

a study guide

compiled and arranged by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre of
New Jersey

The Comedy of Errors

a support packet for studying the play and attending The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Main Stage production

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The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is an independent, professional theatre located on the Drew University campus.

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CLASSROOM

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

What we hear most from educators is that there is a great deal of anxiety when it comes to Shakespeare; seeing it, reading it and especially teaching it. One of the principal goals of the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Programs is to demystify Shakespeare, take him “off the shelf” and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond the field trip to the Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this study guide will help you expand your students’ understanding of Shakespeare in performance, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this study guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the study guide given limited classroom time.

Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the one-page “BRIEF SYNOPSIS” has greatly increased students’ understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last five minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.

When more class time is available prior to your visit, we recommend incorporating the background information on William Shakespeare and the play itself. One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period. I am told that the reading of Old English and Middle English texts was “quite entertaining and very informative.”

Using the questions found in the “TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION,” many teachers will opt to take a class period after the trip to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic and social issues that are found in the play.

One school spent two days working through performance-based activities (a few of which are suggested in the “FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES” section) with a particularly “difficult and rowdy” class. They were astounded with the results. Their students took the opportunity to “ham it up,” and discovered a great joy and understanding from performing Shakespeare.

To learn more about these and many other suggestions for engaging your students, I encourage you to join us this summer for our acclaimed summer professional development institute for teachers, *ShakeFest*. Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the study guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

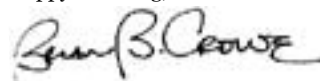
“What’s My Line?” Promoting Active Listening

Teacher-tested, student-approved! Try this exercise with your students:

Before attending the production, give each student one line from the play to listen for. Discuss the meaning of the line and encourage their input in deciphering what Shakespeare meant by the line. How would the student perform the line? Why is the line important to the play? Does it advance the plot, or give the audience particular insight into a character or relationship?

Following the production, discuss the line again. Did the actor present the line in the way your student expected? If not, how was it different?

Happy Teaching,



Brian B. Crowe, Director of Education



ACTIVITIES

Shakespeare: Helpful Tips For Exploring & Seeing His Works

“Just plunge right in

(to Shakespeare). See a play, read it aloud, rent a video, listen to a tape. It’s up to you. When you look at Shakespeare close up, he’s not as intimidating as when he’s seen from afar.”

Norrie Epstein
The Friendly Shakespeare

Tragedy can have humor, and
great comedy always has
elements of the tragic.

Eighteenth-century critics complained that Shakespeare’s tragedies weren’t consistently serious enough. According to the classic rules, tragedy should be uniformly somber. Shakespeare’s use of humor in his tragedies prevents us from becoming washed away in a dense fog of emotion. Rather, it forces us out of the “tragic” long enough to appreciate the level to which the play’s passions have taken us.

“Some of the plays have taken on mythic proportions. By myths, I mean we grow up knowing certain things about [Shakespeare’s] characters but we don’t know how we know them.

There are lots of
SHAKESPEAREAN MICROCHIPS
lodged in our brains.”

Charles Marowitz, director

“It was Olivier’s *Henry V*
that made me realize that

Shakespeare is
about real
people
and that his language
wasn’t simply beautiful
poetry.”

Robert Brustein, director



“My advice to anyone seeing Shakespeare:

Don’t worry so much!

Just make sure your ears are clean and your eyes are sharp. Listen and look and watch.

Look at the distance people stand from each other; look at the relationships being developed.

Stay with it.

Don’t negate the move that Shakespeare will make toward your gut, toward your soul--

because he will touch you there, if you allow yourself to be touched.”

David Suchet, actor

“There are some parts of the plays you’ll never understand. But excuse me, I thought that’s what great art was supposed to be about.

DON’T FREAK OUT OVER IT!”

Peter Sellars,
Director

Don’t be afraid to
LISTEN, WATCH AND REACT;
laugh, cry, and be moved.

Shakespeare wrote for
a live and active audience.

Both audience and actor
must be involved to create
a truly winning performance.

The Life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592 he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work



was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare's plays were not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608 Shakespeare's involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called quartos, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's London

London, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most life centered around making a living or going to church, the main source of diversion for Londoners was the theatre. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appeasing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare's plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare's day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare's company of actors, was easily accessible to Londoners and an active social center. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors maintained a relatively low status, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade work. The aristocracy's desire for entertainment, however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron. Shakespeare's acting company was originally named "Lord Chamberlain's Men" after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later,

under the patronage of King James I, they were known as "The King's Men," an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Outbreaks of the Black Plague (the bubonic plague) frequently erupted, killing thousands of citizens. Theatres, shops, and the government were all shut down during these times in hopes of preventing the spread of the disease. Elizabethans were unaware that the disease was being spread by the flea and rat populations, which well outnumbered the human population of London.



The Sonnets

You might have thought that Shakespeare wrote the sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of "stepping stone" to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.

Are You SURE This Is English?

Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write in Old English, or even Middle English. **PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURIES WROTE IN MODERN ENGLISH.** Shakespeare spoke (and wrote in) the same language which we speak today. It is possible to be thrown a bit by grammatical “carry-overs” from earlier English [“thee” and “thou” instead of “you”] and the poetic liberties that Shakespeare took, but there is no doubt that the words and syntax used in his plays can be understood today without any “translation.” To help clarify this point, here are some examples of Old, Middle and Modern English.

Old English (500 - 1150 CE)

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in BCE 55-4, the Celtic (pronounced KEL-tic) tribes lived in the British Isles. Their languages survive today in the forms of Gaelic (Scotland and Ireland), Welsh (Wales) and Manx (Isle of Man). The Romans brought Latin to Britain. However, early English developed primarily from the language of tribes which invaded and settled England from what is now Germany. This language, known as Old English, was also influenced by the Latin spoken by Catholic missionaries from Rome as well as the Scandinavian dialects of Viking raiders and settlers.

selection from *Beowulf* author unknown, ca 800 CE

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaðena prëstum,
monegum mægðum meodo-setla oftëah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærert wearð
fëasceaft funden, hë þæs frofre gebåd,
wëox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þäh,
oð-þæt him aeghwylc ymb-sittendra
ofer hron-råde hýran scolde,
gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning!

