



talk like Shakespeare!

powered by
Chicago Shakespeare Theater

Shakespearean Balderdashery

In small groups, leaf through a passage of the Shakespearean play you're studying to find two words that you're pretty sure will be completely unknown to everyone. Then using the footnotes (or the online lexicon listed below), look up and write out the definitions. Now as a group, make up two other convincing definitions for each word that your classmates might believe.

After proclaiming your word, read out loud the entire line in which the word appears. Then read your three definitions aloud, including, of course, the correct one! Then as a class, vote on the definition you think is correct. Often in Shakespeare, the context of the word can lead you to its definition—even with words you've never heard before. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1abc, 2a, 4b*)

For help, take a look at this online lexicon that our actors use when they are learning their lines: Alexander Schmidt, Shakespeare Lexicon and Quote Dictionary (Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library site): <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.03.0079>

Three Examples from *Twelfth Night*:

Mellifluous (Context: Act 2, Scene 3, as Feste finishes singing)

Sir Andrew: A mellifluous voice, as I am true knight.

Sir Toby: Very sweet and contagious, i' faith.

- a) fragrant b) argumentative c) melodious

Welkin (Context: Act 3, Scene 1, Feste, speaking to Viola)

Feste: My lady is within, sir. I will construe to them whence you come; who you are and what you would be out of my welkin, I might say "element" but the word is over-worn.

- a) house b) comfort zone c) mind

Malapert (Context: Act 4, Scene 3)

Sebastian: If thou darest tempt me further, draw thy sword.

Sir Toby: What, what? Nay then I must have an ounce or two of this malapert blood from you.

- a) royal b) bad-mannered c) delicious