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# EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

# THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

## Educator Resource Guide

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## Dear Educators,

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* is often regarded as an outlier in the Shakespearean canon for a number of reasons; the first and foremost being that it happens in a town that can be found on a map, about 85 miles southeast of Shakespeare's hometown. Unlike the imagined far-off towns found in other Shakespearean comedies, such as Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, Arden in *As You Like It*, Windsor appears with a level of familiarity that resonated with Elizabethan audiences, and continues to pervade our modern adaptations.

Merry Wives is also an anachronism, populating the town of Windsor with well known (and well loved) characters from Shakespeare's history plays (Falstaff, Nym, Pistol, Mistress Quickly, etc.). By mixing past and present elements, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* exposes the way in which the themes within this play have existed throughout time.

Coupled with the fact that Merry Wives boasts the highest percentage of prose (as opposed to verse) in any Shakespeare play, making the language more plebeian than his other plays, Windsor mirrors everyday life in a way that doesn't feel delicate or inaccessible. Shakespeare dissects plain-spoken English and gives each character a unique verbal tic that reveals something essential about their natures. From Nym's over-use of the word "humor" for seemingly every context, to the thick accents of Windsor's foreigners, to Mistress Quickly's outlandish malapropisms, these characters come to life through their prose.

Part of the reason I love Shakespeare is because of how indisputably human his scripts feel. While the language feels antique, the themes, struggles, and ideologies have direct links to the present day. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a perfect example of this; showing humor lingering in the mundanity of everyday life.

Enjoy the play!

Best,  
Anna Klein  
Youth and Engagement Manager of Seattle Shakespeare Company

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Production still of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023)  
Photo by Giao Nguyen

## The Plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

The play opens with Justice Salvo, a pompous woman who has just arrived in Windsor with her young cousin, Slender, a suitor for the beautiful and sought-after Anne Page— the daughter of Page, a wealthy owner of the Garter Inn, and his wife, Meg Page. Salvo rages that she has been disgraced by John Falstaff, a roguish celebrity knight whose boisterous ego allows him to believe he can get away with anything. Salvo confronts Falstaff who is flanked by two companions, Simple and Pistol. Falstaff confesses to his wrongdoings. The coil resolved, all are charged to share a meal with Page while Slender unsuccessfully endeavors to woo Anne outside.

Later, at the Garter Inn, Falstaff discloses his resolve to pursue the wives of not one, but two wealthy men, namely Meg Page and Alice Ford. When his companions refuse to help, he sends his servant, Simple, with a letter to each wife. Pistol resolves to inform the husbands of Falstaff's plot.

The wives meet and compare their letters and find that they are identical. Enraged by his attempt at them, they decide to teach Falstaff a lesson by inviting him to come to Alice Ford's house when her husband is out. However, by this point Pistol has

made the men aware of Falstaff's plans to cuckold them. While Page is unbothered, the jealous George Ford, distrustful of his wife, decides to catch her in her infidelity. Ford disguises himself as a man called Master Brook, seeks out Falstaff. In an attempt to gather information, Ford (disguised as Brook) declares his love for Mistress Ford and bribes Falstaff to pursue her on his behalf. Falstaff agrees before disclosing that a meeting is already arranged. This makes Ford even angrier at his wife.

While the plot against Falstaff is in motion, we are met by three different men who desire the hand of Page's daughter, Anne; Slender, who we met before, and Doctor Caius, a bumbling Frenchman. Anne, meanwhile, is already meeting with Pistol, whom she loves in secret since her father disapproves of them. Anne's mother hopes that the French doctor Caius will become Anne's husband, while Page favors Slender. When Caius learns of Slender's rival suit, he challenges Slender's advisor, Justice Salvo, to a duel. However, Quickly, the host of the Garter Inn sets different meeting places to confuse the antagonists. Eventually, they are persuaded to make up their differences.





