



SHELL  
EDUCATION

Leveled Texts  
for  
Classic Fiction

# Shakespeare



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## ***Shell Education***

5301 Oceanus Drive

Huntington Beach, CA 92649

<http://www.shelleducation.com>

**ISBN 978-1-4258-0982-9**

**e-PUB ISBN 978-1-5457-1488-1**

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# What Is Fiction?

Fiction is the work of imaginative narration. In other words, it is something that is made, as opposed to something that has happened or something that is discovered. It helps bring our imaginations to life, since it offers an escape into a world where everything happens for a reason—nothing is by chance. Fiction includes three main elements: plot (sequence), character, and setting (place).

Each event occurs in a logical order, and somehow, the conflict is resolved. Fiction promises a resolution in the end, and so the reader waits for resolution as the characters change, grow, and survive experiences. We are drawn to fiction because it is very close to the story of our lives. Fiction suggests that our own stories will have meaning and a resolution in the end. Perhaps that might be the reason why we love fiction—it delivers what it promises.

Fiction compels its readers to care about the characters whether they are loyal friends or conniving enemies. Readers dream about the characters and mourn their heartaches. Readers might feel that they know a fictional character's story intimately because he or she reminds them of a friend or family member. Additionally, the place described in the story might feel like a real place the reader has visited or would like to visit.

## Fiction vs. Nonfiction

Fiction is literature that stems from the imagination and includes genres such as mystery, adventure, fairy tales, and fantasy. Fiction can include facts, but the story is not true in its entirety. Facts are often exaggerated or manipulated to suit an author's intent for the story. Realistic fiction uses plausible characters and storylines, but the people do not really exist and/or the events narrated did not ever really take place. In addition, fiction is descriptive, elaborate, and designed to entertain. It allows readers to make their own interpretations based on the text.

Nonfiction includes a wide variety of writing styles that deal exclusively with real events, people, places, and things such as biographies, cookbooks, historical records, and scientific reports. Nonfiction is literature based on facts or perceived facts. In literature form, nonfiction deals with events that have actually taken place and relies on existing facts. Nonfiction writing is entirely fact-based. It states only enough to establish a fact or idea and is meant to be informative. Nonfiction is typically direct, clear, and simple in its message. Despite the differences, both fiction and

nonfiction have a benefit and purpose for all readers.

# The Importance of Using Fiction

Reading fiction has many benefits: It stimulates the imagination, promotes creative thinking, increases vocabulary, and improves writing skills. However, “students often hold negative attitudes about reading because of dull textbooks or being forced to read” (Bean 2000).

Fiction books can stimulate imagination. It is easy to get carried away with the character Percy Jackson as he battles the gods in *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan 2005). Readers can visualize what the author depicts. Researcher Keith Oatley (2009) states that fiction allows individuals to stimulate the minds of others in a sense of expanding on how characters might be feeling and what they might be thinking. When one reads fiction, one cannot help but visualize the nonexistent characters and places of the story. Lisa Zunshine (2006) has emphasized that fiction allows readers to engage in a theory-of-mind ability that helps them practice what the characters experience.

Since the work of fiction is indirect, it requires analysis if one is to get beyond the surface of the story. On the surface, one can view *Moby Dick* (Melville 1851) as an adventure story about a man hunting a whale. On closer examination and interpretation, the novel might be seen as a portrayal of good and evil. When a reader examines, interprets, and analyzes a work of fiction, he or she is promoting creative thinking. Creativity is a priceless commodity, as it facilitates problem solving, inventions, and creations of all kinds, and promotes personal satisfaction as well.

Reading fiction also helps readers build their vocabularies. Readers cannot help but learn a myriad of new words in Lemony Snicket’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999). Word knowledge and reading comprehension go hand in hand. In fact, “vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of reading achievement” (Richek 2005). Further, “vocabulary knowledge promotes reading fluency, boosts reading comprehension, improves academic achievement, and enhances thinking and communication” (Bromley 2004). Most researchers believe that students have the ability to add between 2,000 to 3,000 new words each school year, and by fifth grade, that number can be as high as 10,000 new words in their reading alone (Nagy and Anderson 1984). By exposing students to a variety of reading selections, educators can encourage students to promote the vocabulary growth that they need to be successful.

