

Outreach & Education Department
Study Guide for

The Comedy of Errors

By William Shakespeare
First performed around 1594

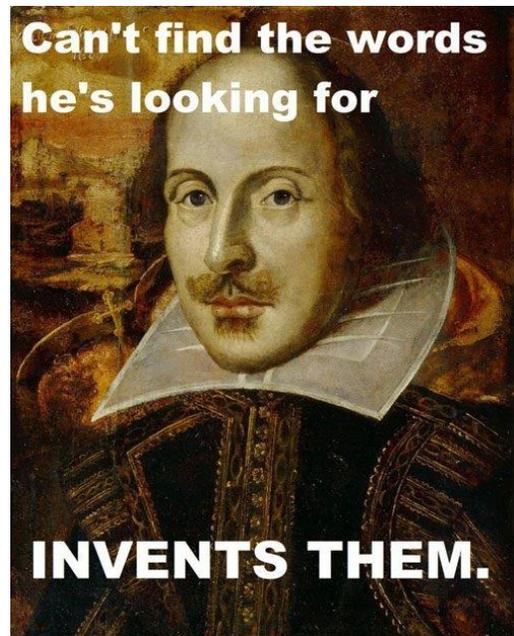
Shakespeare's Influence

William Shakespeare, the English playwright, was christened April 26, 1564, and according to an inscription on his tomb died April 23, 1616. Although the exact date of his birth is not recorded, it is traditional to celebrate his life on April 23 during the Feast of St. George, the patron saint of England. A contemporary of Galileo, the Italian astronomer, Shakespeare lived in years that spanned a fundamental change in world-view. Shakespeare experienced, or knew people who experienced, the Protestant Reformation, the exploration and colonization of a New World, the establishment of the Copernican theory, and the fundamental philosophical shift toward a human-centered universe: for as our understanding of the world changed, so did our understanding of ourselves in it. Shakespeare's drama, more than any other set of words in any language, documents, describes, and explores, some have even said *invents*, what it means to be human. It is Shakespeare's drama that gives us our conception of ourselves.

Shakespeare's Language

In Shakespeare's theater, his characters speak in ways that may seem very strange to our visually-oriented 21st century ears. Shakespeare's language sounds the way it does because it carries a burning intensity of feeling, an unfettered imagination, and a profound depth of meaning. Although very intense, Shakespeare's English is *our* English and in the mouths of skillful actors can be understood with little difficulty. It is a language to be heard, not silently read, and simply reading passages aloud can uncloak some of its mystery.

Not only was Shakespeare writing in modern English, he took liberties and had fun with language. You could imagine that this irreverence and playfulness to be very similar to the spirit in which every generation creates slang terms that define its experience. The only difference with Shakespeare is that the words he



invented stuck and actually became part of our common, everyday language. Imagine our vocabulary without word such as: *addiction; amazement; bedroom; blanket; champion; cold-blooded; dawn; elbow; eyeball; gossip; lonely; moonbeam; torture; unreal; worthless; and zany*. In all, Shakespeare added some 1700 words to our language!

Watching the Performance

NCSHakes' production of *Hamlet* features seven professional actors playing all the roles in a 60-minute version of Shakespeare's classic play. Many actors play more than one role.

- Hopefully you've had a chance to read *Hamlet* before seeing the Shakespeare To Go performance. What things do you notice that are changed in this 60-minute version of the play? Why do you think each change was made?
- If you haven't read the play, listen to and watch the actors carefully. Shakespeare can be difficult to understand for a modern audience, so don't get frustrated if you don't understand every word. Remember also that plays in *performance* offer a context for the words in the form of settings, action, gesture, and costumes. A word that may seem confusing *on the page* may be more easily understood *on the stage*. After a few minutes, you will likely begin to understand the story with more and more ease.
- Do you find watching the story easier to understand than reading the story? Why or why not?
- Actors love it when the audience reacts to what they are doing. So, if you find something truly funny or moving, laugh, gasp, answer back. React. It will make the show that much better.
- Enjoy the show!



A view of the stage of the rebuilt Globe as it stands now, London, England.

