

Question 24

To what extent can collaboration be identified in the Shakespeare canon?

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Shakespeare was a star, but he was also a team player. He formed temporary partnerships with other professional playwrights to work on specific projects. Elizabethan professions were normally based on an apprenticeship system, so at the beginning of his career Shakespeare worked with older more experienced, better educated authors. For instance he teamed up with George Peele to write *Titus Andronicus*. Peele got the ball rolling; Shakespeare ran with it. At least three different writers got together to produce *Henry VI Part I*, Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare. When he got older Shakespeare himself became the veteran, teaching his trade to promising younger men. He paired Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, with George Wilkins on *Pericles*, and with John Fletcher on *Cardenio*, *All is True* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. After his death, Shakespeare's company commissioned Thomas Middleton to update two of his plays, *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure*. None of Shakespeare's plays is the product of an isolated genius.