



2022 National Shakespeare  
Writing Program  
**English-Speaking Union**

# ESU NATIONAL SHAKESPEARE WRITING PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Includes chapters for Branches, Judges, Teachers and Students

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# ESU National Shakespeare Writing Program: The Writing Competitions

## Introduction:

This new addition to our Shakespeare programming seeks to engage students who express themselves via the written word, rather than through performance. In conjunction with the National Shakespeare Competition, the ESU is seeking to reach more students, expand their venues for expression and increase their opportunity to celebrate our shared love of the English language, especially the works of Shakespeare. At present, this writing program consists of three distinct competitions. Non-competitive events and activities will be included in the future.

Please check the ESU website for dates and deadlines.

## The Goals of the Writing Program:

- To create competitions of academic value to students
- To provide pedagogically sound resources for our community of teachers
- To enrich the ESU Shakespeare community, especially our branches and members

## History:

A partnership with the Morgan Library and Museum in the fall of 2020 resulted in a remarkably successful writing competition that has encouraged us to expand our Shakespeare programming. Our plan is to introduce a series of writing programs, for middle and high school students, centered on the ESU National Shakespeare Competition. In this way we hope to expand our reach to more students and engage adolescents beyond those who are adept at performance. These programs will also provide competition teachers with an opportunity to engage students who do not advance to the next round of the competition, extending their connection to the competition and to the ESU's offerings for teachers and students.

These competitions are intended as an extension of the existing Shakespeare Competition that will round out our offerings and create opportunities for engagement with a wider range of students and teachers.

### **Acknowledgement:**

Tapping into the ESU's extensive community of Shakespeare educators, we enlisted Ms. Abbey Hope to share her expertise with us. Many of the resources and exercises provided in the competition curriculum, and in this handbook, come from her existing practice as a veteran teacher with over 18 years of experience. Her contributions to the program are also informed by her time as an ESU TLab Scholar at Shakespeare's Globe in 2019. Abbey also received an NEH Grant to study teaching Shakespeare at the Folger Shakespeare Theater in 2012. She was recently accepted into a three-year pilot program partnering ten New York City public school teachers with The National Theatre of London to write curriculum to be used with filmed productions. She holds a BA from the University of Massachusetts, a Master in English Education from Lehman College, and is currently engaged in post-graduate work in School Leadership at Manhattan College.

Abbey Hope teaches AP Literature, AP English Language and a Drama elective at Riverdale Kingsbridge Academy in the Bronx, New York. She teaches a Shakespearean sonnet unit each year, and also a rotating variety of Shakespeare plays. Her goal is to prepare one new play per year.

Through our association with master educators like Abbey, the ESU is actively seeking partnerships with educational leaders such as The National Theater of London to expand our connections to theaters and learning institutions both here and in the UK.

The ESU extends its sincere thanks to Abbey and looks forward to more such fruitful collaborations in the future.

## The Competition Prompts:

**For complete prompts, please visit the resources for each competition.**

### **The ESU I Am Shakespeare Competition**

*Students will strictly follow the form of a Shakespearean sonnet (14 line, ending couplet, volta, etc.) and write a contemporary sonnet inspired by their lives. Requires a good understanding of sonnet structure, and familiarity with Shakespeare's themes and works. This high-rigor competition is open to high school students only.*

### **The ESU Modern Troubadour Competition**

*Students will take one of Shakespeare's sonnets, deconstruct it and make it accessible for contemporary audiences. Students can modernize the language, create song lyrics or a rap, or a spoken word poem. This program provides multiple points of entry (UDL) for students unfamiliar with Shakespeare's sonnets and provides teachers with an opportunity to introduce Shakespeare to uninitiated students such as those in SPED and ENL classes. This competition focuses on creativity and is open to both middle and high school students. Submissions will be accepted in multiple formats ex. Written sonnet, MP3, MP4, YouTube video, digital art (or scan of physical art piece submitted digitally).*

### **The ESU Evelyn Wrench Shakespeare Essay Award**

*Presented to the high school student who submits the best literary analysis of a Shakespearean play or sonnet. This competition appeals to those students who are not performers or creative writers, but who excel in analytical writing and are comfortable with high rigor. Meant as an incentive to excellent student writing, submissions to this competition could easily be responses to an assignment in an AP Lit, AP Lang or advanced English Literature class. Students are encouraged to submit work from their actual classes, or they may submit work written specifically for this contest. Students must provide the prompt or thesis as provided by their teacher or created on their own.*

## **Important Information Regarding Rubrics:**

For specific information on rubrics and how they will be employed in the competition, please see the section below for judges. We highly recommend that both teachers and students familiarize themselves with the rubrics and how they will be utilized.

