

Research Component:

30 arguments for both sides of the discussion, with counter arguments.

Students may be assigned any of the **Topics** on the next pages to research for the class presentation, debate, or trial modules. There are 15 arguments for William of Stratford and 15 for Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. For each argument, there is a counter-argument. Based on the number of students a teacher has, the teacher may choose topics from both the Stratford and Oxford sides, one for each student. Be sure half the class has Stratford topics (1-15) and half has Oxford topics (16-30). This plan accommodates up to 30 students, but if more topics are needed, the teacher can divide the arguments and counter-arguments as necessary.

For the Research → Presentation mode, topics can be simply assigned as they are, with students researching, then explaining and discussing the Evidence and Counter-Argument for each topic. They can simply copy and paste the wording of the topic into google or ChatGPT, along with the phrase; “Give evidence for this claim with links to sources.” If you would like to supplement the lesson, use the “Evaluating Online Sources Worksheet” listed among the lesson plan materials.

For the **Research** → **Debate** and the **Research** → **Trial** modes, please refer to the instructions given for that mode, given separately.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will be able to analyze and present arguments for and against the authorship of works attributed to William Shakespeare, incorporating evidence and counterarguments.
2. Students will be able to assess the credibility of online sources and verify claims generated by AI tools such as ChatGPT.

ASSESSMENTS (rubrics provided below):

Students will be assessed on the quality of their research and presentations, including clarity, evidence provided, and engagement in the class discussion. Students will complete source evaluation worksheets for each source they use, where they will analyze the online articles and determine their credibility based on author qualifications, source, and evidence provided.

KEY POINTS:

- Understanding the arguments for both William of Stratford and Edward de Vere's authorship claims.
- Understanding author qualifications (e.g., educational background, expertise).
- Identifying scholarly sources (e.g., articles from universities or educational institutions).
- Assessing the credibility of claims (e.g., looking for supporting evidence).
- Recognizing common characteristics of credible evidence (e.g., recent, peer-reviewed).
- Evaluating evidence and counter-arguments critically.

- Developing skills in counter-argumentation to strengthen discussion.
- Developing effective research and presentation skills using digital tools (search engines, Google Slides, PowerPoint).
- Engaging in constructive class discussions.

OPENING:

- Begin with a thought-provoking question: "Is it possible that for many decades people have mistakenly believed that the wrong person wrote the plays of Shakespeare?"
- Briefly introduce the lesson's goals and structure.
- Start research with a discussion question: "How do you decide if a source is reliable?" (Introduce Evaluating Online Sources Worksheet.)

INTRODUCTION TO NEW MATERIAL:

- Present key arguments for both sides (William of Stratford vs. Edward de Vere) using a visual aid (e.g., the chart on the following pages).
- Discuss the importance of evidence in supporting arguments. The research component is crucial here.
- Present a mini-lecture on the criteria for evaluating sources using the source evaluation worksheet (If time permits, use real examples of credible and non-credible sources for discussion.)
- Anticipate misconceptions: "If a website looks professional, it must be credible." Discuss why appearances can be misleading. Some students may believe that authorship is universally accepted without evidence when, in fact, it is a contentious issue.

ASSESSMENTS: Students will be assessed based on the quality of their research and presentations, including the clarity of arguments and counter-arguments, as well as their participation in the class discussion. Assign students to complete the source evaluation worksheet for each source used, analyzing a minimum of three different online sources on the topic they were assigned.

STANDARDS ALIGNED:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.

30 Research Topics: Cases For and Against

For the teacher: this is background information, any topic of which could be expanded or researched further. These are the major points of argumentation between the Stratfordian and Oxfordian camps. For clarity, the name “Shakspere” refers to the Stratford man, while the name “Shakspeare” refers to the author, whomever it may be.

Case for William of Stratford

1. Name on the Plays and Poems

Evidence: The name “William Shakespeare” appears on published plays and poems during his lifetime. There was one William Shakespeare in the theater at that time and it was the man from Stratford.

Counter-Argument: Skeptics argue that “Shakespeare” was a common name and could have been a pen name or an allonym (a name that is assumed by an author but that actually belongs to another person). The pen name may have come from the actor in the King’s Men, Shakspere of Stratford, who may have been a front man for the true author.

2. Records Match the Stratford Man

Evidence: Baptism, death, and burial records of Shakspere from Stratford-upon-Avon match the timeline that the playwright would have lived. He received a coat of arms in his family name that clearly says “Shakespeare.”

