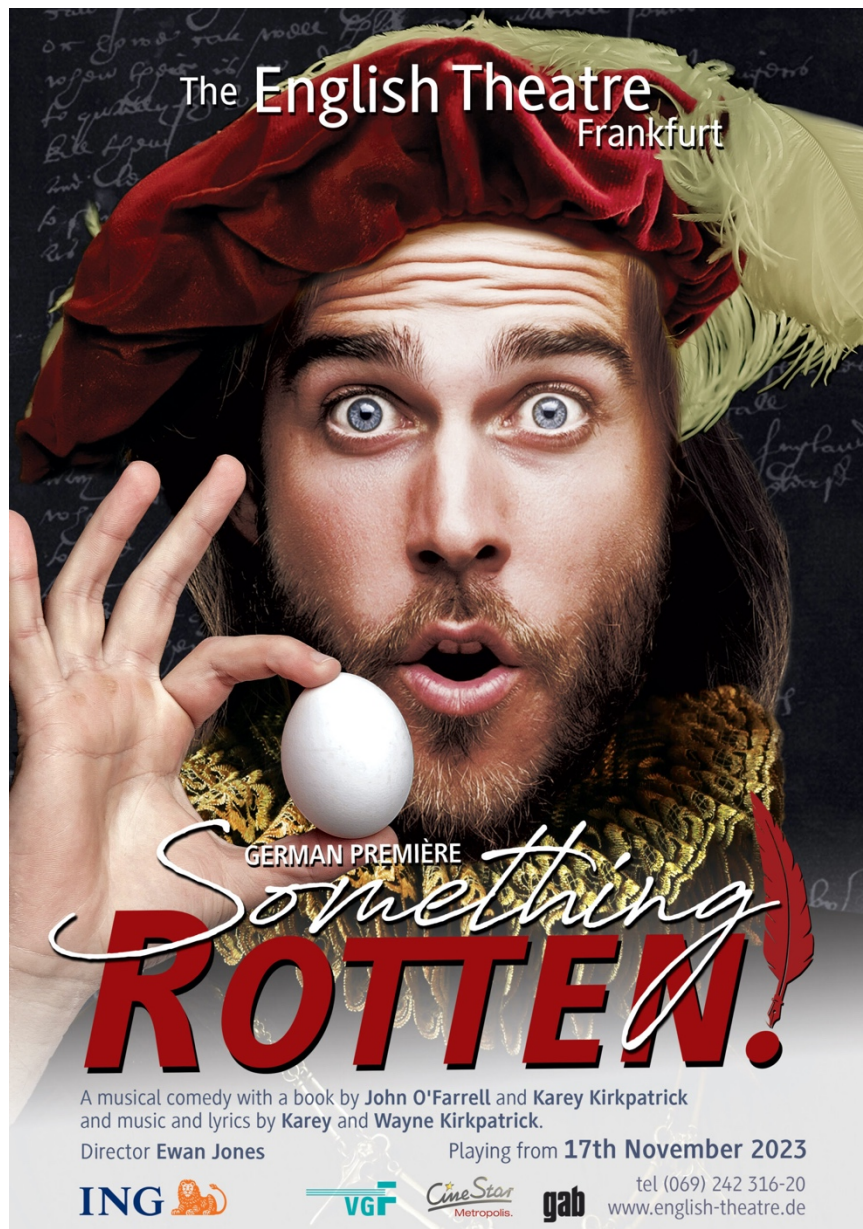


# ***Something Rotten!***

A musical comedy with a book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell and music and lyrics by Wayne Kirkpatrick and Karey Kirkpatrick. Concieved by Karey Kirkpatrick and Wayne Kirkpatrick

17<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – 31st March 2024



**The English Theatre Frankfurt**

**Teachers' Resource Pack**

This teachers' resource pack includes factual information as well as tasks and topics to be dealt with in the classroom. Cut and paste as you please, and please consult the official program for additional information.

## The authors

### Karey Kirkpatrick (Book, Music and Lyrics)

Is an American filmmaker. His films include *Chicken Run*, *The Rescuers Down Under*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Over the Hedge*, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. He has also directed the films *Over the Hedge*, *Imagine That* starring Eddie Murphy as well as *Smallfoot*. Kirkpatrick wrote the English-language screenplays for the U.S. releases of the Studio Ghibli films *The Secret World of Arrietty* in 2012 and *From Up on Poppy Hill* in 2013.



His older brother is American songwriter and musician Wayne Kirkpatrick, with whom he wrote the 2015 musical *Something Rotten!* as well as the 2020 musical *Mrs. Doubtfire*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karey\\_Kirkpatrick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karey_Kirkpatrick)

### John O'Farrell (Book)



is a British author, comedy scriptwriter, and political campaigner. Previously a lead writer for such shows as *Spitting Image* and *Have I Got News for You*, he is now best known as a comic author for such books such as *The Man Who Forgot His Wife* and *An Utterly Impartial History of Britain*. He is one of a small number of British writers to have achieved best-seller status with both fiction and nonfiction. He has also published three collections of his weekly column for *The Guardian* and set up Britain's first daily

satirical news website *NewsBiscuit*. With comedian Angela Barnes, he co-hosts the light-hearted historical podcast *We Are History*.

O'Farrell co-wrote the musical *Something Rotten!*, which opened on Broadway in April 2015, and co-wrote a Broadway musical of *Mrs. Doubtfire* which opened on Broadway in December 2021 and in London's West End in May 2023. In September 2017, he published *Things Can Only Get Worse?*, a sequel to the 1998 political memoir that originally made his name. His books have been translated into around thirty languages and adapted for radio and television.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_O%27Farrell\\_\(author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_O%27Farrell_(author))

### Wayne Kirkpatrick (Music and Lyrics)

(right)

Wayne Kirkpatrick is an American songwriter, musician and brother to Karey Kirkpatrick. The brothers grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and later, Kirkpatrick found a career in Nashville as a musician performing background vocals, guitar and keyboards. He also wrote music for several famous artists, such as Faith Hill, Garth Brooks, Babyface, Amy Grant, Joe Cocker, Wynonna Judd, Bonnie Raitt and many others. Kirkpatrick most intimately worked with the country band Little Big Town beginning in 2005 with their second album, *The Road to Here*. He continued to work and write on *A Place*



to Land, The Reason Why and The Road to Here. Other notable works include a solo project called The Maple Room, with songs "Wrapped Up in You" and "My Armageddon," which later became hits for Garth Brooks. In 2000, he worked with songwriters Gordon Kennedy, Phil Madeira and Billy Sprague on the album Coming From Somewhere Else, including Kirkpatrick's song "Change the World" with Eric Clapton, which won the Grammy Award for Song of the Year in 2002. Wayne began working with his brother, Karey, on Something Rotten! in 2010, which opened on Broadway in 2015. The Kirkpatricks and book writer John O'Farrell, were nominated for Best Book of a Musical and Best

## The director – Ewan Jones



Ewan trained at Arts Educational Schools and holds an MA in Choreography. Choreography for screen includes seasons 2 & 3 of *Sex Education* (Netflix) and *The Ballad of Renegade Nell* (Disney+).

Stage credits as choreographer include: *The Phantom of the Opera* (UAE Tour); *Candide* (WNO); *Barber of Seville* (Garsington); *The Phantom Of The Opera* (Athens, Greece); *Sister Act* (Director/Choreographer, The English Theatre Frankfurt); *Matilda* (Director/Choreographer, Folketeateret, Oslo); *The Yeomen of the Guard* (Grange Festival); *Milky Peaks* (Theatre Clwyd); *She Loves Me* (Sheffield Crucible); *Der Mond* (Opera National de Lyon); *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (Opera de

Limoges); *L'Etoile* (Theatre Sao Carlos, Lisbon); *Offenbach's Fantasio* (Garsington Opera); *The Phantom Of The Opera* (Folketeateret, Oslo); *Bring It On* (Director/Choreographer, Southwark Playhouse); *West Side Story* (Future Stages/RNCM Theatre, Manchester); *The Wizard Of Oz* (Sheffield Crucible); *13 – The Musical* (Director/Choreographer, Ambassadors Theatre); *Travels With My Aunt* (Chichester); *Ragtime* (Charing Cross Theatre); *What I Go To School For* (Brighton Theatre Royal); *The Phantom Of The Opera* (Teatrul National Bucharest); *The Tales Of Hoffman* (English Touring Opera); *Ariodante and Giove In Argo* (International Handel Festival); *The Three Little Pigs* (Director/Choreographer, Palace Theatre/UK & International Tour – Broadway World nomination for Best Choreography); *Vert Vert* (Garsington Opera); *Elegies for Angels, Punks & Raging Queens* (Criterion Theatre); *Altar Boyz* (Greenwich Theatre); *L'Enfant et Les Sortilèges* (Britten Theatre); *The Mikado* (Hackney Empire); *Ha Ha Hoods!* (UK tour); *The Three Billy Goats Gruff, Goldilocks And The Three Bears* (Singapore Repertory Theatre); *The Dreaming* (Rose Theatre); *Mexican Hayride* (Sadlers Wells); *Don Pasquale* (Opera Holland Park); *Cabaret* (Grand Theatre Swansea); *Fame* (Grimsby Auditorium); *HMS Pinafore – Revisited* (Kings Head Theatre – Offies nomination for Best Choreographer); *Carousel* (Broadway Theatre); *Cinderella* (Swan Theatre, High Wycombe); *Aladdin* (Sunderland Empire); *Cinderella, Snow White & The Seven Dwarves, Jack and the Beanstalk* (Palace Theatre Mansfield); *Sleeping Beauty* (Malvern Festival Theatre).

