material, so it's a metaphor. Thank you very much. They're metaphors, aren't they?

[Luke]

Idioms.

[Rick]

Come full circle, and things like that.

[Luke]

They're idioms, they're things that express an idea, but in with imagery or metaphor or something like that. Yeah, yeah, exactly.

[Rick]

I know that other phrases have just stuck in, I think it's The Tempest. Into thin air, something's disappeared, it's gone into thin air. I mean, the notion of thin air wouldn't come to you, but Shakespeare has made it go into thin air, and it's now a very widely used expression.

[Luke]

Yeah, where did he go? He just vanished into thin air. Yeah, exactly.

But it's, yeah, it's a lovely expression. Yeah. So yes, Shakespeare's work has added so many dimensions and colours to the English language in terms of its vocabulary and has informed English.

And we've just, you know, maybe more phrases have come from Shakespeare than from any other work that you can think of, except maybe like the English, the first English translation of the King James Bible, which also brought, you know, kind of introduced lots of English into common parlance. But except for that, except for the Bible, it's Shakespeare's work where so many lovely expressions have come from. Yes, it's meant to be, his work is meant to be read out, though, isn't it?

So when, it, okay, maybe I can pose this question like this. His work is challenging, though, isn't it? It's difficult.

Like people, when they, people might think, right, I'll, I better read some Shakespeare, because everyone says it's brilliant. So I'll pick up Romeo and Juliet, there'll be a nice romance. I'll enjoy that.

And then they start reading it. And it's really impenetrable and difficult to understand.

[Gill]

Yes.

[Luke]

So what would you say?

[Gill]

They were written as plays, and you have to experience them as plays.

And they don't come to life until you do that. You have to see the people on the stage acting it out. And then they come to life.

Just reading it is, can be tedious, I think.

[Luke]

Definitely. But even going to the theatre and watching actors interpret the work. I mean, you, both of you brought James and me to the Royal Shakespeare Company lots of times to see Shakespeare, which was great.

And I've seen quite a few of the plays. But when I was 14, sitting and watching whatever, any, almost any of the plays, I rarely

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understood what really was going on. And there were large, you know, some of the plays are hours and hours long.

And I might sit there for an hour just going, I've got no idea what's happening. And then someone has a fight and someone gets killed. And that's exciting.

But I don't know really why they were killed or even who they were. You know, it's kind of, I remember being very confused by Shakespeare. And I think I still probably am.

So, you know, how much work do you have to do in order to really be able to understand, understand, it's not that accessible.

[Gill]

But I mean, I mean, I still, there are plays I watch. And I think, "what?" It's like at the beginning of Henry V. There's long speeches about who inherits the crown.

And what's the phrase that they use all the time? The Salic laws. That's right.

All these people pontificating about the Salic laws. And you think, oh, just get on with it. So there are definitely bits like that in all the plays.

[Rick]

It's difficult because at the time, people would have understood this debate about the succession and Shakespeare was bending over backwards to basically say that the Henrys were legit. And so

we have to go through that lot to set the scene before we have Agincourt and all the action.

[Gill]

Except that's another interesting thing. There isn't any action really in Shakespeare. I mean, there are fights between individuals, but all the history plays where there are wars and things, you very rarely have a fight scene or a battle scene.

It all happens off stage. And then someone comes on and reports what's happened.

[Luke]

Yeah. So one of my favourites is Macbeth, which you took us to see once. And also we studied it a little bit at school.

And there's a pretty good, there's a couple of pretty good film versions of it as well. And the beginning of Macbeth is a good example of this, that there's no actual, well, no direct action, because there's a war or a battle at least at the beginning of the play. And it happens off stage.

And one of the characters comes on and describes what Macbeth was doing in the battle. And it's sort of quite a good description of the character before you meet him, talking about how he was wielding his sword and killing people in really grotesque ways. What a brilliant fighter and warrior he was.

And so that's reported by someone who kind of has come from the battle.

[Rick]

It's obvious, they couldn't stage these things. You know, remember, they were all done in daylight. You know, they didn't have any floodlights on the Globe Theatre.

They did everything in daylight. And that's why in a lot of scenes where it's actually night, the actors tell you it's night. They come on and say, you know, oh, I hear the owl and, you know, darkling stars.

They're telling the audience, it's nighttime, okay. And it's the same with all these scenes that they can't do on stage. In Hamlet, which we'll come to in a minute, Hamlet's girlfriend, Ophelia, drowns in the river.

Well, I mean, I don't think they could do drowning in the river on stage. So basically, it's a reported description of it, which is actually beautifully written.

[Gill]

It's brilliant. It's Gertrude who comes in and says what she's seen. It's quite funny in some respects, because she comes on and she tells Hamlet that she's just seen his girlfriend, for want of a better word, drowning herself.

And she describes it all beautifully. And she went out onto a branch and it broke and she went in the river and she floated. And you feel like saying to her, what were you doing just standing there watching her?

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Why didn't you save her? So you can, you know, it can be funny in some ways, but it's a beautiful description of someone dying, you know, drowning.

[Luke]

Yeah. Yeah. She just stood there for half an hour.

[Rick]

Observing, probably taking notes.

[Luke]

Exactly. Thinking, I must remember the way that the sun was reflected off these leaves.

Yeah.

[Rick]

Anyway, the main point is, of course, that you always got to remember that this was staged in front of a big audience. Not only all the people sitting around in this theatre in the round, but also the groundlings, the poorer seats, if you like, but there weren't any seats. So for your four-hour plays, they were standing there all the time in front of the stage, quite close to the actors.

So there was only a limited amount of things they could actually do on stage. So it means that quite a lot of it is, you know, reported off stage. In the play, *The Winter's Tale*, there's a marvellous stage direction, a famous stage direction, "Exit pursued by a bear".

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Right. So he has to run off and they've obviously got some kind of bearskin thing. So it races after him across the stage, "Exit pursued by a bear".

[Luke]

Yeah, that's a famous one. Yeah. Okay.

So do you have particular favourite plays?

[Gill]

Oh, loads of them. I mean, one thing about Shakespeare is even though he was writing all those hundreds of years ago, he's very modern in lots of ways. And there's one of my particular favourites is Measure for Measure, which is about the corruption of authority and politics, which is very appropriate for today.

This guy, Antonio, who takes over the running of the country. It's in Austria. It doesn't really matter where it is.

He takes over the running of the country, or he's given the job of doing it. And he is well known for being... I'm hopeless at remembering quotes, but they say that his blood is like ice and I can't remember, but he's very upright, very prudish and...

[Rick]

Intolerant of others, poses as being very devout.