Rubrics for each competition are provided on the following three pages. Please make copies of these pages for all involved parties.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sonnet Name: \_\_\_\_\_

ESU National Shakespeare Writing Competition: **“I Am Shakespeare” Rubric**

Students will write an original sonnet with the following elements:

- 14 lines
- Iambic Pentameter – five feet per line
- Shakespearean rhyme scheme – three quatrains and a couplet (*abab cdcd efef gg*)
- A minimum of two figures of speech: simile, metaphor, personification, and imagery
- Must have a tone shift, or turn, occurs in lines 9-14 or a summary in the couplet
- Must have a unifying theme such as Shakespeare’s. Ex.: Love (frustrated), lover’s beauty, how death can’t be avoided, the importance of pro-creation, rivalry, or a topic from the student’s own life/world

**Sonnet Grading Rubric**

Category	20 points each	15 points each	10 points each	5 points each
<b>Format: Iambic Pentameter &amp; Structure</b>	Flawless use of iambic pentameter (14 lines, ten syllables per line) Except for intentional, meaningful variation.	1-2 errors	3 errors	4 or more errors
<b>Rhyme Scheme</b>	Follows the rhyme scheme: <i>abab cdcd efef gg</i>	1 error in rhyme	2 errors in rhyme	3 or more errors in rhyme
<b>Rhyming Couplet</b>	Contains a clear turn (VOLTA) a <b>but</b> or a satisfying summary	Contains a turn or <b>volta</b> or a summary	May contain a turn or <b>volta</b> or a summary	Does NOT contain a turn or <b>volta</b> or summary
<b>Content</b>	Clear subject, speaker, tone and message. Very creative – uses imagery and creative use of metaphor, simile & personification	Clear subject & message. Demonstrates use of speaker and tone. Creative and imaginative	Contains a subject and message. Speaker and tone may be unclear. Creative and imaginative	No subject or message. Does not demonstrate use of speaker and tone. Lacks creativity & imagination
<b>Figures of Speech</b>	Two clear and suitable examples of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	Two examples of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	One example of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	No examples of figures of speech

