



**Cheat Sheet by Allison Burr**

**Episode 6**

# **How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare**

**Guest: Ken Ludwig**

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## Meet Ken Ludwig

Ken Ludwig is the author of *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*.

He is also an internationally-acclaimed playwright whose work has been performed in more than 30 countries in over 20 languages. He has had six shows on Broadway as well as six in London's West End.



Ken is the recipient of Laurence Olivier Awards, the Charles MacArthur Award, the Helen Hayes Award, the Edgar Award for Best Mystery from The Mystery Writers of America, the SETC Distinguished Career Award, and the Edwin Forrest Award for Services to the Theatre. His first play on Broadway, *Lend Me A Tenor*, won three Tony Awards and was nominated for nine.

## In this Episode

In this episode, Ken describes the methods he personally used while teaching his own children how to love and memorize Shakespeare. He provides practical encouragement and makes Shakespeare accessible even for those parents who have never previously studied the Bard.

Ken reminds us of the truth that children love to memorize, and that we should be filling their storehouses up with beautiful language. What carries more beauty than the words of Shakespeare?

Ken also discusses several helpful picture books based upon Shakespeare's plays and then answers some great questions, including "Do you recommend seeing a performance or watching a movie before a play, or does it really matter?" "Are there adaptations or retellings that you recommend, like the Charles and Mary Lamb or the Edith Nesbit versions?"

## Cheater's Guide

Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or [listen to the entire podcast](#).

- 5:59 Ken's initial motivations in introducing his kids to Shakespeare.
- 8:27 Falling in love with Shakespeare in junior high.
- 10:00 What surprised Ken the most about introducing his young daughter to Shakespeare.
- 12:12 The greatest challenge in teaching Shakespeare to children.
- 15:30 Shakespeare as a foreign language.
- 18:45 Why retellings of Shakespeare still count as encountering Shakespeare!
- 20:34 A timeline for working through a passage.
- 22:41 What do you say to a parent who is intimidated by Shakespeare?
- 25:26 Handling the impropriety and difficult passages of the Bard.
- 27:40 Should parents read through Ken's book first, before teaching it?
- 28:22 Ken's recommended adaptations and recommendations.
- 33:59 Should we focus on the plot and characters without too much analysis?
- 36:18 What about watching a performance or movie before reading the play?
- 37:23 The opening passages of a play can be very accessible to kids.
- 39:48 What kids gain from taking the time to learn these passages is an inner intellectual backbone.
- 42:57 Helping make our kids more fully human, by helping form virtue in them.

**What kids gain from taking the time to learn these passages and then gain familiarity with Shakespeare is a kind of inner intellectual backbone. They probably will fool themselves; they didn't know they had it in them to do it. You suddenly can read a lot of literature as you grow older that's not Shakespeare, but that gives you a frame of reference that simply makes you smarter. It gives you confidence.... you don't do it so you become better on tests. You do it because you become a more intelligent being.**

–Ken Ludwig

# Major Takeaways

## 1. Kids aren't as intimidated by Shakespeare as adults are.

Kids (thankfully!) are nearly not as hung up on the gaps in their education as we parents are.

Just because you feel unworthy to teach the greatest playwright of all time does not mean that your kids will feel anxious about stepping into such deep waters.

Enter the depths with them; you will learn the complex, beautiful language and the masterful storylines right alongside them, and in the process will help cement a shared family culture.

## 2. Kids love the beauty and simplicity of the language.

They are drawn to the simplicity and the beauty of the language, mirroring the fact that humans are innately created for the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty.

Not every scene in every play will be appropriate for your kids, so of course parental discernment is always necessary. But there is so much richness to choose from, and so many helps available to us, that there is no excuse not to soak your kids in some of the most-quoted literature of all time.

Perhaps begin with *Midsummer Night's Dream*, as Ken suggests. It is magical, fun, and beautiful – the perfect introduction for both parent and child.

## 3. Kids love to memorize!

You already know this, but it bears repeating. Don't squander their inherent ability to implant magnificent and timeless language in their souls.

Ken's now-grown children love to banter their memorized Shakespeare when the family is together.

Training them to memorize beautiful language, and encouraging their hearts to love beautiful language, plants your children firmly in the tradition of four centuries of the best scholars, poets, artists, and authors who have done precisely the same thing.

## Show Notes

[How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare](#) by Ken Ludwig

[HowToTeachYourChildrenShakespeare.com](#), with audio clips of the passages Ken suggests and other helps to get you going!

Ken Ludwig's website: [KenLudwig.com](#)

The Young Reader's Shakespeare series by Adam McKeown: [Romeo & Juliet](#), [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#), [Julius Caesar](#), [Hamlet](#), [Macbeth](#)

[Tales from Shakespeare](#) by Charles & Mary Lamb ([FREE audio version!](#))

[Shakespeare's Stories for Young Readers](#) and [Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare](#) by E. Nesbit (FREE audio versions: [Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare](#), and [Children's Shakespeare](#))

[The Young Person's Guide to Shakespeare](#) by Anita Ganeri

[Shakespeare's Theatre](#) by Andrew Langley

[The Shakespeare Library](#) by Wendy Greenhill: Ken recommends the whole series. Used copies are available from many sources, for example [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) from Amazon.

Other sources: [AbeBooks](#), [BetterWorldBooks](#), [Half.com](#).

Many thanks to Lauren for this episode's **Let the Kids Speak!** She recommended [The Drovers Road](#) by Joyce West.

# Action Plan

## 1. Beginning is easy:

Pick up Ken's book or one of the adaptations referenced in the interview. Do you like the thought of beginning with the magic of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or perhaps another that your children are already familiar with, making it a more logical place to begin?

## 2. Read through Mystie Winckler's [Shakespeare for Kids: An Easy 5-Step Plan at Simply Convivial.](#)

Mystie gathers more simple helps, including picture books, movie adaptations to consider, and even a set of Shakespeare paper dolls to help re-enact famous scenes.

Mystie Winckler is also a guest on [Episode 14](#) of the Read-Aloud Revival.

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com).