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 revealed 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 your colleagues. Although these materials are protected by copyright, you may make as many copies as you need for your classes. Please share your comments on the program at www.ymiclassroom.com/anonymousfeedback.html. We depend on your feedback to continue providing free educational programs that make a real difference in students' lives.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dominic Kinsley

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

Make a master copy of these materials to share with your colleagues. Each activity is designed for one class period, with additional research, writing, and follow-up lessons. After hanging the wall poster, read the film synopsis aloud prior to beginning the activities. It is not necessary to see the film to complete the activities.

FILM SYNOPSIS

Set in the political snake-pit of Elizabethan England, *Anonymous* (Rated PG-13) 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. After discussing the conflicts posed by the historical records and the biographies of the men proposed to have written Shakespeare's works, students can use the questions on the sheet as a springboard for additional research. Have them 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

This activity introduces students to Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Students consider the evidence, conduct their own research, and either write a position paper or conduct a debate about the issues. You might have them write 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? To what extent are they portrayed from an outsider's perspective on that world?

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*, discuss 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 assess how the plot of the film mirrored a Shakespearean tragedy and what role theater played in the drama.

DISCUSSION, RESEARCH, AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Have students research the Stratfordian and Anti-Stratfordian theories. Using their research and knowledge of Shakespeare's works, they should decide which group they choose to support. Students might write an opinion paper on the topic or engage in a class debate.
- The de Vere vs. Shakespeare of Stratford authorship question has been the subject of mock trials, including one held at American University in 1987, presided over by Supreme Court Justices Harry Blackmun, William Brennan, and John Paul Stevens. Have students research the trial—partial footage is available on YouTube, and segments of the transcripts can be found on PBS's "The Shakespeare Mystery." Then, conduct your own mock trial on the subject.
- Experts suggest that knowing the author of the Shakespearean plays and sonnets is important because it affects how they are interpreted and read. Do your students agree or disagree? Does the question about the authorship influence their appreciation of the writings?
- Censorship was a concern for playwrights in the Elizabethan era. Likewise, concern about revealing insider information about the Court is cited as a reason for de Vere's anonymity. Have students review the Shakespearean plays you are reading to identify religious, social, or political themes and messages that may have been included as propaganda and considered seditious.







REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SHAKESPEARE DEBATE

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BOOKS

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Theories Concerning the Authorship of the Shakespearean Plays, by H.N. Gibson (Methuen, 1971)

William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems, by E.K.Chambers (Clarendon Press, 1989)

WEBSITES

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www.whowroteShakespeare.com

De Vere Society—www.deveresociety.co.uk

Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook-

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The Shakespeare Fellowship—www.shakespearefellowship.org William Shakespeare Identity/Authorship Problem—

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BOOKS ON EDWARD DE VERE, 17TH EARL OF OXFORD

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DE VERE AS PRESENTED IN ANONYMOUS

Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom: The True History of Shakespeare and Elizabeth, by Charles Beauclerk (Grove Press, 2010) The Monument: "Shake-Speares Sonnets By Edward de Vere", by Hank Whittemore & Alex McNeil (Meadow Geese Press, 2005)

Anonymous—www.anonymous-movie.com Young Minds Inspired—www.ymiclassroom.com

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









MISTAKEN IDENTITY?



an 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.
- 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? Some candidates who have been proposed over the years include:

- 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 some 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 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, as some believe, they are the plays we attribute to Shakespeare.

JOIN THE DEBATE

The new film **Anonymous** invites us to take a second look at our assumptions about Shakespeare and the nature of literary genius. You can start with the questions below:

- The case against Shakespeare usually rests on the belief that education provides a reliable measure of literary talent. What evidence can you cite to support or refute this belief? How does imagination factor into this theory about the sources of literary talent?
- 2. Shakespeare doubters also typically count his middle-class background against him, along with his interest in the entrepreneurial side of Elizabethan show business. They point out that characters who match this profile are generally portrayed as buffoons or villains in Shakespeare's plays. What characters can you recall to support or refute this argument?
- 3. Shakespeare supporters remind us that doubts about his authorship did not arise until more than 200 years after his death. What social and intellectual developments during that time might have prompted the search for the true author? What developments in our own time may be steering attempts to discover the untold secret of his genius?

Uncover the true genius of William Shakespeare. See *Anonymous*—in theaters October 28, 2011.









THE SOUL OF THE AGE



mong 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

Born in 1550, Edward de Vere 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 Theatre in London. 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 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.



WEIGH THE ODDS

Anonymous presents a compelling portrait of Edward de Vere as the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Before you see the film, consider the evidence for yourself.