[Gill]

That's it. And of course, he falls and there's one of the other characters is a young nun who's come to beg for the life of her brother who is being put to death by this regime. And she comes

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and then this guy, the moment he sees her, of course, he just falls for her.

And so, of course, he ends up propositioning her saying, if you sleep with me, basically, I'll let your brother go. And she's absolutely astounded and said, I'll tell everyone about this. And he says, who would believe you?

And it's like #metoo. It's all these men in power who've had their way with all these young girls and say, nobody would believe you if you told them. It's that sort of thing.

I mean, he explores modern... Well, I suppose it's the fact that it's humanity again. It's the sort of thing that human beings have done throughout history.

But yeah, Measure for Measure is one of mine. And...

[Rick]

I'm more down market, really. I think I like Twelfth Night, which is one of the comedies. Now, comedies nearly always have a dark side, but they resolve themselves at the end.

[Gill]

Now, the interesting... This is another interesting thing about Shakespeare, because there were these traditional types of play. There was the comedy, the tragedy, and the history.

And Shakespeare slightly changes all of them. So he'll have comedies. The definition of a comedy is that the two, the man and the woman get married in the end.

They always end with marriages.

[Rick]

As in Jane Austen.

[Gill]

That's the traditional meaning of a comedy. But Shakespeare always slightly changes them. It's like in Measure for Measure.

It's described as a comedy, even though it's about corruption. At the end, the two main characters, Antonio, who's been the villain, he is married off to someone who he had jilted sometime before. So he is tricked.

Jilted. Jilted. He was betrothed to Mariana and decided he wasn't going to marry her after all.

[Luke]

So she's waiting to get married to him and he doesn't come, basically. That's to jilt someone. Leave them waiting.

Yeah.

[Gill]

The play ends with him being tricked into marrying her. Anyway, so she ends up with him. So that's their marriage.

And then the other marriage is between, no it isn't. The guy who's actually in charge of the country, who had handed over the running of the country to Antonio. He's been observing all this all the time.

And he has fallen in love with the young nun, Isabella. And at the end, he proposes to her.

[Rick]

And he comes back from his self-imposed exile and makes everything good.

[Gill]

And he proposes to her and she doesn't answer. And that's the end of the play. So, you know, I like that.

The fact that she probably wouldn't marry him.

[Luke]

Yeah. But it's technically considered a comedy just because of that definition. Because there's a marriage at the end.

The main character is married at the end. But in fact, there's all sorts of themes going on, which are...

[Gill]

Which are not comedic at all. And it was known for a long time as a problem play because it didn't fit into the confines of a true comedy. But I mean, that's Shakespeare.

He doesn't do comedies the way other people do.

[Luke]

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But even if it is, on the face of it, a comedy, there will be tragedy involved and there'll be other big themes going on. It's not frivolous. There's something serious going on.

So Twelfth Night, then. You talk about Twelfth Night.

[Rick]

Well, it probably is a little bit more frivolous, because there are some great moral themes in Shakespeare. I don't know whether there is a particularly great moral theme in Twelfth Night. It's just a rip-roaring good tale.

And it's one I know well, because I acted a small part in it at university. So I know the play very well. It's got some great characters in it.

It's got some of Shakespeare's themes in it. One is about cross-dressing. Shakespeare was quite interested in men dressed as women and women dressed as men.

[Gill]

Another modern element to Shakespeare.

[Rick]

And whether sexuality is absolute or not, which is, again, very modern. Some critics say, oh, I bet he was gay. Absolutely no evidence of that whatsoever.

And of course, on stage in his time, it was not acceptable for women to act on stage. So all the women's parts, and some of

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them are really quite well developed, were played by boys. So in Twelfth Night, you've got a shipwreck, twins, a girl and a boy.

They both each think the other one's died. The girl dresses as a man because she's in hostile territory, and she thinks she'll be safer that way. She gets into service with the Duke, the Duke, and she falls in love with the Duke while she is dressed as a boy.

He sends her off to the neighbouring lady to woo her on his behalf. The lady falls in love with the girl who's dressed as a boy. Meantime, there's a really strong subplot going on.

And sometimes the play is called Malvolio, because that's the name of the guy at the centre of the subplot. And he is the steward of the lady, and he is arrogant, pompous, and so on and so on. And her cousin, Sir Toby Belch, a drunk, is there with his friend, a foolish knight who is bleeding for his money, Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

And these people decide to play a trick on Malvolio. And that's where it gets a bit dark, because it gets quite vicious. And there's class, that's another theme of Shakespeare's.

Privilege, class. In this one, that's represented by the kind of court jester, if you like, who is employed by the lady. And Malvolio, you know, basically condemns his wit as being useless.

And, you know, he's a waste of space, and she should get rid of him, which is crucial to his well-being and his livelihood. And he takes this out on Malvolio when they're tricking him in a quite harsh

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way. The thing is all resolved, of course, in that the heroine, Viola's twin brother, shows up.

There's now wonderful confusions over who is who, because she dressed the same as him, and they're supposed to look alike. And it all gets resolved at the end.

[Luke]

Because the boy ends up with the woman who fell in love with his sister, thinking she was a boy, and then yadda yadda, yeah, OK.

[Gill]

There's lots of very interesting themes. The thing I like about it is the fact that Viola dresses as a boy, Cesaria, and she falls in love with the Duke. And they have long conversations, and the Duke gets to know her/him.

And he finds himself very puzzled, because he finds he's attracted to this young boy, and he can't understand why. And they get to know each other as two men, two males. That's how he talks to her, as though she is a man, the same as him.

You know, oh, women aren't like that, and women aren't like us, are they, mate? You know, that kind of thing. And I think it's quite, it's rather good that he gets to know her properly, because he doesn't talk to her as though she's a woman.

He gets to know her because he thinks she's a man.

And it seems to me that their relationship is much deeper because of that.

[Luke]

Right.

So as well as it being perhaps a comment on gender roles and gender identity and all this sort of thing, and there's like, isn't it interesting, this guy's falling in love with this person, even though this young man, and it's like, what's, you know. But as you say, that maybe this gets to the heart of real love, because he's falling in love with this person, and who this actual person, rather than falling in love with the idea of a woman, you know, without there being the encumbrances of the appearance of a woman.

[Gill]

Yes.

[Luke]

He's actually falling in love in the most genuine, true way.

[Gill]

Yes.

[Luke]

Yeah. And so it's something to do with the real nature of love.

[Gill]

Exactly. Yeah. And one worries for the lady, what's her name?

[Rick]

You're talking about Olivia?

[Gill]

Olivia, who ends up married to Sebastian, who is Viola's brother. And she fell in love with Viola because she thought she was Cesario.

