

the merry wives of windsor

chicago
shakespeare theater
on navy pier



Teacher handbook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Art That Lives.	2
Bard's Bio.	2
The First Folio	3
Shakespeare's England.	4
The Renaissance Theater.	5
Courtyard-style Theater.	6
Timelines	8

Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Dramatis Personae	10
The Story	11
Act-by-Act Synopsis	11
Something Borrowed, Something New...	
Shakespeare's Sources.	13
What's in a Name? Unpacking Comedy	14
From the Inside Out: A Look into Windsor.	15
Windsor's (and England's) Women . . .	15

Scholars' Perspectives

A Local Habitation and a Name	18
Windsor Washing	19
The 20th Century Looks Back	20

A Play Comes to Life

<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> in Performance.	24
A Conversation with the Director	26

Classroom Activities and Resources

Before You Read the Play	29
As You Read the Play	36
After Reading the Play	52
The Performance: Preparing and Reflecting	57
Exploring the Merrily Desperate Housewives of Windsor through a Sitcom Lens	63
Theater Warm-ups.	67
Techno Shakespeare	73
Suggested Readings	77

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Teacher Handbook grew out of a team effort of teachers past and present, Chicago Shakespeare Theater artists, interns, educators, and scholars. Interns Rebecca Dumain, Samuel Evola and Julie Strassel revised a previous edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* handbook for this production. Chicago Shakespeare Theater gratefully acknowledges the groundbreaking and indelible work of Dr. Rex Gibson and the Cambridge School Shakespeare Series, and The Folger Shakespeare Institute, whose contributions to the field of teaching have helped shape our own work through the years.

chicago shakespeare on navy pier theater

Barbara Gaines **Criss Henderson**
Artistic Director Executive Director

Chicago Shakespeare Theater is Chicago's professional theater dedicated to the works of William Shakespeare. Founded as Shakespeare Repertory in 1986, the company moved to its seven-story home on Navy Pier in 1999. In its Elizabethan-style courtyard theater, 500 seats on three levels wrap around a deep thrust stage—with only nine rows separating the farthest seat from the stage. Chicago Shakespeare also features a flexible 180-seat black box studio theater, a Teacher Resource Center, and a Shakespeare specialty bookstall.

Now in its twenty-seventh season, the Theater has produced nearly the entire Shakespeare canon: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3*, *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale*. Chicago Shakespeare Theater was the 2008 recipient of the Regional Theatre Tony Award. Chicago's Jeff Awards year after year have honored the Theater, including repeated awards for Best Production and Best Director, the two highest honors in Chicago theater.

Since Chicago Shakespeare's founding, its programming for young audiences has been an essential element in the realization of its mission. Team Shakespeare supports education in our schools, where Shakespeare is part of every required curriculum. As a theater within a multicultural city, we are committed to bringing Shakespeare to a young and diverse audience of 40,000 students each year. Team Shakespeare's programming includes free teacher workshops, student matinees of main stage shows, post-performance discussions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, and an abridged, original production each year of one of the "curriculum plays." Team Shakespeare offers a region-wide forum for new vision and enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare in our schools. In 2012, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, honored that vision with the prestigious Shakespeare Steward Award. The 2013-14 Season offers a student matinee series for three of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's full-length productions: in the fall semester, *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand; and in the spring, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry V*. Also this spring, a 75-minute abridged version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be performed at the Theater on Navy Pier and will tour to schools and theaters across the region. We hope that you and your students will enjoy our work—and Shakespeare's creative genius brought to life on stage.

Marilyn J. Halperin Director of Education
Jason Harrington Education Outreach Manager
Molly Topper Learning Programs Manager



There is more life and reality in the first act of The Merry Wives of Windsor alone than in all German literature.

—LETTER FROM ENGELS TO
MARX, 10 DECEMBER 1873

THE *Merry Wives* OF WINDSOR

written by **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**
directed by **BARBARA GAINES**

Photos by Bill Burlingham



When Falstaff blusters into Windsor, his suitcase filled with schemes and scandal, two housewives rise to the occasion. In the generally tranquil and overwhelmingly normal Windsor countryside, husbands banter with bravado, children romp in carefree abandon, and wives—well, they take care of the rest. Adrift and off-kilter, Sir John Falstaff's an alien in this world of Windsor, where family life is treasured, traditions honored, and morality immovably fixed. The battle that unfolds grows into a riotous romp—bringing the witty and witless, the pious and irreverent, the innocent and jaded—all into collision. As they seek to settle this conundrum, the townsfolk wrestle with their community's most fundamental questions, offering a hilarious take on neighborly relations. ★



ART THAT LIVES

Drama is a living art. It is written to be performed live before a group of people who form an audience and together experience a play. Cave paintings depicting men disguised as animals reveal that since ancient times, impersonation and imitation have served humans in their efforts to

express themselves and to communicate. The drama of western civilization has its roots in the ancient Greeks' religious rituals and observances.

