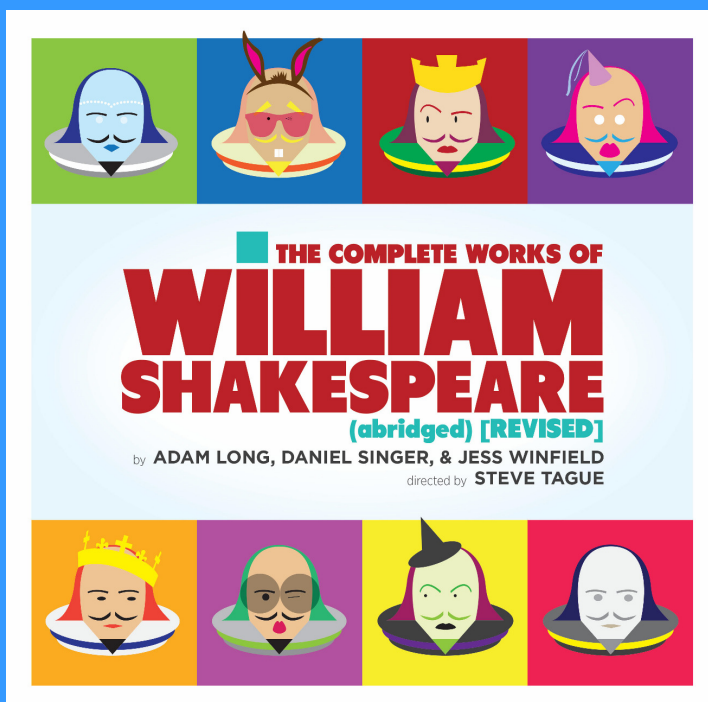




INSIGHTS

DTC's Teacher Resource



The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [Revised]

By Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield
Directed by Steve Tague

**Delaware Theatre Company
November 29-December 23, 2017**

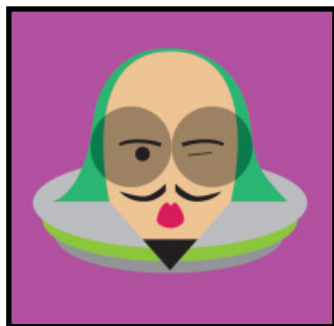
A Word from the Playwrights...

Daniel Singer: After drama school, I sent the [Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Marin County, California] a proposal to produce a half-hour *Hamlet*. . . . They gave the show a green light. . . . [The] script was originally just a reduction of the play with no jokes in it. We were all strongly influenced by the antics of the Marx Brothers, Bugs Bunny, and Monty Python. Our *Hamlet* became a showcase of broad humor and personal interactions between the actors. This allowed the audience to enjoy the show on multiple levels: the cleverness of seeing the greatest play in the English language rudely compacted into an absurdly short skit; the delight of vaudeville-style slapstick adapted to a 16th-Century idiom; and the witty interplay of three charismatic guys struggling to get through the damn thing.

--from *Onstage and Backstage*, a blog by Hal Leonard Performing Arts Publishing Group

William Shakespeare: I want you to be the first to know I'm petitioning Congress to extend the Copyrights Law. That's right—extend that bad boy. These words are mine! I own them. Hell, in many cases I invented them! The free ride's over, people.

--from the "Backword" to *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Reader's Guide for the Attention-Impaired* (abridged) by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor of the Reduced Shakespeare Company.



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Delaware Division of the **Arts**

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INSIGHTS

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Delaware Theatre Company
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Wilmington, DE 19801
(302) 594-1100
www.delawaretheatre.org

**39th Season
2017-2018**

***THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE***
(abridged) [Revised]

by

**Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and
Jess Winfield**

Directed by
Steve Tague

*Delaware Theatre Company
Executive Director*

Bud Martin

*Department of Education and
Community Engagement*

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**This study guide includes material adapted from and/or previously published in DTC's Insights, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged), 2007.*

Characters and Summary

A Note to Readers: To assist educators in preparing their students for seeing our shows, the Department of Education and Community Engagement at DTC prepares and shares detailed summaries of the plots of our productions. These summaries disclose important plot points, including the climax and resolution of each play. Furthermore, our study guides are constructed under the premise that the educator has read our summary, and additional articles herein may reference these same plot points. This notice is intended to provide a “spoiler alert.”