Ewan has choreographed work for various drama schools including Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Guildhall, RADA, RAM, RCM, Bird College, Arts Educational Schools London, LSMT and Guildford School of Acting.



## **Something Rotten!**

### **Synopsis**

Something Rotten takes place in 1595 London, England. The Bottom brothers, Nick and Nigel are trying to find success by writing plays, but are outshined by the rock-star playwright of the Renaissance, William Shakespeare. Desperate to find success Nick gets help from a soothsayer for the next big hit. Nostradamus tries to predict what Shakespeare's most successful work will be and – always a little amiss – sees lots of big and successful titles ending on a modified version of *Hamlet*. In cahoots with Shylock, their secret sponsor, Nostradamus, Nick and Nigel set out to write the next big hit: *Omelette: The Musical*.

For Nick, the commercial success is what is most important for their endeavor, since he wants to be able to provide a living for his very progressive and pregnant wife. Nigel, on the other hand, wants to stay true to himself and write something of meaning and value right along the lines of Shakespeare's works, not least because he wants to impress Portia, the woman of puritan descent he fell in love with.

Shakespeare, himself suffering from a severe writer's block, catches wind of the brothers' plans and joins their acting company in disguise, in order to steal their ideas.

Opening night arrives, and Nick, Nigel and the Troupe perform their big number, "Something Rotten! Make an Omelette." But Shakespeare stops the show to reveal his true identity and inform the Troupe that Nick has been seeking help from Nostradamus to steal what should have been Shakespeare's greatest play.

Nick is left with the realization that his dishonesty hurt everyone he cares about, and now he has to pay the price. On trial in court, Nick and his fellow defendants face a multitude of crimes with the MASTER OF JUSTICE abiding over the proceedings. Bea enters disguised as an old lawyer and makes a defense of temporary insanity for Nick. Unconvinced, the judge is about to pronounce a sentencing of beheading when Bea calls Master William Shakespeare to the stand. In a surprise twist, Shakespeare suggests that Nick should be exiled rather than beheaded. The star-struck Master of Justice agrees with the famous Bard and sentences Nick and Nigel to be banished to the New World – and to take their so-called 'musicals' with them. Portia arrives to say a final farewell... to her father. She tells him where her true love, Nigel, is going, she is going as well. In America, their new musical form is a smash. Shylock gets news from England that Shakespeare's new play has opened and is considered his masterpiece. It's called Hamlet, to which Nostradamus replies, "Hamlet! I was this close!"

### **The Characters**

#### **Nick Bottom**

Unsuccessful playwright who has been in the theatre business for some time. Was in a company with Shakespeare and told Shakespeare that he should rather write instead of acting. Envious of Shakespeare and strict with his brother Nigel. Married to Bea, who is pregnant. He worries about being the provider of his family.

#### **Nigel Bottom**

A talented poet and author, younger brother of Nick Bottom. He is in love with Portia, a Puritan woman, and looks up to Shakespeare as an idol. He is very idealistic and wants to write something of value.

## Shakespeare

The Bard, a genius of his time and at the peak of his career. He enjoys being famous a lot but currently suffers from writer's block. He is vain and devious because is willing to steal the ideas of others to remain famous.

## Bea Bottom

Nick Bottom's wife, literally his better half, who still puts food on the table despite the lack of money. She is very feminist and in the course of the play she takes on several "male professions" in disguise, which usually leads to misunderstandings when she interacts with her husband.

## Portia

Daughter of Brother Jeremiah. She was brought up Puritan but loves poetry and drama. This inclination leads to her falling in love with Nigel Bottom, much to her father's displeasure.

## Brother Jeremiah

A stoic and influential Puritan, father of Portia. He hates the theatre and singing. An adversary to the love of Portia and Nigel Bottom.

## Lord Clapham

He begins as the Bottom brothers' primary patron, but that changes quickly once he hears that Shakespeare is performing the same play. Clapham is excited by the arts and certainly not ashamed to share his sometimes zealous opinions about the Bottoms' shows.

## Shylock

Shylock is a Jewish moneylender who wants nothing more than to be considered a patron of the arts but by law, can't be considered an official investor. Regardless, he continues to help Nick because he can't stand to be anywhere else besides the theater.

## Thomas Nostradamus

Thomas Nostradamus is Nostradamus' nephew and not quite as talented or adept at telling the future like his uncle. In fact, he gets Nick's premonition for the greatest play of all time very, very wrong.

# William Shakespeare

## Biography

William Shakespeare is considered by many the greatest English writer and playwright of all time. He wrote approximately 154 sonnets, 38 plays, two narrative poems and many verses in the **late 16th century**. His reputation made him known as “The Bard of Avon” and England’s national poet. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, Shakespeare’s parents were John Shakespeare, a glover and a member of the municipal council, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a rich landowning farmer. He had two older sisters, Judith and Joan, and three younger brothers – Edmund, Richard and Gilbert.

He was **baptized on April 26, 1564**, and though his actual birthdate is undetermined, most celebrate his birthday on April 23 on Saint George’s Day. Much is unknown of his childhood, but he was believed to attend King’s New School in Stratford and there learned the basic tenets of a Latin education.

At eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on November 27, 1582, and later went on to have three children: Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet. At

the age of eleven, Hamnet died for unknown reasons and was buried on August 11, 1596. The years following the twins’ births are considered the lost years, with little evidence of Shakespeare’s whereabouts until **1592 in London**. By that point, **Shakespeare’s plays had found a home on the London stage**, and his name was mentioned in the Stationers’ Register by playwright Robert Greene with a quote from *Henry VI*, Part 3. In the paper, Greene accuses Shakespeare of overreaching in the presence of more established and successful writers like Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe.

Many scholars believe he **began his career in the mid-1580s with Lord Chamberlain’s Men**, which became the premier troupe in London. The company changed its name to the King’s Men after receiving a royal patent by King James I after Elizabeth’s death in 1603. By 1594, some of Shakespeare’s plays had been published in early quarto editions, and by 1598, his name was printed on the title pages.

Meanwhile, he continued to act in his plays and his contemporaries’. During this time, he was divided between Stratford, where he bought the second-largest house in the city, and London, where he spent the majority of his time. In **1599**, Shakespeare and his business partners built The **Globe Theatre** on the Thames River, which would later become a symbol of his legacy.

Shakespeare was thought to have died on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52 for reasons unknown. There were allusions to the idea that perhaps he drank too much alcohol and caught a fever, but there are no specific records detailing cause of death.

Though there’s been much **speculation** about whether or not Shakespeare was the true and sole author of his many plays, most scholars believe that he was indeed the man with the quill. Without a doubt, Shakespeare’s legacy continues to inspire literature, art and entertainment to this very day.

[https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten\\_educational-guide.pdf](https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten_educational-guide.pdf)

<https://www.geo.de/geolino/mensch/1926-rtkl-weltveraenderer-william-shakespeare>



## Authorship Question and Conspiracy Theories

The **Shakespeare authorship question** is the argument that someone other than William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote the works attributed to him. Anti-Stratfordians—a collective term for adherents of the various alternative-authorship theories—believe that Shakespeare of Stratford was a front to shield the identity of the real author or authors, who for some reason—usually social rank, state security, or gender—did not want or could not accept public credit. Although the idea has attracted much public interest, all but a few Shakespeare scholars and literary historians consider it a fringe theory, and for the most part acknowledge it only to rebut or disparage the claims.

Shakespeare's authorship was first questioned in the middle of the 19th century, when adulation of Shakespeare as the greatest writer of all time had become widespread. Shakespeare's biography, particularly his humble origins and obscure life, seemed incompatible with his poetic eminence and his reputation for genius, arousing suspicion that Shakespeare might not have written the works attributed to him. The controversy has since spawned a vast body of literature, and more than 80 authorship candidates have been proposed, the most popular being Sir Francis Bacon; Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford; Christopher Marlowe; and William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby.



There even exists a conspiracy theory – **the Marlovian Theory** - centering around Christopher Marlowe. Little is known for sure about Marlowe. What is generally accepted is that he was born in 1564 - the same year as Shakespeare - and educated at Cambridge. He was only granted his degree after the government intervened (a sure sign that he was involved in official work) and wrote his plays, including *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, and *The Jew of Malta*, in just six years.

