



**CBC's Shakespeare Selfie Student
Writing Challenge**

2019

TEACHER GUIDE

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CBC's Shakespeare Selfie Youth Writing Challenge



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Introduction

Over 400 years have passed since the death of William Shakespeare, yet his body of work continues to be studied, explored and enjoyed by audiences in the 21st century. His plays serve as inspiration for modern artists of all stripes, from young adult novels like E.K. Johnston's *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* to playful comic books like Ryan North's *To Be or Not To Be*.

Shakespeare was a master satirist, unafraid of shedding an unflattering light on England's ills and poking fun at political leaders. What would the Bard have to say about society today? We'd like students to answer this question.

CBC Books will be accepting entries online from **April 9 to 30, 2019**.
For details, visit www.cbc.ca/shakespeareselfie

Shakespeare Selfie is a writing competition that challenges students to write a soliloquy or monologue (200-400 words) in the voice of a Shakespearean character based on a prominent news, pop culture or current affairs event from the last year (April 2018 to April 2019).

For instance, how would *Macbeth's* three witches feel if their prophecies were labeled "fake news"? Would Viola from *Twelfth Night* have joined the Women's March in January?

Shakespeare Selfie is a fun and creative challenge that asks student to stretch their critical thinking abilities to their greatest limits.

The purpose of this guide:

This document supplements the Shakespeare Selfie Student Writing Challenge, guiding students through the process of choosing a subject to polishing the final drafts of their entry.

On curio.ca, educators may access a series of videos featuring Canadian authors, actors and Shakespeare scholars discussing topics from Shakespearean satire to adapting current affairs for fiction to performing monologues. The videos offer a bit of wisdom into the writing craft, as well as some insight into the Bard's role as a satirist. This guide provides discussion questions as well as classroom activities. Visit: www.curio.ca/shakespeareselfie

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Materials in this guide:

- An introduction to Shakespeare (video, discussion questions & tips) — Shakespeare Selfie judge Kenneth Oppel is joined by University of Toronto Shakespeare scholar Philippa Sheppard. Together they discuss William Shakespeare's reputation as a satirist and lessons on the writing craft that 21st century artists can glean from his monologues and soliloquies.
- Adapting current affairs for fiction (video and classroom activities) — Sharon Bala, author of *The Boat People*, talks about the research that went into her debut novel, which centres on the experience of refugee detention in Canada.
- Performing monologues and soliloquies (video and classroom activity) — Kristin Kreuk imparts her knowledge on monologues from an actor's perspective.
- Example of a winning entry (video & text): Ali Nelson's winning 2017 poem (Grades 7 to 9 category) *That Something Wicked...* is performed by theatre actor Bahareh Yaraghi.
- Example of a winning entry (text): Emma George's winning 2017 poem (Grades 10 to 12 category) *Naught is Discernible Within This Place*.
- Suggested subjects (text): A list of possible current affairs topics to kickstart the writing process.

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An introduction to Shakespeare: Kenneth Oppel & Philippa Sheppard

Background:

Kenneth Oppel is the judge of the Shakespeare Selfie Student Writing Challenge — www.cbc.ca/shakespeareselfie. He is the award-winning author of books like *The Nest*, *Airborn* and *Silverwing*. Philippa Sheppard is a professor of Shakespeare at the University of Toronto. Together, they discuss William Shakespeare's reputation as a satirist and lessons on the writing craft that 21st century artists can glean from his monologues and soliloquies. Before showing the video in class, it is essential to explain the concept of the Shakespeare Selfie challenge to students.

Discussion questions:

After watching the video, here are some possible questions to engage the students in discussion:

- Did you learn anything about William Shakespeare's life that surprised you?
- Why did being an outsider to British high society make Shakespeare a good critic of it?
- Philippa gave a couple of examples of how Shakespeare worked political commentary into his plays. Can you think of any more examples in the plays we've studied?
- What kinds of current events do you think William Shakespeare would be critical of today? Or, what could you imagine his characters commenting on?
- Do you think art has a role to play in social or political commentary?
- Can you think of any examples of modern-day art inspired by Shakespeare?