Production still of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023)  
Photo by Giao Nguyen

When Falstaff reaches Alice Ford's house, he begins his flirtation. Unbeknownst to him, the wives had conjured a plan to have his courtship interrupted. Mistress Page announces that the men are returning, so they convince Falstaff to hide in a large laundry basket, and he is carried out to the river while Ford ransacks the house in search of him. The delighted wives decide to repeat the trick (especially after seeing the reaction of the jealous Ford) and invite Falstaff to call again. Despite being tipped out on a muddy river bank during the previous trip, Falstaff is persuaded to accept by Brook (who is the disguised Ford). Like the first occurrence, he is interrupted by Ford's return. This time, however, the women convince Falstaff to disguise himself as the 'witch' of Brentford while Ford searches the contents of the linen basket. Ford, who deeply detests the witch of Brentford, unknowingly sends Falstaff away. Successful in their attempt, the wives reveal the hoax to their husbands. Page suggests Falstaff should be publicly humiliated to stop his attempts on honest women. They arrange one last prank.

Mistress Ford invites Falstaff to meet her at night in Windsor Park for a Halloween party with him disguised with antlers. All dressed up, the community encircles Falstaff while dressed as fairies and pinch him. Anne uses the occasion to elope with Pistol, escaping the plots of her mother and father for Anne to be stolen away by the respective suitors of their choice (Caius and Slender).

Falstaff recognises the trick and realizes that he has deserved his punishment. He makes up with Page and Ford, and their wives, while Ford is also reprimanded for mistrusting his wife. Anne returns married to Pistol, while Caius and Slender realize they eloped with boys, whom they mistook for Anne in the dark woods. Page and Mistress Page accept Pistol, and all revel and sing joyously.

***Wives may be merry,  
and yet honest too.***

**(Mistress Page, Act 4 Scene 2)**



Are you interested in catching a modernized adaptation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*?

Check out this 2006 romantic comedy:  
*John Tucker Must Die*



## Characters

*(specific to the Seattle Shakespeare Company professional production, Fall 2023)*

### Alice Ford

Wife to George Ford and a dear friend of Mistress Page. Mistress Ford hopes to prove to her husband that she is entirely faithful, so that he will get over his oppressive jealousy.

### Falstaff

A pompous knight, scoundrel, an occasional thief who thinks he can get away with anything, including seducing married women in order to gain access to their husbands' cash.

### Meg Page

Wife to Francis Page, mother to Anne Page, and a dear friend of Mistress Ford. Mistress Page and her husband disagree about who should marry their daughter.

### Francis Ford

The jealous husband of Alice Ford. Willing to go great lengths to disguise himself and uncover his wife's perceived infidelity.



Mari Nelson  
as Alice Ford



Jasmine Joshua  
as Falstaff



Joyce Thi Brew  
as Meg Page



George Mount  
as Francis Ford





## George Page

The easy-going husband of Meg Page, who lives unbothered by Falstaff's plot. He and his wife disagree about who should marry their daughter Anne.

## Simple

A companion of John Falstaff, while he runs Falstaff's errands, he also works for Quickly, Page, and Ford.

## Pistol

A companion of John Falstaff who elects to preserve his honesty and, alongside Simple, reports Falstaff's plans to Page and Ford, as well as the secret suitor of Anne Page, whom neither her father nor mother approve of.

*In the original Shakespeare play, there is a character by the name of Fenton who serves as Anne's love-match in the play, while Pistol is exclusively a former follower of Falstaff. In this adaptation, these two characters have been combined.*

## Slender

Page's preferred suitor for Anne Page's hand; Slender is urged on by Shallow, but he is unable to speak anything but nonsense to Anne.



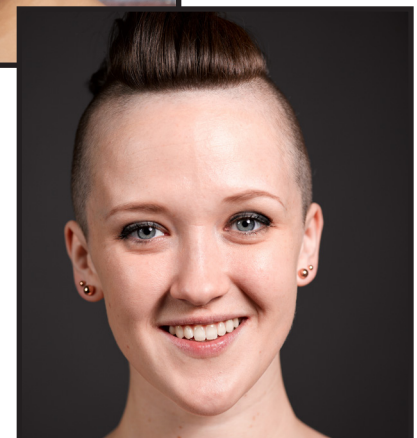
Terence Kelley  
as George Page



Brandon Felker  
as Simple



Rhys Daly  
as Pistol



Maddy Nibble  
as Slender



## Anne Page

The sought-after daughter of Meg Page and George Page.

