

## Language in Shakespeare

### Descriptive language using nettle and ivy

**Aim:** Pupils improvise a conversation using plant qualities to describe a character.

Shakespeare uses the qualities of plants to tell us more about a character or a situation.

In his play *Troilus and Cressida* about the Trojan War, one of his characters is described as witty as '...a nettle against May'. What do you think this tells you about the character? (We would say 'in May' rather than 'against', although the word 'against' with its sharp 'st' sound at the end, is helpful in reinforcing a sense of aggression).

In another great play, *The Tempest*, a King is forced out of his kingdom by his younger brother - with a bit of help from the army. The King describes his brother:

*'He was the ivy which had hid my princely trunk  
And sucked my verdure\* out on't.'*

What do you think the King meant by 'my princely trunk'?  
Why might he describe the brother who steals his power as an ivy?

#### Activity:

- This whole task can be undertaken outside.
- Spend a little time looking at ivy and/or nettle plants
- Remind yourself of the qualities/properties of nettles and ivy (stinging, creeping, parasitic, suckers, grow in clumps, health-giving etc)
- Improvise a short conversation with another student using these plants to say what you mean. E.g. 'Their tongues were the nettles that stung my heart'
- Record the conversation on smart phones/tablets and/or perform for the whole class.



#### Resources:

Nettles and Ivy in school grounds

#### More springboards:

- Literacy Learning Springboards - Active literacy task Iambic Pentameter.
- Pappus Nettle ID sheet and Ivy ID sheet

#### Key vocabulary:

\* *verdure* - means 'my youthful force / growth'

#### Success criteria:

- ✓ I can use the features of a plant such as a 'stinging' nettle to describe a person's characteristics
- ✓ I know and can quote a few examples of Shakespeare using plants to describe a person's characteristics