[Luke]

So she fell in love with Viola because she thought Viola was a boy. She was attracted to, yeah, but then when she, the brother who actually is a boy, she, she ends up with him, but you worry about her because you think, well, yeah, she's falling in love with someone who just looks like him. So it's about appearances and what's underneath the surface and what, you know, real love really means and loving someone because of their looks versus loving someone because of who they actually are versus loving someone based on what society sort of allows you to do.

[Gill]

I mean, the more you look into it, the more there is there. I mean, it's absolutely fascinating.

[Rick]

And it's also got a lot of good jokes.

[Gill]

Yes. It's also funny. You know, I mean, we saw it just before Christmas and it was played like a pantomime and it was very funny, but you can play it really dark and really sad and it still works, you know, incredible.

[Luke]

Yeah. So that was Twelfth Night. Twelfth Night, that one.

Okay. Shall we talk about Hamlet then? Because we said before that we could talk about it.

So Hamlet is perhaps the most famous one along with a couple of others, like Romeo and Juliet is obviously a very famous one as well. But Hamlet is probably the most famous one and it's got famous scenes in it and famous quotes and so on. All right then.

So why does everyone say Hamlet is so brilliant? What's so great about Hamlet? Easy questions for you.

[Gill]

Hamlet is the one that most directly gets to the heart of what it is to be a human being, you know, in the body of Hamlet, because he goes through all these... I mean, it's ostensibly a revenge tragedy. And at the time Shakespeare was writing, the revenge tragedies were all a rage and they were all terribly bloody, you know, that something, somebody was having to take, a son was having to take revenge for something that had happened to his father, say.

And he would go at it and he would kill everybody and, do all the swashbuckling stuff and the stage would be covered in blood. And ostensibly, that's what Hamlet is. But it doesn't turn out like that because Hamlet is too thoughtful.

He can't just say, okay, I'm going to revenge my father and I'm going to go and kill Claudius because he thinks about it too much.

[Rick]

Shall I try and summarise the plot?

[Luke]

Go ahead.

[Rick]

I mean, some of your listeners might not know what the story's about. It's a very complicated plot.

So I'll try and do it very briefly.

We're in Denmark, in Elsinore Castle.

And one of Shakespeare's co-actors had been there on a tour. Richard Burbage. And he came back with, among other things, a document which has some of the names in the document that he used in the play.

Anyway, the King of Denmark is called Hamlet as well. So Hamlet is his son. There's a Hamlet Senior and a Hamlet Junior.

But basically, Hamlet Senior, the King, has died while his son, Hamlet, has been away at university. And Hamlet comes back and to discover that his father's brother, called Claudius, has become the king and married his mother.

[Luke]

That was quick.

[Rick]

Which upsets him quite a lot. And as he says, it's bad enough having the crown. I mean, as the son of the king, he should have become the king.

But he didn't. And it's bad enough with that happening and also Claudius marrying his mum. So he's not happy.

And then the ghost of his father appears to him, but also seen by others. So it's not in his imagination. And the ghost is dressed in armour and everything else.

And he tells Hamlet that his brother murdered him by pouring poison in his ear when he was asleep in the and that he wants revenge. Okay. So you would think Hamlet might get his sword out and go rushing off and kill his uncle.

But he doesn't. And he's worried, first of all, that the ghost is not at rest. He is being tortured.

It's horrible. We don't know any detail, but the ghost tells you what a horrible existence he's having as a ghost who can't go to rest. And he's, first of all, he's worried about what happens after you die.

Do you go into some kind of horrible purgatory? So he's worried about that. He's worried that seeing a ghost isn't good enough evidence.

What if the ghost is a demon? And it's not true, you know. And so he has doubts about this, doubts about that.

The main doubt is that he knows that if he kills the king, he himself will be killed.

[Luke]

By the king, the king's people. Yeah. Okay. So his death, he's staring death in the face.

[Rick]

So he knows that it will be his own death. Yeah. And he and that's this famous speech to be that's to be alive, or not to be.

Yeah, if he's going to do it, he has to come to terms with whether he's alive or not alive. So that's the question. If I go and do this, I will not be anymore. I will, I will die. Yeah. And of course, it is this big theme about mortality.

We don't know what happens and so on and so on. The play has twists and turns, which are really fantastic. I mean, really, really good.

He decides when the players travelling players come, he'll stage a play in front of the king, where a Duke gets killed by someone pouring poison into his ear in the garden. And he will watch the king to see whether he can confirm his guilt or not. It's in... it's not sure.

The king storms out saying, "give me light". But what does that mean?

[Luke]

So Hamlet puts on this play with these actors, which is interesting in itself, because you've got a play within a play within a play. It's always interesting thing, isn't it?

[Rick]

There's also a play within the play within the play.

[Luke]

Right. Okay. So we've got inception, basically in Shakespeare terms.

So Hamlet puts on this play with these actors in front of his uncle, the new king. And in the play, he has a scene where someone murders another person by pouring, a Duke, by pouring poison in their ear. And Hamlet's kind of like watching his uncle throughout the play to see how his uncle reacts in order to see if maybe, you know, if he can't handle it, if he reacts in a certain way, it might confirm that he did it.

And during this play, Claudius, the uncle, has to leave. He says, I need light, I need air or something. Give me light.

Give me light. So he has to leave the theatre.

[Rick]

Yeah, he storms out. Not before Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, who is now married to Claudius. When the play is being enacted and in the play, and the wife of the Duke is saying, I will never marry again.

There's only one man in the world for me. And that's you and all that kind of thing. She says, the lady does protest too much, we think.

Which shows how shallow she is.

[Luke]

Okay, so she doesn't believe that this woman in the play could really be, let's say, committed to only one man.

[Rick]

So committed, that's right.

[Luke]

She just like doesn't believe it, which again, reveals that she perhaps was a bit, you know, as you say, shallow and not the most loyal. Yeah. Very revealing.

[Rick]

Meantime, Hamlet decides that he's going to pretend to be going mad in the court. [Luke: As you do]. As a way of finding out what happened.

Not a very good plot line, but he says, I should put on an antic disposition, which means, and he does, he acts in a very bizarre way. But some people think he is going, I mean, he's disturbed, whether he's actually gone mad or not, is an open question. Depends how it's played.

Depends how it's played, but I don't think so. I think he is acting crazy. And in that condition, he gets very upset about instructions from on high to leave Ophelia alone.

Ophelia is daughter of the King's right hand man. And they don't think it would be suitable for Ophelia to be with Hamlet. So he's instructed to leave her alone.

This does disturb him a lot. And Ophelia does go mad.

[Gill]

It disturbs Ophelia a lot more.

[Rick]

Of being cut off by Hamlet, her much beloved boyfriend.

[Luke]

And then she spends half an hour drowning herself in the river while someone else watches, shocked. It's shocking. But Gertrude watches, shocked, and writes everything down in a notebook.

