

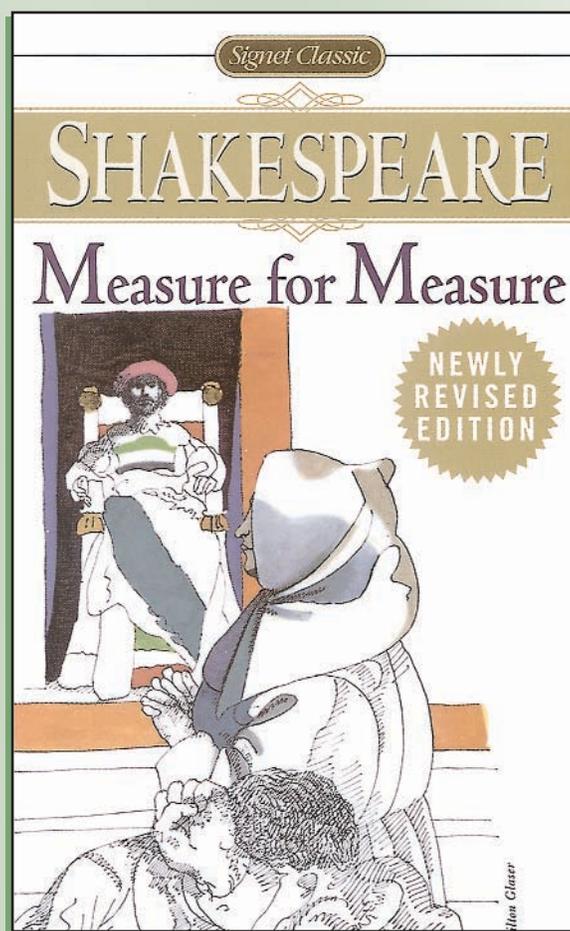


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

# MEASURE FOR MEASURE

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## AN INTRODUCTION

### THE PROBLEM OF THE PLAY

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*Measure for Measure* is clearly one of Shakespeare's more puzzling plays. Many critics and scholars have found fault with its structure, themes and characters in trying to obtain a clear reading of the play. This section will focus on a number of studies done by notable Shakespeare scholars to illustrate what makes *Measure for Measure* so difficult.

Shakespeare scholar Rosalind Miles begins her study of the play, *The Problem of Measure for Measure: A Historical Investigation*, by stating, "*Measure for Measure* holds today an unassailable position as chief "problem" among the various plays of Shakespeare."

She continues, "*Measure for Measure* is a critic's delight, for the nature of the drama and the intention of the author are sufficiently eclipsed as to permit the most highly individual interpretations" (p.13). Daryl Gless, another notable scholar, expands upon that idea in his book, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*. He writes:

Despite an almost infinite variety in treatment of individual passages, the critical commentary that has engulfed *Measure for Measure* divides, roughly speaking, into two hostile camps. On the one hand, a significant number of critics . . . would have us believe the play is a parable whose characters embody and whose plot illustrates central concepts of Christian doctrine. A larger, more heterogeneous division refuses to perceive in *Measure for Measure* any specifically Christian meanings whatsoever, and some argue that its implications are positively anti-Christian. (p. 3)

A feminist look at the play reveals further debate. An article posted on the webpage "Dr. Donna Freitas on Feminism and Shakespeare" reveals very disturbing insights into the relationship between the males and females in the play, labeling scenarios in the play as "brutal" to women. The author continues that Isabella is put in a situation of sexual harassment when she must deal with Angelo's stern commands on her (<http://stjohns-chs.org/English/Shakespeare/feminism/feminism.html>, p. 1).

Scholar Daniel Colvin writes about human behavior in the play. He writes that the play "considers the need for statutes, laws to govern human appetites and ensure domestic tranquility" (p.1). He explores the correlation between the outer actions of society and the inner values of the individual in *Measure for Measure*, as these themes are quite prevalent throughout with all major characters.

On the other hand, David Stevenson takes a different approach to the fundamental meaning of the play. He writes that readers "have been jostled and goaded by ironies of event and ironies of expectation throughout *Measure for Measure* . . . It is [an] assault on our . . . superficial and conventional views of ourselves and of others . . . that provokes in us a feeling that we have a surer knowledge of the actuating forces from which moral choices truly emerge" (p. 133). He goes on to point out how *Measure for Measure* illustrates "an ineluctable evil in man." (p. 133)

Harold Bloom, however, finds yet another principal theme for the play and discusses power, specifically male power, in his writings. He writes:

It is little wonder, then, that the play of Shakespeare's in which the word "authority" occurs more often than in any other should have an extraordinary pertinence for a century in which the word "authoritarian" is on so many lips. The central male figure of the drama is one of the most searching studies ever made of the effects of power upon a character. (Bloom, p. 23)

*Measure for Measure* addresses many themes that continue to be part of our lives many centuries later; the major characters in most cases can be seen not only as individuals involved in events but also demonstrating those themes in action. Consequently, whatever approach to the teaching of the play one takes, helping students to recognize those themes as relevant to their own lives is fundamental to successful study of the play.

### BRINGING THE PLAY TO A CLASSROOM

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The complexity of the play along with its incorporation of mature topics and issues makes best suited for mature students. The themes provide fertile material for exploration of many serious ethical questions. While prostitution and other types of sex are a part of the play, they are best understood as a major means of portraying Vienna as a morally corrupt place under the Duke's rule. That corruption itself drives much of the major theme of "judge not, lest ye be judged." It is

incumbent upon a teacher to help students understand the artistic use by Shakespeare of such controversial matters. Because moral issues arise in the modern world, it can be of great benefit for students to consider these issues in the classroom. A play that has spawned such diverse critical opinions and explores deep questions could provide a welcome challenge for mature students.

## OVERVIEW

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

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**Vincenzio:** As the Duke of Vienna, Vincenzio is an absolute ruler. However, he decides to pretend to leave the city for Poland but remain in the disguise of a friar. He appoints Angelo, one of his officers, to rule in his absence. Angelo is much firmer in his views of law enforcement than the Duke, who recognizes that humans make mistakes and that a ruler cannot be just if he condemns the people he rules for mistakes that he himself has made. As Friar Lodowick, the Duke watches as Angelo rules.

**Angelo:** Angelo believes that the laws must be rigidly obeyed and that he is the model for good behavior. Once in power, however, he abuses his position to bargain Claudio's death sentence with fornication with Isabella. When he has had sex with her, he reneges on his promise and sends a death order to the prison.

