



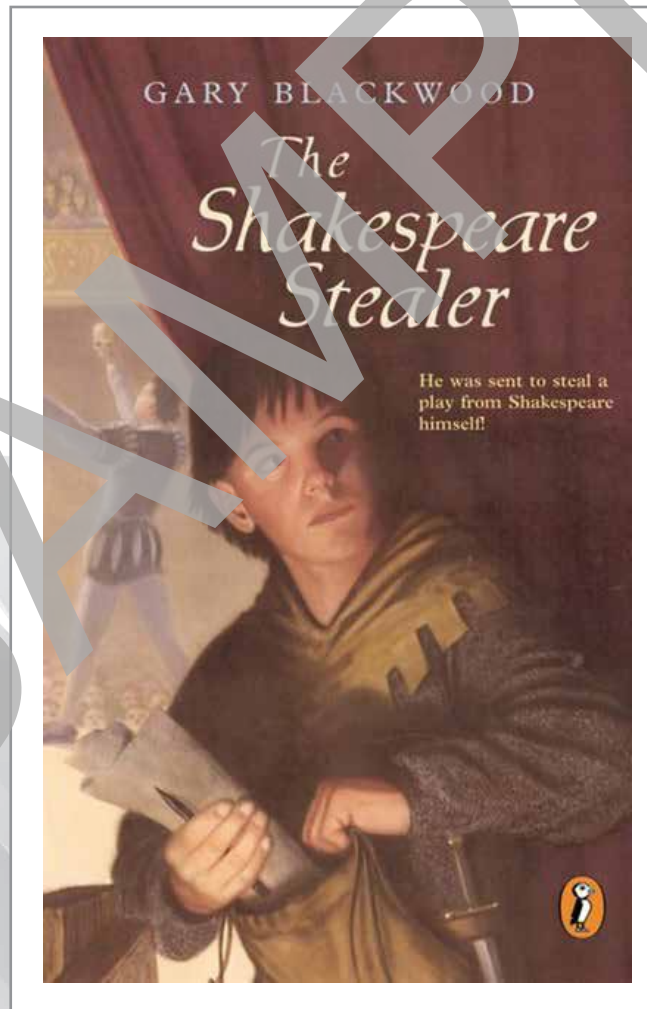
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Shakespeare Stealer

Gary L. Blackwood



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Shakespeare Stealer

Gary L. Blackwood

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Summarizing, sequencing,
inferring, cause/effect

Literary Elements

Theme, point of view, character
analysis, dialect, story mapping,
figurative language

Writing

Report, script, essay, shorthand
systems, character sketch, blog
critique

Critical Thinking

Evaluation, research,
compare/contrast, supporting
details, decision-making,
predicting

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral report,
dramatization

Vocabulary

Glossary, definitions, context
clues, synonyms/antonyms

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—history, time line,
Queen Elizabeth I, works of
William Shakespeare, geography,
apprenticeships, European
plague outbreaks, Shakespearean-
era clothing, the Lord
Chamberlain’s Men; Art—map,
architecture, costume and stage
set design; Health—interpersonal
relationships, “Four Humours,”
bullying; Math—monetary
systems; Current Events—legal
issues, careers; Physical Fitness—
fencing; Foreign Language—
French

Genre: fiction

Setting: England and the Globe Theatre near London; late 1500s–early 1600s

Point of View: first person

Themes: belonging, family, coming of age, friendship, loyalty, courage, honesty, disguise, obedience, deception, identity, morality

