

SCOP Shakespeare Plots

The top twelve plays you'll need to know

TRAGEDIES

Romeo and Juliet

Characters:

Romeo Montague

Mercutio, his friend

Juliet Capulet

Nurse, her confidante

Tybalt, her cousin

Friar Lawrence

Paris, Juliet's fiancé

Plot: In Verona, the Montagues and Capulets are at war. Juliet is to meet her fiancé, Paris, at a ball hosted by the Capulets, but she falls in love with Romeo instead. Romeo courts Juliet from under her balcony later that night. The next day, they are married by Friar Lawrence. Spurred on by his love for Juliet, Romeo attempts to separate Mercutio and Tybalt during a duel, but Mercutio is fatally stabbed under Romeo's outstretched arm. Romeo kills Tybalt in revenge, which Juliet almost immediately forgives. The pair spend a passionate night together. Romeo flees in the morning to escape the Capulet clan, who wish to avenge Tybalt's death. Juliet's parents, unaware of the marriage, pressure her to wed Paris. To escape this fate, Juliet drinks a potion to feign death, and is lying in her family's tomb when Romeo returns. Not knowing that Juliet is drugged and not dead, Romeo goes to her, killing Paris on the way in, and commits suicide with poison over her "body." When she wakes to find Romeo dead, Juliet stabs herself with Romeo's dagger and dies. Lords Montague and Capulet realize the pain their feud has brought, and agree to promote peace within Verona by erecting a golden statue of the pair.

Julius Caesar

Characters:

Julius Caesar

Calphurnia, his wife

Cassius

Brutus

Portia, his wife

Marcus Antonius

Octavius Caesar

Plot: Caesar returns from victory over Pompey to much excitement, and ignores a warning from a soothsayer to "beware the Ides of March." Cassius convinces Brutus to kill Caesar by writing fake letters from the Roman populace expressing concern that Julius Caesar will become a dictator and subjugate the wills of the people. Against Calphurnia's advice, Caesar makes his way to the senate on the Ides of March, a group of conspirators, including Cassius and Brutus, stab him to death. Brutus gives a speech to the people explaining his actions, but Marcus Antonius reveals that Caesar's will leaves money to each citizen of Rome, and the tide turns against the conspirators. Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), Octavius Caesar, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus join forces as a triumvirate and go to battle against the conspirators, who are all slain. Marcus Antonius commends the dead Brutus as "the noblest Roman off them all," since he acted for what he felt was best for Rome, rather than from desire for power.

Shakespeare

Version 1.2

Hamlet

Characters:

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Claudius, his uncle, King of Denmark

Gertrude, his mother, Queen of Denmark

The Ghost of Old Hamlet, his father

Polonius, an advisor to King Claudius

Laertes, Polonius's son

Ophelia, Polonius's daughter, a romantic interest of Hamlet

Horatio, Hamlet's longtime friend and confidante

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's friends

Fortinbras, King of Norway

Plot: Set in Elsinore Castle, Denmark. Gertrude and Claudius have married and are ruling Denmark after the death of Old Hamlet, the previous king and Claudius's brother. Old Hamlet's ghost appears to Hamlet to seek revenge against Claudius, who poisoned Old Hamlet to gain the throne. Hamlet begins to act insane to discover whether this is true. Claudius and Gertrude call in Hamlet's old school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but they fail to discover why Hamlet is mad. A group of traveling actors comes to the castle, and Hamlet has them perform a play in which a king's brother kills the king and married the queen to gain the throne. Convinced by Claudius's reaction that he's guilty of Old Hamlet's murder, Hamlet plans to kill his uncle. He confronts Gertrude in her chambers and stabs Polonius through a curtain, thinking he's Claudius. Claudius sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but he gives them the slip, and they're killed upon arriving in England. Ophelia goes mad and drowns herself, and Claudius convinces Laertes to avenge his family by dueling Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Claudius prepares a cup of poisoned wine in case the sword fails to kill Hamlet. During the duel, Hamlet and Laertes accidentally switch swords, and Laertes is killed. Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Hamlet, slowly dying after being scratched with the poisoned sword, kills Claudius and dies. Fortinbras arrives and claims the throne, and he and Horatio honor the fallen prince.

Othello

Characters:

Othello, a Moor

Desdemona, his wife

Brabantio, her father

Iago, soldier under Othello's command

Cassio, a lieutenant under Othello's command

Roderigo, a rich man, Desdemona's suitor

Plot: Brabantio accuses Othello of using witchcraft to marry Desdemona, but Othello explains before the Venetian senate that Desdemona was attracted by stories of Othello's life. He sails to Cyprus with Iago, Emilia, Roderigo, and Desdemona. Iago, out of hatred for Othello, schemes to destroy him. He gets Cassio drunk and uses Roderigo to provoke him to violence against the local governor. Othello strips Cassio of his title, and Iago tells Cassio to approach Desdemona to get back in Othello's favor, then suggests to Othello that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair. Emilia steals Desdemona's handkerchief, and Iago makes it seem as though Desdemona gave it to Cassio. Consumed by jealousy, Othello asks Iago to help him get revenge. Iago wounds Cassio and Othello murders Desdemona in her bed. Emilia arrives and discovers what Othello has done, reveals the truth, and is killed by Iago. Iago flees, but is brought back. Othello wounds him, then commits suicide. Lodovico announces that Othello's property will be given to Graziano and Iago will be executed.