**Claudio:** Isabella's brother and a gentleman, Claudio is arrested and sentenced to death by Angelo because Claudio has had sex with Juliet. The two are engaged but not yet married. Although there is considerable agreement that the sentence is too harsh, Angelo will not yield. When Isabella informs him that Angelo has offered to free Claudio if she will have sex with him, Claudio at first argues that she should not; but then, even though he recognizes his own weakness, he asks Isabella to save him.

**Isabella:** A resident of a convent, she is a figure of absolute virtue and purity. Though she condemns her brother's sin, she asks Angelo to spare him. When Angelo offers to do so only if she will have sex with him, she is outraged and refuses. However, when her brother begs her to accept Angelo's offer, Isabella agrees to the Duke/Friar's plan to have Mariana have sex with Angelo while disguised as Isabella.

**Juliet:** A young woman about to be married to Claudio, Juliet is pregnant with his child as a result of a moment of weakness that both she and Claudio acknowledge. She wishes that he be saved so that they can be married and be parents to their child.

**Mariana:** At one time the fiancée of Angelo, Mariana lost her dowry as a result of a shipwreck, and he broke the engagement. Despite how he's treated her, Mariana is still deeply in love with Angelo, and so she agrees to replace Isabella in the sexual encounter with Angelo in hopes that he will have to marry her.

**Escalus:** Another official of the Duke, Escalus is very loyal to him and to Angelo as his appointed substitute. He believes that laws must be enforced but that enforcement must be fair and just. He does not agree with the condemnation of Claudio.

**Lucio:** One of Claudio's friends, Lucio enjoys a way of life that includes many of the vices that Angelo plans to eliminate, including visiting prostitutes. In fact, he has fathered a child with a prostitute. He represents a cynical view of human nature, and expresses the belief that Angelo, despite his efforts to rule more firmly and strictly, cannot succeed in reforming the city.

### SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

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**Provost:** A government official serving in the jail, the Provost, like Angelo, believes in the strict rule of law. However, like Escalus, he also does not feel that Claudio should be executed. Without being disloyal, therefore, he supports the efforts to change Claudio's sentence.

**Friar Thomas:** A representative of religion, Friar Thomas makes it possible for the Duke to don the disguise of a friar.

**Friar Peter:** Throughout most of the play he is not an active character. He supports the Duke and encourages his plan to save Claudio. Friar Peter also assists the Duke when he drops his disguise as a Friar.

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**Froth:** A minor character, Froth provides comic relief, especially in one scene where he is accused of insulting another character's wife.

**Elbow:** A constable, Elbow also does not contribute to the plot of the play. Prone to accuse other characters of misbehavior, he provides comic relief.

**Pompey:** A clown in the sense that that term is used in drama of this time, he works in the brothel of Mistress Overdone. Another comic relief character, he does become involved in the planned executions of Barnardine and Claudio.

**Barnardine:** A prisoner whose execution is planned at the same time as Claudio's, Barnardine expresses no remorse for his crimes. In order to fool Angelo, Barnardine's head is to be delivered to Angelo as that of Claudio. He is saved after the Duke/Friar realizes that Barnardine has not yet repented his sins.

**Abhorson:** Abhorson is the prison executioner.

**Mistress Overdone:** She is mistress of a brothel that many in Vienna frequent.

**Francisca:** She is a nun in the convent where Isabella is living at the start of the play.

**Two Gentlemen:** Perhaps representative of the general vice of the city, they talk with Lucio about the brothels, syphilis, and similar subjects.

## SUMMARY

### ACT I, SCENE I

The play opens with the Duke of Vienna complaining to Escalus that Vienna is corrupt. He sends for Angelo and, when he arrives, tells Escalus and Angelo that he, the Duke, will need to be gone for some time. In his absence Angelo is to serve as regent, a decision that Escalus agrees is a good one. Angelo expresses his feelings of unworthiness but is willing to follow the Duke's wishes. The Duke then says that he will need to leave at once and encourages Angelo to reform the city and its citizens.

### ACT I, SCENE II

In another part of the city, Lucio and two other gentlemen enter discussing their own vices, of which they are proud. They specifically mention having sex with prostitutes in whorehouses. While they are reflecting on the pleasures they have received, Mistress Overdone, proprietor of one of the houses, wanders in. She comes bearing the news that Claudio, whom she says is "worth five thousand of you all," has been arrested and is in prison because he has had sex with his fiancée Juliet and she is pregnant. Lucio and the two gentlemen rush off to find out what has happened. Pompey the Clown arrives with the same news and adds that the whorehouses in the suburbs of the city are closed and will be "pulled down." Claudio arrives in custody, followed by Lucio and the two gentlemen, and states that he has indeed made Juliet pregnant. He also explains that Angelo is the source of his arrest, having made fornication a crime. Before he is led away, he asks Lucio to find his sister Isabella, who lives in a convent, and ask her to influence Angelo to free him.

### ACT I, SCENE III

The Duke/Friar enters with Friar Thomas. He explains that he has given Angelo the power to rule and explains his doing so:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,  
The needful bits and curbs to headlong weeds,  
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip. (I, iii, 19-21)

Vincentio hopes that Angelo will be able to reform the city. He tells the friar that he wants "to behold his sway" and wishes to appear as "a brother of your order" in order to monitor Angelo's actions with his newly assigned power.

## ACT I, SCENE IV

At the convent, Isabella tells the nun Francisca that she wishes there were “a more strict restraint/Upon the sisterhood,” a comment that reveals her character as similar to Angelo's. Lucio arrives and explains to her what has happened on the outside: Angelo has been given power to rule Vienna and is much firmer in enforcing the laws than the Duke was. He tells her of her brother's arrest and death sentence, assigned for impregnating Juliet. He also tells her that Claudio has asked for Isabella to ask Angelo to change his sentence. Isabella agrees, although she does not think she can influence him.

