

Learn Shakespearean characters from great works of art



ABC Shakespeare in Art

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Front cover: Frank Dicksee (1853-1928), *Romeo and Juliet*, 1884
Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton, UK

Back cover: William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus*,
c. 1850-51, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, UK

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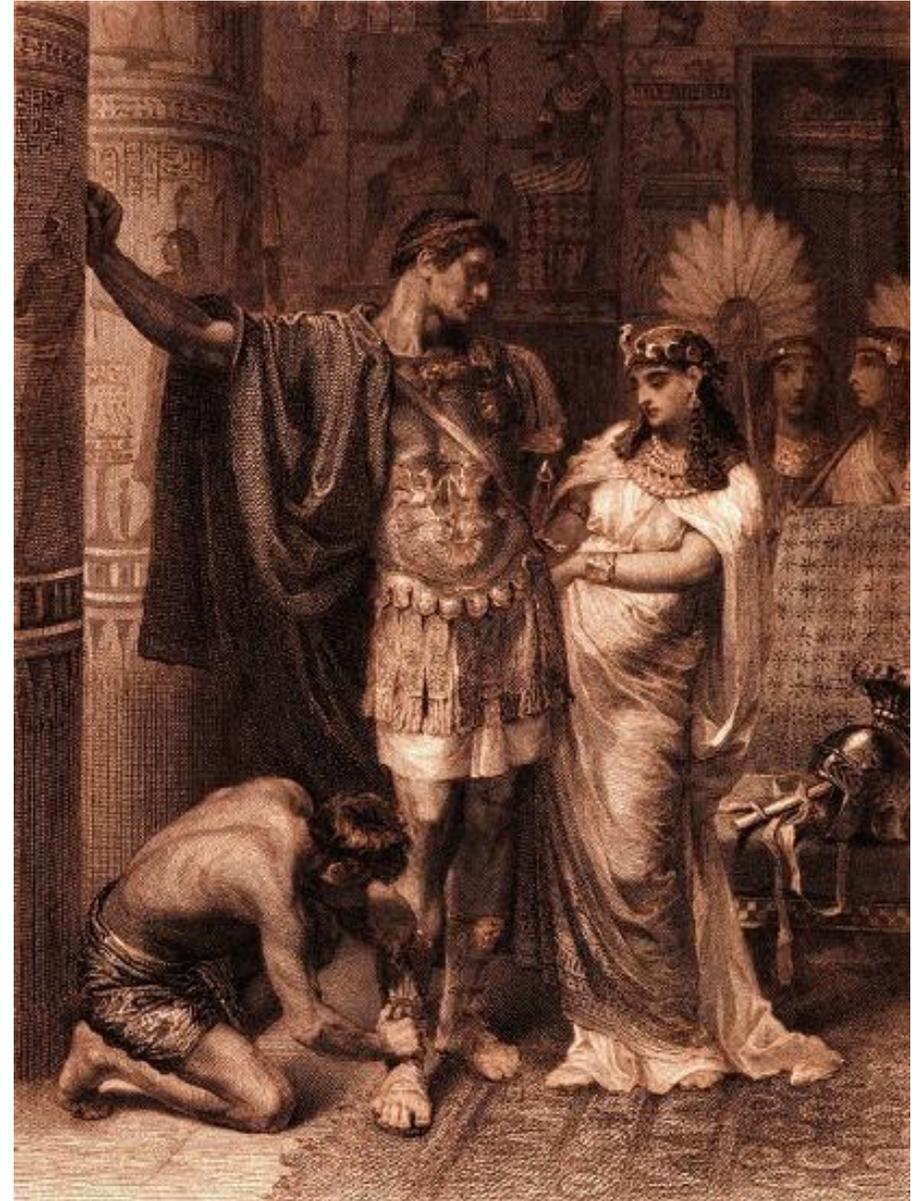


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A is for Antony

Antony and Cleopatra

Antony is a Roman general and one of the triumvirs, torn between his duties and his love for Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. His infatuation leads him to neglect Rome, sparking conflict with Octavius Caesar. Antony's indecision and emotional vulnerability result in his defeat and tragic demise. Dying, he reunites with Cleopatra before she takes her own life



