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**LANGUAGE ARTS 1206**  
**ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE**

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804 N. 2nd Ave. E., Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759

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# ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE

Five members of the Tudor family ruled England from 1485 to 1603. Of those one hundred eighteen years, Queen Elizabeth I ruled for forty-five (1558-1603). During her reign, the religious, political, economic, and intellectual changes that had begun under her grandfather, Henry VII, and her father, Henry VIII, reached a climax. The result was a flourishing of the arts and patriotism. As Queen, Elizabeth not only ruled but also gloriously represented the spirit of her times. Both she and her people loved and lived life with zest. The Elizabethan Age was one of exuberance and enthusiasm.

The medieval focus on life after death gave way to an Elizabethan emphasis on the here and now. Though still religious, Elizabeth's subjects vigorously pursued the pleasures and benefits of worldly living.

Religion itself had been a source of controversy and struggle in England since the reign of Henry VIII. When the Catholic Pope refused to grant Henry a divorce from his Spanish wife, Catherine, so that he could marry Anne Boleyn, Henry cut ties with the Church in Rome and established himself as the head of the Anglican Church of England. Thus Henry VIII introduced the Protestant Reformation, begun in Germany, to England. Though Henry generally maintained a balance between the Protestant and Catholic elements, his successors did not. The power struggle between religions accelerated under Henry's son and immediate successor, Edward VI, and under Mary, Henry's daughter by Catherine and successor to Edward. After Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, took the throne she definitively reestablished the Anglican Church.

One of the greatest crises England encountered during Elizabeth's reign was an attack by the powerful Spanish navy. In July, 1588, Philip II of Spain sent his Invincible Armada to invade England. The Spaniards lost over sixty-three ships and nine thousand men, and Spanish dominion of the seas was ended. England ruled the seas, and her spirit of pride and patriotism soared.

The Elizabethan Age was a period of geographical explorations and expansion. Consequently, England emerged as a leader in the European race to build commercial empires. Trade with distant countries provided a new source of wealth to the middle class merchants.

Enjoying the spirit of success, England was an eager recipient of the spirit of "rebirth" or "reawakening" that was influencing the thought of sixteenth-century Europe.

This "rebirth," later labeled by historians as the Renaissance, was sparked by a renewed interest in the classics of ancient Greece and Rome. It also resulted in a burst of creativity in and cultivation of the fine arts, in a growth in the spirit of individualism, in an expansion of intellectual thought, and in a new insight into the purpose and significance of the human person.

The Renaissance emphasis on the magnificence and wonder of the individual person as well as of the surrounding world encouraged the Elizabethan to consider life as more than a process of waiting for life after death. They believed that life was exciting and beautiful and should be enjoyed immediately. Shakespeare's Hamlet exclaims, "What a piece of work is man! how noble is reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable."

The Renaissance ideal expanded the concept of the individual to include all aspects—spiritual, rational, emotional, and physical—of the human personality. The Elizabethan exuberance, therefore, was a reflection of a seemingly limitless desire to know and to do and to be.

The English literature of the Renaissance offers ample proof of the Elizabethan respect for life and beauty, wherever it may be found. In this LIFEPAC® you will read and study the songs and sonnets of the poets. You will study the prose of the King James Bible. You will examine the development of the English drama and read one of Shakespeare's plays. Finally, you will analyze and criticize the play you have read.

## OBJECTIVES

**Read these objectives.** The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAAC.

When you have completed this LIFEPAAC, you should be able to:

1. Identify characteristics of Elizabethan songs.
2. List the basic techniques for interpreting songs and sonnets.
3. Define the literary devices used in poetry and prose.
4. Define the sonnet and its rhythm and rhyme patterns.
5. Identify sonnet forms and the common themes and subjects used by Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Donne.
6. Explain the background of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible and three literary forms used by Scripture writers.
7. Explain why Francis Bacon was an outstanding essayist of his time.
8. Trace the development of English drama.
9. Name the major types of drama written by Shakespeare.
10. Identify the characteristics of Elizabethan English.
11. List the three major types of drama written by Shakespeare.
12. Define tragedy as a type of drama as it applies to *Hamlet*.
13. Trace the chronological development of plot in *Hamlet*.
14. Outline the structure of the plot of tragedy and its related elements in *Hamlet*.
15. Identify the personality traits of each of the seven major characters in *Hamlet* and their relationships with minor characters.
16. Explain the major conflicts in *Hamlet*.
17. Define criticism and its dependence on evidence.
18. Explain the methods of writing critical essays.
19. Identify the five steps used in writing a critical essay.
20. Write a critical essay on one of *Hamlet's* characters.

