

CREATIVE ARTS learning springboards

Pappus

CONIFERS in Shakespeare: conveying setting and atmosphere

Exploring Shakespeare's 'English' countryside, in particular the role of trees in creating atmosphere and depth

Aim: Understand the role of pine trees in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare grew up in the English countryside, in Stratford-upon-Avon. He worked and also lived in London, but no-one knows whether he travelled abroad, although some of his plays are set in Italy where many varieties of coniferous trees grow naturally. When he refers to conifers in his plays, it is always using the term pines and often they occur in his Italian plays, particularly those based on Roman history.

There's often a sense of intrigue and power connected with the trees. Antony, in Antony and Cleopatra says he '*will discover all*' where '*yonder pine does stand*'. Prospero in The Tempest who has many magical powers, tells his spirit-servant Ariel that '*it was mine art...that made gape /The pine and let thee out*'.

In The Merchant of Venice (a play that's rarely performed now owing to anti-Semitic themes such as the hatred that is shown towards Shylock, who is Jewish, by the dominant Christians) Antonio the Merchant says that expecting mercy from Shylock is as likely as the mountain-top pines standing still in a storm because you tell them to:

*'You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops and to make no noise,
When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven.'*

Activities:

- In pairs, create a short drama with a specific tree as the location. Think about the atmosphere being created and how the tree species will contribute to that. Does the piece require rustling leaves, thick branches, sharp needles, a statuesque appearance or maybe slim and flexible in the wind? Use the Pappus Plant ID sheets to research which tree will provide the necessary staging required.
- Study Edgar's soliloquy in Act 2 Scene 3 of King Lear:
*'I heard myself proclaimed
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt.'*

Resources:

Use leaves and other natural plant-based materials as props as well as inspiration for movement and sound, for example

- Pappus Plant ID Sheets - various

Success criteria:

- ✓ I understand and can describe the use of the characteristics of trees to convey setting/atmosphere.