Characters

In the original Reduced Shakespeare Company production of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*, the three authors (Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield) each played themselves as members of a troupe of actors presenting these plays to the audience. The script lists the characters as “Jess,” “Adam,” and “Daniel,” after the names of the three authors. In the DTC production, the actors will be introducing themselves to the audience by their actual names, but will be taking on the dialogue and roles assigned to the characters of “Jess,” “Adam,” and “Daniel.”



Jeffrey Hawkins

Jeff (taking on the dialogue of “Jess”)

Jeff’s character is the pompous know-it-all who presents himself as a Shakespearean scholar. During the course of the play, he provides narration for *Romeo and Juliet* and plays such roles as Titus Andronicus, Macbeth, and Hamlet.



John Zak

John (taking on the dialogue of “Adam”)

John’s character is the screw-up of the bunch, seemingly always making mistakes, and has a deathly fear of performing *Hamlet*. He takes on most of the women’s parts (Juliet, Lavinia, Cleopatra, Cressida, and Ophelia), playing them all with horrible wigs and with a tendency to engage in fake vomiting.



Josh Carpenter

Josh (taking on the dialogue of “Daniel”)

Josh’s character is the somewhat calm host of the bunch who must stall for time and work the audience when his fellow actors abandon him. He takes on such roles as Romeo, Nurse, Caesar, Richard III, Lear, Horatio, and Polonius.

(continued)

Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary

Act I

Josh (in character) welcomes the audience and gives them a brief orientation as to how the evening will unfold. He then introduces Jeff (in character), who provides the audience with a “scholarly” preface to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [Revised]*. Josh then introduces John, who gives a brief biography of William Shakespeare that somehow merges the life of Adolf Hitler with that of the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon.

With that, they launch into the plays, starting with *Romeo and Juliet* narrated in a faux “Masterpiece Theatre” style. Then things start to get out of control as, in short order, the actors present *Titus Andronicus* as a cooking show, *Othello* as a rap number, all the comedies as one play, and *Macbeth* with every possible Scottish stereotype imaginable. *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* get very short shrift. Jeff starts to provide a scholarly discussion of *Troilus and Cressida*, but the others decide this is too much of the “dry, boring” Shakespeare people are afraid of. To counteract this, they present the history plays (*King John*, *Richard III*, etc.,) as a football game.

At this point, the actors realize they have covered every single play except *Hamlet*. John runs out of the theatre in fear of this “serious” play. Jeff chases after, and Josh suggests to the audience that now would be the perfect time to take intermission.

Act II

As the audience returns, Josh confesses that John has not yet come back to the theatre. To kill time, Josh begins to cover the 154 Shakespeare sonnets, which he has condensed onto one index card. Just as he begins, Jeff brings John back in and they commence with *Hamlet*.

The entire second act is dedicated to *Hamlet*, complete with a surprisingly moving “What a piece of work is man” speech and an audience participation section to illustrate Ophelia’s subtext at a key moment.

After they finish *Hamlet*, they present a two-minute version, a five-second version, and a backwards version.

The rest, as they say, is silence.



A view from the stage inside the rebuilt Globe Theatre

About the Playwrights

The Reduced Shakespeare Company is a three-man comedy troupe founded in 1981 by Daniel Singer, Adam Long, and Jess Winfield. After premiering two successful abridged comic versions of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* at Renaissance fairs, the trio developed a host of full-length comic shows dedicated to bringing classic plays, stories, and even historic events to life. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* was fully developed and first performed in 1987, followed by *The Complete History of America (abridged)* and *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged)*. Known as the “Bad Boys of Abridgment,” the Reduced Shakespeare Company has, in their own words, “created ten world-renowned stage shows, two television specials, several failed TV pilots, and numerous radio pieces, all of which have been performed, seen, and heard the world over. . . . The RSC had more shows running in the West End than Andrew Lloyd Webber. They were also funnier.” More information about the company can be found at www.reducedshakespeare.com.

About William Shakespeare

Arguably the most famous playwright in the world, William Shakespeare was born in April of 1564. His birthday is often celebrated on April 23, suggested by some historians as having occurred the traditional three days prior to his baptism on April 26, 1564 (for which there is a historic record). He was the first surviving child of his parents, John Shakespeare (a glove-maker and seller of wool) and Mary Arden. A country boy whose family was active in the local politics of the time, Shakespeare was brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon in the heart of England. He married Anne Hathaway, a woman older than he, but spent very little time with her as he lived mostly in London working as a playwright and actor. William and Anne had three children: Susannah and twins Hamnet (who died as a child) and Judith.