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_/100

ESU National Shakespeare Writing Competition: "Evelyn Wrench Shakespeare Essay" Rubric  
 Topic/Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>5 Collegiate Excellence (20 pts)</b>	<b>4 H.S. Excellence (16 pts)</b>	<b>3 Needs some Improvement (12 pts)</b>	<b>2 Needs to work Diligently to Improve (8 pts)</b>	<b>1 Far below Standards (4 pts)</b>
<b>Analysis of text through the writing prompt addressed by the thesis</b>	Text is analyzed with great insight and nuanced understanding through unique and thoughtful response to the chosen writing prompt. Thesis is clearly and elegantly written.	Text is analyzed with insight and understanding through thoughtful response to the chosen writing prompt. Thesis is clearly and well written.	Text is analyzed in a reasonable but limited way through an adequate response to the prompt. Thesis may not be crystal clear or well written.	Text is analyzed or explained in a very limited or confused way and / or prompt is not addressed in a reasonable way. Thesis may be unclear or not well written.	Text is not analyzed or explained or prompt is not addressed. OR Thesis is non-existent or poorly written.
<b>Use of quotations as evidence</b>	Quoted excerpts are carefully chosen to specifically support all of the student's claims about the text, and insightfully explained to bring greater understanding to our reading of the text.	Quoted excerpts are chosen to accurately support all of the student's claims about the text and adequately explained to bring understanding to our reading of the text.	Quoted excerpts are chosen to accurately support most of the student's claims about the text.	Quoted excerpts are chosen to support a few correctly, or some inaccurately of the student's claims about the text.	Excerpts are not quoted in support of claims the student makes about the text.
<b>Introduction to and citations of quoted or paraphrased excerpts</b>	Quotations or paraphrases are introduced with brief background or context so the reader is situated and are all correctly cited with the act, scene, & line #s of the play in parentheses following the quote.	Most quotes or paraphrases are introduced with brief background or context and / or most are correctly cited with the act, scene, & line #s of the play in parentheses following the quote.	Some quotes or paraphrases are introduced with brief background or context and / or some are correctly cited with the act, scene, & line #s of the play in parentheses following the quote.	Quotes are either not introduced textual background or are not correctly cited with the act, scene, & line #s of the play in parentheses following the quote.	No use of citations or introductions of quotes.
<b>Writing Fluency &amp; Organization</b>	Writing flows through the adept use of transitions, the precise use of academic vocabulary, a variety of types of sentences, and highly effective organization.	Transitions are used fluently, academic vocabulary is used, a variety of types of sentences appear, and organization is effective.	Transitions are used competently, a range of vocabulary is used, attempts are made to vary sentence structure, and organization is clear and competent.	Transitions are few, or poorly used, vocabulary is mostly basic or perhaps words are used incorrectly, and / or organization is attempted.	Transitions are not attempted, vocabulary is basic, sentence structure is repetitive, or paper lacks organization.
<b>Mechanics &amp; Formatting</b>	Even when using sophisticated language, this writer has made no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or the writing of sentences. Correct MLA formatting is employed,	While using sophisticated language, this writer has made only 1 or 2 errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or the writing of sentences. Correct MLA formatting is employed,	While using sophisticated language, this writer has made only a few errors that do not hinder comprehension. Correct MLA formatting is employed, perhaps with 1-2 errors.	While using primarily basic language, this writer has made only a few errors that do not hinder comprehension. MLA formatting may not be employed.	This writer has made many errors, or errors that hinder comprehension. MLA formatting may not be employed.

Score: \_\_\_\_\_/100

ESU National Shakespeare Writing Competition: “Modern Troubadour” Rubric

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Category	20 points each	15 points each	10 points each	5 point each
<b>Rhythm:</b>	A clear and compelling pattern of beats is established and maintained, although there may be meaningful variations.	A clear pattern of beats is established and mostly maintained.	A clear pattern of beats can be identified in some sections.	No pattern of beats can be identified.
<b>Rhyme Scheme</b>	Follows a fascinating rime scheme.	Rimes are consistently used.	Rimes are included occasionally.	No rimes are included.
<b>Structure: Borrows one or more elements of Shakespeare’s Sonnet Structure:</b> Contains a clear turn (VOLTA) a <i>but</i> or a satisfying summary using a riming couplet as the last two lines OR uses 16 lines of 5 beats each OR uses a riming pattern of ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG	Contains two or more of the elements of a sonnet as listed in this row, and both are executed perfectly or near-perfectly.	Contains only one or the elements of a sonnet as listed in this row, executed perfectly or near-perfectly.	Includes one of the elements in this row but it is not done perfectly.	Does NOT contain any of the elements mentioned in this row.
<b>Content</b>	Clear subject, speaker, tone and message. Very creative – uses imagery and creative use of metaphor, simile & personification	Clear subject & message. Demonstrates use of speaker and tone. Creative and imaginative	Contains a subject and message. Speaker and tone may be unclear. Creative and imaginative	No subject or message. Does not demonstrate use of speaker and tone. Lacks creativity & imagination
<b>Figures of Speech</b>	Two clear and suitable examples of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	Two examples of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	One example of any of these: simile, metaphor, imagery and/or personification	No examples of figures of speech

Total Points: \_\_\_\_\_/100

## ***Important Information for Branches***

### ***Competition Information:***

National will provide prizes to the national winner of each competition, but branches are encouraged to provide additional prizes for their local winners (see options below)

Each student will be asked for their branch affiliation. All post-competition publicity will feature the student's branch affiliation, if any, regardless of branch participation.