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Shakespeare Selfie Tips from Kenneth & Philippa:

At the end of the video, Kenneth and Philippa talk about some of the ways students can set their work apart from the competition. Here are some of the tips they talked about:

1. Write multiple drafts



The first draft is always terrible. And it's in subsequent rewritings that you get to pay attention to your word choices and character and theme and that's what makes a piece of writing as good as it can be. Just doing it again and again and again. – Kenneth

2. Pay attention to what made Shakespeare great



*Try and create some **really rich imagery** because Shakespeare was a master at that. **Use some unusual words** because Shakespeare actually made up a lot of words. His vocabulary was beyond compare.* – Philippa

3. Make jokes



A sense of humour [will get my attention]. It's really hard to write something witty. And Shakespeare was really funny. – Kenneth & Philippa

4. If you're going to try verse, make sure it scans*



Many people attempting to write verse may successfully rhyme the last word at the end of every line, but they do not give any attention to the rhythm. With iambic pentameter, the rhythm is five metrical feet, two syllables in each foot, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. What I notice, not only in students' work, but also in published verse picture books for children is that the rhythm is inconsistent — that is, it doesn't scan. One line of verse will have twelve syllables, the next ten etc. Shakespeare did break the metre sometimes, but always on purpose, and often to achieve a certain effect — to suggest emotional turmoil, for instance. The best way for a student to check if his/her verse scans is to read it out loud. If there are too many or too few syllables in a line, the rhythm will sound broken, or off or clunky. — Philippa

***Verse and iambic pentameter are not requirements for this challenge, but students are welcome to use these devices.**

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Current affairs in fiction with Sharon Bala, author of *The Boat People*

Background:

The Boat People (www.cbc.ca/1.4469966) follows a man named Mahindan, one of 500 refugees to arrive on Canada's shores in a rusty cargo ship after surviving the horrors of the Sri Lankan civil war. Upon arrival, Mahindan and his six-year-old son are thrown into refugee detention as media stories swirl and speculate on whether the "boat people" are friend or foe.

This debut novel from Sharon Bala was inspired by the MV Sun Sea (www.cbc.ca/1.879557), a ship that carried a group of Tamil refugees to the coast of British Columbia in 2010. Bala, based in St. John's, Newfoundland, won the 2017 Journey Prize for short story writing.

In this video, Sharon talks about the research behind *The Boat People*, the events that inspired her book and offers tips to aspiring writers — see www.curio.ca/shakespeareselfie.

Tips from Sharon Bala:

1. Find a subject you're passionate about

Whether it's a news story that you were obsessively following or a groundbreaking film that you watched over and over again, pinpoint a subject that you feel really connected to. The more passionate you are about a topic, the easier the words will flow and the more fun the assignment will be. If you had a megaphone to hold up to the world and you could tell them one thing, what would it be?

Here's how Sharon found the subject that became her first book:

“*Before I was a writer in August of 2010, I was in Halifax at Pier 21, which is the immigration and refugee museum. I was walking around through the exhibits and thinking about the waves upon waves of people who've come to this country by boat. There was this great sentence that I saw on the wall, it was something an immigration official had said to someone. This official had said: 'You've come to a good country, there's room for you here.' And that sentence really stayed with me. I wrote it down and I wasn't even sure why. Three years later when I sat down and started to think about writing a novel, I didn't know what I was going to write about, but this sentence just came back to me. It was like the spark that lit the flame that became the fire that became the book. It's important to find something that really just resonates with you.*” – Sharon

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→ → → Activity: Class brainstorm of ideas

Lead a classroom-wide brainstorm of current affairs events and major news stories from the past year. Record the ideas on a blackboard or whiteboard. After a large number of diverse ideas have been suggested, ask students to write down the three or five topics that they are most interested in. Instruct them to find and read one news article about each of the subjects they've written down. This small exercise may help them pick a subject for their Shakespeare Selfie challenge.

Here are some questions to help get the discussion started:

- What are the major local or provincial events from the last year? Canadian events? International events?
- What do you think was the most surprising or shocking news event from the last year?
- What was the biggest story of the year in sports?
- What album did you listen to or film did you see in the last year that sparked a lot of discussion with your friends or family?
- What is one news story that you felt deserved more attention?

