LESSON TITLE: Does Art Imitate Life?

GRADE LEVEL: Grades 9-12

TIME ALLOTMENT: Two 45-minute class periods

OVERVIEW
Writers are often told to “write what they know”. This lesson will ask students to explore this idea using examples of great writers, with a particular focus on William Shakespeare. In the Introductory Activity, students will look at several authors (either the authors suggested in this lesson or authors of your own choosing who better reflect your class’s study) and begin to identify ways in which authors’ lives are reflected in their writing. In the Learning Activity, students will watch video segments from the PBS series *Shakespeare Uncovered* providing biographical information about Shakespeare and exploring the question of whether or not events in Shakespeare’s life may have influenced his plays. Finally, in the Culminating Activity, students examine text from *The Tempest* and will assert, in a one- to two-page paper, whether or not Prospero’s speech from Act V, Scene i was in fact Shakespeare’s farewell to the theatre.

This lesson can be used during a study of Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, or in a unit focused on writers and writers’ lives. The lesson is best used after students have examined the lives and works of several authors.

SUBJECT MATTER
English/Language Arts

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After completing this lesson, students will be able to:
- Describe how authors’ lives influence their work.
- Identify the possible influence of events in Shakespeare’s life on his plays.
- Collect evidence from informational sources, including texts and video.
- Analyze text for sub-textual meaning.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards
http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy

Grades 9-10
RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

**Grades 11-12**

RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**NCTE/IRA Standards**

http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncte-ira

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

**MEDIA COMPONENTS**

**Video**

Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.
Segment 1: “Shakespeare’s Biography”
A brief biography of Shakespeare’s life.

Segment 2: “The Loss of a Son”
A discussion of the twins in *Twelfth Night* and the role twins played in Shakespeare’s life.

Segment 3: “The Resurrection”
An analysis of Shakespeare’s “resurrection” of Sebastian and its personal meaning for him.

Segment 4: “Shakespeare’s Daughter”
A look at how Shakespeare’s relationship with his daughter might have affected the story of *The Tempest*.

Segment 5: “I’ll Drown My Book”
An analysis of whether or not Prospero’s speech is Shakespeare’s farewell to the theatre.

Websites:

**Biblio.com**
http://www.biblio.com/authors.php
This website provides a wide range of detailed author biographies, which may be used in the Introductory Activity of this lesson.

**The Glencoe Literature Library Study Guide for *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare**
This is an extensive study guide, but depending on your students’ familiarity with William Shakespeare and *The Tempest*, sections you may want students to read include “Meet William Shakespeare (page 9) and “Before You Read – Background” (page 12). The “Introducing the Play” section (pages 10 and 11) is used in the Culminating Activity.

**American Shakespeare Center Podcast Central – Dr. Ralph Presents: *The Tempest***
In this 40-minute podcast, Ralph Alan Cohen talks about *The Tempest*. Dr. Ralph addresses the autobiographical nature of the play at around 31:44 and again at 36:10.

**MATERIALS**

For each student:
“Shakespeare’s Life and Art” Student Organizer
“Introducing the Play” (pages 10-11 of the Glencoe Study Guide)
“I’ll Drown My Book” Text Excerpt

For each group:
- One computer OR copies of author biographies if computers for each group are not available.

For the class:
- “Shakespeare’s Life and Art” Student Organizer Answer Key

PREP FOR TEACHERS

Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to:

Preview all of the video segments used in the lesson. Prepare to watch them using your classroom’s Internet connection.

Bookmark all websites which you plan to use in the lesson on each computer in your classroom.

Print copies of the handouts for each student and group.

Consider other authors to whom your students have been exposed, as well as how events in their lives may have affected their writing. Possible authors to consider include, but are not limited to: Harper Lee, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Willa Cather, and Ralph Ellison. You will be breaking your class into groups and each group will focus on a different author, so the number of authors you choose will depend on the size of your class.

Confirm the writers you have chosen have biographies on Biblio.com or another reputable website. If there are not available computers for each group, you may print out the biographies and prepare copies for your students.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY
1. Write the following quote on the board: “Write what you know.”
2. Ask students to reflect on the quote – have they ever heard this quote before? In what context? What does the quote mean? (Accept all answers.)
3. Explain to students that many authors, whether consciously or unconsciously, heed this often repeated advice. Tell students they will be researching the lives of authors they have studied in class and they will try to draw parallels between the authors' lives and writings – they will try to “prove” the authors have “written what they know.”
4. Divide the students into groups (size and number of groups will depend on your class size) and assign each group a different author. If computers are not available for each group, distribute handouts of author biographies.
5. Give the students 10-15 minutes to read through the authors’ biographies and to identify ways in which they think the authors’ lives influenced their writing. Students should be specific, and if possible, provide textual evidence to support their assertions (i.e. note settings, characters, themes, etc. that may have been influenced by the author’s life).

6. Spend the next several minutes allowing each group to share their findings with the class. Encourage students to discuss similarities and differences among the authors, and also encourage students to challenge their colleagues if they don’t agree with the assertions. (Accept all answers.)

LEARNING ACTIVITY

1. Transition to the next activity by explaining to students that now you will be looking closely at the life of William Shakespeare and attempting to correlate events in his life with events in his plays. Tell students many people believe that while Shakespeare’s plays were never truly autobiographical, they were heavily influenced by his life. Tell students the goal of the lesson is for them to form their own opinion about whether or not Shakespeare’s life influenced his art.

2. Explain you will be showing a series of video segments from the PBS series Shakespeare Uncovered that provide biographical information about Shakespeare and also discuss how his plays might have been influenced by events in his life.

