

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

Definition

Old language refers to words, phrases, or expressions that were common in earlier periods of English but are less frequently used or have changed meaning in contemporary usage. Understanding old language requires recognizing archaic vocabulary, outdated expressions, and historical contexts.

Example

Old Language	Modern Equivalent	Time Period Common
"Thou" and "thee"	"you"	Middle English to Early Modern English
"Hither" and "thither"	"here" and "there"	Old English to Early Modern English
"Ere"	"before"	Old English to Early Modern English
"Alas"	Expression of grief or concern	Middle English to 19th century
"Forsooth"	"in truth" or "indeed"	Middle English to Shakespeare's time

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

PART 1: Multiple Choice

Choose the correct modern meaning for each old language word or phrase from Shakespeare's poetry.

1. "Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

- a) Where are you, Romeo?
- b) Why are you Romeo?
- c) How did you become Romeo?
- d) When will you be Romeo?

2. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

- a) Will I compare you in the future?
- b) Should I compare you?
- c) Can I compare you?
- d) May I compare you?

3. "Mine eyes have seen thy glory"

- a) My vision shows your story
- b) My sight reveals your greatness
- c) My eyes have witnessed your beauty
- d) My view contains your history

4. "O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power"

- a) Oh you, my handsome boy, who with your strength
- b) Oh that, my pretty boy, who in your ability
- c) Oh when, my little boy, who in your youth
- d) Oh where, my fair boy, who in your wisdom

5. "Hath not old custom made this life more sweet"

- a) Has not traditional practice made this life sweeter
- b) Had not former habits made this life sweet
- c) Have not ancient rituals made life sweet
- d) Has never old tradition made life sweet

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

PART 2: Matching

Match each Shakespeare term with its modern meaning by writing the correct letter.

_____ ere

_____ methinks

_____ hast

_____ woe

_____ doth

- a) before
- b) I think/it seems to me
- c) have (second person)
- d) sorrow/misery
- e) does

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

PART 3: Fill in the Blank

Read these lines from Shakespeare's sonnets and fill in the blanks with the modern equivalents of the old language words.

1. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments."

In modern English: Let me not admit obstacles to the marriage of true _____.

2. "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."

In modern English: Love is not love that _____ when it finds change.

3. "Thy eternal summer shall not fade."

In modern English: _____ eternal summer shall not fade.

4. "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st."

In modern English: When in eternal lines to time you _____.

5. "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this and this gives life to thee."

In modern English: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this and this gives life to _____.

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

PART 4: Short Answer

Translate these famous Shakespeare poetry lines into modern English.

1. But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

Modern translation:

2. Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there.

Modern translation:

3. Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

Modern translation:

4. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May.

Modern translation:

5. And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Modern translation:

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language

PART 5: Context Clues

Use context clues to determine the meaning of the underlined old language words in these Shakespeare quotes.

1. My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red.

What does "mistress" most likely mean in this context?

- a) a married woman having an affair
- b) a woman in a position of authority
- c) the female beloved or the subject of the poem
- d) a female employer

2. When I do count the clock that tells the time, And see the brave day sunk in hideous night

What does "brave" most likely mean in this context?

- a) courageous
- b) defiant
- c) splendid/fine
- d) bold

3. The forward violet thus did I chide

What does "chide" most likely mean in this context?

- a) praise
- b) scold/reproach
- c) grow
- d) hold

Name _____

Date _____

Meanings of Old Language – Answer Key

PART 1: Multiple Choice

- b) Why are you Romeo?
- b) Should I compare you?
- c) My eyes have witnessed your beauty
- a) Oh you, my handsome boy, who with your strength
- a) Has not traditional practice made this life sweeter

PART 2: Matching

- a (ere = before)
- b (methinks = I think/it seems to me)
- c (hast = have, second person)
- d (woe = sorrow/misery)
- e (doth = does)

PART 3: Fill in the Blank

minds
changes
Your
grow
you

PART 4: Short Answer

1. "But wait, what light is shining through that window over there?"
2. "Unfortunately, it's true I have wandered from place to place."
3. "You are more beautiful and more moderate/gentle."
4. "Strong winds shake the lovely buds of May."
5. "And summer's time is too short."

PART 5: Context Clues

1. c) the female beloved or the subject of the poem
2. c) splendid/fine
3. b) scold/reproach