Middle English (1150 - 1450 CE)

The conquest of England by the Norman army in 1066 brought great changes to English life and the English language. The Old French spoken by the Normans became for many years the language of the Royal Court and of English literature. Over time, the spoken English still used by the lower classes borrowed about 10,000 words from French, as well as certain grammatical structures. By the time English reappeared as a written, literary language in the 14th century, it only distantly resembled Old English. This German-French hybrid language is known as Middle English.

selection from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, ca 1390 CE

But natheless / while I haue tyme and space
Er that I ferther / in this tale pace
Me thynketh it acordant to resoun
To telle yow / al the condiciun
Of eeche of hem / so as it seemed to me
And whiche they weere / and of what degree
And eek in what array / that they were inne
And at a knyght thanne wol I first bigynne.

Modern English (1450 - present day)

With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the English language began to develop and mutate at an unprecedented rate. Books, previously a precious and expensive commodity, were now widely available to anyone with basic literacy. Works in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese were being translated by the hundreds, and the translators found it necessary to borrow and invent thousands of new words. English trade and exploration fueled even more cultural and linguistic exchange. The early Modern English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been referred to as “English in its adolescence”: daring, experimental, innovative and irreverent.

selection from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, ca 1595 CE

Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! No, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare...

What did Shakespeare sound like?

While we may associate Shakespeare with the “refined” British accent of an Ian McKellen or Judi Dench, linguistic scholars say that the closest approximation to the London accent of Shakespeare’s day is the accent heard nowadays in the Appalachian region of the United States.

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,
awing the earls. Since first he lay
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,
till before him the folk, both far and near,
who lived by the whale-path, heard his mandate,
gave him gift: a good king he!*

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*But nonetheless, while I have time and space
Before I continue in this story
I think it appropriate to speak of,
To tell you, the condition
Of each of them, as it seemed to me.
And who was who, and of what degree,
And in what fashion each was dressed.
And with a knight then I will begin.*

The Comedy of Errors: A Synopsis

The play begins with the arrest of Egeon, a merchant from the city of Syracuse (on the island of Sicily) who has illegally entered the city of Ephesus (on the coast of modern-day Turkey). Due to their past conflicts, a law prescribes either death or a fine of 1,000 gold marks for any Syracusian found in Ephesus.

Egeon explains to Duke Solinus, the ruler of Ephesus, that he traveled to Syracuse in search of his wife and one of his identical twin sons, separated from him in a shipwreck some 25 years before. As Egeon explains, his twins (both named Antipholus) were being raised with another set of identical twins (both named Dromio) whom Egeon purchased from their destitute mother to be his sons' servants as they grew up. When the remaining Antipholus and Dromio (of Syracuse) became adults, they insisted that Egeon let them go off in search of their missing brothers, and so for the past five years, the merchant has been separated from them as well.

The duke is deeply moved by Egeon's tale, and allows him 24 hours to try and raise the ransom needed to save his life.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to everyone, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse have themselves arrived in Ephesus (taking care to conceal their Syracusian identity) as they continue their quest for their lost brothers. As it happens, the other Antipholus is now a native of Ephesus, a wealthy citizen with the other Dromio as his servant. Thus, the two Syracusian twins are almost immediately befuddled by the fact that everyone in Ephesus acts as if they know them.

Adriana, Antipholus of Ephesus' long-suffering wife, encounters Antipholus of Syracuse and, believing him to be her philandering husband, drags him home to dinner (along with the Syracusian Dromio). There, Antipholus of Syracuse finds himself more interested in his supposed sister-in-law, Luciana, while Dromio of Syracuse is horrified to learn he is engaged to a grotesquely fat kitchen wench, Nell. Meanwhile, the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio arrive home for dinner and find themselves locked out because, as they are told, they are already inside.

Antipholus of Ephesus, furious, plans to revenge himself on his wife, while Antipholus of Syracuse plans a speedy escape from a city that seems to be inhabited by witches. Both their plans are thwarted, however, by the fact that each time one man sends his Dromio on an errand, he encounters the other man's Dromio coming back.

Further confusion is created when Antipholus of Syracuse accidentally receives an expensive gold chain ordered by Antipholus of Ephesus. When the goldsmith Angelo bills Antipholus of Ephesus for it, he refuses to pay, claiming (justly) that he never received the goods. Angelo has Antipholus of Ephesus arrested for non-payment of debt, and Antipholus sends Dromio home for bail money.

Adriana, increasingly dismayed by her husband's odd behavior, is still more alarmed to learn that he has been arrested, and with Luciana she goes out to find him. Meanwhile Antipholus of Syracuse encounters a courtesan to whom Antipholus of Ephesus promised the gold chain (in exchange for a diamond ring of hers). When Antipholus of Syracuse refuses to give her the chain, believing her to be another witch, the courtesan decides to report the misconduct to Adriana.

The courtesan's story only confirms Adriana's fears that her husband has gone mad, so she enlists the services of an exorcist, Doctor Pinch. Meanwhile, when Dromio of Ephesus returns without the bail money (which Dromio of Syracuse was sent for), an exasperated Antipholus of Ephesus begins beating his hapless servant. He is discovered by Pinch and the women in this violent mood, which is only intensified when Pinch begins performing an absurd exorcism on him.

Just as Pinch and his associates succeed in binding and removing the Ephesian twins (who will be taken home to be "treated" for madness by locking them in the cellar), the Syracusian twins appear, swords drawn. The women (and the police officer) are terrified, believing that the madmen have escaped and found weapons. As the one group scatters, Angelo appears and is enraged to see Antipholus of Syracuse wearing the gold chain. When Adriana reappears, the Syracusians flee into an abbey for refuge. Although Adriana demands that the nuns release her husband into her custody, the abbess refuses to hand him over. Adriana decides that she will catch the duke as he passes by on his way to the impending execution and ask him to intervene.

However, when Duke Solinus appears with Egeon and the executioner, the confusion deepens. As Adriana tells her story and everyone's attention is focused on the abbey, a dishevelled Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus appear from the opposite direction. Having overpowered Doctor Pinch, they have returned so that Antipholus (now truly on the verge of madness) can plead his case to the duke as well. Egeon is at first thrilled to see his son and servant, then bewildered and saddened when they claim not to know him. Duke Solinus decides that all of them must be bewitched, and resolves to ask the abbess to help unravel the mystery.