Frank Bernard Dicksee (1853-1928)
"Antony and Cleopatra," Act III, Scene XI
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, US

B is for Beatrice

Much Ado About Nothing

Beatrice, a sharp-witted and independent noblewoman, engages in lively banter with Benedick, masking their mutual affection. When her cousin Hero is falsely accused, Beatrice defends her and demands justice. Tricked into confessing their love, she and Benedick finally embrace their feelings, leading to a joyful reconciliation and marriage



Norman Mills Price (1877-1951)
Beatrice and Benedick, c. 1920-1929
Private Collection

C is for Cordelia

King Lear

Cordelia, King Lear's honest and loyal youngest daughter, refuses to flatter him for land, unlike her deceitful sisters, resulting in her disinheritance. Later, she returns with an army to rescue her father, but they are defeated. Captured and executed, she dies tragically, leaving Lear heartbroken in his final moments



George William Joy (1844-1925)
Cordelia Comforting Her Father, King Lear, in Prison, 1886
Leeds Museums and Galleries, Leeds, UK

D is for Desdemona

Othello

Desdemona, Othello's noble and devoted wife, secretly marries him despite her father's objections. Her kindness and loyalty make her an easy target for Iago's schemes. Falsely accused of infidelity, she pleads her innocence, but Othello, consumed by jealousy, kills her



William Powell Frith (1819-1909)
Othello and Desdemona, 1840-1856
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK

E is for Emilia

Othello

Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's loyal attendant, unknowingly aids Iago's scheme by giving him Desdemona's handkerchief, which he uses to frame her for infidelity. Realizing the truth too late, she exposes Iago's treachery. This leads to her own murder at his hands, following Desdemona's death



Daniel Maclise (1806-1870)
Othello, Desdemona and Emilia, c. 1867
Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

F is for Ferdinand

The Tempest

Ferdinand, the Prince of Naples, shipwrecked on Prospero's island, encounters Miranda and falls in love. Despite Prospero's tests of hard labor, he proves his devotion. His perseverance earns Prospero's approval, and he ultimately marries Miranda, returning to Naples with her



William Hogarth (1697-1764)
Scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, c. 1736-1738
Nostell Priory, Nostell, UK

G is for Goneril

King Lear

Goneril is Lear's eldest daughter, who flatters him to gain a share of his kingdom. Cruel and ambitious, she later betrays Lear, mistreats him, and conspires against her husband and sister. Her ruthless nature leads to jealousy, murder, and, ultimately, her own suicide