Counter-Argument: The records show that Shakespeare of Stratford was an actor, father, husband, property owner, and money lender, but not a writer.

3. The First Folio (1623)

Evidence: Compiled by actors John Heminge and Henry Condell, the First Folio names William Shakespeare of Stratford and includes a portrait. There is a poem in the dedication of the First Folio by Ben Jonson, and all three would have known the actor Shakspere in real life.

Counter-Argument: Doubters question the reliability of the Droeshout portrait and point out that the Folio was published after Shakespeare's death, possibly as part of a cover-up or tribute to a front man. The references in the First Folio to Stratford and Avon are indirect and could be misleading.

4. Ben Jonson's Testimony

Evidence: Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's contemporary, praised him in the First Folio as a peerless writer.

Counter-Argument: Skeptics say Jonson may have been in on the scheme to use "Shakespeare" as a front and was offering a general tribute to the work itself rather than firsthand verification of authorship in the First Folio.

5. References by Contemporaries

Evidence: Other contemporaries (e.g., Francis Meres, Leonard Digges) identified Shakespeare as a well-known playwright.

Counter-Argument: Authorship skeptics suggest these references were to the brand or persona of "Shakespeare," not the Stratford man specifically. They were praising the work, not the actor from Stratford.

6. Acting and Theatre Connections

Evidence: William Shakspeare was a shareholder in the Globe Theatre and acted in plays. The plays show first hand knowledge of this theatrical experience.

Counter-Argument: Critics say this proves Shakspeare was involved in theater but not necessarily that he wrote the plays. He may have been a front for the real author. Edward de Vere also had extensive knowledge of the theater.

7. Will of William Shakespeare

Evidence: The 1616 will of William Shakspeare is a legal document from a man of property and names the actors Heminges, Condell, and Burbage, showing his connection to the theater.

Counter-Argument: The will contains no mention of books, manuscripts, or literary interests, which skeptics see as odd for a major writer.

8. Scholars Accept the Stratford Authorship

Evidence: For many, many years the overwhelming majority of scholars have accepted that the man from Stratford is the writer of the plays and poems. People who question this history are conspiracy theorists and fringe attention seekers.

Counter-Argument: Scholars may have continued to build on a mistaken idea from many years ago, and like the idea that “Columbus discovered America,” it’s time to question that narrative with evidence. Calling someone a “conspiracy theorist” is just an insult to avoid looking at the question.

9. Publication During Lifetime

Evidence: Many plays and poems were published under his name during his lifetime.

Counter-Argument: The only evidence we have in Shakspere of Stratford’s handwriting are his six signatures on legal documents. The signatures are so shaky and messy that many people are convinced Shakspere could not hold a pen.

10. Connection to Stratford Schooling

Evidence: He likely attended the Stratford grammar school, which offered a rigorous classical education.

Counter-Argument: There’s no surviving record that he attended, and skeptics doubt a grammar school education could produce works that showed such intense scholarship.

11. Family and Legal Documents

Evidence: Various legal records, including lawsuits and property deals, show William Shakespeare as an active and literate individual.

Counter-Argument: None of these documents reference literary activity. Critics say a literary genius should have left more direct literary traces.

12. Testimonies from the Stationers' Register

Evidence: Several plays were entered under Shakespeare's name during his lifetime.

Counter-Argument: The Stationers' Register recorded claims of publication, not authorship verification, and could have been manipulated.

13. The Monument in Stratford

Evidence: His monument shows him to be a writer and poet.

Counter-Argument: The monument was erected after his death and may have been revised. The original monument showed someone holding a sack of some sort but was changed to show him holding a pen and paper.

14. Dedications in Poems

Evidence: *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were published under his name and dedicated to the Earl of Southampton.

Counter-Argument: Skeptics propose the dedications could have been written by someone else or that Shakespeare was merely a literary mask for someone within Southampton's circle, like Edward de Vere.

15. No One Questioned the Authorship

Evidence: No contemporary disputed Shakespeare's authorship during or shortly after his lifetime.

Counter-Argument: Absence of dispute isn't proof. Critics argue that questioning the authorship would have been socially or politically risky, and that there's evidence of early doubts that Shakspere was Shakespeare.

The Case for Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford

16. Elite Education and Courtly Experience

Evidence: De Vere had an extensive education, fluency in multiple languages, and direct courtly experience—matching the sophistication and aristocratic insight in Shakespeare's works.

Counter-Argument: While de Vere was educated, many other nobles were as well. There's no direct link between his writings and the Shakespeare canon. Also, formal education is not required to produce great literature.

