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Spelling Wisdom

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Compiled and Edited by Sonya Shafer

Book 4

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Book Four

(American Version)

Learn today's 6,000 most frequently used words,
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Compiled and Edited
by
Sonya Shafer

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four (American Version)
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Published in electronic format by
Simply Charlotte Mason, LLC
P.O. Box 892
Grayson, Georgia 30017-0892

www.SimplyCharlotteMason.com

Contents

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Introduction 15
A Word about Dictation
How to Use *Spelling Wisdom*
About *Spelling Wisdom*

Exercise 1: Forming Just Opinions 19
A Quote by Charlotte Mason

Exercise 2: Eloquence 20
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 3: They Call Me Deerslayer 21
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 4: Computer Shopping 22

Exercise 5: On War 23
A Quote by Sir Winston Churchill

Exercise 6: Raphael 24
From *Pictures Every Child Should Know* by Mary Schell Hoke Bacon

Exercise 7: A Heroine in Tears 25
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 8: Hiding a Canoe 26
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 9: So Live 27
A Poem by William Cullen Bryant

Exercise 10: Perfectly Happy 28
From *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen

Exercise 11: First Attempts 29
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 12: A Handsome Girl 30
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 13: Come to Be Happy 31
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 14: The Week in Review 32
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 15: The Method 33
From *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Exercise 16: Pinned to a Tree 34
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 17: Ostracism 35
From *MacMillan's Reading Books, Book V*

Exercise 18: Leave Me, O Love 36
A Poem by Sir Philip Sidney

Exercise 19: The Old Gentleman's Days 37
From *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen

Exercise 20: Searching for Treasure 38
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 21: The Flame 39
From *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 22: Corot 40
From *Pictures Every Child Should Know* by Mary Schell Hoke Bacon

Exercise 23: An Active Magistrate 41
From *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Exercise 24: An Absurd Cousin 42
From *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 25: The Influence of Her Behavior 43
A Quote by W. M. Thackeray

Exercise 26: The Power of Memory 44
From *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen

Exercise 27: Human Nature. 45
From *Ourselves* by Charlotte Mason

Exercise 28: The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet 46
From *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

Exercise 29: Botticelli and Rembrandt 47
From *Little Journeys to the Homes of the Great, Volume 6* by Elbert Hubbard

Exercise 30: Distances Between Villages 48
From *Amusements in Mathematics* by Henry Ernest Dudeney

Exercise 31: Exploring the Sea 49
From *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne

Exercise 32: Suspense 50
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 33: Call to Watson. 51
From *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Exercise 34: The Ship's Position 52
From *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne

Exercise 35: A Child's Education 53
From *George Muller of Bristol* by A.T. Pierson

Exercise 36: The Glory He Deserved 54
From *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne

Exercise 37: Sonnet 18 55
A Poem by William Shakespeare

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 38: Idle Assertions 56
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 39: A Letter to Papa 57
From *The Letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Exercise 40: A Momentous Shot 58
From *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 41: The Literary Society 59
From *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne

Exercise 42: Fanny's Cousins 60
From *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen

Exercise 43: Word Game 61

Exercise 44: Mrs. Wickam. 62
From *Dombey and Son* by Charles Dickens

Exercise 45: Reimbursements 63
From *Beethoven's Letters 1790–1826, Volume 1* by Ludwig von Beethoven

Exercise 46: Development. 64
A Poem by Robert Browning

Exercise 47: Reading Aloud 65
From *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen

Exercise 48: The Strange Chest. 66
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 49: Inquiring for Miss Tilney 67
From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Exercise 50: Sources of Merriment 68
From *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 51: Cicero's Banishment 69
From *Roman Life in the Days of Cicero* by Alfred J. Church

Exercise 52: When He Awoke 70
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 53: The Diving Suits 71
From *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne

Exercise 54: The Village Alive 72
From *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 55: Death, Be Not Proud 73
A Poem by John Donne

Exercise 56: A Lively Mind 74
From *Emma* by Jane Austen

Exercise 57: To the Canoe! 75
From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 58: Richard's House Design 76
From *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 59: The Atlantic Ocean 77
From *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne

Exercise 60: Kissing St. Peter's Foot 78
From *The Letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Exercise 61: Belle Visits 79
From *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

Exercise 62: Pigeons 80
From *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper

Exercise 63: Pine Forests 81
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 64: The Fool's Prayer 82
A Poem by Edward Rowland Sill

Exercise 65: Durer 84
From *Pictures Every Child Should Know* by Mary Schell Hoke Bacon

Exercise 66: On His Being Arrived to the Age of Twenty-Three 85
A Poem by John Milton

Exercise 67: Weather 86
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 68: Breathing. 87
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 69: Studying Latin 88
From *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

