



EDUCATION PACK

Education Pack. Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents

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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare wrote nearly twenty roles for queens in his plays. Some were minor figures with just a few lines – like Queen Isabeau in Henry V – but most were substantial characters that featured strongly in the story. In many cases, the queens are vital to the plot and drive the action.

Just think:

- Without Regan and Goneril, King Lear could have had a comfortable old age.
- Without Cleopatra, Mark Anthony might have remained faithful to Rome and to his wife.
- Without Lady Macbeth, King Duncan would have ruled longer and over a far less bloody Scotland.

And we would have all missed out on some of the world's greatest plays.

She-wolves and Serpents

The idea of women exercising such great power as many of Shakespeare's queens did, was not readily accepted either at the time they ruled or even in Shakespeare's day. This is despite the fact that Queen Elizabeth the First had been on the throne since before Shakespeare was born and reigned for most of his life. Elizabeth had succeeded her half-sister Queen Mary of England and Mary Queen of Scots was only 21 when Shakespeare was born. All three of these queens were queens regnant and ruled in their own right. This means they had inherited the throne for themselves and not become queens as a result of marrying a king, which would have made them queen consorts.

Women were then considered the 'weaker sex' and were expected to defer to men and to obey their husbands. Women's power was thought to come from the 'dark side' of sorcery and witchcraft, while man's authority was God given. If they exercised their power like men, women were considered 'unnatural' they were called 'she-wolves' and characterised as ferocious animals. If they emphasised their femininity - the 'serpents' of our play - they risked being condemned as whores. Both approaches to the exercise of female power are explored in Shakespeare's plays.

However, Shakespeare was clearly interested in the complexity of human nature and his enduring success is largely based on his ability to draw three-dimensional, fully-formed characters. As a result, his Queens do not conform neatly to either the she-wolf or serpent caricature although each of them generally leans more in one direction than the other

Queen consorts were much more acceptable than queens regnant. But this acceptance depended on their sticking to their role and position as subordinate to their husbands. They were expected to restrict their political activity to securing a few top jobs for their relatives and deciding if and whom

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their ladies in waiting could marry. Their main role was to keep the king happy and produce a healthy son to inherit the throne. Given the infant mortality rate of the times, this meant producing quite a few sons to make sure at least one survived into adulthood.

Some queen consorts, however, took on far greater powers. Queen Eleanor ran England in her husband's place during his frequent, long trips to fight wars in France. She also ruled in place of her son, Richard the Lionheart when he went to the crusades and, after his death, alongside her younger son, King John.

Queen Margaret, on the other hand, simply seized power from Henry VI when he was forced to name their enemy the Duke of York as his heir. This cut Henry and Margaret's son, Edward, out of the succession and so she raised an army and went into battle to get the throne back for him. Henry VI was from one branch of the royal family – The House of Lancaster - which had a red rose as its emblem. The Duke of York's branch – The House of York - had a white rose. And this is why the civil war between the two Houses was called the War of the Roses.

In the play, the concept of queens as either she-wolves or serpents is explored. First through a raging argument about 'how to be a queen' that Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots are still having, even after their deaths. Then, through the lives of Shakespeare's Queens to whom they turn for inspiration.

Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents provides a fast-moving and exciting introduction to many of Shakespeare's most powerful female characters. We hope our audiences will find them as fascinating as we do and that they will go on to meet these queens again, in full-length versions of the plays.

Kath Perry
Straylight Australia

SHAKESPEARE, QUEEN ELIZABETH I and MARY QUEEN of SCOTS

In the play, Shakespeare introduces his Queen characters, at the request of the real historical figures of Elizabeth I (QEI) and Mary Queen of Scots (MQS), who also represent the concepts of she-wolf and serpent explored in the text.

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) aimed to rule as a King would. Despite huge pressure to marry and produce an heir she refused to do so as she was determined to retain sole power. Throughout her reign, she was in full command of her advisers, armed forces and clerics. Among her most famous actions, she had Mary Queen of Scots executed for treason and then defeated the Spanish Armada sent to avenge Mary's death. In Elizabeth's later years, a huge propaganda machine maintained the image of a youthful, beautiful and wise sovereign and she became celebrated as 'Gloriana' and 'The Virgin Queen'. However, Elizabeth was aware of the increasing likelihood, as she grew older, of being deposed in favour of a more youthful, male ruler. As a result, she refused to name an heir until she was on her deathbed – still Queen. Ironically, the heir she chose was Mary Queen of Scots' son, James VI of Scotland and I of England.

Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587) was married three times and believed a queen's main duty was to produce an heir to the throne rather than to actually govern the country. Contemporary reports describe her sitting sewing while her all-male council of advisers got on with the business of governing Scotland. This did not mean she was unambitious. She was briefly Queen consort of France as a result of her first marriage and persistently laid claim to the throne of England, while sending Queen Elizabeth I a steady stream of letters proposing they be great friends. When proof of her involvement in the death of her second husband came to light, she was deposed in favour of her son, James, who was then only one year old. She fled to England, where despite being under effective house arrest, she became involved in increasingly dangerous plots against Elizabeth I. Eventually the Queen of England reluctantly signed Mary's death warrant and she was executed.

Shakespeare (1564-1616) is thought to have begun writing his plays in the late 1580s. By 1594, they were being put on at Court and there are documents to show that Shakespeare himself was acting in them, presumably before the Queen, who was a great supporter of theatre. Shakespeare was in the middle of his writing and performing career at the time of Elizabeth's death in 1603. There is no actual evidence of any meeting between these two major celebrities of their time, which is very disappointing for some historians. Stories have been made up to fill this tempting vacuum, including widely discredited theories that Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare may have been lovers or that he may even have been her son.

Mary and Elizabeth, also never actually met. In our play, we show all three of these characters together but only after their deaths. Mary and Elizabeth have been waiting quite a long time to meet the Bard. They want to examine the Queens from his plays to get fresh fuel for their long-running argument about how best to rule a country.

SHAKESPEARE'S QUEENS and THEIR PLAYS

Queens Goneril and Regan (*King Lear*)

Player Queen (*Hamlet*)

Queen Gertrude (*Hamlet*)

Cymbeline's Queen (*Cymbeline*)

Titania the Fairy Queen (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

Lady Macbeth – later Queen (*Macbeth*)

Queen Isabel (*Richard II*)

Queen Eleanor (*King John*)

Katharine de Valois – later Queen (*Henry V*)

Queen Isabeau (*Henry V*)

Queen Margaret (*Henry VI pts I (as princess of Anjou), II and III, Richard III*)

Queen Elizabeth (*Richard III*)

Lady Anne – later Queen (*Richard III*)

Queen Katherine (*Henry VIII*)

Anne Boleyn – later Queen (*Henry VIII*)

Queen Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*)

Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile (*Antony and Cleopatra*)

Tamora, Queen of the Goths (*Titus Andronicus*)

PLAY SUMMARIES for SIX SELECTED QUEENS

The stories of six of Shakespeare's Queens are summarised below.

Queens Goneril and Regan

In the fictitious story of 'King Lear', Lear divides his kingdom equally between his two oldest daughters so that he can retire and enjoy his old age free of the cares of State. Jealous and greedy, Goneril and Regan fight, first with their father, and then with each other. When their younger sister, Cordelia, attacks from France to rescue her father and the kingdom, death and destruction follow.

'King Lear' is set in medieval England. It was written a couple of years after Queen Elizabeth's death and was probably first performed at Christmas 1606, for King James I.

The speeches and scenes used in **Shakespeare's Queens** are from: Act 1, scene 4; Act 2, scene 4 and Act 5, scene 3.

Cymbeline's Queen

When King Cymbeline marries his second wife, they already have one child each, by earlier marriages. The new Queen is determined to get her stupid son, Cloten, onto the throne. This means the King's beautiful daughter, Innogen, must either marry Cloten, whom she hates, or be killed off. The Queen's pursuit of her goal drives a major strand of the play's action.

'Cymbeline' is loosely based on the life of a real Celtic king, Cenobelinus, who ruled in Britain at the time of Christ. It is not clear when this play was written although it is known to have been performed in 1611.

The scene used in **Shakespeare's Queens** is from: Act 1, scene 5

Queen Margaret

Margaret of Anjou was a real person in history. She was the daughter of the Duke of Anjou, who was also King of Naples and Sicily. In the first part of 'Henry VI', the Duke of Suffolk captures her in battle and falls in love with her. Already married himself, Suffolk decides to persuade his King, Henry VI of England, to marry Margaret so she will live at court where he can still see her. Having accomplished this, Suffolk plans to make Margaret his mistress and through her control both the King and the country. (*Henry VI, part I*)

When Margaret arrives at Henry VI's court in the second part of 'Henry VI', she is shocked to see that the King, although now in his mid-20s - is completely under the thumb of the Duke of

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Gloucester and his wife, Eleanor. The Duke was made Regent when Henry inherited the throne at only 9 months old and Henry still hasn't taken power for himself. This is not the sort of King Margaret had in mind. She and Suffolk become lovers. Working together, they get rid of the Gloucesters - banishing the Duchess and imprisoning the Duke. But when Gloucester is subsequently murdered, Henry finally stands up for himself and banishes Suffolk, who is killed by pirates, breaking Margaret's heart.

