



WHAT COUNTRY, FRIENDS, IS THIS?

THREE PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES PACK

ABOUT THIS PACK

The first RSC productions in the [World Shakespeare Festival](#) are three plays cross-cast within one acting company and one shared environment; creating a world of shipwrecks, grief, laughter, love and reunion. Led by RSC Associate Director David Farr, this ensemble company of RSC actors stages a cycle of plays exploring migration, exile, and the discovery of brave new worlds.

All three cross-cast productions share the same creative team and play in repertoire in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. They also perform at The Roundhouse in London in summer 2012.

The activities in this pack are inspired by the themes in the three plays and can be used either as stand-alone practical approaches to the plays or as supporting activities for students seeing the productions. They have been designed with KS3 students in mind, but can be adapted for other age groups. Some are best suited to an open space such as a hall, but many can be used in a classroom. Separate packs are available with activities specific to each production: www.rsc.org.uk/education/resources



Emily Taaffe as Viola in *Twelfth Night*

ABOUT OUR EDUCATION WORK

We want children and young people to enjoy the challenge of Shakespeare and achieve more as a result of connecting with his work. Central to our education work is our manifesto for Shakespeare in schools, *Stand up for Shakespeare*. We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them. We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do Shakespeare on their feet - exploring the plays actively as actors do
- See it Live - participate as members of a live audience
- Start it Earlier - work on the plays from a younger age

We also believe in the power of ensemble: a way of working together in both the rehearsal room and across the company enabling everyone's ideas and voices to be heard.

Artistic Director, Michael Boyd encapsulates this vision for ensemble in his rehearsal room where actors are encouraged to try out different interpretations of scenes before deciding together on what will be presented to an audience in the final performance.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Contextual notes from the 2012 production, or background info



ACTIVITY

A classroom or open space activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses

ABOUT THE PLAYS



FROM THE DIRECTOR, DAVID FARR

Talking about this series of three plays, David Farr said:

'In this shipwreck trilogy we are exploring the recurrent obsessions of Shakespeare with migration, exile and the discovery of yourself through others. Amir Nizar Zuabi [directing *The Comedy of Errors*] and I are both keen to interrogate these in a modern context and we have chosen to use a shared design environment [by Jon Bausor] to do so.

'In these plays again and again Shakespeare returns to the image of man or woman as a drop in the ocean seeking another drop. He describes love and passion as being like the sea, and he sees in shipwreck the destruction and the revival of the self. For a man who appears never to have left his country, he travelled far in his imagination.'



INTERNATIONALISM & MIGRATION

David was keen to find the right plays for the year of the London Olympics: for him, what's interesting about the Olympics is lots of people from different places arriving in one place and spending a short but intense time together. When looking at Shakespeare's work, he felt that this was best reflected and explored in these particular three plays, where people arrive in places unexpectedly and face a huge challenge and culture shock.

This internationalism also informed the casting. David believes it is almost an ethical responsibility of a director, if putting on a play, particularly one so old, to deeply consider what relationship it has to the contemporary world. In these plays, he decided it lies in the migration of people - the separation of families and what happens to people when they are apart from their home. He thinks about the play in terms of a group of people finding themselves washed up somewhere, who don't necessarily remember when they arrived or when they decided to stay.

In *Twelfth Night* this quality of sustained impermanence informed the choice of the hotel as the setting. David wanted the setting to be somewhere warm, where you'd find wealthy people. It was important to him that the serving staff were non-white, reflecting how the service industry in the UK often exploits migrant workers. To make sure everyone could easily access the play, David also dresses the characters in contemporary clothes and he edited out some of the 'legal' jokes which don't make sense to modern audiences.

In rehearsals for all three plays the actors talked about the characters living in extreme circumstances. They are all essentially plays about the relationships between people. David feels that in *Twelfth Night* these relationships are often fuelled by addiction, or addictive personalities, that this is a shared quality in the play and therefore in David's production this personality finds expression in alcohol or drugs, as well as love. In this respect, he feels the play has a Chekhovian quality which he wished to explore.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR, AMIR NIZAR ZUABI

The third and earliest play in the trilogy (*The Comedy of Errors*) is directed by Amir Nizar Zuabi.

