



# SHAKESPEARE SUMMARIES

Shakespeare is the most asked about writer in quizbowl. His plays are incredibly important to know for any quizbowl player looking to answer more literature questions. Below are brief summaries of the most asked about Shakespeare plays. While this does not cover every Shakespeare play nor do these summaries adequately cover every important plot point of the play, they should serve as a good jumping off point. We hope that this, like any of our study guides will encourage you to research and read on your own about the topic.

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## “Hamlet” – Shakespeare

Young Hamlet avenges the death of old Hamlet by killing the murderer (who is also his uncle), Claudius. He also kills directly or indirectly many others, including his girlfriend, Ophelia, the courtesans Rosencranz and Guildenstern, the king’s advisor, Polonius, Polonius’s son Laertes, and even his mother, Gertrude.

## “Macbeth” – Shakespeare

A mighty thane (a Scottish lord) usurps the Scottish throne by killing the king at the behest of his wife and the prophecies of 3 witches. A massive cover-up ensues, but the new king dies in the end at the hands of Macduff.

## “King Lear” – Shakespeare

An old king asks for nice things from his 3 daughters, but Cordelia, the honest one, refuses. Goneril and Regan oblige, but only to serve themselves; they use the king and take over his power. Basically, everyone dies.

## “Othello” – Shakespeare

A Moor from Venice is tricked by Iago into believing his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful to him with Michael Cassio. So, he smothers her to death. The truth is revealed by Emilia, Shylock’s wife, but too late to prevent the murder; the moor commits suicide in grief.



“The Tempest” – Shakespeare

The sorcerer Prospero is marooned for 12 years on a magical island his daughter Miranda. The spirit Ariel and monster Caliban are also there. After a shipwreck caused by the titular storm, Prospero takes back his rightful title as Duke of Milan from his usurping brother (Antonio), Miranda marries Ferdinand (the King of Naples’s son), and Prospero breaks his wizard’s staff.

“Merchant of Venice” – Shakespeare

Bassanio needs to borrow money to woo Portia. Antonio (the titular “Merchant of Venice”) goes to Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Shylock agrees to the loan but only if he receives a “pound of flesh” from Antonio if the loan is not repaid. After a bizarre courting ritual involving some caskets, Bassanio elopes with Portia, and Bassanio’s friend Lorenzo runs off with Shylock’s daughter Jessica. In the meantime, Antonio’s ships are lost at sea so he is unable to repay the loan. Shylock, angry about his daughter, demands his pound of flesh. Portia, secretly dressed as a male lawyer successfully defends Antonio in court.