Exercise 70: Vitamins 89
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 71: Lost in Thought. 90
From *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Exercise 72: The Story of Transportation 91
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 73: Jean Francois Millet 92
From *Pictures Every Child Should Know* by Mary Schell Hoke Bacon

Exercise 74: Plant Food 93
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 75: Psalm 103 94

Exercise 76: The Secret Garden 96
From *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 77: A Jury Trial 97
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 78: A Charming Walk 98
From *Emma* by Jane Austen

Exercise 79: Poisonous Plants 99
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 80: Diamonds 100
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 81: Inventions 101
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 82: Like an Eagle 102
From *George Muller of Bristol* by A.T. Pierson

Exercise 83: Over the Sea 103
From *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell

Exercise 84: Sonnet 116 104
A Poem by William Shakespeare

Exercise 85: The Butterfly 105
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 86: Departure on Board. 106
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 87: Legal Procedure 107
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 88: Friendship 108
From *The Practice of Piety: A Puritan Devotional Manual* by Lewis Bayly

Exercise 89: French History 109
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 90: My Beth 110
A Poem from *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

Exercise 91: God's Goodness to Me 111
From *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe

Exercise 92: An Old-Fashioned Pantry 112
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 93: Painters' Subjects 113
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 94: Puzzles 114
From *Amusements in Mathematics* by Henry Ernest Dudeney

Exercise 95: A Song in Storm 115
A Poem by Rudyard Kipling

Exercise 96: Traveling by Stagecoach 117
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 97: A Costly Sacrifice 118
A Letter by Abraham Lincoln

Exercise 98: The Prime Minister 119
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 99: Birds Will Trust Us 120
From *Friends and Helpers* by Sarah J. Eddy

Exercise 100: The Shepherd's Son 121
From *The Reluctant Dragon* by Kenneth Grahame

Exercise 101: The Value of Money 122
From *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe

Exercise 102: Aaron Burr 123
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 103: Making Jars. 124
From *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe

Exercise 104: The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England. 125
A Poem by Felicia Dorothea Hemans

Exercise 105: The Hudson's Bay Company 127
From *The Pupils' Own Vocabulary Speller* by Arthur I. Gates

Exercise 106: Early Influences 128
From *The True Story of My Life* by Hans Christian Andersen

Exercise 107: Riding Camels 129
From *Wonders of the Tropics* by Henry Davenport Northrop

Exercise 108: So Pass the Seasons 130
From *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle

Exercise 109: Master of Every Mechanic Art 131
From *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe

Exercise 110: Otters. 132
From *Secrets of the Woods* by William Joseph Long

Exercise 111: On His Appointment as Commander-in-Chief 133
A Speech by George Washington

Exercise 112: Friends, Romans, Countrymen 134
From *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Exercise 113: Sugar Canes 135
From *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss

Exercise 114: Why Everybody Liked Him 136
From *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

Exercise 115: Changeable Longings 137
From *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 116: Young Walter Raleigh 138
From *Swinton's Advanced Fourth Reader*

Exercise 117: Our Great Catastrophe 139
From *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne

Exercise 118: Significant Words 140
From *Roman Life in the Days of Cicero* by Alfred J. Church

Exercise 119: 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation 141
A Proclamation by George Washington

Exercise 120: Man's Best Friend. 142
By Plutarch, as quoted in *Friends and Helpers* by Sarah J. Eddy

Exercise 121: Psalm 139 143

Exercise 122: The Sugar-Plum Scramble 145
From *Amusements in Mathematics* by Henry Ernest Dudeney

Exercise 123: Androcles and the Lion. 146
From *The Life of Jesus Christ for the Young* by Richard Newton

Exercise 124: The Day of Thanksgiving 147
From *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss

Exercise 125: Conversation. 148
From *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

Exercise 126: Early Schooling 149
From *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* by Benjamin Franklin

Exercise 127: First Day in Philadelphia 150
From *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* by Benjamin Franklin

Exercise 128: The Unfortunate Dinner 151
From *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

Contents (cont.)

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four

Exercise 129: To Be, or Not To Be 152
From *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Exercise 130: The Cave in the Rock 153
From *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss

Exercise 131: Neighbors 154
From *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen

Exercise 132: Describing the Garden 155
From *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Exercise 133: A Very Great Advantage 156
From *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell

Exercise 134: Building a Boat 157
From *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe

Exercise 135: The March Family 158
From *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

Exercise 136: The Day Is Done 159
A Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Exercise 137: A Piano to Use 161
From *Letters of Franz Liszt, Volume 1* by Franz Liszt

Exercise 138: Dr. Livingstone 162
From *Wonders of the Tropics* by Henry Davenport Northrop

Exercise 139: In Africa 163
From *Wonders of the Tropics* by Henry Davenport Northrop

Exercise 140: If 164
A Poem by Rudyard Kipling

Bibliography 165

Index 167

Introduction

A Word about Dictation

Just as Charlotte Mason taught handwriting in the context of an interesting passage or text, so she taught spelling, not in isolated lists of words but in the context of useful and beautiful language.