Until the Renaissance, when Shakespeare wrote, drama was closely tied to religious beliefs and practice. Drama not only depicts human communication, it is human communication. In theater, unlike television or film, there is a two-way communication that occurs between the actors and their audience. The audience hears and sees the actors, and the actors hear and see the audience. We are used to thinking about the actors' roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing an important role in this living art. Because the art lives, each production is guaranteed to be different, depending in part upon an audience's response. Live drama is the sharing of human experience, intensely and immediately, in the theater, which momentarily becomes our universe.

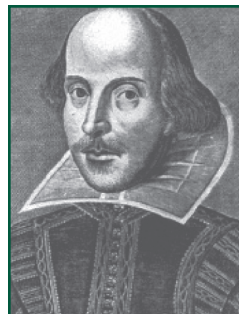
A live theater production depends upon its audience. The best performances depend upon the best actors—and the best audiences. When the actors sense a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. When the actors sense disinterest, they too are distracted and the play they create is less interesting. One actor described the experience of live performance as a story told by the actors and audience together. In this sense, you are also a storyteller in the experience of live theater. We hope you'll enjoy your role—and will help us to give you a dramatic experience that you'll always remember.

[Theatrical performance] is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely fused group, make it easy for the performance to 'take you out of yourself.' This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play... to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.

—TYRONE GUTHRIE, 1962

HOW CAN YOU HELP US GIVE YOU THE BEST PERFORMANCE WE CAN?

- ★ **Please, no talking during the performance.** It distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- ★ **Respond naturally to our play.** Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you'll laugh, cry and even gasp—but as a natural response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- ★ **Please leave all “noisemakers”—food, gum, cell phones, iPods, etc.—back at school or on the bus.** In a quiet theater, wrappers and munching are heard by all, the actors included.
- ★ **No photographs of any kind, please.** Flashbulbs can make the actors lose their focus and can be dangerous. Digital cameras, along with all other kinds of recording devices, are prohibited, as is text-messaging.



BARD'S BIO

The exact date of William Shakespeare's birth is not known, but his baptism, traditionally three days after a child's birth, was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father John Shakespeare was a tanner, glover, grain dealer and prominent town official of the thriving market town of

Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford's grammar school, where he would have acquired some knowledge of Latin and Greek and the classical writers. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind. Some skeptical scholars have raised doubts about whether Shakespeare, due to his relatively average level of education and humble origins, could have possibly written what has long been considered the best verse drama composed in the English language. But not until 1769, 150 years after Shakespeare's death, did these theories arise—and, to all appearances, Shakespeare's contemporaries and immediate successors never seemed to question whether William Shakespeare wrote the celebrated works attributed to him.



At eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died at age eleven. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592, when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare's life. Consequently, these seven so-called "lost years" are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and copying the works of established dramatists.

Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and playwright, but also a partner in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which soon became one of London's two principal companies. The company's name changed to the King's Men in 1603 with the accession of James I, and it endured until the Commonwealth closed the theaters in 1642. Beginning in 1599 the company acted primarily at the Globe playhouse, in which Shakespeare held a one-tenth interest.

During his career of approximately twenty years, Shakespeare wrote or collaborated on what most scholars now agree upon as thirty-eight plays. His earliest plays, including *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *King John* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* as well as other plays, including *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. His great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last play traditionally categorized as comedy, *Measure for Measure*. The earlier histories, comedies and tragedies made way for Shakespeare's final dramatic form—the so-called "romances," which were written between 1606 and 1611 and include *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier historical and tragic forms.

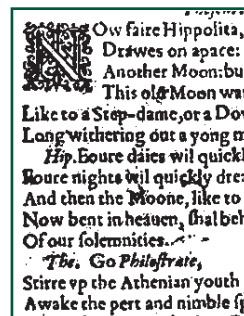
Shakespeare seldom devised his own plots for his plays, but creatively borrowed here and there from histories, prose romances, poems, and plays of his own and others. Shakespeare was an ingenious dramatic artist with a vast imagination. He created masterpieces out of conventional and unpromising material.

In Shakespeare's time, ancient stories were told and re-told. The important thing was not the originality of the plot but how the story was told. In the telling of a story, there are few writers who

rival Shakespeare in theatricality, poetry and depth of character. By 1592 Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright and part-owner of London's leading theater company for nearly twenty years. Shakespeare retired in 1611 to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616.

Shakespeare was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.

—JOHN DRYDEN, 1688



THE FIRST FOLIO

Chicago Shakespeare Theater utilizes the First Folio as its script and acting "blueprint." The First Folio serves as an authentic and effective manual available to Shakespearean actors nearly 400 years after its publication. Shakespeare wrote his plays for the stage, not for print. In Shakespeare's day, plays were not considered literature at all. When a play was published—if it was published at all—it was printed inexpensively in a small book, called a "quarto," the sixteenth-century equivalent of our paperbacks. It was not until 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, when a contemporary of his, dramatist Ben Jonson, published his own plays in an oversized book called a "folio," that plays were viewed as literature worthy of publication. Jonson was chided as bold and arrogant for his venture.