And at the age of 29, before Shakespeare had produced any of his greatest works, such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *Macbeth*, Marlowe was stabbed to death in a tavern brawl. Unless, that is, you believe that he faked his death and resurfaced as the Bard of Avon.

However, both theories **lack historical evidence**. Nearly all academic Shakespeareans believe that the author referred to as "Shakespeare" was the same William Shakespeare who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and who died there in 1616. He became an actor and shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men), the playing company that owned the Globe Theatre, the Blackfriars Theatre, and exclusive rights to produce Shakespeare's plays from 1594 to 1642. Shakespeare was also allowed the use of the honorific "gentleman" after 1596 when his father was granted a coat of arms.

Shakespeare scholars see no reason to suspect that the name was a pseudonym or that the actor was a front for the author: Contemporary records identify Shakespeare as the writer, other playwrights such as Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe came from similar backgrounds, and no contemporary is known to have expressed doubts about Shakespeare's authorship. While information about some aspects of Shakespeare's life is sketchy, this is true of many other

playwrights of the time. Of some, next to nothing is known. Others, such as Jonson, Marlowe, and John Marston, are more fully documented because of their education, close connections with the court, or brushes with the law.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare\\_authorship\\_question](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare_authorship_question)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2001/mar/07/artsfeatures.classics>

## Shakespearean References in *Something Rotten!*

*Something Rotten!* is jam-packed with references from William Shakespeare's plays and life. Here are a few of those quotes, characters and parts of plays that will help you unlock the topsy-turvy world of the Renaissance.

Richard II: At the beginning of the play, the Bottom brothers are rehearsing the story of *Richard II* and actually quote from Shakespeare's *King Richard the Second*. "Let us talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs; Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth." *Richard II* was a history play believed to be written around 1595 and is based on England's King Richard II, who ruled from 1377 to 1399.

Nick and Nigel Bottom: The Bottom brothers are named after the character Bottom from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bottom is an Athenian weaver who is part of the Mechanicals who rehearse the tale of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Bottom begins the play as an earnest performer who eventually falls victim to a little bit of fairy magic.

Bea: Nick's wife takes on several disguises as men to earn extra income for the house. Throughout Shakespeare's plays, there are several heroines that don male personas to get what they want or need. The most important examples include Imogen (*Cymbeline*), Rosalind (*As You Like It*), Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*), Viola (*Twelfth Night*) and Julia (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*).

The Bard: Shakespeare claims it's "hard to be the bard", and he might just be right. "Bard" means poet, and during the period, bards were poets that made a career from travelling and telling stories. Through his cannon of work, Shakespeare became known as "The Bard of Avon."

Romeo and Juliet: This play is one of Shakespeare's most famous stories, written somewhere between 1591 and 1595. *Romeo and Juliet* follows two "star-crossed lovers" whose love comes to a tragic end. Nigel and Portia's secret relationship is somewhat modeled after the original young lovers, with Nick and the Puritans indicating the warring families of the Montagues and the Capulets.

Shylock: The character of Shylock comes from *The Merchant of Venice*, written somewhere between 1596 and 1598. In both stories, Shylock is a Jewish moneylender who loans a sum of money that must be paid.

Portia: Like Shylock, the character of Portia is derived from *The Merchant of Venice*. While Portia in *Something Rotten!* is a Puritan who falls in love with Nigel, Portia from Shakespeare's play is an



heiress who is forced by her father to attain the suitor who chooses the appropriate casket containing her portrait and a scroll.

Sonnet: William Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets that were first published in a 1609 quarto titled "SHAKESPEARS SONNETS." Most sonnets possessed three quatrains with the final couplet in iambic pentameter.

"Now is the winter of our discontent! Made glorious summer by this son of York.": This quote comes from act one, scene one of *The Life and Death of Richard the Third* from the character of Richard. The play was believed to be written in 1592 and follows the rise and fall of King Richard III of England.

"And if music be the food of love—play on!": These lines open *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, a comedy of Shakespeare's written around 1601 to 1602. In the play, Duke Orsino is deeply in love with the Countess Olivia, who lacks mutual affection, and seeks melancholy to console him.

Omelette: Nostradamus's unfortunate premonition for Shakespeare's greatest play, Omelette, was, in actuality, supposed to be *Hamlet*. In fact, when Nigel deals with his heartbreak by writing from his truth, much of what he shares with the Troupe is Hamlet's actual soliloquies. The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark was written somewhere between 1599 and 1602.

[https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten\\_educational-guide.pdf](https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten_educational-guide.pdf)

## Shakespeare's World

### The English Renaissance and Elizabethan Era

**Feudalism was on the decline** at the beginning of the Renaissance. The reasons for this decline include the post-Plague environment, the increasing use of money rather than land as a medium of exchange, the growing number of serfs living as freemen, the formation of nation-states with monarchies interested in reducing the power of feudal lords, the increasing uselessness of feudal armies in the face of new military technology (such as gunpowder), and a general increase in agricultural productivity due to improving farming technology and methods. As in Italy, the decline of feudalism opened the way for the cultural, social, and economic changes associated with the Renaissance in Europe.



Reproduction of Johannes Gutenberg-era Press on display at the Printing History Museum in Lyon, France.

Finally, **the Renaissance** in Europe would also be **kindled by a weakening of the Roman Catholic Church**. The slow demise of feudalism also weakened a long-established policy in which church officials helped keep the population of the manor under control in return for tribute. Consequently, the early 15th century saw the rise of many secular institutions and beliefs. Among the most significant of these, Renaissance **humanism would lay the philosophical grounds** for much of Renaissance art, music, science and technology. Erasmus, for example, was important in spreading humanist ideas in the north, and was a central figure at the intersection of classical humanism and mounting religious questions. Forms of artistic expression which a century ago would have been banned by the church were now tolerated or even encouraged in certain circles.

The velocity of transmission of the Renaissance throughout Europe can also be ascribed to the invention of the **printing press**. Its power to disseminate information **enhanced scientific research, spread political ideas** and generally impacted the course of the Renaissance in northern Europe. As in Italy, the printing press increased the availability of books written in both vernacular languages and the publication of new and ancient classical texts in Greek and Latin. Furthermore, the Bible became widely available in translation, a factor often attributed to the spread of the Protestant Reformation.

The **English Renaissance** was a cultural and artistic movement in England during the late 15th, 16th and early 17th centuries. It is associated with the pan-European Renaissance that is usually regarded as beginning in Italy in the late 14th century. As in most of the rest of Northern Europe, England saw little of these developments until more than a century later within the Northern Renaissance. Renaissance style and ideas were slow to penetrate England, and **the Elizabethan era in the second half of the 16th century is usually regarded as the height of the English Renaissance**. Many scholars see its beginnings in the early 16th century during the reign of Henry VIII. Others argue the Renaissance was already present in England in the late 15th century.

The English Renaissance is different from the Italian Renaissance in several ways. The dominant art forms of the English Renaissance were literature and music. Visual arts in the English Renaissance were much less significant than in the Italian Renaissance. The English period began far later than the Italian, which was moving into Mannerism and the Baroque by the 1550s or earlier.

The **Elizabethan era** is the epoch in the Tudor period of the history of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). Historians often depict it as the golden age in English history. The symbol of Britannia (a female personification of Great Britain) was first used in 1572, and often thereafter, to mark the Elizabethan age as a renaissance that inspired national pride through classical ideals, international expansion, and naval triumph over Spain.

In a strict sense "**Elizabethan**" only refers to the period of **Queen Elizabeth's reign** (1558–1603).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern\\_Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Renaissance)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan\\_era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_era)



## Elizabethan Theatre

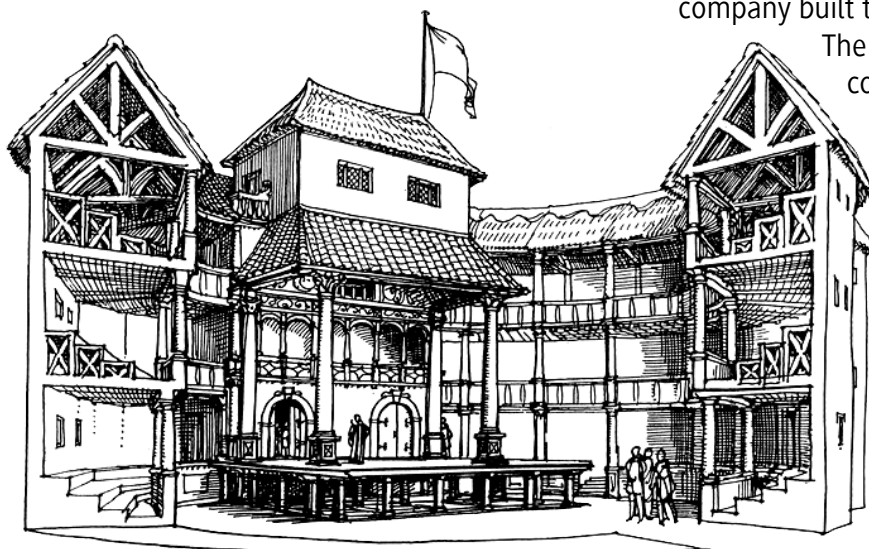
**English Renaissance** theatre may be said to encompass **Elizabethan theatre** from 1562 to 1603, **Jacobean theatre** from 1603 to 1625, and **Caroline theatre** from 1625 to 1642.

