

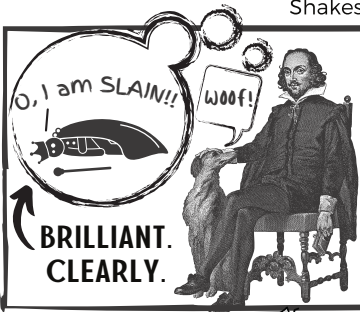
FAMOUS LAST WORDS | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM



BRILLIANT. CLEARLY.

The last thing a character in a play says is sometimes the most important. And Shakespeare wrote some of the best last lines! In fact, some are so good that, even 400 years later, people say them all the time, even if they don't know where they originally came from.

This page explores final lines before a character's death. The second page has more to explore...

Romeo & Juliet



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

In *Romeo & Juliet*, a tragic miscommunication (and some very bad ideas!) leads to the deaths of the main characters.

Shakespeare wrote a comedic version of the same story. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a group of characters put on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, which is basically the same as *Romeo & Juliet*.

Juliet takes a sleeping potion that makes her appear dead. **Romeo** was supposed to get a message explaining that she wasn't actually dead; she would wake up and come to him. But the message doesn't get through. When Romeo hears she's dead, he buys poison and goes to her family's crypt...

First, Pyramus finds a piece of Thisbe's clothing near a lion's den and assumes she's been killed.

ROMEO

Eyes, look your last!

Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavory guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love!

Drinks

O true apothecary!

Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.

Dies

Predictably, Juliet wakes up a little while later and finds Romeo's body. She figures out what happened, but it's too late. Just then, she hears people coming...

JULIET

Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!
Snatching ROMEO's dagger
This is thy sheath;
Stabs herself
there rust, and let me die.
Falls on ROMEO's body, and dies

BOTTOM (as PYRAMUS)

Come, tears, confound;
Out, sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus;
Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop:
Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
Now am I dead,
Now am I fled;
My soul is in the sky:
Tongue, lose thy light;
Moon, take thy flight:
Now die, die, die, die, die.

Stabs himself

Then, Thisbe returns to find Pyramus dead.

FLUTE (as THISBE)

O Sisters Three*,
Come, come to me,
With hands as pale as milk;
Lay them in gore,
Since you have shore
With shears his thread of silk.
Tongue, not a word:
Come, trusty sword;
Come, blade, my breast imbrue:
And, farewell, friends;
Thus Thisbe ends:
Adieu, adieu, adieu.

Stabs herself

Dies



* the three Fates, according to legend, spun out a person's life like a thread and snipped it with scissors at the end

Dies

WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE "LAST WORDS" OF THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS IN MIDSUMMER AND R&J?

WHY ARE ROMEO AND JULIET'S LINES TRAGIC, AND WHY ARE PYRAMUS AND THISBE'S LINES FUNNY?

CAN YOU SAY THE LINES FROM MIDSUMMER IN A SERIOUS WAY? OR CAN YOU REWRITE THEM A BIT TO MAKE THEM TRAGIC?

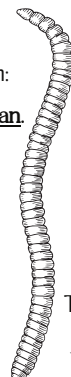
Actually, *Romeo & Juliet* is chock-full of famous last words! For instance: after Mercutio has been fatally wounded in a sword fight, he... talks a lot (typical for him!), including this classic pun:

Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

And then he puns again before exiting and dying offstage:

Help me into some house. Benvolio.
Or I shall faint. A plague a' both your houses!
They have made worms' meat of me. I have it.
And soundly too. Your houses!

So... even if you don't know much about this character, why do you think Shakespeare chose to have him joking right up to the end? What if Shakespeare *hadn't* written it that way?



Near the end of *Richard III*, the king is losing the battle badly, but he fights on. Exhausted, he cries out (twice)

**A horse! A horse!
My kingdom for a horse!**

then he rushes offstage.
It's the last we see of him.

This is one of the most recognizable lines in all of Shakespeare. Why do you think this one line is so famous? Should it be?



ONE-LINERS

Here are some of the best one-line last words. No questions; just enjoy reading them (aloud is always best)!

The rest is silence.
- Hamlet, *Hamlet*

O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!
- Roderigo, *Othello*

Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'
- Macbeth, *Macbeth*

THE DRINK! THE DRINK! I AM POISONED!
- GERTRUDE, *HAMLET*



Now my spirit is going.
I can no more.

- Antony*, *Antony & Cleopatra*

* Antony falls on his sword, but he screws it up. Whoops! It takes him 83 lines (two scenes) to die!

Exit, pursued by a bear

This stage direction, from *The Winter's Tale*, is one of the most famous (and mysterious) final "lines" in Shakespeare.

The Winter's Tale is a strange play; it's not really a comedy or a tragedy. Some parts are funny. Some aren't.

How would you stage this moment in the play? Would you play it for laughs? Or would you want it to be scary?

How would you represent the bear on stage? (Assume that a trained bear is out of the question.)

Does that answer change depending on whether you want the moment to be comedic or tragic?



Julius Caesar gets stabbed by eight senators. The last is his friend Brutus. Caesar says:

Et tu, Brute? Then fall Caesar.