17. Literary Recognition in His Time

Evidence: Contemporary writers praised de Vere as a poet and playwright. George Puttenham called him "best for comedy" among the noblemen.

Counter-Argument: None of de Vere's surviving work compares in quality or style to Shakespeare's. Praise for writing comedy doesn't equate to authorship of the plays.

18. Use of the Pseudonym "Shakespeare"

Evidence: Nobles often used pseudonyms. Using a commoner like Shakspere as a front would shield de Vere from the stigma of publishing plays.

Counter-Argument: There is no contemporary evidence showing de Vere ever used "Shakespeare" as a pen name or needed a front. Aristocrats did publish works under their own names.

19. The Sonnets' Personal Content

Evidence: The Sonnets reference a love triangle, aging, suffering from lameness, holding the canopy, disgrace, and patronage—interpreted by Oxfordians as biographical allusions to de Vere's life, especially his ties to the Earl of Southampton.

Counter-Argument: These interpretations are speculative and rely on reading metaphor as autobiography. Many poets adopt a persona or voice distinct from their own.

20. Extensive Travel, Especially to Italy

Evidence: De Vere traveled through France and Italy in the 1570s, visiting many locations that appear with striking detail in the plays.

Counter-Argument: The playwright's knowledge of Italy is debatable and may have been based on books, not firsthand experience. The same can apply to any playwright.

21. Legal and Courtly Knowledge

Evidence: The plays show deep understanding of law, heraldry, and court life—areas de Vere was immersed in.

Counter-Argument: These topics were widely discussed in the Renaissance, and Shakspeare could have learned them through books, observation, and collaboration.

22. Timing of the Plays

Evidence: Oxfordians argue that most plays were written before 1604 (when de Vere died), despite many being published or performed later. Shipwrecks happened in de Vere's lifetime, and could have been described in *The Tempest*.

Counter-Argument: Many plays contain references to specific events after 1604 (e.g., *The Tempest* and the 1609 Sea Venture shipwreck). Posthumous publication is possible, but not for late topical references.

23. Close Ties to the Theater

Evidence: De Vere was a known patron of acting companies and had plays performed at court.

Counter-Argument: Patronage doesn't equate to authorship. There's no evidence he wrote the Shakespearean works performed in public theaters.

24. Buried Under Westminster—With Poetic Tribute

Evidence: Some say De Vere is buried near where some believe Shakespeare is memorialized in Westminster Abbey, implying high cultural status.

Counter-Argument: Many notable people are buried in Westminster, and this doesn't link him to Shakespeare directly. There's no direct evidence that de Vere is buried under the Shakespeare monument in Westminster Abbey.

25. Handwriting Comparisons

Evidence: Some Oxfordians claim handwriting and phrasing in de Vere's letters resemble Shakespearean diction.

Counter-Argument: Stylometric and linguistic analyses show major differences between known de Vere writings and the Shakespeare canon.

26. Marked Decline in Literary Quality After 1604

Evidence: According to some scholars, Shakespeare's later plays are more collaborative or less stylistically rich—suggesting the true author (Oxford) had died.

Counter-Argument: Literary style changes over time. Collaborations became more common late in Shakespeare's career, but there's no evidence this was due to Oxford's death.

27. Obscured Authorship Fits Tudor Politics

Evidence: The true author may have needed to stay anonymous to avoid political danger or scandal, especially if writing controversial plays like *Richard II*. Some writers were tortured or punished for writing works critical of the royals.

Counter-Argument: Other writers, including Ben Jonson, published political plays under their names. There's no hard evidence de Vere needed secrecy.

28. "Shake-speare" Hyphenation

Evidence: The hyphenated spelling on some title pages ("Shake-speare") suggests a pen name rather than a real name. The Elizabethan Age was called "The Golden Age of Pseudonyms."

Counter-Argument: Hyphenated names were not uncommon in Elizabethan printing. It's not reliable evidence of a pseudonym.

29. Loss of Personal Papers

Evidence: De Vere's personal papers are lost, possibly destroyed to hide his authorship.

Counter-Argument: Many noblemen's papers were lost or destroyed due to time or estate transitions. Absence of evidence is not evidence of conspiracy.

30. Roger Stritmatter's Research (Geneva Bible)

Evidence: Marginal notes in de Vere's annotated Geneva Bible align with biblical references in Shakespeare's plays. Professor Stritmatter showed a correlation between the references and the plays.

