

The Hunt for William Shakespeare – SAMPLE TEXT

OPENING SONG

CHORUS

***Welcome friends both old and new!
The play we're going to act for you
Is all about Shakespeare and his mates.
The year in question? Fifteen ninety eight.***

***There's laughter, danger, thrills galore
That's just Act one –Act Two's got more
In fact our show is quite stupen-dous
Better even than last night's Eastenders***

***We've heroes, clowns and villains too
Brought to life right in front of you
So boo the baddies, give the heroes cheers
And sit back, enjoy - lend us your ears.
Lend us your ears.***

(SPOKEN) *Lend us your ears.*

CD TRACK – underscore to cover scene change and under EDMUND and JOHN playing.

SCENE 1: THE VILLAGE GREEN, BURCOTE, OXFORDSHIRE

EDMUND and JOHN are playing cards or dice. They are laughing. An empty log basket is nearby.

MOTHER charges onto the stage.

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EDMUND and JOHN jump up. They are obviously terrified of her.

MOTHER

Edmund! John! You lazy good for nothings! What are you doing?

EDMUND

Just playing, mother.

MOTHER

Playing? You've got work to do. Picking up sticks. Or are we to go without a fire?

JOHN

But mother, it's hard work!

MOTHER

No buts, John. Sticks! For the fire!

MOTHER comes up close to JOHN and thrusts the log basket at him. He almost topples over.

EDMUND

Sticks for beating us with, more like.

MOTHER goes to clout EDMUND. But EDMUND ducks out of the way.

MOTHER goes.

MOTHER

(CALLS AFTER THE BOYS) A week's worth, mind you!

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EDMUND and JOHN bend over, pick up sticks and put them into the basket.

MOTHER exits. Then from the opposite side of the stage ANNE and KATE run on.

EDMUND

Kate? Anne? What's the matter?

KATE

(BREATHLESS) Guess what? There are players on the village green!

EDMUND

Is it Lorenzo and his dancing bear?

ANNE

No!

JOHN

Not Dribbling Dan and his pig's bladder?

KATE

No, I've not seen this lot before. They're doing a *play*!

From the side of stage which KATE and ANNE entered come WILL KEMPE, THOMAS and the other members of the 1st Company of Players rowdily singing...

Behind the Players come the BURCOTE VILLAGERS, also singing...

They and the players may be using non-pitched instruments (e.g. small hand drum, tambourine, bells)

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SONG

With a hey and a ho and a bottle of sack

And a purse full of silver and gold

I'll drink and I'll eat while I'm still young

And I'll sing when I am old.

(Rpt)

JOHN, KATE, ANNE and EDMUND become part of the village audience.

**THEY ACT OUT A PART OF A SHAKESPEARE PLAY. SCHOOL'S CHOICE,
BUT COULD BE WITCHES' SCENE FROM MACBETH.**

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...Edmund and John are thrilled by the play on the green. One of the players, Thomas Kempe, reveals he is on his way down to London, to join the greatest playwright of them all, William Shakespeare...

With encouragement from their friends Kate and Anne, Edmund and John set out on the long journey to London: their plan to find William Shakespeare and become players in his Company. Everyone wishes them well in the song: 'The Hunt for William Shakespeare'

When Edmund and John arrive they find it a tarrying place. Two street urchins, Sal and Maria seize them...

SAL

You should be careful; we might have slit your throats!

MARIA

There are spies and knifers everywhere. No boy is safe in London.

The rest of the LONDONERS come to life and silently and gradually exit.

SAL looks EDMUND and JOHN up and down and turns her nose up at what she sees.

SAL

Especially country boys.

EDMUND

(OFFENDED) Who said we were country boys?

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SAL

(LAUGHS) A city boy would rather die than be seen wearing *brown*¹ breeches.

MARIA

Let alone a shirt with no collar. Hardly the style now, is it?

EDMUND

Isn't it?

SAL shakes his head in despair at EDMUND.

MARIA

Don't you know anything about fashion? Brown breeches are just so last year.

SAL

You two got names?

EDMUND

Course we've got names. I'm Edmund Tozer. And this is my younger brother-

JOHN

John. And who are you?

SAL

Sal.

¹ Or any colour!

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MARIA

Maria.

SAL

So what have you done wrong?

JOHN

(PUZZLED) We haven't done anything wrong!

SAL

You must have. That's the only reason people come to London. 'Cos they're on the run.

SAL LOOKS EDMUND UP AND DOWN.

SAL

I bet you've been hunting the King's deer!

EDMUND

No we haven't!

SAL

(DRAMATIC) You've killed a fellow, then? Strangled him with your bare hands!

EDMUND

No!

SAL

(DISAPPOINTED) Oh. Shame.

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JOHN

(IMPORTANTLY) We've come to London to find Master William Shakespeare.

MARIA

(SARCASTIC) Oooo... Have you now?

JOHN

We're going to become players in his company. We can sing, we can dance and we can read.

EDMUND gives JOHN a warning look. He thinks JOHN is giving too much away.

SAL

(A SLY GRIN) Is that so?

EDMUND

Yes.

SAL

Well, Edmund and John, you keep with us and you'll be safe enough.

SAL and MARIA move away, with a snigger.

EDMUND and JOHN are reluctant to follow.

MARIA

Come on!

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EDMUND

Where are we going?

MARIA

You want to find Will Shakespeare, don't you?

JOHN

(AMAZED) You know Will Shakespeare?

SAL

Shakespeare, Cake-speare, Belly-ache-speare, we know 'em all, don't we
Maria!

MARIA

Sure.