Henry, meanwhile, is battling against a popular uprising. No sooner has that been put down than The Duke of York arrives with an army from Ireland and challenges Henry's claim to the throne. Henry had come to the throne through a branch of the royal family called the House of Lancaster. York believes his own claim, through the House of York, is equally strong. They fight the first battle in the Wars of the Roses – the emblem of the House of Lancaster is a red rose and of York, a white rose. York wins and Henry is ready to surrender but Margaret forces him to flee, rather than give up the crown. (*Henry VI, part II*)

When Henry gets back to court in 'Henry VI Part 3', he finds York sitting on his throne. He pleads to be allowed to remain king, which York allows but, in return, Henry is forced to name York as his heir. This cuts Henry and Margaret's son, Edward, out of the line of succession, which Margaret will not tolerate. She leaves her husband, raises an army of her own and goes back into battle against York on behalf of her son. When her forces capture York, she taunts and kills him. But York's remaining three sons win the day and kill both her son and husband. York's oldest son, also Edward, takes the throne. (*Henry VI, part III*)

Although officially banished and, by now, old and embittered, Margaret remains at the Court of Edward IV. Here she haunts and curses those now in power and watches as York's third son, Richard, gradually does away with his brothers, their heirs and anyone else between him and the throne. (*Richard III*)

These four plays are based on the actual reigns of Henry VI and Richard III, although Shakespeare does adapt historical fact to suit his dramatic purposes. The action spans 63 years, from Henry VI's succession on the death of his father, Henry V, in 1422 to Richard III's death in 1485.

The speeches and scenes used in **Shakespeare's Queens** are from: Henry VI(I) Act 5, scene 3 and Act 5, Scene 5. Henry VI(II) Act 1, scene 3. Henry VI(III) Act 1, scene 1; Act 1, scene 4. Richard III Act 1, scene 3.

Anne Boylen

Anne becomes Henry VIII's second wife and his Queen when he succeeds in getting his marriage to Katharine of Aragon annulled. By then he has been infatuated with the young Anne Boleyn for several years, during which time she has refused to sleep with him unless he marries her. Henry is also anxious for a male heir, which Anne is more likely to produce for him than Katherine who is now nearly fifty. Once crowned Queen, Anne is under considerable pressure to produce a boy. However, her first baby, born at the end of the play, is a girl – later to become Queen Elizabeth I.

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The play is set in the time of the real Henry VIII, who ruled from 1509 to 1547. It opens before Henry meets Anne and ends with the birth of Anne and Henry's daughter Elizabeth in 1533.

The Globe Theatre burned down in 1613, during the first performance of 'Henry VIII'.

The speeches and scenes used in **Shakespeare's Queens** are from: Act 2, scene 3 & Act 2, scene 4.

Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile

Cleopatra ruled Egypt half a century before the birth of Christ. Shakespeare's play, 'Antony and Cleopatra', is based on her story. To keep the Roman army at bay, Cleopatra had an affair with Julius Caesar and then, following his death, she began one with Mark Anthony. However, this second liaison is viewed harshly by Julius' successor in Rome who attacks Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra lose the resulting Battle of Actium and Antony kills himself, rather than face this disgrace. Cleopatra, heartbroken and fearful of being dragged through Rome as part of Caesar's Triumphal Procession, follows suit.

'Antony and Cleopatra' is thought to have been written in either 1606 or 1607.

The speeches and scenes used in **Shakespeare's Queens** are from: Act 3, scene 7 & Act 5, scene 2.

Tamora, Queen of the Goths

In 'Titus Andronicus', Tamora's eldest son is sacrificed to the gods after being captured with his mother in a battle against Rome. Tamora's resulting thirst for revenge drives the action in this fictitious and bloodthirsty story. She marries the Roman Emperor early in the play and uses her lofty position to strike her enemies down, one by one, through the next 4 Acts. However, Titus is cleverer than she thinks and things do not end happily for Tamora – or, indeed for anyone.

The play is set in Rome in the 4th century AD. It is one of Shakespeare's earliest plays and was probably first performed in 1593, when he was 29 years old.

The speeches and scenes used in **Shakespeare's Queens** are from: Act 1 (which has only 1 scene).

SCRIPT EXTRACTS from
SHAKESPEARE'S QUEENS: SHE-WOLVES AND SERPENTS

In the extracts from 'Shakespeare's Queens' that follow, some of the dialogue and speeches from the original plays have been cut or rearranged for brevity or emphasis. References are given below to allow the original text to be consulted.