3. Distribute the “Shakespeare’s Life and Art” Student Organizer to students. Provide a focus for the first video segment by asking students to take notes on the Student Organizer. They should note milestone events in and important facts about Shakespeare’s life.

4. Play the segment “Shakespeare’s Biography.” (Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.) After the video is finished playing, ask students to share some of the biographical information about Shakespeare they learned from the video segment. (Shakespeare was born in the rural town of Stratford. His father had a glove business. By 18, Shakespeare was married to an older woman named Anne Hathaway. When they married, Hathaway was already three months pregnant. According to historians, Shakespeare was too young to be married; his wife was the “right” age. Their first child was a daughter named Susanna. When Susanna was two, Hathaway gave birth to twins – Hamnet and Judith. As a writer, Stratford was not the place for Shakespeare to be – he needed to be in London. Shakespeare moved to London without his family and worked as an actor. One of his first plays was The Comedy of Errors. In this play, he used twins as a central comic device, which suggests he drew from his family experiences for the play. According to historians, Shakespeare showed a special interest in twins throughout his career, which is likely because of his family. In Twelfth Night, the twins are a boy and a girl – like his own twins.)

5. Provide a focus for the next video segment by asking students to again use their Student Organizers to take note of the events in Shakespeare’s life and how they may have influenced his plays. Play the segment “The Loss
of a Son.” (Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.)

6. When the segment is finished playing, ask students to share their observations. (In 1596, Shakespeare’s son died at the age of 11. Especially during that time, losing a son was particularly hard – sons were the heirs and legacies for their fathers. In Twelfth Night, which was written a few years after Hamnet’s death, the loss of a brother is a central idea. It mirrors the loss of the male twin in Shakespeare’s life.)

7. Remind students to continue to record their evidence on the Student Organizer. Play the segment “The Resurrection.” (Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.)

8. When the video is finished playing, ask students to share the evidence they collected from the segment. (The twins are reunited. Historians suggest that this turn of events was particularly emotional for Shakespeare. It is almost as if Shakespeare’s play is his own “wishful thinking” that perhaps his own son could be brought back to life.)

9. Remind students to continue to record their evidence on the Student Organizer. Play the segment “Shakespeare’s Daughter.” (Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.)

10. When the video is finished playing, ask students to share the evidence they collected from the segment. (When Shakespeare was writing The Tempest, he was worried about his daughter Judith – she was involved with an “unreliable” man. Shakespeare’s own paternal anxieties are reflected in his character Prospero. The Tempest shows a father testing a man to see if he is suitable for his daughter.)

11. Ask students to look over their Student Organizers and share what they think are the most compelling correlations between Shakespeare’s life and Shakespeare’s plays. (Accept all answers. Guide students to understand that one’s own experiences can provide excellent opportunities for stories and authors, in writing about their lives, are often able to channel emotions and write more vivid stories.)

12. Optional: If students have written fictional works for class, facilitate a discussion in which students share how their work has (or has not) been influenced by their personal lives. Ask students:

- When they are asked to write fiction, do they draw on their own lives or do they prefer to write something completely different from their lives? (Accept all answers.)
- What are the benefits of each approach? (Accept all answers. Writing what you know: lends insight and may make the writing more believable because you’ve experienced the emotion; people may find your writing more “credible”; etc. Writing the unknown: it can be fun and challenging to try to write something unknown.)

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

1. Transition to the next activity by telling students they will now examine one of Shakespeare’s speeches from The Tempest to determine whether or not Shakespeare was using the character of Prospero to express his
“farewell” to the theater. If students are not familiar with *The Tempest*, provide a brief plot summary of the play (an overview is provided in the Glencoe Study Guide).

2. Provide a focus question for the final video segment by asking students to take note of the evidence provided suggesting *The Tempest* was Shakespeare’s “farewell” to the theater. Play the video segment “I’ll Drown My Book.” (Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.)

3. When the segment is finished, ask students to share the evidence they discovered in the video segment (*Shakespeare may be using Prospero’s magic as a metaphor for his own imagination/writing; The Tempest was Shakespeare’s last play; the image of “drowning his book” suggests letting go and saying goodbye.*)

4. Distribute the “Introducing the Play” section (pages 10 and 11) of the Glencoe Study Guide for *The Tempest*. Explain to students they may use this introduction to look for further evidence that *The Tempest* is or is not autobiographical. Ask them to record the evidence they find. Give students 10-15 minutes to read through the study guide and take notes.

5. Ask students to share all the evidence they have heard, seen, and read regarding whether or not *The Tempest* was Shakespeare’s “farewell” to the theater. (*Accept all answers.*)

6. Distribute the “I’ll Drown My Book” Text Excerpt. Tell students the class will read the speech aloud twice as a group. Lead the first reading, and ask for a volunteer to perform the second reading. Focus the reading by asking students to circle or underline key words or phrases that are connotative or perhaps contain hidden meaning, or that create a certain mood or tone.

7. Once the class has read through the speech twice, ask students what tone is created in Prospero’s speech. What particular words or phrases contribute to the tone? (*Accept all answers. Help students define any words or phrases with which they struggled.*)

8. Ask students to identify other elements of the speech that may prove (or disprove) the theory that *The Tempest* was Shakespeare’s “farewell” to theater.

9. Either as an in-class assignment or for homework, ask students to write a 1-2 page paper defending their belief of whether or not *The Tempest* was Shakespeare’s “farewell” to the theater. Students should cite specific evidence from the video segments shown in class, the Glencoe Study Guide, and Prospero’s “I’ll Drown My Book” speech to support their assertions.

10. Collect students’ papers for an assessment of the lesson.