Shakespeare was widely popular in his lifetime and made a great deal of money from his writings. He was a consummate poet who revolutionized the art of playwriting, taking existing stories and reworking them in innovative ways. He is often credited with making plays character-driven for the first time, for until Shakespeare wrote characters like Hamlet and Othello, plays had been mostly plot-driven. Unlike other playwrights of the age, he did not concentrate on one genre, instead writing histories, comedies, and tragedies. He was the first playwright to put comedy into an essentially tragic play, and to inject dark elements into comedic plots. For this he was criticized during his lifetime. Regardless of this criticism, though, Shakespeare’s works were well-received by both royalty and the general public. He died on April 23, 1616.



Teachable Themes and Topics

William Shakespeare: Creator, Adapter, Latin Lover

Although Shakespeare was not a university scholar, he was a gifted writer able to create characters and stories as well as adapt commonly known tales into stirring dramas and witty comedies. How did he do it? How, indeed, could a man who had no formal schooling beyond the age of fourteen, a man who likely had never traveled beyond Britain, a man without the internet or even a typewriter, for goodness' sakes, how could he create such masterpieces as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello*?

The answer: we don't really know for sure. But we have a pretty good inkling.

From around the age four to age six or seven, Shakespeare most probably attended a primary school known as a "petty school," where he learned the basics of reading and writing. Like other boys, he then would have transitioned to grammar school, where he followed a traditional course of learning that emphasized Latin vocabulary and grammatical construction. In addition to Latin, religion, and arithmetic, boys studied history and the classic writings of the Romans and the Greeks—Ovid, Virgil, and Homer. These studies would have introduced Shakespeare to some of the most well-known stories of real people and fictional characters and given him ideas for his own writing ventures. Grammar school continued for boys until age 14, when they either pursued the learning of a trade or, if a member of the upper class, continued to a university education. Though age 14 seems young to contemporary American audiences for the completion of formal schooling, the school day and year were much different for Shakespeare and his peers—usually forty or more hours a week were spent in the classroom. With the long hours and emphasis on language and the classics, Shakespeare's schooling provided him, as it did for the average boy in Elizabethan times, a strong educational foundation. And perhaps his education also kindled his personal interest in history and literature, motivating him to continue reading on his own.

Shakespeare's knowledge, then, about someone such as Mark Antony may have come from school-directed readings of Plutarch's *Lives*, and the plays *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar* possibly inspired or shaped by this material. The works of the Roman poet Ovid, some of whose works may have been available to Shakespeare only in Latin, created a backdrop for him in his poem "Venus and Adonis." With such a background in Latin, Greek, and the classics, Shakespeare had access to some of the greatest stories and characters around.

Some of Shakespeare's most famous works about fictional characters are actually adaptations of what someone else had already written. Yes, Shakespeare took other people's stories and reworked them. For example, *Romeo and Juliet*'s basic tale of love gone wrong came from Arthur Brooke's poem "Romeus and Juliet." But Shakespeare reworked events from the poem to make his play more time-urgent, to make Tybalt a more threatening villain, and to make the two young lovers' passion more immediate to begin and to end. In addition, Shakespeare wrote it as a drama, giving each character dialogue stylized to show his social status in the Verona community. Shakespeare took many freedoms with old stories to create plays whose plotlines melded together seamlessly.

Shakespeare also used his own imagination from start to finish in creating a play. As near as scholars can tell, Shakespeare's *Loves Labour's Lost* is one play in which the characters and plot do not appear to have direct connections to previous works by other authors. And though the historic events relayed in Shakespeare's "Henry plays" have a corresponding factual basis, the dialogue of the characters—and even some of the characters themselves found within the plays—were clearly an invention of Shakespeare's creativity rather than a documenting of actual speech. Shakespeare's 1611 play *The Tempest*, though possibly inspired by stories circulating of shipwrecks in Bermuda and the New

(continued)

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

William Shakespeare: Creator, Adapter, Latin Lover (continued)

World, is also considered to be a product of his imagination, with original characters and plotlines.