Elizabethan theatre is the style of the plays of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.

During Queen Elizabeth's time, the theatre and all the other arts became popular and the artists were able to make a living for themselves. Elizabeth was a great lover of the arts. Her government paid for the construction of many theatres and for many plays to be written.

The **public theatres** were very large and held as many as **2,500 people**. They were built around a courtyard that had no roof.

The **earliest theatres** were built on the outskirts of London. These theatres included The Theatre (the first public theatre), the Curtain, the Rose, and the Swan. In **1599**, Shakespeare and his company built the **Globe Theatre**.



The building enclosed a courtyard (sometimes round, squared or many sided). Most theatres had 3 levels of galleries, each about 10 meters high. The courtyard was called the pit. The stage was at one end of the pit. The **price of admission for the poorer spectators** was usually **one penny** that paid for **standing room** in the pit. The spectators were called **groundlings**.



For an extra fee, the wealthier patrons could sit on the benches in the galleries.

Shakespeare's theatre was full of life. People did not sit all the time and it was not quiet during the **performance**. The **audience** could walk around, eat and drink during the play. They cheered, **booed** and sometimes even threw objects at the actors. Most of Shakespeare's audiences were illiterate. His words were chosen to be spoken or heard, not to be read.

**Stages** were large platforms that projected into the pit allowing the groundling to watch from three sides. The left and right rear of the stage had two doorways that led to the dressing rooms. The back of the stage had a curtain that covered a discovery space. This space revealed a hiding place or another room of the main stage.

Above the stage was a small gallery that served as a balcony or castle wall in some of the plays. A hut with a half roof projected over the upper stage. Inside this stage was machinery for sound effects or for lowering actors to the main stage (gods, angels, etc.) This hut was sometimes called the heavens.

The main stage had a large trap door. Actors playing ghosts and spirits could disappear through the door. The trap door, when opened, could also serve as a grave.

Scenery was not used very much. That is why Shakespeare and many other writers described the scenes in their plays.





Public Performances always took place at 2:00 p.m. as the players had to make **use of natural daylight** because there was no electricity. The citizens of the town knew that there was to be a performance that day if the flag was raised on the roof. The color of the flag informed them about the genre of the play.

Since **Shakespeare's** plays were **seen by both rich and poor**, his plays had to appeal to audiences of all kinds, from members of the nobility to merchants and labourers, from queens and kings to wives and students. His plays were based on plots from previously published histories or tales that the audience often recognized. Some of his plays were set in foreign lands. Since many of the people of his day could not travel, he gave them a taste of another culture and place. Some of his plays retold the history of the famous kings and queens of England. His plays have been grouped **into comedies, histories and tragedies**.

**Acting companies** consisted **only of men and boys** because women did not perform on the Elizabethan stage. A typical acting company had 8 to 12 'sharers' who were the leading actors as well as the owners of the company. They had charge of the company's money. They bought the plays and costumes, rented the theatres, paid the fees, and split the profits.

The paid workers, called Airlings, took minor roles in the plays, performed the music, served as prompters, and did various odd jobs. The helpers were boys who played the roles of women and children. The boy actors were often well trained and highly skilled. Disguise played an important part in Shakespeare's dramas. Audiences enjoyed comic situations in which a boy played a girl character who disguised herself as a boy. Female characters masqueraded as men in several of Shakespeare's plays, including "As You Like It", "The Merchant of Venice" and "Twelfth Night."

These companies operated under the **sponsorship of a member of the royal family** or an important nobleman. Shakespeare's company was sponsored from 1594 to 1603 by Lora Hunsdon and his son who later became Lord Chamberlain in the queen's court. That is why Shakespeare's company was called the Lord Chamberlain's Man. These sponsors usually did not give money but only their names to these acting companies. This was like advertising for the Lord and often showed his importance.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_Renaissance\\_theatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Renaissance_theatre)

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<https://quizlet.com/499965528/why-shakespeare-the-globe-theatre-diagram/>

## Puritans



The *Puritans* were English Protestant Christians, primarily active in the 16th-18th centuries CE, who claimed the Anglican Church had not distanced itself sufficiently from Catholicism and sought to 'purify' it of Catholic practices. The term was originally an insult used by Anglicans to refer to people whom they claimed were too easily offended by the liturgy of the Anglican Church and were nitpicking at details and causing trouble while justifying their efforts through proof-texting of the Bible. Puritans did not use the term to refer to themselves, primarily using 'Saints' as a self-referent.

Although initially a small sect of dissenters who drew inspiration from the writings of the religious reformer John Calvin (l. 1509-1564 CE), Puritanism became more widespread toward the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century. They objected to the use of the Book of Common Prayer, the Anglican Church hierarchy, the use of incense and music in worship services, and a number of other aspects of Church liturgy and practice. Under Queen Elizabeth I of England (r. 1558-1603 CE) they were accommodated (for the most part) while under her successor James I of England (r. 1603-1625 CE) they were persecuted.

The Puritans lived and breathed the word of the Bible, closely adhering to its text and chastizing those who transgressed against it. They closely tied providence and prosperity, charity and self-discipline. Puritans were known for their work ethic, a trait drawn along American, especially New England, lines.

<https://www.worldhistory.org/Puritans/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z9qpjty/revision/1#>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/the-jews-of-medieval-england/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00q6l4t>

## Role of women and gender expectations

Context- Role of women and gender expectations In the late sixteenth century, when *Romeo & Juliet* was written, the idea of marrying for love in high society as Juliet does in the play was fairly new. People married for all kinds of other reasons – for money or for political or social advantage, for example. Women could marry very young (legally, they could marry from the age of twelve). The majority of women in late sixteenth century England were uneducated. However, women who came from families of high social standing were taught by personal tutors at home. They would have studied reading, writing and arithmetic, and languages such as Greek, Latin and French. They were also taught sewing and music. While a woman's place in this world was primarily at home and with her family, some women had jobs as midwives and apothecaries (pharmacists); others were employed in trades as shoemakers, milliners (hat makers) and embroiderers. Women were also washerwomen and servants. This was a male-dominated society (a patriarchy): women in Elizabethan England were of lower status than men. Women were brought up to obey the men in their lives – their fathers, brothers and husbands. They were not allowed to own property once they were married. Married women had children on average every two years. About half of the babies born died not long afterward. Many women also died in childbirth. Honour, especially male honour, was very important. The slightest insult to male honour was a very serious business and had to be answered. The result of this code was that public fights were common and often ended in bloodshed and death. Because of the fights and bloodshed, governments tried very hard to keep public order and rid society of this impulse to row and riot. Punishments for public fights were very severe. This was a very Christian society and strict obedience to the laws of the Christian faith was expected. There were many life-threatening dangers in Elizabethan times. Fewer than 50% of children reached the age of five and a high percentage of women died during their first childbirth. Many men were killed in wars and great epidemics of smallpox and the plague killed thousands more. If you were ill, there was little the doctors could do. 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die' was a good saying for this period in history. In Shakespeare's time the class system was very powerful. You knew your place in society and that was dictated by how much money you had, what you did for a living and who your ancestors were. It was very difficult to move from one class to another: marriage was one opportunity to do this. At the very least people made every effort not to move down the social rankings. In Shakespeare's time there were only about fifty-five noble families in England. These families were very rich and powerful and supported large households of relatives, servants and other associates. You became a nobleman by ancestry or by a grant from the king or queen.

Despite this, some women did have influence and took on important roles. This is reflected in Shakespeare's plays, where there are examples of women in control. For example, the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* is a strong, intelligent woman who controls the events of the play.

<https://www.beths.bexley.sch.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=3421&type=pdf>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z726yrd/articles/zjdybqt>

## Life of Jews

During the Elizabethan era, Jews faced significant discrimination and were officially banned from living in England in 1290. While some conversos (Jews who converted to Christianity) lived in England discreetly, they faced suspicion and prejudice due to their background. Jews were looked upon as heretics. The restrictions and negative perceptions surrounding Judaism continued, influencing their social and legal standing during that period.

In many parts of Europe, Christians were legally forbidden from collecting interest. Though not legally barred from the practice, Jews who did charge interest on loans came to be seen as greedy and devious. Shakespeare addressed this stereotype in *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that has proven ambivalent for many audiences through the centuries. Shakespeare's depiction of the Jewish moneylender Shylock has struck many as anti-Semitic. Yet the play is also at pains to show that cruelty and greed, as well as pain and suffering, are traits that can be found in Jews and Christians alike. Shakespeare clearly indicates that Shylock's cruelty partly arises in response to his experience of discrimination and abuse, yet within the play itself there is no empathy for the vilified man, who disappears in disgrace at the end of the fourth act.