It is important to be aware that only a few extracts of original text are used to introduce each character and that the stories of the plays are greatly abbreviated. A better understanding will be obtained from reading a detailed synopsis and/or the relevant Shakespeare play in full. The Further Resources page has suggestions of websites where these materials can be found.

However, the extracts given below, supported by the comments made by our Shakespeare (S), Queen Elizabeth I (QEI) and Mary Queen of Scots (MQS) will be sufficient to provide students with a framework for thinking about and discussing the issues raised in the suggested classroom activities.

NOTE: The initials S for Shakespeare, QEI for Queen Elizabeth I and MQS for Mary Queen of Scots are used throughout the play script and in the extracts given here.

GONERIL and REGAN
King Lear

Fool

Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away.

S. That's an interesting place to start. Power-sharing, but not with a husband - with another Queen. Regan and Goneril were made joint Queens of England when their father, King Lear took early retirement.

QEI

Fool!

S Instead of a golden handshake, Lear chose a luxury, fully-catered, perpetual holiday. He and his train of a hundred favourite followers would stay with his daughters - a month with one, a month with the other... But on his very first visit, Goneril tried to get rid of half his men:

Goneril

Be thou desired,
By her that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train.

S. And storming off in a huff to Regan's didn't do him much good, either: *(Goneril follows)*

Regan

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
I looked not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. What, fifty followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more?

Goneril

Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants, or from mine?

Regan

Why not my lord? If you will come to me -
For now I spy a danger - I entreat you
To bring but five-and-twenty; to no more
Will I give place or notice.

Lear

I gave you all.

Regan

And in good time you gave it.

Lear

Made you my guardians, my depositaries,
But kept a reservation to be followed

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With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty, Regan? Said you so?

Regan

And speak't again, my lord.

Lear (*to Goneril*)

I'll go with thee,
Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty.
And thou art twice her love.

Goneril

Hear me, my lord,
What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

Regan

What needs one?

Lear

O reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest things superfluous.
You see me here, you gods, a poor old fellow,
As full of grief as age, wretched in both. (*Exit*)

Regan

This house is little. The old man and his people
Cannot be well bestowed. 'Tis his own blame;
Hath put himself from rest, and must needs taste his folly.

S. So ex-King Lear was left homeless, stranded on the blasted heath with winds blowing and cracking their cheeks and cataracts and hurricanes spouting. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child', indeed!

MQS. So, a perfect example of a couple of rulers working together to get what they wanted.

QE1 One is never safe with ex-Kings around. Some faction or other might decide at any minute to reinstall their aged posterior ...

S. ...bottom.

MQS. ...arse.

QE1 ...on one's throne.

S. Which was exactly what Lear's other daughter, Cordelia, Queen of France, was about to do.

QE1. Typical French! But the 'working together' didn't last long, did it? As soon as a man turned up....

MQS Mmmm, Edmund the bastard.

Edmund

To both these sisters have I sworn my love,
Each jealous of the other, as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed
If both remain alive.

Regan

He led our powers,
Bore the commission of my place and person.

Goneril

In his own grace he doth exalt himself,
More than in your addition.

Regan

In my rights,
By me invested, he compeers the best.

Goneril

That were the most, if he should husband you.

Regan

Jesters do oft prove prophets.

Goneril

Holla, holla!
That eye that told you so look'd but a-squint.

Regan

Lady, I am not well; else I should answer
From a full-flowing stomach. General,
Witness the world, that I create thee here
My lord and master.

Goneril

Mean you to enjoy him?

Regan

Let the drum strike, and prove my title thine.
Sick, O, sick!

[To Edmund]

Goneril

[Aside]
If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

S. Yep. Goneril poisoned Regan – which I suppose could be taken to show that job-sharing the Queen role – even with another woman – is pretty tricky; especially if someone gets greedy.

CYMBELINE'S QUEEN

Cymbeline

S I used another really good poisoning plot in Cymbeline, a great play for showing the lengths minor royals will go to get their own or their kids' bottoms onto the throne. Cymbeline's second wife was desperate to get the throne for her thuggish son, Cloten. Either he'd have to marry his stepsister - the King's innocent daughter, Innogen who, of course, despised him – or Innogen would have to die... which is where the poison came in.

Queen

Now, master doctor, have you brought those drugs?

Cornelius

Pleaseth your highness, ay: here they are, madam
But I beseech your grace, without offence ..
My conscience bids me ask... wherefore you have
Commanded of me these most poisonous compounds
Which are the movers of a languishing death:
But, though slow, deadly?

