

Dear Educator,

There's little debate that William Shakespeare is one of the world's greatest poets and playwrights. But who is William Shakespeare?

The answer to that question is the starting point for *Anonymous*, Sony Pictures' exciting new historical thriller directed by Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*) and starring Rhys Ifans and Vanessa Redgrave, which arrives in theaters on October 28, 2011.

Anonymous takes us back to a time when plays and politics were intertwined, and when uncovered secrets reveal how the works we attribute to William Shakespeare may have actually been written by Queen Elizabeth I's one-time favorite, Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford.

Your students can explore this theory, and gain a fresh perspective on Shakespeare and his times, with this free educational program from Sony Pictures and the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI). The program includes easy-to-implement activities for English literature, theater, and British history classes. Students will investigate the true identity of William Shakespeare, and discover how power struggles surrounding Queen Elizabeth and the political strife of 16th-century England impacted the players and playwrights of that Golden Age.

We encourage you to share this program with other teachers in your school. Although these materials are protected by copyright, you may make as many copies as you need for your classes. **Please complete and return the reply card to let us know your opinion of the program.** We depend on your feedback to continue providing free educational programs that make a real difference in students' lives.

Sincerely,



Dr. Dominic Kinsley
Editor in Chief
Young Minds Inspired

ANONYMOUS

TARGET AUDIENCE

This program is designed for students in English literature, theater, and British history classes.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- To encourage critical thinking by challenging students to examine the theories about the authorship of Shakespeare's works and to formulate their own opinions.
- To strengthen students' communication skills through classroom discussion and debate.
- To engage students in creative writing exercises.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- This one-page teacher's guide
- Three reproducible activity masters
- A classroom wall poster

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

Photocopy this teacher's guide and the program's activity masters before putting the wall poster on display. Make a master copy of these materials to share with other teachers in your school. Each activity is designed for one class period, with additional research, writing, and follow-up lessons. Read the film synopsis aloud prior to beginning the activities. It is not necessary to see the film to complete the activities.

NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

For a list of standards that the student activities meet, please go to www.ymiclassroom.com/AnonymousStandards.pdf.

FILM SYNOPSIS

Set in the political snake-pit of Elizabethan England, *Anonymous* (Rated TK) speculates on an issue that has for centuries intrigued academics and brilliant minds ranging from Mark Twain and Charles Dickens to Henry James and Sigmund Freud, namely, was William Shakespeare the author of all the plays for which he is given credit? Experts have debated, books have been written, and scholars have devoted their lives to protecting or debunking theories surrounding the authorship of these most renowned works in English literature. *Anonymous* poses one possible answer, focusing on a time when cloak-and-dagger political intrigue, illicit romances in the Royal Court, and the schemes of greedy nobles hungry for the power of the throne were exposed in the most unlikely of places—the London stage.

ACTIVITY 1 MISTAKEN IDENTITY?

In this activity, students are introduced to the ongoing debate about the authorship of William

Shakespeare's works. Part A contains questions for class discussion. In Part B, students research additional information about the proposed theories and reflect upon Shakespearean works studied in class. Students should write an opinion piece about who they believe is the real author of Shakespeare's plays, or engage in a class debate on the topic.

Follow-Up Activity: Discuss how (or if) knowing the identity of the author influences our appreciation of the plays.

ACTIVITY 2 THE SOUL OF THE AGE

In Part A, students debate whether they think Edward de Vere could be the author we call "Shakespeare" and the issue of anonymity. In Part B, students present their opinions by writing a soliloquy for de Vere, either defending him and his anonymity, or denying that he is the author.

Follow-Up Activity: After students have seen *Anonymous*, explore how the life of a courtier like de Vere is reflected in Shakespeare's plays. To what extent do characters like Hamlet and Henry V seem to speak from within the world of royalty or from an outsider's perspectives?

ACTIVITY 3 A KINGDOM FOR A STAGE

The London theater of the late 1500s is the focus of this activity, which includes pre- and post-film viewing exercises. Before seeing the film *Anonymous*, complete Part A by discussing the elements of a Shakespearean tragedy. Use plays you've read in class as reference. Point out that a protagonist may have a tragic flaw which causes the character to make errors and contributes to his or her destruction or demise. The character may recognize the errors late in the plot, prompting the audience to feel pity or sympathize.

After seeing the film, have students complete Part B and assess how the plot of the film mirrored a Shakespearean tragedy and what role theater played in the drama.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Anonymous—www.anonymous-movie.com
Young Minds Inspired—www.ymiclassroom.com
Declaration of Reasonable Doubt—www.DoubtAboutWill.org
For a complete list of references, go to www.ymiclassroom.com/AnonymousReferences.pdf



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ACTIVITY 1

MISTAKEN IDENTITY?