Shakespeare, unlike Jonson, showed absolutely no interest or involvement in the publication of his plays. During Shakespeare's lifetime, only half of his plays were ever printed, and those as quartos. He did, however, oversee the publication of three narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets. It was not until seven years after the playwright's death that two of his close colleagues decided to ignore tradition and gather his plays for publication. In 1623, the First Folio, a book containing thirty-six of his thirty-eight plays, was published. The First Folio was compiled from stage prompt books, the playwright's handwritten manuscripts, various versions of some of the plays already published, and from his actors' memories. Its large format (much like a modern atlas) was traditionally reserved for the "authority" of religious and classical works.



Shakespeare's First Folio took five "compositors" two and one-half years to print. The compositors manually set each individual letter of type by first memorizing the text line by line. There was no editor overseeing the printing, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected, but due to the prohibitively high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies of the First Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, each slightly different. Chicago's Newberry Library contains an original First Folio in its rich collections.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater utilizes the First Folio as the basis for its playscripts. Its punctuation gives clues to actors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important. In Shakespeare's own theater company, with only a few days to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential. Today they still help actors make the language easier to break apart—even though you're hearing language that's 400 years "younger" than ours.

A key to understanding Shakespeare's language is to appreciate the attitude toward speech accepted by him and his contemporaries. Speech was traditionally and piously regarded as God's final and consummate gift to man. Speech was thus to Elizabethans a source of enormous power for good or ill... Hence the struggle to excel in eloquent utterance.

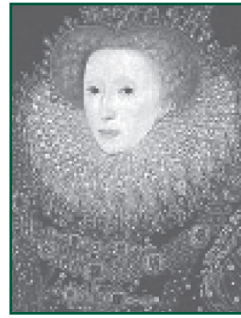
—DAVID BEVINGTON, 1980



TEACHER RESOURCE CENTER

Teachers, looking for new ideas? Check out our Teacher Resource Center, located on the Theater's fourth level. In addition to its primary focus on teaching Shakespeare in performance, the collection includes a number of biographies, history books, scholarly criticism, periodicals and books for young readers about Shakespeare's life and times. The collection also includes reference materials and dictionaries that specifically target Shakespeare's language.

Call the Education Department at 312.595.5678 to schedule a visit—on your own or with your colleagues.



SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

Elizabeth I ruled England for forty-five years from 1558 to 1603 in a time of relative prosperity and peace. "Few monarchs," says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, "have ever influenced an age so per-

vasively and left their stamp on it so permanently." The daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child—and an illegitimate monarch. The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth's reign, even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years.

Elizabeth had no heir, and throughout her reign the politics of succession posed a real threat to the nation's peace—and provided a recurrent subject of Shakespeare's plays. While Shakespeare was writing *Julius Caesar*, the Earl of Essex, one of the Queen's favorite courtiers, rebelled against her government. Shakespeare's portrayal of the forced abdication of a king in *Richard II* was censored in performance during Elizabeth's reign.

Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be subsequently. It had withdrawn from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World had barely begun. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England's economy was still based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who "enclosed" what was once the farmers' cropland for pastures. Uprisings and food riots were commonplace in the rural area surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up.

London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived there, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. It was a time of change and social mobility. For the first time in English history, a rising middle class aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.

Under Elizabeth, England returned to Protestantism. But in her masterful style of accommodation and compromise, she incorporated an essentially traditional and Catholic doctrine into an Episcopal form of church government that was ruled by the Crown and England's clergy rather than by Rome's Pope.

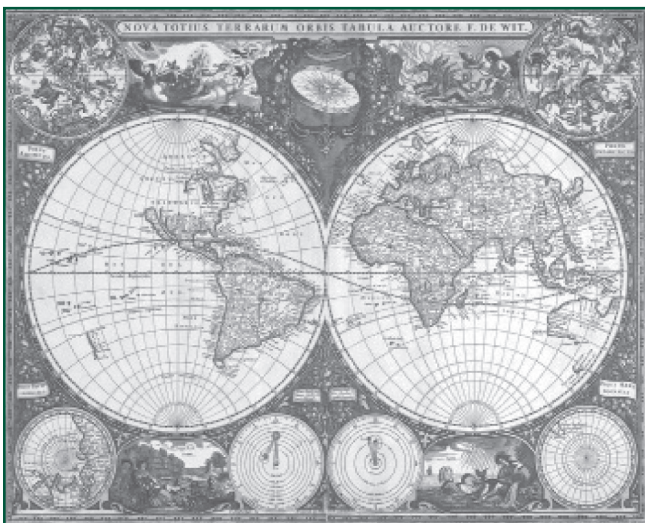


Extremists on the religious right and left hated her rule and wanted to see Elizabeth overthrown. She was declared a heretic by Rome in 1569, and her life was endangered.