The Characters

Who's Who in The Comedy of Errors

- Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, believes in justice but is merciful
- Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse, in search of his missing family
- Antipholus of Ephesus, son to Egeon and Aemilia and twin brother of Antipholus of Syracuse; Adriana's husband and a respected merchant of Ephesus
- Antipholus of Syracuse, son to Egeon and Aemilia and twin brother of Antipholus of Ephesus; has been traveling and searching for his brother and mother
- Dromio of Ephesus, comical attendant on Antipholus of Ephesus and twin brother of Dromio of Syracuse
- Dromio of Syracuse, comical attendant on Antipholus of Syracuse and twin brother of Dromio of Ephesus
- Balthasar, a merchant in Syracuse
- Angelo, a goldsmith in Syracuse
- First Merchant, a merchant of Ephesus and friend to Antipholus of Syracuse
- Second Merchant, needs money owed to him by Angelo
- Pinch, a schoolmaster who performs an outrageous exorcism on Antipholus of Ephesus
- Aemilia, Abbess of Ephesus and wife to Egeon
- Adriana, wife to Antipholus of Ephesus
- Luciana, single sister to Adriana
- Luce (Nell), servant to Adriana; helps Dromio of Syracuse guard the door to her lady's home
- A Cortesan, friend of Antipholus of Ephesus; entertains him when he is locked out of the house

The Actors



Thomas Bell (Antipholus of Syracuse/Headsman)



Joseph Bromfield (Antipholus of Ephesus) is a professional actor and teaching artist. A graduate of Rollins College and The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, Joseph has performed professionally with The Cumberland Theatre, The Public Theatre of Maine, and FOODPLAY Productions. Joseph's teaching experience spans from Lingue Senza Frontiere in San Remo, Italy and MaineStage Shakespeare in Kennebunk, ME to the California Theatre Center in

Sunnyvale, CA, and even his alma mater, The McCallie School in Chattanooga, TN. Joseph is proud to return to NCSakes for a second tour with the Shakespeare To Go Company.

Corey Keller (Duke Solinus/Pinch) is an actor originally from West Virginia. He attended Greensboro College in North Carolina, and was an apprentice at the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.



Alexandra Leigh (Dromio of Syracuse) is an actress born and raised in Philadelphia, PA. This is her first Shakespeare tour! She received her BA in Communication Studies from Ithaca College and her classical training from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in England. She wants to dedicate these performances to her loving family, friends, and cast!



Courtney McClellan (Adriana/Courtesan) excitedly rejoins NCSakes for her third tour with Shakespeare to Go after a run of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* in Nashville (Nurse Flinn). Other Nashville credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* (Circle Players) and *Once on this Island* (Street Theatre Company). Regional credits include: *Chicago* (Mama Morton), *Big River* (Alice), and *The Sound of Music* (Sister Berthe) with Weathervane Playhouse (Newark, OH); *Romeo and Juliet* (Lady Montague, mainstage/Lady Capulet/Benvolio, STG), *Macbeth* (Witch/Malcolm, STG), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Titania/Helena/Quince, STG) with NCSakes. Education/training: B.A. Communications/Minor: Performance Theatre, Hampton University; McCaskill Studios, NYC.



Jeffrey Mindock (Aegeon/Angelo) hails from Allentown, PA. Jeffrey is ecstatic to be performing this Spring with NCSakes. Favorite roles include Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*, Dave in *The Full Monty*, Marcus Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, and the Beast in *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*. Jeffrey would like to thank his family, friends, Paige and Bowser for their constant support and laughs. "When we lose our ability to laugh, we lose our ability to think straight."



This tour marks Julie Roble's (Dromio of Ephesus) NCSakes debut! A BFA Acting graduate from Pace University, Julie has performed in a variety of productions in NYC, including *Out At Sea*, *The Conduct of Life* (La MaMa ETC); *Coriolanus* (Under St. Marks), and Hudson Shakespeare Company's tours of *Othello* ("Bianca") and *The Comedy of Errors* ("Courtesan"). She is an alumni of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Apprentice Company. Julie has taken Shakespeare master classes with numerous Shakespearean masters such as Devon Allen, Philip Bird, and hand-picked by F. Murray Abraham. www.julierobles.com