2. Pay attention to the small details

William Shakespeare frequently drew from nature to set the tone of his stories, create a sense of atmosphere and bring his audience closer to the action. Sharon Bala says paying close attention to small details and finding unique ways to describe universal feelings and images can bring your work to a new level.

Here's Sharon's advice:

“ One piece of advice I can give for writing a story, short fiction or a novel, is to really pay attention to the details. The way the wind really feels when it's biting cold versus a warm summer breeze. The small details of how something looks, like the way a sticker on a library book curves around the spine. Those are the details that, as a person moving through the world, if you notice them and you store them away, when you sit down to write the book, those are the details you put into the book. It's those small details that will make people really think: 'Oh, this story is just taking me in. It feels so true even though it's fiction.'” — Sharon

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→ → → **Activity: Pick any object in this room, study and describe it**

Instruct students to walk around the classroom and find an object to write about. Ask them to study their object closely, finding as many unique details about that object as they can. Ask them to write a sentence about each of those unique details. This activity will get students to stretch and focus their creative muscles.

3. Fact check

After completing their Shakespeare Selfie entries, students should go over their poems and make sure the details derived from the current affairs event are accurate.



I think with any book that you write, particularly something that involves civil war and historical aspects, you end up going back to do the research over and over again. Even once I started writing, really until the very last draft, I was still going back to the research to look up small details.” – Sharon

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Getting in your character's heads with David Chariandy, author of *Brother*

Background:

Brother is set in Scarborough, Ont. in the 1990s. It follows two young men of mixed-heritage descent who are being raised in 'The Park' by their single mother. With love and music, the brothers rise above their difficult circumstances until one of their lives is tragically cut short after an encounter with a police officer.

Brother received the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize in 2017 and will be defended on Canada Reads 2019 by actress Lisa Ray.

In this video, Chariandy offers tips for aspiring writers, particularly on getting into the heads of characters.

Tips from David Chariandy

1. Ask the question 'What if?'

The Shakespeare Selfie challenge requires students to dig deep into the psyche of the characters they are writing about. In understanding their core motivations, students can then speculate and think critically about how those characters would feel about current day events. David Chariandy says that one trick he uses is to ask the question, "What if?"

Here's David's advice:



I think one of the exercises I have for getting into the heads of characters is by asking myself the question, 'What if?'

What if my life was slightly different from the life I've lived? What if I grew up in a slightly different family? What if I lost a loved one? What if an encounter with authority went sideways and had a catastrophic result? These are some of the exercises that I have when writing."

— David

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→ → → Activity: Interrogate your character

When preparing their Shakespeare Selfie entries, suggest that students start by exploring a 'what if?' scenario involving their chosen character and topic. From there, other questions will arise, helping them better understand where they should take the direction and tone of their piece.

For instance, what if it was *The Tempest's* Ariel that was responsible for the Ottawa-Gatineau tornado in September of 2018? Why would he want to attack Ottawa, the country's centre of political power? Or, did he carry out the storm on Prospero's orders? What would they hope to gain with this tornado? Would he have regrets or rejoice in the aftermath?

2. Read widely

A standard piece of advice that all writers give: read widely. Absorbing as many possible examples of the written word is a vital tool in understanding how to write well and to develop one's own style of writing.

Here's David's advice:



Read carefully, read deeply and read widely. Reading is most important for a writer. I also think working hard at writing is essential. Writing is never going to come easily."

→ → → Activity: Read as much as possible

When preparing their Shakespeare Selfie entries, suggest that students start by reading about their characters and their chosen topic as much as possible. In terms of the character, pay attention to their dialogue and how Shakespeare has distinguished it from other characters. What is their personality and how does that correspond with their way of speaking? In terms of their chosen subject, read at least three articles from different sources to get a solid sense of the topic and understand a variety of perspectives on it.

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Monologues from an actor's perspective with Kristin Kreuk

Performance is not an aspect of the Shakespeare Selfie writing challenge — www.cbc.ca/shakespeareselfie — but it might be helpful to remind students that monologues and soliloquies are ultimately meant to live off the page. After students have finished writing their first drafts, performing their work out loud to themselves or to their peers may help them notice flaws or weaknesses in their poems.