## Dr. Caius

A bumbling French doctor, and Meg Page's preferred suitor for her daughter's hand. His accent often encourages jokes at his expense.

## Quickly

The mischievous host/ess of the Garter Inn and everyone's messenger.

*In the unedited Shakespeare play, there is the Host of the Garter Inn, who is a friend to Falstaff and serves the general populace of Windsor, while Quickly works for Doctor Caius, helps Anne's various suitors, and spreads gossip around town at the behest of the wives of Windsor. In this production, those two characters have been combined.*

## Justice Salvo

A foolish figure of the law who represents misplaced authority. She urges Slender to try to seduce Anne Page, even speaking for him at times.



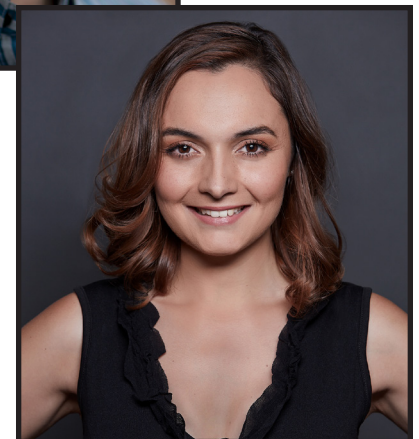
Kataka Corn  
as Anne Page



Malex Reed  
as Dr. Caius



Vincent Milay  
as Quickly



Iveliz Martel  
as Justice Salvo





## Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest dramatist in the English language, was born in the month of April of 1564 to John Shakespeare, a city councilman and glove maker, and Mary Arden. He was the eldest son in a family of eight.

Not much is known about William's childhood or education. The local school in Stratford would have provided him with a foundation in classical Latin authors, as was standard in Elizabethan curriculum. In 1582, at eighteen years old, William was married to Anne Hathaway (not the same one from *The Princess Diaries*). The marriage was apparently a hasty one, as Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, six months later. Two years later the couple had twins, a son Hamnet and a daughter Judith. After the birth of the twins, records of William cease for several years.

These "lost years" have caused speculation among historians and suggestions about his vocation during this time vary greatly. Some say William began his theatrical career minding the horses at the theatre's stables. Regardless of what he was doing, William must have been honing his skills as a writer. No one knows when he began writing exactly, but we do know when people began to take notice.

In 1592, theatre records show that William Shakespeare's plays started being performed in London. William joined an acting company called Lord Chamberlain's Men. This company, co-owned by William and several other actors, became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I and of her successor, James I. Records from the period show that William acted in his own plays, usually as minor characters, as well as in other productions. William Shakespeare's earliest plays were largely comedies and histories. In 1596, William's son, Hamnet, died of an unknown illness.

In 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men had gained enough success to fund the construction of their own theater venue, the Globe Theatre. As Shakespeare's career grew, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became one of the most popular theatre groups in London. William's writing also matured as he began writing his great tragedies.

In 1603, with James I's succession to the throne following the death of Elizabeth I, the new king became the official patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the group changed their name to the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men expanded to purchase the indoor Blackfriars theatre. Shakespeare himself became quite wealthy due to his career success; he made numerous property purchases, including New Place, the second largest house in his hometown of Stratford. He divided his time between London and Stratford, eventually retiring to Stratford. Shakespeare died on April 23rd, 1616. The cause of his death is unknown.

"Richard Brinsley Sheridan" Encyclopædia Britannica. 03 July, 2018. <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Brinsley-Sheridan>> Encyclopædia Britannica, 11th Edition, Volume XXIV. John George Robertson. Cambridge: University Press, 1911. pp. 845-7.

# Themes in *Merry Wives*

## ***Jealousy, Deception, and Revenge***

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Sir John Falstaff attempts to seduce two wealthy housewives, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, in order to gain access to their husbands' bank accounts. When the wives learn of this, they work together to seek revenge by staging a series of elaborate pranks designed to humiliate Falstaff in front of the entire community.