Shakespeare

Version 1.2

Macbeth

Characters:

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis

Lady Macbeth, his wife

Macduff, a nobleman

Banquo, a general

Fleance, Banquo's son

Duncan, king of Scotland

Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's sons

Plot: Set in Dunsinane Castle, Scotland. Returning from war, Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches, who tell Macbeth that he will be made Thane of Cawdor and eventually king, and that Banquo's offspring will also rule Scotland. When they reach Dunsinane, Macbeth is indeed made Thane of Cawdor, and Lady Macbeth decides that he must kill King Duncan to gain the throne and fulfill the witches' prophecy. He does so and is made king. Malcolm and Donalbain flee in fear for their lives. To stop Banquo's progeny from fulfilling the witches' prophecy by taking over the throne, Macbeth hires murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance

King Lear

Characters:

Lear, King of Britain

Goneril, his daughter

Regan, his daughter

Cordelia, his daughter

Albany, Goneril's husband

Cornwall, Regan's husband

King of France

Gloster

Edmund

Edgar

Kent

Plot: Lear sets out to divide his kingdom between his daughters. He asks them to extol their love for him, which Goneril and Regan, desiring power, readily do. Cordelia, who loves her father dearly, refuses to make flowery speeches that could never measure up to her love, and Lear disowns her, revoking her dowry. Despite her poverty, the King of France marries Cordelia. When Kent, Lear's long-time loyal supporter, attempts to defend Cordelia's actions, Lear casts him into exile. Meanwhile, Edmund, bastard son of Gloster, schemes to gain an inheritance at the expense of his legitimate brother, Edgar. Kent rejoins Lear's retinue in disguise as Lear visits Goneril and Regan, who insult him, eventually locking Kent up in stocks. Lear realizes too late that only Cordelia truly loves him. As Cordelia leads the French army in an invasion of Britain, Goneril kills Regan and then commits suicide, Edmund dies, Cordelia dies, and Lear dies of grief.

Shakespeare

Version 1.2

COMEDIES

The Comedy of Errors

Characters:

Antipholus of Syracuse

Dromio of Syracuse

Antipholus of Ephesus

Dromio of Ephesus

Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus

Egeon, father of the Antipholuses

Emilia, mother of the Antipholuses

Plot: Egeon of Syracuse is arrested in Ephesus while seeking his son, Antipholus of Ephesus. He reveals that, 25 years before, he was traveling with his wife, twin sons (Antipholus and Antipholus), and his sons' twin servants (Dromio and Dromio), when a shipwreck separated one twin, his servant, and his mother from the other twin, his servant, and his father. Confusion ensues, as Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are visiting Ephesus, and have several run-ins with Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus before Emilia, an abbess in Ephesus, collects everyone together and reveals the truth.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Characters:

Theseus, Duke of Athens

Hippolyta, Amazon queen

Oberon, king of the fairies

Titania, queen of the fairies

Puck, a trickster

Hermia

Helena

Demetrius

Lycaster

Plot: Theseus is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta when Egeus, an Athenian noble, asks him to settle a problem with his daughter, Hermia. Hermia loves Lysander and wishes to marry him, but Egeus wants Hermia to marry Demetrius. Helena, Hermia's friend and a former love of Demetrius's, tells Demetrius of Hermia's plan to run away with Lysander. Demetrius follows Lysander and Hermia into the forest, and Helena follows him. A group of fairies, led by Oberon and Titania, are in this forest, traveling to bless Theseus's marriage and arguing over a beautiful young Indian boy, who Oberon wishes to make a knight. Hoping to make Titania appreciate the boy's beauty, he asks Puck to spread a love potion on Titania's sleeping eyelids so that she will fall in love with the first person she sees when she wakes. He also orders Puck to spread some on Demetrius's eyelids to make him fall in love with Helena. Puck mistakenly spreads the potion on Lysander's eyelids, and he falls in love with Helena. Chaos ensues as Puck attempts to rectify his mistake. Meanwhile, Titania awakes and falls in love with Bottom, a buffoonish Athenian with the head of a donkey. Eventually, everything is sorted out. Theseus and Hippolyta find the young lovers and take them back to Athens, where Demetrius marries Helena and Lysander marries Hermia. A group of craftsmen come out of the forest to perform a play after the wedding. Finally, Puck asks the audience to imagine that the play was simply a dream.