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self

Style: narrative

Tone: suspenseful, entertaining

Date of First Publication: 1998

Summary

Widge is a 14-year-old orphan apprenticed to Dr. Timothy Bright, a cruel minister who teaches him charactery (a form of shorthand). When a stranger named Falconer arrives at Dr. Bright's rectory to learn more about charactery, he purchases Widge instead and takes him to Leicester to meet Simon Bass, who becomes Widge's new master. Bass orders Widge to attend one of Shakespeare's plays at the Globe Theatre and transcribe it using charactery. After two failed attempts, Widge is unable to copy the play, so he joins the company in hopes of stealing the script. Widge learns and performs various roles in Shakespeare's plays and befriends a girl named Julia who disguises herself as a boy in order to perform with the troupe. When Nick, one of the troupe members, steals the play book to take to Falconer, Widge and Mr. Armin, the company's fencing instructor, chase him. After Mr. Armin kills Falconer in a duel, he and Widge discover Falconer is Simon Bass in disguise. Widge is accepted by the company as a true member of the troupe.

About the Author

Gary Blackwood was born in 1945 in Meadville, Pennsylvania. He grew up in rural Cochran, Pennsylvania and attended one of the last one-room schoolhouses in Pennsylvania. He began writing at an early age and sold his first story when he was 19 years old. Blackwood received a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1967 from Grove City College. Blackwood enjoys writing in a variety of genres. His articles have appeared in numerous magazines, and many of his plays have been produced by regional and university theaters. He has written over 20 fiction and nonfiction books for middle grades and young-adult readers. Blackwood's best-known books include *The Shakespeare Stealer* (1998), *Shakespeare's Scribe* (2000), and *Shakespeare's Spy* (2003). Blackwood currently lives near Carthage, Missouri with his family.



It is important to note certain issues specific to the time period in which the novel is set. These issues include the widespread acceptance and casual treatment of teenage drinking and violence resulting in murder, as well as gender issues related to the performances of Shakespeare's plays.

Chapters 1–6

Widge recounts his childhood in an orphanage and his apprenticeship to Dr. Bright, a harsh minister who invents charactery and teaches Widge how to use it. A man named Falconer visits Dr. Bright's home, inquiring about charactery. Dr. Bright claims Widge has perfected the system, so Falconer buys Widge and takes him to Leicester to meet his employer, Simon Bass. Bass commands Widge to attend and transcribe Shakespeare's *Hamlet* so Bass's theatre company can perform it before other companies corrupt the original. Widge and Falconer travel to London for the play.

Vocabulary

appellation
melancholy
appended
concealed
ravenous
abruptly
dismal
deflected
substantial
competent
virtuals
errant

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Widge indifferent about transcribing other ministers' sermons, even after he realizes Dr. Bright is repeating them word for word as his own sermons? (*Widge does not know right from wrong. He was never taught about morals at the orphanage or by Dr. Bright. At the orphanage, Mistress MacGregor's primary concerns were feeding and clothing the children. She may have not had the time, money, or patience to teach the children. In fact, Widge recounts how she would beat them when she was angry. Dr. Bright adopts Widge but only uses him as a servant and is unaffectionate toward him. The extent of Widge's knowledge about morality is "Right was what benefited you, and anything which did you harm was Wrong" [p. 6]. Some students might even think Dr. Bright's hypocrisy confuses Widge about morality.*)
2. Is it surprising that Dr. Bright steals other ministers' sermons? Explain why or why not. (*Answers will vary. Since Dr. Bright is a minister students may believe he should have a higher standard of morality and behavior, acting as a role model for others.*)
3. How does Widge feel as he leaves the Brights' home? Why? (*Widge hopes one of the Brights is watching him leave so they can say goodbye since he is leaving forever. Answers will vary. After living with the Bright family for seven years, Widge views himself as a family member. When none of the Brights tell Widge goodbye, he realizes they do not consider him a part of their family. This compounds Widge's feelings of loneliness.*)
4. How does Widge feel on the journey with the stranger? (*Answers will vary. Widge is probably both excited and frightened. He is excited to be leaving Dr. Bright and seeing new surroundings while on his journey. Widge is also frightened because of Falconer's menacing demeanor and their unfamiliar location. However, Widge is afraid to run away from Falconer, thinking, "To run [into the woods] would be like jumping into the fire to escape the cooking pot" [p. 18]. Also, he is afraid to venture out on his own because he only knows what he has been apprenticed to do; therefore, he would not know how to survive on his own even if he escaped from his new master.*)
5. Describe Falconer's personality and appearance. (*Falconer's dark cape and appearance make him seem threatening and mysterious. When he and Widge encounter robbers on their journey to Simon Bass's house, Falconer proves to be an excellent swordsman. His impatience and lack of interest in Widge show that Falconer is not very warm or affectionate. Additionally, Falconer angers quickly when he becomes frustrated or irritated.*)
6. What can you infer about Widge's new master's social status, based on Widge's descriptions? (*Widge's new master is wealthy. Widge describes the master's house as large and secluded with a horse stable that is just as impressive. Widge's master has servants who wear uniforms. The kitchen is lit by candles instead of rush lights [an inexpensive alternative to candles]. Widge is also given his own room and plenty of food.*)