## ACT II, SCENE I

Angelo and Escalus are discussing enforcement of the law as they enter. Angelo states that the law must be strictly enforced using an analogy to a scarecrow and birds:

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,  
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,  
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it  
Their perch and not their terror. (II, i, 1-4)

Escalus suggests that even Angelo may have broken the law sometime. Angelo rejects the idea and orders the Provost to execute Claudio. As the Provost leaves, Elbow, Froth and Pompey arrive, a comic scene follows in which Elbow accuses Froth of being rude to his wife. When Pompey tries to stick up for Froth, Pompey's role as working for Mistress Overdone is revealed. Highly annoyed, Escalus states that Elbow should be replaced and tells him to bring the names of replacements. Left alone with the Justice, Escalus expresses sorrow that Claudio must die but concludes that the law must be enforced.

## ACT II, SCENE II

The Provost urges Angelo to spare Claudio but gets nowhere. Angelo also orders the Provost to move Juliet away, as she is about to give birth. Isabella arrives with Lucio to plead with Angelo for Claudio's life. An exchange follows in which Isabella makes a strong and articulate case that justice must be tempered with mercy. When she says to him, “Go to your own bosom/Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know/That's like my brother's fault,” Angelo says to himself that she is, in fact, causing him to have sexual desire for her. Isabella begins to leave, and Angelo suggests that she return the next day. When she is gone, Angelo reflects to himself, “Never could the strumpet,/With all her double vigor, art and nature,/Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid/ Subdues me quite.”

## ACT II, SCENE III

The Duke disguised as friar comes to the prison and tells the Provost that he wishes to help the prisoners deal with their crimes and the consequences. When Juliet arrives, the Duke learns that Claudio is to be executed for fornication with her. The Duke questions her about her feelings concerning what she has done. She says that she is deeply sorry, but, in reply to his question “Love you the man that wronged you?” she says yes and that the sin was “mutually committed.” The Duke leaves to speak with Claudio about his sin and comments, “Your partner, as I hear, must die tomorrow.” Juliet, left with the Provost, cries out with despair.

## ACT II, SCENE IV

Angelo waits for Isabella to return and reflects on his lust for her and his own weakness. When Isabella arrives, she begs Angelo to spare her brother. He asks her: If a condemned man's sister discovered that she was desired by one who had the power to save the brother, what would she do? She rejects the idea of yielding to that desire, saying that it would be better for her brother to die than that she sacrifice her purity. Angelo tells her that he loves her, and she replies that Claudio loved Juliet and now he must die. Angelo replies, “He shall not Isabel, if you give me love.” Isabella claims that she will tell the world what he has offered her and Angelo replies that his reputation for purity will protect him. Isabella agrees that she cannot stain his reputation and says that her brother would rather die than have her honor destroyed.

### ACT III, SCENE I

As a part of his plan, the Duke as friar pays a visit with the Provost to Claudio at the prison. When he asks Claudio if he still hopes he will be pardoned by Angelo, Claudio says, "The miserable have no other medicine/But only hope:/I have hope to live, and am prepared to die." The Duke makes a lengthy statement that life is not valuable, that should he accept that he will die he will only be giving up the fears of life, but that, should he be pardoned, he will have gotten something he had not expected and life will mean much more. Claudio agrees. Isabella arrives, and the Duke excuses himself and appears to leave with the Provost but remains hidden where he can hear what Isabella and Claudio say. Claudio asks Isabella what Angelo plans, and she tells him to prepare for death. When he asks again, "Is there no remedy?" she at first avoids answering, then tells him that the only way to be saved would destroy his honor. When he insists, she tells him, "Dost thou think, Claudio, If I would yield him my virginity,/Thou mightst be freed?" His first reaction is horror. Then, as he thinks about death, he changes and asks her to yield to Angelo. Isabella, angry, says to him, "O you beast, O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch!" and continues, "Might but my bending down/Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed. I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,/No word to save thee."

Having heard this, the Duke re-enters, says quietly to Claudio that Angelo's offer to Isabella was just a test of her honor and urges him to prepare for death. When the Duke and Isabella are alone, he shares a plan he has that will save both her honor and Claudio's life. The plan centers on Mariana, who was at one time Claudio's fiancée but whom he rejected when her dowry was lost. Isabella is to go to Angelo, tell him she accepts his offer but only later when it is dark. Then Mariana will replace Isabella. Angelo will then have to free Claudio and will have to marry Mariana because he will have had sex with her. Isabella consents enthusiastically, although this plan involves another woman losing her virginity. She leaves to go to Angelo, and the Duke leaves to go talk Mariana into carrying out the plan.

### ACT III, SCENE II

In this scene, Elbow, Pompey, the Duke as Friar, Lucio, and later Escalus, the Provost, and Mistress Overdone provide humor revolving around prostitution. Escalus, having accused Pompey of living off prostitution, begins to take him to prison, when Lucio arrives. Pompey asks him to bail him out, but Lucio refuses saying that he hopes Pompey enjoys his prison time. Lucio then complains to the Duke that the harshness of Angelo will do no good in changing Vienna. He condemns Angelo for failing to understand human nature and expresses a wish that the Duke should return because he enjoyed the pleasures of life and did not condemn others who did as well. The Duke/Friar defends the Duke with considerable animation and challenges Lucio to repeat what he has said about the Duke to the Duke. Lucio agrees and then leaves. The Duke reflects on the fact that even virtue cannot protect a person's reputation. At this point, Escalus and the Provost bring Mistress Overdone onto the scene as they take her to jail for running a house of prostitution. Lucio has made the accusation, and she accuses him of fathering a child without marrying the mother. The officers take her away, and Escalus says that he is going to confront Lucio. He tells the Duke that he has asked Angelo to pardon Claudio but does not think he will. The Duke explains that he has been to visit Claudio to help him face his death. When Escalus leaves to try one more time to persuade Angelo to have mercy on Claudio, the Duke reflects on the fact that a ruler should be just and merciful, speaks about Angelo's unfortunate failure to be both, and concludes that Angelo will receive what is just for him when he has sex with Mariana and has to marry her. He will be shown to severely punish others for failings like his own.

### ACT IV, SCENE I

As the scene begins, Mariana is listening to a boy singing a sad love song. When the Duke enters, still disguised as a friar, she sends the boy away. The Duke asks her if anyone has asked for him. Mariana says that no one has just as Isabella arrives. Mariana leaves.

Isabella tells the Duke that she has spoken to Angelo and that she agreed to his demand for sex in exchange for Claudio's freedom. She has told him that the encounter must be brief, somewhere dark and hidden, and that a female servant will be with her, thus explaining the presence of Mariana. Her criteria suggest that she feels a sense of guilt and shame that she has agreed to the plan. The Duke then calls Mariana back into the room and sends her away with Isabella, who explains the plot. They then return so that the Duke can endorse the plan, thus making it acceptable to Mariana. He does, saying, "He is your husband on a precontract;/To bring you thus together, 'tis no sin,/Sith that the justice of your title to him/ Doth flourish the deceit."