Shakespeare

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The Taming of the Shrew

Characters:

Katherine, the shrew

Bianca, her sister

Lucentio, in love with Bianca

Petruchio, Katherine's suitor

Christopher Sly

Plot: [In a framing story, Christopher Sly gets drunk, and a local lord decides to play a trick on him. With the help of some locals, he puts Sly in his bed and convinces him upon waking that he is the lord of the manor, and that he only believes he's a tinker because he has been insane. For his benefit, some actors put on "The Taming of the Shrew."] Lucentio arrives in Padua and falls in love with Bianca, but is unable to marry her until her older sister, Katherine, is married. Petruchio arrives, looking for a wife and declaring that he will marry any woman regardless of her disposition. He settles on Katherine, and informs her that he will marry her regardless of her wishes. He shows up to their wedding late and in ridiculous garb, then keeps Katherine from eating or sleeping in several days. He eventually manages to completely bend her to his will, convincing her that the sun is the moon and an old man is a young woman. Lucentio and Bianca fall in love and decide to elope without their fathers' consent, but finally manage to convince the men to accept their marriage. At Hortensio's wedding banquet, Petruchio and Lucentio compete to see whose wife is more obedient. Bianca refuses to obey Lucentio's summons, but Katherine comes immediately.

The Merchant of Venice

Characters:

Antonio, the titular merchant

Bassanio, his friend

Shylock, a Jewish money-lender

Jessica, his daughter

Portia

Nerissa, her maid

Plot: Portia's late father has set a test for any man who wishes to marry Portia; all suitors must try to find her portrait, which is contained in one of three chests, made of gold, silver, and lead. If they choose correctly, they may marry Portia, but an incorrect choice dooms them to a life without women. Bassanio wishes to marry Portia, but lacks the money to travel to her, so he asks for a loan from Antonio, who in turn goes to Shylock despite their mutual enmity. Shylock agrees to lend Bassanio the money on the understanding that, if it is not repaid at the end of three months, he may take the pound of Antonio's flesh closest to his heart. Jessica runs off with Lorenzo, a Christian, with the help of Antonio and Bassanio, which angers Shylock. When several shipwrecks leave Antonio unable to pay his debt, Shylock demands his pound of flesh. Meanwhile, Bassanio correctly chooses the lead chest and marries Portia, while his friend Gratiano weds Nerissa. He returns to Venice in time for Antonio's trial against Shylock, at which Portia, disguised as a young lawyer, demonstrates that Shylock may not spill any of Antonio's blood while taking his flesh, and must thus forfeit the bond. Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity, effectively destroying his life and livelihood.

Shakespeare

Version 1.2

Much Ado About Nothing

Characters:

Leonato, a nobleman of Messina

Hero, his daughter

Beatrice, his niece

Benedick

Claudio

Don Pedro

Don John the bastard, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother

Plot: Don Pedro returns from war to Leonato's home with Don John, Benedick, and Claudio. Claudio and Hero fall in love, and Benedick and Beatrice engage in a battle of witty banter. Claudio and Hero conspire to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love. Their plan succeeds, though the pair don't admit their love to each other. Don John, meanwhile, makes Hero's maid dress up like Hero and accept the advances of Borachio at Hero's window, which causes Claudio to reject Hero at the altar. Leonato pretends that Hero has died of shock, and when the local police discover that she is innocent, Claudio mourns his loss. Beatrice and Benedick admit their love, and Claudio is convinced to marry Leonato's "niece," who is nearly identical to Hero. At the double wedding, Hero reveals that she is Leonato's "niece," and the overjoyed couples dance happily.

The Tempest

Characters:

Prospero, a wizard

Miranda, his daughter

Ariel, Prospero's familiar

Caliban, another of Prospero's servants

Alonso, the King of Naples

Ferdinand, his son

Antonio, Prospero's brother

Plot: A ship (containing Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo) is wrecked near Prospero's island, and Prospero reveals to Miranda that he was the Duke of Milan until his position was usurped and he and his daughter were left on a raft to die by Antonio and Alonso; seeking revenge, Prospero caused the ship to sink. Ariel, Prospero's familiar, appears and tells Prospero that the passengers on the ship have been brought to the island and separated into groups. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love, but Prospero separates them to ensure that their relationship develops at a healthy pace. Meanwhile, Ariel makes a group of noblemen, including Alonso, go to sleep. Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill him, but Ariel makes him wake up before the plot can come to fruition. Prospero makes Ferdinand work for him, and Ferdinand and Miranda agree to marry. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban get drunk and plan to kill Prospero to take over the island. Prospero and Ariel trick everyone on the island to Prospero's home and diffuse all of the plans they've made to kill Alonso and Prospero. Prospero reveals Ferdinand and Miranda and tells everyone his story. He is reinstated as a duke and plans to return to Milan. He releases Ariel from his servitude, asking only that he keep the seas calm for the group's return to Italy.