



Hamlet For Kids (Shakespeare Can Be Fun!)

By Lois Burdett

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Perhaps the best-known of Shakespeare's tragedies, **Hamlet** has all the ingredients for a gripping story: revenge and power, familial love and betrayal, dramatic sword fights, dark spooky scenes. Once again Lois Burdett has woven her own brand of magic by transforming Shakespeare's complex verse into rhyming couplets. She has created a version of **Hamlet** especially for children, even as young as seven, and one that readers of all ages will enjoy.

At the appropriately named Hamlet Elementary School in Stratford, Ontario, where Burdett has taught for over 20 years, her students have created wonderful drawings of **Hamlet** to illustrate Burdett's fluid rhymes. The students' interpretations are vivid evidence of Burdett's clever ability to bring Shakespeare's complex characters and intricate plots to life for young people.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 2-4-This seventh series entry retells the story in rhymed couplets with illustrations by the author's students, ages 7 to 12. The style is lively and interesting, and some of the phrasing is humorous: "Meanwhile, King Claudius was still uptight./The cause of Hamlet's madness had not come to light." The fact that stage directions and speakers' names are included within the verses poses some difficulty when acting out the play. A very perceptive narrator would be needed to make it all come out just right. Boxed insets of children's rewritten segments of the play as letters or diary entries offer interesting insights into their perception of the characters. Since the colorful drawings represent the characters in a wide variety of styles, they lack a sense of unity. Activities are presented at the end of the book to extend the experience. This is a good source of ideas for teachers who want to use Shakespeare in their elementary classrooms. Leon Garfield's *Shakespeare Stories* (Houghton, 1991) is still the best retelling, but school libraries could make good use of this book.

Carol Durusau, Newton County Public Library, Covington, GA

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Review

Burdett has received numerous awards and commendations for her work in making Shakespeare more accessible to children; *Hamlet for Kids* demonstrates why Burdett's work is deserving of these honors. (Jennifer Ailles *Canadian Children's Literature* 2002-09-01)

The style is lively and interesting, and some of the phrasing is humorous. (Carol Durusau *School Library Journal* 2000-08-01)

A simplified but responsible version of the tragedy. Meant to be read aloud and staged by children. (Julia Bookman *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 2000-07-29)

Ideal for introducing the play (and Shakespeare) in the classroom or before the theatre. (Susan Perren *Globe and Mail* 2000-05-27)

From the Author

Shakespeare Can Be Fun!

Most students will be exposed to the works of Shakespeare, typically in high school. The language and content of the plays is seen as too difficult for younger children but primary children are underestimated as to what they can accomplish given the challenge. The study of Shakespeare has become an integral part of my grade two program at Hamlet School, in Stratford, Ontario, Canada.

When I first moved to Stratford, I had no intention of teaching Shakespeare to 7 and 8 year olds. Stratford is a beautiful city noted for its Shakespearean theatre and I was interested that the schools were all named after Shakespearean characters. I asked my class, "Who is William Shakespeare?" and "Why is our school called Hamlet?" Their answers were surprising. One thought he was a famous boxer. Another believed he was the President of Canada. A third student responded, "I don't know who William Shakespeare is. I don't know any of the big kids." It was the children's enthusiasm and excitement on making the connection between an historical figure and the name of their school, which led me to continue. Thirty years later I can't imagine teaching anywhere in the world and not introducing Shakespeare. The study provided tremendous growth,

particularly in the area of language and communication and evolved into a learning experience of a lifetime. I have endeavored in my books and workshops for teachers to share the excitement of exploring with children, the timeless emotions and ideas of Shakespeare.

The comments of two of my children, written at various times in their daily journals show the lasting impression Shakespeare has had on them.

"Shakespeare is like a big piece of chocolate cake. Once you've started you wish you could go on and on forever, in a non-stopping dream." (Anika, age 7)

"William's incredible words are like a velvet silk coat that rap around his pure thoughts. His pen writes on like all colors of the wind." (Sean, age 7)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Grace Godwin:

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