Amir is the artistic director of the National Theatre of Palestine. The NTP audience is believed to be primarily the people of the Palestinian villages and towns of the Galilee, in the north of Israel, and the refugee camps of the West Bank - people for whom theatre is a relatively new experience.

Amir brings this understanding to Shakespeare's joyful comedy of mistaken identity and follows the fortunes of two sets of identical twins, accidentally separated at birth, then miraculously thrown together again.



The company in rehearsal



EGEON'S SPEECH

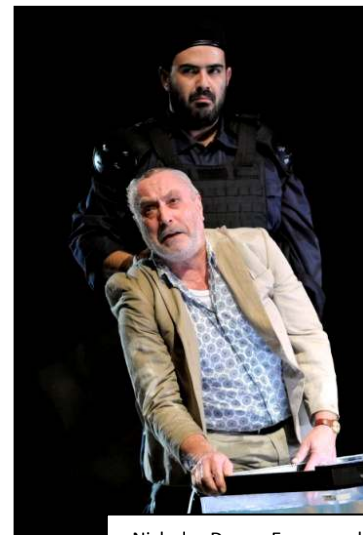
At the beginning of *The Comedy of Errors*, Egeon has a long speech which describes how his twin sons (the Antipholuses) were separated in a storm at sea.

In this production, Egeon is played by Nick Day. We asked him about this speech:

'Shakespeare can convey with such economic efficiency the most complex and subtle thoughts and feelings that a playwright today will agonise over how to express in modern vernacular speech.

We have to see Egeon's speech as part of the story, not just a precursor to it that we have to get out of the way. It's very much part of the theme of longing and loss that runs as a vital thread through the story. Apparently in Arabic and in Hebrew, there is a word for a parent who has lost a child. We have 'widow' and 'orphan' but no actual word for 'parent who's lost a child'.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that modern audiences are used to high-concept productions where the settings are at least as complex and sophisticated as were created in the minds of Shakespeare's most imaginative audiences. And so people coming to see this production might be a bit unhappy to just listen to me [speaking these lines]. That's why I've cut 25% of the lines! No mean feat in blank verse!



Nicholas Day as Egeon and Amer Hlehel as a guard

For an activity based on Egeon's speech, see Activity 4 on page 7.

THEMES AND IDEAS IN THE PLAYS



The three plays David has chosen were written at different stages in Shakespeare's career: one at the beginning (*The Comedy of Errors*), one in the middle (*Twelfth Night*) and one at the end (*The Tempest*). Each play was possibly influenced by Shakespeare's own life, for example David believes that the death of Shakespeare's son Hamnet influenced *Twelfth Night*, and that's why the play works through grief in search of something positive.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, two sets of identical twins, accidentally separated at birth, are miraculously brought together as adults.

In *Twelfth Night*, shipwrecked on the shores of a strange land, Viola believes her twin brother Sebastian has drowned. Disguising herself as a boy to work in the court of Duke Orsino, she finds herself being a go-between for the man she serves and the woman who refuses to love him.

In Shakespeare final play, *The Tempest*, Prospero is usurped from his position as Duke of Milan and cast away with his daughter Miranda to a remote island. Twelve years later, and intent on revenge, he raises a magical storm that shipwrecks his enemies on his shores. What begins as a search for retribution becomes a journey of acceptance.



Jonathan Slinger as Prospero and Emily Taffe as Miranda in *The Tempest*

In the activities on the next pages, your students will explore some of these themes and ideas.

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: SPY – LOVE - HATE



- Ask everyone to walk around the room. Ask them to each pick one person who they must keep their eyes on at all times, but the ‘chosen’ person must not be aware they have been singled out. When they’ve been doing this for a few moments, ask the ‘spies’ to choose someone else to follow. Next, tell everyone that the first person they chose, they ‘love’ and the second they ‘hate’. And when you give the signal (a clap), they must get as physically close to the first person (‘loved’) without touching them, but at the same time they keep as physically far away from the second (‘hated’) person as possible.
- As leader, explain to the students that these three plays involve people landing and taking up residence in foreign and unknown lands. Ask them to play this game again and to imagine that they are in a new land. They want to keep those that they love close, and those they do not know, or are suspicious of, at a distance.
- After this activity, discuss as a whole group:
What does it feel like to be unsure and even distrustful of those around you?

