Anyone who has successfully passed through the American system of secondary education has heard more than once that William Shakespeare is the greatest writer in the English language and perhaps in all languages. This truism is accepted in all schools and at all levels. In this course, we will examine the basis of this statement. Facts and figures can be produced which will support the assertion demonstrating that more people still attend Shakespeare’s plays than any other playwright, ancient or modern. But, why? This is the question we will try to answer in the next fifteen weeks.

Before we begin our coverage, it is important to remember that Shakespeare did not write his plays for the twenty-first century, nor did he write them for the intellectual class. He was trying, above all, to make money so he had to appeal to a wide audience which lived in the London of the sixteenth century. For this reason, it is necessary that we look more closely at that London and at the century in order to better understand what the Bard is doing. The stories of the plays stand the test of time, but they will be more clear to you and more easily appreciated if we see what Shakespeare did and how: the jokes, the allusions and the plots will all make more sense if we understand something of the world about which they were written and the audience to which they were addressed.

Thus, the first work we will cover is the McDonald book which will give you an excellent
survey of the life and times of the playwright. After that, we will take up the plays according to their genres. The comedies will be first, followed by the tragedies, and lastly the history. There will be three exams, two midterms and a final. All three will be hour exams, that is each will only cover the material up to that point: there will be no comprehensive test over the whole course. For the most part, the exams will be subjective with numerous essay questions. Some objective knowledge will be necessary, however, to successfully answer those questions. Every time we begin a play, there will be a reading quiz so as to assure that everyone has read the play by the time we start discussing it. There will also be a short paper due in the sixth week and a longer one in the fourteenth week. The first of these will be on Elizabethan backgrounds and a list of suggested topics will be handed out. The second and longer paper will be individually tailored to each student and conferences will be held after the first exam to discuss topics. A final portion of the grade will be based on oral reports and class discussion. If, by the end of fifteen weeks, you have said nothing, then you can consider that part of the grade to be lost. As with all great authors, Shakespeare's plays say different things to different people and all points of view are valuable in coming to a more complete understanding of his achievements.

As will be explained in class, drama is a form of literature not meant to be read like a novel or a short story. Rather, it should be experienced in a three-dimensional theater with live actors performing the play. To be sure that you understand this aspect of the drama, we shall be making extensive use of videos and movies so that you can come to understand this essential part of live theater. We will have some movie nights so that as a class we can see the completeness of drama.

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<tr>
<th>Grade Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Hour Exams</td>
<td>300</td>
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<td>Twelve Quizzes</td>
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<td>Two Oral Reports</td>
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<td>One Short Paper</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>One Long Paper</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Varies to 75</td>
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