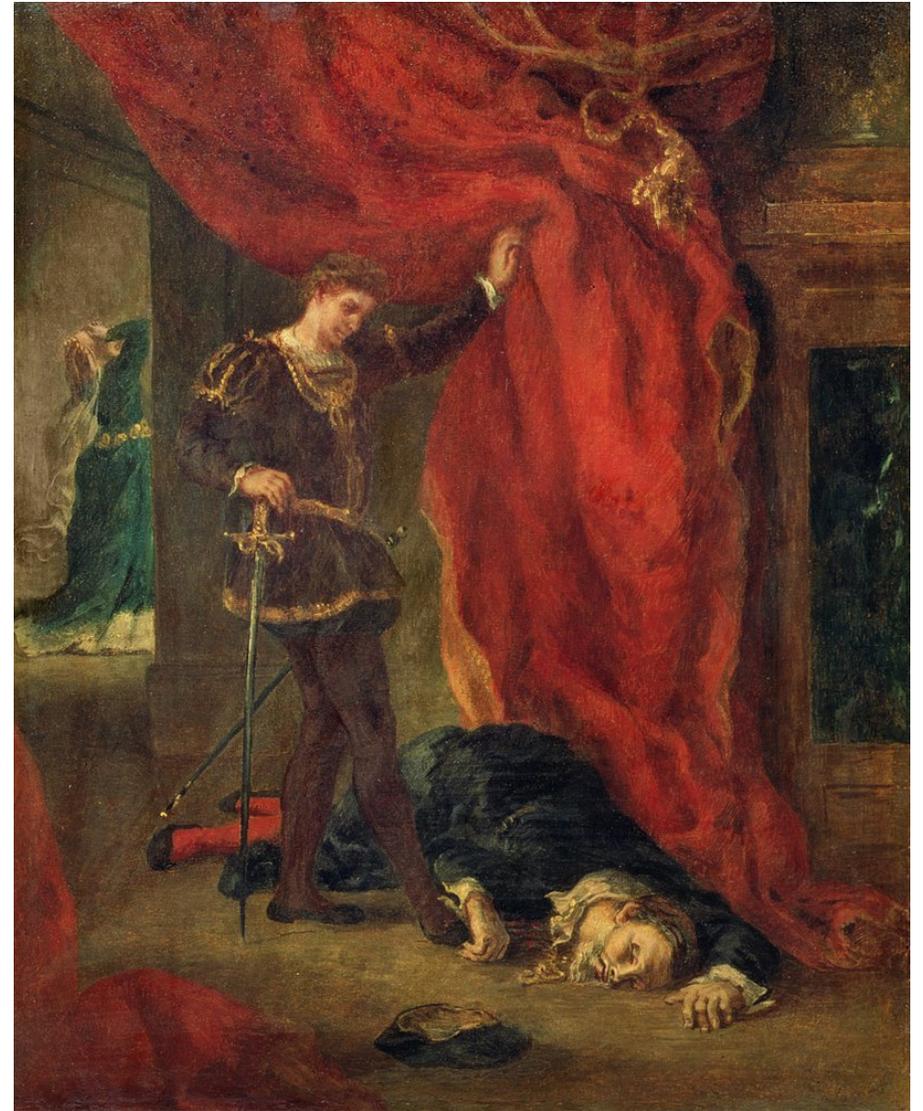


Gustav Pope (1831-1910)
Daughters of King Lear, c. 1875-76
Museo de Arte de Ponce, Ponce, Puerto Rico

H is for Hamlet

Hamlet

Hamlet, a melancholic and introspective Prince of Denmark, feigns madness to uncover the truth after his father's ghost reveals that King Claudius, his uncle, murdered him. His indecision leads to tragedy when he accidentally kills Polonius, Ophelia's father, triggering a chain of deaths. Hamlet avenges his father but dies from poison



Ferdinand Victor Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863)
Hamlet devant le corps de Polonius, 1855
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims, Reims, France

I is for Isabella

Measure of Measure

Isabella, a novice nun, faces Angelo's corrupt demand for her chastity to save her brother Claudio. Refusing to compromise her virtue, she aids the disguised Duke Vincentio's plot. They expose Angelo's hypocrisy, freeing Claudio. The Duke then reveals himself and proposes to Isabella



Frederick William Davis (1862-1919)
'Measure for Measure', Act V, Scene 1, Isabella Appealing to the
Duke, 1907
Royal Shakespeare Company Collection, UK

J is for Juliet

Romeo and Juliet

Juliet, from the Capulet family, falls in love with Romeo, a Montague, amidst their families' bitter feud. Their secret romance ends tragically when a series of miscommunications leads Juliet to take a sleeping potion. Romeo, believing her dead, takes his own life. Juliet awakens and kills herself beside him



Francis Sydney Muschamp (1851-1929)
Romeo and Juliet, 1886
Private Collection

K is for King Lear

King Lear

King Lear, the aging ruler of Britain, decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters based on their flattery.

Deceived by his eldest daughters, Goneril and Regan, he disowns his honest daughter, Cordelia. Betrayed and driven to madness, Lear realizes his mistake too late. He reunites with Cordelia but tragically dies after her execution



George Frederick Bensell (1837-1879)

