



# Heart of America Shakespeare Festival

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## **BARD BASICS TEACHER GUIDE**

### Shakespeare in Education

At the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival we present education programs that nurture an early appreciation for the art of theatre and the work of William Shakespeare. We teach Shakespeare through performance in order to enhance understanding of language arts, Renaissance history and theatre performance. Bard Basics is an exciting way to introduce elementary school students to the Elizabethan world through the eyes of William Shakespeare. Two professional teaching artists will lead students in a presentation with the fairies from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare's life and times will be shared interactively with your students!  
Grades: K-6

"I'll put a girdle round about the Earth in forty minutes." Puck

"Thou speakest aright. I am that merry wanderer of the night." Puck

### Pre-Class Activities

- There are many phrases that we use today that are derived from Elizabethan and Renaissance Times. Share a few of these with your students and have them illustrate them!
  - Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained, it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."
  - There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.
  - Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a wake.
  - England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a bone-house, and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night "the graveyard shift" to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be saved by the bell or was considered a "dead ringer."

- Summarize the plot of A Midsummer Night's Dream before the visit to enhance discussion and in-class activities.

### **Post-Class Activities**

- Have students create their own fairy character. Have them color a picture of it and then share it with the class. What powers does the fairy have? Where does he or she live? Does the fairy like to help humans or create mischief?
- Give the students this speech of Puck's and have them create their own soundscape like they did in class. Then have them divide into small groups and create a frozen picture that shows the mood or feeling of the speech.
  - **PUCK:**
    - If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumber'd here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend:  
if you pardon, we will mend:  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearned luck  
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,  
We will make amends ere long;  
Else the Puck a liar call;  
So, good night unto you all.  
Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- William Shakespeare placed many magical creatures in his plays. Why do you think he did that?
- Many of us think of fairies as being cutesy or girly. Do you think Shakespeare's fairies were portrayed in this way? Why or why not? (Hint: all actors in Shakespeare's time were male)
- What kind of costumes do you think the actors in the Elizabethan era wore to portray a fairy? How would you costume a fairy if you were doing this play?
- This play has an epilogue (above) that completes the play. What purpose do you think an epilogue serves?

#### **Online Resources**

[www.kcshakes.org](http://www.kcshakes.org)  
[artsedge.kennedy-center.org](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org)  
[www.nosweatshakespeare.edu](http://www.nosweatshakespeare.edu)  
[nfs.sparknotes.com](http://nfs.sparknotes.com)  
[www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

For further questions or activities contact the Director of Education for HASF at 816-531-7728