Beautifully.

[Rick]

And of course, there are other lines, which are what, in Shakespeare, quite a lot of the main characters have in the play, something that's called a foil. A foil is someone in a similar position who acts differently. So in this one, Hamlet thinks the King is listening in on him behind the curtains called the Arras.

Okay. And there's a noise. He's talking to his mother.

And there's a noise behind the curtains. And he pulls out his dagger. And he stabs through the curtain thinking he's stabbing the King.

Finally getting it done. I'm finally doing it.

[Luke]

Yeah.

[Rick]

But it isn't. It's his right hand man, Polonius, who is Ophelia's father.

[Luke] Oops.

Okay. So he's killed Polonius by mistake.

[Luke]

He's killed his girlfriend's dad by mistake, which is never a good thing.

[Rick]

Which is not a good thing. And it leads to her killing herself.

Anyway, she has got a brother, Laertes, and he is Hamlet's foil. So Hamlet's father has been murdered.

[Gill]

By Hamlet.

[Rick]

He can't do, he can't come, you know, to bring himself to kill Claudius. And the son of Polonius hears about his death killed by Hamlet. And he comes storming into the castle with a few other people.

Sword raised and he's going to, you know, kill the King. Claudius killed the King. You know, who's killed my father?

Blah, blah, blah. And he has to be talked down. But Claudius cunningly says, I'll give you a chance.

We'll have a fencing match with Hamlet and I shall poison your sword. And then you'll have it.

[Luke]

The thing about Laertes though, being Hamlet's foil, as you say, someone who's in a similar position, but acts differently, which kind of, again, sheds light on Hamlet because it kind of reveals, it emphasises the way he's acting. But it's that Laertes comes storming in and he's very decisive. He's just made up his mind and he has to be stopped.

[Gill]

He's the archetypal revenge tragedy hero. He takes revenge without thinking about it.

[Luke]

Yeah. Everything's very clear. There's no second guessing himself, no overthinking it, whereas Hamlet's doing the opposite.

He's overthinking everything completely. Yeah. Okay.

So Laertes wants to kill Hamlet, but Claudius says, let's make this fair. We'll do it as a fencing match. But then he says to Laertes, but I'll make sure you win because I'll put poison on your sword.

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So don't worry, but we'll make it look kind of fair. Okay. And then at the end, there's a sort of fight scene, isn't there, at the end sort of.

[Rick]

A fencing match at the end, yeah. Dramatic. And of course the swords get switched.

[Luke]

Yeah, but you shouldn't spoil the ending, should you? I don't know, can you do a spoiler alert?

[Rick]

There's a lot of bodies on the stage at the end.

[Luke]

It's nearly 400 years old, this play. So, you know, surely everyone knows, but I don't know.

[Rick]

And there's a poison cup involved. A poison drink.

[Luke]

A lot of people die, basically.

[Gill]

How many bodies are on the stage?

[Rick]

Oh, I don't know, about eight.

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[Luke]

Everyone dies. I mean, it's kind of, it's a bit ridiculous. Someone gets stabbed with a poison sword, they die.

Another person comes in and goes, oh my God, what's happened? And they pick up the sword and sort of accidentally cut their finger on it, they die. And then a rat comes in and licks the part of the sword and then they die.

And then anyone who steps into the room accidentally trips over and falls on the sword and they die.

[Rick]

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Anyway, it's a fantastic finish. It's a great finish to the play, a dramatic finish.

[Gill]

The real finish is when the king, is it the king of Norway?

[Rick]

Fortinbras.

[Gill]

Fortinbras.

[Rick]

It's the prince of Norway.

[Gill]

The prince of Norway comes on the stage. He says, right, they've all destroyed themselves. I'm taking over Denmark.

[Rick]

Basically, he does. Because “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”, I quote. The image of Hamlet that people will probably remember is him studying a skull.

Right, you know that image of Hamlet studying the skull. That comes kind of two thirds of the way through the play, where Claudius has managed to get rid of him by sending him to England on a ship.

[Gill]

With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

[Rick]

With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and her former college mates who are basically working for the king. He discovers that they're carrying a letter that says when he gets to England, he should be killed. So he arranges for them to meet the same fate.

Instead, changes the letter. Pirates invade the ship. He gets landed back in Denmark and he comes incognito, in disguise if you like.

And he's come back to the court and he comes into the graveyard where there's a gravedigger digging a grave. Little does he know that it's Ophelia's grave. But as the gravedigger chucks bones and skulls out of the grave he's digging, he says, oh yeah, that was Yorick.

And Yorick used to be the court jester when Hamlet was a little boy. So he's looking at this skull saying this was a man of most

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infinite jest. And it's a very dramatic symbol of contemplating death.

[Gill]

Memento mori.

[Rick]

It's what you're thinking. He used to be a jolly fellow and now.

Look at him now. He's got a dirty skull. This is how we will all end up.

And so that's really why that image sticks. Hamlet contemplating death. Yes.

He knows he's going to die. He knows he's going to die. And he comes to terms with it in the end with the famous, famous line.

[Gill]

“There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, it is not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now.

If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.”

[Rick]

The readiness is all.

[Gill]

“No man of aught he leaves knows. What is it to leave betimes? Let be.”

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[Luke: Meaning?] Meaning, well, it's the kind of stoic thing, you know, we're all going to die. We may as well just accept it and not make a big thing of it.

Just let be, you know, let it be.

[Rick]

Now, it may be now. If it isn't now, it will come.

[Gill]

It's rationalising.

[Rick]

And it's not to come, it's now. The readiness is all. You've got to be ready for death.

And he is. He becomes ready for death at the end. He knows in his heart of hearts that he's not going to survive this sword fight.

[Gill]

Yes, that speech comes when the foppish guy from the court comes to challenge, to tell Hamlet that Laertes is challenging him to a duel. And he's there with his mate. Oh, what's Hamlet's?

[Rick]

Horatio.

[Gill]

Horatio. And Horatio says, don't, don't, it's a trap. Don't go for it.

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And that's when Hamlet then says, you know, if it's not now, it will be to come. You just have to accept it and let be. What will be, will be.

It's an acceptance.

[Rick]

Very good. Yeah, Horatio is another interesting character. He's his sidekick, trusty friend.

Seems to have a homoerotic relationship with Hamlet. He loves him. But he's like a journalist.

He he's there observing and noting. And at the end, Hamlet tells him he has to survive. So the faithful account will be given.

Right.

[Luke]

Okay. Yeah.

[Rick]

It's a great play.

[Gill]

Oh, I mean, it's bottomless. You could talk about it for days.