Other plays written and performed during Shakespeare's lifetime reflect a similar ambivalence about Jews. Perhaps the most famous of these plays is *The Jew of Malta*, written by Christopher Marlowe around 1589. Marlowe's play tells the story of Barabas, a wealthy and villainous Jewish merchant who falsely converts to Christianity to further his devious plans. Eventually Barabas is tricked into falling into his own trap, which results in his being burned alive. Like Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, it remains unclear for many modern readers whether *The Jew of Malta* condones anti-Jewish fantasies, or if the play works to critique those fantasies.

During the Elizabethan era, England did not have an established Jewish community. The official ban on Jews, enforced by King Edward I in 1290, remained in place until the mid-17th century. Though some conversos resided in England, openly practicing Judaism was prohibited. They often faced suspicion, social exclusion, and legal restrictions due to their heritage, even if they outwardly adhered to Christianity. Anti-Semitic attitudes were prevalent, contributing to the challenging circumstances for individuals of Jewish descent during this time.



Jacob Adler as Shylock in a late-19th-century performance of Shakespeare's *"The Merchant of Venice."* Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Image Collection

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/life-and-times/social-context/jews-in-shakespeares-england/>

[https://elizabethanenglandlife.com/jews-in-elizabethan-era.html#google\\_vignette](https://elizabethanenglandlife.com/jews-in-elizabethan-era.html#google_vignette)

<https://awej-tls.org/the-representation-of-the-jews-and-others-in-marlowes-the-jew-of-malta-and-shakespeares-the-merchant-of-venice-on-the-elizabethan-stage-convention-rhetoric-sources-and-the-spirit/>

<https://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/is-it-time-to-retire-the-merchant-of-venice/>



## Nostradamus

*Something Rotten!*'s Thomas Nostradamus is the nephew of the famous Michel Nostradamus. His visions are known to be misleading, making him slightly less talented in telling the future than his uncle. In fact, he gets Nick's premonition for the greatest play of all time very, very wrong.



Nostradamus or Michel de Nostredame was a 16th-century seer. He and his prophecies—revered by some, ridiculed by others—are still well known today, centuries after he lived, and continue to be the subject of debate.

Nostradamus was born in France in 1503. He first worked as a physician and began his medical practice in the 1530s, although he did so without a medical degree. He began making prophecies about 1547, and he

published his prophecies in a book called "Centuries" (1555). He wrote his prophecies in quatrains: four lines of rhyming verse. The quatrains were grouped in hundreds; each set of 100 quatrains was called a century. Nostradamus gained notoriety during his lifetime when some of his predictions appeared to have come true.

Nostradamus's predictions tended to be about general types of events, like natural disasters and conflict-related events that tend to occur regularly as time goes on. Some people believe that his prophecies have predicted actual events, such as the death of Henry II, the *French Revolution*, the rise of *Napoleon*, the rise of Adolf Hitler, and the *9/11 attacks*. Others claim that because his prophecies tend to be about general types of events that occur frequently throughout history—and are written in a cryptic and vague manner—it's possible to find one that seems to match almost any event that has occurred.

<https://www.britannica.com/story/nostradamus-and-his-prophecies>

## The History of Musicals

In *Something Rotten!*, Nostradamus foretells that a new form of drama entitled "musicals" will be the next big thing in theater. With no experience or knowledge of musicals, the Bottom brothers set out to create the first. However, this wasn't exactly the way musicals came to be, and the story falls short of how the musical form continued to change through the years. Here, we'll follow the birth and evolution of musicals.

### EARLY FORMS

Since **ancient Greece**, dating back to the 5th century BCE, performance **combined language, music and dance**, with dramatists like Aeschylus and Sophocles. In ancient Rome, around the 3rd century BCE, the dramatist Plautus wrote **orchestrations for performance with song and dance**. The Romans too created the **first tapshoes** by attaching pieces of metal called sabilla to their shoes, beginning a long musical theater tradition of tap dance that can even be found in *Something Rotten!* In the Middle Ages throughout Europe, minstrels and troupes travelled from city to city presenting comedies with music. Mystery and miracle plays emerged during this period, presenting religious narratives and parables with alternating liturgical chanting and prose. During the Renaissance, the Italian courts would present plays broken by an intermezzo – a short dramatic piece with music that became an important form of drama in the late 16th century and the beginning of opera.

## OPERA AND OPERETTAS

During the Tudor dynasty and the Elizabethan Age, some plays included extravagant numbers with song and dance called court masques. These masques became the first sung plays and arguably the first English operas. William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656) and John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* (1683) are considered the first English operas. During the 18th century in England, two major musical theater forms emerged: ballad operas and comic operas. Ballad operas, like John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), penned lyrics to contemporary music of the time, while comic operas, like Michael Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* (1845), combined original lyrics with mostly romantic plots. Around 1850, French composer Hervé composed the first comic musical theater piece called the operetta. French composer Jacques Offenbach continued to develop the form. Many scholars credit his music and satirical narrative to be the model for the musical comedy form that inspired Gilbert and Sullivan and many thereafter.

## THE MUSICAL COMEDY

The first musical considered to land in America was *The Black Crook*, with a book by Charles M. Barras and music and lyrics by Giuseppe Operti, George Bickwell and Theodore Kennick. It premiered in New York on September 12, 1866, and ran for 474 performances. That same year, comedians Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart's *The Black Domino/Between You, Me and the Post* was the first show to actually call itself a "musical comedy." Gilbert and Sullivan's operas *H.M.S Pinafore* (1878) and *The Mikado* (1885) did much for the genre, proving that the music and lyrics could work together to create perfectly cohesive stories. Their perfectly paired form would inspire musical composers and writers such as P.G. Wodehouse, Jerome Kern, Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, Ivor Novello, Oscar Hammerstein II, Andrew Lloyd Webber and without a doubt, countless more.

[https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten\\_educational-guide.pdf](https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten_educational-guide.pdf)

## Musical Theatre References in *Something Rotten!*

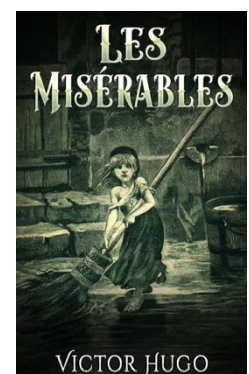
*Something Rotten!* is brimming with countless references from some of the most beloved modern musicals throughout history. Jazz hands out! Below is a list of our favorites from the two songs "A Musical" and "Something Rotten!/Make an Omelette."

"Some musicals have no talking at all": Several musicals are more akin to operas, possessing no spoken dialogue, including *Les Misérables*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Rent* and several others.

"I believe it's called 'Miser-ahh-bluh'": This is directly referring to *Les Misérables*, with music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, original French lyrics by Alain Boubil and Jean-Marc Natel and an English libretto by Herbert Kretzmer.

"Feel that fascinating rhythm move into your feet": These lyrics are from George and Ira Gershwin's "Fascinating Rhythm," which was first included in the Broadway musical *Lady Be Good* in 1924 with Fred and Adele Astaire.

"It's a musical, a Seussical?": *Seussical* was a musical that debuted on Broadway in 2000 and was based on the books of Dr. Seuss. Stephen Flaherty independently composed the music and co-wrote the book with Lynn Ahrens, who also wrote the lyrics.



Sailor Hats: During “A musical,” Nostradamus and the chorus men don sailor hats, which harkens to several nautical-themed musicals, including *South Pacific*, *Anything Goes*, *On the Town* and *Dames at Sea*.



“All That Jazz” Number: This number comes from the John Kander and Fred Ebb musical *Chicago*, featuring the iconic Broadway choreography of Bob Fosse.

“525,600 Minutes” Excerpt: This moment comes from the song “Seasons of Love” from Jonathan Larson’s *Rent*, which won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1996.

Wash Buckets: The ensemble brings on cleaning buckets and emulates the iconic staging of the song “It’s the Hard Knock Life” from Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin’s *Annie*.

“When dancers kick in unison in one big wonderful line”: The lyrics refer to the tradition of a chorus or ensemble dancing in a line in synchronized fashion. This can be seen with the world-famous Radio City Music Hall’s Rockettes and the musical *A Chorus Line*.

A Chorus Line: At the end of the song “A Musical,” the entire company crosses to one line downstage with headshots (or rather head... sketches) in front of their faces. This is a replication of the iconic staging from the musical *A Chorus Line*

“Where is Macavity?”: Macavity is one of the many cats in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Cats*, which first premiered in the West End in 1981.



“An impossible dream”: The line comes from the 1964 musical *Man of La Mancha*, with a book by Dale Wasserman, lyrics by Joe Darion and music by Mitch Leigh.

“There were wheels upon PREPRODUCTION yon dream.”: The line is derived from the 1996 musical *Ragtime*, with a book by Terrence McNally, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and music by Stephen Flaherty.



“And raindrops upon Rosencrantz and whiskers on his kitten”: These lyrics and the mention of Nazis in the scene come from the Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II musical *The Sound of Music*, with a book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.