The Story

Act I

The show opens with Egeon being informed by Duke Solinus of Ephesus that there is a law against trade between Syracuse and Ephesus. Therefore, as a merchant of Syracuse, Egeon has broken the law and must pay a fine of 1,000 marks or die. Egeon explains to Duke Solinus that he has traveled across Greece searching for his missing family. Egeon and his wife Aemilia, along with their newborn twin sons and their newborn twin servants, were separated in a shipwreck. Egeon manages to stay with one of the boys and his servant, but Aemilia loses the other son and his servant. Egeon's son Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant Dromio of Syracuse have gone off in search of their twin brothers eighteen years earlier and Egeon has been searching for his lost family for the past five years. Solinus, moved by Egeon's story gives him until sunset to raise the 1000 marks. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse happen to be in Ephesus on the same day that Egeon is in Syracuse. Unbeknownst to them, their long lost brothers live in Ephesus. After sending Dromio of Syracuse back to the inn where they are staying, Antipholus of Syracuse runs into Dromio of Ephesus who is in search of his own master, Antipholus of Ephesus. He informs him that his wife is waiting for his arrival home for lunch. Antipholus asks Dromio of Ephesus about 1000 marks of gold entrusted to him, and he has no idea what he is talking about, as the other Dromio is the one with the gold. The local Dromio leaves in order to avoid a beating and Antipholus of Syracuse heads back to the inn where he is staying. This is the beginning of many confusing encounters between the twins that involve mistaken identity between the Syracusians and the Ephesians.

Act II

Adriana and her sister are at home awaiting her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, for lunch. Dromio enters and tells Adriana that Antipholus has gone stark mad. He tells her that he is railing about gold marks and that he doesn't even acknowledge that he has a wife. Adriana, thinking that her husband is having an affair sends Dromio back to the marketplace to summons Antipholus. In the meantime Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse reunite in a public square. Antipholus is had the gold marks, not realizing that he was talking to the other Dromio earlier. Dromio is completely baffled with the conversation. Adriana and Luciana arrive at the marketplace and insist to Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse that they return home for lunch. Antipholus of Syracuse completely confused follows his twin brother's wife to her home for lunch and instructs Dromio to guard the gate.

Fun Fact

In Shakespeare's theatre, there were no electric lights, and the sun shone on actors and audience, lighting both equally. Characters spoke directly to the audience, and actors never pretended that the audience was not present.

upset with his servant for denying he

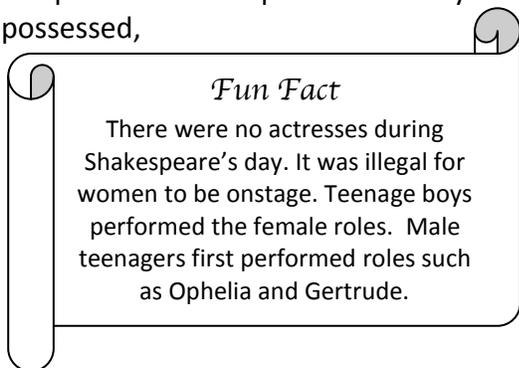
Act III

Antipholus of Ephesus returns home and is surprised to find himself locked out and denied entry. Behind the door, he hears the voice of Dromio of Syracuse. He is accompanied by Angelo, a goldsmith, who is making Adriana a gold chain, and by Balthasar, a merchant. Dromio of Ephesus, who is also with Antipholus is shocked to hear his own voice coming from behind

the locked door. Confusion follows with Antipholus getting more and more upset that his wife will not let him into his house. Finally Balthasar advises him to practice restraint and to be patient. Antipholus of Ephesus decides to dine with a courtesan friend; he offers her the gold chain that he was going to give Adriana. In the meantime, in the home of the local Antipholus, Antipholus of Syracuse has fallen in love with Adriana's sister, Luciana. Dromio of Syracuse marvels that the kitchen wench, who is the local Dromio's wife, is claiming to be his wife. Antipholus of Syracuse sends Dromio to arrange for a ship in order to sail out of town. He leaves the house of Adriana and runs into Angelo in the street. Angelo gives him the gold chain, thinking that he is the local Antipholus. Antipholus is baffled by this unexpected "gift" and still seeks passage out of Ephesus.

Act IV

A merchant is talking with Angelo and tells him that he needs the money that is owed to him. Antipholus of Ephesus instructs Dromio of Ephesus to buy a rope, which he is planning to use to beat his wife. Angelo seeks payment for the gold chain from Antipholus who declares that he never received it. Angelo has an officer arrest Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus runs into Dromio of Syracuse on the way to jail. Antipholus asks Dromio of Syracuse about the rope that he sent Dromio of Ephesus to get and Dromio knows nothing about it. Dromio reports to Antipholus of Ephesus that a boat departs that night. Antipholus who did not ask for the boat is frustrated and sends Dromio home to get bail money. Adriana who is already distraught because she thinks her husband is flirting with Luciana is further upset when Dromio of Syracuse arrives asking for bail money. Dromio takes the purse of gold to Antipholus of Syracuse who has no idea why bail is required. He is also baffled by the courtesan who seeks the chain promised in exchange for a golden ring. The Syracusians flee and Adriana plans to accuse Antipholus of theft. Antipholus of Ephesus is happy when Dromio of Ephesus appears and asks Dromio for the bail money. Dromio of Ephesus gets a beating when he tells Antipholus that he spent the money he had on a rope. Adriana, thinking Antipholus is possessed,



appears and brings a schoolmaster named Pinch who performs a bizarre and humorous exorcism on Antipholus. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are released to be restrained at home. Adriana hears from the courtesan that Antipholus has stolen a ring. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse appear with their rapiers drawn and everyone reacts. Antipholus again expresses his desire to flee Ephesus as he thinks the inhabitants are witches.