7. Why does Widge believe that “new boys have no rights” (p. 27)? *(Answers will vary. Widge is referring to the caste system that exists amongst the servants or in any social group, such as the children in the orphanage. When a new child entered the orphanage, he or she would likely be ridiculed until they asserted themselves as a strong individual. The new child or servant must also gradually make friends within a peer group. When Widge’s money is stolen at Simon Bass’s house, he realizes he has no grounds to accuse the stableboy since he [Widge] is a new servant and they likely will not believe him.)*
8. Why does Simon Bass caution Widge about the way he speaks? *(In Elizabethan England, working-class people spoke differently from those who were educated. When Widge speaks in a dialect used by uneducated people, he is instantly setting himself apart. Widge also uses a dialect specific to one area of England, and Bass expects him to disguise himself as a Londoner in order to complete the mission. Thus, Bass warns Widge that he must speak formal English if he is to blend in with people in London.)*
9. What does Widge mean when he says prentices do not make their own fates? *(Apprentices have minimal to no control over their own lives. While apprentices are not slaves, they are also not free to make their own decisions. An apprentice must work for a number of years doing whatever his master commands him to do. This means that an apprentice is expected to work all day, every day, for an extended period of time. Apprentices are not able to choose their own futures.)*
10. Why does Falconer tell Widge not to talk to anyone when they separate? *(Falconer wants Widge to seamlessly blend in with the Londoners so Widge can copy the play and leave town unnoticed. Since Widge has a distinguishable way of speaking, he is more likely to be noticed and remembered if he talks to people.)*
11. How do Widge’s expectations of London differ from reality? *(Since Widge believes London is “the largest and most cosmopolitan city in England, the symbol of freedom to thousands...” [p. 38], he is disappointed to find the streets quiet when he and Falconer arrive and that London has a curfew. Widge also expects London to be a beautiful, clean city—filled with “gold-plated buildings” and grand cathedrals—a place where only wealthy people live. But the reality is that poverty, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and disease also exist in London. Thus, he is surprised when he sees “shabby rows of houses” [p. 42], pits of waste by the side of roads, and plague houses. In many ways, the villages Widge has previously lived in were probably cleaner and healthier than London, since in the villages there is less overcrowding and the plague is not as widespread.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Complete the Thought Bubble on page 22 of this guide.
2. **Math:** Widge is sold to Falconer for ten pounds sterling. Research the British monetary system to find out how much ten pounds sterling is in American dollars.
3. **Literary Analysis:** Begin the T-chart on page 23 of this guide to analyze the way Widge speaks. Continue to fill in your chart as you find more instances of Widge’s different style of speaking in the novel.
4. **History/Writing:** Research European plague outbreaks in history. Write a brief essay about causes of the plagues, including the living conditions in cities. Then, connect this information to the sights Widge sees in London. (Note: Teachers should supervise the Web sites students visit.)
5. **Character Analysis:** Begin the Character Growth chart on page 24 of this guide for Widge. Continue to fill in your chart as you read more about Widge in the novel.