In a video on curio.ca, actor Kristin Kreuk, who plays lawyer Joanna Hanley on CBC's *Burden of Truth*, gives students tips on delivering monologues — see www.curio.ca/shakespeareselfie.

Tips from Kristin Kreuk

“ *I think a great monologue **has a logical foundation, has a build emotionally** so there's some sort of an **arc of emotional experience** that isn't monotonous. **It's got dynamics to it.** And **there's some truth** within it. To prepare to deliver a monologue is almost the same as preparing for any other piece of work. I sit down with the material and I will **map out the intentions and the motivations** — why I'm saying each thing, what I'm trying get out of those things.”* — Kristin

→ → → Activity: Peer to peer feedback

In any field, peer to peer feedback is an essential part of the creative process. Once students have written their first drafts, divide them into groups of three. Ask them to perform their monologues and soliloquies to one another and provide both positive and negative feedback. Based on Kristin's advice, here are some questions the students should keep in mind as they listen to their fellow students perform:

- What is the central message the character is attempting to convey and is that clear to an audience?
- Does one thought follow the next in a smooth and logical way?
- Is there an emotional arc to this monologue? Does it build to a climax?
- Is the monologue or soliloquy dynamic? Does the character experience a range of emotions throughout?

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The Universe's Greatest Love Story by Cynthia Gan

This poem was the Grades 7 to 9 category winner in 2018. This is provided as an example to students as they prepare their entries. This entry is inspired by the 2017 solar eclipse. On curio.ca, there is a reading of this poem paired with footage from across Canada from this eclipse. See www.curio.ca/shakespeareselfie

Subject: 2017 solar eclipse

Character: Friar Laurence from *Romeo & Juliet*

Comments from judge Kenneth Oppel: "A unique comparison of a total solar eclipse to the consuming and short-lived love of Romeo and Juliet, this original poem features some strong metre and excellent use of metaphor."

The moon sets sail from over inky seas,
Where waves engulf the woeful lovers' tears:
The sun and moon, like fire and powder, reach
Across a timeless, unforgiving sea;
And thus, I witnessed heaven's stage, where there
Unfolds eternity's most woeful tale:

A path of most tragic mischance
Upon which he is condemned to dance,
For the moon, come every bittersweet dawn,
Stained with dimmed colours of his muse
And bearing his heavy heart of awe,
Is forever plagued to bid her adieu;
It is with bittersweet reverence he surrenders her beauty,
And with a heavy heart fade invisible as she yawns.
It is heaven's cruel trick, having sparked a love this bright,
Though his love then lies not truly in his heart, but in his eyes,
Having never seen one with beauty more absolute
Than that of his ever venerated muse;
For none dare compare with her glorious inferno of melted gold —
Though at daybreak, it was not only for him whom she arose.
He draws near, starved a thousand nights of her warmth,
A sight that steals the breath from the sky as he comes forth.
And, like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume,
The birds and animals fall silent, the earth briefly entombed,

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As the Moon is gifted two minutes cradled in her embrace,
And the stars, waterlogged with envy, look away.
As swiftly as the lovers met,
The cosmos gently tugs them on their way,
Like yolk slipping from an egg,
Like the sluggish moments before midnight when time doth stand still.

And so verily, I witnessed the angels' tapestry,
Intricately woven from the universe's greatest love story —
Or, perhaps, one could say its greatest tragedy,

Though upon a wise man's observation, appears to be something in between.

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That Something Wicked... by Ali Nelson

This poem was the Grades 7 to 9 category winner in 2017. On curio.ca, there is a video of theatre actor Bahareh Yaraghi performing the speech as the First Weird Sister from *Macbeth*. This is provided as an example to students as they prepare their entries. See www.curio.ca/shakespeareselfie.

Subject: Syrian Civil War

Comments from judge Kenneth Opper: "This is a powerful evocation of the bloodshed and grief unleashed during the Syrian Civil War."