While both wives are faithful, Mistress Ford has a mistrustful husband who believes that all women will cheat on their husbands if given the opportunity. When Francis Ford learns of John Falstaff's plans to seduce his wife, Ford disguises himself as "Brook" to gain intel from Falstaff himself, which backfires since Falstaff is being deceived by the wives as well.

Through their revenge plot, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are able to hit two birds with one stone; Falstaff is effectively punished for his efforts to seduce married women, and Mistress Ford is able to exploit the jealousy of her husband in order to make him look foolish as well.



Production still of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023). Photo by Giao Nguyen

## ***Marriage, Love, and Wealth***

Love, Money, and Marriage are deeply intertwined in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In the play's main plot, Falstaff tries to seduce two housewives in order to gain access to their husbands' cash:

"I will be cheater to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me" – Falstaff (Act 1, Scene 3).

He, of course, fails miserably as the wives prove faithful to their husbands.

Meanwhile, in the subplot, Anne Page, the daughter of the wealthy George Page, is pursued by three suitors; Doctor Caius who is favored by Anne's mother, Slender who is favored by her father, and Fenton (or in our version, Pistol), who is favored by Anne herself. Anne's father doesn't approve of Fenton (aka Pistol) because he believes Fenton is only courting Anne to gain access to her family's money. Fenton confesses to Anne that this was originally his plan, but now that he knows her, he knows that she is the true prize (awww).

"Albeit I will confess thy father's wealth  
Was the first motive that I woo'd thee, Anne:  
Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value  
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags;  
And 'tis the very riches of thyself  
That now I aim at."

– Fenton (Act 3, Scene 4)

(SPOILERS) In the end, Anne and Fenton decide to go against the wishes of Anne's parents and elope, emphasizing Shakespeare's opinion that marriage should be motivated by love.



Production still of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023). Photo by Giao Nguyen



# Shakespeare's Genres

## SHAKESPEARE'S GENRES

While occasionally dissected further, Shakespeare's plays are typically divided into three categories: **Comedy, Tragedy, and History.**

**COMEDY:** A Shakespearean comedy is not necessarily what a modern audience would expect when they hear "comedy". Whilst there may be some laugh-out-loud moments, the most commonly identifiable traits of a Shakespearean comedy are:

- Young lovers struggling to overcome problems (often thanks to their strict elders)
- Mistaken identities, often involving disguise
- Complex, interwoven plot-lines
- Frequent use of puns
- A happy ending (often involving a wedding)



Actors in Seattle Shakespeare's Wooden O production of *The Comedy of Errors* (2021). Photo by John Ullman.



Gretchen Hahn and Stephanie Roman as Friar Lawrence and Romeo in Seattle Shakespeare's educational tour production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2023). Photo by Giao Nguyen

**HISTORY:** Shakespeare's histories are focused on English monarchs, and were often used to perpetuate Elizabethan propaganda, and influence the perception of royalty. Many historians have suggested there are inaccuracies in the depictions, but the plays have proved influential for centuries in shaping how we view these historical figures.

**TRAGEDY:** While they may feature comedic moments, Shakespearean tragedies boast high-stakes storylines that often involve the death of main characters. The main features of a Shakespearean tragedy are that:

- Characters are impacted heavily by social or societal turmoil
- Themes of inescapable doom
- A noble, but flawed central character that suffers a terrible downfall
- Ends in death



Kathy Hsieh, Rhys Daly, and Rachel Guyer-Mafune as King Henry IV, Prince Hal, and Poin in Seattle Shakespeare's production of *Drum and Colours: Henry IV* (2023). Photo by Robert Wade



## References in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

### Folklore: Herne the Hunter

Haunting Windsor Forest is a tall, horned man by the name of Herne the Hunter. This iconic ghost first appears in literature in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but it is likely that Shakespeare drew from local legend of sightings in the Windsor Woods. He is said to have been a torturer of humans and animals alike, drawing blood from cattle rather than milk, and rattle chains in the night. Most likely, Herne is a regional manifestation of the Wild Huntsman myth. The usual story associated with the Wild Hunt involves someone excessively fond of the chase who makes a rash pact with a stranger (the devil) and is thus doomed to hunt forever. Seeing the Wild Hunt was thought to forebode some catastrophe such as war or plague, or at best the death of the one who witnessed it. While the origins are unclear, one thing is for certain: Beware Herne the Hunter.