"Her combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary," says David Bevington, and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which might threaten her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout Early Modern Europe, governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords. The rule of monarchs like Queen Elizabeth I was absolute. She and her subjects viewed the monarch as God's deputy, and the divine right of kings was a cherished doctrine (and became the subject of Shakespeare's history plays). It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against God but could not protect Elizabeth from rebellion at home, even from her closest advisors or from challenges from abroad.

Childless, Elizabeth I died in 1603. The crown passed to her cousin James VI, King of Scotland, who became England's King James I. Ruling from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616), James I was responsible for overseeing the creation of a new bible, which in its powerful cadence and poetry would remain a legacy of this fertile time, just as Shakespeare's canon has. But his reign was troubled with political and religious controversy. It would be James's son, Charles I, who was beheaded in the English civil wars of the 1640s for tyrannically abusing what he believed was his divinely ordained power. ✪



THE RENAISSANCE THEATER

A man who would later become an associate of Shakespeare's, James Burbage, built the first commercial theater in England in 1576, not much more than a decade before Shakespeare first arrived on the London theater scene—a convergence of two events that would change history. Burbage skirted rigid restrictions governing entertainment in London by placing his theater just outside the city walls, in a community with the unglamorous name of "Shoreditch."

Burbage was not the only one to dodge the severe rules of the Common Council of London by setting up shop in Shoreditch. His neighbors were other businesses of marginal repute, including London's brothels and bear-baiting arenas. Actors in Shakespeare's day were legally given the status of "vagabonds." They were considered little better than common criminals unless they could secure the patronage of a nobleman or, better still, the monarch.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They provided popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth's court as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and continued to enjoy court patronage after King James I came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King's Men. Their success at court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's company the funds to build the Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe joined a handful of other theaters located just out of the city's jurisdiction as one of the first public theaters in England.

Shakespeare may have developed his love for the theater by watching traveling acting troupes temporarily transform the courtyard of an inn or town square into a theater. When he was a boy growing up in Stratford-upon-Avon, acting troupes traveled around the countryside in flatbed, horse-drawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, stage and storage for props and costumes. Their horses pulled the cart into an inn yard or the courtyard of a country estate or college. People gathered around to watch, some leaning over the rails from the balconies above to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

Many of these traveling performances staged religious stories, enacting important scenes from the Bible—the form of theater that endured throughout the Middle Ages. During the Renais-



sance, the enacted stories became more secular. Public officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London's walls came to be feared as places where physical, moral and social corruption spread. The authorities frequently shut them down during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the city was menaced by the plague or by political and social rioting. When the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word in a new play. The show could not go on until he gave his permission.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers. A full house in the Globe numbered about 3,000 people. Though the same dimensions as the original structure, the reconstruction of the Globe holds 1,500 at maximum capacity—an indication of just how close those 3,000 people must have been to one another. They arrived well before the play began to meet friends, drink ale and snack on the refreshments sold at the lays. An outing to the theater might take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert, than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating at Chicago Shakespeare Theater) while the “common folk”—shopkeepers and artisans—stood for a penny, about a day's wages for a skilled worker. They were a diverse and demanding group, and Shakespeare depicted characters and situations that appealed to every cross-section of Renaissance society. The vitality and financial success of the Elizabethan theater is without equal in English history.

There was no electricity for lighting, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. A throne, table or bed had to be brought on stage during the action since Elizabethan plays were written to be performed without scene breaks or intermissions. When the stage directions for *Macbeth* indicate that “a banquet is prepared,” the stage keepers prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. From what scholars can best reconstruct about performance conventions, Shakespeare's plays were performed primarily in “modern” dress—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare's time—regardless of their historical setting. The actors wore the same clothes on the stage as their contemporaries wore on the street. Hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy provided the elegant costumes for the play's royalty.

Most new plays had short runs and were seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows but, due to the number of ongoing and upcoming productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a few days.



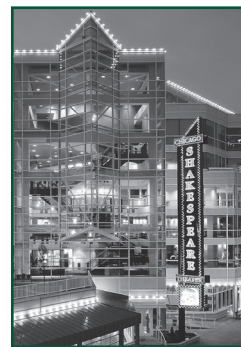
*An Elizabethan sketch
of the original Swan*

It was not until 1660 that women would be permitted to act on the English stage. Female roles were performed by boys or young men. Elaborate Elizabethan and Jacobean dresses disguised a man's shape and the young actors were readily accepted as “women” by the audience.

In 1642 the Puritans succeeded in closing the theaters altogether. They did not reopen until the English monarchy was restored and Charles II came to the throne in 1660. A number of theaters, including the Globe, were not open very long before the

Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. During the eighteen years of Commonwealth rule, years when the English theaters were closed, many of the traditions of playing Shakespeare were lost.

