



How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare

Ken Ludwig

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A foolproof, enormously fun method of teaching your children the classic works of William Shakespeare

To know some Shakespeare provides a head start in life. His plays are among the great bedrocks of Western civilization and contain the finest writing of the past 450 years. Many of the best novels, plays, poems, and films in the English language produced since Shakespeare's death in 1616—from *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Godfather*—are heavily influenced by Shakespeare's stories, characters, language, and themes. In *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*, acclaimed playwright Ken Ludwig provides the tools you need to inspire an understanding, and a love, of Shakespeare's works in your children, and to have fun together along the way.

Ken Ludwig devised his friendly, easy-to-master methods while teaching his own children. Beginning with memorizing short passages from the plays, his technique then instills children with cultural references they will utilize for years to come. Ludwig's approach includes understanding of the time period and implications of Shakespeare's diction as well as the invaluable lessons behind his words and stories. Colorfully incorporating the history of Shakespearean theater and society, *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare* guides readers on an informed and adventurous journey through the world in which the Bard wrote.

This book's simple process allows anyone to impart to children the wisdom of plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. And there's fun to be had throughout. Shakespeare novices and experts and readers of all ages will each find something delightfully irresistible in *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*.

How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare Details

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From Reader Review How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare for online ebook

Anna says

This was both a great introduction to several of Shakespeare's plays, as well as a practical guide to introducing him to your children through the explanation and memorization of 25 passages from 9 different plays (as well as suggestions for "bonus passages"). I was thoroughly inspired by Ken Ludwig's obvious love of Shakespeare and convinced that memorizing is the way to go if you want to really develop a love for and understanding of his work. This was somewhat of a revelation for me, as I have so far just read a few children's versions of the plays to my kids, and while they have their place, I think now that the real beauty of Shakespeare is in the actual words he used and how he put them together. I want my kids (and myself!) to see and understand that, and not just know the plots of the various plays. I didn't necessarily agree with all his ideas, and would probably delay introducing some of the plays and/or characters until my kids are older, but overall I learned so much from this book and would highly recommend it.

Nathan Albright says

[Note: This book was provided by Blogging For Books for free in exchange for an honest review.]

It is clear from even a cursory look at this book that Ken Ludwig has a passion for drama. Ludwig is a multiple Tony Award winning dramatist and a fan of Shakespeare from his youth, and he shares with parents and teachers (the intended audience for this work) the same sort of tips to teach Shakespeare to children that he used with his own children. Although the book is somewhat lengthy (including its appendices and an annotated bibliography that seeks to provide books and movies about Shakespeare for further reading, it comes out to around 350 pages), it is clearly written by someone who remains a bit of a child at heart and has an exuberant enthusiasm for drama in general and the wit and wisdom of Shakespeare in particular. For those who are bardophiles [lovers of Shakespeare's works] and wish to pass on that love to others, this book has a lot of helpful advice and tips.

This book is full of intrigue. For one, it recommends a particular order to teaching Shakespeare's plays, starting with plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when children are about the age of six or so, young enough to enjoy the repetition and old enough to be able to appreciate the theater and grasp the language (with questions about meaning). The book includes a companion website (howtoteachyourchildrenshakespeare.com) and is filled with all kinds of interesting tips on how to break down long speeches of prose and especially poetry from some of Shakespeare's plays into an easily digestible form. There are also lots of photos from Shakespeare productions, including a photo from one interesting performance where David Tennant played Hamlet and Patrick Stewart played Claudius. As a whole the book is divided into three parts and 40 passages, the first part dealing with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, and one passage from *Romeo & Juliet*. The second part has passages from *Macbeth*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *As You Like It*, and *Henry V*. Part three closes with passages from *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*. Throughout the book as a whole, the author discusses the themes of love, death, the meaning of life, time, and loyalty to family, among other issues.

