Madness, truth, honor, pity—these are a few of the concepts Shakespeare explores in his earliest plays. We will scrutinize the representations of these ideas and others that emerge in plots of political intrigue, tyranny, rebellion, and vengeance. Working within this frame, we will attempt to understand how Shakespeare’s plays confronted the political and social assumptions of his original audiences and how his writing continues to challenge similar concerns we face in our own culture. To this end, students will carefully read sonnets and plays and develop interpretive arguments using the skills of close reading and analysis to produce critical essays of varying length, totaling 8-10 pages. Students will leave the course having read extensively from the works of one of the major writers of the western tradition, and they will have acquired interpretive, analytical, and communication skills that will aid them in their future coursework in English and other disciplines. Students need not have prior familiarity with Shakespeare or early modern literature to succeed in this introductory class.

Required Texts

I have ordered inexpensive editions of each of the following plays. Please purchase these specific texts, even if you already own one or more of the plays in a different version. Note that having access to more than one edition will help you with close reading assignments. Digital editions of the plays will not suffice.


Sonnets and supplementary readings will be provided on the course website.

Your ongoing enrollment in this course indicates that you have read this syllabus and accept its requirements and expectations.
Learning Outcomes  In addition to gaining a preliminary understanding of texts and contexts of Shakespeare's early work, this course's assessment procedure is built around six learning outcomes. Students are expected to

1. read Shakespeare's works with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of early modern conventions;

2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;

3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary, theatrical, and other cultural texts;

4. write focused, critical analyses of Shakespeare’s texts in clear, grammatical prose;

5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;

6. engage primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay’s thesis.

Grading Scale

A+ 100 | C+ 77-79
A  94-99 | C  74-76
A-  90-93 | C- 70-73
B+  87-89 | D+ 67-69
B  84-86 | D  64-66
B-  80-83 | D- 60-63

Assessment  Formal Writing Projects

Three Close Reading Kits  45% of final grade
One Critical Analysis Essay  15%
OR
One Creative Project

Contributions

Four Quizzes  20%
Five Discussion posts/responses  10%
Two real-time sessions on Canvas  10%
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Formal Writing Projects
For each of the four plays, you will submit a formal, written Close Reading Kit. These assignments will prepare you to produce a successful Critical Analysis or Creative Project on your choice of any one of the three plays we will have studied. Directions and requirements for each of these assignments will be provided later in the term.

To pass the course, you must complete all formal writing projects.

Contributions
This class emphasizes the communication of ideas both in writing and in discussion, so your active participation is essential. Anything less than full and informed involvement in all of these activities can count against your course grade.

You can earn an A for Contributions by

- Reading the assigned texts carefully according to the reading schedule;
- Participating in two real-time class discussions in two different weeks;
- Posting one substantive comment in five discussion threads and responding to at least two comments posted by others.
- Completing four short quizzes.

Formatting and Submitting Assignments
All written work must be typed and double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. Include the following information on upper left corner of the first page:

Your Name
ENG 207
Dr. Katie Myers
Description of the assignment (Close Reading, Critical Analysis)
Word count
Date due

Your original title (centered)

Insert your last name and page numbers in the header on subsequent pages of each document (Name 2, etc.). Use MLA format for quoting and citing plays.

All formal writing projects must be submitted on Canvas.
COURSE POLICIES

Contact: Email
Feel free to email if you have questions. I will respond to emails within 24 hours. Please consult the guidelines for email etiquette available on the course website.

I will communicate with the class via Canvas. Plan to check your email at least daily.

Attendance
Attendance is required at two real-time sessions in two different weeks.

Technical Difficulties
These things happen. However, technical difficulties are not an excuse for failing to produce your assigned work on time. Back up your files.

Late Work
All assignments are due on the date and by the time indicated on the course schedule. Every day an assignment is late, it will be marked down one third of a letter-grade. If you are unable to submit an assignment on time, you should make arrangements with me via email at least 24 hours before the due date/time.

Academic Honesty
All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, which means you may not submit papers or portions of papers you have written for another class, even if you’ve read the plays before). The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please consult The Little Duck Handbook and the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. In cases where academic dishonesty has been clearly established, the award of an F for the final course is standard practice. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

Most academic dishonesty cases happen when students panic at the last minute. If you ask at least 24 hours in advance of a deadline, I will usually grant you an extension, so please don’t resort to cheating.

I expect you to read every play in its entirety in the original language. Online summaries are also not written for college-level courses, and thus they are only a good supplement if you are struggling. Relying on someone else’s work in any capacity on an assignment constitutes Academic Dishonesty and be treated as such. If you do quote from, get an idea from, or even read an online summary, that source must appear in a “Works Consulted” list on any subsequent assignment.

A note on using online summaries, paraphrases, and other sources:
I expect to see your own grappling for meaning with these texts in your writing and contributions for this course. You have something valuable to contribute, and there is usually not one “correct” interpretation. Remember that online summaries are other people’s interpretations. They reflect the choices other people make about what to include and what to emphasize. They are themselves arguments, and their paraphrasing of Shakespeare erase some possible meanings while privileging others.
Incompletes  
No grades of “Incomplete” will be assigned for this course.

Advisory  
This class offers a safe space to explore competing and controversial ideas, but a safe space is not the same as a comfort zone. Learning is uncomfortable. Expect to have your ideas challenged and to challenge the ideas of others. However, seek to remain open to understanding perspectives different from your own. Engaging your own biases is one of the most important and most uncomfortable components of education.

You should be aware that Shakespeare deals with adult themes and subjects. His work can be violent and sexual, sometimes simultaneously. His work challenges conventional conceptions of political and religious issues. We will discuss these subjects specifically in class. Please be prepared for thoughtful engagement with the texts and with your classmates on a spectrum of provocative and potentially uncomfortable topics. I do not expect you to like (or to agree with) everything you read, but I do expect gracious and responsible treatment of your classmates and of these intellectually challenging texts.