We can present the child with a list of words to learn, such as: "am, will, can, I, ought." How much more pleasant to rearrange that list of words into an inspiring or interesting thought, like Charlotte Mason's motto for students: "I am, I can, I ought, I will."

Charlotte used this principle with prepared dictation to teach spelling, beginning in about the third or fourth grade. In prepared dictation, the student is given a passage to study before he is required to write it—the chief objective being to write it correctly.

Miss Mason believed that "the gift of spelling depends upon the power the eye possesses to 'take' (in a photographic sense) a detailed picture of a word; and this is a power and habit which must be cultivated in children from the first. When they have read 'cat,' they must be encouraged to see the word with their eyes shut, and the same habit will enable them to image 'Thermopylae.'"

She discouraged teachers from allowing their students to see a word incorrectly spelled, for "once the eye sees a misspelt word, that image remains; and if there is also the image of the word rightly spelt, we are perplexed as to which is which."

Of course, students will not spell every word correctly every time, therefore, it becomes "the teacher's business to prevent false spelling, and, if an error has been made, to hide it away, as it were, so that the impression may not become fixed."

"Dictation lessons, conducted in some such way as the following, usually result in good spelling."

(Quotations from *Home Education*, pp. 240, 241)

How to Use *Spelling Wisdom*

1. Once or twice a week **give** your student a dictation exercise you want him to learn. Simply print or copy the exercise from this book. (You have permission to duplicate the exercises for use within your immediate household.)

2. Look through the exercise together and **identify** the words that you or the student thinks needs his attention in order to spell them confidently.

3. Instruct the student to **study** the identified words—one at a time—until he is sure he can spell every word in the exercise. This study period may take anywhere from a few minutes to several days, depending on the length of the exercise and the needs of the student. Set aside a little time each day for brief but consistent study of the exercise as needed. (See below for how to study a word.)

4. When the student is confident that he can spell every word in the exercise, **dictate** the passage to him one phrase at a time, saying the phrase only once. Pause after each phrase is spoken to allow him time to write it. Keep a careful eye on his efforts. If a word is misspelled, quickly cover it with a small self-stick note so its false spelling won't be engraved in the student's mind.

5. After the dictation is complete, the student should study any words that he misspelled and, when he is ready, **write** the words correctly on the self-stick notes.

How to Study a Word

You may want to work with younger or uncertain students to teach them how to study an unfamiliar word, as outlined below. Older students or students more accustomed to using the method below may study independently.

- Copy the word carefully, making sure it is spelled correctly.
- Look at the word until you can close your eyes and see it spelled correctly in your mind.
- Practice writing the word only if the teacher is nearby to immediately erase any misspellings.

Along with Charlotte's method of visualizing the word, we might add one or two study techniques for students who like to use their other senses in the learning process.

- Say the letters aloud in order while looking at the word.
- "Write" the word with your first finger on a sheet of paper or other smooth surface, being careful to look at the word and spell it correctly.

About *Spelling Wisdom*

When I read about Charlotte Mason's method of using prepared dictation to teach spelling, I loved the idea and wanted to use it. But I was concerned about missing some necessary words as I selected dictation passages to use. I felt very secure using my traditional spelling lists that I knew included the most frequently used words in the English language, which my children definitely needed to learn to spell.

So I decided to try to combine the two: dictation exercises that I could be sure included the most frequently used words in the English language. The *Spelling Wisdom* series is the result of that effort.

The five books' exercises become progressively longer and contain more difficult words as you work through the series. Each book contains 140 exercises. If you cover two exercises per week, you should be able to finish a *Spelling Wisdom* book in a little less than two school years. Charlotte began dictation exercises with students around the third or fourth grade. With that schedule in mind, here is a rough model of which books correspond to which grades:

Grades 3–4	Book One
Grades 5–6	Book Two
Grades 7–8	Book Three
Grades 9–10	Book Four
Grades 11–12	Book Five

Content

The exercises cover a broad range of subjects and topics to reinforce Charlotte's love of a full and generous education. Because the books are not thematic, you can use and benefit from the exercises no matter what you may be studying in other school subjects.

I wanted to keep Miss Mason's high standards for beautiful thoughts and engaging narratives, so the sources of these exercises are speeches, letters, and quotations of famous people; excerpts from historical documents; descriptions of historical people and events; poetry; Scripture; excerpts from great literature; and selections from old readers and books for young people. Most of the passages were written prior to 1900. (I did find it necessary to write a few original exercises that involved the more modern words, like "infrastructure" and "computer.") Each book's bibliography and table of contents will provide more specific information as to which sources were used.