[Luke]

Mm hmm. So if I was to do a sort of passage from it in an episode, maybe in an upcoming episode, perhaps the perhaps an

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interesting one would be the soliloquy, which appears in that film with Withnail and I.

[Gill]

Oh, yes.

[Luke]

Right.

[Rick]

What does he say...?

[Gill]

You know, it's the one about, oh, I'll go and get it.

[Luke]

What piece of work is a man?

[Rick]

This world is a sterile commentary (promontory).

[Luke]

Yes. What a wonderful earth, you know, look at the sky. It's wonderful, isn't it?

But for me, it's just a congregation of pestilent vapours.

[Rick]

Yes. It's quite early on when he's depressed, to say the least. Yeah.

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Because of the things that, you know, he's discovered, his uncle and his, and he's just genuinely very depressed.

[Gill]

No, no, no. It happens quite early on in the play. Yes, early on.

[Luke]

So, yeah, he's depressed and he's talking about his depression and he says, this is the quote, he says, "I have of late, wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth. And indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy, the air.

Look you, this brave overhanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire. Why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man.

How noble in reason. How infinite in faculties. How like an angel in apprehension.

How like a god. The beauty of the world, paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

Man delights not me. No, nor women, neither. Nor women, neither."

So that's quite a good one. And it does appear in that film, which I did an episode on a few years ago with James.

[Gill]

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Yes, I think it's a brilliant, it's a really brilliant piece. It's a brilliant description of depression, isn't it?

[Rick]

It's when his former students have been brought to court by Claudius to find out what's wrong with him. And he just says...

[Luke]

Hold on, you can put your phone on silent.

[Rick]

Yes, sorry.

[Luke]

There's a lot of dinging going on. Sorry, dad.

[Rick]

I was just saying that these two are called Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The two of the names in the document that came back from Elsinore, by the way. And so he's used those names. And they, what was the phrase used?

Glean. Glean what afflicts him. "Glean what afflicts him".

[Luke]

That's what the king has asked them to do, to find out what's going on with Hamlet.

[Rick]

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What's the matter with him? And of course, he doesn't trust them. He greets them as old pals and everything else. And basically says, so what are you doing here?

And they kind of shuffle and everything. And he says, you were sent for, weren't you? And they, well, we'd like to come and see you sir.

You were sent for, weren't you? You know, and then they have this icier relationship.

[Gill]

Where is your phone? Well, can you take it out...?

[Rick]

I'm sorry. All these messages piling in were so popular.

[Luke]

There's no Shakespeare quotes about the annoying sound of dinging mobile phones, is there?

[Gill]

No, not that I know of.

[Rick]

There's a modern play by a great playwright called Tom Stoppard, which is called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. And I mean, it's a fabulous play, but it's all set in *Hamlet* behind the scenes.

[Gill]

You know it, don't you, Luke?

[Luke]

I do.

[Rick]

So the plot is going on in the background. And these two are, as the title suggests, they are, it is a line in the play when the king discovers that Hamlet hasn't been killed in England and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have instead.

So it's reported back Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. So the title of this play is that line. And of course, it's a very interesting play on a whole number of levels.

But one of them is questions and answers. One of the things about Hamlet is that it is full of questions and answers. Or full of questions.

Not many answers. Certainly full of questions. It starts with a question.

The guards on the castle walls at night. Who goes there? It's a question.

And there's lots of them in the play. Yeah.

[Luke]

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, which is that modern play that you just mentioned. There's a really good film version of it. It was filmed.

[Gill]

Tim Roth and Gary Oldman.

[Luke]

Tim Roth and Gary Oldman playing the two characters. Two great actors. And yeah, it's brilliant.

All of the dialogue is excellent. And it's really good.

[Rick]

Yeah. There's a nice scene where they're playing real tennis. This is the original type of tennis on a real tennis court.

It's interior. Yeah. They play a game where they have to ask questions.

So the first one who breaks down loses a point. So it goes right to, is it my serve? Why are you asking?

That kind of thing. You know, that you have to answer with a question.

[Luke]

A fun game. It's a fun game where you do kind of question tennis. Where someone says, you know, how are you doing today?

Wouldn't you like to know?

[Gill]

Yes. Why are you asking?

[Luke]

What's wrong with me asking in the first place? How many times are you going to ask me that? And you keep going and going.

Yeah. It's quite a good challenge where you have to keep asking meaningful questions in response. Okay.

All right. Good. You're going to go and see Hamlet, aren't you?

Soon at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford?

[Gill]

Yeah.

[Luke]

Okay. Well, I hope it'll be a good one.

[Gill]

Well, we've seen loads of different Hamlets and each one is different.

[Luke]

Yeah. I remember we saw Hamlet at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre with Kenneth Branagh in the role of Hamlet.

[Gill]

Yes. That was a real endurance test, wasn't it? Because he did the full text.

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Because the full text is very rarely done because it runs for about four hours long.

[Rick]

Four and a bit.

[Gill]

And he decided he would do the whole lot. So you and James were dragged along to this four-hour-long Hamlet.

[Luke]

It's all right, though. I only have good memories of that, really. Good.

I mean, it's obviously nice being in the theatre and stuff and it's always good to see. And Kenneth Branagh, you know, top-level stuff, right?

[Gill]

Yeah, yeah.

[Luke]

But I do remember some of those plays being, yeah, as you say, a bit of an endurance test. Yeah. I was going to mention film versions of these plays because it might be difficult for people to go out to the theatre and see Shakespeare in English and it might be easier to watch film versions.

Are there any particularly good feature films of Shakespeare plays?

[Gill]

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Loads of them. I mean, talking of Hamlet, the most famous one, I think, is the Laurence Olivier one, which was done in the 30s, wasn't it?

[Rick]

Very old-fashioned, yes.

[Gill]

It's in black and white and it's very cut. It's very short. And then there's Kenneth Branagh's one, of course, which is on film.

There's a Mel Gibson one. Mel Gibson? Yeah, it wasn't bad.

Really? Gosh, there's loads of them. I can't think of any at the moment.

[Luke]

Yeah, so there's those versions of Hamlet. There's also, yeah, so yeah, the Kenneth Branagh one from the 90s with Kate Winslet and lots of other great actors. The Laurence Olivier one, as you said, the old one.

Mel Gibson's one, right? But then there are other plays as well, other Shakespeare plays on film, including several versions of Macbeth, which are not bad. I mean, I've only ever seen the Roman Polanski Macbeth.

I think it was done in the 70s and there's quite a lot of, it's quite horrific, as Macbeth should be.

[Gill]

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But that's the interesting thing, because when it's done on film, they tend to be much more explicit with the battle scenes and all that kind of thing, which you don't get on the stage. So it's a different experience.