The abbess emerges with the Syracusian twins, and everyone is astounded to see the pairs of twins side by side at last. The abbess reveals herself as Aemilia, Egeon's long-lost wife. After the shipwreck, she too was separated from the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio, and went into a life of religious seclusion, believing her whole family to be lost. There is general rejoicing as the family is reunited and all the "errors" are explained. Antipholus of Ephesus pays Egeon's ransom, everyone is reconciled, and Aemilia invites the entire group to a "gossip's feast."



Illustration of an ancient Greek ship (trireme) with dolphins, reproduced from a classical ceramic plate, by Alexander Speltz, *Styles of Ornament*, 1906.

Sources and History of the Play

The Comedy of Errors was one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, and probably his first comedy. We know that it was performed in 1594 at Gray's Inn to conclude a night of revels for London's lawyers. Apparently it was a memorable evening, as the records of Gray's Inn note that "Night was begun, and continued to the end, in nothing but confusion and Errors; whereupon, it was ever afterward called *The Night of Errors*." However, some argue that it may have been written as early as 1589, which would make it among the first, if not the first, of Shakespeare's surviving plays. It was performed at court in 1604, and has been revived and adapted continuously throughout the subsequent centuries.

The Comedy of Errors is the shortest of Shakespeare's plays, measuring only 1,777 lines, and is mostly written in verse. For the key plot elements, Shakespeare drew from two plays that he may well have studied as a schoolboy, the ancient Latin *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo* of Titus Maccius Plautus.

Plautus was born in the Umbria region of Italy around 254BCE and died in 184BCE. Somewhat like Shakespeare, he rose from humble origins (he was perhaps first employed as a scenic carpenter or stagehand) to become a celebrated actor and the leading dramatist of his day. Plautus took the Greek "New Comedy" of Menander and other authors and adapted it to a broad Latin-speaking audience.

Plautus' witty, polished verse was considered a model of Latin rhetoric and was widely studied in Elizabethan grammar schools, where boys were required to copy, recite, and imitate the "Plautine" style. It is more than likely that Shakespeare's own grammar school in Stratford required him to learn passages from Plautus, perhaps even from the very plays on which he based *The Comedy of Errors*. While Shakespeare was probably a fairly proficient reader of Latin, despite Ben Jonson's famously dismissive assessment of his friend's abilities, it is also possible that Shakespeare had access to the manuscript of William Warner's English translation of *Menaechmi*, which was published in 1595.

Menaechmi includes the search for a long-lost twin son, one twin being mistaken for another, the comic exorcism, the courtesan and the jealous wife, and the quarrel over a piece of jewelry. The idea of two sets of twins, master and servant, and the episode in which a husband is locked out of his house at dinnertime occur in *Amphitruo*. Indeed, one of the popular Renaissance editions of Plautus, published in 1576, notes all the comic "errors" on stage in both plays. If Shakespeare was also working from this Latin text, it may have directly inspired the title of his play.

One of Shakespeare's major alterations from his source material was in shifting the action of the play from Epidamnium to Ephesus, a city made notorious in the New Testament as a city of magic and witchcraft.

Although *The Comedy of Errors* has always been regarded as something of a journeyman effort, a waystation on the road to Shakespeare's mature plays, it has received its share of critical applause. To Samuel Taylor Coleridge, it was the epitome of farce, a literary term that derives from the short, slapstick interludes (*farce* literally means "stuffing") in medieval morality plays. Fast pace, broad physical humor, mistaken identities and absurd, exaggerated situations are the hallmarks of farce, which continues to flourish as a genre in movies and television.

Its broad, farcical nature has made the play well-suited to whimsical and creative production decisions. In 1938, Fyodor Komisarjevsky directed it for the Royal Shakespeare Company in a "hallucinogenic," surrealist style that seemed drawn from Alice in Wonderland. In the same year, Lorenz and Hart turned it into the first-ever Broadway musical adaptation of a Shakespeare play, *The Boys from Syracuse*, which married classical Greek costumes and contemporary swing music. More recently, the Mansaku Company explored its similarities to the classical Japanese farce style known as *Kyogen* in a 2001 performance at Shakespeare's Globe entitled *The Kyogen of Errors*, entirely in Japanese with English supertitles.



ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE. "Go, bear it to the Centaur."
Act I, Scene II.

Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse arrive in Ephesus in this drawing by famed American illustrator E.A. Abbey, published in *Harper's Monthly*, March, 1891.

Commentary and Criticism

In *The Comedy of Errors*, there are only a few passages of a poetical vein, yet such perhaps as no other living dramatist could have written; but the story is well invented and managed—the confusion of persons does not cease to amuse—the dialogue is easy and gay beyond what had been hitherto heard on the stage—there is little buffoonery in the wit, and no absurdity in the circumstances.

Paul Dean
Introduction to the Literature of Europe, 1838

The Comedy of Errors [is] remarkable as being the only specimen of poetical farce in our language, that is, intentionally such.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Notes and Lectures Upon Shakespeare, 1849

The Comedy of Errors is not only very good theatre, it is also very good reading. It is a finely-balanced mixture of pathos and suspense, illusion and delusion, love turned bitter and love that is sweet, farce and fun.

T.S. Dorsch
Introduction to the Cambridge edition of *The Comedy of Errors*

If, psychologically, a certain threat is inherent in self-mirroring, it may be because the self is naturally prone to division. In *The Comedy of Errors* there is no mistaking the fearful implications of the loss of self-possession, the idea of confounding, the suggestion of drowning implicit in the simile used by the twin to explain that he is “like a drop of water.”

Brian Gibbons
“Doubles and Likenesses-with-Difference”
Connotations, Vol. 6, no. 1

The shortest and most unified of all Shakespeare’s plays, *The Comedy of Errors* is regarded by many scholars as his very first, which I tend to doubt. It shows such skill, indeed mastery—in action, incipient character, and stagecraft—that it far outshines the three *Henry VI* plays and the rather lame comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. It is true that in comedy Shakespeare was free to be himself from the start, whereas the shadow of Marlowe darkens the early histories (*Richard III* included) and *Titus Andronicus*. Yet, even granted Shakespeare’s comic genius, *The Comedy of Errors* does not read or play like apprentice work.