### History: Sir John Falstaff

Sir John Falstaff is a fictional character who appears in three plays by William Shakespeare (*Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and is eulogized in a fourth (*Henry V*). His significance as a fully developed character is primarily formed in the plays *Henry IV, Part 1 and Part 2*, where he is a companion to Prince Hal, the future King Henry V of England.

The character is known to have been very popular with audiences. While many plays could not get good audiences, Leonard Digges (an acquaintance of Shakespeare) wrote, "let but Falstaff come... you scarce shall have a room".

Shakespeare adapted *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* from an earlier play called *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, in which Sir John "Jockey" Oldcastle, a real historical personage who died in 1417, appears as a dissolute companion of the young Henry. Shakespeare originally named Falstaff "John Oldcastle", but Lord Cobham, a descendant of Oldcastle, complained, forcing Shakespeare to change the name. The new name "Falstaff" probably derived from the medieval knight Sir John Fastolf who fought at the Battle of Patay against Joan of Arc, which the English lost. He was among the few English military leaders to avoid death or capture during the battle, and although there is no evidence that he acted with cowardice, he was temporarily stripped of his knighthood.



Jasmine Joshua as Falstaff in Seattle Shakespeare's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



# Shakespeare's Audiences

Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved differently than what we think of today when we go to the theatre. In general, audiences were much more rowdy and directly involved in the show than modern audiences.

Shakespeare is often associated with the Globe Theatre in London, which was a wooden stage constructed in 1599, and hosted many of Shakespeare's world premieres, including *As You Like It*; *Hamlet*; *Othello* and *Macbeth*. On June 29th, 1613, the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A modern reconstruction of the theatre, named "Shakespeare's Globe", opened in 1997, and is located approximately 750 feet from the site of the original theatre.

London theatres like the Globe could accommodate up to 3,000 people watching popular plays. With theatres running most afternoons, that could mean as many as 10,000–20,000 people could see a play every week! Shakespeare's audiences included the very rich, the upper-middle class, and the lower-middle class. People sought entertainment just as we do today and could afford to spend money going to the theatre. To get into the Globe Theatre cost a penny. In Elizabethan England, one penny would buy a loaf of bread, a pint of ale, or a ticket to the theatre. Those who paid just one penny were known as "groundlings," because they stood on the ground in what was known as "the yard," which is the area closest to the stage. For another penny, they could sit on a bench just behind the yard. For a penny more, they could sit more comfortably on a cushion. To get into the upper galleries, which were covered and had seats, cost would start at 6 pence.

Since there was no electricity, both performances took place in broad daylight, allowing actors and audience members to see each other and interact. Shakespeare's soliloquies would be spoken directly to the audience, who could potentially answer back! The audience would clap for the hero, boo the villain, and cheer for the special effects. They might even dance at the end of a comedy along with the characters onstage. However, in the case where an audience didn't like a play, they caused a ruckus, and had been known to throw furniture and damage the theatre.

Shakespeare used several tricks to gain and hold his audience's attention. His plays rarely begin with main characters onstage; instead a minor character typically begins the first scene. Without lights to dim at the beginning of a play, the performance simply started when actors walked onstage and started to speak, usually over the noise made by the audience. Because of this, the first scene would usually set the mood of the play, but the opening dialogue wasn't vital because it might not be heard.

Another trick that Shakespeare used was to break up the main action of the play with comedy. In most of his plays, there is comic relief in the form of "clown" or "fool" characters sprinkled throughout the show, making jokes or clowning around onstage. This ensured that even during a 3-hour history play, there would be something that appealed to everyone.