Finally, reading fictional text has a strong impact on students’ ability as

writers. According to Gay Su Pinnell (1988), “As children read and write, they make the connections that form their basic understandings about both.... There is ample evidence to suggest that the processes are inseparable and that teachers should examine pedagogy in the light of these interrelationships.” Many of the elements students encounter while reading fiction can transition into their writing abilities.

### Text Complexity

Text complexity refers to reading and comprehending various texts with increasing complexity as students progress through school and within their reading development. The Common Core State Standards (2010) state that “by the time they [students] complete the core, students must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and careers.” In other words, by the time students complete high school, they must be able to read and comprehend highly complex texts, so students must consistently increase the level of complexity tackled at each grade level. Text complexity relies on the following combination of quantitative and qualitative factors:

| Quantitative Factors                       |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Word Frequency</b>                      | This is how often a particular word appears in the text. If an unfamiliar high-frequency word appears in a text, chances are the student will have a difficult time understanding the meaning of the text.          |
| <b>Sentence Length</b>                     | Long sentences and sentences with embedded clauses require a lot from a young reader.   |
| <b>Word Length</b>                         | This is the number of syllables in a word. Longer words are not by definition hard to read, but certainly can be for young readers.   |
| <b>Text Length</b>                         | This refers to the number of words within the text passage.   |
| <b>Text Cohesion</b>                       | This is the overall structure of the text. A high-cohesion text guides readers by signaling relationships among sentences through repetition and concrete language. A low-cohesion text does not have such support. |
| <b>Level of Meaning or Purpose of Text</b> | This refers to the objective and/or purpose for reading.  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Structure</b>                       | Texts that display low complexity are known for their simple structure. Texts that display high complexity are known for disruptions to predictable understandings.  |
| <b>Language Convention and Clarity</b> | Texts that deviate from contemporary use of English tend to be more challenging to interpret.  |
| <b>Knowledge Demands</b>               | This refers to the background knowledge students are expected to have prior to reading a text. Texts that require students to possess a certain amount of previous knowledge are more complex than those that assume students have no prior knowledge. |

(Adapted from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers 2010)

The use of qualitative and quantitative measures to assess text complexity is demonstrated in the expectation that educators possess the ability to match the appropriate texts to the appropriate students. The passages in *Leveled Texts for Classic Fiction: Shakespeare* vary in text complexity and will provide leveled versions of classic complex texts so that educators can scaffold students' comprehension of these texts. Educators can choose passages for students to read based on the reading level as well as the qualitative and quantitative complexity factors in order to find texts that are "just right" instructionally.

### Genres of Fiction

There are many different fiction genres. The *Leveled Texts for Classic Fiction* series focuses on the following genres: adventure, fantasy and science fiction, mystery, historical fiction, mythology, humor, and Shakespeare.

**Adventure** stories transport readers to exotic places like deserted islands, treacherous mountains, and the high seas. This genre is dominated by fast-paced action. The plot often focuses on a hero's quest and features a posse that helps him or her achieve the goal. The story confronts the protagonist with events that disrupt his or her normal life and puts the character in danger. The story involves exploring and conquering the unknown accompanied by much physical action, excitement, and risk. The experience changes the protagonist in many ways.

**Fantasy and science fiction** are closely related. Fantasy, like adventure, involves quests or journeys that the hero must undertake. Within fantasy,

magic and the supernatural are central and are used to suggest universal truths. Events happen outside the laws that govern our universe. Science fiction also operates outside of the laws of physics but typically takes place in the future, space, another world, or an alternate dimension. Technology plays a strong role in this genre. Both science fiction and fantasy open up possibilities (such as living in outer space and talking to animals) because the boundaries of the real world cannot confine the story. Ideas are often expressed using symbols.

**Mystery** contains intriguing characters with suspenseful plots and can often feel very realistic. The story revolves around a problem or puzzle to solve: *Who did it? What is it? How did it happen?* Something is unknown, or a crime needs to be solved. Authors give readers clues to the solution in a mystery, but they also distract the reader by intentionally misleading them.

**Historical fiction** focuses on a time period from the past with the intent of offering insight into what it was like to live during that time. This genre incorporates historical research into the stories to make them feel believable. However, much of the story is fictionalized, whether it is conversations or characters. Often, these stories reveal that concerns from the past are still concerns. Historical fiction centers on historical events, periods, or figures.