"et tu" is Latin for "you, too," and "Brute" is the version of "Brutus" you'd use when speaking to him in Latin. It's two syllables ("broo-tay") because Latin is silly.

How many ways can you say this line? Try it as:

- a warning
- a curse
- a realization
- a disappointment
- any other way you can think of!





FAMOUS LAST WORDS | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Of course, not everyone in Shakespeare has stuff to say as they're dying. But that doesn't mean they don't get a chance to say something interesting, or funny, or mic-drop-y before they leave. (Hey, if Shakespeare can make up words, anyone can!)

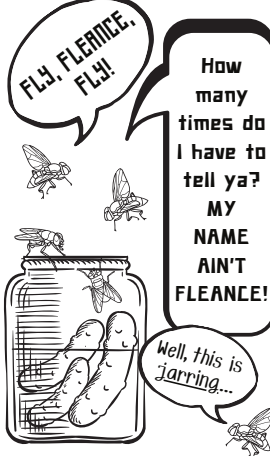
Anyway. Here are some famous last words that come before a character's final exit.



“TRINCULO
I have been in such a pickle since I saw you last that, I fear me, will never out of my bones: I shall not fear fly-blowing.

“IN A PICKLE”
this famous phrase comes from *The Tempest*. Trinculo has been drunk for most of the play. In the final scene, he's coming to his senses, and really feeling bad for himself. Have you heard this phrase? What does it mean to you?

NERD ALERT BONUS
Trinculo's joke here refers to how flies swarm on pickle brine. He's so "pickled" that someone will need to blow flies off him for the rest of his life!



SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS LAST WORDS IN SHAKESPEARE COME FROM MACBETH.



As her husband gets more paranoid and withdrawn, Lady Macbeth goes mad. In her final scene, she is sleepwalking (and washing her hands) and saying all sorts of things...

LADY MACBETH

Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale. — I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave. ... To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate: come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. — To bed, to bed, to bed!

Until this scene, Lady Macbeth speaks only in verse. Why does she speak in prose for this scene, do you think?

(She even talks about Banquo, who Macbeth had killed in a fit of paranoia... and whose ghost showed up in a previous scene!)

This speech can be done a million ways. She's dreaming, after all! Try it a few ways. What works for you? Why?

During both parts of *Henry IV*, Prince Hal becomes good friends with John Falstaff, an older knight who loves to party, joke around, and hang out with townsfolk in dive bars. But in *Henry IV, Part 2*, the king dies, and Hal becomes King Henry V. Falstaff is super-excited to hear that his friend has become king, so he rides straight to London to congratulate "King Hal."

But, in front of everyone, the new king disowns his old friend, saying "I know thee not, old man." Apparently, Falstaff isn't the kind of person Hal should be spending his time with anymore. Falstaff turns to a retired judge and says...

FALSTAFF
My lord, my lord, -- (Six beats of silence)
Lord Chief-Justice, I cannot now speak: I will hear you soon.

What goes on in that first line? This talkative person (he has more lines in Shakespeare than any other character!) is suddenly speechless. Try it a few ways. What works for you?

In *Othello*, Iago famously refuses to give a speech once his plot is discovered:

IAGO
Demand me nothing: what you know, you know: From this time forth I never will speak word.

Why might he do this? How does a story change when the villain explains themselves at the end... or doesn't?



...BETTER...



THAT'S A WRAP!

Plays, themselves, also have some famous last words. Here are a few of the best endings.

Compare these two final speeches, which come after the senseless deaths of several characters. What's similar? What's different?

The end of *King Lear* is devastating. Most of the main characters die in the final act, but nothing is really accomplished by their deaths. No one really knows what to say, so the Duke of Albany ends the play with this short speech.

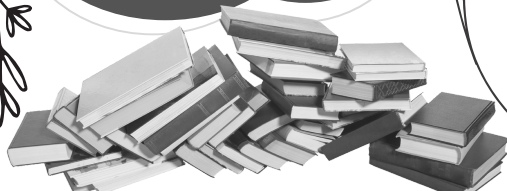
The weight of this sad time we must obey; Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. The oldest hath borne most; we that are young Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

What is Albany's message? What does it "mean"? Is it hopeful? Hopeless? Both? Neither?

At the end of *Romeo & Juliet*, the parents of the young couple see (or seem to see!) the error of their ways. The Prince ends the play with these six lines:

A glooming peace this morning with it brings; The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head: Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things; Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished: For never was a story of more woe Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

What are your favorite endings? Think of books, movies, TV shows, anything!



PUCK



If we shadows have offended, Think but this, and all is mended. That you have but slumber'd here, While these visions did appear. And this weak and idle theme, No more yielding but a dream. Gentles, do not reprehend: if you pardon, we will mend: And, as I am an honest Puck, If we have unearn'd luck Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue. We will make amends ere long; Else the Puck a liar call. So, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends, And Robin shall restore amends.

How is it different to end a play with an epilogue, rather than a regular speech, like the ones from *King Lear* and *Romeo & Juliet*?