Queen

I wonder, doctor,
Thou ask'st me such a question: have I not been
Thy pupil long? Hast thou not learned me how
To make perfumes? Distil? Preserve? Yea so,
That our great king himself doth woo me oft
For my confections? Having thus far proceeded...
Unless thou think'st me devilish... is it not meet
That I did amplify my judgement in
Other conclusions? I will try the forces
Of these thy compounds on such creatures as
We count not worth the hanging, but none human,
To try the vigour of them and apply
Allayments to their act, and by them gather
Their several virtues and effects.

Cornelius

Your highness
Shall from this practice but make hard your heart.

Queen

O content thee!
Doctor, your service for this time is ended;
Take your own way.

Cornelius

(Aside)

I do suspect you, Madam;
But you shall do no harm.

S. You see, the Doctor had given the Queen a sleeping draft, not poison. So providing another of those clever cliff-hanging apparent-death moments that proved so popular in my major blockbuster, *Romeo & Juliet*.

QUEEN MARGARET
Henry VI Parts 1-3 and Richard III

S Baby Henry VI 'in infant bands crown'd king' was only 9 month's old when his father died. So he got rather used to other people looking after things for him. When it came to getting married, he was quite happy that the Duke of Suffolk had a bride in mind for him, Margaret of Anjou. He was especially pleased that Suffolk had already done the wooing.

MQS Suffolk got the idea when he took Margaret prisoner in one of the frequent squabbles between England and France.

Suffolk

So seems this gorgeous beauty to mine eyes.
Fain would I woo her, yet I dare not speak.

Margaret

What ransom must I pay before I pass?
For I perceive I am thy prisoner.

Suffolk

How canst I tell she will deny my suit,
Before I make a trial of her love?

Margaret

Why speak'st thou not? what ransom must I pay?

Suffolk

She's beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd;
She is a woman, therefore to be won.

Margaret

Wilt thou accept of ransom? yea, or no.

Suffolk

Say, gentle princess, would you not suppose
Your bondage happy, to be made a queen?

Margaret

To be a queen in bondage is more vile
Than is a slave in base servility;
For princes should be free.

Suffolk

I'll undertake to make thee Henry's queen,
To put a golden sceptre in thy hand
And set a precious crown upon thy head,
If thou wilt condescend to be my--

Margaret

What?

Suffolk

His love.

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How say you, madam, are ye so content?

Margaret

An if my father please, I am content.

Suffolk

But madam, I must trouble you again;
No loving token to his majesty?

Margaret

Yes, my good lord, a pure unspotted heart,
Never yet taint with love, I send the king.

Suffolk

And this withal.

Kisses her

Margaret

That for thyself: I will not so presume
To send such peevish tokens to a king.

Suffolk

(Aside)

Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king:
But I will rule both her, the king and realm.

S Finding herself at Henry VI's court for the first time, Margaret was a bit disillusioned to discover he was still totally under the control of the 'Lord Protector' the Duke of Gloucester.

Queen Margaret

What shall King Henry be a pupil still
Under the surly Gloucester's governance?
Am I a queen in title and in style,
And must be made a subject to a duke?
I tell thee, sir, when in the city Tours *(to Suffolk)*
Thou ran'st a tilt in honour of my love
And stolest away the ladies' hearts of France,
I thought King Henry had resembled thee
In courage, courtship and proportion:
But all his mind is bent to holiness.
I would the college of the cardinals
Would choose him pope, and carry him to Rome.

S. It's the Duke's wife, Eleanor, she hated most, though.

Q Margaret

She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies,
More like an empress than Duke Humphrey's wife:
Strangers in court do take her for the Queen. *(she drops her fan)*
Give me my fan: what, minion, can ye not? *(she gives the duchess a box on the ear)*

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I cry you mercy, madam, was it you?

D of G

Was't I? Yea, I it was, proud frenchwoman:
Could I come near your beauty with my nails,
I'd set my ten commandments in your face.

King H VI

Sweet aunt, be quiet: 'twas against her will.

D of G

Against her will, good king? Lok to't, in time,
She'll hamper thee and dandle thee like a baby:
Though in this place most master wear no breeches,
She shall not strike Dame Eleanor unrevenged.

S Oh but striking was only the start. Margaret and Suffolk then went on a total power trip. They got Eleanor banished for witchcraft and the Duke of Gloucester murdered. But they'd underestimated Henry's attachment to his uncle and in his one decisive moment, he retaliated by banishing Suffolk.

MQS Who ended up dead due to pirates cutting his head off. Lot of it about!

QEI Which broke Margaret's heart, making her more dangerous than ever. She wasn't called the she-wolf of France for nothing even though she was only a consort, and French, and had a son....

S Meanwhile, another plotter, the Duke of York was determined to get his rear end

MQS butt

QEI derrière

S on the throne. Forcing Henry to name him heir, he cut Henry and Margaret's son, Edward out of the succession.