## ACT IV, SCENE II

In the prison, the Provost meets with Pompey to ask him to serve as assistant executioner because there are to be two executions tomorrow: Barnardine's and Claudio's. He offers Pompey a pardon for doing so, and Pompey says he will. The Provost then tells executioner Abhorson that Pompey will be his assistant, a decision that he does not like but accepts. They leave to summon Claudio and Barnardine. Claudio enters without Barnardine, who is asleep. After the Provost produces the death warrant for Claudio, the Duke arrives and tells them that Claudio may well be saved. However, a messenger with a note for the "Duke" says it must be obeyed exactly. Although the Duke thinks it is the pardon from Angelo based on his sexual encounter with Mariana, it is a final order for Claudio's execution. As proof, the note orders that Claudio's head be sent to him.

Angelo has broken the agreement. The Duke begins to look for other ways to satisfy Angelo and suggests that they could send Barnardine's head to Angelo and say it is Claudio's. The Provost refuses. The Duke shows him a letter in the handwriting of the Duke and with his seal and says that the Duke will return in two days. They leave as the Duke, still believed to be a friar, tells the Provost that the letter will persuade him to agree to the plan.

## ACT IV, SCENE III

Still in prison, Pompey comments to himself that the prison is so full of acquaintances from Mistress Overdone's house of prostitution that he feels as if he is among friends. Abhorson enters and orders Pompey to bring him Barnardine for execution. When the Duke speaks to him, Barnardine refuses to die because he is too tired and too drunk to prepare himself. The Duke agrees that Barnardine should not die because he is "A creature unprepared, unmeet for death;/And to transport him in the mind he is/Were damnable." The Provost then proposes a plan:

Here in prison, father,  
There died this morning of cruel fever  
One Ragazine, a most notorious pirate,  
A man of Claudio's years, his beard and head  
Just of his color. What if we do omit  
The reprobate till he were well inclined,  
And satisfy the deputy with the visage  
Of Ragozine, more like to Claudio? (IV, iii, 70-77)

The Duke agrees, and the Provost sets off to make arrangements. Isabella arrives believing that her brother has been pardoned, but when the Duke reveals that Claudio has been executed, she is angry that Angelo has broken his promise and grief-stricken by her loss. The Duke/Friar tells her that the Duke will be back the next day and will be both fair and just. Isabella is willing to follow his advice. Lucio then appears and tries to comfort Isabella, saying that, had the Duke been the judge, Claudio would be alive. Isabella leaves without speaking to him, and Lucio, speaking to what he believes is a friar, praises the Duke and reveals that he, Lucio, fathered an illegitimate child and was not punished when the Duke was in charge. The Duke comments, "Sir, your company is fairer than honest," and they leave together.

## ACT IV, SCENE IV

Escalus and Angelo discuss the messages they have received from the Duke, messages that seem to contradict each other. Confused, they decide that a notice should be sent to the citizens of Vienna that anyone with a complaint should come to the place where they have been ordered to welcome the Duke, because, as Angelo concludes, at least he and Escalus will be safe from false accusations in the future. When Escalus leaves, however, Angelo reflects that Isabella might use the meeting with the Duke to accuse him, though he doubts she will because she would have to admit in public that she had lost her virginity and how that happened. He reflects that Claudio should have lived, although he might have taken revenge in the future. He ends his thoughts with the comments, "Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,/ Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not."

## ACT IV, SCENE V

The Duke as friar asks Friar Peter to hold the letters he has given him to be delivered at the right time and assures him that the Provost will also cooperate. He asks Friar Peter to ask several leading citizens to meet him when he returns.

## ACT IV, SCENE VI

As they prepare for the Duke's return, Isabella and Mariana discuss their parts in the plan. Isabella is still embarrassed and worried because the Duke/Friar has told her that he might not support her accusations at first. Friar Peter then tells them that the Duke is arriving and they must come at once.

## ACT V, SCENE I

[Note: Act V has only one scene that takes place in a single location. The summary of this act/scene is divided into subsections with brief titles to help the reader follow the various shifts in the action.]

### **THE ARRIVAL OF THE DUKE AND HIS MEETING WITH ISABELLA AND MARIANA**

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The Duke, now dressed as Duke, enters through the city gate and greets Angelo and Escalus. He takes their hands and praises them for the excellent jobs they have done while he was gone. Isabella enters and, at Friar Peter's urging, falls to her knees and begs the Duke to give her a hearing for her complaints. He asks her to speak, but to "Lord Angelo," who, he says, "shall give you justice;/ Reveal yourself to him." She replies, "You bid me seek redemption of the devil," and asks the Duke to hear her. Angelo attempts to keep him from hearing her complaint, saying she is unbalanced, but Isabella condemns him. For the benefit of the gathering, the Duke, considers briefly that she may be mad but lets her speak. She tells him a version of what has happened: She begged Angelo not to execute her brother; she had to have sex with him to gain Claudio's freedom; and yet Angelo executed him nevertheless. The Duke pretends not to believe her and praises Angelo, saying, "First, his integrity/ Stands without blemish." Isabella then suggests Friar Lodowick (the Duke as Friar) as someone who knew she was coming to speak with him, and Lucio condemns Lodowick as "saucy" and "scurvy" and someone who should have been beaten. Friar Peter, while continuing to defend Angelo and condemn Isabella, defends Lodowick and brings Mariana to testify, supposedly in support of Angelo. Isabella is sent off with guards; and Mariana, her face covered with a veil, tells the Duke, "I will not show my face/ Until my husband bid me" and, calling Angelo her husband, says that she, not Isabella slept with Angelo. She then tells the Duke what really happened: that she was betrothed to Angelo, what Angelo agreed to, and that she had had sex with him. Angelo, still acting as judge, rejects what has happened as a plot; and the Duke pretends to agree with him and, at Friar Peter's urging, sends the Provost to bring Friar Lodowick to testify. The Duke then leaves. Escalus and Lucio talk briefly, and Escalus sends for Isabella.