These various passages are explained, words are defined, and lessons are taught with a great deal of energy

and skill. Yet there is a great tension that this book and its author find itself in that is not necessarily openly acknowledged. For one, this book talks a lot about the place of Shakespeare within the canon of English literature (in language much like that used to discuss the Bible, which is referred to often in these pages) and the worth of knowing Shakespeare for its moral depth and elevated concepts and language. Yet at the same time the author delights in recommending R-rated movies and playing up the transgressive elements of Shakespeare's work (he even recommends having boys do the whole cross-dressing bit from Shakespeare if they are up for it, something that can lead to ridicule if one does it around the wrong people). Of course, a similar tension exists between a focus on memorizing Shakespeare's words and an appreciation for the ambiguity in his writing, as well as between the fact that Shakespeare's work was time-bound within the late 16th century as well as redolent of more contemporary drama with its existential concerns, and the tension between our regard and respect for Shakespeare's plays and the bowldezing that was often done to his texts by later generations. These tensions enrich this work and make for a complicated and nuanced picture.

Some of the tips that the author gives are very worthwhile to fans of Shakespeare of any age. For example, it is good to look up unfamiliar terms and useful to read the words aloud rather than just rely on reading them on the page. Making Shakespeare relevant by playing games like coming up with creative Shakespearean insults, or using Shakespeare's epigrams in everyday circumstances, or compete to notice imagery in Shakespeare's writings as well as elements like meter and internal rhyme are all suggested within these pages. Among the funniest epigrams that can be used by parents and children alike is Falstaff's immortal line from Henry IV Part One: "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation." (The author suggests this line should be repeated when one is caught doing something one ought not to be doing, which makes for some very humorous contexts.) Besides the tips, the author includes a lot of context about Shakespeare, theater, and publishing that ought to provide enough information for inquisitive young people who have a lot of questions. Parents and teachers of such children who wish to encourage and develop a love of the appropriate kind of drama will appreciate this book greatly.

Alanna Truong says

This is the book I will credit with really getting me into Shakespeare. I cannot WAIT to read, listen to and watch everything Shakespeare, then memorize favourite passages on top of it all. So begins what will likely be a lifelong obsession...

Rachel says

I won this book from First Reads.

I found this book to be enjoyable, and wish I'd had it when I was in high school English class. Plots from some of the plays were explained in a way that was really easy to understand! There are a couple of pieces of Shakespeare I had wanted to try and learn for the fun of it, and this book had some nice tips for learning them. This is one I plan on keeping around for sure if I ever have kids of my own someday.

Casey says

So helpful! Ludwig's enthusiasm for Shakespeare is contagious and this book has made teaching/reading

Shakespeare much less daunting for me. I will revisit this book in the future.

Kristy says

I have a great love and appreciation for the works of William Shakespeare, especially his comedies. I was fortunate to have been introduced to Shakespeare's works by my mom while I was in middle school and I definitely reaped the benefits in high school and college. So it was a pleasant surprise when I came across this work by playwright Ken Ludwig. I'll admit I was a bit skeptical that I would be able to teach my 6 and 7 year old how to memorize and recite passages from some of The Bard's greatest works. My skepticism was short lived and by the time I reached the third chapter I was excited to try out the techniques Ludwig outlines in this work. (I managed to hold off on experimenting on my children until after I finished reading the manual.)

The layout of the book was very helpful and often times it felt like I was participating in a really good classroom lecture. Ludwig begins his instruction by informing the reader about the benefits of introducing young children to Shakespeare and how it has also brought his family closer together. After this introduction Ludwig gives an outline of the rest of the book. The rest of the book consists of instructions on how to teach the 25 chosen passages (the quotation printouts available on the website were very helpful.) But it's not all about tricks on to how to recite and memorize the prose, the author also gives a brief age appropriate (and simple) explanation or modern translation of the passage. He also goes into the main plot points behind each play introduced without getting too academic.

In compliance with FTC guidelines, I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads. All views and opinions expressed are my own and I received no compensation for this or any other review posted by myself on Goodreads.com.

Lauriann says

"Shakespeare should not be an occasional visitor. He should be a permanent houseguest, living in that spare room down the hall, ready to join you for a meal or an evening whenever you crave his company."

Everyone with kids should read this book.

Everyone without kids should read this book.