Can a man of limited education who evidently never traveled beyond his native country flourish as a prolific and talented poet and playwright? Theorists who doubt that William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon authored at least 37 plays and 154 sonnets would say, “No.” And that is the answer explored in the new historical thriller, *Anonymous*, directed by Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*) and starring Rhys Ifans and Vanessa Redgrave, which arrives in theaters on October 28, 2011.

Anonymous brings Elizabethan England to life as an era filled with political intrigue, illicit affairs, backstabbing, and espionage—the perfect setting for a subterfuge that may have led to William Shakespeare taking credit for a series of masterpieces that were actually penned by a far more sophisticated author. After all, what do we really know about this man named Shakespeare?

THE UPSTART CROW

Here’s what the historical records have to tell us:

- William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 to John Shakespeare, a glove maker, wool merchant, and town alderman, and his wife, Mary Arden, the daughter of a local landowner.
- We know that boys like Shakespeare usually attended grammar school in Stratford, where they studied Latin, literature, and rhetoric. There is no reason to believe that Shakespeare ever attended a university.
- In 1582, at the age of 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, age 26.
- The first evidence that Shakespeare was involved in the theater comes in 1592, when the playwright Robert Greene accused him of plagiarism.
- By the late 1590s, Shakespeare is named as a member of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, an acting troupe later known as The King’s Men. He became part owner of the Globe Theatre when it opened in 1599, and a shareholder in the Blackfriars Theatre in 1608.
- Shakespeare made his first appearance as an author on the title page of *Venus and Adonis*, a long, erotic poem published in 1593, but the first play to carry his name was not published until 1598. Thereafter, records indicate that he produced approximately two plays a year until 1611.
- William Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1616. His partners in The King’s Men published a collected edition of his plays in 1623.

REASONABLE DOUBT

Skeptics accept all these facts, but they find it impossible to believe that a mere grammar school graduate could have written the plays and poems attributed to Shakespeare. Wouldn’t it make more sense, they ask, to suppose that William Shakespeare was only the stand-in for a better educated author?



For example:

- **Sir Francis Bacon**—A Cambridge-educated philosopher, statesman, and scientist, Bacon was a member of Parliament under Queen Elizabeth, and Lord Chancellor under King James I. His writings are echoed in several of Shakespeare’s plays, and some have even found his name encoded in Shakespeare’s verse.
- **Christopher Marlowe**—The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe graduated from Cambridge in 1587, the same year that his play *Tamburlaine* revolutionized English drama. He was reportedly murdered in 1593 while awaiting trial on charges of heresy, but some suspect that Marlowe actually fled England and passed his plays on to William Shakespeare.
- **Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford**—One of England’s highest ranking noblemen and the son-in-law of William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth’s chief advisor, de Vere had received honorary degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford by the age of 16. His talent for poetry and drama were highly praised, but none of his plays has ever been found, unless, they are the plays we attribute to Shakespeare.

PART A: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Are Shakespeare’s plays the work of a highly educated writer with firsthand experience of aristocracy? Or could they be the work of an author with exceptional creative talent and observational skills who borrowed from learned books to enhance his own writing? Divide your class into two teams, the Upstart Crows and the Reasonable Doubters, to weigh the question: Was William Shakespeare really an improbable genius, or just a front man for someone with real ability?

PART B: WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Use the information on this sheet to research the theory that William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon was not the author of the “Shakespeare” plays. Then write a persuasive essay supporting your position.

UNCOVER THE TRUE GENIUS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.
SEE *ANONYMOUS*—IN THEATERS OCTOBER 28, 2011.

ACTIVITY 2

THE SOUL OF THE AGE

Among all those suspected of being the true author of Shakespeare's plays, the most plausible candidate may be Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. Since 1920, his supporters have gathered evidence to support their claim that he was the secret genius behind Shakespeare's reputation. Now, that evidence comes to life in the new film *Anonymous*, directed by Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*) and starring Rhys Ifans and Vanessa Redgrave, which arrives in theaters on October 28, 2011.

Anonymous unfolds the life of Edward de Vere, tracing his complicated relationship with Queen Elizabeth and her chief advisor, William Cecil, to show how politics and a poetic personality may have entangled de Vere in a situation that brought unexpected fame to an ambitious actor and brought down his own hopes to preserve the British throne. But in the end, we are left wondering: Was Edward de Vere really an invisible giant of his times, or is he only a figment of our imagination?

