

Shakespearean Ear Candy



To Elizabethan audiences, an evening at the theater was a treat as much for the ear as for the eye. They expected witty dialogue, beautiful imagery, and clever wordplay. William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* did not disappoint them.

Punning is a special kind of wordplay in which one word looks or sounds like another word but has a totally different meaning. The puns below appear in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and are just one of the kinds of wordplay for which Shakespeare is famous. See whether you can figure the two (or three!) meanings Shakespeare was intending for the words in bold.

1. “**Home**-keeping youths have ever **homely** wits.” (*Valentine, Act I, sc. i*)

2. Valentine: ‘Tis true; for you are over-**boots** in love,
And yet you never swum the Hellespont.

Proteus: Over the **boots**? nay give me not the **boots**.

Valentine: No, I will not; for it **boots** thee not. (*Act I, sc. i*)

3. Twenty to one then, he is **shipped** already, and I have played the **sheep** in loosing him. (*Speed, Act I, sc. i*)

4. Proteus: Nay, in that you are astray: ‘twere best **pound** you.

Speed: Nay, sir, less then a **pound** shall serve me for carrying your letter. (*Act I, sc. i*)

5. “This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father; no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay, that cannot be so neither: yes; it is so, it is so: it hath the worsor **sole**: this shoe with the hole in it, is my mother.” (*Launce, Act II, sc. iii*)

6. Panthino: Launce, away, away: aboard: thy master is shipped, and thou art to post after with oars; what's the matter? Why weep'st thou, man?
- Launce: It is no matter if the **tide** were lost, for it is the unkindest tide, that ever any man **tied**.
- Panthino: What's the unkindest **tide**?
- Launce: Why, he that's **tied** here, Crab my dog. (*Act II, sc. iii*)
7. Speed: I **understand** thee not.
- Launce: What a block art thou, that thou canst not? My staff **understands** me.
- Speed: What sayest thou?
- Launce: Aye, and what I do too: look thee, I'll but lean, and my staff **understands** me.
- Speed: It **stands under** thee indeed. (*Act II, sc. v*)
8. Speed: How now Signior Launce? What news with your **mastership**?
- Launce: With my **mastership**? Why, it is at sea. (*Act III, sc. i*)

Try It!

Write some ear candy of your own. Take one of the following sets of words and see whether you can use them to construct a clever sentence like one of Shakespeare's. Try your sweet sentence out on a friend or family member. Ask an adult whether you can send your sentence to us at www.summershakespeare.org. We'll post some of our favorites on the website.

- horse/hoarse
- reed/read
- hare/hair
- bow (ribbon)/bow (bend at waist)/bow (weapon used with arrows)