Harold Bloom
Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human

This is a play that celebrates its unities. Every syllable of *The Comedy of Errors* is spoken in one place, Ephesus, and in one day’s time. Not until the end of his career would Shakespeare again lock himself so ruthlessly in the here and now.

John R. Ford
“Methinks You Are My Glass”
Shakespeare Bulletin, March 22, 2006

A sign of things to come

The hint of tragedy... and the tonality of romance give way to a more physical comedy of substitutions and misrecognitions, and it is easy to underestimate the sophistication of the play’s devices....

The Comedy of Errors maps in clear and recognizable terms a pattern that we will find throughout Shakespeare: losing is finding, confusion the path to sanity; the stern edicts of the law may give way to mercy; and madness and dream offer a path to transformation.

Marjorie Garber
Shakespeare After All



Promotional poster for the 1878 national tour of *The Comedy of Errors*, starring Stuart Robson and W.H. Crane, the most popular comic duo of American theatre in the late 19th century, as the Dromios. From the collection of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Shakespeare's Common Tongue

alack- expression of dismay or shock
anon- soon, right away
ere- before
hath- has
hence- away (from here)
henceforth- from now on
hither- here
lest- or else
naught- nothing
oft- often
perchance- by chance, perhaps, maybe
sirrah- "hey, you" as said to a servant or someone of lower status
thee- you
thence-away, over there
thine- yours
thither- there
thou- you
thy- your
whence- where
wherefore- why
whither- where

... and the "thys" have it

Often Shakespeare will alternate his usage of "thou" for "you", or "thy" for "your", or "thine" for "yours". Though the words are synonymous, there is a great deal of information that can be obtained by looking closely at these choices.

The different use of these pronouns have to do with status, relationship, degrees of intimacy and shifting attitudes. "You" is used in formal situations and conveys respect from the speaker. It is used when addressing royalty and parents. "Thou," used in more informal settings, also can suggest contempt or aggression from the speaker. The use of "thou" places the speaker above the status of the person to whom s/he is speaking. Children are addressed using "thou," thee or "thy." In a conversation between two people of equal status, the use of "you" suggests that everything is going along smoothly, whereas "thou" would suggest that there is some kind of upset or unrest in the relationship.

Terms and Phrases Found In *The Comedy of Errors*

synod – an assembly or council having civil authority; a legislative body
disannul – to annul or cancel
crupper – a strap of leather reaching from the saddle to the tail of the horse
cozenage- cheating
"break thy pate across" – "break your head," to slap someone
lour(eth) – to scowl
sconce – the head
ensconce – to place or fortify
choleric – irascible, angry
buffet – to beat, to box
America – surround
Lapland – a province in Finland whose people once worshipped pagan gods, hence associated with witchcraft
avaunt – exclamation of contempt or abhorrence ("get out!")
strumpet – prostitute
ireful – full of anger
halberd – a battle-ax fixed to a long pole
anatomy – skeleton
mountebank – a quack, a fake
vouchsafe – permit (graciously)
cuckold-mad – "horn-mad"; having an unfaithful wife
infringe – to encroach or trespass
rancor- bitter, rankling resentment or ill will
mark – a former unit of currency in England, equal to 13s. 4d
league – approximately 3 miles (4.8 kilometers)
almanac – calendar
maw – mouth
hie – to go in haste
prate – to babble
discourse – talk, conversation
voluble – characterized by a ready and continuous flow of words
flout – to treat with disdain, scorn, or contempt
periwig – a type of wig
niggard – a stingy person
incorporate – not embodied; incorporeal
ruffian – a lawless person
contagion – communication of a disease by contact
shrive – to impose penance on
rheum- a thin discharge of the mucous membranes

armadoes of caracks – a large fleet of ships of burden
ballast – to load
curtal – wearing a short frock
bass-viol – a double bass
mace – club-like armor-breaking weapon of war
morris-pike – a formidable weapon, supposed to be of Moorish origin
tarry – to wait
hoy – a small vessel
ducat – any of various gold coins used through Europe; money
ecstasy – madness
sooth- truth, reality, fact
perdie- by God (from the French: "par Dieu")
revile- to use abusive language
sans fable – from French: "without fable"; truthfully
dissemble- to put on the appearance of; to feign
priory – a religious house of women governed by a prior or prioress, often attached to and dependent upon an abbey
mire – mud, sewage
bestrid – stood over, dominated
Circe – Witch-Queen of the island of Aea who was the lover of Odysseus for one year in the Odyssey

A Man of Many Words

Shakespeare used over **20,000 different words** in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them. To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the King James Bible uses only 8,000 different words. Homer is credited with using approximately 9,000 different words in his works. Milton is estimated at using 10,000 different words in his works.

The Comedy of Errors: Food For Thought

Sin City?

Shakespeare followed his source, Plautus, very closely in constructing much of *The Comedy of Errors*. Perhaps the most significant change is in the setting: where Plautus uses Epidamnus, a Greek colony on the shores of modern-day Albania, Shakespeare shifts the action to Ephesus, a much better-known port city located on the western coast of what is today Turkey.

Because of its harbor, Ephesus was one of the major mercantile centers of the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine eras. It was especially famous for being the site of a massive temple dedicated to an ancient fertility goddess, whom the areas Greek conquerors later identified with Artemis. Built over a period of 120 years, the original Temple of Artemis was identified as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Tourists from around the Greek and Roman world flocked to cosmopolitan Ephesus, vastly enriching the temple, which was perhaps three times the size of the Parthenon and filled with priceless works of art.

In early Christian times, apostles and missionaries butted heads with the wealthy and powerful cult of Artemis. St. Paul was famously associated with the church there, which he helped found after having persuaded many Jewish and Greek residents to convert to the fledgling Christian faith. Like all cities that thrive on tourism, Ephesus was rife with ways for out-of-towners (and locals) to spend money on cheap thrills. In the New Testament, Paul takes Ephesus to task for its fortunetellers, conjurers, thieves, prostitutes, and loose women, all believed to derive from its pagan “idol-worship.”

In one account, Paul entered the famous temple and ordered its “demons” to leave, at which point the altar of Artemis cracked and half of the building collapsed. Historically, with the conversion of the Byzantine emperors to Christianity, the temple was closed, and in 401 CE a mob led by St. John Chrysostom demolished what was left of the Wonder, carrying off heaps of marble to be used in new buildings.