National will promote the competition using our existing database, however, we welcome the efforts of participating branches to promote the competition in their communities.

### ***2022 Launch Competition Structure: National/Branch Model***

Each student submits their work and national will divide the submissions for each competition among a body of judges chosen by national staff. A winner will be selected for each competition.

Branches may choose to be involved on a local level. National will send participating branches all the submissions from their area. Branches are then free to find local judges, and adjudicate for local prizes. All submissions will still be eligible for national prizes.

### ***Potential Future Competition Structure: Regional Model***

In the future, if there is sufficient interest among our branches and regions, submissions will be divided by region. Branches within each region will then volunteer judges. Submissions from each region would then be sent to these regional judges via email for them to adjudicate locally, using the provided rubrics to pick their regional winner. These regional winners' submission would then be sent to National who would adjudicate using a separate panel of judges to pick the national winners from the regional winners. This structure follows the format of the monologue competition.

### ***Notes to branches on selecting and assigning judges:***

- You can reach out to teachers you know, but it is preferable to not have essays read by students' current or previous teachers, so as to avoid any appearance of unfairness or favoritism. You might think of retired teachers, student teachers, librarians, teachers at a higher education level. You might also reach out to others in the community such as administrators, college students, journalists, family and friends, book club members, theatre professionals, etc. When you approach prospective judges, share these materials with them and allow them a chance to back out prior to committing.
- Be sure your judges are up for a fair amount of reading and precise grading. As an estimate, most graders will spend 15-30 minutes on each essay or poem for Shakespeare Scholar and I am Shakespeare, and 5-10 minutes on each poem from Modern Troubadour. For most readers, it is best to carefully read the rubric before starting grading, and perhaps discuss each criterion with the local contest organizers or with the other graders. Then, the first few essays will usually take more time, and as reading progresses, it becomes possible to work faster.
- If it is possible to provide judges with an honorarium you should do so, and if not, be sure to thank them amply and publicly.
- You should have at least two judges, depending on the number of entries and the availability of judges.
- A useful plan is to divide up the essays amongst the judges. Each reader will complete a rubric and feedback for the student writers they are reading, finally settling on their top five essays. Then all judges should read these top essays and rate them from 1-10. Judges may need to discuss to reach final selections of top three.
- Judges must have a solid command of written English, and, especially for the Shakespeare Scholar Contest, be familiar with Shakespeare's work. For the I am Shakespeare Contest, they will have to either be already versed in sonnet form and structure or be willing to learn, which they can readily do using the same curriculum materials created for students. Judges for the Traveling

Troubadour Contest should keep in mind that creativity is more important than correctness. The students entering this contest may have learning challenges or may be new learners of English. This contest is also open to Middle School students, so there must be a more flexible approach to grading this group than the highly rigorous standards of the other two contests.

- Judges must also be willing to use the provided rubrics in grading, which will help them to be objective, to not grade too heavily based on certain traits they, personally, set store by, and to standardize the grading criteria.
- Finally, judges are asked to provide a small amount of feedback for each essay: At a minimum, one thing the student can feel proud of doing well and one thing they might work on improving as they grow as writers.

***A Note on Norming:***

Norming is the process by which a group of judges calibrate how they assess submissions to reach a degree of consistency. The purpose of this is to ensure that all judges assessing a submission share the same understanding of the rubric and what it requires of the submitted work. Norming is helpful when judges come from different backgrounds, have different priorities or preferences, or have different degrees of familiarity with using rubrics. While we do not require panels of judges to norm, we highly encourage it.

Rubrics have been provided to make clear, to both students and judges, what is expected of submissions to each competition. As is always the case in the humanities, our decision are subjective – there is often ambiguity and nuance in the judging process. We trust that our judges will make concerted efforts to find an equilibrium and select submissions based as much as possible on the requirements of the rubric.

