Boston celebrates Shakespeare's most beloved plays in new exhibit

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BOSTON, Mass. — People will get to see some early editions of William Shakespeare's most beloved plays.

The Boston Public Library is celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death with a free exhibition that opens Friday. The exhibit is titled, "Shakespeare Unauthorized." Bard means poet and the Bard was one of Shakespeare's nicknames.

The library famously holds a copy of the "First Folio," a large book containing the earliest published collection of Shakespeare's works. The "First Folio" is rare and very valuable. The Boston Public Library has one of about 230 copies still in existence.

The exhibition also has early "quartos," or booklets of individual works. Some highlights include, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Hamlet" and "The Merchant of Venice."
One Of The Great Cultural Treasures Of Boston

"These are the books that all modern Shakespeare texts are based on," says Jay Moschella, who collects rare books for the library. "They're extremely valuable and we’re one of the few places that has them. They’re one of the great cultural treasures of Boston."

"Shakespeare Unauthorized" features about 60 items. They represent a relatively small selection from the library’s sizable holdings of original works by Shakespeare. The library’s Shakespeare collection is considered among the best that the public can see in the United States.

The last time the library showcased these materials was 100 years ago, on the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, according to Moschella. Most of the year, they are securely kept and made available to researchers by request.

The library purchased much of its collection of Shakespeare materials for $34,000 from the family of a prominent collector in 1873. The purchase also came with thousands of other early works of English literature.

Early Versions Of Important Works Differed

Tucked in the library’s grand Beaux Arts building downtown, "Shakespeare Unauthorized" opens with a discussion of "Hamlet." The exhibit shows how early versions of the important work differed.

The famous line "To be or not to be, that is the question," for example, is written differently. In the earliest version, it is "To be or not to be, ay, there's the point."

"It’s not only significantly less poetic," Moschella explains, but people who study Shakespeare study this question. "Why is that text different and how does that affect what we're reading?"

Was Sir Francis Bacon The Real Author?

Elsewhere, the exhibit examines the rumors and stories surrounding Shakespeare. One is the theory that the true author of his plays and poems was the famed English philosopher and scientist Sir Francis Bacon. It also displays copies of famous fakes and works that at first were said to have been written by Shakespeare. Later, experts found out they were not written by the Bard.

The main highlight of the exhibition is the richly made "First Folio." The handmade, encyclopedia-sized book, titled "Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies Published According to the True Originall Copies," is displayed in a large glass case along with copies of later folios. An interactive screen nearby lets visitors study a digital copy of the 900-plus-page book.
The "First Folio" was published in 1623, years after Shakespeare's death. It contains 36 of his works, 18 of which had never been printed before, including "Macbeth," "Julius Caesar" and "The Tempest."

"These are major, important Shakespeare works. Without these, Shakespeare would not be Shakespeare," Moschella says. "And it is a pretty safe bet that most if not all of these plays would have been lost if they had not been memorialized in the "First Folio."
Quiz

1. Read the following statement from the section “One Of The Great Cultural Treasures Of Boston.”

“These are the books that all modern Shakespeare texts are based on,” says Jay Moschella, who collects rare books for the library. “They’re extremely valuable and we’re one of the few places that has them. They’re one of the great cultural treasures of Boston.”

Moschella uses the term “cultural treasures” to mean:
(A) things that can be sold for a high price
(B) things that are artistically valuable to society
(C) things that promote the study of other countries
(D) things that are only valuable to a few people

2. Which selection from the article explains why the “First Folio” is valuable to students of Shakespeare?

(A) People will get to see some early editions of William Shakespeare’s most beloved plays.
(B) “These are the books that all modern Shakespeare texts are based on,” says Jay Moschella, who collects rare books for the library.
(C) Tucked in the library’s grand Beaux Arts building downtown, “Shakespeare Unauthorized” opens with a discussion of “Hamlet.”
(D) The “First Folio” was published in 1623, years after Shakespeare’s death.

3. Select the paragraph from the section “Was Sir Francis Bacon The Real Author?” that explains how scholars discovered some plays they thought were Shakespeare’s really were not.
Read the following sentences from the section "Early Versions Of Important Works Differed."

The famous line “To be or not to be, that is the question,” for example, is written differently. In the earliest version, it is “To be or not to be, ay, there’s the point.”

How does using the word "question" instead of "point" affect the TONE of Shakespeare’s line?

(A) It conveys a sense of boredom that makes the statement less intense.
(B) It conveys the sense that the speaker is not as important as before.
(C) It conveys a sense of uncertainty that makes the statement less direct.
(D) It conveys the sense that the speaker is not as smart as he could be.