“I could have danced all night!”: This lyric comes from the song of the same name from the Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner musical *My Fair Lady*.

“Gentle prince, thine absence ‘twas worrisome for the King and I.”: *The King and I* was one of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s most famous musicals, debuting on Broadway in 1951.

“With their succor, we shall make war against the Puerto Ricans. TONIGHT!”: The line is based on the primary conflict in the American musical *West Side Story*, with a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein and libretto and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.



In the play, the Jets, comprised of Caucasian Americans, and the Sharks, comprised of Puerto Ricans, battle one another for territory in New York City.

"Oh luck, be thy a lady tonight.": The lyric is based on the song "Luck Be a Lady" from the 1950 musical *Guys and Dolls*, with a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows and music and lyrics by Frank Loesser.



"Fair guests – willkommen, bienvenue, welcome.": The German welcome comes from the 1966 musical *Cabaret*, with music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb and a book by Joe Masteroff.

"Right here in River City, Shipooi...": River City is the town mentioned in the 1957 musical *The Music Man*, with music and lyrics by Meredith Willson and a book co-written by Willson and Franklin Lacey. "Shipooi" is a song featured in the musical.

"And I am telling you I'm not going to be an omelette...": This iconic moment comes from the song "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" from the 1981 musical *Dreamgirls*.

[https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten\\_educational-guide.pdf](https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten_educational-guide.pdf)



## Pre-Watching Activities

### From Page to Stage – performing a script

#### The Individual Theatre Experience

- 1) In class: Talk about your personal experiences of theatres and plays, e.g. the atmosphere in the theatre, the plays you watched, what you liked or disliked...
- 2) Discuss the differences between seeing a play on stage or reading a script<sup>1</sup>. Explain which you prefer.



#### Getting into the Script of *Something Rotten!*



*Something Rotten!* Is a musical that deals with two brothers who earn their money as playwrights<sup>2</sup> and are constantly outshined by Shakespeare.

In order to have a financial success, they desperately need to come up with something that is better than Shakespeare's next production.

- 1) Read the excerpt and try to visualize the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> A script: written version of a film or a play

<sup>2</sup> Playwright: professional writer

**(1) SCENE 2: The Theatre**

*Inside the theater NICK BOTTOM steps forward, standing center stage wearing a crown and cape. He is flanked by his TROUPE.*

**NICK**

Oh noble kinsmen that royal blood and love do bind.  
Seek now thy own succor, and flee thy native land.  
To die today twill not be done til dawn  
Ta-tee, ta-tum, da-dee-da-dum and who talks like this?

*(to Nigel)*

Nigel, why can't we just write like we speak?

**TOM SNOOT**

Yeah. I haven't understood a single word in our last three plays.

*ROBIN enters in a dress.*

**ROBIN**

Did I miss my cue?

**NICK**

Robin, what are you wearing? This isn't dress rehearsal.

**ROBIN**

Oh. I, um, thought it might help me get into character if I were to wear dresses and hang out in taverns and flirt with men. You know... for research.

**PETER QUINCE**

Nick, I have a question about motivation...

**NICK**

Yes...?

**PETER QUINCE**

Why haven't you given up yet?

**NICK**

Peter! This one is working, I can feel it—it's just missing something right here.  
Nige, help me out.

**NIGEL**

Um, well... I did write something in my notebook last night...

*(removes a small leather bound book from his satchel)*

I was thinking it might be good if King Richard is contemplating his own mortality...  
but now that I've said it out loud, it sounds stupid.

**NICK**

Well, let me read it.

**NIGEL**

It's probably terrible.

**NICK**

Let me see!

*There's a tug of war. NICK finally gets the notebook and reads as NIGEL nervously looks on.*

**NIGEL**

Oh, God, it's bad, isn't it? I don't even know why you let me write with you.

**NICK**

Nigel, it's good.

**NIGEL**

Yeah?

**NICK**

It's really good.

**NIGEL**

Well, I put a lot of layers in it...

**NICK**

One suggestion.

*(pointing to pages)*

How about instead of "tombstones" he says "epitaphs."

**NIGEL**

Oooh, yeah—that's better. Good one, brother.

**NICK**

Okay, everyone take your places. Let's try this.

*(reading)*

Let us talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs;

*(raised eyebrow to Nigel, impressed with himself)*

Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes

Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.

*(then—fist pump)*

Yes! That is good! I'm starting to believe this is gonna be the Bottom Brothers' first hit.

(2)

**NICK**

Okay, everyone take your places. Let's try this.

*(reading)*

Let us talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs;

*(raised eyebrow to Nigel, impressed with himself)*

Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes  
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.

*(then—fist pump)*

Yes! That is good! I'm starting to believe this is gonna be the Bottom Brothers' first hit.

**LORD CLAPHAM**

Pity we have to shut it down!

*LORD CLAPHAM, their patron, enters. He's a lessor lord and extravagantly overdresses to compensate; pink and orange satin with a ridiculously ornate feathered hat. THEY all bow to him.*

**NICK**

Lord Clapham. What do you mean—shut it down?

**LORD CLAPHAM**

Guess whose next production is going to be The Tragedy of Richard the 2nd??

*CLAPHAM unrolls a scroll/POSTER that says "THE TRAGEDIE OF RICHARD II by William Shakespeare." TROUPE GASPS!*

**NIGEL**

Shakespeare??

**NICK**

Why is he doing Richard the 2nd?? He just did Richard the 3rd! Who goes backwards?!

**NIGEL**

He breaks convention. That's why he's so great.

**NICK**

Oh yeah? Did you see Romeo and Juliet? What's so great about two lovers who kill themselves in the end?

**LORD CLAPHAM**

OH, YOU'VE SPOILT IT! I'm seeing it this evening.

**NIGEL**

You should. It's life-changing.

**NICK**

Is it? "Love you, stab myself, drink poison, the end."

**LORD CLAPHAM**

*(putting fingers in his ears, stomping like a child)*



STOP IT! STOP IT, STOP IT! You're ruining everything! Now I paid for an original play and you will lose my patronage, do you hear? No more money—unless I hear a new idea—on the morrow!

**TOM SNOUT**

I think that means "tomorrow"

**PETER QUINCE**

If he quits, we're all out of a job...

*CLAPHAM starts to exit. NICK follows.*

**NICK**

Lord Clapham, please...

**LORD CLAPHAM**

Write something original — like the Bard!

*CLAPHAM exits*

**NICK**

The "bard." Why is he the Bard? He's uh bard. Just like I'm a bard, you're a bard.  
HE'S JUST ONE OF THE BARDS!

**NIGEL**

He's the Bard because he does it all: histories, tragedies, comedies.

**NICK**

Comedies?? Name one thing of his that's funny. Gimme a line, anything.

**NIGEL**

"On my word, we'll not carry coals for then we should be colliers!"

*NIGEL laughs. The TROUPE laughs.*

**NICK**

That's not funny! Urggggghhhhhh...

- 2) Write short character descriptions for:

Nick

Nigel

Tom Snout, Robin & Peter Quince

Lord Clapham

Also include their position on Shakespeare.

- 3) The parts of the script in *italics* are called *stage directions*. Identify the stage directions and point out what kind of information they give the actors and how they help the readers visualize the scene.

Explain how, besides stage directions, the actors might know how to act on the basis of the dramatic script. Add a few stage directions of your own.

#### Staging the Scene

- 1) In groups of 5, choose a part of the scene and practice performing it – either the beginning before they first act out the new piece of the play (1) or the second part, when Lord Clapham enters the scene (2).
  - a) Before actors start rehearsing<sup>3</sup> their roles, they try to find out as much as possible about their characters, e.g. their age, their looks, how they feel in a situation, their relationships with each other. Discuss these aspects with your partners with regards to the characters you choose. Make notes.
  - b) Make a list of things you can do to express dramatic meaning in your part, e.g. certain gestures, movements, positions on stage, tones of voice, etc.
  - c) Rehearse. Prepare to present your performance to the rest of the class.

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<sup>3</sup> To rehearse a play, dance, piece of music: repeat in detail, prepare and practice for a performance

## Getting to know “The Bard”

William Shakespeare – in *Something Rotten!* also called *The Bard* – is the antagonist to the Bottom brothers’ attempt to write a hit.

In reality, Shakespeare indeed was one of the most influential writers and still influences world culture and literature.



- 1) Do some research on William Shakespeare. Be careful to use reliable sources. Take notes on the most important aspects of his life and write down titles of his work you have already heard about.
- 2) Choose a title you have not heard about yet (sonnet or play) and do research on that title. Present the content and the characteristics of the text in class in your next English lesson.

## Globe Theatre and Elizabethan Theatre

### Elizabethan Theatre

*Something Rotten!* is not a Shakespeare play but is set in the Elizabethan Era and deals with a fictional version of Shakespeare’s creative process. The Elizabethan society and theatre world plays an important role in the musical.