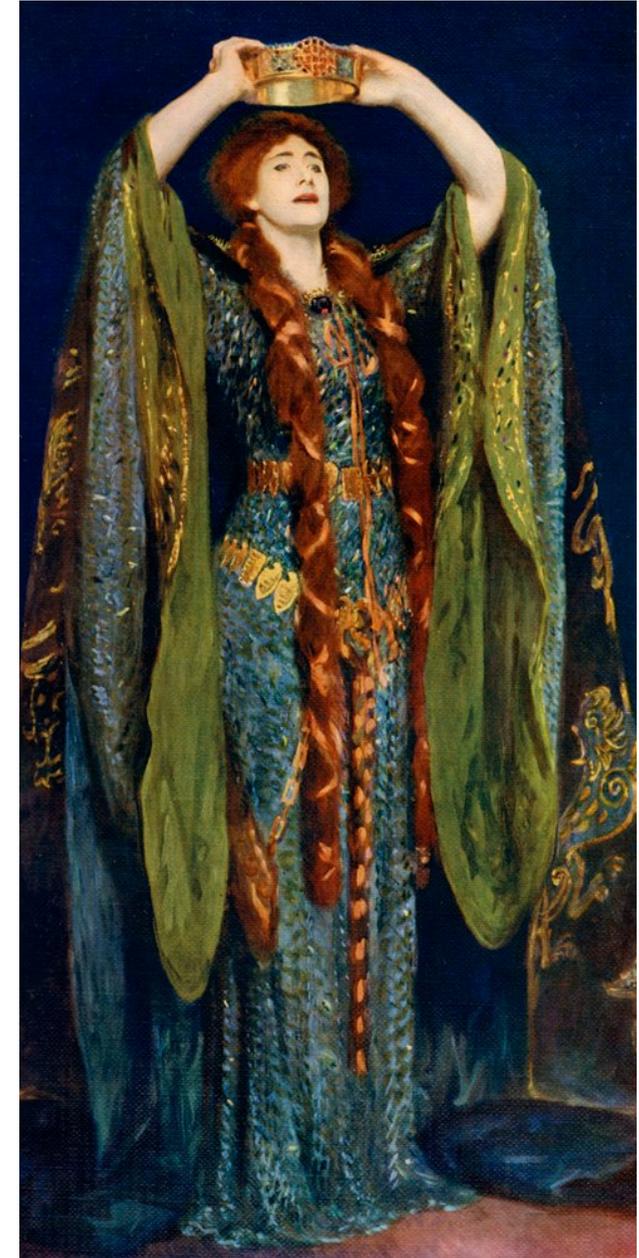
King Lear

The Knohl Collection

L is for Lady Macbeth

Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's ambitious wife, who encourages him to murder King Duncan to seize the throne of Scotland. She initially appears ruthless, but guilt eventually consumes her, leading to sleepwalking episodes and hallucinations. She ultimately takes her own life as Macbeth's rule collapses



John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)
Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, 1889
Tate Britain, London, UK

M is for Miranda

The Tempest

Miranda, Prospero's innocent and compassionate daughter, was raised in isolation on a remote island. Naive to the world, she falls in love with Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples, the first young man she meets apart from her father. As Prospero orchestrates events with his magic, Miranda's love story unfolds. She departs the island to begin a new life with him



John William Waterhouse (1849-1917)
Miranda-The Tempest, 1916
Private Collection

N is for Nym

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Nym, a former follower of Falstaff, is one of the disgruntled companions who seeks revenge after Falstaff dismisses him.

Along with Pistol, he exposes Falstaff's scheme to seduce Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. His actions contribute to the wives' elaborate trickery, leading to Falstaff's humiliation and a reckoning for his arrogance



Hugh Thomson (1860-1920)

Enter Falstaff, Pistol, Nym and Bardolph, 1910

The Merry Wives of Windsor, William Heinemann, London, UK

O is for Ophelia

Hamlet

Ophelia is the daughter of Polonius and Hamlet's love interest. Caught between her father's loyalty to the king and Hamlet's erratic behavior, she becomes overwhelmed with grief after her father's death. She ultimately drowns in what is implied to be suicide



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
Ophelia, c. 1851
Tate Britain, London, UK

P is Portia

The Merchant of Venice

Portia, an intelligent and wealthy heiress, is bound by her father's will to marry the suitor who chooses the correct casket. She falls in love with Bassanio, who wins her hand. Disguised as a lawyer, she cleverly saves Antonio in court by outwitting Shylock, ensuring justice while remaining loyal to her husband