[Luke]

John Finch is the actor who plays Macbeth in the Roman Polanski one. It's from 1971.

I mean, it's good. It's very atmospheric and I think I remember the witches being particularly frightening and the ending is good, you know, because there's a gruesome ending, you know, when Macbeth finally meets his end and a few special effects and stuff.

[Gill]

And Vernon Wood comes to Dunsinane.

[Rick]

And he's faced with Macduff. Macduff, who comes along and sorts him out.

He says, I can't be killed by a man, a woman born. And Duncan says, I was ripped untimely from my mother's womb. I wasn't born at all.

I'm a Caesarian.

[Luke]

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Spoiler alert. So there's Macbeth.

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There's also a more recent Macbeth with Michael Fassbender. I can't say if it's good, though. I haven't seen it.

Yeah, we saw it. You didn't like it. [Rick: No, I didn't.]

[Gill]

I think I rather liked it, but Rick didn't.

[Rick]

There are loads of films of Shakespeare. I mean, obviously Branagh did Henry V quite famously. And Much Ado About Nothing.

Much Ado is in that as well, along with Emma Thompson.

[Luke]

And there's obviously the famous Romeo and Juliet, Baz Luhrmann, which was good, I think. A modern telling of that story with kind of rival gangs in the US.

[Gill]

That was the one with Leo, whatever his name is.

[Luke]]

Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes. Yes. So I hope everyone has enjoyed listening to us, or mainly you, rambling about Shakespeare.

Thank you very much.

[Gill]

Well, it was very much a ramble, I'm afraid.

[Luke]

Well, you know, what can you do?

I think, to be honest, if it had been anything else, it probably would have ended up being... Because, you know, with this sort of thing, you could think, right, we should really prepare this in advance. But the more you prepare it, the more boring it becomes, ultimately.

[Rick]

It becomes like a lecture.

[Luke]

I mean, yeah. Exactly. It becomes like a lecture.

And there's something, I think, more compelling in a sort of natural conversation that kind of happens spontaneously, especially when there's no real pressure for an episode of this podcast. It's not like you're doing a lecture to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, or you're doing some sort of big lecture in a public place or something, as an expert on Shakespeare. This is really more just a conversation about Shakespeare.

And I think that...

[Gill]

It's more a case of, isn't Shakespeare brilliant?

[Luke]

Yeah, yeah.

[Gill]

Than anything else.

[Luke]

Yeah.

[Gill]

When it comes down to it, that's what... what else can you say?
He's brilliant.

[Luke]

I don't know what we could say to people in terms of what they can do next. If, you know, some people who perhaps didn't know much about Shakespeare, or people who knew a bit but not that much, and now they feel like, right, I'd love to see Hamlet or experience this, get into this somehow. What should they do?

I mean, I suppose it's some of those film versions.

[Rick]

Yeah, you're quite right.

They should watch one or two of the films and see what they think of it.

[Gill]

There's another... Richard III. Remember Ian McKellen, Richard III, set in the 1930s. That's a very good version.

[Rick]

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Some people say they don't like modern dress Shakespeare. They think it should all be, you know, set in the 16th century. But over the years, people have soon discovered that the themes are universal.

And you can set these plays in all sorts of different places. And they bring out new things. When Shakespeare put them on, they were modern when he did it.

So, you know, I think people shouldn't be at all prejudiced about, you know, something set in the 1930s or something, because the themes are explored in a similar way.

[Gill]

Well, it just shows how universal he is, you know, that you can set him in all different ages and times and periods and styles. And it works.

[Rick]

And the language is difficult. At the beginning of this podcast, you were saying how when you're kind of 14, you found it difficult. You're not alone.

I mean, I think kids, when they start studying Shakespeare, are put off by the difficult language because it's difficult in two reasons. One is this early modern English has got quite a lot of different words in it and expressions. But also Shakespeare's very dense.

He does, you know, speeches which have layers in them and similes and all sorts of, you know, references. So you have to sometimes you're reading it. Go over it again.

I don't have understood that so that you get the feeling. On stage, you nearly always know what's going on. And, you know, you might not understand the words particularly well, but you certainly get the idea.

[Luke]

And I'll come back to the subject on the podcast soon, where I'll go through some speeches or from lines of text, read them out and try and interpret them as best I can and talk about them. And maybe I could do a few different types, because there's the dark stuff that I enjoy. But then there's also the more romantic passages from Romeo and Juliet or something about politics or, you know, so I'll try and find some good passages that I can talk about in future episodes.

OK, OK. Right. Well, thank you for that.

Yeah. And I hope you enjoy seeing Hamlet in a few weeks time. And have a lovely rest of your afternoon.

[Rick]

Yeah. Have a lovely day.

[Gill]

And you.

[Rick]

OK.

[Gill]

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OK.

[Rick]

Nice to see you.

[Luke]

Cheers.

[Gill]

Bye.

[Rick]

Bye for now. Bye.

[ENDING]

So that was my mum and dad on the podcast, talking about Shakespeare, explaining why Shakespeare's work is so great. And I hope you enjoyed listening to them. It's always nice to hear their voices on the podcast to get their contributions.

So thanks again to both of them. And how was that for you? You can always leave your comments wherever you are listening to this.

I'm very curious to know what you think. And of course, many of you listening will be familiar with Shakespeare, you might have studied his work, you might have seen plays, Shakespeare plays performed on stage in the theatre. Or maybe you've read them, maybe you know a lot about Shakespeare, and you have things to comment and share.

Or maybe you never really knew much about Shakespeare. And this was a chance for you to understand what all the fuss is about,

meaning why everyone talks about Shakespeare and why he's considered to be so great. Hopefully, this gave you a window into what is so great about Shakespeare.

But leave your comments in the comment section. Any insights, any comments about the subject, about the episode? Have you ever seen a Shakespeare play on stage?

Which one was it? What did you think of it? Have you ever read any Shakespeare?

Did you find it difficult to understand? Or did you enjoy the poetic language? What's your favourite Shakespeare play?

Have you ever seen a Shakespeare play transformed into a film? Have you ever seen any of the film versions? And what did you think of them?

Yes, leave your comments in the comment section. It's always nice to get your responses. Now, I think there is a lot to learn from this episode, not just about the topic, of course, not just for your general knowledge about this subject, but also in terms of the English that you could pick up from this.

So much descriptive language when describing the characters, the storylines, also describing the plays, the works of literature, discussing opinions and things like that. So much language that you could pick up from this. Lots to learn about the topic and also English and not just the basics, you know, like a play.

And these are a couple of words I just wrote down that in my experience as a teacher, I've noticed that I would kind of think are quite simple words, really, but that learners of English don't always sort of instantly know them. So you obviously have a film or a movie in the cinema, but a play is what is performed in a theatre on

stage, right? So actors performing, for example, Romeo and Juliet, this is a play and you go and see a play in the theatre, OK?