**Please visit this link for more**

**information:** <https://ace.wsu.edu/documents/2015/03/rubrics-norming.pdf/>

## ***Important information for Judges***

- It is preferable to not have essays read by students' current or previous teachers, so as to avoid any appearance of unfairness or favoritism. Potential judges include retired teachers, student teachers, librarians, teachers at a higher education level, administrators, college students, journalists, family and friends, book club members, theatre professionals, etc.
- Judges should be up for a fair amount of reading and precise grading. As an estimate, most graders will spend 15-30 minutes on each essay or poem for Shakespeare Scholar and I Am Shakespeare, and 5-10 minutes on each poem for Modern Troubadour. For most readers, it is best to carefully read the rubric before starting grading, and perhaps discuss each criterion with the local contest organizers or with the other graders. Then, the first few essays will usually take more time, and as reading progresses, it becomes possible to work faster.
- Competition organizers may opt to divide up the essays amongst the judges. Each reader will complete a rubric and feedback for the student writers they are reading, finally settling on their top five essays. Then all judges should read these top essays and rate them from 1-10. Judges may need to discuss to reach final selections of top three. Please check with the organizer who recruited you to discuss how the submissions will be divided.
- Judges must have a solid command of written English, and, especially for the Shakespeare Scholar Contest, be familiar with Shakespeare's work. For the I Am Shakespeare Contest, they will have to either be already versed in sonnet form and structure or be willing to learn, which they can readily do using the same curriculum materials created for students. Judges for the Traveling Troubadour Contest should keep in mind that creativity is more important than correctness. The students entering this contest may have learning challenges or may be new learners of English. This contest is also open to Middle School students, so there must be a more flexible approach to grading this group than the highly rigorous standards of the other two contests.

- Judges must also be willing to use the provided rubrics in grading, which will help them to be objective, to not grade too heavily based on certain traits they, personally, set store by, and to standardize the grading criteria.
- Finally, judges are asked to provide a small amount of feedback for each essay: At a minimum, one thing the student can feel proud of doing well and one thing they might work on improving as they grow as writers.

### ***Grading Tips for Judges:***

- You need not have an exhaustive knowledge of Shakespeare's works to grade the critical essays. Give writers the benefit of the doubt in terms of any theories or interpretations of the material but look for evidence that students offer in support of their claims. Even if you have not read the play in question, you can fairly grade an essay using the rubric. Does the student offer a complex thesis and support it with textual evidence? Does it appear that they have reached a meaningful understanding of the work? Is the writing clear and vivid? Does it flow and engage the reader?
- Give yourself a chance to get used to the rubric and the assignment. Teachers usually grade the first three essays in pencil as they reach an equilibrium in grading. Sometimes the first essay you grade is head and shoulders above or below the rest, which can really throw off your grading.
- Please use the Rubric.

### ***How to use the Rubric:***

- First, carefully read it, even before you read your first essay.
- Have a pencil in hand as you start to read the first essay and mark where you feel the paper falls for each category. It's fine if you think an essay falls between two levels, such as 3.5.

- When you have marked all the categories you tally up the points. But then ask yourself if you believe the quality of the essay matches the final score. You may need to backtrack and revise your scoring.
- Repeat this process on your next couple of essays. After reading 3-4 essays you will start to notice if you have been grading too strictly or not strictly enough; you reach an equilibrium. Then go back and revise any scores as needed

***A Note on Norming:***

Norming is the process by which a group of judges calibrate how they assess submissions to reach a degree of consistency. The purpose of this is to ensure that all judges assessing a submission share the same understanding of the rubric and what it requires of the submitted work. Norming is helpful when judges come from different backgrounds, have different priorities or preferences, or have different degrees of familiarity with using rubrics. While we do not require panels of judges to norm, we highly encourage it.

Rubrics have been provided to make clear, to both students and judges, what is expected of submissions to each competition. As is always the case in the humanities, our decisions are subjective – there is often ambiguity and nuance in the judging process. We trust that our judges will make concerted efforts to find an equilibrium and select submissions based as much as possible on the requirements of the rubric.

**Please visit this link for more**

**information:** <https://ace.wsu.edu/documents/2015/03/rubrics-norming.pdf/>

## ***Particularities of each Competition, or What are We Looking For?***

### ***I Am Shakespeare:***

- We are asking students to show their understanding of the form and structure of a Shakespearian Sonnet by writing in this exacting form themselves.
- We are asking students to express their own thoughts, feelings, and impressions so as to write a meaningful poem.
- Ideally the winning poems will follow the form and structure exactly and also move readers with their content and use of poetic devices such as imagery, symbolism, and sound effects.
- The content may be modern and can be on any topic as the writers draw from their own worlds and selves.
- Understanding each element of the rubric is critical for this contest.
- We do anticipate that some may have questions about **lambic Pentameter**, in which each line of the sonnet should be written (although intentional, meaningful irregularities are acceptable).
  - If you need a refresher on **lambic pentameter**, the easiest resource is to review the materials provided for students. In a nutshell, each line should sound like: da **dum** da **dum** da **dum** da **dum** da **dum**, with no extra syllables.
- This contest is highly rigorous and seeks submissions of the greatest quality. It is our hope that the competition will produce winning sonnets that readers will be surprised and impressed to learn were written by High School students.
- If any material is discovered to be plagiarized, it will be disqualified, of course.

## ***Particularities of each Competition, or What are We Looking For?***

### ***Shakespeare Scholar:***

- The prompt is a literary analysis essay on a Shakespeare text. We are asking students to show that they have closely read and analyzed a piece of writing by William Shakespeare. This might be an aspect of an entire play, such as a character's development, or a theme or symbol, or it might be a soliloquy or monologue, or a sonnet. We hope that students will display their uniqueness of thought and ability to support their assertions using textual evidence.
- When students provide evidence in the form of quotes, it is expected that they will explain the meaning of the words quoted and also explain how this material supports their thesis.
- Writing should be fluent and graceful, expressive and succinct. In other words, in addition to demonstrating the depth of their reading, students are also presenting their very best writing.
- This contest is highly rigorous and seeks submissions of the greatest quality. It is our hope that the competition will produce winning essays that readers will be surprised and impressed to learn were written by High School students.
- If any material is discovered to be plagiarized, it will be disqualified, of course.

## ***Particularities of each Competition, or What are We Looking For?***

### ***Modern Troubadour:***

- This prompt requests students to imagine themselves as a modern-day troubadour – what writing would Shakespeare produce if he found himself in our current world? Students' interpretations and responses will vary. Some may write a song or a rap. Some may record a spoken word performance. This prompt is purposely open-ended so as to encourage creative submissions from students of a variety of backgrounds.
- Judges of this contest should not be as exacting as those judging the other two contests. They should score holistically and look for effort and creativity, rather than expecting an exact replication of a Shakespearian sonnet.
- Students from Special Educational and Language-Learning classes, as well as both Middle and High School Students are encouraged to apply to this contest.
- Students may submit either a written response or they may submit an audio or video recording.
- The purpose of this contest is to encourage an interest in Shakespeare and also in writing, and to build confidence and creativity.
- If any material is discovered to be plagiarized, it will be disqualified, of course.

## **Important information for: Teachers**

Introduction: Each of the English-Speaking Union's new writing contests for students has been designed with the objective of developing students' interest in Shakespeare's writing and helping you motivate your students to produce their very best work.

- Rich and complete curriculums are provided specifically for ***I Am Shakespeare*** and ***Modern Troubadour***. You should feel free to modify these to suit yourself, your school, and your students, or even to substitute a curriculum of your own if you wish. The curriculum for ***I Am Shakespeare***, on the Shakespearian sonnet, might also be used prior to students analyzing a sonnet, which analytical essay could then be submitted for the ***Shakespeare Scholar*** contest.
- However, we hope that teachers will submit student essays on many Shakespeare topics to this contest. In other words, if you already teach one of the Shakespeare plays, the essays you currently include as assessment should be suitable to submit to this contest, although you will want to align your requirements with our rubric.
- Topics eligible for ***Shakespeare Scholar*** are almost myriad. Students should produce an analysis of any aspect of any Shakespeare play or of a sonnet. When designing prompts for plays, the best topics are somewhat narrow but also have a universal impact. One option is to encourage students to look at a topic from a particular perspective or to analyze the development of a theme or character as the play progresses. A close reading of a soliloquy or sonnet can also produce a compact, yet thorough, analysis. Consider offering students a selection of prompts to choose from so they can best engage with their topic.
- Keep the length restrictions in mind as you assign prompts.
- As contests are introduced a livestream event may be held to provide an overview of the contest and to give teachers an opportunity to ask specific questions. If you miss the livestream a recording will also be made available to you.