Ephesus, in the minds of Shakespeare’s audience, would have probably seemed something like Las Vegas seems to us now—a byword for excessive indulgence and pleasure-seeking, at once alluring and alarming. In the presence of the Abbess, as well, there may be a Christianized echo of the lost Wonder of the World and its virgin priestesses.

Geography Lesson

Many other Greek cities of the Hellenistic period are mentioned in *The Comedy of Errors*. Egeon and Aemilia’s native **Syracuse** (or Syracuse, as it’s sometimes called in the play) is in modern Sicily, a colony of Corinth founded around 734 BCE. The city grew to become an independent nation, one of the political, military and cultural powerhouses of the Mediterranean. Perhaps its most famous son was the brilliant mathematician and engineer Archimedes, whose innovations in weapons technology helped hold the Romans at bay for decades.

Corinth itself, in southern Greece, is mentioned as the home of the “rude fishermen” who kidnapped the children who were rescued with Aemilia in the shipwreck (Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus).

Epidamnus, where the four children were born, was a Greek colony on the coast of what is now Albania. Interestingly, Shakespeare would return to this region for his next play about a shipwreck and separated twins, *Twelfth Night*.

Who are you calling a courtesan?

For an Elizabethan audience, a “courtesan” might refer to anyone from an ordinary street prostitute to a king’s mistress. Strictly speaking, however, a courtesan (from the Italian *cortigiana*) was associated with nobility and the court. In an era in which most marriages, especially in society’s higher echelons, were determined solely by money and politics, spouses frequently sought companionship outside their marriage.

A courtesan was expected to be physically attractive, but more particularly to have an excellent personality, as Antipholus of Ephesus explains, “a wench of excellent discourse, pretty and witty.” Often, courtesans came from fairly prominent families themselves, as they were expected to be able to socialize among the elites. Courtesans did not necessarily have a roster of “clients,” but were more likely to be the kept mistress of a single wealthy individual.

In many cases, a career as a courtesan allowed women to attain far more economic and intellectual freedom than they could in any other way during Shakespeare’s lifetime. It was accepted that a courtesan could speak freely in a way that would be entirely scandalous for a married woman. Without the responsibility of being obedient to a husband, courtesans were often free to pursue artistic and intellectual accomplishments, and to buy and sell property.

Given her diamond ring, Antipholus’ description of her, and how easily she enters into conversation (and even an alliance) with Adriana and Luciana, it is likely that the Courtesan in *The Comedy of Errors* is meant to belong to this world of high-class “professional mistresses.”



Portrait of Veronica Franco (attributed to Jacopo Tintoretto) painted around 1575, when Franco was 29. In her life, Franco was Venice’s most celebrated courtesan as well as an accomplished poet and a social reformer who administered a government-financed home for indigent women.

In All Seriousness: *The Comedy of Errors*

By Kay K. Cook

Although *The Comedy of Errors*, undoubtedly one of Shakespeare's early plays, anticipates his later comedies and romances, such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, it is, nonetheless, a play that clearly stands on its own. Granted, *The Comedy of Errors* requires its audience to stretch considerably the willing suspension of disbelief. The "shipwrecked and separated at birth" motif that drives the plot and provides the comedy does give one pause. In addition, the audience is required to keep track of, sort out, and sustain its credulity about the following:

- two masters (twins);
- two servants to the two masters (also twins);
- both masters having the same name (Antipholus);
- both servants having the same name (Dromio);
- finally and incredibly, the coincidence of master and servant from Syracuse docking in Ephesus, where reside not only the other master and servant, but also, unbeknownst to everyone, including the audience, resides their mother (currently an abbess) and now their father, who has just landed at Ephesus.

Well, it does give one pause. The challenges for the director to make the play coherent to the audience are great; finding two actors enough alike to be mistaken one for the other by the other characters could be a casting nightmare. Yet, most scholars of Shakespeare find such good comedy and such poignant drama in this play that it is considered among Shakespeare's best, despite these contrivances.

Drawn from, among other sources, a farce by the Roman playwright Plautus, who himself drew from a Greek farce, now lost, Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* goes beyond the physical comedy that embodies farce to the often brooding element of disaster and poignancy that hovers around the edges of all his comedies. Although not abandoning the farcical and comical nature of the play, this article explores those serious boundaries within which the comic action takes place.

For example, unlike its Roman counterpart, the very present threat of Egeon's death casts its shadow over the comedy that ensues from the beginning of the play to the final act. Egeon, father of the twin Antipholuses, resides in Syracuse. Upon his arrival in Ephesus, however, he is immediately sentenced to death for the mere reason that he is from Syracuse, and the two cities are declared enemies. The duke, bound by the laws that demand this death sentence, does modify that sentence upon hearing Egeon's plaintive report of his five years' wandering in search of his son, who left Syracuse to search for his brother. Yet, the duke's announcement that he will give Egeon the day to come up with the thousand marks that will stay his execution is hardly a victory. Egeon believes he knows no one in Ephesus; for him, the extra hours granted him are useless, and he anticipates his death: "My woes end likewise with the setting sun" (1.1.28; all quotes from the play are from William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, London: Penguin Books, 1972).

As we switch from the death sentence to the almost surreal quality of mistaken identities of both master and servant, however, it may seem easy to forget the opening scene and its foreboding. Quite possibly, the audience puts any concern about Egeon aside as he disappears from the action and as the comedy becomes more rollicking with each encounter where the Syracusan Antipholus and Dromio are taken for their Ephesian counterparts—and vice versa.

But the play itself really won't let the audience forget the brief amount of time allotted to Egeon. Even during the episode in which the baffled Antipholus of Syracuse is bade by the Ephesian servant Dromio to come home to lunch we hear "The clock hath struck twelve upon the bell" (1.2.45). At the very beginning of Act 2, Adriana frets that her husband, Antipholus of Syracuse, has not returned for lunch; by now, "Sure . . . it is two o'clock" (2.1.3). After Antipholus of Ephesus is arrested, claiming not to have the chain for which he owes Angelo money (he doesn't have it, of course; Angelo mistakenly gave it to the twin from Syracuse), Dromio (it's not important which one) implores Adriana to hasten to post her husband's bond: "time comes stealing on by night and day" (4.2.59). As the comedy moves toward the final scene, we are well aware of the hour as the second merchant announces the pending arrival of the duke for the execution, since "the dial points at five" (5.1.18). Amidst all the confusion, chaos, and laughter, then, time, the thief has been moving surely toward the hour of execution for Egeon.