Edward Alcock (1745-1778)
Portia and Shylock, from Shakespeare's "The Merchant of
Venice", IV, i, c. 1778
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, US

Q is for Queen Titania

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Titania, the queen of the fairies, is in a dispute with her husband, Oberon, over a changeling boy. Her refusal to yield leads Oberon to enchant her with a love potion, causing her to fall in love with Bottom, who has been transformed into a donkey-headed creature. Her bewitchment creates chaos but ultimately resolves the conflict, restoring harmony



Edwin Landseer (1802-1873)
Scene from A Midsummer Night's Dream. Titania and Bottom,
1848-1851
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

R is for Romeo

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo, the passionate and impulsive son of Montague, falls in love with Juliet, a Capulet, amidst their families' feud. Following their secret marriage, he kills Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, and is banished. Believing Juliet dead, he returns to her tomb and drinks poison, dying just before she awakens



Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale (1872-1945)
Romeo and Juliet Farewell
Private Collection

S is for Sylvia

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Sylvia, the noble daughter of the Duke of Milan, is Valentine's love. She rejects the deceitful Proteus, who betrays his friend to pursue her. Loyal and strong-willed, she remains faithful to Valentine, even when facing attempted abduction, and is ultimately rescued and happily reunited with him



Edwin Austin Abbey (1852-1911)

"Who Is Sylvia? What Is She, That All the Swains Commend Her?", 1896-1899; reworked 1900

The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., US

T is for Titus

Titus Andronicus

Titus Andronicus, a Roman general, seeks revenge after the Gothic Queen Tamora and her sons harm his family. In his quest for justice, he descends into madness, orchestrating brutal revenge. The cycle of vengeance culminates in multiple deaths, including Titus's own, leaving Rome in chaos as Lucius ascends to the throne



Jean-Michel Moreau (1741-1814)
Illustration of Act 3, Scene 1 from Titus Andronicus,
1785, engraving by Noel le Mire
Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., US

U is for Ulysses

Troilus and Cressida

Ulysses, a Greek general in the Trojan War, manipulates Achilles into fighting by exaggerating Ajax's reputation. He also cynically reveals Cressida's infidelity to Troilus, the Trojan prince and brother of Paris, by showing her with Diomed, a Greek warrior