Original or adapted, Shakespeare's plays also benefited from the strong theatrical traditions in performance. One such theatrical tradition is that of *commedia dell'arte*, a performance genre popularized in Renaissance Italy that made use of stock characters, stock plots, and comic conventions. As an established actor, Shakespeare would have been familiar with these conventions and how actors incorporated them into their performances. Using physical humor and witty banter, Shakespeare's plays entertained both the action aficionado and the language lover.

A good story is one thing. Keeping an audience's attention for "the two hours' traffic" of action on a stage is another. Whether creating characters from his imagination, providing a new twist on an oldie-but-goodie, or giving dramatic life to dead historical heroes and villains, Shakespeare certainly knew how to write a script and create a performance that was appreciated by an audience of his contemporaries, yet has stood the test of time in its widespread appeal.

"Family Tree" of the Romeo and Juliet Story

Shakespeare was not the only author who adapted the works of others into new forms. As mentioned above, Shakespeare's version of *Romeo and Juliet* was probably inspired by the poem "Romeus and Juliet" by Arthur Brooke. But even Brooke was inspired by previous works.

Brooke's version of the Romeo and Juliet story is taken from a French poem by Pierre Boaistuau (1559) that was based on an Italian story by Matteo Bandello (1554), which was itself inspired by Luigi da Porto's "Giulietta e Romeo" (circa 1530). Although Shakespeare also consulted William Painter's 1562 English translation of Boaistuau's poem titled "Rhomeo and Julietta" (and possibly some of the earlier Italian texts), Brooke's "Romeus and Juliet" was his direct and primary source.

—Ryan McKittrick, American
Repertory Theatre

Did you get all that?



*Image of Juliet and Romeo ,
from Act II Scene v.*

***Teachable Themes and Topics* (continued)**

The 36 Dramatic Situations, or “Same Story, Different Century”

In 1917, a man named Georges Polti published a book entitled *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. In this book, Polti offered that every story known to man can be classified into one of thirty-six basic plots. Stories with multiple plotlines cross between several dramatic situations. One such story, the well-known Cinderella story (which Polti would call the “Rivalry of Superior and Inferior” situation) is a good example of a basic plot. Though some might disagree, it does make you think: how many versions of a Cinderella story have you heard or seen? There is the fairy tale in the Brothers Grimm book, the Disney cartoon version with singing mice, the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical version (a 1997 TV special of this one featured Brandy and Whitney Houston), the movie *Ella Enchanted*, and the Selena Gomez modernization *Another Cinderella Story*. But don’t forget films like *Seabiscuit*, about a lowly horse who wins a great race against a mighty opponent, or even books/movies like *The Hunger Games* series, in which Katniss is an unlikely heroine against a richer, more powerful foe. The list could go on and on.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [Revised] toys with the notion that many of Shakespeare’s plays seem to be cut from the same cloth. Plot devices such as mistaken identification leading to chaos, lovers pretending to dislike one another, or overbearing fathers keeping their daughters from marrying are indeed utilized in many of Shakespeare’s comedies. Likewise, *The Complete Works...* suggests that Shakespeare’s tragedies and histories have a similar plot line: villains try to overthrow a king while an honorable family member tries to restore the throne to a proper leader.

Much of the fun in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [Revised]* comes from finding new ways to present old plots. Turning the histories into a football game highlights the family vs. family, country vs. country, Cowboys vs. Eagles, team vs. team conflict. Abbreviating *Macbeth* into just a few pages pulls together the essence of the climactic scene between Macduff and Macbeth (Polti would call it the “Vengeance of a Crime” situation). In just a few short minutes, the audience can gather the basic idea of one of the chief plotlines in a five-act play.

As you watch *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [Revised]*, see if you can connect a Shakespearean play with one of these dramatic situations:

Obstacles to Love

Vengeance Taken Upon Kindred for Kindred

Mistaken Jealousy

Enjoy the way these traditional situations are served up by the Reduced Shakespeare Company!