Yet, after all, it is a comedy—not a tragedy—of errors. Between acts one and five we have ample opportunity to enjoy the classic cases of Shakespearean mistaken identity, and doubly so. Farce, of course, relies on the visual as well as on that indispensable technique of drama, dramatic irony, wherein the audience knows more than the characters on the stage. The two Dromios are constantly punished for not carrying out their masters' orders, when, in fact, they believe they have meticulously done so. Antipholus of Syracuse finally gives in to Adriana's insistence that he is her husband and agrees to dine with her; in the meantime the Ephesian Antipholus arrives at his own home for dinner but Adriana will have none of it, since her husband, she believes, is already at home dining. And so on. The audience is well aware that all the chaos and confusion will be untangled in the final act, so we do have permission, so to speak, to sit back and enjoy these confusions.

Shakespearean scholars nevertheless find a seriousness and depth even to the farcical elements of this play. Several scholars have drawn attention to the assault on identity that both sets of twins face as their world becomes unknowable and unpredictable. Dromio of Syracuse best expresses this identity crisis when he exclaims to his (real) master: "Do you know me sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? *Am I myself?*" (3.2.73, emphasis mine).

The loss of community and family, the search for the self and in the case of the twins, the other self, and the challenge to the identity that occurs when one twin is mistaken for the other bear looking into. What is the effect, other than comic, when a person is so thoroughly mistaken for someone else? When a father believes he has lost both sons and a wife? When years are spent searching for completeness?

The most frequently quoted line from *The Comedy of Errors* speaks to this dilemma. As Antipholus of Syracuse enters

Ephesus he is greeted with warmth by the citizens, especially the first merchant, who wishes him contentment. The Syracusan ruminates: "I to the world am like a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop, / Who falling there to find his fellow forth / Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself" (1.2.35-38).

Stanley Wells, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Comedy of Errors*, looks at the power of the water imagery, especially appropriate, he says, since the family was lost at sea. Of the Syracusan Antipholus, Wells states, "He will not merely give up his own concerns while seeking his brother, but will also, by being treated as if he were someone other than he really is, be made to feel that he has lost his own identity" (29). Similarly, R.A. Foakes focuses on the serious theme: "The play has farcical comedy . . . but it does more than merely provoke laughter. . . . It also invites compassion, a measure of sympathy, and a deeper response to the disruption of family and social relationships which the action brings about" ("Serious Themes: *The Comedy of Errors*," *Readings on the Comedies* [San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997], 86).

Coppélia Kahn, however, points to the positive result of identity lost and found: "Identity [in the play] grows through time and through loss, confusion, and challenge. Errors are part of a process whereby youth grows into and out of the family to find itself" ("The Providential Tempest and the Shakespearean Family," *Representing Shakespeare*, ed. Murray M Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn [Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1980], 225).

Surely at the end of the play, when the entire family is reunited and Egeon's death sentence commuted, the elements of comedy and melancholy have blended with those of romance: the missing are found, the dead revived, the family restored, and identity is once more intact. Perhaps it is fitting that the twins who have the last word are the Dromios. After all, it is they who have physically suffered from all the master/servant mixups. To conclude *The Comedy of Errors* with a brief and trifling conflict about which of the twins is older—and therefore has the privilege of exiting first—certainly provides the restoration of the social order required at the conclusion of classic comedy.

Reprinted with permission from the Utah Shakespearean Festival study guide to *The Comedy of Errors*, 2003.



ADRIANA. "O, bind him, bind him! let him not come near me."
Act IV., Scene IV.

Illustration of the exorcism scene from *The Comedy of Errors* by E.A. Abbey, *Harper's Monthly*, March, 1891.

Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. Sibling relationships are an important aspect of *The Comedy of Errors*. Think about the relationship between Adriana and Luciana, as well as the similarities and differences between the two Antipholuses and the two Dromios. How are these sisters and brothers alike? How are they different? How do they cooperate or compete with one another? Is the relationship between each Antipholus and Dromio always a master-servant relationship, or has it taken on any aspects of a fraternal relationship? What is Shakespeare trying to say about the nature of being a brother or sister? **LAL:** 3.1, 3.3 **VPA:** 1.5

2. One of Shakespeare's major changes to his source material was setting the story in Ephesus, a city associated in Biblical tradition with thievery and magic. Why do you think Shakespeare chose this setting? How does the city of Ephesus become a kind of character in the play? (Discuss this again after seeing the play— see below). Are the Syracusians' perceptions of Ephesus correct or incorrect? **LAL:** 3.1, 3.3, 3.5 **VPA:** 1.1, 1.3, 1.5

3. Ephesus, in Shakespeare's play, is also portrayed as a city of *commerce*, where buying and selling are at the heart of (or at least connected to) almost every interaction. How does commercialism affect the outcome of the story? How is this like or unlike our contemporary society? Are there areas in which commerce does not affect the characters or their relationships? **LAL:** 3.1, 3.3, 3.5 **VPA:** 1.1, 1.5

4. Personal identity is one of the key issues of the play. Midway through the play, a confused and frightened Dromio of Syracuse asks: "Do you know me? Am I Dromio? Am I myself?" The concept of personal identity was just beginning to develop and be explored in Shakespeare's time. How do we define and maintain our identities? How do Shakespeare's characters define and maintain theirs? **LAL:** 3.1, 3.3 **VPA:** 1.1, 1.5

About this Production

1. Director Stephen Fried's inspiration for the set came from reading the book *Will in the World*, which speculates on Shakespeare's arrival in London as a young man, and from the experience of arriving in a foreign city for the first time, as depicted in films like *Lost in Translation*. How did this inspiration translate into the finished scenery? Do you agree that "culture shock" is an important element of *The Comedy of Errors*? How does this scenery physicalize the experience of culture shock? **LAL:** 3.3, 3.5 **VPA:** 1.1, 1.3, 1.4

2. This production uses certain recognizable contemporary props and costumes. How did these elements enhance or detract from your viewing experience? Did they help you connect the play's events more closely to your own life? Why do you think the designers chose these particular objects and styles for this play? **LAL:** 3.3, 3.5 **VPA:** 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5