Counter-Argument: The connections are often tenuous or subjective. Biblical references were common in Renaissance literature, and the same verses were often cited by many.

Stratfordian vs. Oxfordian Authorship Comparison Chart

#	Stratfordian Argument (William Shakspere of Stratford)	Counter-Argument	Oxfordian Argument (Edward de Vere)	Counter-Argument
1	His name appears on many title pages	Could be a pen name or a front man	De Vere was a known poet and playwright	His surviving work is not like Shakespeare's
2	Baptism, death, and burial records match the playwright	Proves only that he lived, or was an actor, not that he wrote	Educated nobleman with elite court access	Education ≠ authorship; many nobles wrote
3	First Folio (1623) attributes works to him	Published years after Shakspere's	De Vere's literary circle had theatrical ties	No direct link to Shakespeare's plays

death; possibly
misattributed

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|---|--|--|--|---|
| 4 | Praised by Ben Jonson and contemporaries | Jonson may have been eulogizing the brand Shakespeare, not the Stratford actor | Sonnets' themes mirror de Vere's biography | Reading biography into poetry is speculative |
| 5 | Contemporary references identify him as a playwright | Could refer to the pen name, not the man from Stratford | Traveled extensively in Italy, which is shown in plays | Plays may draw from books or conversation, not travel |
| 6 | He was a shareholder in the Globe Theatre which produced Shakespeare plays | Business role ≠ authorship; the Globe put on plays but other writers as well | Deep legal, political, and classical knowledge; spoke and read foreign languages | These could be learned or assisted by others |
| 7 | His will shows a successful man | No books or literary references in the will | Died in 1604, matching the style decline in later plays | Several plays post-date his death |
| 8 | Scholars have accepted his authorship for generations | Scholars may have continued to build on a mistaken idea from many years ago | Patron of performing arts, with court performances and his own theatre troupes | Patronage ≠ authorship |
| 9 | Works published during his lifetime | Publishers may have used his name as cover; he never | Nobles used pseudonyms to hide authorship | No solid evidence that de Vere used "Shakespeare" |

claimed writing them

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|----|--|--|--|--|
| 10 | Likely educated at Stratford grammar school | No school records survive | Personal experience aligns with Shakespeare's knowledge | Correlation doesn't confirm authorship |
| 11 | Legal and property documents show literacy | No literary references in documents | Marginal notes in his Bible match Shakespeare's themes | Parallels are circumstantial, not conclusive |
| 12 | Sonnets written in Shakespeare's voice and name | Sonnets don't reflect what we know of Stratford man's life | Sonnets' references to disgrace, aging, and Queen's canopy fit de Vere | Interpretive rather than definitive |
| 13 | Stratford Monument and Folio commemorate him as a writer | May have been politically motivated and the monument was altered | Some believe Westminster Abbey references are coded tributes | No primary evidence of a hidden memorial to de Vere in Westminster Abbey |
| 14 | Stationers' Register lists him as author | Not a secure authorship source | "Shake-speare" hyphenation implies pen name | Hyphenation was common and not conclusive |
| 15 | No one questioned authorship until centuries later | Lack of controversy ≠ proof; and people did question authorship early on | De Vere's papers missing; perhaps destroyed | Paper loss was common; no evidence of suppression |

Evaluating Online Sources Worksheet

Objective: Practice identifying credible, accurate, and objective online sources.
Complete one for each source you use in your research.

Name / Title of article or webpage:

Date Accessed:

Author's Name (if given):

Author's Background (education, job, expertise) if given:

Where is the article published?

(e.g., .edu, .org, .gov, .com, etc.)

Does the article cite sources or include a bibliography? Circle one: **Yes** / **No**

Is the information recent (within the last 5-15 years)? Circle one: **Yes** / **No**

Is the article detailed, informative? (explain)

Evidence & Objectivity Check

What kinds of evidence does the article use? (Check all that apply)

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert quotes | <input type="checkbox"/> Links to studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical facts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal opinions | <input type="checkbox"/> News reports | <input type="checkbox"/> No evidence | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain) |

Does the article consider more than one side of the issue? Yes No

Does it use emotional or dramatic language? Yes No

Give an example of neutral or biased wording from the article:

Fact check at least one of the important claims made in this article in another source.

Source you checked: _____

Does it confirm the article's information? Yes No

ChatGPT or other AI: if you pose a question to ChatGPT be sure to ask for sources for that information when it makes its reply. Use the sheet above to verify the strength of those sources for any claim you intend to use.