



2012 HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST

Sponsored by the Shakespeare Fellowship
and the Shakespeare Oxford Society

Welcome, students and teachers, to the 2012 High School Shakespeare Authorship Essay Contest!

The purpose of the contest is to involve students in the creative and analytical synthesis of knowledge about Shakespeare, the Shakespeare Canon, and the Shakespeare Authorship Question by offering prizes for the best essays.

Since the contest began in 2002, many teachers have written to thank us for the pedagogical opportunity that this competition provides. In past years, we have received as many as 690 entries, and essays have been submitted from all over the United States as well as other countries including Canada, Bulgaria, Romania, Nigeria, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Korea, and the United Kingdom.

We welcome entries from students of all nations, and we hope that teachers the world over will find that this essay contest is a useful resource for stimulating thinking, discussion and the development of analytic and critical thinking skills.

On this site, you will find everything you need to start the process of entering the 2012 contest!

RULES FOR SUBMISSION AND CONTEST GUIDELINES

ESSAY TOPICS

RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCES

WINNING ESSAYS FROM PREVIOUS CONTESTS ARE POSTED
ON THE SF WEBSITE:

<http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/2002contestwinners.htm>

2012 ESSAY TOPICS
SELECT ONE FOR YOUR ESSAY

TOPIC #1: A century ago, Mark Twain wrote an essay called *Is Shakespeare Dead?* in which he questioned the traditional attribution of the authorship of the plays and poems of “Shakespeare.” In fact, many distinguished people including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman and Sigmund Freud, have doubted that the man from Stratford-upon-Avon actually wrote these works.

QUESTION: Why have doubts about the author persisted for such a long time? Are the reasons valid? Support your answer.

For a point of departure, you may use Mark Twain’s essay or Keir Cutler’s dramatic adaptation of the Twain satire using the video posted here:

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7004942638729319523>

For additional background, you may consult the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt posted at <http://www.doubtaboutwill.org> or the PBS documentary “The Shakespeare Mystery,” information available at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shakespeare/tindex.html

TOPIC #2: It is frequently stated by those who adhere to the traditional position that “it doesn’t matter who wrote Shakespeare.”

QUESTION: Do you agree or disagree that “it doesn’t matter who wrote Shakespeare”? Discuss the reasons for your opinion.

In your arguments, make use of the YouTube video featuring Mark Rylance as he discusses this point:



www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcPGi1DQkag

TOPIC #3: Shakespeare is noted for creating dynamic women characters who are the intellectual equals of men. This equality of women is a remarkable feature for works written in the 16th century, an era in which only 5% of the women were even literate. In answering the following question, suggested plays from which to choose women characters are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, or *Hamlet*.

QUESTION: In the play of your choice, discuss these strong, effective Shakespearean heroines in their historical context. What does this tell you, if anything, about the author's attitude toward women, the education of women, and their role in society?

TOPIC #4: The feature film, *Anonymous*, directed by Roland Emmerich, presents Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, as the author of the Shakespeare Canon with De Vere using "William Shakespeare" as his nom de plume. The plot of the film deals with Queen Elizabeth and the members of her court, and portrays the 17th Earl of Oxford as Shakespeare during the Essex Rebellion and the crisis surrounding the royal succession.

AFTER SEEING THIS FILM, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- 1. Does the film *Anonymous* credibly present Edward de Vere as the author of the works of Shakespeare? Support your answer.**
- 2. Does the plot of *Anonymous* present a believable explanation for the writer's anonymity? Did the political turmoil at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign contribute to the suppression of his identity as the author of the Shakespearean works?**
- 3. Does the film open up new perspectives on the interpretation of the works known to us today as the Shakespeare Canon?**

If you choose Topic #4, the guidelines committee suggests that you use as a resource the article "The Prince Tudor Dilemma: Hip Thesis, Hypothesis, or Old Wives' Tale" by Christopher Paul published in *The Oxfordian*, 2002: http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/wp-content/oxfordian/Paul_PT_Dilemma.pdf *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom* by Charles Beauclerk supports the view that is presented in Emmerich's film. Reviews of Beauclerk's book by Michael Delahoyde and Christopher Paul are available in the online journal *Brief Chronicles*: <http://www.briefchronicles.com/ojs/index.php/bc/article/view/72/133> Diana Price's discussion of the "PT Theory" in the *The Elizabethan Review* is available online at <http://elizabethanreview.com/tudor.html>. For historical background, the biography of the Earl of Essex by historian Robert Lacey is recommended.