## Towards Culturally Responsive Education:

- The sponsors and designers of these competitions passionately believe that Shakespeare should continue to be taught to High School and even Middle School students. We also believe that students should read contemporary books by a variety of diverse authors. Students should read both as broadly and as deeply as possible, in fact, across many genres.
- Furthermore, even the greatest authors should not be placed up on a pedestal; instead, students should have the freedom to question the choices, even of Shakespeare, and should have the opportunity to struggle as they read, learning that this work is accessible to them.
- One empowering way students can come to understand a form is to mimic it, as they are asked to do by the *I Am Shakespeare* and, in a looser way, the *Modern Troubadour* competitions. Just as you attempt to create a warm and welcoming environment for students so they feel comfortable and secure in your physical classroom, you will want to introduce Shakespeare in a way that welcomes rather than intimidates.
- Rather than aggrandizing Shakespeare's European culture, find ways to emphasize commonalities and connections; this won't be too hard to do since Shakespeare often wrote about universal themes that still resonate with us today.
- Also, don't shy away from discussing social issues that grate awkwardly on modern sensibilities: Isn't Kate's husband abusive in *Taming of the Shrew*? What about the racism displayed towards Othello in *Othello* and the anti-Semitism towards Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*? In *The Tempest*, is *Prospero* a kindly old magician who was cast out of his own land or is he a colonialist who enslaves the natives of the new land he settles?
- Offer students a menu of options when you are designing prompts for them to write to. Student Choice gives them voice in their work and students always produce stronger responses when they feel a connection with, and enthusiasm about, their topic.

- Many of Shakespeare's plays give readers insight into the plight of those with less power; time and time again we empathize with characters who seek to seize the power that has been withheld from them; therefore, teachers can design prompts that examine gender, power, societal roles, and 'otherness' that students may be drawn to.
- Encourage students who are preparing for the *I Am Shakespeare* and *Modern Troubadour* to write about their own emotions and experiences, and to use diction, images, and symbols that are personal and meaningful to them.
- Students from many cultures learn better socially than independently. Only solo students can write the submissions to the contests, but students can still work collaboratively to make their writing wonderful through peer feedback and revision. Consider allowing students to work in twos or threes, reading each other's writing and providing constructive and supportive feedback. Use careful protocols for this. Depending on your students, you can allow them to self-select groups or you can create heterogenous groups so that stronger students can be helpful to those finding the work especially challenging.
- Provide rich and detailed feedback in the drafting process. Some students will really benefit from a writing conference, so make yourself available, if possible.
- Use multiple modalities to teach Shakespeare. For example, students can read silently, but it is much more fun to act out sections of a play, especially if you can provide a few simple costume pieces or props such as crowns, a sword, etc.
- Additionally, try to show some video of plays and sonnets being performed (a great deal of material is available on YouTube) and seek out performances that feature multi-racial casts, and gender-blind casts.

## *Important Information for Students*

- If you are reading this note you should enter the contest! Is everyone going to be a winner? Well, no... it's a contest! Are we looking for the best? Of course, it's a contest! But you will find, if you put sincere effort into this, that you write some of your best work yet, that you reach a deeper understanding of one of the world's best writers, and that you grow as a student, a humanist like Shakespeare, and a writer, yourself.
- Is Shakespeare hard? Yes, no doubt it is a challenge to understand his writing, especially at first. You will probably have to struggle and be persistent to fully understand some of what you are reading, and sometimes you will find you don't understand every word, which is also okay. But as you apply yourself you will see that you understand more and more, and that what Shakespeare writes is meaningful to you. The work, itself, is rewarding, and through working at it you will become more and more adept.
- Maybe you have already read some Shakespeare, or maybe this is your first encounter. Maybe you love what you have read so far, or maybe you are feeling unsure. Either way, rest assured that Shakespeare is for everyone. When he was first writing and producing plays, all of London would attend: from royalty up in the peers' boxes, to the unwashed and illiterate 'groundlings' who had paid only a penny for admission. Shakespeare wrote for the full range of his audience.
- If you are working on a play or a sonnet and find you are struggling, the best advice I can give you is to watch a performance or listen to a recording as you read. Also, go back and re-read whenever you need to. And don't panic if there are sections you don't understand.
- If you find something universal in Shakespeare's writing, if you relate to an emotion or a situation, then you will agree that Shakespeare is *your* Shakespeare.