A performance of *King Lear* at the new Globe Theatre in London.

Audiences today can learn from Elizabethan audiences about how to watch a Shakespeare play. Here are some tips:

- Remind yourself that the first scene mostly sets the mood of the play and rarely has vital dialogue, so if you miss some of the words at the beginning, that is okay. It can take a couple minutes to adjust to Shakespeare's unusual language. It's a little bit like listening to someone with a heavy accent; at first it can be difficult to understand, but after a minute or two it becomes easier. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't make sense right away. Our actors are professionally trained to make sure that you understand the words, so you'll catch on!
- Enjoy the play and feel free to express your enjoyment. Laugh at the clowns, clap for the heroes, gasp at important revelations, and applaud for the actors at the end to thank them for their work. This will keep you engaged in the show and help let the actors know that the audience is paying attention and enjoying the play.
- Remember that in a play, unlike in a movie, the actors can see and hear you too! Even with more sophisticated theatre lighting that keeps the stage lit and the audience dim, the actors are often very close to the first few rows, and they can definitely hear the audience. That means please don't talk to your neighbor during the show, and keep your phones silent and away for the duration of the performance (it lights up your face!) — these can all be very distracting to the performers and your fellow audience members.
- And finally, remember that the theatre exists for everyone. Theatre is not meant to be only for the upper class, college graduates, and old people. In Shakespeare's day theatre was an affordable form of entertainment that had something any person could enjoy. Shakespeare's plays have something for you, whether you have seen one hundred plays or no plays at all, if you're rich, poor, young, old, or if you enjoy jokes, speeches, banter, or battles. Shakespeare wrote his plays with a diverse audience in mind, and that is part of the reason they are still significant today.

## **Pre-Show Reflection Questions**

These questions will help students to think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it. Have students discuss these questions in partners or small groups, or write journal entries based on these prompts.

- **What is jealousy – an emotion or a reaction? Explain your reasoning.**
- **Does jealousy always come with consequences?**
- **Is revenge ever productive?**
- **What is the craziest prank you’ve ever pulled on someone? What did the aftermath look like?**

## **Post-Show Discussion Questions**

After the show, discuss these questions in small groups or as a class. For all of these, student responses may vary. Some possible responses are provided, but students may have additional answers based on their reactions to the play.

**Why do Mistress Ford and Mistress Page seek revenge on Falstaff by humiliating him in front of all of Windsor? Is it deserved?**

**Ford’s reaction to his jealousy causes him quite a bit of public embarrassment. Do you think this humiliation is an unfortunate backlash of the revenge plot on Falstaff, or a deliberate revenge plot of its own?**

**Do you think Ford is “cured” of his jealousy by the end of the play? Why or why not?**

**Compare and contrast the relationships depicted between the Fords versus the Pages.**

**Who do you think is the main character/s of the play? Why?**

**Quickly often plays matchmaker during the play. Now it’s your turn! Who would you pair with who, and why? Do people end up with the right people at the end of the play? Why or why not?**

# Activity: Trick or Treat?

Shakespeare's plays are full of intrigue and mystery, as well as a fair amount of deceit and trickery. How well do you know fact from fiction? Which of these Shakespeare plots ACTUALLY happened? Be careful, there are some red herrings here.

**Q1: In *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Lawrence offers Juliet:**

- A. A love potion
- B. A sleep potion that can make her appear dead
- C. A disguise
- D. An evil scheme to rebel against Lord Capulet

**Q2: In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, what animal does Puck turn Bottom into?**

- A. A lion
- B. A donkey
- C. A frog
- D. An owl

**Q3: In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Claudio is deceived into believing that Hero is cheating on him! How is this done?**

- A. Beatrice writes a letter in Hero's hand confessing to the betrayal and gives it to Claudio
- B. Hero runs away with Don John while Claudio is asleep
- C. Borachio, one of Don Jon's men, convinces Maragret, one of Hero's ladies in waiting, to dress up in Hero's clothes and embrace Borachio on the balcony outside Hero's room while Claudio watches
- D. Don John bets Claudio that he can court Hero in a disguise.