RULES AND GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

1. Entries for the 2012 Essay Contest must be **ELECTRONICALLY SUBMITTED** by **DECEMBER 17, 2012**.
2. **Submit essays in a Word or pdf file** to: [Shake a spear@hotmail.com](mailto:Shake_a_spear@hotmail.com)
Students are encouraged to submit their essays at any time before this date as this will greatly help the Essay Judging Panel in the process of reading and evaluating the essays.
3. **ELIGIBILITY: The contest is open to students the world over.**
Contestants must be between the ages of 14 – 19 and/or enrolled in high school grades 9 – 12, in public or private schools in the year 2012. Homeschoolers are welcome. College freshmen may enter if they were graduating seniors in the spring of 2012.
4. **All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, in English, and must be the original work of the contestant.** Plagiarism or use of another's work without proper attribution is strictly prohibited.

Expository essays should conform to the APA or MLA style sheets:

APA Guidelines: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

MLA Guidelines: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

5. **Essays must be between 750 to 3000 words.**
All pages must be numbered. Each contestant may enter only one essay.
6. The total prize money of \$3,000 will be awarded as follows*:

First Place: \$1,000

Second Place: \$800

Third Place: \$600

Three Honorable Mentions @ \$200 each

* *Prizes based on minimum of 50 essays submitted.*

7. The awards will be announced on April 12, 2013, and prize money remitted to the winners at this time.

The first place essay will be published in the sponsoring organizations' newsletters: **Shakespeare Matters** and/or the **Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter**.

8. The following contact information must appear at the upper left hand corner of the first page of the essay: The name, address, phone number and email address of the student; the student's age and grade or date of graduation; the student's high school and sponsoring teacher if applicable. (See Rule #9 below)

Essays that do not include this information will not be read.

9. **The teacher's name is optional.** The endorsement of a teacher is not required for a student to enter this contest. Of course the guidelines committee strongly encourages the participation of teachers of English, Theater Arts, and History to enter as many of their students as possible.

10. **Essays will be judged on the following criteria:**

1. Originality of thought
2. Insight into Shakespearean interpretation, most especially as it relates to the authorship question
3. Effective and logical development of thesis
4. Consideration of contrary evidence
5. Effective use of resources
6. Elegance of style

Each entrant will be notified by email when his or her essay is received. Using the criteria given above, a volunteer panel of Shakespearean scholars and writers will determine which essays will be chosen FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION. These essays will go to the Judging Panel for consideration for one of the monetary awards. The Judging Panel is made up of university professors and professional writers.

Contact for additional information:

Shake_a_spear@hotmail.com

"Time's glory is to calm contending kings
To unmask falsehood
And bring truth to light."



RECOMMENDED READING

Before selecting a topic, the guidelines committee recommends the following articles for preliminary study by both teachers and students:

1. William Niederkorn's "An Historic Whodunit: If Shakespeare Didn't, Who Did?" published in the New York Times.

www.shakespearefellowship.org/Niederkorn-NYTWhodunit.htm

2. Dr. Roger Stritmatter's "Is This the Bard We See Before Us? Or Someone Else?" published in the Washington Post.

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/16/AR2007031602692.html

The Shakespeare Fellowship and the Shakespeare Oxford Society have a mandate to encourage public education on the Shakespeare authorship question. We agree with John Keats' statement that "Shakespeare led a life of allegory; his works are the comments on it." Moreover, a focus on the authorship question will enliven your classroom like few teaching strategies you've ever used.

In designing the contest, the guidelines committee is aware that doubts about the established position are unacceptable in mainstream academia. In fact, it was clearly stated by Columbia University Professor James Shapiro in his recent book *Contested Will* that discussion of this subject is prohibited in the academic setting. Therefore, the committee understands that, for this reason, many teachers may shy away from introducing their students to this intriguing debate. Yet, in spite of this academic taboo, an increasing number of scholars, teachers, and authorities believe that William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon was not the real author of the works, but a front man for someone else. We hope that teachers will take advantage of this contest to "think outside the box" and broaden the educational horizons of their students.

