

Learning literature through history and mapping:  
The worlds of Cervantes and Shakespeare  
Grade 12  
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As the Renaissance Era saw change and development in the conventions of politics, religion, and culture in Europe, it also allowed for innovation in literature, traditions which continue to influence modern storytelling. William Shakespeare of England and Miguel de Cervantes of Spain easily hold titles as literary exemplars of the Renaissance. While many modern readers and scholars inadvertently refer to Cervantes as the "Spanish" Shakespeare (and never the other way around), the truth remains that these two figures left their mark on the European Renaissance through their groundbreaking work on the play and the novel as literary traditions. Specifically, the two writers engaged in their craft and art during the time when their countries engaged in adversarial politics. Their works both reflect upon yet transcend the politics, cultural aspects, religions, and moral attitudes of the Renaissance era. While both writers rely heavily on the classical tradition and on literary archetypes, they also use their literature as commentary on the human condition. Cervantes and Shakespeare so identify with Renaissance literature that UNESCO commemorated their work (and dates of their deaths) by establishing the International Day of the Book in 1995.

This unit plan offers a study of how the political, historical, and religious cultures of the Renaissance allowed Shakespeare and Cervantes to produce timeless literature. Teaching strategies include the creation of literary maps that will illustrate the geographical and historical influences on the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes, and the historical elements that connect them.

Outline of curriculum:

1. Presentation of the political atmosphere in Europe, particularly of England and Spain
2. Personal histories: The Christian connection
  - Shakespeare: no real knowledge of his personal faith history; however, his parents were probably active in the Counter-Reformation, and his plays often note references to religion
  - Cervantes: again, uncertainty regarding his faith history, but debate remains regarding his background as an Old Christian or a New Christian.
3. Presentation on the history of England's and Spain's political history during the reign of Elizabeth I
4. Use of maps
  - Include examples of Renaissance maps of Europe
  - Include examples of Renaissance maps of Britain and Spain
  - Literary maps: Choose works from Cervantes and Shakespeare and guide students to create maps (drawing, painting, sketching) based on the settings described in the works. Creating literary maps helps students gain a sense of setting, which is essential in understanding the works of these writers.
5. Literary connections
  - Use of literary archetypes
  - Reliance on classical (Greek and Roman) tradition in literature

**Standards: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills*****§113.42. World History Studies***

(5) History. The student understands the causes, characteristics, and impact of the European Renaissance and the Reformation from 1450 to 1750. The student is expected to:

(A) explain the political, intellectual, artistic, economic, and religious impact of the Renaissance; and

(B) explain the political, intellectual, artistic, economic, and religious impact of the Reformation.

(15) Geography. The student uses geographic skills and tools to collect, analyze, and interpret data. The student is expected to:

(A) create and interpret thematic maps, graphs, and charts to demonstrate the relationship between geography and the historical development of a region or nation; and

(B) analyze and compare geographic distributions and patterns in world history shown on maps, graphs, charts, and models.

(16) Geography. The student understands the impact of geographic factors on major historic events and processes. The student is expected to:

(A) locate places and regions of historical significance directly related to major eras and turning points in world history;

(B) analyze the influence of human and physical geographic factors on major events in world history, including the development of river valley civilizations, trade in the Indian Ocean, and the opening of the Panama and Suez canals; and

(C) interpret maps, charts, and graphs to explain how geography has influenced people and events in the past.

***§110.34. English Language Arts and Reading, English IV***

(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) compare and contrast works of literature that express a universal theme;
- (B) compare and contrast the similarities and differences in classical plays with their modern day novel, play, or film versions; and
- (C) relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time.

(4) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to evaluate how the structure and elements of drama change in the works of British dramatists across literary periods.

(5) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) analyze how complex plot structures (e.g., subplots) and devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashbacks, suspense) function and advance the action in a work of fiction;
- (B) analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters;
- (C) compare and contrast the effects of different forms of narration across various genres of fiction; and
- (D) demonstrate familiarity with works of fiction by British authors from each major literary period.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose.