- 1) Watch the excerpt from the movie *Shakespeare with Love* for the first time for global understanding. Sum up the plot of the excerpt in class.<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgtRCiypTy0> (2.45 minutes)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7\\_hbQv6r00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7_hbQv6r00) (9 minutes)

- 2) Watch the video for the second time. Choose one of the aspects below and focus on your chosen aspect while watching:
  - Architecture of the theatre
  - Analyze the audience – who attends? Differences in “seating?” How do you know?
  - Role of women in theatre
- 3) Now read this extract from the prologue to the history play *Henry V* (ca. 1599).

### *Henry V*: Prologue William Shakespeare

**Chorus:** [...] Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> You can choose between the shorter version (stop the video at 2.45 minutes) about the attempt of arresting a woman illegally acting on stage or the longer version (9 minutes) showing the movie’s production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

<sup>5</sup> Casques: Helme

That did affright<sup>6</sup> the air at Agincourt? [...]J  
 And let us, ciphers to this great account,  
 On your imaginary forces work.  
 Suppose within the girdle<sup>7</sup> of these walls  
 Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies,  
 Whose high upreared and abutting fronts  
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.  
 Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
 And make imaginary puissance<sup>8</sup>.  
 Think when we talk of horses that you can see them  
 Printing their proud hooves i'th' receiving earth,  
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck<sup>9</sup> our kings,  
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,  
 Turning th' accomplishment of many years  
 (From: *Henry V*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2001)

- 4) *Pair*: Using what you have found out about Shakespearean theatre from the extract from *Shakespeare in Love* and from the Chorus in *Henry V*, summarize the demands the Chorus makes of the audience and the challenges productions at this time-period faced.
- 5) Share: briefly compare your results. Address still existing questions.
- 6) In class discussion: To what extend are theatre audiences today faced with the same condition?

## While-Watching Activities

### Observation Tasks – Elizabethan Theatre

- 1) When preparing for your theatre visit, you have talked about the Elizabethan theatre and the role of women within it as well as the theatre traditions of that era.  
 While watching focus on
  - a) The role of women as shown in the musical
  - Or
  - b) The set-design
- 2) When back in the classroom, compare in class what you have learned about the era to what you have seen in the musical.

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<sup>6</sup> Affright (archaic): erschrecken

<sup>7</sup> Girdle: Gürtel

<sup>8</sup> Puissance (archaic): Kraft

<sup>9</sup> To deck s.o.: ausstaffieren, festlich bekleiden

### *Something Rotten! Quiz*

- 1) After being too late for Richard the II, what does Nigel want the Bottom brothers' next play to be about?
  - a. The love story of Nick and Bea
  - b. The life story of the two brothers
  - c. Queen Elizabeth
  - d. The Black Death
- 2) Why does Nick dislike Shakespeare?
  - a) Nick thinks he is everything but a genius writer and that his plays are too wordy.
  - b) He finds Shakespeare to be a mediocre actor at best.
  - c) He is jealous of his popularity.
  - d) Shakespeare has stolen Nick's old flame from him when they were still working together as actors.
- 3) Describe which sentence describes Shylock best.
  - a. He is a moneylender who works with Nostradamus to trick the Bottom Brothers into producing a huge and expensive play.
  - b. He is a Puritan who sees the devil in all of the arts.
  - c. He is a lover of the arts and wants to invest in Nick's play. However, since he is Jewish, he is technically not allowed to do that.
  - d. He is a lover of the arts and wants to play a role in Nick's new play.
- 4) Nick takes money out of his and Bea's money box. Why?
  - a. To buy a gift for Bea
  - b. To buy a cottage in the country
  - c. To finance his new play
  - d. To pay a soothsayer – Thomas Nostradamus
- 5) Who inspires Nick to write a musical?
  - a. Michel de Nostradame
  - b. Nigel
  - c. Thomas Nostradamus
  - d. Bea
- 6) Nick and Nigel end up losing Lord Clapham as their patron. Why does he remove his patronage?
  - a. He wants to sponsor Shakespeare instead.
  - b. He has a fight with Nick about Bea.
  - c. He is afraid the Puritans who hate the idea of musicals.
  - d. He runs out of money.
- 7) Bea wants to make some extra money. Why is she not allowed to act in Nick's play?
  - a. She is bad at acting.
  - b. Nick does not want her to work because of his male ego.
  - c. It was illegal for women to be on stage at the time.
  - d. Nick is afraid she will attract other men and leave him.
- 8) Brother Jeremiah is a Puritan and he despises the theatre. Why?



- a. Men dress up as women and kiss other men on stage.
  - b. He finds it unfair that women are not allowed to act.
  - c. He is a failed actor.
  - d. He is involved in a personal feud with William Shakespeare.
- 9) Nigel falls in love with a Puritan called Portia. What do the two of them have in common?
- a. They both have strict parents.
  - b. They both love poetry.
  - c. They are both Puritans.
  - d. They both hate Shakespeare.
- 10) Bea disguises herself as a man to earn better wages. What job does she take on?
- a. Acting
  - b. Teaching
  - c. Collecting bear feces
  - d. Writing poetry
- 11) Nigel attends Shakespeare's party with Portia. Why did Shakespeare invite him?
- a. He was impressed with the sonnet Nigel sent to him.
  - b. He wants to make amends and regain his friendship with Nick.
  - c. He wants to steal Nigel's lines and ideas.
  - d. He wants to collaborate with Nigel.
- 12) What does Shakespeare find out from his spy?
- a. Nick is stealing an idea that he himself would have had in the future
  - b. He finds out that Nick allowed the Jew Shylock to be the Bottom brothers' sponsor
  - c. He finds out that Nigel loves him and would like nothing more than Shakespeare returning to their troupe.
  - d. He finds out that Nick's wife Bea is pregnant with his (Shakespeare's) child
- 13) Shakespeare disguises himself as an actor and takes a part in Nick's play. Why?
- a. He misses working with his old colleague Nick.
  - b. He despises the fame and wants to be anonymous for once.
  - c. He adores the Bottom brothers' work.
  - d. He wants to steal the Bottom brothers' play.
- 14) Who tells Nigel to write from the heart?
- a. Portia
  - b. Bea
  - c. Brother Jeremiah
  - d. His father
- 15) Brother Jeremiah discovers that his daughter is in love with Nigel Bottom. What does he catch the two of them doing?
- a. Dancing
  - b. singing
  - c. Kissing
  - d. Acting
- 16) Why does Nick insist that the play must be breakfast-themed?
- a. Breakfast is his favourite meal.

- b. Eggs are the perfect symbol for life.
- c. Nostradamus foresaw that "Omelette" would be Shakespeare's biggest hit.
- d. It is a compromise offered to Nigel who wants the musical to be about their lives. Eggs remind Nick of their childhood.

**17)** Nick and Nigel end up in court for their musical. What stops the Master of Justice from sentencing them to death?

- a. He secretly loved the musical.
- b. Shakespeare threatens to write a play about the event and portray him badly.
- c. He is generally opposed to the death penalty.
- d. Shakespeare confesses that he has stolen ideas and lines from Nigel Bottom and creates a greater scandal over which the egg musical is quickly forgotten.

**18)** What are the Bottom brothers sentenced to instead of the death penalty?

- a. They are banished from England and have to go to America.
- b. They are sent into exile in Scotland.
- c. They are not allowed to ever put on a play again.
- d. They have to publicly apologize for their offensive portrayal of eggs.

**19)** In America, people are excited to see the Bottom brothers' musical. What is the story they end up being successful with?

- a. Omelette – The Musical
- b. Hamlet
- c. Their life story
- d. The Black Death

## Post-Watching Activities

### Shakespearean Sonnets

There are different tools for different jobs. Saws, hammers and screwdrivers will help you build things. Pots, pans, whisks, tongs and knives will help you cook things. There are also tools that will help you write poetry. Since poetry is all about using the power of words to evoke emotion or provoke thought, the tools for poetic writing involve words and how we use them, and these include:

| TOOLS FOR POETIC WRITING   |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Figurative Language</b> | <b>Simile</b> – making a comparison using the word “like” or the word “as”<br><br><b>Metaphor</b> – making a comparison by saying that one thing is something else (no “like” or “as”)<br><br><b>Imagery</b> – “painting a picture” with your words to help the reader create a mental image<br><br><b>Personification</b> – giving human traits or characteristics to a non-human thing<br><br><b>Hyperbole</b> – extreme exaggeration that is not intended to be taken literally |
| <b>Alliteration</b>        | Using consecutive words that begin with the same sound   |
| <b>Line Breaks</b>         | Making choices about how you divide the text in order to dictate how it is read  |
| <b>Rhyme</b>               | Using words that sound the same or have the same ending sound  |
| <b>Rhythm/Meter</b>        | The pattern or arrangement of words or syllables, often repeated throughout a work of poetry. This last tool is especially important in Shakespeare’s writing.   |

### Analyzing Meter: Iambic Pentameter in Shakespeare’s sonnets

What is **iambic pentameter**? You could probably describe it with sounds because you’ve heard Shakespeare’s writing (da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM). Let’s break it down. Meter in poetry is **composed of syllables**. Two syllables together form a “foot.” A foot that has an **unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable** (da DUM) is called an “iamb.” “Penta” is the prefix for five (ever seen a pentagon?). So, pentameter is a line with five feet. Iambic pentameter is written with **lines of five iambs**, or ten syllables in the pattern of unstressed followed by stressed.