And the play is performed on the stage by actors. There's a script, right? So the actors have to practise reading the and remembering the lines of the script and then they have to perform it.

I'm always impressed that actors are able to do that, that they can memorise all of those complex lines and it's very impressive that they can do that. So that's a play on stage in a theatre, reading a script, but also lots of other vocabulary. And I'm talking about things like just all the stuff that came up during the episode.

And I've got a list, I've got a vocab list on the PDF for this episode. I mentioned it briefly. I mentioned briefly at the beginning of the episode that there's a PDF for this one and there is, and you can get it.

It's completely free. You can download it. And the PDF contains these things.

First of all, it contains a full transcript of the episode. So every word transcribed. So you can go into the transcript, find words and phrases that you heard or check things in the script or read from the transcript.

Again, use it as a practising tool. So you can do some, you know, listen and repeat and then check the transcript. You could try and transcribe some sections, check the transcript.

The transcript is a very valuable resource if you're motivated enough. It can provide you with sort of, you know, the written version of the audio that you heard. And it's just a great thing to do.

You could just even just simply read the transcript after having heard the conversation. You could read the transcript again, just without listening, just to kind of reinforce what you heard by getting it again, but in the written version. And of course, you can note things and copy paste them into vocab lists.

So you've got the transcript, but on the PDF as well, you've got a selection of comprehension questions. So I went through the episode again, the conversation and wrote about 20 comprehension questions based on the conversation. And you can use those comprehension questions just to check that you've understood the conversation.

Now, I would go through them all now. I would love to do that. And if I was in a language classroom, maybe I would do that if we had like a two or three hour class.

That might be something that I would do. I'd set the questions in advance. This time I didn't do that because I didn't want to do an incredibly long introduction where I read out lots of comprehension questions.

I wanted to try and get straight to the conversation as early as possible. But there are something in the region of 20 comprehension questions that you could use to see how much you understood the conversation. And by going through those questions and searching for answers, that's a good way to, let's say, maybe focus your attention more specifically on certain details in the episode, test your memory, test your understanding.

So you've got comprehension questions. You've also got the answers to those comprehension questions on the PDF. And as well as that, yes, the full script and also a vocabulary list with something like 30, over 30 items of vocabulary, including things

like, you know, language used to describe the work of Shakespeare, like the fact that it's, I said that his work is impenetrable.

Some people, when they read Shakespeare, they find it impenetrable. If something's impenetrable, it means you can't really, you can't really get into it. You can't access it.

It's kind of like it's completely blocked. There's no way in. A building can be impenetrable, meaning that it's like a sort of a castle, right?

A castle could be impenetrable. You can't penetrate it. You can't get in because the walls are too solid.

The doors are locked and really strong. So the castle is impenetrable. Similarly, to some people, Shakespeare's work is quite impenetrable.

It's difficult to understand. It's difficult to get into it, right? So impenetrable, that's just the first item on the list.

Also eloquent is another one, another adjective. Eloquent speech or eloquent writing. If something is eloquent, it means it's very expressive, using all the right words and expressing a specific feeling or a specific description using all the right, very specific words.

So I think that either my mum or dad described Hamlet as a very sort of dramatic symbol of the contemplation of death. And it's very eloquent. The play is very eloquent.

It describes our complex relationship with death in very precise, articulate, specific language. So it's very eloquent. And the list goes on.

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There's just loads of stuff, loads of adjectives to describe the work, to describe the characters. So adjectives to describe personality, the sorts of language that we would use to describe Shakespeare's work. For example, iambic pentameter, which is a poetic rhythm that you find in Shakespeare's plays and his sonnets.

And by the way, I'm going to read a sonnet. Sonnet. No, sonnet.

I'm going to read one to you in a few moments just before the end of the episode to give you an idea. And so on and so forth, right? Lots of vocab.

And as well as the list, and the list contains the words, examples from the episode, definitions of the words and little comments to help you remember them. As well as that, there's a vocabulary quiz, which you can use to check your understanding and check your memory of all the words in the list. So go and have a look at the PDF and get stuck in there.

At least try to answer the comprehension questions. Check the answers. Try to do the vocab quiz.

Check the answers to that as well. And if you want, you could read through the script if you want to kind of reinforce what you heard by converting it into the sort of visual sort of written English for you. Yes.

So that's all there to help you learn English from this podcast beyond just listening to the episode and enjoying it. I want to say just before I read a poem to you, I want to say that this is the first of more episodes about Shakespeare, which will be coming up on Luke's English Podcast soon. I mentioned this earlier, but yes, I have plans to do a few different episodes.

So the idea, the plan is that so I'm going to have some free episodes and then a few premium episodes as well, because there's a lot to do, a lot to deal with. In terms of free episodes, I'm going to probably do about two more free episodes relating to Shakespeare. The first one will be idioms and expressions from Shakespeare.

I've got a list of really nice, expressive, lovely sounding, natural expressions that we use today. Crucially, we use them in everyday English today, but they originally came from Shakespeare's work and they've got that nice sort of touch of class to them, you could say. I mentioned some of them during the episode, but I've got a list.

So I'll do like a section of my list. I'll make it a free episode going through some idioms and expressions from Shakespeare, and then I'll do the rest of my list of other episodes featuring all the other items in the list. They will be premium episodes, but the first one will be free.

The others will, I'll finish my list in premium episodes. And then another free episode relating to Shakespeare will be analysing Shakespeare's English. And the plan there is to look at some scenes from some of his famous plays.

At the moment, I'm looking at Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet. And the idea is to pick out some sections of the text, read them out to you, and then analyse what's written there. Pick apart the old-fashioned English and convert it into maybe more modern English to give you a chance to get a sense of what that old English looks like and sounds like.

And then also to analyse and discuss what the lines actually mean. So interpreting the deep meanings being expressed in those lines.

For example, Hamlet and his philosophising about, you know, life, the universe and everything to be or not to be.

Romeo talking to Juliet when she's on the balcony, expressing his love for her, and some other things. So that will be another free episode analysing Shakespeare's English. And then the other episodes will be premium ones.

And I've got, I want to do a premium episode in which I go through the vocab list for this episode and review the vocab list. Kind of go through it and talk about it. Go through the comprehension questions on the PDF for this episode and kind of point things out and give you more comments and stuff.

So a way to digest this episode. So I'm planning a premium episode where we review what came up in this episode. And then, yeah, the other premium episodes will be finishing off the idioms and expressions from my big list.