**Myths** are collections of sacred stories from ancient societies. Myths are ways to explain questions about the creation of the world, the gods, and human life. For example, mythological stories often explain why natural events like storms or floods occur or how the world and living things came to be in existence. Myths can be filled with adventures conflict, between humans, and gods with extraordinary powers. These gods possess emotions and personality traits that are similar to humans.

**Humor** can include parody, joke books, spoofs, and twisted tales, among others. Humorous stories are written with the intent of being light-hearted and fun in order to make people laugh and to entertain. Often, these stories are written with satire and dry wit. Humorous stories also can have a very serious or dark side, but the ways in which the characters react and handle the situations make them humorous.

**Shakespeare's plays** can be classified in three genres: comedy, tragedy, and history. Shakespeare wrote his plays during the late 1500s and early 1600s, and performed many of them in the famous Globe Theater in London, England. Within each play is not just one coherent story but also a set of two or three stories that can be described as "plays within a play." His plays offer multiple perspectives and contradictions to make the stories

rich and interesting. Shakespeare is noted for his ability to bring thoughts to life. He used his imagination to adapt stories, history, and other plays to entertain his audiences.

# Elements of Fiction

The many common characteristics found throughout fiction are known as the elements of fiction. Among such elements are *point of view*, *character*, *setting*, and *plot*. *Leveled Texts for Classic Fiction* concentrates on setting, plot, and character, with an emphasis on language usage.

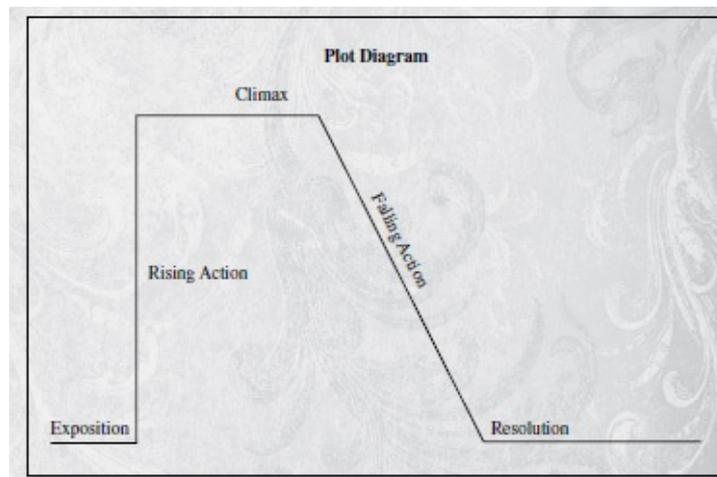
**Language usage** typically refers to the rules for making language. This series includes the following elements: *personification*, *hyperbole*, *alliteration*, *onomatopoeia*, *imagery*, *symbolism*, *metaphor*, and *word choice*. The table below provides a brief description of each.

| Language Usage  | Definition  | Example   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Personification | Giving human traits to nonhuman things                              | The chair moaned when she sat down on it.   |
| Hyperbole       | Extreme exaggeration  | He was so hungry, he could eat a horse.   |
| Alliteration    | Repetition of the beginning consonant sounds                        | She sold seashells by the seashore.   |
| Onomatopoeia    | Forming a word from the sound it makes                              | Knock-knock, woof, bang, sizzle, hiss   |
| Imagery         | Language that creates a meaningful visual experience for the reader | His socks filled the room with a smell similar to a wet dog on a hot day.                                     |
| Symbolism       | Using objects to represent something else                           | A heart represents <i>love</i> .  |
| Metaphor        | Comparison of two unrelated things                                  | My father is the rock of our family.  |
|                 | Words that an author uses to make the story                         | In chapter two of <i>Holes</i> by Louis Sachar (2000), the author directly addresses the reader, saying, “The |

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
| Word Choice | memorable and to capture the reader's attention | reader is probably asking...." The author predicts what the reader is wondering. |
|-------------|---|--|

**Setting** is the *where* and *when* of a story's action. Understanding setting is important to the interpretation of the story. The setting takes readers to other times and places. Setting plays a large part in what makes a story enjoyable for the reader.