### **THE DUKE REASSUMES HIS DISGUISE AS FRIAR AND IS REVEALED BY LUCIO**

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The Duke, now dressed as the Friar, enters with the Provost and Isabella. The Duke/Friar condemns the Duke and speaks of the corruption in Vienna, and Escalus orders him taken away to prison. Before he can be removed, however, Lucio speaks to him, accusing him of calling the Duke "a fleshmonger, a fool, and a coward." The Duke/Friar states that Lucio made these insults against the Duke. Lucio attempts to help the Provost take the Duke/Friar to prison and, pulling off his friar's hood, reveals that he is actually the Duke.

### **ALL TRUTHS ARE REVEALED AND ALL CONFLICTS RESOLVED**

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Now revealed, the Duke challenges Angelo to defend himself; and Angelo, realizing that his actions have been made public, admits his guilt and does not ask for a trial: "But let my trial be mine own confession./ Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,/ Is all the grace I beg." The Duke orders him to marry Mariana at once, and he, Mariana, the Provost, and Friar Peter leave to carry out the ceremony. The Duke then calls Isabella to him. Still believing that Claudio is dead, she explains how the loss of her brother has hurt her. The Duke tells her that the execution came so quickly he was unable to stop it. Now married, Angelo and Mariana return. The Duke tells Angelo that he has executed Claudio for the same crime of fornication that he committed, "The very mercy of the law cries out/ Most audible, even from his proper tongue./ 'An Angelo for Claudio, death for death.'" The Duke refers to Matthew 7:1-2, and calls Angelo's death "Measure still for Measure." However, Mariana begs for mercy for Angelo and pleads with Isabella to join her in kneeling before the Duke. Isabella does.

After an exchange with the Provost, the Duke commands that Barnardine, who was not executed, although he was included in the order that Claudio be executed, be brought to him. The Provost brings him to the Duke but also brings Claudio, his face muffled, and Juliet. The Duke dismisses Barnardine and has Claudio's face uncovered. Almost in passing, he proposes to Isabella: "If he [Claudio] be like your brother, for his sake/ Is he pardoned; and, for your lovely sake,/ Give

me your hand, and say you will be mine. . .” Isabella says nothing in reply. Then the Duke pardons Angelo, commanding him to love his wife. The Duke says he cannot pardon Lucio for the insulting things he has said about the Duke and orders him to marry the prostitute that bore his child before he is whipped and hanged. On second thought, he rescinds the order concerning whipping and hanging but orders his marriage. Then, in the final lines of the play, he tells Claudio that he must marry Juliet, wishes Mariana joy, and tells Angelo to love her. Next he thanks Escalus and the Provost for their loyalty to him and promises to reward them. Finally, he returns to his proposal to Isabella:

Dear Isabel,  
 I have a motion [proposal] much imports your good,  
 Whereto you'll a willing ear incline  
 What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.  
 And with that he invites those present to join them at the palace to learn of more good things to come: “So, bring us to our palace, where we'll show/ What's yet behind that's meet [fitting] you all should know.” (V, i, 537-543)

## TEACHING THE PLAY

*Measure for Measure* is set in Vienna, probably sometime in the early 1600s. It is a deeply corrupted city, especially sexually. A few scenes probably intended to be comic involve discussions among men who frequent houses of prostitution and, in a couple of cases, a woman who is the madam of a house of prostitution. A major aspect of the plot centers on the sexual activity of two men clearly from the ruling class, Claudio and Angelo.

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

Many critics have found the major characters of the play to be deeply flawed. The Duke, for example, is described this way in one short essay: “The Duke’s behavior is unsatisfying on many levels, as he is abusing his power and manipulating people shamelessly, while trying to appear as a benevolent ruler” (“Classic Notes on *Measure for Measure*: About *Measure for Measure*,” p. 1). Shakespeare scholar Nalin Ranasinghe argues that the Duke has placed Angelo in power because he “expects that he will . . . purge the city of the fever that has afflicted it. This will make it possible for [the Duke] to . . . reintroduce moderate rule, and thus gain the respect of the chastised citizenry. (p. 3)

Ranasinghe describes Isabella as equally flawed:

It is understandable that Isabella should regard her remarkable interview with Angelo, where he undertakes to barter her brother’s life for her chastity, as the Devil’s attempt to trip her up during her last normal encounter with a man. The hysterical fury that she displays when Claudio pleads with her for his life can only be justified in this context. She is fearfully devoted to a contentless idea of chastity that makes it impossible for her to entertain affection for anything in the world. She leaps to the conclusion that even filial love will lead to sin and disgrace. (p. 5).

Another scholar, Tillyard, points to the fact that Isabella is characterized by “decision and the acute sense of her own independent and inviolate personality” until “the Duke takes charge.” At that point Tillyard sees her “exchange her native ferocity for the hushed and submissive tones of a well-trained confidential secretary.” He describes her willingness to participate in the Duke’s scheme as “tame acquiescence” and concludes that by the last act “she has turned into a mere tool of the Duke” and that “she is not . . . the same Isabella” as at the beginning of the play (Geckle, pp. 101-102).

Claudio, in his willingness to have his sister violate her virginity with Angelo, the man who has ordered him executed, is also oddly flawed for someone who might have been the sympathetic victim of the play. Angelo, rigid in his virtue, with both coercion and a willingness to violate his philosophy of strict adherence to the law, offers to swap a pardon for Claudio for sex with Isabella.

### THE TYPE OF PLAY: A COMEDY, A TRAGEDY, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

A major question asked about the play has been related to whether it is a romantic comedy, a satire, a melodrama, or some largely unsuccessful hybrid. In this regard the structure of the play has also been criticized. One scholar, for example, makes a case for the play being almost a gluing together of two types of Elizabethan drama:

The play begins as a romantic comedy, but at the end of the second act both its ideological perspective and its formal structure undergo a metamorphosis; from this point on the play proceeds to its conclusion in accordance

with the form and ideas of the disguised monarch play. This generic shift in medias res is not, however, entirely successful—and its failure is at the root of the play's notorious contradictions, incongruities, and frustrated expectations, which are the result not of the play's subversive intent, but of the conflicting imperatives of two genres fundamentally different in form and ideological function. (Cohen, p. 2)

Friedman points out that most scholars and critics have agreed that the fact that the Duke suddenly asks Isabella to marry him in the concluding lines of the play happens although “the text provides no evidence to suggest a romantic attachment to Isabella on the Duke's part until the moment of the proposal.” He goes on to look at productions of the play and concludes that “the play's stage history reveals a pattern of attempts to supply what the text lacks, either through stage business or interpolated declarations of love” (p. 1). It is this surprise ending that Chute points to when he says, “[It] can be called a comedy chiefly because it has a happy ending” (p. 105).

