

Is Shakespeare's language alive today?

## Quoting Shakespeare

Although Shakespeare wrote his plays and poems some 400 years ago, the stories and the characters can be just as interesting and real today as they were then. However, the language used all those years ago was sometimes rather different from that which we use nowadays and it is not always easy to understand what Shakespeare meant. Some of the words he used were 'coined' (invented) by him – and many of his expressions are still familiar to us today.

As **Bernard Levin** once famously wrote:

"If you cannot understand my argument, and declare **"It's Greek to me"**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more **sinned against than sinning**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your **salad days**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act **more in sorrow than in anger**, if your **wish is father to the thought**, if your **lost property** has **vanished into thin air**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to **budge an inch** or suffered from **green-eyed jealousy**, if you have **played fast and loose**, if you have been **tongue-tied**, a **tower of strength**, **hoodwinked** or **in a pickle**, if you have **knifted your brows**, made a **virtue of necessity**, insisted on **fair play**, **slept not one wink**, **stood on ceremony**, **danced attendance** (on your lord and master), **laughed yourself into stitches**, had **short shrift**, **cold comfort** or **too much of a good thing**, if you have **seen better days** or **lived in a fool's paradise** - why, **be that as it may, the more fool you**, for it is a **foregone conclusion** that you are (**as good luck would have it**) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is **early days** and clear out **bag and baggage**, if you think it is **high time** and that **that is the long and short of it**, if you believe that **the game is up** and that **truth will out** even if it involves **your own flesh and blood**, if you lie low till the **crack of doom** because you suspect **foul play**, if you have your **teeth set on edge** (**at one fell swoop**) without **rhyme or reason**, then - to **give the devil his due** - **if the truth were known** (for **surely you have a tongue in your head**) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you **bid me good riddance** and **send me packing**, if you wish I were **dead as a door-nail**, if you think I am an **eyesore**, a **laughing stock**, the **devil incarnate**, a **stony-hearted villain**, **bloody-minded** or a **blinking idiot**, then - **by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut!** for **goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me**, for you are quoting Shakespeare."



Nicholas

## Game Four

Here is another more modern version written for young children.

If you promise your best friend you will keep a secret and declare

**"Mum's the word"** you are quoting Shakespeare; if you believe your Nan's cooking is a **dish fit for the gods**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you struggle with algebra and say **"It's Greek to me"** and you get **in a pickle** over your homework, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have **slept not one wink** because you were so excited about a holiday or school trip, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you are a **night-owl** and stay up late on your X-Box or you read a scary novel that **makes your hair stand on end**, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you sing in the shower to your **heart's content** and wish you were a contestant on X-Factor, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you try to convince your teacher that your homework **"vanished into thin air"** and when she does not believe you it is **a foregone conclusion** that you must do it in detention, you are quoting Shakespeare; then you decide to stay out of the way and **lie low** because you are in trouble with your parents, you are quoting Shakespeare; and if at the end of the school year you say it is **"high time"** the summer holidays arrived so you can bid **good riddance** to your school uniform, eat your parents **out of house and home** and spend **forever and a day** hanging out with your friends, then guess what? You are most definitely quoting Shakespeare!

The words and phrases shown in bold type are called **idioms**.

Try creating your own passage or story using as many of Shakespeare's idioms as you can.