Follow-up Activities

1. Write a review of this production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (lights, set, costumes and sound). Explain what you liked and disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper. **LAL:** 3.2.A-B, 3.2.D, 3.4.A-B, 3.5.A-C **VPA:** 1.1, 1.3-1.5

2. **Character Web.** Many of the "errors" in this play come from the complex familial and social relationships of the characters. Map these out graphically in a "character web" that shows how all the characters are connected to one another. Discuss the complexity and variation in these relationships (romantic attachments, economic bonds, social status) and how they affect the events of the play. **LAL:** 3.1.E, 3.1.G-H, 3.3.A, 3.5.A **VPA:** 1.1, 1.3-1.5

3. **"Alert the media!"** Surprising events and near-scandals abound in the Mart of Ephesus as *The Comedy of Errors* unfolds. Select a series of events from the play, and "cover" them in the style of a newspaper or television journalist: the diplomatic implications of the capture and impending execution of Egeon, a feature story on Dr. Pinch (celebrity exorcist), "madmen on the loose," etc. How is your version of these events like or unlike Shakespeare's? **LAL:** 3.1.G-H, 3.2.A-B, 3.2.D, 3.3.D, 3.5.A -C, **VPA:** 1.2, 1.5

4. **After the Feast** In *The Comedy of Errors*, family members who have been separated for years are suddenly reunited in a single day. Write a scene in which you explore how they adjust to this, setting it the next day, the next week or months or even years in the future. Use the information Shakespeare provides you to hypothesize about these characters' future lives. What issues might come up between family members who haven't seen one another in decades? Will the whole family remain in Ephesus? Return to Syracuse? Go somewhere else? Discuss and/or perform your scenes. **LAL:** 3.1-3.5 **VPA:** 1.1-1.5

5. **Casting Agent** Work in groups of 6-8, in which each group is responsible for one character from *The Comedy of Errors*. If you were asked to cast a new Hollywood movie adaptation of this play, whom would you cast? Write a detailed analysis of your group's character, using the information provided by Shakespeare's text. Make sure you account for both the physical and psychological characteristics of your character, as well as his/her relationships with the other characters. Choose a contemporary actor who your group thinks would fit the role. Write a statement and create a photo collage (using magazines such as *Entertainment Weekly*) justifying your choice to the producers. **LAL:** 3.1-3.2, 3.5 **VPA:** 1.1-1.5

Teachers:

Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to info@ShakespeareNJ.org and we will share them with other teachers, and maybe even include them in future study guides.

Test Your Understanding

- Shakespeare's plays are most often written in:
 - rhyming couplets
 - Old English
 - blank verse
 - prose
- Shakespeare wrote in what language?
 - Old English
 - early modern English
 - Middle English
 - Latin
- The Comedy of Errors* is set in what city?
 - London
 - Syracuse
 - Ephesus
 - Corinth
- According to Antipholus of Syracuse, Ephesus is famous for:
 - its strict laws
 - its courtesans
 - its goldsmiths
 - its witches and sorcerers
- Adriana suspects her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, of:
 - having lost his money
 - being unfaithful to her
 - having his slave, Dromio, spy on her
 - being a cross-dresser
- Angelo has promised to make Antipholus of Ephesus a:
 - gold chain
 - dress
 - suit of armor
 - diamond ring
- Who is Egeon?
 - The Duke of Ephesus
 - Luciana's husband
 - a Syracusan goldsmith
 - the father of the Antipholi
- What caused the twins to become separated?
 - a war
 - a divorce
 - a shipwreck
 - a magic spell
- Over what period of time do the events of *The Comedy of Errors* take place?
 - one day
 - one week
 - one month
 - one year
- Doctor Pinch attempts to cure Antipholus of Ephesus of:
 - marital infidelity
 - a rash
 - demonic possession
 - his bad mood
- The Comedy of Errors* is the _____ of Shakespeare's plays?
 - longest
 - most political
 - best-known
 - shortest
- What couple is engaged to be married as the play ends?
 - Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse
 - Egeon and Aemilia
 - Dr. Pinch and the courtesan
 - Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus
- What other Shakespeare play deals with the reunion of twins?
 - The Tempest*
 - The Merry Wives of Windsor*
 - Twelfth Night*
 - none of the above
- Who wrote the play upon which *The Comedy of Errors* was based?
 - Christopher Marlowe
 - Terence
 - Sophocles
 - Plautus
- Which of these musicals was based on *The Comedy of Errors*?
 - West Side Story*
 - The Boys from Syracuse*
 - Kiss Me Kate*
 - Carnival!*

What Did He Say?

This is an opportunity to test your comprehension of Shakespeare’s language. Below you will find a passage from *The Comedy of Errors*. Answer the questions as specifically as possible.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

He that commends me to mine own content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

1. To what does Antipholus compare himself in line 3? What literary device is this? What is the meaning of this comparison?
2. Do hard or soft sounds predominate in this passage (look at line 5, for example)? What does this tell you about Antipholus’ mood?
3. What is Antipholus searching for? What is it that he “cannot get” as a result of this search? What further result does this make him fear?
4. Would you describe the rhythm of this passage as choppy or flowing? Does this rhythm change from the first four lines to the last four lines? Why might this be?

Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it. One character has two of the quotes listed. One character has none.

- | | | |
|----|---|------------------------|
| A. | “And may it be that you have quite forgot
A husband’s office?” | DUKE SOLINUS |
| B. | “Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me,
I’ll knock elsewhere, to see if they’ll disdain me.” | EGEON |
| C. | “Be quiet, people. Wherefore throng you hither?” | ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE |
| D. | “Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown.
Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects.” | DROMIO OF SYRACUSE |
| E. | “I am due to a woman: one that claims me, one that haunts me,
one that will have me.” | ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS |
| F. | “There’s none but witches do inhabit here,
And therefore ‘tis high time that I were hence.” | DROMIO OF EPHESUS |
| G. | “Saving your merry humor, here’s the note
How much your chain weighs to the utmost carat.” | ADRIANA |
| H. | “Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail
Of you, my sons...” | LUCIANA |
| I. | “Five summers have I spent in farthest Greece,
Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia...” | THE COURTESAN |
| J. | “I have some marks of yours upon my pate,
Some of my mistress’ marks upon my shoulders...” | ANGELO (THE GOLDSMITH) |
| K. | “Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner,
Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised...” | DR. PINCH |
| L. | “One of these men is genius to the other;
And so of these. Which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? Who deciphers them?” | AEMILIA (THE ABBESS) |



The Abbess reveals herself as Aemilia in this 1794 engraving by Charles Gauthier Playter, from Boydell's *Shakespeare Gallery*.