ENTER EDWARD DE VERE

History tells us that de Vere had all the qualifications to become a world-class author. Born in 1550, he was tutored at home until age 12, when his father died and he was sent to live with William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's chief advisor. Cecil provided him with private tutors in languages, literature, law, music, and the sciences, and by age 16, de Vere had received honorary degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford. At age 21, he took his seat in the House of Lords and married Cecil's daughter, Anne—a promising start for a career in politics.

After a tour through Europe, de Vere returned to England and became a fixture at Elizabeth's Court, a patron to poets and scholars, and the sponsor to a company of actors, even taking a lease on the Blackfriars Theater in London. He was also a poet. In 1586, a book called *Discourse of English Poetry* declared him the "most excellent" poet at court, and in 1589, a book called *The Art of English Poesie* ranked him first among all poets and named him one of the best playwrights for comedy.

Despite his reputation, little of de Vere's poetry and none of his plays exist today, which is one reason why some suspect he may have concealed his genius with the help of William Shakespeare. There is, however, one problem with this theory: Edward de Vere died in 1604, long before plays like *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest* ever appeared on stage.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Setting that problem aside, why would de Vere want to conceal his identity if he really were the author of Shakespeare's plays? His modern-day supporters answer, "For his own safety."

- As a member of the Queen's inner circle, it would be prudent for de Vere to remain anonymous when writing

history plays about her predecessors on the throne, especially during a time when Elizabeth's spies were on the lookout for any hint of a plot against her.

- Likewise, if a character in one of his comedies resembled a member of the Court, anonymity would protect de Vere from blame and possible retaliation.
- Most importantly, in tragedy, which explores the frailty and failures of mighty princes, remaining anonymous would shield de Vere from accusations that he was exposing flaws in Elizabeth herself and save him from execution for treason.

In short, the politics of the time would have made it almost impossible for de Vere to acknowledge his authorship of "Shakespeare's" plays. He would have needed a stand-in, and so perhaps, as occurs in the new film *Anonymous*, he secretly passed his plays along to an up-and-coming actor named William Shakespeare, who kept the secret and the fame.



PART A: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Based on this short sketch of Edward de Vere and your knowledge of Shakespeare's plays, what are the arguments pro and con that de Vere was the true author of the plays? Compare ideas, weigh the evidence, and come to a consensus. Then imagine that de Vere really was the true author. Should he have remained anonymous? Should Shakespeare have taken credit for his plays?

PART B: WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Voice your opinion about the authorship debate in true Shakespearean style—write a soliloquy for de Vere that reveals whether or not he was the real genius behind Shakespeare's plays.

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ACTIVITY 3

A KINGDOM FOR A STAGE

The Elizabethan playhouse was a gathering place for entertainment, information, and social interaction. The first playhouse, called the Theatre, opened in 1576, and before long there were more than a dozen, including Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, which opened in 1599. Each playhouse had its own company of actors, who often performed a different play every day of the week, except Sundays, drawing upwards of 3,000 audience members to each show.

This power to draw a crowd made the playhouses seem a potential source of trouble to Queen Elizabeth and her ministers, and beginning in 1582, all plays had to be approved by the Court before they could be performed. Plays that portrayed the monarchy in a positive light were acceptable, but anything that seemed to question royal authority was not, and many playwrights found themselves charged with sedition for an inappropriate joke or unflattering episode from history, including Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare.

Fears about the power of performance actually came true in 1601, when the Earl of Essex used the Globe Theatre to help incite a public uprising against the Queen's counselors. This event is recalled in *Anonymous*, where it is Edward de Vere who arranges for a performance at the Globe to rally public support for Essex and his men, but as occurred in history, the plan fails, and Essex is put to death.

PART A: PRE-VIEWING *ANONYMOUS*

The downfall of the Earl of Essex has all the core elements of Shakespearean tragedy—a noble protagonist, a moral dilemma, and a fatal end. Before you see *Anonymous*, discuss in class how these and other elements of the Essex affair match up with Shakespearean tragedies you have read. Then try to imagine what kind of play Shakespeare would have made of this episode had Essex succeeded.