MQS At which point she totally did her nut!

King Henry

Pardon me, Margaret; pardon me, sweet son -
The Earl of Warwick and the Duke enforced me.

Queen M

Enforced thee? Art thou king, and wilt be forced?
But thou prefer'st thy life before thine honour.
And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself
Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,

Until that act of Parliament be repealed
Whereby my son is disinherited.
The Northern lords that have forsworn thy colours
Will follow mine, if once they see them spread -
And spread they shall be, to thy foul disgrace
And to the utter ruin of the house of York.
Thus do I leave thee.

S So off she rode to defend the House of Lancaster in the Wars of the Roses, thus developing into my most powerful queen of all. With Margaret, I really wanted to push the boat out on appropriate behaviour of Queens. So when she got onto the battlefield with York finally at her mercy.....

Q Margaret

Look, York, I stained this napkin with the blood
That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point
Made issue from the bosom of thy son.
And if thy eyes can water for his death,
I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withall.

D of York

She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France.
Whose tongue more poisons than an adder's tooth.
O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide.
That face of his, the hungry cannibals,
Would not have touched, would not have stained with blood.
But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,
O, ten times more, than tigers of Hyrcania.

Q Margaret

Off with his head and with his head, the crown.

S. So, now we leap to Richard III - a play with 3 Queens. Quite a struggle that was. I think two is probably as many Queens as you'd want on the same stage at the same time.

MQS. Or one. Probably!

S. Queen Margaret is still here. Her husband, Henry VI, and their son, Edward, have both been killed and her old enemies the Yorks are in power. Despite this she clings on at court, old, bitter and twisted, cursing everyone in sight. Queen Elizabeth, the new king's consort, is one of her favourite victims and is also being hassled by the king's brother, the upwardly mobile Richard of Gloucester.

Q Elizabeth

My lord of Gloucester, I have too long borne

Your blunt upbraidings and your bitter scoffs.
By heaven I will acquaint his majesty
Of those gross taunts that oft I have endured.
I had rather be a country servant-maid
Than a great queen with this condition
To be so bated, scorned and stormèd at.
Small joy have I in being England's queen.

Q Margaret

Hear me, you wrangling pirates that fall out
In sharing that which you have ta'en from me.
Which of you trembles not that looks on me?
If not, that I am Queen, you bow like subjects,
Yet that, by you deposed, you quake like rebels.

Richard

Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?
Wert thou not banishèd on pain of death?

Q Margaret

I was, but I do find more pain in banishment,
Than death can yield me here by my abode.
A husband and a son thou ow'st to me.
And thou a kingdom: all of you allegiance.

Richard

The curse my noble father laid on thee,
When thou did'st crown his warlike brows with paper
And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,
And then, to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout
Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland -
His curses then, from bitterness of soul
Denounced against thee, are all fall'n upon thee,
And God, not we, hath plagued the bloody deed.

Q Elizabeth

So just is God, to right the innocent.

Q Margaret

What? Were you snarling all before I came,
Ready to catch each other by the throat,
And turn you all your hatred now on me?
Why then, give way, dull clouds to my quick curses.
Long mays't thou live to wail thy children's death,
And see another, as I see thee now,
Decked in thy rights, as thou art 'stalled in mine.
Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And after many lengthened hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen.

Richard

Have done thy charm, thou hateful, withered hag.

ANNE BOLEYN
Henry VIII

Anne B

His highness having lived so long with Katherine,
So good a lady that no tongue could ever
Pronounce dishonour of her . O, and now
After so many courses of the sun enthroned,
To give her the avaunt! it is a pity
Would move a monster.

Old Lady

Alas, poor lady!
She's a stranger now again.

Anne B

I swear, 'tis better to be lowly born,
Than to be perk'd up in a glist'ring grief,
And wear a golden sorrow.
By my troth and maidenhead,
I would not be a queen.

Old Lady

Beshrew me, I would,
And venture maidenhead for't; and so would you,
For all this spice of your hypocrisy:

Anne B

Nay, good troth.

Old Lady

You would not be a queen?

Anne B

No, not for all the riches under heaven.
I swear again, I would not be a queen
For all the world.

Old Lady

In faith, for little England
You'd venture an emballing: I myself
Would for Caernarvonshire, although there long'd
No more to the crown but that. Lo, who comes here? *[Enter Chamberlain]*

Lord Chamberlain

Good morrow, lady. The king's majesty
Commends his good opinion of you, and
Does purpose honour to you no less flowing
Than Marchioness of Pembroke: to which title
A thousand pound a year, annual support,
Out of his grace he adds.