Lekeshua says

I have a new found appreciation and courage to tackle Shakespeare. I recall being assigned to read Shakespeare without any hand holding. Shakespeare writing is deeper than what meets the eye and as a high schooler trying to read and truly understand was difficult. I no longer feel that way and plan on sharing this with my children. Ken Ludwig along with Charlotte Mason has inspired me to share Shakespeare with my children from the beginning and not wait until they are in high school. I believe starting earlier helps us create a relationship with this great man.

Thank you Jennifer for this amazing gift. It has touched my heart!!!!

Jackie says

not just children-smile

Abby Ophus says

This book was a joy to read. Ludwig teaches you how to help your children memorize key passages from Shakespeare's plays. Each passage he uses he gives you an introduction to the play and plot so your children can understand the context of the part they are memorizing. This book deepened my love and appreciation for Shakespeare's works (and I already loved them quite a bit). I can't wait to use this book with my children when they are older, and I think I may start memorizing the passages myself just for fun.

Jill says

I had so much fun reading this book. If you always have loved the writing of Shakespeare, or, better yet, wanted to love it but just didn't get it, this is the book for you!

How To Teach Your Children Shakespeare is by an acclaimed playwright who hopes to provide you with the tools to help you and your children make Shakespeare a part of your lives. He shows you how to make Shakespeare both informative *and* fun. He writes:

"Shakespeare should not be an occasional visitor. He should be a permanent houseguest, living in that spare room down the hall, ready to join you for a meal or an evening whenever you crave his company. Better yet, he should feel like a part of your family..."

With passion and enthusiasm, he sets out to convince you how to do just that, with plenty of guidance.

I don't know how well this book would work on kids, but it certainly helped *me* to understand Shakespeare better than I ever did, and I studied Shakespeare extensively in college.

He goes through many passages adding "translations," as in this example:

*"I have of late [recently],
but wherefore [why] I know not,
lost all my mirth [cheerfulness]"*

If the speech might be particularly abstruse for modern audiences, he uses two columns, with Shakespeare's words on the left, and a summary of their meaning on the right. He also explains the imagery and importance of the passages, and why they are considered so masterful. For example, in discussing Hamlet, he observes:

"The Ghost fills Hamlet's ear with the details of his own murder the way Claudius filled King Hamlet's ear with poison. This paradox underscores an important question: Is the Ghost lying or telling the truth? Are his

words reliable or poisonous? This is something that Hamlet will spend the next two acts of the play trying to find out."

I loved too how he demonstrates the way in which Shakespeare manipulated word length and alliteration to slow down or speed up delivery of lines for dramatic effect.

He even provides ideas for entertaining ways to encourage your children to incorporate some of Shakespeare's *bot mots* into your own lives. For example, to echo Falstaff from *Henry IV, Part I*:

"Our daughter, Olivia, stays up past her bedtime and her mother catches her in bed with her computer.

Mom

Olivia, what do you think you're doing?

Olivia

Why, Mom, 'tis my vocation, Mom. 'Tis no sin for a girl to labor in her vocation."

As he explains at the outset, in answer to the question "Why Shakespeare?":

"...Shakespeare isn't just one of the many great authors in the English language; Shakespeare is, indisputably, one of the two great bedrocks of Western civilization in English. (The other is the King James translation of the Bible.) Not only do Shakespeare's plays themselves contain the finest writing of the past 450 years, but most of the best novels, plays, poetry, and films in the English language produced since Shakespeare's death in 1616 - from Jane Austen to Charles Dickens, from *Ulysses* to *The Godfather* - are heavily influenced by Shakespeare's stories, characters, language, and themes."

Evaluation: I truly enjoyed this book; it gave me so many new insights into the wonderful world of Shakespeare, and allowed me to enjoy his work in an entirely new way. Highly recommended even without any potential pupils besides yourself!

Rating: 4.5/5

ladydusk says

Library.

I know nothing about Shakespeare or his works. Seriously, I am just starting to learn about Shakespeare.