I'll be starting that in a free episode. I'll finish it off in premium. Okay, so more Shakespeare stuff coming on the podcast, not necessarily immediately after this, but over the next few weeks, you will see some more Shakespeare themed episodes coming up as I attempt to do justice to this important subject and this important aspect of English language and culture, which I think should be dealt with.

I think if, you know, if you're really getting into English, it's worth having, you know, even a basic knowledge of Shakespeare, certainly the expressions that were introduced in his work, and also just a sense of what the lines, the poetry is like in Shakespeare's work, certainly some key scenes from his play. So that will be coming up. I hope that you will be interested in that.

And then finally, right at the end, I said that I'd read a sonnet to you. Now, what I'm going to read to you is not actually one of Shakespeare's sonnets, because that would frankly take a lot more time for me to get into. But instead, I found a poem in a book of poetry.

I've got this book of poetry, it's called 180 More Extraordinary Poems for Every Day. So it's a sort of a collection of everyday poems. It's a really good book with some interesting works of poetry inside, with different styles and things.

And poem number 104 is actually called Shakespearean Sonnet by R.S. Gwynne. And I thought it was perfect as a way of ending this episode. So this is a sonnet that was written, not by Shakespeare, but by an American poet called R.S. Gwynne. And it's called Shakespearean Sonnet. And the interesting thing about this is that it is a sonnet and it conforms to all of the normal, it conforms to all of the normal conventions of a sonnet. So to be considered a sonnet, this kind of poem has to have these features.

So it has to have 14 lines, okay, and it has to have a certain structure. It should be written in iambic pentameter, right? Iambic pentameter is a rhythm, a rhythm, also called a metre of poetry, which means that there are 10 syllables in each line.

Okay, so 14 lines with 10 syllables in each line. My dad mentioned this during the episode. He talked about iambic pentameter, five pairs of syllables,
da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.

That's the rhythm of each line, basically. And also a kind of a rhyming structure as well, which goes
A-B-A-B-C-D-C-D-E-F-E-F-G-G. So the A-B-A-B thing means that

A is the first line, B is the second line, then the next line after that rhymes with the first line.

So that's A-B-A-B, meaning that's the rhyming system where A and A rhyme with each other, B and B rhyme with each other. Then C-D-C-D, same thing, C and C rhyme, D and D rhyme. And I say rhyme, I mean the sounds of the words are the same, like ghost and host, fight and night, right?

These are rhymes. So pairs of rhyming lines, and then the last two lines are known as a couplet, and that's where they directly rhyme with each other. So mistake and snake, for example, okay, that's known as a couplet.

So it's A-B-A-B-C-D-C-D-E-F-E-F-G-G, right? Fourteen lines, ten syllables in each line, and a certain rhyming structure. And this Shakespearean sonnet, yes, it's written by Gwynne, and it follows the structure of a sonnet.

And the interesting thing is that each line is a summary of a different Shakespeare play, okay? And it's really clever and really quite nice. It's kind of light and quite funny and playful in its tone, this sonnet.

And I'm going to read it to you now, and you can kind of notice the rhythm and the rhyming structure and everything. But also, if you know anything about Shakespeare plays, maybe you can identify the name of each play at the end of each line. For example, I'll just tell you the first line of the sonnet as an example.

The first line is this, A man is haunted by his father's ghost. A man is haunted by his father's ghost. Obviously, this is Hamlet, as you know, right?

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You know now if you didn't know before, but this is Hamlet, isn't it? So for each line, notice the structure, and can you guess which play is being described? So this is Shakespearean sonnet by R.S. Gwynne. A man is haunted by his father's ghost. A boy and girl love while their families fight. A Scottish king is murdered by his host.

Two couples get lost on a summer night. A hunchback murders all who block his way. A ruler's rivals plot against his life.

A fat man and a prince make rebels pay. A noble moor has doubts about his wife. An English king decides to conquer France.

A duke learns that his best friend is a she. A forest sets the scene for this romance. An old man and his daughters disagree.

A Roman leader makes a big mistake. A sexy queen is bitten by a snake. So that is Shakespearean sonnet.

So the first line, a man is haunted by his father's ghost. This is Hamlet. Second line, a boy and girl love while their families fight.

This is obviously Romeo and Juliet, because it's about a boy and girl who come from two rival families, families that are at war with each other. But the boy and girl come from these two families, but they fall in love. A Scottish king is murdered by his host.

This is Macbeth, the Scottish play. And at the beginning of the play, Macbeth meets these witches, three witches who predict the future and tell Macbeth that he will be the king. And Macbeth, his ambition to become the king sort of obsesses him to the point that when he is hosting the current king in his castle, his wife and him, they conspire together to murder the king.

And in doing so, Macbeth becomes king. And then everything goes horribly, horribly wrong. So that's a Scottish king is murdered by his host.

Two couples get lost on a summer night. That's a Midsummer Night's Dream about two couples getting lost in the forest. A hunchback murders all who block his way.

This is Richard III, the story of an English king who people think he had a hunchback, like a sort of deformation on his back, which caused him to have this large sort of hunch, a big bump on his back, which meant that he couldn't stand up straight. So there's a hunchback. A hunchback murders all who block his way.

A ruler's rivals plot against his life. This is Richard II. A fat man and a prince make rebels pay.

This is Henry IV. A noble moor has doubts about his wife. This is Othello, telling the story of this noble moorish prince, I think, who is sort of made to believe that his wife is cheating on him.

But what's really going on? An English king decides to conquer France. This is Henry V.

A duke learns that his best friend is a she. This is Twelfth Night. All right, a duke learns his best friend is a she.

So this is what my dad was talking about in this play. One of the characters pretends is a girl, but pretends to be a boy because it's too dangerous to wander into this new place as a girl on her own. So she disguises herself as a boy.

She makes friends with this duke and they fall in love. But the duke is confused because he doesn't understand why he feels so attracted to this person. And in the end, he realises that he is actually a she.

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Right, a forest sets the scene for this romance. This is As You Like It, another sort of romance in this case, set in a forest. An old man and his daughters disagree.

This is King Lear. A Roman leader makes a big mistake. This is Julius Caesar.

And a sexy queen is bitten by a snake. It's Antony and Cleopatra, telling the story of Antony and Cleopatra, of course. So there you go.

I thought that would be an interesting way to end the episode. But that's it. So yeah, more Shakespeare stuff coming soon at some point on Luke's English podcast, as well as, you know, more other content that you, you know, may be expecting the usual stuff.

I'll let you discover it when it arrives. Thank you for listening. And yes, leave your comments.

And that's all for this episode. Lovely to talk to you, speak to you in the next part. But for now, it's just time to say goodbye.

Bye, bye, bye, bye. Thanks for listening to Luke's English podcast. For more information, visit teacherluke.co.uk