### THE THEMES OF THE PLAY

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Despite its flaws as drama, the play deals in a challenging way with a number of very relevant themes. Students can relate to these themes and find examples in their own lives. The classroom is an excellent setting for students to explore them. The most important of these themes include:

1. What are the results of hiding behind a disguise to spy on people and is doing so ethical? (the Duke)
2. Is it ethical to attempt to control other people through surrogates? (the Duke)
3. Can we judge others' errors and sins if we are not perfectly free of those errors and sins ourselves? (Angelo)
4. Should justice be tempered with mercy? (the Duke) Or, is justice for its own sake appropriate? (Angelo) What are the results of each approach to justice?
5. Can marriage ever be a union of equals in a society that has different rules for the elite and that sanctions prostitution?

### BEFORE READING THE PLAY

*Measure for Measure* will challenge many students. To prepare to read the play, students should consider the themes they will encounter. Each of the following activities can be accomplished through class discussion or writing in a journal and then sharing with a small group. These discussions can result in “Preliminary Notes” to be posted in the classroom so that, as the students read the play, they will be able to look at what is happening in light of their personal experiences related to the theme.

1. Ask students when they have encountered someone who successfully used a disguise or pretended to be someone he or she was not and thus was able to find out about things they otherwise would not have. For example, a teacher may have acted as a friend but then told the principal and parents what had been confided in him or her. Students might also consider how disguises are used (e.g. at Halloween) and their positive and negative results.
  2. Have students consider whether they have been manipulated by another person without realizing they were being controlled and later regretted their actions. To prepare them to understand Angelo, students can brainstorm and list examples of others (in life, literature, TV or movies), who pretended successfully for a time to be one type of person while actually being someone quite different.
  3. Ask students to think of individuals they have encountered who are rigid and demand complete adherence to rules and are willing to punish severely those who violate the rules. Students can respond in writing or discuss in a small group the following: Would those individuals be willing to break the rules they punish others for breaking? They can then brainstorm and list examples of people in life, literature, tv or movies who project an appearance of strict virtue but, in fact, have the same weaknesses and commit the same acts they condemn in others.
  4. Since the play deals with individuals in love as well as those desiring sexual relations (Juliet and Claudio, Mariana for Angelo), students can write about or discuss why people fall in love. They can refer to their own personal experiences or to those of friends. If they are uncomfortable revealing personal experiences, they can look to stories they have read, newspaper articles, television programs or movies. In groups, they might list three to five reasons people fall in love and provide an example of each.
  5. Students can write about and/or discuss the very broad theme of the play: strict application of laws and rules or mercy
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and forgiveness of those who violate laws and rules and the results of each. Punishment of students who violate school rules should provide extensive material for discussion.

6. As there are a number of different types of relationships between men and women in the play—Angelo to Mariana and to Isabella, the Duke to Isabella—in small groups students can discuss how men and women differ in intelligence, strength, sensitivity, language, and motivation. What stereotypes relate to women and men? How do these stereotypes affect the relationships between men and women? (This activity can be done in single gender groups and later in mixed gender groups.)
7. The Duke is an absolute monarch. Students can discuss or write about how a society with an absolute monarch differs from a democratic society. How are the two similar? Students can use newspapers, news magazines, and the Internet to research modern examples of societies with absolute rulers as well as democracies.
8. Although *Measure for Measure* is not a traditional Renaissance comedy, it does follow the broad structure of such plays. Students can research the elements of comedy and then skim the text of the play to identify where each of these takes place: introduction of major characters, start of the conflict, and identification of major themes (Act I); increasing complexity and conflict (Acts II, III, IV); and total resolution so that “good” characters are rewarded and happy and “bad” characters are punished (Act V). Small groups of students can then discuss stories they have read, television programs, and movies that have conflicts among the characters and reflect on how these conflicts are resolved. How do modern comedies differ from Renaissance comedy? How are they similar?
9. Finally, students can discuss the meaning of the words that provide the title of the play:

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine own eye and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7, 1-5)

Ask students: Why do you think Shakespeare titled the play *Measure for Measure*? Does this give a clue of what might occur in the play?

### WHILE READING THE PLAY

1. In Act V the Duke makes reference to a passage from “The Gospel According to St. Matthew”—“Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;/ Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure”—that he applies to Angelo. Students should consider the title of the play as well as reflect on their discussion of the passage from the Bible they had prior to reading the play. Throughout their reading of the play, they should ask themselves how the meaning of this passage relates to the characters, plot, and themes of the play.
2. As they read the play, students should keep in mind that it is a play and, therefore, meant to be performed, as Gibson makes clear in his text *Teaching Shakespeare*:

Shakespeare was essentially a man of theatre who intended his words to be spoken and acted out on stage. It is in the context of dramatic realization that the plays are most appropriately understood and experienced. The consequence for teaching is clear: treat the plays as plays, for imaginative enactment in all kinds of ways (p. xii).

If the class is reading the play aloud, students should stop reading from time to time to think about and discuss what the setting would be like and what actions the characters would be performing as they deliver their lines. They might also consider how a person might deliver a contemporary passage similar in meaning to a passage in the play. Then they can use that same voice to say Shakespeare's lines.

3. Visualizing each character may be difficult for students. They might, consequently, in groups, work to develop pictures of a character using newspapers, magazines, and other sources. Although they may find some pictures that present their character in the dress of Elizabethan England, pictures of modern people who have similar personalities and might look like the characters in the play will help students understand what kinds of people the characters in the play are. For each character, then, the class could have a photograph album that can be revised and added to as the play progresses.