Sources for this study guide (and other resources):

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE, Introductions, Notes, and Bibliography by A.L Rowe
 ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Isaac Asimov
 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS, New Cambridge edition, edited by T.S. Dorsch
 THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, by Laurie Rozakis
 FREEING SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE by Kristin Linklater
 THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein
 THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer
 SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce
 SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL by Marjorie Garber
 SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov
 SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench
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 SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN by Harold Bloom
 THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding
 The Utah Shakespearean Festival Study Guide for *The Comedy of*

Errors, 2003 (www.bard.org)
 The Shakespeare Theatre Company study guide for *The Comedy of Errors*, 2005 (www.shakespearetheatre.org)
 Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.com)
 Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet (shakespeare.palomar.edu)
 The Shakespeare Resource Center (www.bardweb.net)

Test Your Understanding Answer Key

1. c 2. b 3. c 4. d 5. b 6. a
 7. d 8. c 9. a 10. c 11. d 12. a
 13. c 14. d 15. b

Who Said That? Answer Key

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| A. Luciana | I. Egeon |
| B. Antipholus of Ephesus | J. Dromio of Ephesus |
| C. Aemilia (The Abbess) | K. The Courtesan |
| D. Adriana | L. Duke Solinus |
| E. Dromio of Syracuse | |
| F. Antipholus of Syracuse | |
| G. Angelo (The Goldsmith) | |
| H. Aemilia (The Abbess) | |

Meeting Core Curriculum Standards

In 1996, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted Core Curriculum Content Standards that set out to clearly define what every New Jersey student should know and be able to do at the end of his/her schooling. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is committed to supporting teachers by ensuring that our educational programs are relevant to standards-based teaching and learning. Viewing a performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for discussion, writing, and other outlets for higher-order thinking. On this page, and on the discussion and activities page (p.19) you will find suggestions for ways to align your study of our production to each standard.

LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

As a theatre dedicated to the classics, we are continually engaged in exploring some of the world's greatest literature, and the relationship between the written text and performance. Our philosophy and practice follow the four underlying assumptions of the Language Arts Literacy CCCS: that "language is an *active process* for constructing meaning," that "language develops in a *social context*," that language ability increases as learners "engage in texts that are *rich in ideas and increasingly complex in language*," and that learners achieve mastery not by practicing isolated skills but by "*using and exploring language* in its many dimensions." In the practice of theatre, we merge all areas of the language arts, as the standards suggest, "in an integrated act of rehearsal, reflection, and learning." Using the visual and performing arts to motivate and enhance language arts learning is explicitly recommended by the CCCS, citing extensive research.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

STANDARD 3.1: All students will apply the knowledge of sounds, letters and words in written English to become independent and fluent readers, and will read a variety of materials and texts with fluency and comprehension.
Read a scene from the play as a class and use context clues to interpret new words and expand vocabulary (3.1.C/F); demonstrate understanding by performing a scene from the play (3.1.G); compare and contrast literary elements in the play with another text being studied (3.1.H)

STANDARD 3.2: All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
Write a new ending for the play in blank verse or in modern prose (3.2.D), write a critique of the play which will be workshopped and published in a classroom setting (3.2.A/B/D)

STANDARD 3.3: All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
Participate in a post-show discussion (3.3.A/B), memorize and perform a monologue or scene from the play (3.3.D)

STANDARD 3.4: All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.

Select one speech or line from the play and compare how it was performed in the stage and film version (3.4.A/B)

STANDARD 3.5: All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, nonprint, and electronic texts and resources.

Discuss how the play expresses cultural values of the playwright's time (3.5.A); compare and contrast the printed text with its staged version (3.5.B)

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

According to both No Child Left Behind and the New Jersey CCCS, the arts (including theatre) are a core subject and "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." In the area of performing arts, performances, workshops and study guide exercises developed by The Shakespeare Theatre address all five state standards.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

STANDARD 1.1: All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Discuss the use of metaphor in both the text and the design of the production; discuss how the play expresses cultural values of its period and/or of today

STANDARD 1.2: All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Perform a monologue or scene from the play; participate in a classroom workshop that develops the physical and technical skills required to create and present theatre

STANDARD 1.3: All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Participate in a post-show discussion of elements such as physicality and creating motivated action; discuss the relationship between playtext and production design

STANDARD 1.4: All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.
Write a review of the production using domain-appropriate terminology; develop a class rubric for effective theatrical presentations; compare and contrast the play with work by other artists

STANDARD 1.5: All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.
Discuss the representation of social issues (class, political leadership, etc.) in the play; research how the historical period affected the writer's work; compare the play to work from other historical periods

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (formerly called “New Jersey Shakespeare Festival”) is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey’s only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare’s canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 46th season in 2008.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre’s mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company’s dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting “new” theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY

Shakespeare LIVE! is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exceptional, visually-imaginative abridged productions of Shakespeare’s masterworks and other literary classics directly into schools. Workshops are also available in Stage Combat and Shakespeare in Performance.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS

The Theatre’s summer acting program for kids ages 11-17, the Junior and Senior Corps combines professional acting instruction, classic literature, and a commitment to developing the individual student’s self-confidence and creativity, all in the setting of an acclaimed theatre company. Each session culminates in an ensemble performance of Shakespeare or another classic play. Admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the intensive Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas. For a full brochure of the opportunities available, please contact the Education Department.

SHAKEFEST: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is a weeklong professional development program filled with myriad practical ways to conquer “ShakesFear” and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and “speaking the speech.”

SHAKESPERIENCE: NJ STUDENT SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

This annual festival, developed in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library and Rider University, gives middle and high school classes the opportunity to spend a day at the Theatre experiencing Shakespeare together as both actors and audience. The *Shakespeare: NJ* Festival celebrates the power of performance as a teaching tool on a statewide scale.

For more information about these and other educational programs
at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey,
log onto our website,
www.ShakespeareNJ.org
or call **(973) 408-3278**