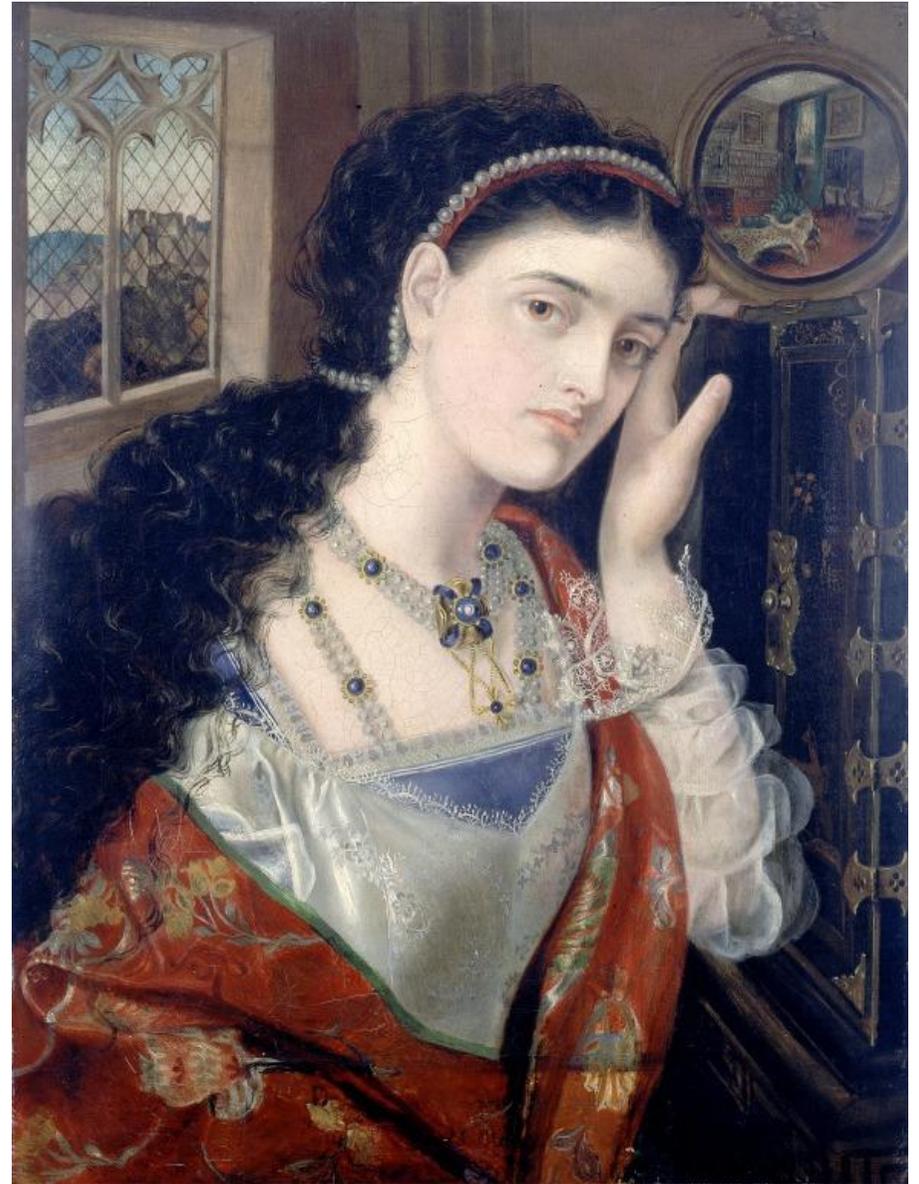
Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807)

Diomed and Cressida, c. 1789, engraving by Luigi Schiavonetti
National Trust Collections, UK

V is for Viola

Twelfth Night

Viola, shipwrecked and believing her twin brother Sebastian dead, disguises herself as a man named Cesario. She enters Duke Orsino's service and falls in love with him, while he is in love with Olivia. The truth is revealed when Viola's twin reappears, and she marries Orsino



Emma Sandys (1841-1877)

Viola, c. 1865-1877

National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

W is for Witches

Macbeth

The Three Witches, or “Weird Sisters,” are mysterious, supernatural figures who prophesy Macbeth’s rise to power, sparking his ambition. Their cryptic predictions—that he will become Thane of Cawdor and king—set the tragic events in motion. They later deceive him with misleading assurances of invincibility, which contribute to his downfall



Henry Fuseli (1741-1825)
The Three Witches or The Weird Sisters, c. 1785
The Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, US

X is for Xanthippe

The Taming of the Shrew

Xanthippe, the ill-tempered wife of Socrates, is mentioned by Petruchio to compare her to Katherina, a strong-willed and outspoken woman. As Petruchio seeks to "tame" Katherina, he uses wit and manipulation to challenge her fiery nature. Their battle of wills unfolds, ultimately leading to Katherina's transformation and submission in their relationship



Reyer Jacobsz van Blommendael (1628-1675)
Socrates, his two Wives, and Alcibiades, c. 1660s
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France

Y is for Yorick

Hamlet

Yorick, the deceased court jester, is remembered when his skull is unearthed by a gravedigger. Holding the skull, Hamlet reflects on the inevitability of death, reminiscing about Yorick's humor and kindness from his childhood. Yorick's remains symbolize mortality, deepening Hamlet's existential contemplation as he faces his own fate



Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863)
Hamlet et Horatio au cimetière, c. 1839
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France

Z is for Zephyr

The Tempest

Zephyr, the gentle west wind in Greek mythology, is often associated with spring and renewal. Though not directly named in "Cymbeline," it is referenced as a symbol of gentleness. In "The Tempest," Prospero invokes Zephyr to ensure calm seas for Ferdinand and Miranda's voyage



Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510)
The birth of Venus (part of), c. 1483-1485
Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy