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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume I: Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare

Queen Elizabeth's Influence on Disguise in Shakespeare's Plays and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

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When Elizabeth I gained the throne in 1558, women began to receive a voice in literature. England had not before had such a dynamic and intelligent female regent. Elizabeth was celebrated in poetry and was herself an accomplished poet. As a woman with a man's job, Elizabeth had to adopt various personas to appease her advisors and subjects. She invoked her father's strength when she needed to overcome her femininity. Elizabeth's ability to transform herself as necessary is what makes her a model for strong women who use disguise as a means to an end. I chose this unit topic as a way to expose my students to several of Shakespeare's plays and an epic poem with strong female heroines and villains. We will examine the role of female disguise in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Macbeth*. We will also examine the disguised female knight, Britomart, in book 3 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

(Developed for AP Literature, grade 12; recommended for Language Arts, grades 11-12)

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