Here, for example, is how Robert Barrett, a secondary educator from Kitsap County, WA, described his experience teaching the authorship question to 9th graders at Central Kitsap Jr. High:

“When I began to discuss the Shakespeare authorship question with my students, I found I was tapping into something almost reflexive in its immediacy. Their natural iconoclasm and vague curiosity about the world around them quickly grew to focused interest in how it was possible that the Stratford man was credited with great works. I was pleased to see students’ eagerness to engage figurative language as they looked for clues to confirm or reject the ideas that were arising in our discussions. Critical thinking skills sharpened...”

This could happen in your classroom too!! We encourage you to join the growing number of English, Theater Arts and History teachers who are introducing their students to one of the most amazing stories in our cultural history!

In responding to the question of your choice, you may conclude that Edward de Vere was not the author and decide that the evidence favors the traditional attribution of authorship or even someone else; but the winning essays must show that the proposition has been considered carefully and evaluated thoughtfully.

“O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown shall live behind me!
If ever thou didst hold me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world, draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.”





RECOMMENDED RESOURCES: WEBSITES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: At least three of the following resources **must be cited** in the essay for it to be considered for a monetary prize. The utilization of additional sources is also encouraged.

The Shakespeare Fellowship – <http://www.shakespearefellowship.org>

The Shakespeare Oxford Society – <http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com>

The Shakespeare Authorship Coalition – <http://www.doubtaboutwill.org>

Shakespeare By Another Name – <http://www.shakespearebyanothername.com>

The De Vere society – <http://www.deveresociety.co.uk>

Is Shakespeare Dead? Dr. Keir Cutler's adaptation of Mark Twain's book – <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7004942638729319523>

Shakespeare Authorship Research Center – <http://www.authorshipstudies.org>

Nieder Korn, William. "A Historic Whodunit: If Shakespeare Didn't, Who Did?" *New York Times and Leisure Desk*, February 10, 2001 –

www.shakespearefellowship.org/NiederKorn-NYTWhodunit.htm

Stritmatter, Roger. "Is This the Bard We See Before Us? Or Someone Else?" *Washington Post Outlook*, B1-B5, March 18, 2007 --

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/16/AR2007031602692.html>

Mark Rylance on "What Shakespeare Means to Me" --

www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcPGi1DQkag

Many historical documents pertaining to Edward de Vere and his family have been transcribed by Nina Green and are available on her website: <http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/documents.html>

www.oxford-shakespeare.com/documents.html

The Elizabethan Review -- <http://elizabethanreview.com/tudor.html>.

Anderson, Mark. *Shakespeare by Another Name*. New York: Gotham Books, 2005.

Beauclerk, Charles. *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*. New York: Grove Press, 2010.

Chambers, E.K. *William Shakespeare: A Study in Facts and Problems, Vol. I and II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Hope, Warren and Kim Holston. *The Shakespeare Controversy: An Analysis of the Authorship Theories*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.

Lacey, Robert. *Robert, Earl of Essex: An Elizabethan Icarus*. London: Phoenix Press, 1971.

Michell, John. *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1996.

Ogburn, Charlton. *The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1984.

Price, Diana. *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Schoenbaum, Samuel. *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Shapiro, James. *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

Sobran, Joseph. *Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.

The Shakespeare Mystery, DVD produced by the Public Broadcasting Service and WGBH/Frontline. This DVD is available at most public libraries.

Whalen, Richard F. *Shakespeare: Who Was He? The Oxford Challenge to the Bard of Avon*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1994.

Note: The books listed above are only a small fraction of the books and articles that are available on the authorship subject. Suggested for further reading: *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* by George Greenwood, *Shakespeare Identified* by John Thomas Looney, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* by Eva Turner Clark, Bernard Ward's *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, and *De Vere as Shakespeare* by William Farina. Roger Stritmatter's doctoral dissertation on *Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible* is available through Concordia University's bookstore. The Bookmark: www.cu-portland.edu/bookstore. *Monstrous Adversary* by Alan Nelson gives an opposing view on the Earl of Oxford's candidacy. John Michell's book (see above) has an excellent bibliography of materials supporting alternative candidates, and informative books published subsequently are Peter Dawkins' *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Francis Bacon), Sam Blumenfeld's *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection* (Christopher Marlowe), Brenda James and William D. Rubinstein's *The Truth Will Out* (Henry Neville), and Robin Williams' *Swan of Avon* (Mary Sidney).