**Unit Content Objective:** Students will examine the parallel writing careers of Shakespeare and Cervantes, and research the effects of Renaissance political structure, particularly that of England and Spain, had on their works and on the development of modern European literature.

**Unit Language Objective:** Students will develop contextual political and literary vocabulary, and analyze how Shakespeare and Cervantes used their literary works as social and political criticism.

**Notes on Essential Questions:** The Essential Question for each week can be used in the following manner:

- Quick answers for "exit cards" (on index cards)
- Prompts for daily paragraph writing (with the incorporation of contextual vocabulary)
- Prompts for research and extended essays.

### **Introduction:**

**Scholars recognize the Renaissance as the dawn of the modern era of European History. In *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes* (2013), author Roland Greene outlines five major ideas that shaped this time: invention, language, resistance, blood, and world. According to Greene, these three themes set Europe on a path that has determined its history. During this plan students will understand the following:**

1. The Renaissance and contributing elements
  - role of the printing press in emerging *literature*
  - role of the printing press in emerging European *literacy*
  - re-emergence of Classical tradition
  - how to read/recreate geographical maps
  - how to read/recreate political maps
2. The role of religion during the Renaissance
  - effects of the Protestant Reformation
  - the competition for religious/political alliances
3. The antagonistic political relationship between England and Spain, and their positions as competing European powers
4. The antagonistic and competitive natures of England and Spain as world powers in exploration and Western settlement
5. Two major voices of the Renaissance: Cervantes and Shakespeare
  - Shakespeare (English poet and playwright)
    - ✓ effects of Reformation and Counter-Reformation
    - ✓ as media darling and courtier during reigns of Elizabeth I and James I
    - ✓ as social critic (the human condition, critic of politics)
    - ✓ success in England
    - ✓ legacy for 21st century readers
  - Cervantes (Spanish novelist: developing the modern novel)

- ✓ effects of Inquisition
- ✓ effects of social controversy (imprisonment)
- ✓ as social critic (romance as farce, critic of the Church)
- ✓ success in England and Europe
- ✓ legacy for 21st century readers
- Mutual Influence of literary style (for advanced students)
  - ✓ *The History of Cardenio*
    - possible collaboration between Shakespeare and other writers
    - based on a character from *Don Quixote*
  - ✓ UNESCO World Book Day

Readings (on-level students):

- Selections from *Don Quixote de la Mancha*
- Selections from *Henry VIII*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*
- *Macbeth (complete)*
- Individual readings as assigned through research

Readings (advanced students):

- *Don Quixote de la Mancha (complete)*
- *Macbeth (complete)*
- Selections from *Henry VIII*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*
- *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes*
- Selections from *The Power of Myth* (Joseph Campbell)
- Selections from individual readings as assigned through research

Video viewings include scenes from the following:

- *Elizabeth (1998)*
- *Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007)*
- *The Magic of Saffron and Cervantes (PBS video, 2008*  
*<http://video.pbs.org/video/1182527353/>)*
- Looking for Cervantes *<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/tag/miguel-de-cervantes/>*

Map interpretations, art, and readings available from online sources. Keywords include: Britain, Spain, Inquisition, papacy, Elizabeth I, James I, religion, Catholicism, Protestantism, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Elizabethan theatre, modern novel, Shakespeare, Cervantes.

## Lesson Plans

### Week 1: The Renaissance and the Printing Press

**Essential Question: How did the printing press revolutionize the literary traditions of Europe, particularly in light of the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes?**

1. What is the Renaissance?
  - Emerging from the Medieval Era
  - The Reformation and Counter-Reformation
  - Cultural Advancement or return to the Classical era
2. The Printing Press
  - Gutenberg Bible
  - Availability of mass printed/translated materials across Europe
  - Development of literacy in Europe
  - Most influential element of the Renaissance?