For example, the following lines from Sonnet 18 (sung in the show as lyrics to “Will Power”) demonstrate the pattern:

Shall I com**PARE** thee **TO** a **SUM**mer’s **DAY**?  
Thou **ART** more **LOVELY AND** more **TEMPERATE**:  
Rough **WINDS** do **SHAKE** the **DAR**ling **BUDS** of **MAY**,  
And **SUM**mer’s **LEASE** hath **ALL** too **SHORT** a **DATE**

Speaking the lines in this pattern puts **emphasis on certain words** and makes them more important. What would happen if the stressed syllables shifted?

- 1) Try speaking the four lines in the example above with opposite stress. Does it work? Does the meaning change?
- 2) Read the whole sonnet without already stressed syllables. Try to read it as you would normally, if it were prose, stressing the words that you think are important. Did you stress the same words that are stressed in the iambic pentameter?

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

- 3) Mark the iambic Pentameter with the rest of the sonnet and read it again.
- 4) Now try writing a few lines in iambic pentameter. Remember, 10 syllables (5 iambs) with unstressed followed by stressed syllables make up a line. Be sure to keep in mind what words are falling on the stressed syllables and make sure that the sound and meaning are working.

Shakespeare's sonnets were written in iambic pentameter. There are a few more rules for this form: Shakespearean sonnets have **14 lines divided into 3 quatrains** (four lines) **and one couplet** (two lines). The **rhyme scheme** is as follows: **abab cdcd efef gg**

- 5) Mark the rhyme scheme in Shakespeare's sonnet 18 above.

## Creative Writing – Nigel's sonnet

John O'Farrell (one of the book writers) wrote **Nigel's sonnet** that he reads for Portia in Act Two. The text, as it appears in the show, is below:

Like stars and sun together never seen,  
Yet heaven made us one our flames to shine.  
Through night and day, no dusk nor dawn between,  
And none could dim our light nor love divine.

Astronomers - behold these starry eyes!  
Forbidden love - bid secret hearts beat loud!  
If laws of man our stately love denies,  
In laws of nature is our love allowed.

(Missing Quatrain...)

And to the stars will fly the elusive dove,  
To heaven's gate with my eternal love!

You'll notice that there are four lines missing. Nigel gets carried away and skips the third quatrain, going straight to the final couplet.

- 6) Can you fill in the missing quatrain? Remember,
- you need four lines in iambic pentameter (10 syllables, unstressed-stressed)
  - The first and third lines should rhyme with each other,
  - and the second and fourth lines should rhyme with each other (efef).
  - you cannot use the rhymes that have already been used in the first two quatrains or in the final couplet.

<https://poets.org/poem/shall-i-compare-thee-summers-day-sonnet-18#:~:text=1616-.Shall%20I%20compare%20thee%20to%20a%20summer's%20day%3F,all%20too%20short%20a%20date.>  
[https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten\\_educational-guide.pdf](https://www.mtishows.com/sites/default/files/something-rotten_educational-guide.pdf)

## Research task: Women in the Elizabethan Era - Emilia Bassano

Research the life of Emilia Bassano. She was a poet and a writer and was said to be the inspiration for many of Shakespeare's female characters and may have even helped him with his writing. Find out as much about her life as you can and create an info page to show what you have found.

<https://www.gamacheseries.com/cultural-inspirations-from-a-great-reckoning/>





## How to write a review

### General tips

- Use present tense
- Structure your review in introduction – body – conclusion
- Give an opinion
- Present alternative ideas or recommendations

### The structure

- Introduction:
  - Title, author(s), artform
  - Origin
  - Short summary
- Body:
  - Your opinions on the Musical
    - Set
    - Actors
    - Light and Sound
    - ...
- Main aspects of your criticism and praise
- Recommendations and/or alternative ideas

## Appendix

### Answers to the quiz *Something Rotten!*

- 20) After being too late for Richard the II, what does Nigel want the Bottom brothers' next play to be about?
- e. The love story of Nick and Bea
  - f. The life story of the two brothers**
  - g. Queen Elizabeth
  - h. The Black Death
- 21) Why does Nick dislike Shakespeare?
- e) Nick thinks he is everything but a genius writer and that his plays are too wordy.
  - f) He finds Shakespeare to be a mediocre actor at best.
  - g) He is jealous of his popularity.**
  - h) Shakespeare has stolen Nick's old flame from him when they were still working together as actors.
- 22) Describe which sentence describes Shylock best.
- i. He is a moneylender who works with Nostradamus to trick the Bottom Brothers into producing a huge and expensive play.
  - j. He is a Puritan who sees the devil in all of the arts.
  - k. He is a lover of the arts and wants to invest in Nick's play. However, since he is Jewish, he is technically not allowed to do that.**
  - l. He is a lover of the arts and wants to play a role in Nick's new play.
- 23) Nick takes money out of his and Bea's money box. Why?
- m. To buy a gift for Bea
  - n. To buy a cottage in the country
  - o. To finance his new play
  - p. To pay a soothsayer – Thomas Nostradamus**
- 24) Who inspires Nick to write a musical?
- q. Michel de Nostradame
  - r. Nigel
  - s. Thomas Nostradamus**
  - t. Bea
- 25) Nick and Nigel end up losing Lord Clapham as their patron. Why does he remove his patronage?
- u. He wants to sponsor Shakespeare instead.
  - v. He has a fight with Nick about Bea.
  - w. He is afraid the Puritans who hate the idea of musicals.**
  - x. He runs out of money.
- 26) Bea wants to make some extra money. Why is she not allowed to act in Nick's play?
- y. She is bad at acting.
  - z. Nick does not want her to work because of his male ego.
  - aa. It was illegal for women to be on stage at the time.**
  - bb. Nick is afraid she will attract other men and leave him.
- 27) Brother Jeremiah is a Puritan and he despises the theatre. Why?
- a. Men dress up as women and kiss other men on stage.**
  - b. He finds it unfair that women are not allowed to act.
  - c. He is a failed actor.
  - d. He is involved in a personal feud with William Shakespeare.
- 28) Nigel falls in love with a Puritan called Portia. What do the two of them have in common?
- cc. They both have strict parents.**

- dd. **They both love poetry.**
- ee. They are both Puritans.
- ff. They both hate Shakespeare.

29) Bea disguises herself as a man to earn better wages. What job does she take on?

- gg. Acting
- hh. Teaching
- c. **Collecting bear feces**
- d. Writing poetry

30) Nigel attends Shakespeare's party with Portia. Why did Shakespeare invite him?

- ii. He was impressed with the sonnet Nigel sent to him.
- jj. He wants to make amends and regain his friendship with Nick.
- kk. **He wants to steal Nigel's lines and ideas.**
- ll. He wants to collaborate with Nigel.

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- f. He finds out that Nick allowed the Jew Shylock to be the Bottom brothers' sponsor
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- h. He finds out that Nicks wife Bea is pregnant with his (Shakespeare's) child

32) Shakespeare disguises himself as an actor and takes a part in Nick's play. Why?

- mm. He misses working with his old colleague Nick.
- nn. He despises the fame and wants to be anonymous for once.
- oo. He adores the Bottom brothers' work.
- pp. **He wants to steal the Bottom brothers' play.**

33) Who tells Nigel to write from the heart?

- a. **Portia**
- b. Bea
- c. Brother Jeremiah
- d. His father

34) Brother Jeremiah discovers that his daughter is in love with Nigel Bottom. What does he catch the two of them doing?

- qq. Dancing
- rr. singing
- ss. **Kissing**
- tt. Acting

35) Why does Nick insist that the play must be breakfast-themed?

- uu. Breakfast is his favourite meal.
- vv. Eggs are the perfect symbol for life.
- ww. **Nostradamus foresaw that "Omelette" would be Shakespeare's biggest hit.**
- xx. It is a compromise offered to Nigel who wants the musical to be about their lives. Eggs remind Nick of their childhood.

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- yy. He secretly loved the musical.
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- b. They are sent into exile in Scotland.
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38) In America, people are excited to see the Bottom brothers' musical. What is the story they end up being successful with?

ccc. Omelette – The Musical

ddd. Hamlet

**eee. Their life story**

fff. The Black Death

| 15-19 correct answers   | 06-14 correct answers  | 0-5 correct answers  |
|---|--|--|
| <br>Congratulations! You understood a lot! | <br>Quite good already! Talk to your classmates again about the play, you might tap into new levels of understanding! | <br>Don't give up! Talk to your classmates about the parts of the play that are still a bit fuzzy to you. |