**Plot** forms the core of what the story is about and establishes the chain of events that unfolds in the story. Plot contains a character's motivation and the subsequent cause and effect of the character's actions. A plot diagram is an organizational tool that focuses on mapping out the events in a story. By mapping out the plot structure, students are able to visualize the key features of a story. The following is an example of a plot diagram:



**Characters** are the people in the story. The protagonist is the main or leading character. He or she might be the narrator of the story. The antagonist is the force or character that acts against the protagonist. This antagonist is not always a person; it could be things such as weather, technology, or even a vehicle. Both the protagonist and antagonist can be considered dynamic, which means that they change or grow during the story as opposed to remaining static, or unchanging, characters. Readers engage with the text as they try to understand what motivates the characters to think and act as they do. Desires, values, and outside pressures all motivate characters' actions and help to determine the story's outcome.

# A Closer Look at Shakespeare

In Shakespeare's time, plays were acted for both the upper class and nobles as well as the lower class and illiterate citizens. Shakespeare's plays can be classified in three genres: tragedy, history, and comedy. Tragedy deals with great suffering and distraction and usually ends with the death of the main character. Shakespeare's history plays are based on the lives of English Kings. Comedy is a play intended to make the audience laugh, results in marriage, and the protagonist usually ends up better than he started out.

This book includes the following titles:

- *Twelfth Night*—Act I, Scene II
- *Julius Caesar*—Act I, Scene I
- *The Tempest*—Act I, Scene I
- *Henry V*—Act IV, Scene III
- *Othello*—Act I, Scene III
- *Richard III*—Act I, Scene I
- *Winter's Tale*—Act II, Scene II
- *Hamlet*—Act IV, Scene VII
- *King Lear*—Act I, Scene I
- *Macbeth*—Act I, Scene VII
- *Much Ado About Nothing*—Act II, Scene III
- *The Merchant of Venice*—Act V, Scene I
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—Act II, Scene I
- *Romeo and Juliet*—Act II, Scene II
- *The Taming of the Shrew*—Act II, Scene I

The table below characterizes the passages by element. However, all of the selected passages *can* present multiple elements.

| Element of Fiction | Passage Title |
|--------------------|---------------|
|                    |               |

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>Setting</b></p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Twelfth Night</i>—Act I, Scene II</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Julius Caesar</i>—Act I, Scene I</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>The Tempest</i>—Act I, Scene I</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Character</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Henry V</i>—Act IV, Scene III</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Othello</i>—Act I, Scene III</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Richard III</i>—Act I, Scene I</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Winter’s Tale</i>—Act II, Scene II</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Plot</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Hamlet</i>—Act IV, Scene VII</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>King Lear</i>—Act I, Scene I</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Macbeth</i>—Act I, Scene VII</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>—Act II, Scene III</li> </ul>                                       |
| <p><b>Language Usage</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>—Act V, Scene I</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>—Act II, Scene 1</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>—Act II, Scene II</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>—Act II, Scene I</li> </ul> |

# Leveled Texts to Differentiate Instruction

Today's classrooms contain diverse pools of learners. Above-level, on-level, below-level, and English language learners all come together to learn from one teacher in one classroom. The teacher is expected to meet their diverse needs. These students have different learning styles, come from different cultures, experience a variety of emotions, and have varied interests. And, they differ in academic readiness when it comes to reading. At times, the challenges teachers face can be overwhelming as they struggle to create learning environments that address the differences in their students while at the same time ensure that all students master the required grade-level objectives.

What is differentiation? Tomlinson and Imbau say, "Differentiation is simply a teacher attending to the learning needs of a particular student or small group of students, rather than teaching a class as though all individuals in it were basically alike" (2010). Any teacher who keeps learners at the forefront of his or her instruction can successfully provide differentiation. The effective teacher asks, "What am I going to do to shape instruction to meet the needs of all my learners?" One method or methodology will not reach all students.

