

ESSAY 1:

ANALYZE A FAMOUS SHAKESPEAREAN SPEECH

Analyze a well-known speech from a Shakespeare play *not* on our reading list by comparing it to its *No Fear Shakespeare* translation into modern English prose. (I've provided a list of such speeches below.)

By a “famous speech,” I mean the kind of speech that actors regularly use as audition pieces, one that gets reprinted in anthologies, a speech that has become a cultural touchstone. Why have these speeches so captivated the minds and ears of actors, scholars, and audiences?

Perhaps you think these speeches became famous because of the profound, or at least interesting, things they have to say. If so, consider that the *No Fear Shakespeare* versions of the speeches say the same things but will never appear in anthologies or audition repertoires.

Comparing the language of a celebrated Shakespearean speech to a bland modernization of it — a modernization that delivers all of the information in the speech but none of its magic — should help you see how things like sound patterning, word choice, and syntax can transform a mere vehicle for conveying ideas into an amusement park ride for its readers' minds.

Think of the *No Fear* modernization as a tool to help you sharpen your perception of verbal nuances, to help you see more of what's going on in the language than you might otherwise have noticed.

Do not try to talk about everything going on in the language of the speech. Instead, focus on a handful of specific examples and analyze them thoroughly and in excruciating detail. Fill your essay with fine-grained analysis, not with mushy generalizations. The more specific your analysis, the better.

Everything you say in your analysis must relate directly to the actual words of the text. Don't get sidetracked; stick with the words. Analyze the speech itself, not the character who speaks the lines, or the plot they're involved in, or the themes or ideas they express.

Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste your time (or mine) trying to sound impressive. Write, instead, in a conversational voice: the clear, plainspoken, engaging voice of a person talking about a subject they find interesting. Don't let your essay run longer than what you have to say. Make every word count. One sentence that has something to say is better than a paragraph that doesn't.

Your essay should be between 500–800 words. Use MLA Format for quotations and citations. (See drmarkwomack.com/mla-style/, especially “How to Quote Shakespeare,” “Anatomy of a Citation,” and “Document Format.”)

Submit your essay through the TurnItIn link on the class Blackboard Learn page labeled “Essay 1—Famous Speech.” You needn’t submit a hard copy version of your essay.

DUE DATES:

- **COMMENTS DEADLINE: October 3**
If you want comments on your essay, you must submit it on or before Monday, October 3.
- **FINAL DEADLINE: October 10**
Although I will make few or no comments on essays submitted after Monday, October 3, I will grade these papers just the same as those turned in by the earlier date.

TWELVE FAMOUS SHAKESPEAREAN SPEECHES

Here are a dozen well-known, well-loved verse speeches from Shakespeare, each about twenty to thirty lines long. If you want to analyze a speech that's not on this list, please check with me first.

The line numbers are from the Pelican Shakespeare edition. (Line numbers vary from edition to edition primarily because typesetting choices — such as page, margin, and font sizes — determine the length of prose lines. Therefore prose always skews the line numbers of the subsequent lines in any scene where it occurs.)

The *No Fear Shakespeare* editions are available at: nfs.sparknotes.com

Antony and Cleopatra

(2.2.201–28) “The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne”

As You Like It

(2.7.138–65) “All the world's a stage”

Hamlet

(1.2.129–59) “O that this too, too sullied flesh would melt”

(3.1.56–88) “To be, or not to be — that is the question”

(4.4.32–66) “How all occasions do inform against me”

1 Henry IV

(1.2.188–210) “I know you all, and will awhile uphold”

Henry V

(Prologue.1–34) “O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend”

Julius Caesar

(3.2.73–107) “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears”

The Merchant of Venice

(4.1.182–203) “The quality of mercy is not strained”

Richard III

(1.1.1–31) “Now is the winter of our discontent”

Romeo and Juliet

(2.1.2–32) “But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?”

(2.1.85–106) “Though knowst the mask of night is on my face”