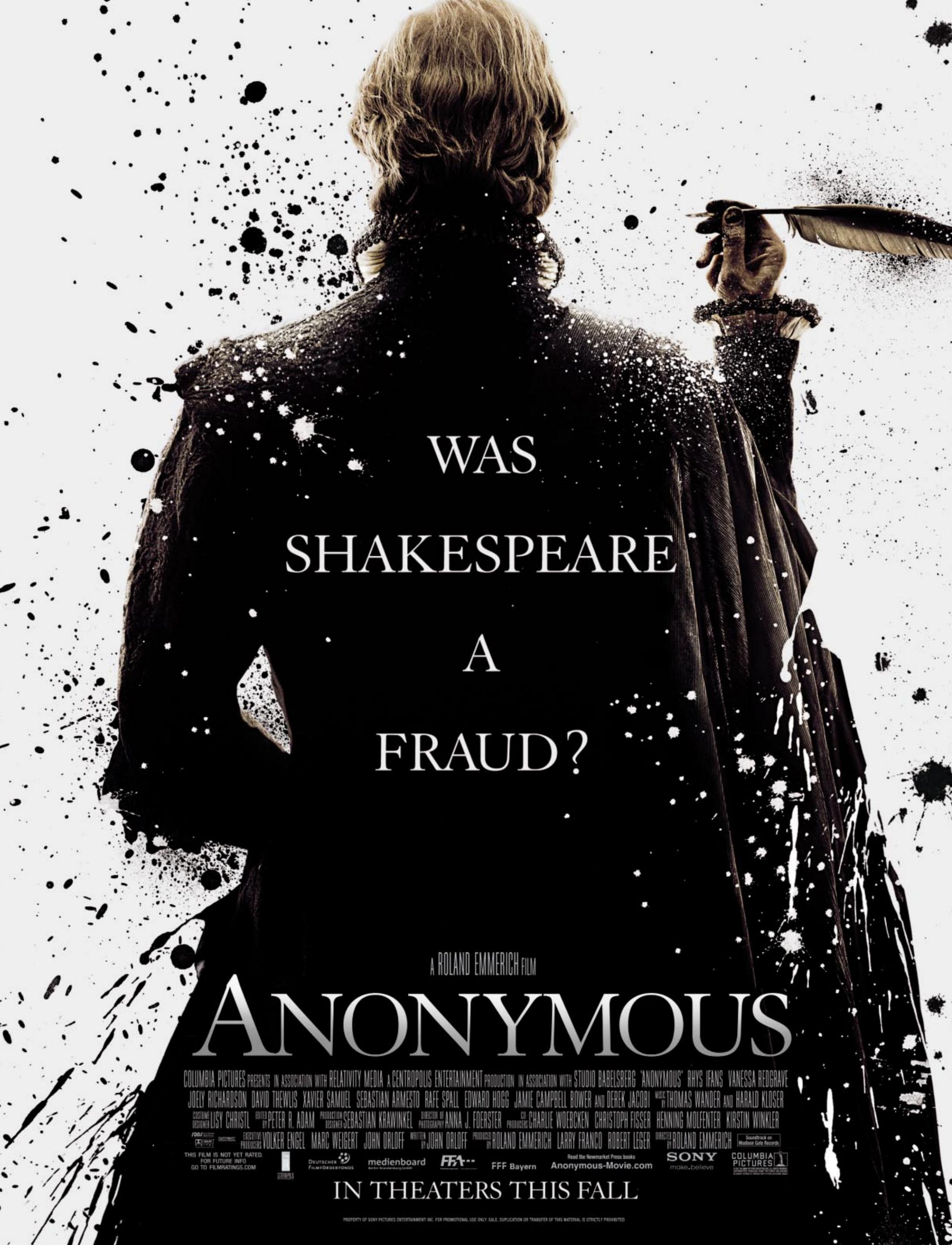
PART B: POST-VIEWING *ANONYMOUS*

According to director Roland Emmerich, *Anonymous* has "all the elements of a Shakespeare play. It's about Kings, Queens, and Princes. It's about illegitimate children, it's about incest, it's about all of these elements which Shakespeare plays have. And it's overall a tragedy." After you have seen the film, discuss these questions in class:

- How does the plot of the film compare to a Shakespearean tragedy?
- How does the filmmaker's use of scenes performed by Elizabethan actors compare to Shakespeare's use of actors to stage a play within the play?
- How did the film affect your opinion about the theory that de Vere was the true author of the Shakespeare plays?



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WAS
SHAKESPEARE
A
FRAUD?

A ROLAND EMMERICH FILM

ANONYMOUS

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JOELY RICHARDSON DAVID THEWLIS XAVIER SAMUEL SEBASTIAN ARMESTO RAFF SPALL EDWARD HOGG JAMIE CAMPBELL BOWER AND DEREK JACOBI MUSIC BY THOMAS WANDER AND HARALD KLOSER
COSTUME DESIGNER LUSY CHRISTL EDITOR PETER R. ADAM PRODUCTION DESIGNER SEBASTIAN KRAWINKEL DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ANNA J. FOERSTER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS VOLKER ENGEL MARG WEIGERT JOHN ORLOFF WRITTEN BY JOHN ORLOFF PRODUCED BY ROLAND EMMERICH LARRY FRANCO ROBERT LESER DIRECTED BY ROLAND EMMERICH
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ANONYMOUS

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