Act V

The merchant and Angelo discuss the refusal of Antipholus to pay for the gold chain. They encounter Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse on the street and notice that Antipholus is wearing the chain. The merchant confronts him and calls him a villain. Adrianna arrives, defending Antipholus saying that he is mad. Antipholus and Dromio seek refuge in a priory. The Abbess chastises Adriana for her jealousy and gives Antipholus and Dromio sanctuary. Duke

Solinus arrives with Egeon and his executioner. Adrianna explains the situation with Antipholus to the Duke who agrees to speak with the Abbess. Suddenly Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus enter and Antipholus asks the Duke for justice. The Duke calls for the Abbess as he thinks everyone is stark mad after hearing the various accounts of the day. Egeon is wondering why Antipholus and Dromio do not know him as he thinks them to be the Syracusians. The Abbess emerges with Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. She reveals herself as Egeon's wife, Aemelia. She tells him the story of how Antipholus and Dromio ended up with rude fisherman after the shipwreck and how she ended up in Ephesus. All of the confusion and mistaken identity issues are resolved. The Abbess invites everyone to feast and the family is reunited.

Post-Show Lesson Plan

***The Comedy of Errors* – Plot Synopsis in Tableau**

Grades: 4 – 8

Goal: to promote understanding of the plot of *The Comedy of Errors* through active exploration of the text

Preparation: Students need to have either read or seen *The Comedy of Errors*

Materials Needed: *The Comedy of Errors* plot synopsis ("The Story" section included in this study guide will work well.)

Activity:

1. Students will be put in groups of 5.
2. Each group will be given a copy of the synopsis for *Comedy of Errors*. They will be assigned a specific act of the play to explore.
3. Students will form 3 tableaus that visually illustrate the plot happenings of their section.
4. Each group will write a brief summary of how the events in their section propel the action.
5. Each group of students will present their tableaus to the class beginning with the first Act. One student will read the summary while the others strike the poses.

Core Standards:

RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves towards a resolution.

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Online Resources

It is easy to search the internet for information about William Shakespeare. Just type “Shakespeare” into your search engine and tens of thousands of sites come up. Here are a few sites that we find particularly helpful:

- www.shakespeareinamericancommunities.org
- www.shakespeares-globe.org
The website of the newly reconstructed Globe Theatre in London
- www.shakespeare.nit.edu
The complete works of Shakespeare in a format that you can copy and paste for your own use
- www.shakespeare.palomar.edu
A guide to many websites about Shakespeare and his times
- www.shakespeare.com
A basic collection of Shakespearean facts presented in an easy, non-scholarly format.
- www.shakespeare.org.uk
This is the site run by the Shakespeare Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK. Lots of stuff about the real estate associated with Shakespeare.
- www.bardweb.net
A good site for homework help. Lots of general information, plot summaries, and so on.
- www.folger.edu
The website of the famous Folger Library in Washington DC. Lots of primary source material and lesson plans for teachers.

Here are some old-fashioned books that are good, too:

- Marchette Chute’s *Shakespeare of London* is a sort of scholarly novel that interpolates from the primary resources a probable narrative of the man’s life.
- *The Arden Shakespeare* is an edition of all of Shakespeare’s works. You can buy paperback copies of every play with all the Arden scholarship included. It’s a good edition to read because the footnotes are plentiful and helpful.
- *The Shakespeare Miscellany* by David Crystal and Ben Crystal is a fun little book with all sorts of facts about Shakespeare and his plays. It was published by the Overlook Press in 2005.

There are other very helpful editions available as well and are easy to find in the Drama Section of your book store. The Folger Library has an edition. There is no need to buy a “Complete Works” when you can buy the works one play at a time in paperback, but if you want a big hardback for your bookshelf, *The Riverside Shakespeare* is a handsome volume with lots of great scholarship and a very conservatively edited presentation of all of Shakespeare’s known works.