



St. Columba's College

English Department

Willis Memorial Prize for Shakespeare 2025

Open to Sixth, Fifth and Fourth Forms

An essay on an aspect of Shakespeare's writing chosen from the options below. It is to be completed by 9.00pm on Thursday 8th May and handed in to Mr Girdham by then either by paper or scanned via Firefly (ask him to set a task for you).

It *must* be handwritten (unless a candidate also types for state exams), and must be completed in **a maximum of 4 sides of A4**.

You may use notes, the text, and critical works as you wish. All writing must be your own, and you must be able to explain your reasoning in an interview (see below).

After completion, strong candidates will be interviewed by Mr Girdham and asked questions on their essay and on their play/s.

Choose **one** of the following statements and write on it (you may of course write on the play you have studied this year – *King Lear* for Sixth, *Macbeth* for Fifth, *Julius Caesar* for Fourth – or other plays). You can write on more than one play.

1. It is the level of Shakespeare's brilliance with language that makes him history's most powerful playwright.
2. We always have mixed feelings about the central characters of Shakespeare's plays, because they are always complex.
3. The power of Shakespeare's plays comes from brilliantly-achieved individual scenes.
4. Shakespeare's plays constantly surprise and challenge their audiences.
5. Shakespeare is enduringly important because his ideas, themes and characters are relevant to all societies and times.
6. Choose one important speech by a central character in one of the plays of at least 20 lines, and write your detailed explanation of every sentence in it, showing how it works and what it reveals about the character and its importance in the play. You also need to learn it off by heart – if interviewed, you will start by reciting the speech.