- 1. In addition to his impressive education and intimate relationship with Elizabethan nobility, supporters of de Vere point to the resemblance between episodes in his life and episodes in Shakespeare's plays. He saw places like Shylock's Venice and Romeo's Verona firsthand, and even escaped from pirates like Prince Hamlet. But why do similarities like these count as evidence of authorship? Should we be able to find an autobiographical element in every great work of literature?
- 2. Before he became a leading candidate in the search for the true author of Shakespeare's plays, Edward de Vere was almost erased from the pages of history. Learn a little more about him to decide whether he was a major figure in his day or only a background figure whom our admiration for Shakespeare has put in the spotlight.
- 3. Given the political risks of the time, it is easy to understand why a high ranking aristocrat like Edward de Vere could not reveal himself as the author of Shakespeare's plays. But we can still debate whether it was right to operate behind the scenes in this way. For example, some might call de Vere a coward for hiding his literary identity, while others might argue that he was simply living a lie. What is your view on the moral cost of remaining anonymous in a time of political doubt and social change?

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ACTIVITY 3

A KINGDOM FOR A STAGE



he 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.

LITERATURE OR LIFE?

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*, talk about 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.

Post-Viewing **Anonymous**

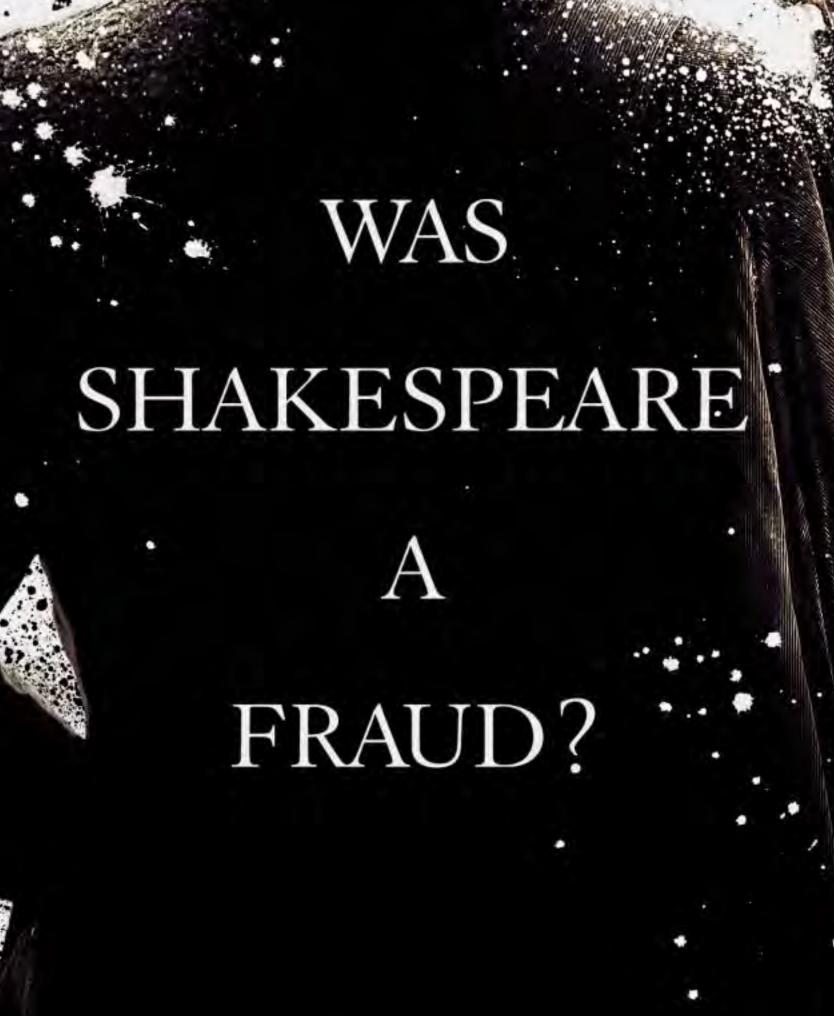
According to director Roland Emmerich, *Anonymous* has "all the elements of a Shakespeare play. It's about Kings, Queens, and Princes. It's about illegitimate children, it's about incest, it's about all of these elements which Shakespeare plays have. And it's overall a tragedy." After you have seen the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

- 1. How does the plot of the film compare to a Shakespearean tragedy?
- 2. 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?
- 3. How is William Shakespeare himself portrayed in the film? What characters in Shakespeare's plays does he resemble? What role does he play in this Shakespearean drama?
- 4. In the film, we gain insight into the complex world of Queen Elizabeth and the control exerted by her advisor William Cecil. What characters play a role similar to Cecil's in Shakespeare's plays? How might the history of Elizabethan England have been changed if de Vere had been the Queen's closest advisor?



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A ROLAND EMMERICH FILM

ANONYMOUS

IN THEATERS THIS FALL