4. To help students remember what has happened and why, one or more students might be designated to summarize the events and their implications for the characters as each scene is read. These summaries can be used to begin the reading of the next scene. Or one or more students can be responsible for following the words, actions, responses, and situations of one character. Students can refer to these on-going character reviews as each character is developed throughout the play.
5. As the students orally read the play, they should stop at key points to consider how the play would have developed if the actions and interactions that had just taken place had not happened. For example, what might have happened if Isabella had not made her first visit to Angelo to plead for her brother? As they read on, they will be better able to see how key events influence both the play and the lives of the characters.
6. Students can stop their reading from time to time to write briefly about their reactions to some event, character, speech or line in the scene they have just finished. These can be shared with other students and posted for general reading by the members of the class. Students can also be given a brief passage from the scenes they have read to prepare for the class and given time to write a response to the passage. The writing can take many forms including a simple reaction, a personal reaction, a poetic reaction, a short piece of fiction, a letter to a character in the play, or a song. The students can share their responses in small groups, which can then summarize the forms and contents of the responses and share those summaries with the rest of the class.
7. Students can present a scene that has a number of characters and interactions. One set of students can read the lines from the sidelines while another set of students performs the actions of the characters in relationship to each other. They should take time to practice this activity. It may help to bring the play to life without students being responsible for all the elements of acting. As an alternative, the students could write descriptions of what the characters would be doing while speaking their lines in such scenes.
8. In pairs, students can assume the role of a reporter and of a character from the play. The reporter interviews the character and writes a human-interest article about the character for a newspaper. Students portraying both roles should study similar interviews in newspapers prior to planning and conducting the interview.

## AFTER READING THE PLAY

### WRITING, RESEARCH, AND DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to pretend that they went to a movie version of *Measure for Measure* on Sunday night. Now it's Monday and a friend asks, "What did you like about it? What was good in it? What did not seem right? What was it like?" They should write answers to these questions as they would say them orally to a friend. As an alternative, students can write a review of the movie as it might appear in a newspaper, using examples of newspaper reviews. Then they should trade papers with other students. After they each read the other's paper, they should compare notes. They might also share their writing in a small group.
2. Each student can write a single sentence that says what they think the play means, using as much lively language—Shakespearean or modern—as they can muster. Students can then compare what they have written, looking at the text of the play where appropriate. As an alternative, they might consider that *Measure for Measure* is usually called a comedy or a romantic comedy and write whether or not it fits these terms and why, using specific scenes and quotations to illustrate their conclusions and references to other plays, books, movies, and television comedies.
3. There are several events in the play that some critics and scholars have concluded are difficult or impossible to believe—the Duke proposing to Isabella, for example. In small groups or individually, students can go back over the action of the play, using notes and posted results of class discussions, and decide what events, if any, are difficult to believe. They should take into account the personalities of the characters involved. Then they should prepare an explanation of why the event is improbable. Each group could share their conclusions with the class.
4. There are a number of themes in the play (see "Teaching the Play" above for one list). Using this list or a version modified during the reading, students can identify a line, multiple lines, or a scene as an example of the development of each theme.
5. Have students select the character they would most or least like to portray and explain why. They might also assign each character to a senior superlative from the school yearbook—Most Popular, Class Clown, Most Likely to Succeed, for example. Alternatively, students can develop a collage for that character using magazines and other sources of pictures, words, and letters.

6. Several of the characters might be called "common people." These characters provide the comic scenes. Ask students to include them in the activities in number five above. They might also consider whether or not they are funny and why or why not.
7. At the end of the play, the major characters leave with the Duke for his palace, and the Duke promises them that each will be rewarded. Have students write a follow-up scene in which they show what happens when they get to the palace. Are they rewarded? How?
8. There are several characters in the play who are or appear to be in love with another character who may or may not return that love. Students can take each of these characters and write a paragraph describing how the character feels about the one he/she seems to love, how each feels about being loved, and how each feels about having married or being about to marry.
9. Students in groups can prepare a paragraph or two in which they consider how the play would be different if it were set in a different time period. Each group should use a different time period and then share their ideas. As a class, prepare a timeline with the differences listed briefly for each time period considered. Following this exercise, they can discuss how the time in which the play is set influences the characters and events.
10. Students can go to the Internet and look for information about the play. Start with one of the sites listed in the Bibliography and use the links to start the search process. They can then provide the rest of the class with a comprehensive list of sources, including a brief sentence stating what is found at that site and how useful it is.
11. The language of *Measure for Measure* may be difficult for modern readers, both because of its age and because of the huge vocabulary that Shakespeare uses. Students can take an important scene and re-write it in today's English. They might each take a different scene and, when the writing is complete, their versions can be collected as a modern version of the play, with a copy given to each student.
12. Students interested in acting can dig further than was done in class into how plays were presented: costumes, props, scenery, and the stage. They can share the results of their research with the rest of the class.

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### **DRAMATIC ACTIVITIES**

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1. Conduct an interview with one of the characters. Ask his or her opinions about specific events, situations, and fellow characters.
  2. Hold a trial deciding the guilt or innocence of a character in the play. Have characters appear as witnesses for either side. Allow the class to be the jury. Each side must present specific evidence to support their claims of guilt or innocence.
  3. Re-enact a scene from the play on videotape. Alternatively, rewrite a scene from the play giving it a modern setting and then present that version on videotape.
  4. Present an on-location news report about an event in the play. Interview characters as eyewitnesses.
  5. Present a videotaped television commercial for a mini-series based on the play.
  6. Have a panel of characters debate an issue in the play from their personal viewpoints.
  7. Prepare and present a soliloquy that a character did or might give. Include thoughts and feelings that are appropriate to that character.
  8. Stage a session that a character has with his/her therapist.
  9. Set up a talk show in which either an individual character is interviewed or a panel of characters is featured. The author of the play could also be interviewed.
  10. Put *Measure for Measure* on trial for potential censorship.
  11. Many studies of Shakespeare have examined the use of music as a dramatic device in the plays as well as the use of musical terminology to shade the meaning of the character's words. Ask students to examine "Take, O take" in Act IV, scene i and comment on how it creates a mood for what follows. Students can also review the entire play or an individual scene for examples of musical terminology to appreciate how Shakespeare plays with words and meanings.
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**CRITICAL EXAMINATIONS OF THE PLAY**


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Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.

Chute, Marchette. *Stories from Shakespeare*. New York: World Publishing Co., 1956.

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Colvin, Daniel. Introduction to *Measure for Measure*, [www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/measure/essay/1\\_1\\_Introduction](http://www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/measure/essay/1_1_Introduction).

Friedman, Michael. "O, let him marry her!': Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Winter 1995, pp. 454-464.

Geckle, George L., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Measure for Measure*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

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Miles, Rosalind. *The Problem of Measure for Measure; A Historical Investigation*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976.