The new theater of the Restoration approached Shakespeare's plays very differently, rewriting and adapting his original scripts to suit the audience's contemporary tastes. It is left to scholars of Early Modern English drama to reconstruct the traditions of Elizabethan theater from clues left behind. ✪



COURTYARD-STYLE THEATER

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's unique performance space reflects elements of both the first public playhouses in London and the courtyards of inns-turned-theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage.

The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area with three galleries, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape of a capital “T.” The audience sits on three sides of the thrust stage, so the play is staged in the middle of the audience—much like the Elizabethan Swan theater's design, for which a traveler's careful sketch still



remains. This immersion of the stage and the action performed on it creates a three-dimensional theater that demands three-dimensional directing, acting and design elements.

The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated along the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses of the audience (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform.

As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors' energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. Architect David Taylor and his company, Theatre Projects Consultants, worked closely with Chicago Shakespeare Theater's leadership to design this courtyard theater. "It's important that we don't lose the performer among the faces, but it's essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what's going on," Taylor explains. "That's the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design."

"The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race," Taylor notes, "so we're putting Shakespeare into its proper context by making human faces the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater." According to Taylor, "this close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience. The courtyard experience was about leaning out of windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting." Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the "leaning rails" to watch the players below—like those watching from an inn's balconies centuries ago when a traveling troupe set up its temporary stage.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design: "They're not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There's a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage." Actors are always fed by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage.



Chicago Shakespeare Theater

Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-

Avon. The Swan served as a model for Chicago Shakespeare Theater. With their deep thrust stages, both were designed to create an intimate relationship between actors and audience. Prominent architectural elements in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience and natural wood that creates a feeling of warmth. Brick is an aesthetic choice but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustical choice. The angle of the bricks in the side walls helps diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting and rigging systems are

all state-of-the-art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's design accommodates a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space.

Shakespearean theater is about people. As Taylor describes the experience, "You're the scenery. You're the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front, and out of, you." 🌟



CST FOR \$20

Chicago Shakespeare is committed to making our productions accessible for everyone, so CST for \$20 was designed to fit the budget of students. We have allocated thousands of tickets across the entire season, giving our friends under 35 the opportunity to see world-class theater at an everyday price. Anyone under 35 can buy up to two \$20 tickets per production. You and your students will be receiving information on CST for \$20 when you come to the Theater.

**You can find out more at
www.chicagoshakes.com/cst20.**

TIMELINE



1300

- 1326** Founding of universities at Oxford and Cambridge
- 1348** Boccaccio's *Decameron*
- 1349** Bubonic Plague kills one-third of England's population
- 1387** Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

1400

- ca.1440** Johannes Gutenberg invents printing press
- 1472** Dante's *Divine Comedy* first printed
- 1492** Christopher Columbus lands at Cuba
- 1497** Vasco da Gama sails around Cape of Good Hope

1500

- 1501-4** Michelangelo's *David* sculpture
- 1503** Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*
- 1512** Copernicus' *Commentariolus* published, theorizing that Earth and other planets revolve around sun
- 1518** License to import 4,000 African slaves to Spanish American colonies granted to Lorens de Gominzot
- 1519** Ferdinand Magellan's trip around the world
- 1519** Conquest of Mexico by Cortez
- 1522** Luther's translation of the New Testament

1525

- 1531** Henry VIII recognized as Supreme Head of the Church of England
- 1533** Henry VIII secretly marries Anne Boleyn, and is excommunicated by Pope
- 1539** Hernando de Soto explores Florida
- 1540** G.L. de Cardenas "discovers" Grand Canyon
- 1541** Hernando de Soto "discovers" the Mississippi

1550

- 1558** Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I
- 1562** John Hawkins begins slave trade between Guinea and West Indies
- 1564** Birth of William Shakespeare and Galileo
- 1565** Pencils first manufactured in England
- 1570** Pope Pius V excommunicates Queen Elizabeth
- 1573** Francis Drake sees the Pacific Ocean

1575

- 1576** Mayor of London forbids theatrical performances in the City
Burbage erects first public theater in England
(the "Theater" in Shoreditch)
- 1577** Drake's trip around the world
- 1580** *Essays* of Montaigne published
- 1582** Marriage license issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway
Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

ca. 1592-1595 comedies

Love's Labor's Lost
The Comedy of Errors
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
A Midsummer Night's Dream
The Taming of the Shrew