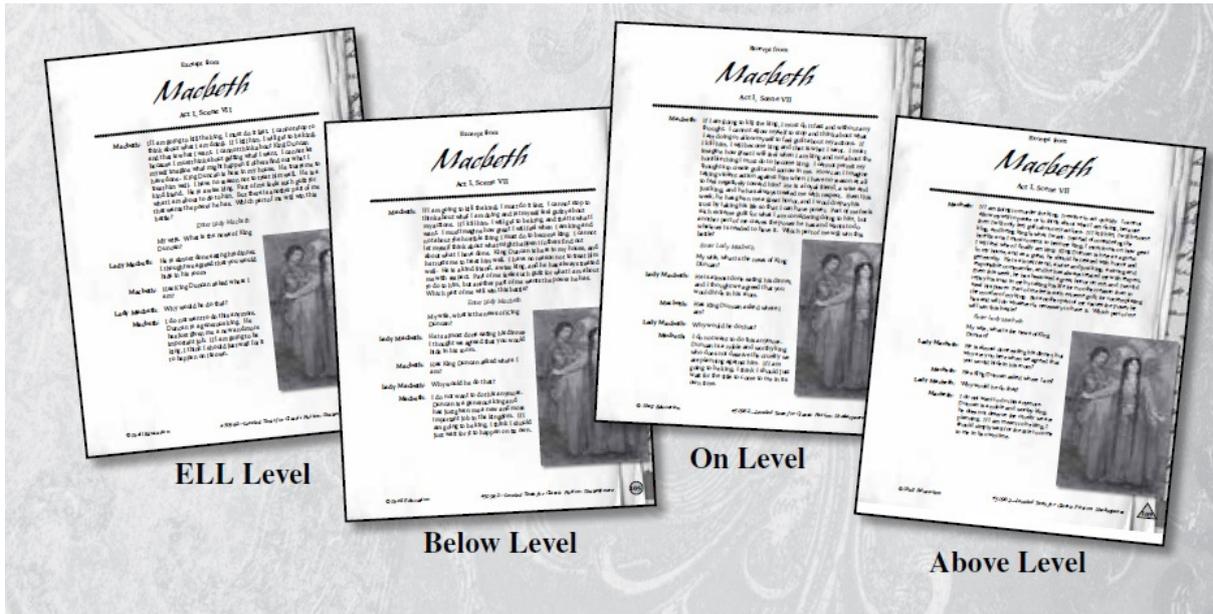
Differentiation includes what is taught, how it is taught, and the products students create to show what they have learned. When differentiating curriculum, teachers become organizers of learning opportunities within the classroom environment. These opportunities are often referred to as *content*, *process*, and *product*.

- **Content:** Differentiating the content means to put more depth into the curriculum through organizing the curriculum concepts and structure of knowledge.
- **Process:** Differentiating the process requires using varied instructional techniques and materials to enhance student learning.
- **Product:** Cognitive development and students' abilities to express themselves improves when products are differentiated.

Teachers should differentiate by content, process, and product according to students' differences. These differences include student *readiness*, *learning styles*, and *interests*.

- **Readiness:** If a learning experience aligns closely with students’ previous skills and understanding of a topic, they will learn better.
- **Learning styles:** Teachers should create assignments that allow students to complete work according to their personal preferences and styles.
- **Interests:** If a topic sparks excitement in the learners, then students will become involved in learning and better remember what is taught.

Typically, reading teachers select different novels or texts that are leveled for their classrooms because only one book may either be too difficult or too easy for a particular group of students. One group of students will read one novel while another group reads another, and so on. What makes *Leveled Texts for Classic Fiction: Shakespeare* unique is that all students, regardless of reading level, can read the same selection from a story and can participate in whole-class discussions about it. This is possible because each selection is leveled at four different reading levels to accommodate students’ reading abilities. Regardless of the reading level, all of the selections present the same content. Teachers can then focus on the same content standard or objective for the whole class, but individual students can access the content at their particular instructional levels rather than their frustration level and avoid the frustration of a selection at too high or low a level.



Teachers should use the texts in this series to scaffold the content for their

students. At the beginning of the year, students at the lowest reading levels may need focused teacher guidance. As the year progresses, teachers can begin giving students multiple levels of the same text to allow them to work independently at improving their comprehension. This means that each student will have a copy of the text at his or her independent reading level and at the instructional reading level. As students read the instructional-level texts, they can use the lower-leveled texts to better understand difficult vocabulary. By scaffolding the content in this way, teachers can support students as they move up through the reading levels and encourage them to work with texts that are closer to the grade level at which they will be tested.

A teacher does not need to draw attention to the fact that the texts are leveled. Nor should they hide it. Teachers who want students to read the text together can use homogeneous groups and distribute the texts after students join the groups. Or, teachers can distribute copies of the appropriate level to each student by copying the pages and separating them by each level.

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