NA. "Dr. Donna Freitas on Feminism and Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*," <http://stjohns-chs.org/english/shakespeare/feminism/feminism.html>

Ranasinghe, Nalin. "All's Well That Ends Swell," <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/measure/essays/allswell.html>

Stevenson, David Lloyd. *The Achievement of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure"*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966.

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**INTERNET SITES**


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A number of essays from the Internet were used in this discussion of the play, and others provided background for the discussion. What follows includes these sites and also a broad selection of others that are likely to be most helpful to teachers preparing to teach *Measure for Measure* and to students who are studying the play.

<http://www.folger.edu/education/lesson.cfm?lessonid=9>

The Folger Library site provides plans for teaching the play plus links to other Folger sites.

<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/measure/essays/html>

This site provides access to several of the essays quoted in this discussion of the play. These essays provide contrasting and thought-provoking looks at the play, its structure, characters, and themes.

<http://www.jetlink.net/~massij/wssq/measure.html>

This site provides a short list of questions about the play for use with students.

<http://www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/>

This site presents extensive information about the Globe Theatre, including a link to a major database on the Globe (<http://www.shakespeare-globe.org/>).

<http://www.renfaire.com/Language/index.html>

This site presents a reader-friendly guide to learning about the English of Shakespeare's time. It includes links to sections dealing with pronunciation, pronunciation drills, vocabulary, grammar, forms of address, insults and cursing, and songs of the times.

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<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

An excellent source of information about Shakespeare scholarship as well as teaching the plays, this site also has links to a number of other sites, many of which either take an approach to Shakespeare that could be directly appealing to students or present teaching ideas.

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/timeline/timeline.htm>

This site presents a series of dates in Shakespeare's life that one can access by clicking on the date. The entry also gives a brief description of what was going on in England and related places at this time in his life.

<http://stjohns-chs.org/english/shakespeare/measure/mm.html>

This site provides an extensive list of critical issues in the play and many links to other sources, including the discussion of feminism in *Measure for Measure*.

<http://stjohns-chs.org/english/shakespeare/feminism/feminism.html>

This site contains an article dealing with issues related to the conditions of life of women at the time of the writing of the play.

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## FILMOGRAPHY

*Measure for Measure*. BBC Shakespeare Plays. VHS Released 1979. Starring Kate Nelligon and Alun Armstrong and period music. ENG006 145 minutes. (<http://ambrosevideo.com>)

A modern dress version directed by David Thacker with cast including Tom Wilkinson and Jiliet Aubrey from 1994. The Poor Yorick Shakespeare Multi-media Catalogue. <http://www.bardcentral.com> may be able to secure this for you.

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## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

Adams, Richard, ed. *Teaching Shakespeare: Essays on Approaches to Shakespeare in Schools and Colleges*. London: Robert Royce Limited, 1985.

This collection contains many teaching ideas, especially related to actually producing Shakespeare's plays as a way of teaching them to students.

Coursen, H. R., ed. *Teaching Shakespeare with Film and Television: A Guide*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997.

This collection is an excellent resource and guide to using modern technology to present Shakespeare's plays as plays.

Davis, James E. and Ronald E. Salomone, eds. *Teaching Shakespeare Today: Practical Approaches and Productive Strategies*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993.

This text is a good practical collection of essays providing many ways to involve students in the reading and production of Shakespeare's plays.

Edens, Walter, et al, eds. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Many of the ideas for teaching Shakespeare's play at the college and university level in this collection can be adapted easily for use with younger students.

Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

This guide deals with different aspects of what to teach about and how to teach Shakespeare's plays at different educational levels.

Leach, Susan. *Shakespeare in the Classroom: What's the Matter*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992.

Growing out of a project related to teaching Shakespeare's play, this book shows how a teacher can guide students to see the plays as approachable.

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O'Brien, Peggy. *Teaching Shakespeare*. London: Edward Arnold, 1982.

O'Brien critiques the most common ways Shakespeare's plays are taught and arrives at negative conclusions and then presents the Folger Library's program emphasizing performance by students.

Salomone, Ronald E. and James Davis, ed. *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997.

This is another excellent collection of essays by teachers presenting approaches to the plays.

Vineberg, Steve. "Shakespeare and the Visual Text: Using Video in the Classroom." <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/measure/taechguide/video.html>

Vineberg presents five broad questions related to how a video presents Shakespeare's plays to a viewer's mind, not just through the ears but also through the eyes.

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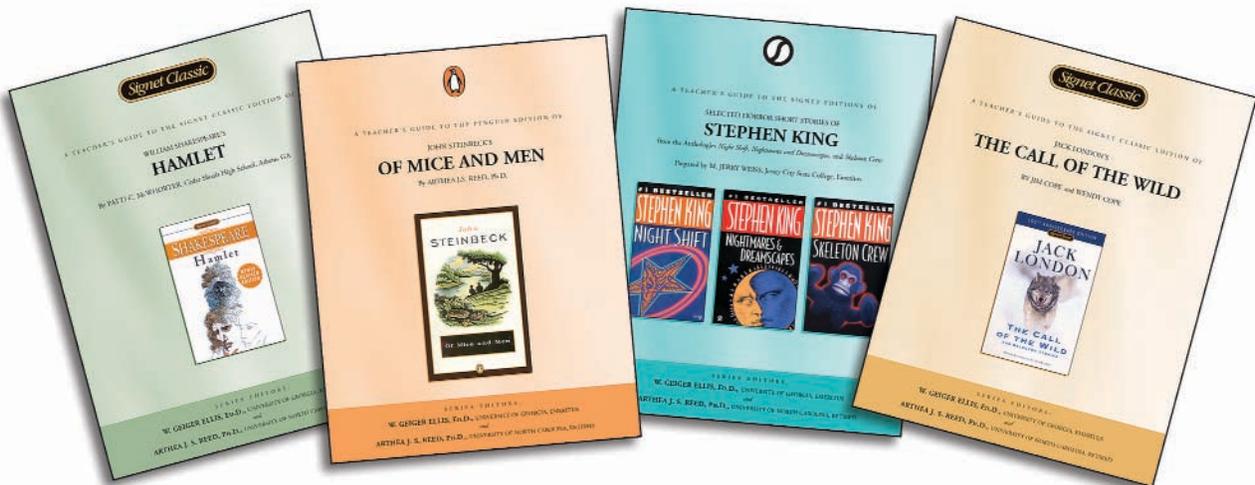
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