Anne B

Beseech my lord,
Vouchsafe to speak my thanks and my obedience,
As from a blushing handmaid, to his highness;
Whose health and royalty I pray for.

CLEOPATRA
Antony and Cleopatra

S It is a bit hard to see how Cleopatra my 'serpent of old Nile' could have kept her kingdom if she hadn't taken to seducing every Roman general sent to conquer it. She did ride out with her troops as well, although Antony's generals disapproved of a woman in the field.

Cleopatra

I will be even with thee doubt it not.
Thou hast forspoke my being in these wars
And say'st it is not fit.

Enobarbus

Well, is it, is it?
Your presence needs must puzzle Antony.
Take from his heart, take from his brain, from's time
What should not then be spared. He is already
Traduced for levity, and 'tis said in Rome
That Photinus an eunuch and your maids
Manage this war.

Cleopatra

Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
That speak against us. A charge we bear i'th'war.
And as the president of my kingdom will
Appear there for a man. Speak not against it.
I will not stay behind.

S. Sadly, though, she wasn't much of a soldier and she and Antony lost their big sea battle against Caesar. The disgrace led Antony to kill himself and Cleopatra was faced with the grim prospect of a starring role in Caesar's triumphal procession in Rome.

Cleopatra

Now, Iras, what think'st thou?
Thou an Egyptian puppet shalt be shown
In Rome, as well as I. Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forced to drink their vapour.

Iras

The gods forbid.

Cleopatra

Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers

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Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore.

Iras

O the good gods!

Cleopatra

Nay, that's certain.

Iras

I'll never see't, for I am sure my nails
Are stronger than mine eyes.

Cleopatra

Why, that's the way
To fool their preparation and to conquer
Their most absurd intents. -
Show me, my women, like a queen: go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus
To meet Mark Antony.

TAMORA – QUEEN OF THE GOTHS

Titus Andronicus

MQS One of your queens did quite well out of being in a Roman Triumph, didn't she?

Titus

How comes it that the subtle Queen of Goths
Is of a sudden thus advanced in Rome

MQS Yes, that one.

S. Well it wasn't all roses! Our final Queen, Tamora, was captured in battle by Titus Andronicus. After the Triumph, he sacrificed her eldest son to the Gods. Queen Tamora swore revenge and The Emperor, Saturninus - jealous of Titus' popularity and furious that Titus' daughter Lavinia had just jilted him – played right into her hands.

MQS. Sounds like another she-wolf.

S. And with a touch of serpent, too. When Titus offered to fetch his daughter back to Saturninus, the Emperor declined and decided to marry Tamora instead.

Saturninus

Behold I choose thee, Tamora, for my bride.
And here I swear by all the Roman gods,
I will not resalute the streets of Rome
Or climb my palace, til from forth this place
I lead espoused my bride along with me

Tamora

And here in sight of heaven to Rome I swear,
If Saturnine advance the Queen of Goths
She will a handmaid be to his desires
A loving nurse, a mother to his youth.

S So Tamora was now the Empress, and spent the rest of the play slowly destroying Titus while publicly pretending to have forgiven him. Here's how she responds when Titus claims he has been wrongly treated by Saturninus over the issue with Lavinia.

Tamora

(to Saturninus)

My worthy lord, if ever Tamora
Were gracious in those princely eyes of thine,
Then hear me speak indifferently for all;
And at my suit, sweet, pardon what is past.

Saturninus

What, madam! be dishonour'd openly,
And basely put it up without revenge?

Tamora

Not so, my lord; the gods of Rome forbend
I should be author to dishonour you!
But on mine honour dare I undertake
For good Lord Titus' innocence in all.
My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last;
Dissemble all your griefs and discontents:
You are but newly planted in your throne;
Lest, then, the people, and patricians too,
Upon a just survey, take Titus' part,
Yield at entreats; and then let me alone:
I'll find a day to massacre them all
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father and his traitorous sons,
To whom I sued for my dear son's life,
And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain.
Come, come, sweet emperor; come, Andronicus;
Take up this good old man, and cheer the heart
That dies in tempest of thy angry frown.

(Aside to Saturninus)

[Aloud]

Saturninus

Rise, Titus, rise; my empress hath prevail'd.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities to prepare the class for watching **Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents**.

She-wolves and Serpents

Many people in Shakespeare's time were wary of women in power and believed them to be 'unnatural'. As a result they demonised powerful women. In the play we look at two concepts of these demons: she-wolves and serpents.

1. She-wolf characteristics include: waging war and fighting in battles, ruthlessness, open aggression, command, domination, pride, lust.
2. Serpent characteristics include: deception, manipulation, flattery, scheming, vanity, seduction.