The 6,000 most-frequently-used English words included in these exercises are taken from A General Service List of English Words by Michael West (Longman, London 1953) and The Academic Word List by Coxhead (1998, 2000). We have also included more than 6,500 other words that we think well-educated children should know. These bonus words are in addition to those on the lists, making a total of more than 12,500 English words covered in the *Spelling Wisdom* series of books.

About *Spelling Wisdom* (cont.)

Index

The index in the back of each *Spelling Wisdom* book will give you a list of all the words included in that book's exercises. If you want to concentrate on or review a particular word, just look in the book's index to find any other exercises that use it. The index should also prove to be a friendly help if you spot a word or two in the child's written narrations that need some attention. You can easily find and assign a dictation exercise that uses the word in question and reinforces its correct spelling.

Spelling Variations

You may have noticed that the older writings contain some different spellings than we use today. For example, in Charlotte Mason's *Home Education* passage quoted at the beginning of this introduction, the word we spell today as "misspelled" was originally spelled "misspelt." Because the main objective of dictation is correct spelling, I updated such older words to modern spelling.

Two versions of the *Spelling Wisdom* series are available: American and British. The British version contains the British spelling preferences that I'm aware of. If I overlooked a possible alternate spelling, you can easily write your preferred spelling on the printed sheet that you give your student. (Then would you please e-mail us with the details of the change, or any other corrections, so I can change it in the book? Just contact us at http://simplycm.com/contact. Thank you!)

Poetry Variations

Many poets "take liberties" with word spellings in order to make the words fit in their assigned poetical places. Several of the poetry selections in these dictation exercises contained contracted words, such as "o'er" instead of "over." Since the goal of dictation is correct spelling, and missing letters don't help us reach that goal, I replaced contracted words with their spelled-out versions. You can easily enjoy the original form of the poems in your regular poetry studies, but for dictation purposes I thought the prudent path was to display the words correctly spelled.

Punctuation Variations

Because Charlotte advocated dictating "with a view to the pointing [punctuation], which the children are expected to put in as they write," I have attempted to edit the punctuation of the older passages to bring them more closely into conformity with modern punctuation guidelines. Encourage the children to make sure they are familiar with where the capital letters and punctuation marks go in their assigned exercises, even as they make sure they can spell all the words.

It is my hope that this collection of dictation exercises will make your journey more enjoyable and your path a little smoother on the "royal road to spelling."

(Quotations from *Home Education*, pp. 241, 242)

Exercise 1

Forming Just Opinions

By Charlotte Mason

The person who thinks out his opinions modestly and carefully is doing his duty, and to do our duty in our thoughts by forming just opinions in a very great part of our work in life.

Exercise 2

Eloquence

From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

Catherine wished to congratulate him but knew not what to say, and her eloquence was only in her eyes. From them, however, the eight parts of speech shone out most expressively, and James could combine them with ease.

Exercise 3

They Call Me Deerslayer

From *The Deerslayer* by James Fenimore Cooper

They call me Deerslayer, I'll own, and perhaps I deserve the name in the way of understanding the creature's habits, as well as for some certainty in the aim, but they can't accuse me of killing an animal when there is no occasion for the meat or the skin. I may be a slayer, it's true, but I'm no slaughterer.

Exercise 4
Computer Shopping

Jay leafed through the catalog looking for just the right computer. He wanted one with a minimum price, while still keeping all the features he needed.

It would need to have a fast internal hard drive component to be compatible with the latest version of his favorite game. Then there was the monitor, which should have a large aspect ratio and be in the cool LCD format. Finally, he wanted a CD burner, so he could export any neat creations he made and show them to his friends.

Exercise 5

On War

By Sir Winston Churchill

Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

Exercise 61

Belle Visits

From *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

One day this week Captain Keller brought Belle, a setter of which he is very proud, to see us. He wondered if Helen would recognize her old playmate. Helen was giving Nancy a bath and didn't notice the dog at first. She usually feels the softest step and throws out her arms to ascertain if any one is near her. Belle didn't seem very anxious to attract her attention. I imagine she has been rather roughly handled sometimes by her little mistress. The dog hadn't been in the room more than half a minute, however, before Helen began to sniff and dumped the doll into the washbowl and felt about the room. She stumbled upon Belle, who was crouching near the window where Captain Keller was standing. It was evident that she recognized the dog; for she put her arms round her neck and squeezed her. Then Helen sat down by her and began to manipulate her claws. We couldn't think for a second what she was doing; but when we saw her make the letters "d-o-l-l" on her own fingers, we knew that she was trying to teach Belle to spell.

Exercise 112

Friends, Romans, Countrymen

From *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—
For Brutus is an honorable man;
So are they all, all honorable men—
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honorable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause:
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.