Study Guide

Acting Shakespeare
Presented by the Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival

Friday, October 16, 2015 at 10:30 AM

Grades 5 - 12

Eissey Campus Theatre
Palm Beach State College
11051 Campus Drive, Palm Beach Gardens
561-207-5910

OVERVIEW
Four performers from The Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival will take the stage to discuss, perform, and workshop the writing of The Bard as a way of introducing students to Shakespeare’s language through the eyes of the theatre artists who bring his words to life. In a casual and semi-scripted atmosphere the actors will break down famous speeches and scenes, discuss his relevance both on and off the stage, demonstrate various ways he can be interpreted and include students in a variety of simple and often humorous exercises.
WHY DO WE STILL PERFORM SHAKESPEARE?

1) Illumination of the Human Experience

Shakespeare’s ability to summarize the range of human emotions in simple yet profoundly eloquent verse is perhaps the greatest reason for his enduring popularity. If you cannot find words to express how you feel about love or music or growing older, Shakespeare can speak for you. No author in the Western world has penned more beloved passages.

2) Ability to Turn a Phrase

Many of the common expressions now thought to be clichés were Shakespeare's creations. Chances are you use Shakespeare's expressions all the time even though you may not know it is the Bard you are quoting. You may think that fact is "neither here nor there", but that's "the short and the long of it."

3) It Was Meant to Be See, Not Only Heard

Students sometimes struggle with the language of Shakespeare in a classroom setting. The language is English but of a form we do not use today. However, once the words are used in a proper performance, all ages are able to get a better grasp of what is happening within the play. While Shakespeare is worthy of study, he wrote to entertain the masses, using common expressions from that time, but with the same emotions and thoughts within us all. When the words are broken down, described simply, then performed passionately, what may have at first seemed like another language comes to life for them and they can move forward knowing that with a little thought, Shakespeare is not only easy to understand, but incredibly moving and relevant.

THE ARTISTS

From 1988-1990, the Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival founders produced events in association with the Chamber Theatre of the Palm Beaches and Young Audiences of Palm Beach County. Their success lead to the formation of the Shakespeare Festival in January 1990. Their premiere production was in March, featuring Shakespeare’s MACBETH at the Duncan Theatre, Palm Beach Community College, West Palm Beach campus, with Burt Reynolds as Honorary Chairman. In September 1990, PBSF moved to Carlin Park, Jupiter, and premiered Shakespeare by the Sea: A Renaissance Festival and Play-in-the-Park, featuring Shakespeare’s comedy, TWELFTH NIGHT. The event attracted over 10,000 people in one weekend. Shakespeare By The Sea has continued as an
annual event, featuring THE TEMPEST ('91), MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM ('91), RICHARD III ('92), AS YOU LIKE IT ('93), ROMEO AND JULIET ('94), TWELFTH NIGHT ('96 amphitheatre premiere), MACBETH ('97), THE WINTER’S TALE ('98), MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING ('99), HAMLET ('00 Tenth Anniversary feature), THE COMEDY OF ERRORS ('01), TAMING OF THE SHREW ('02), and ROMEO AND JULIET ('03).

Since its inception, PBSF has toured to numerous South Florida schools, as well prominent theatres, community centers and festivals in Palm Beach and Martin County. For two seasons, PBSF founded and operated Theatre At The Harbour – Palm Beach Gardens, presenting new works and children’s programs. In 1990, PBSF premiered at its “outdoor home,” Carlin Park, an oceanfront park in Jupiter. Subsequently, the County Commission and Department of Parks and Recreation designated the park as the North County Cultural site and built an amphitheater (capacity of 3,000) which was debuted by PBSF in January of 1996. In 2003, PBSF established an “indoor home” as the resident professional theatre company of the new 700-seat Eissey Theatre, Palm Beach Community College, Palm Beach Gardens campus.

PRE-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS

1. **Who was Shakespeare?**

William Shakespeare was a British playwright and poet during the Renaissance in the late 1500s and early 1600s. He wrote during a time when theatre was the main form of entertainment. People would crowd into open air theatres even though the plague was running rampant through their city. Considered by many to be the greatest writer of the English language, Shakespeare wrote plays that are still performed all over the world year after year. He wrote about themes that never seem to lose their importance and his great characters continue to be the most sought after roles for actors.

2. **What do we hope to learn at the presentation?**

Do any students have specific questions they would like answered during our discussion? We will ask the audience at the presentation, but if teachers have already screened the questions to be asked we can allow them to point us to the student with the question as a way of keeping silly questions to a minimum. (Not that we don’t like silly questions!)
3. **Extra thoughts**

Tell the students to imagine no electronics of any kind including TV, radio or even pen or pencils for the majority of the population. What would they do for entertainment? Would they risk disease and crowds for a break from everyday life?

4. **Theatre etiquette**

Prior to attending the performance, students should discuss audience etiquette. We will be opening up questions to the audience and asking some of them to participate. Students should avoid talking out of turn, using their cell phones and should keep applause respectful.

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

Acting Shakespeare can be used in conjunction with lessons on Shakespeare, playwriting, and listening/speaking. The following activities are designed to meet several state standards.

1. **Sonnets**

   **Activity:** Shakespeare's sonnets are some of the easier of his works to understand. Have the students select a sonnet and try to “translate” the sonnet using 21st Century language and idioms (#getcreative). Then, have the students write their own sonnet in Elizabeth style (emulating Shakespeare).

   **Twists**
   1. Give extra credit if the poem is written in iambic pentameter.
   2. Have each student draw two vocabulary words from a hat.
   3. Give extra credit for a pun or wordplay.
   4. Have each student read his/her sonnet for the class.
   5. Have each student write his/her sonnet to a classroom mascot and read the sonnet before the class to the mascot.
   6. Do this exercise in conjunction with analysis of an actual Shakespearean sonnet.

2. **Plays**

   **Activity:** Select a passage from one of Shakespeare's plays. Select two or more students to read the scene. Once that scene is read, have the students explain what Shakespeare was saying. Once that scene is broken down, have them perform it again with the newly-understood intent behind the lines.
**Activity:** Have the students write a scene for their own play. It can be an exchange between characters or a monologue. Once that scene is created, have the students go back and write it in Elizabethan style. If time allows, have a selected scene performed for the class.

**POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS**

1. Did the performance meet your expectations? If not, did it exceed or not meet and why?

2. Did the actors’ performances help you to understand what Shakespeare wrote? How or why not?

3. After seeing this performance, perhaps students will view Shakespeare in a new light. Discuss what has changed about their perception of Shakespeare and his works.

**FLORIDA STANDARDS**


**INTERNET LINKS**

Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival  
[http://www.pbshakespeare.org](http://www.pbshakespeare.org)

Adapted Shakespeare plays for kids  
[http://kidsloveshakespeare.com/](http://kidsloveshakespeare.com/)

Shakespeare Resource for Teachers  