Oh, I know what is "common knowledge." I recognize some lines from Shakespeare and probably which play they're from. I think I read Romeo and Juliet in High School (Freshman English? Maybe? and maybe Macbeth at some point). It's possible - highly likely even - I only "read" the parts that we read in class.

This book was a big help. Ludwig walks the reader through many plays, introducing the play -its plot, characters, and philosophy - by way of certain lines to memorize. Some are more well known than others.

His own love for Shakespeare flows from each page. His excitement over the words and ideas, particularly the idea of the world and the stage coinciding, is palpable.

Ludwig doesn't even touch the controversy of "Who was Shakespeare?" but takes him at face value.

I can't say that I think the title is particularly true to the book. Teaching Shakespeare to your children seems to be more about memorizing - using a few tools - than anything else. He does recommend acting out the scenes. He recommends using art in a way I hadn't thought about. But, mostly, it is learning sections - lines, soliloquies, epigrams - by heart. He talks about different figures of speech and poetics, how Shakespeare wrote to tell you how to act, and some allusions he made. For many of the passages, he provides a modern language paraphrase. But, in general, he wants you and your children to memorize Shakespeare. (Yes, I said that three times)

I'm happy to see memorization coming back into vogue.

The Appendices are full of excellent information: a bibliography, other famous passages and or lines, and a list of resources from books to video to audio. The book might be worth owning simply for the Appendices.

One, minor, issue. And I already told you I don't know anything about Shakespeare, remember? But Ludwig, as a playwright, seems to bring forward that idea of theater representing real life a lot. In almost every chapter, almost every passage, toward the end of the book that idea is considered from a different aspect. I thought that, perhaps, there would be some other aspects of Shakespeare's ideas discussed ... and the lack of mention of the influence of scripture or God or a playwright (one explanation of an allusion to Proverbs and one brief, almost ashamed, mention of the possibility of a supernatural playwright was all I noted in this vein)

A great introduction, though. An easy read with short chapters and helpful information, I definitely recommend it to those who wish to learn about Shakespeare or teach him to their children.

peaseblossom says

Useful, basic, probably best for people who don't already obsess about Shakespeare. Emphasis on memorization. Somehow still uses sullied flesh instead of solid, but otherwise decent.

Nancy says

Easily the best book we did "all together" in 2014-2015 school year. I wish there were a sequel.

Monika says

Originally posted on my blog, A Lovely Bookshelf on the Wall:

Confession: I am a very reluctant Shakespeare reader. I don't remember being exposed to his works before high school, and I don't remember my teachers showing much spirit when Romeo and Juliet and Julius

Caesar came along on the syllabus. We're a homeschooling family, and I know there will be time I'll have to teach things I'm not terribly interested in. But I want my daughter to appreciate Shakespeare's works in the same way I want her to appreciate great pieces of art or music: because these works are "part of our cultural DNA and cannot be missed," as Ken Ludwig says. Although I have concerns that it is too late for me, I'd love to enjoy Shakespeare, too.

Thank you, Ken Ludwig, for writing *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*. I didn't even have to warm up to it! He writes about Shakespeare in such an engaging way, with vivaciousness, passion, and a wildly contagious enthusiasm. Not only do I find myself having a sense of awe and appreciation for what I'm reading, I'm falling in love with the words, the way they are crafted, their deeper meaning. If Ludwig can do this for me as an adult, someone so reluctant and with major Shakespearean hang-ups... the possibilities for using this in my child's education are huge.

Ludwig starts off with a very simple (but stunning) seven-word line from *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, tackling it very briefly. He moves on to discuss Shakespeare's importance and to give a bit of explanation about the layout of the book and key factors in learning to appreciate and enjoy his works. Ludwig then gets back to the literature itself, complete with synopses, selected passages, explanations, and suggestions for memorization. The book's website offers printable quotation sheets and audio clips of all twenty-six passages.

Because of its focus on memorization and recitation, classical and Charlotte Mason homeschoolers will find *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare* especially useful. We're more of a relaxed/eclectic homeschooling family, but the enthusiasm within this book has earned it a permanent place on our bookshelf.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher via Blogging for Books in exchange for my honest review.