**Q4: In *Cymbeline*, how does Iachimo convince Posthumus that Imogen has betrayed him?**

- A. He sneaks into Imogen's bedroom and steals a bracelet from her hand (creepy, dude!)
- B. He puts on a play to convince Posthumus that Imogen doesn't love him
- C. Iachimo writes a strange sonnet and slips into Posthumus' chambers
- D. Iachimo tells Imogen that Posthumus has betrayed HER and she should have revenge

**Q5: In *Measure for Measure*, the Duke disguises himself as:**

- A. His lesser-known brother
- B. A blacksmith
- C. The Bailiff
- D. A friar

**Q6: In *Macbeth*, which of the following ingredients are NOT included in their spell:**

- A. Eye of Newt
- B. Tongue of Dog
- C. Fox's Tail
- D. Fillet of a Fenny Snake



Actors in Seattle Shakespeare's production of *Macbeth* (2022).  
Photo by Robert Wade

ANSWER KEY: 1. B, 2. B, 3. C, 4. A, 5. D, 6. C

## Activity: Acting Challenge

The *Merry Wives of Windsor* is a whirlwind comedy, full of tricks and traps. Theatremakers play with a variety of different methods to complex and intricate stories. One of these methods is tableaux. A type of composition that emphasizes action and character relationships on stage. In manipulating distance, position, and gesture, a tableaux can be a useful tool to highlight important moments of plot.

### Acting Challenge: A Story in Three Scenes

Split the class into several small groups of 3-5. Ask students to come up with **tableaux\*** that describe a particular scenario. Challenge the students to break each situation into three, individual moments, with each building on the last. After giving them time to create each image, ask their fellow students to act as audience members and recite the story that their group is telling.

#### Potential prompts:

- A secret being revealed
- A plan going wrong
- A surprise
- A prank/scheme

#### Reflection questions:

- What clues did you use to figure out what was happening on stage?
- Which prompts challenged you the most? How? Why?

#### What if students get stuck?

- Remind them of three crucial elements to any story, a beginning, middle and end.
- You can encourage students to pull ideas from stories they already know, such as fairy tales or folktales, to get them started
- Encourage them to work inside out. Empower students to make a bold “first choice” and see what they come up with from there. What happens if I raise both my hands above my arms? What if I kneel on one knee? Building around the gestures themselves could be an excellent starting point.

#### \*What is a tableaux?

A tableaux is a frozen picture. Think of it like the work of an action photographer. As a football player moves to throw the ball across the field, their arm is extended and their body is turned the direction they would like to throw the ball, making their body into a dynamic pose. It communicates action even in a still image.

A tableaux achieves a similar goal. If we were to take a snapshot of a moment on stage, a tableaux will clearly demonstrate to you what is occurring in that moment. A successful tableaux will even help you determine what may have happened moments before and what may happen moments after. In the example of our football player, we know that they intend to throw the ball. Before, they may have been turning their body and raising their arm by their head to prepare for their throw and afterwards, their arm will extend forwards as they release their throw.



# Activity: Visual Connection

Can you match the description to the image?

A. Falstaff reveals his plot to pursue the wives of two wealthy men

B. Herne the Hunter

C. Mistress Ford and Mistress Page pull a prank on Falstaff, convincing him to hide in a laundry, or buck, basket to hide from the “jealous” Mistress Ford’s jealous husband.

D. Mistress Ford and Mistress Page celebrate the success of their latest scheme against Falstaff



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Seattle Shakespeare Company's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2011) at the Center Theater. Photo by John Ullman.

ANSWER KEY: 1. C, 2. A, 3. B, 4. D



## MISSION STATEMENT

With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

## ABOUT US

Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region's year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company's growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works. Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

## EDUCATION STAFF CONTACTS

### In-School Residencies and Camps

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## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops

- In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
- Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
- Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

### Touring Productions

- Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
- Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

### Camps and Classes

- Our summer "Camp Bill" series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
- In our Fall and Spring after-school "Short Shakes" programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
- Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.