- **A note about *Shakespeare Scholar*:**

- This competition is seeking sensitive and thoughtful original analysis of any text written by William Shakespeare, or any aspect of that text. We want to hear your thoughts and responses, written with skill and carefully edited. We are NOT looking for a summary of other scholarly opinions. Review the specifications for the prompt and study the rubric provided to be sure your submission aligns to these requirements. Support assertions with cited textual evidence and explain your evidence, showing how it supports your thesis.

- **A note about *I Am Shakespeare* and *Modern Troubadour*:**

- These two competitions are looking for a creative response. *I Am Shakespeare* requires that students mimic Shakespeare's form, following the structure, rhyme scheme, and meter of a Shakespearian sonnet whilst conveying their original concept from their own experiences or thoughts, and using imagery, symbols, and diction from their own world. This is an assignment of poetic rigor and exactitude. *Modern Troubadour* has less strict guidelines. It is accessible for students in Special Educational and English Learner classes, in Middle School as well as High School. A variety of different types of writing might be suitable to submit. Students are asked to imagine they are a troubadour from Shakespeare's time who has time-travelled to the present day. What kind of songs or poems would they perform? Students may compose a song, a rap, a poem, or a spoken word composition and may either submit it as a written work or may submit an audio or video recording.

## Culturally Responsive Education for Students:

- The sponsors and designers of these competitions passionately believe that Shakespeare should continue to be taught to High School and even Middle School students. We also believe that students should read contemporary books by a variety of diverse authors. Students should read both as broadly and as deeply as possible, in fact, across many genres. Furthermore, even the greatest authors should not be placed up on a pedestal; instead, students should have the freedom to question the choices, even of Shakespeare, and should have the opportunity to struggle as they read, learning that this work is accessible to them. One empowering way students can come to understand a form is to mimic it, as they are asked to do by the *I Am Shakespeare* and, in a looser way, the *Modern Troubadour* competitions.
- Shakespeare often wrote about universal themes that still resonate with us today. Also, don't shy away from discussing social issues that grate awkwardly on modern sensibilities: Isn't Kate's husband abusive in *Taming of the Shrew*? What about the racism displayed towards Othello in *Othello* and the anti-Semitism towards Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*? In *The Tempest*, is *Prospero* a kindly old magician who was cast out of his own land or is he a colonialist who enslaves the natives of the new land he settles?
- Many of Shakespeare's plays give readers insight into the plight of those with less power; time and time again we empathize with characters who seek to seize the power that has been withheld from them; therefore, we encourage you to examine gender, power, societal roles, and 'otherness' that students may be drawn to.
- In preparing for the *I Am Shakespeare* and *Modern Troubadour*, we encourage you to write about your own emotions and experiences, and to use diction, images, and symbols that are personal and meaningful to you!
- You can only submit your individual work to the contest, but you can still work with other students to make your writing wonderful through peer feedback and revision. Ask your teachers if they will allow students to work in twos or threes,

reading each other's writing and providing constructive and supportive feedback. Maybe you can ask for help from stronger students if you are finding the work especially challenging.

- Ask for feedback in the drafting process. Some students will really benefit from a writing conference with their teachers.
- Try approaching the material from a few different ways. You can read silently, but it is much more fun to act out sections of a play, especially if you can find or make a few simple costume pieces or props such as crowns, a sword, etc. Additionally, watch some video of plays and sonnets being performed (check out YouTube) and check out performances that feature multi-racial casts, and gender-blind casts.