### Week 2: England and Spain during the Renaissance

**Essential Question: How did the relationships between Britain and Spain (political, geographical, and religious) create a breeding ground for the creative yet critical commentaries of Shakespeare and Cervantes regarding the culture of their times?**

1. Humanist Movement: from religious to the secular
  - philosophical awareness of self
2. Re-adoption and re-integration of the Classical (Greek and Roman) tradition
3. Colonization interests beyond Europe, particularly the west (Americas)
4. The Anglo-Spanish War Era (1585-1604)
  - Causes:
    - Religious argument (Spain's resistance of the growing Protestant movement)
    - ✓ Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots as a possible catalyst to war.
    - ✓ England and Spain supporting opposing French factions
    - ✓ Political struggle over Portugal

- ✓ Spain's support of Irish rebellion
- ✓ England's support of Dutch rebellion against Spain
- Competition for world exploration
- ✓ Issues/conflict with Caribbean settlements
- ✓ Issues/conflict with Mexico settlement

#### Activity

1. Read/create political maps of Europe as described above
2. Read/create maps of settlements across the Atlantic

### **Week 3: Cervantes and Shakespeare: Literary Rebels?**

**Essential Questions: How Shakespeare and Cervantes utilize literary commentary to criticize the Church's political power in their countries? What were the ramifications for these writers and for the current culture?**

Both writers flouted the political conventions of the times:

1. Shakespeare (English poet and playwright)
  - Effects of Reformation and Counter-Reformation
  - As literary darling and courtier during reigns of Elizabeth I and James I
  - As social critic (the human condition, critic of politics)
  - Success in England
2. Cervantes (Spanish novelist: developing the modern European novel)
  - Effects of Inquisition
  - Effects of social controversy (imprisonment)
  - Success in international translation.

#### Activity:

Selections from *Don Quixote de la Mancha*

Selections from *Macbeth, King Lear, Henry VIII*

Map activity: Students will select a scene each from Cervantes and Shakespeare, and map/recreate a scene (through drawing). As they recreate/map the scene, they will identify items and characters, then develop a vocabulary list from which they will draw to write a plot summary or alternative scenario.

### **Week 4: Focus on Renaissance Literature**

**Essential Question: Why do the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes represent the iconic examples of the modern play and the modern novel?**

1. Shakespeare and Literature

- Classical themes
  - ✓ Universals and particulars
  - ✓ Archetypes
    - Literary
    - Gender (Jungian\*)(*\*Jungian is an anachronistic term*)
- Focus on plays and structure
  - ✓ Comedy and tragedy
  - ✓ Language structure (rhyme and prose)
  - ✓ Play/drama devices
  - ✓ Strong dependence on biblical allusions

2. Cervantes and Literature

- Development of the modern novel:
  - ✓ Multiple characters
  - ✓ Literary archetypes
  - ✓ Gender (Jungian\*) archetypes (*\*Jungian is an anachronistic term*)
  - ✓ Sophisticated plot structure
  - ✓ Sophisticated character development
- Literature as criticism
  - ✓ Don Quixote as romantic farce
  - ✓ Don Quixote as social and political criticism of Spanish rule
- Literary legacies
  - ✓ Storytelling standards in modern media
  - ✓ UNESCO International Book Day (April 23)

Activity: Students will select a scene each from Shakespeare and Cervantes and identify/explain at least three literary and gender archetypes

Students will have completed selected readings.

**Week 5: A confluence of writing: A Cervantes/Shakespeare collaboration?**

**Essential Questions: Is there enough evidence to consider a confluence of the parallel careers of Cervantes and Shakespeare?**

(for advanced students)

1. *The History of Cardenio* and unfinished/lost work

- Possible collaboration between Shakespeare and other writers based on a character from *Don Quixote*
- Did these contemporaries influence each other?

**Unit Vocabulary:**

Renaissance	Classical	literacy
Gutenberg	universals	Elizabethan
Reformation	particulars	Jacobian
Counter-Reformation	comedy	histories
New Christian	tragedy	vernacular
Old Christian	novel	iambic pentameter
Reformation	plot	episodic
courtier	allusion	picaresque
literary archetypes	farce	farce
gender archetypes	allegory	chivalry
humanism		
secular		