histories

1, 2, 3 Henry VI
Richard III
King John

tragedies

Titus Andronicus
Romeo and Juliet

the sonnets

probably written
in this period



TIMELINE

- 1585** Christening of son Hamnet and twin Judith
1587 Mary Queen of Scots executed
1588 Destruction of the Spanish Armada
1592 Shakespeare listed with the Lord Chamberlain's Men
1593-4 Plague closes London playhouses for 20 months
1595 Coat of arms granted to Shakespeare's father, John
1596 Death of son Hamnet, age 11
Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
1597 Shakespeare, one of London's most successful playwrights,
buys New Place, one of the grandest houses in Stratford-upon-Avon
1599 Globe Theatre opens, as home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men,
with Shakespeare as part-owner
- ## 1600
- 1602** Oxford University's Bodleian Library opens
1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth, coronation of James I
Lord Chamberlain's Men become the King's Men upon endorsement of James I
1603-11 Plague closes London playhouses for at least 68 months (nearly 6 years)
1605 Cervantes' *Don Quixote Part 1* published
1607 Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall
Founding of Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement on
American mainland
1608 *A true relation of such Occurances and Accidents of Note as hath passed
in Virginia* by John Smith
Galileo constructs astronomical telescope
1609 Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial indoor theater,
becomes winter home of the King's Men
1611 "King James Version" of the Bible published
1613 Globe Theatre destroyed by fire
1614 Globe Theatre rebuilt
1615 Galileo faces the Inquisition for the first time
1616 Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quinney
Death of William Shakespeare, age 52
1618 Copernican system condemned by Roman Catholic Church
1619 First African slaves arrive in Virginia
1623 The First Folio, the first compiled text of Shakespeare's complete works published

1625

- 1625** James I dies, succeeded by Charles I
1633 Galileo recants before the Inquisition
1636 Harvard College founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts
1642 Civil War in England begins
1642 Puritans close theaters throughout England until following the Restoration
of the Monarchy, 18 years later, with Charles II
1649 Charles I beheaded
1649 Commonwealth declared

CA. 1596-1600 comedies

- The Merchant of Venice
Much Ado About Nothing
✪ The Merry Wives of Windsor
As You Like It
Twelfth Night

histories

- Richard II
1,2 Henry IV
Henry V

tragedies

- Julius Caesar

CA. 1601-1609 comedies

- Troilus and Cressida
All's Well That Ends Well

tragedies

- Hamlet
Othello
King Lear
Macbeth
Antony and Cleopatra
Timon of Athens
Coriolanus
Measure for Measure

CA. 1609-1613 romances

- Pericles
Cymbeline
The Winter's Tale
The Tempest
The Two Noble Kinsmen

histories

- Henry VIII

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Residents of Windsor

MISTRESS MARGARET PAGE, a wife of Windsor

MASTER GEORGE PAGE, husband to Mistress Page

ANNE PAGE, daughter to the Pages, sometimes called "Nan"

WILLIAM PAGE, son to the Pages

MISTRESS ALICE FORD, a wife of Windsor

MASTER FRANK FORD, husband to Mistress Ford

JOHN, servant to the Fords

ROBERT, servant to the Fords

SIR HUGH EVANS, a Welsh parson

DOCTOR CAIUS, a French physician*

MISTRESS QUICKLY, housekeeper to Dr. Caius

JOHN RUGBY, servant to Dr. Caius

ROBERT SHALLOW, a country justice

ABRAHAM SLENDER, a county squire, and nephew to Shallow

PETER SIMPLE, servant to Slender

HOST of the Garter Inn

FENTON, suitor to Anne Page

* in CST's production, a veterinarian

Visitors from London

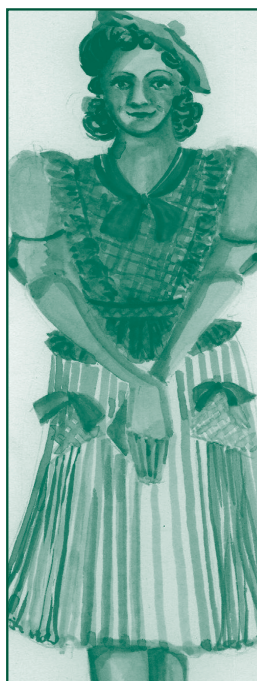
SIR JOHN FALSTAFF, a knight of the Court

ROBIN, page to Falstaff

BARDOLPH, soldier from Falstaff's regiment

NYM, another soldier

PISTOL, another soldier



COSTUME RENDERINGS BY SUSAN E. MICKEY



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



THE STORY

The citizens of Windsor lead decidedly provincial lives. The men go to work, the children go to school—and the women? They take care of everything else. Masters Page and Ford are two well-to-do citizens whose daily lives convivially converge in this country town.

Then Sir John Falstaff bursts onto the scene and schemes to seduce two wealthy Windsor wives in a last-ditch effort to buttress his sagging finances—Mistresses Page and Ford, as it happens. While the wives, privy to his plan, step forward to take matters into their own capable hands, Master Ford falls hook, line and sinker for the rumors spread by Pistol and Nym, who have their own agenda after being dismissed from Falstaff's service.