Some people claim that powerful women are still characterised as either she-wolves or serpents, rather than being accepted as holding power legitimately. Make a list of powerful women today, in government, business, sport, entertainment and other fields. Look at recent media coverage of them to see whether demonisation is still going on.

Not Only Queens

Write, cast, rehearse and perform your own Shakespeare's Characters play.

- Think of your own subject for a show like this eg Shakespeare's Heroines, Shakespeare's Kings, Shakespeare's Clowns etc.
- Find 3-5 characters to include and decide on a theme for the show eg Brave and Brainy or Magic and Mystery
- Choose some of your characters' scenes and speeches to illustrate your theme
- Decide how you will link them - you don't need to have 'Shakespeare' introduce them if you'd rather try something else.
- Put the script together, cast the roles and rehearse the show to put on for your class.

The Celebs of their Day – Shakespeare's Queens in the Media

Imagine that the modern media had access to these Queens and their lives. Choose one of the Queens and stage a press conference, talk-show appearance or door-stop interview with her. Make a video report for TV news, put a photo-spread together or write a story for a magazine based on what is said.

Royal Networking

Maintaining a network of friends, advisers and supporters was as important to Shakespeare's

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Queens as it is to people today. But it was a slow process, relying on letters or messages carried from person to person by friends or servants. What if the Queens had had access to social media? Pick one of the Queens and invent a twitter address for her, write her some tweets, design a Facebook page for her or write an entry in her blog.

Add One Queen And Stir Well

Are there any Queens in the Shakespeare play(s) you are currently studying in class? If there aren't any, how do you think the play would be changed if there was a queen involved? If there is one or more, how would the play be changed if the Queen wasn't there. Role-play a couple of key scenes adding the Queen or taking her out and see what happens.

Designing Queens

Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents features nearly 20 queens from different countries and historical periods, as well as Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. All are played by 2 actors who often have less than a minute to change character. Using the six mothers featured in these notes, design costumes for the play that will be practical for the actors, contribute to the visual appeal of the show and help the audience differentiate between the characters.

WATCHING THE PLAY

When you watch the play, you will see how the director uses lighting, costumes and set to help the actors tell the story. Look out for these staging elements during the play so that you can discuss them in class afterwards.

Some of the things you may notice include:

The set

What does the stage look like? Are there any clues about the story from the way the floor or walls are decorated or from furniture or other objects on the stage?

Sound

Is there music playing when you come into the theatre space? If so, does it tell you anything about the play you are about to see?

Is any music used during the play? If so, what is its role in telling the story?

Are there any sound effects? Why do you think the director has chosen to use these?

Costume

Do the costumes suggest a particular time or place or mood? Do they contribute to the story in other ways? What colours are used and why do you think they were chosen? Are there a lot of costume changes? If so, how are these managed and are they effective?

Lighting

Are there changes in brightness and colour of the lighting? Is the whole stage lit all the time or does it switch from area to area. Are the lighting changes easy to spot or more subtle? Do they help tell the story? If so, how?

Action

Do the actors use the space well? Can you see and hear everything that is happening? Are exits and entrances dramatic or subtle?

How do the actors relate to the audience and to each other?

Can you notice places where the pace speeds up or slows down? Overall, does the show seem to move too slowly or too fast?

Characterisation

Each actor plays a lot of characters - what do they do to make each character distinct?

Which characters do you remember best at the end of the play, and why them?

The BIG Questions

What effect did the play have on you? What did you feel when you watched it? What did you want to talk about afterwards?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERNET

[Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents](#)

Straylight Australia's website for the play. The site is developing alongside the production and will include photos, biographies, media materials, technical specifications and more by the time we open in Adelaide.

[Shakespeare Plot Summaries](#)

Spark Notes summaries for each of Shakespeare's plays.

[Shakespeare's Plays](#)

The full text of all of Shakespeare's plays available free from MIT to read or print.

[Shakespeare Information](#)

All kinds of information about Shakespeare and his world, including the full text of all his plays, a dictionary, quiz and list of insults!

[Mr William Shakespeare and the Internet](#)

A general guide to Shakespeare resources on the internet.

PRINT

'She Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth I' by Helen Castor. Faber & Faber. 2011

'Shakespeare's Queens (of England)' by Kate Parrott. Trafford Publishing. 2007

'Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens' by Jane Dunn. Harper Perennial. 2004

'Elizabeth's Women' by Tracy Borman. Vintage. 2010

CONTACT US

If you have any queries about **Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents** or about this education pack, please email Kath Perry, Company Manager, at the following address:

Education Pack. Shakespeare's Queens: She-wolves and Serpents

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