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#shakespeareforkids

Sex, murder and criminal intentions. Suicidal depression and ravenous desire for power. Slavery, abuse, bestiality, racism, vengeance, bloody warfare and betrayal. As he wrote them, Shakespeare's plays should come with an "R" rating. English-speaking teens, both engaged and confused, sit at desks and unravel the poetry to get at the meat of the Bard's humour, violence and social commentary. However, exposure to the Shakespearean omnibus doesn't have to be age-exclusive. With some creativity, a touch of the adorable, and the right resources, Shakespeare's tales can be made accessible to a much younger audience. The plays can form the foundation of a language program for those who love a good story. There is no better place to find the necessary resources than in a library, and no better place to find those story-lovers than in an elementary school.

Lois Burdett is an elementary teacher in Stratford, Ontario. In that pre-hashtagged, blogged-out educational era called the 90s, she came up with a formula for introducing the magic of Shakespeare to students as young as seven: She began to rewrite some of the plays in rhyming couplets, weaving some of the original lines (often the really famous ones) into the structure of modern language. Through Macbeth's murderous undoing, Viola's disguised quest for love, Hamlet's despondent vengeance, Juliet's pure innocence and Prospero's path to forgiveness, Burdett's students developed their literacy skills and became excited about these characters dreamed up 400 years ago. The series, *Shakespeare Can Be Fun*, includes eight books - A Child's Portrait of Shakespeare followed by seven plays (*Hamlet for Kids*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream for Kids*, *Macbeth for Kids*, *Romeo and Juliet for Kids*, *The Tempest for Kids*, *Twelfth Night for Kids* and *Much Ado About Nothing for Kids*). Surrounding the theatrical text of each book are the often hilarious and always delightful illustrations by Burdett's students, as well as reflective excerpts from their writing such as summaries, opinions and journals describing the innermost thoughts and motivations of the characters. These books are a goldmine of teaching tools and even include suggestions for extensions and cross-curricular activities. The 800s shelf in your library needs them.

Fast-forward to the year 2015, a digital age in which books are still beloved but technology is a force to be reckoned with. Burdett is in the final stages of developing a digital literacy curriculum for *A Midsummer Night's Dream for Kids*, the first in a series that will include all of the *Shakespeare Can Be Fun* books. She describes the curriculum as a balanced literacy program designed to be implemented over the course of a full term, targeting students in grades 3-6 (though its open-ended nature would make it appropriate for even older students). Divided into two types of lessons that can be accessed digitally, the program includes teacher guides, anchor charts, prewriting models, blackline masters, assessment templates and active learning cards for role-play and cooperative experiences. The "Exploring the Text" lessons guide students through Burdett's narrative, revealing only a little of the plot each day to keep them wanting more (Burdett says that in testing the lessons, students have been so desperate to keep reading that they ask to miss recess). The "Quoting the Bard" lessons highlight passages from Shakespeare's original play. Both types of lessons develop students' writing skills through a study of form, function and focus (Burdett gives the example of writing a "friendly letter" with the function "to persuade" and a focus on "word choice"). Years of work on Burdett's part are making it easier than ever for teachers, in particular teacher-librarians, to make Shakespeare come alive for today's screen-loving iKids.

In 21st-century classrooms, teachers can place the text under a document camera for shared reading. They can scan the pages and put them online for guided or independent reading. They can create audio or video recordings of the plays for a flipped classroom. They can create whole cross-curricular units of study integrating language, social studies, arts and math with a comedy or tragedy at their core. Resources and a teacher-librarian combine naturally to inspire learning. Students don't have to learn Shakespeare behind a library's walls, but shouldn't they be able to discover him there? The school librarian of the past would have been responsible for stocking Burdett's series; for the teacher-librarian of today, the books are just the first step. In