(continued)

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

The Authorship Controversy

Since the 18th century, a number of people have debated whether the person named William Shakespeare actually could have written the plays attributed to him. Most scholars find that there is plenty of strong evidence to credit the Bard with authorship, though. Shakespeare's common upbringing could have provided him enough education to know the stories and histories that were source material for some of his plays. His known activities in the theatre of the age as well as the mentions of and tributes to him by other actors and playwrights put the person in the right place and time for him to have written the plays. And these same scholars point out (and rightly so) that similar or even less evidence is viewed as sufficient for other authors of the time to receive credit for their work. Yet there are still those who question whether or not the person known as William Shakespeare could have been so prolific and written with such depth. Here are four candidates that these anti-Stratfordians (doubters in Shakespeare's authorship) have advanced as possibilities for being the real author of the plays attributed to Shakespeare.

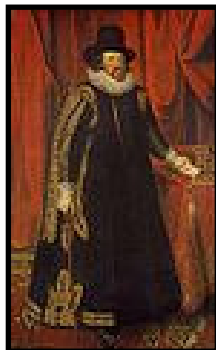
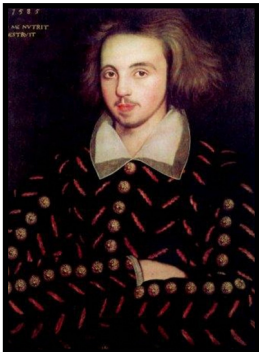
Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)—Shakespeare's early career theatrical competitor, Marlowe was a well-known playwright of the Elizabethan age who died an untimely death as a result of a bar fight. Those who put forth Marlowe as the true author explain away the fact that he died before many of the plays were written by suggesting Marlowe's death was faked (and he was possibly a spy for the Queen). As a result, he could no longer publish under his own name, and he took on the nom de plume of Shakespeare as he continued to write. However conspiratorial or far-fetched that angle is, Oxford University Press announced in 2016 that, despite the criticism of that move from other Shakespeare scholars, it will include Marlowe as co-author of the three *Henry VI* plays.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)—English philosopher, statesman, and essayist, Francis Bacon was well-educated, well-travelled, and well-connected with the aristocracy, traits that make him, in the eyes of some, a strong candidate who authored the plays. As a member of the aristocracy, Bacon would have lost social status by having a career as a playwright, so his supporters say he took the name of William Shakespeare to shield himself from the stigma.

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604)—De Vere was an Elizabethan courtier, poet, and sportsman. Though he was a member of the aristocracy, he was known to act in plays and was a leaseholder in the Blackfriars Theatre. Proponents of the de Vere authorship point to his knowledge of aristocracy, his education, and his interest in theatre as making him a strong candidate to consider as the true playwright behind Shakespeare's works.

J.K. Rowling (1965-)—The creator of the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling had nothing whatsoever to do with the writing of Shakespeare's plays; so really, we can rule her out.

*Below: Proposed Cast of "Real Authors of ~~Beverly Hills~~ Shakespeare's Plays":
Marlowe, Bacon, de Vere, Rowling*



Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Fun with Shakespeare

Shakespeare and a Football Game?

The original authors of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* used many references that were contemporary to 1987, the original year of production. Since then, as the play has continued to be performed, the references to contemporary people, places, and events have been adapted by production companies (with the authors' blessing) to suit the time and place of the performance. In the 2017 DTC production, look for contemporary references our director, actors, and designers have incorporated into the play that relate to the audience in this time and place.



A Renaissance artist depicts putting the left foot out, or something of the sort.

If Shakespeare Had Written the Hokey-Pokey by Jeff Brechlin

O proud left foot, that ventures quick within
Then soon upon a backward journey lithe.
Anon, once more the gesture, then begin:
Command sinistral pedestal to writhe.
Commence thou then the fervid Hokey-Poke,
A mad gyration, hips in wanton swirl.
To spin! A wilde release from Heaven's yoke.
Blessed dervish! Surely canst go, girl.
The Hoke, the Poke — banish now thy doubt
Verily, I say, 'tis what it's all about.

Questions for Classroom Discussion

Knowledge and Comprehension

1. What are the three actors trying to accomplish?
2. What style or genre is this show?
3. Name three plays you saw adapted here. Summarize the main conflict of these plays.

Application and Analysis

1. Describe the three actors playing all of the roles. What kind of personalities do they have? Do you notice any repeats among the character types each actor plays? If so, what types did you notice?
2. How does the *Complete Works*...version of *Romeo and Juliet* compare with other versions you have seen and read? What differences do you note?
3. What are the key plot points of *Hamlet* covered in *Complete Works*...? What, if anything, was eliminated from *Complete Works*... that you would like to have seen?
4. How does the use of a cooking show apply to events from *Titus Andronicus*?