**Survey the LIFEPAAC.** Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

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# I. ELIZABETHAN POETRY AND PROSE

Elizabethan poetry offers a variety of thoughts in words and rhythms that are pleasing to hear. The prose of the King James Version of the Bible presents God's Word in messages that are clear and direct. The ease with which you may enjoy this literature could lead you to the mistaken conclusion that the writer's task is an easy one. In this section you will analyze some of the devices the writer must use to create poetry and prose that are melodious and meaningful. Your familiarity with these devices, in turn, will aid you in interpreting what you read.

## SECTION OBJECTIVES

**Review these objectives.** When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Identify characteristics of Elizabethan songs.
2. List the basic techniques for interpreting songs and sonnets.
3. Define the literary devices used in poetry and prose.
4. Define the sonnet and its rhythm and rhyme patterns.
5. Identify sonnet forms and the common themes and subjects used by Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Donne.
6. Explain the background of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible and three literary forms used by Scripture writers.
7. Explain why Francis Bacon was an outstanding essayist of his time.

## VOCABULARY

**Study these words** to enhance your learning success in this section.

abstraction

courtier

petition

archaic

deviate

pithy

complemented

equating

quest

concrete

immortalize

sequences

contrition

**Note:** All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAK appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

## SONGS

The exuberance of the Elizabethan Age often expressed itself in songs, some spontaneous and others carefully designed. The development of musical instruments, such as the *virginal* and *viola da gamba*, **complemented** this impulse to sing. Nearly everyone in Elizabethan times could sing or play a musical instrument. In 1577 Richard Tottel published the first collection of songs and lyrics under the title *Songs and Sonnets*. This book, however, usually is called *Tottel's Miscellany*. Similar song books soon appeared, some with titles such as *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* and *The Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*. Like these titles, many of the Elizabethan songs were decorative and elaborate; others, however, were clear and simple.

Elizabethan songs often alluded to Greek mythology. Such references are a natural way for Renaissance songwriters to express their admiration of classical times. In the poem “The Triumph of Charis” the poet used Charis as his subject. In Greek mythology, Charis is the personification of beauty and charm.

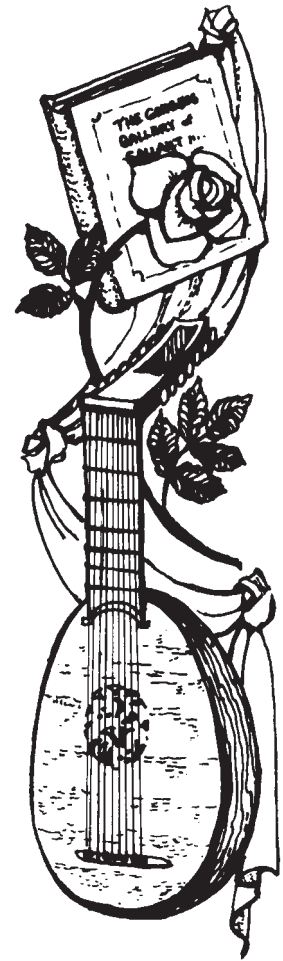
“The Triumph of Charis”

See the chariot at hand here of Love,  
Wherein my lady rideth!  
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,  
And well the car Love guideth.  
As she goes, all hearts do duty  
Unto her beauty;  
And enamor'd, do wish, so they might  
But enjoy such a sight,  
That they still were to run by her side,  
Through swords, through seas, whither she  
would ride.

Do but look on her eyes, they do light  
All that Love's world compriseth!  
Do but look on her hair, it is bright  
As Love's star when it riseth!  
Do but mark, her forehead smoother  
Than words that soothe her;  
And from her arched brows, such a grace  
Sheds itself through the face  
As alone there triumphs to the life  
All the gain, all the good, of the elements'  
strife.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,  
Before rude hands have touched it?  
Have you marked but the fall of the snow  
Before the soil hath smutched it?  
Have you felt the wool of the beaver?  
Or swan's down<sup>1</sup> ever?  
Or have smelt o' the bud of the briar<sup>2</sup>?  
Or the nard<sup>3</sup> in the fire?  
Or have tested the bag of the bee<sup>4</sup>?  
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!

Ben Jonson



1. *down*: soft, fine feathers.
2. *bud of the briar*: the wild rose.
3. *nard*: an aromatic substance.
4. *honey*: bag of the bee.