Sir John is not the only one with amorous ambitions in Windsor. As the wives deflect Falstaff's advances, the Pages' daughter is pursued by several bachelors of varying desirability: Slender, the dimwitted nephew of a local justice; Dr. Caius, a Frenchman whose reason is subordinated by his emotions; and Master Fenton, a young American whose life is changed by falling in love. Enter Mistress Quickly, who serves as a go-between for any soul in need of assistance.

Scandal, suspicion and sweet revenge reign presently in Windsor—until order can be restored and life continue in its merry fashion. ★



ACT-BY-ACT SYNOPSIS

Act 1

Justice Shallow complains of his injuries at the hands of Sir John Falstaff to his nephew, Abraham Slender, and the Welsh clergyman, Sir Hugh Evans. Evans encourages Shal-

low to put aside his grievances and seek the hand of Anne Page on behalf of his nephew, Slender. At the Pages' house, they find Falstaff, who admits unabashedly the wrongs he has done to Justice Shallow.

Attempting to assist Slender's courtship of Anne Page, Evans sends Slender's man, Peter Simple, with a message to Mistress Quickly, enlisting her support. Falstaff tells the Host of the Garter Inn that, because his expenses are too heavy, he must discharge some of his followers. Seeking to improve his financial situation, Falstaff discloses his plans to seduce two mistresses: Ford and Page, Windsor's most prosperous housewives. Pistol and Nym refuse to serve as his postmen and are thus dismissed by Falstaff. In revenge, they resolve to warn Masters Ford and Page of Falstaff's designs on their wives.

Simple's visit to Mistress Quickly is interrupted by the return of her master, Dr. Caius, a Frenchman living in Windsor. When he learns why Evans has sent Simple to see Mistress Quickly, Caius (who is also pursuing Anne Page) resolves to challenge Evans, his rival's supporter, to a duel. After Caius departs, Fenton, a poor English nobleman, reveals himself to Mistress Quickly as yet a third suitor to Anne Page. ★

Act 2

Both Mistresses Page and Ford are outraged at receiving identical love letters from Sir John, and decide to teach him a lesson by leading him on and making a fool of him. Pistol and Nym warn Ford and Page of Falstaff's intentions. Ford is overcome by jealousy and decides to put his wife's fidelity to the test. When Mistress Quickly, acting as go-between for Fenton, arrives to see Anne Page, the two wives enlist her help in delivering messages to Falstaff. Shallow and the Host arrive to report plans of a duel between Evans and Caius.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



Ford asks the Host to introduce him, disguised as a "Mr. Brook," to Falstaff. Mistress Quickly informs Falstaff that Mistress Ford expects her husband to be away from home that day. Also delivering an encouraging message from Mistress Page, Mistress Quickly insists that neither woman knows of the other's pursuit by Falstaff. Ford, disguised as Brook, meets with Falstaff and offers generous sums in return for Falstaff's seduction of Mistress Ford—then, posits Mr. Brook, she could no longer claim chastity as her reason for denying his own pursuits. Caius looks for Evans at their designated meeting place, but the Host, trying to avoid a duel, has sent Evans to the neighboring village of Frogmore. He persuades Caius to accompany him there, promising they'll encounter Anne Page.

Act 3

Evans waits for Caius at Frogmore. When the Host and company finally arrive with him, they demand a verbal rather than physical confrontation. Evans and Caius, perceiving the other's mockery, agree to get even with the Host.

Ford, again disguised as Brook, has been warned of Falstaff's appointment with his wife and plans to surprise the pair. He persuades Caius, Evans and Page to accompany him home, where he promises to reveal a monster. But Mistress Page reports their imminent arrival, so Falstaff is hustled into a basket of clothing and carried from the house. Ford intercepts those men carrying the load and questions them but accepts their answer—that the basket is filled with dirty laundry—without ever looking inside. In vain, he searches the house with his friends, who chide him for his unreasonable jealousy. The basket with its contents is tossed into the river.

Fenton expresses to Anne Page his despair at not gaining her father's favor. When the Pages interrupt, Master Page orders Fenton to keep away from his daughter. Fenton appeals to Mistress Page, who says she's impartial and agreeable to the gentleman most pleasing to her daughter.

Falstaff laments his humiliation at being dumped into the river. Yet, when Mistress Quickly brings a second invitation from Mistress Ford, Falstaff agrees to another visit. Ford, still disguised, learns of the second rendezvous' appointed hour and is certain that he will catch the pair together this time.

Act 4

Mistress Page again warns Falstaff and Mistress Ford that Master Ford is returning to surprise them. To conceal the would-be lover's identity and humiliate him yet again, the wives dress Falstaff up as an old woman. Ford, believing the "old woman" to be a witch, beats her out of the house. Thinking

Falstaff should have learned his lesson by now, the two wives resolve to tell their husbands the whole story and let them decide whether to torment Sir John further.