Only rubble, rubble, blood and rubble,
A home, a land, a nation in trouble.
Divided, sep'rate, alone these gents stand.
Some flee and run to strange, distant, new lands.
Some stayeth to square, to cry, scream or grieve,
Some remaineth trapped, unable to leave.
Neighbour kills neighbour, friend kills friend.
A darkness and evil that may nev'r end.
Flame falls from the sky and death clouds the air
Plunging its people far into despair.
There is no order, no wrong nor a right
When man's killing man late into the night.
Love one divided by those whom they trust,
Family deserted, left in the dust.
Killing and murder for personal gain,
Leaders and 'heroes' all turning insane.
And I, I just gaze this treacherous scene,
This is no place for me to intervene.
I gaze all the death, I gaze the betrayal
I gaze them all fight about who they hail.
I gaze the destruction, the blood, the gore.
I gaze it expand. I gaze them make more.
And as they descend deep into tartar,
I and mine sisters shall gaze from afar.
For foul is fair, and they've madeth their beds.
And so I shall gaze their destruction spread.
No final battle to end all this strife.
For this is no story, this is real life.
And so all this horror may nev'r be done.
That something wicked? 'T has already come.

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Suggested Subjects

Students may select any current affairs topic or trend from April 2018 to April 2019. Here are some possible subjects to help get the ball rolling. Students do not have to choose from this list of topics — they are merely suggestions.

Canadian current affairs

- 2018 sets new record in wildfires in B.C.: www.cbc.ca/1.4803546
- New NAFTA deal, CUSMA, reached after months of tense negotiations: www.cbc.ca/1.4926961
- Driver in Humboldt crash pleads guilty: www.cbc.ca/1.4969739
- Bruce McArthur pleads guilty to eight charges of first-degree murder: www.cbc.ca/1.4997242
- Liberals to buy Trans Mountain pipeline for \$4.5B: www.cbc.ca/1.4681911
- Jody Wilson-Raybould resigns from Trudeau's cabinet: www.cbc.ca/1.5016995
- 11-year-old girl dies after Amber Alert: www.cbc.ca/1.5020744
- Maxime Bernier quits PCs and plans to start a new party: www.cbc.ca/1.4795894
- RCMP, Quebec police investigating use of fake Indian status cards for tax breaks: www.cbc.ca/1.4869139
- Toronto students charged in connection to allegations of sexual assault at Catholic all boys' school: www.cbc.ca/1.4952022
- Cannabis is legalized in Canada: www.cbc.ca/1.4862207
- Tornado rips through Ottawa-Gatineau area: <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/ottawa-gatineau-tornado-storm-2018>
- 4 people, including 2 police officers, killed in Fredericton shooting: www.cbc.ca/1.4780578
- The Irving Oil refinery explosion in Saint John: www.cbc.ca/1.4855395

International current affairs

- Saudi woman barricades herself in a Bangkok hotel before being granted asylum in Canada: www.cbc.ca/1.4974344
- CFO of Chinese tech giant Huawei arrested in Vancouver, sought by U.S. for extradition: www.cbc.ca/1.4934269
- 12 boys and their soccer coach rescued from flooded cave in Thailand: www.cbc.ca/1.4740318
- Devastating fire in Bangladesh's capital kills 67 people: www.cbc.ca/1.5027580

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- Economic collapse and humanitarian crisis in the oil-rich nation of Venezuela: www.cbc.ca/1.4993519
- Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testifies against U.S. Supreme Court candidate Brett Kavanaugh: www.cbc.ca/1.4840472
- The killing of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi: www.cbc.ca/1.4869227
- Hurricane Florence pounds Carolina coast with fierce winds, flooding: www.cbc.ca/1.4824419
- Trump hopes to strike nuclear weapons deal in second summit with North Korea's Kim Jong-un: www.cbc.ca/1.5033540

Sports and entertainment

- Kawhi Leonard & Danny Green traded to the Toronto Raptors for DeMar DeRozan and Jacob Poeltl: www.cbc.ca/1.4989282
- John Tavares joins Maple Leafs: www.cbc.ca/1.4730452
- Kevin Hart steps down as Oscars host over past homophobic tweets: www.cbc.ca/1.4936206
- Ariana Grande breaks up with her SNL fiance Pete Davidson and writes a hit song: www.cbc.ca/1.4891161
- Chef and TV host Anthony Bourdain dies at 61: www.cbc.ca/1.4697510
- Meghan Markle marries Prince Harry and announces pregnancy: www.cbc.ca/1.4862836