Synthesis and Evaluation

1. What modern references or conventions were used in the play to connect today's audiences with Shakespeare's plays? Were these modern references effective? How appropriate were they for helping a contemporary audience understand material written over 400 years ago? Explain your ideas.
2. With what Shakespearean play or poem are you most familiar? If you could create a zany *Complete Works* scene depicting elements of that Shakespearean play or poem, what would you do with it?
3. If you were in charge of casting *Complete Works*..., what would you look for in hiring your three actors? What kinds of skills do you think are necessary for actors in this show?

Classroom Activities

1. Using one of these dramatic situations (from Politi's *Thirty-Six...*), identify as many stories that fit the description as possible. Consider fairy tales, folk tales, myths, and urban legends, as well as contemporary books, movies, or TV shows.

Obstacles to Love

Mistaken Jealousy

Vengeance Taken on Kindred by Kindred

Fatal Imprudence

Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal

Prepare a chart or other depiction of the various stories and how they connect with the basic dramatic situations. Share with the class.

2. Select one of the above dramatic situations and write a short play that contains elements from the situation. Act out your play, or present a reader's theatre for the class. Afterwards, discuss with your classmates the elements of the dramatic situation that were identified in your piece.

3. Select one of Shakespeare's plays or poems and read it carefully. Write a short summary (fewer than ten sentences) of the play or poem. Make a list of any memorable lines or quotations from the piece. On your own or with a partner, create a way to dramatize this play or poem in a performance of two minutes or less. What literary or performance/media style might be a creative background for using in your new version? A music video? A game show? A "Real Housewives" style? Be creative as you select your new way to dramatize the piece, remembering to highlight the important plot, character, or dialogue elements you previously identified so your audience can make the connection.

4. Research the type of schooling available to children for three different time periods and/or locations. Examples could include Elizabethan England, Colonial America, or even schooling from recent decades such as the 1960s. Examine what was taught, to whom, and by whom. What were the costs for schooling? Who paid for it? Was anyone excluded from the education systems? How much education did the typical child get before going into the workforce? Present your findings to the class.

5. How do scholars, historians, or other experts determine who was the author or creator of a particular piece? Choose an avenue such as painting, literature, sculpture, or even historical documents, and investigate the kind of training a person would have to get to become an expert in determining the authenticity or origin of a piece. What records help that expert determine the age or authenticity of a work? What physical characteristics are common to works of the same age and time? What types of evidence exist to support a claim of authorship or ownership? If possible, find a contemporary expert in the field to interview about their work, their challenges, and their discoveries. Share your findings with your class.

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Page 8--Christopher Marlowe (presumed). Painter: Unknown. Location: Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Public domain. Accessed at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Christopher_Marlowe.png.

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Page 9--Ball at the Court of Henri III of France. Circa 1580; painter unknown. Public domain image. Accessed at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ball_Henri_III.jpg.

Why Go to the Theatre?

State and National Education Standards Addressed Through Taking Your Students to a Live Theatre Production

When your students view live theatre, they are taking part in a learning experience that engages their minds on many levels. From simple recall and comprehension of the plot of a play or musical to analysis and evaluation of the production elements of a show, students receive and interpret messages communicated through words, movement, music, and other artistic devices. Beyond “I liked it; it was good,” students learn to communicate about the content and performance of an artistic piece and to reflect on their own and others’ emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual points-of-view and responses. And the immediacy of live theatre--the shared moments between actors and audience members in the here-and-now--raises students’ awareness of the power and scope of human connection.

The following educational standards are addressed in a visit to a performance at Delaware Theatre Company along with a pre-show DTC classroom presentation and post-show talkback session at the theatre. *(Additional standards addressed through the use of the study guide or through further classroom study are not included here.)*

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

Reading: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, 6

Language: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, and 5

National Core Arts Standards—Theatre:

Responding: Anchor Standards 7, 8, and 9

Connecting: Anchor Standard 11

Delaware Standards for English Language Arts (DOE):

Standard 2: 2.2a, 2.4b1, 2.5b, 2.5g, 2.6a

Standard 3: 3.1b, 3.3b1, 3.3b2

Standard 4: 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2f, 4.3a, 4.4b

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