ACTIVITY 2: WHAT’S IN A NAME?



- Ask the students to get into groups of four. Ask everyone to write down their first name on a piece of paper, decorating it (or not) however they wish.
- Then ask everyone, in their groups, to share something about their name, for example, what it means, why they were called it, whether they like it etc.
- When everyone’s done this, ask the groups to create a group name, combining all the names in their group however they choose and find a way to present it to the others. After time to prepare, ask the groups to share their group names with everyone.
- After this activity, discuss the idea of names (people’s names and group names) with the whole group. Explain that in these three plays, the characters’ names are very important because they are (often) the only thing they have brought with them, they are a first introduction that they share with the people they meet.

ACTIVITY 3: TWINS



Tell the whole group that they will be asked to find their ‘twin’ in response to a series of questions. And to do this in silence.

Ask ‘Find the person with...:’

- Eye colour most like yours
- The same size palms as you
- Eyebrows most like yours
- The most similar nose to your own

Add extra things as you wish.



Felix Hayes as Dromio of Ephesus and Bruce Mackinnon as Dromio of Syracuse In *The Comedy of Errors*

STORYTELLING AND IMPROVISATION

ACTIVITY 1: THE OBJECT GAME

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. You as leader take an object (something that has an interesting shape: a water bottle, a coat hanger etc) and pass it around the circle. Each player should turn it into something that in no way resembles what object is, for example: a dog on a lead, an aeroplane etc. Ask them to mime this 'object' to the rest of the group, who then have to guess what the object has become.

ACTIVITY 2: 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING?'

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Pick one person to stand in the centre, performing an action. The person on their right now goes in to join them and asks: 'What are you doing?' to which the first person replies with a lie (eg: if their action is brushing their teeth, they may say, 'building a shed').

The second person then starts the 'lie' action (ie: building a shed) and the first person leaves. Next the third person (ie, the person to the right of the second) enters the circle and asks, 'What are you doing?' The second person lies and the third person takes on this 'lie' activity. Continue the game until everyone has had a turn.

ACTIVITY 3: MAGIC BOXES

- First explain what is meant by 'suspending your disbelief': in stage productions, everyday objects are often turned into a whole range of things. This relies on the audience suspending their disbelief and using their imagination. This is the 'magic' of theatre. Throughout these productions, audiences are constantly being required to suspend their disbelief as familiar objects take on new lives.
- Ask the group to get into pairs. Explain that in each pair, one person will pretend they have a magic box and, with the other person encouraging them, they will pull imaginary things out of their magic box. Encourage everyone to make the items as mad and large as possible. Swap over so the other person has a turn. If you have time, ask a few of the pairs to show some of their improvisation.

ACTIVITY 4: STORYTELLING

- When your group has a good understanding of the story of the play you're working on, get together to tell the story of the shipwreck as a group. Tell the group to make sure they include exactly how the people were shipwrecked and rescued. With everyone standing in a circle, you as leader say one sentence to start the story and go around the circle with everyone contributing one sentence at a time. As leader, ask for more details about people, places or objects, encouraging everyone to describe things in detail.
- After this, explain that in all three of these plays, one character has to tell the story to another character(s) and audience of how they arrived in the new place. Discuss how you can make the story as interesting and engaging as possible for the audience.
- Ask the group to reflect on the difference between this approach and working with Shakespeare's text.

MORE RESOURCES



Visit www.rsc.org.uk/education/resources for more resources on *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* including:

- Teachers' activity packs based on each of the 2012 productions of the 'What country friends is this?' trilogy (*The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*)
- Teachers' activity packs based on previous productions of all three plays
- Images, videos and information about past productions in the Resource Bank

More teaching activities to support your active approaches to Shakespeare can be found in our book, *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers*, which is available to buy at the [RSC Shop](#). We also run a range of courses for teachers and students - for more information: www.rsc.org.uk/education

Photos by Keith Pattison (*The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*) and Simon Annand (*The Tempest*)
Pack written and designed by RSC Education