Ford and Page believe more sport should be made of Falstaff—this time, in front of the entire community. The women propose another encounter with Falstaff, whom they instruct to dress as a mythical hunter to meet them in Windsor forest. Anne Page and the children of the town will pretend to be fairies and harass the disguised schemer. Privately, Master Page arranges for Slender to elope with Anne during the masquerade; Mistress Page and Caius plan the same.

Page has arranged with Slender—and Mistress Page with Caius—how each suitor shall recognize their daughter during the masquerade, not knowing that Fenton has already secured Anne's promise to elope with him and has enlisted the Host to arrange for their marriage that night.

Act 5

Falstaff meets the two wives in Windsor Forest. Wearing his character's customary buck's head, he seeks them at the appointed time and place. As they embrace, Mistress Quickly, costumed as a "fairy queen," orders the town's children to pinch and torment Falstaff. Slender and Caius both steal away with the fairies they believe to be Anne, but she has already stolen away with Fenton.

As the tricks are exposed and the masks shed, Falstaff realizes he has been bested and Master Ford promises to trust his wife, giving up his irrational jealousies. Though deceived, Master Page accepts and blesses his daughter's marriage to Fenton and all rejoice as they're invited home to "laugh this sport o'er by a country fire." 🌟



Photo by Liz Lauren

HEIDI KETTNERING AS MISTRESS FORD AND SCOTT JAECK AS SIR JOHN FALSTAFF
IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*,
DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING NEW

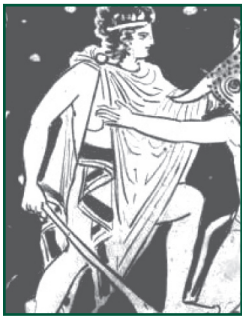
Shakespeare's Sources for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

He was more original than the originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.

—WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, 1846

The detection of [Shakespeare's sources] has its own fascination and is useful insofar as they illustrate the workings of Shakespeare's imagination, but the most notable feature of the play is the dramatist's inventiveness, brilliantly fusing scattered elements from legend, folklore and earlier books and plays into a whole that remains as fresh and original now as when it was composed.

—R.A. FOAKES, 1984



According to early eighteenth-century tradition, Shakespeare composed *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the request of Queen Elizabeth, who so appreciated Falstaff in both parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* that she longed to see the character in love. The queen, so the story goes, commanded that the play be finished in fourteen days. This legend, though generally dismissed by scholars, helps to point out how Shakespeare's final product from its very inception

has existed in relation to his other works. Shakespeare spun his stories from threads already well known to Elizabethan audiences. Though the search for definitive sources of *Merry Wives* has been largely unsuccessful, it is much informed by prior European literary history.

The main arc of *Merry Wives* draws heavily on the older, well-established mode of *fabliau*. This French genre adopted into English by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* chronicles what Anne Barton called the "sexual misadventure" of common folk: A would-be lover seeks the illicit favors of a married woman and the story recounts the course of his frustrated suit or the consummation of their cuckoldry.

The Falstaff-Ford/Brook sequence closely resembles a tale of this type in Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone* in which a student at Bologna consults his professor on the science of love, neither knowing the woman he seeks is the professor's wife. When the husband grows suspicious, he raids the house but the student-lover is concealed under a heap of laundry. Still unawares, the student tells his teacher of his close call and that he has planned another meeting that night. The professor gathers townspeople to interrupt his student and untrue wife, but the lover has already been smuggled out by the time he assaults a pile of clothes. No English translation of this Italian story is known to have been available to Shakespeare, but he could have come upon the Italian originals or learned of them by word of mouth.

Rather than old Italian manuscripts, Shakespeare's most compelling inspiration was more likely to come from the world around him. The confusing ordeal with the German horse thieves likely mirrors public gossip about a German nobleman obsessively intent on being inducted into the Queen's Order of the Garter. Previously undocumented, the story of Herne the Hunter either originates from local oral tradition or was a Shakespearean invention—though years after the play was written, a "Herne's Oak" was singled out in Windsor Park, as were the "real" houses of Page and Ford. There also exist many analogues to the courtship of Anne Page, a plot in which unwelcome suits are undone by resourceful young people. The Bianca-Lucentio plot of Shakespeare's own (and earlier) *The Taming of the Shrew* is just one example.

What is perhaps most interesting in this discussion are the departures Shakespeare makes from his source material. Unlike many *fabliaux*, including Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*,

Falstaff's plans for seduction are never realized; the English wives are, in fact, virtuous. This essential change poses many questions about a work's premise and the author's intentions. Utilizing a conventional formula, Shakespeare adds sparks of local color and deft characterization. Most important is the

play itself, the brilliant picture of life offered by *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and how it appropriates older stories' traditions to relate to us today. ☆

**What is perhaps most interesting...
are the departures Shakespeare makes
from his source material. Falstaff's plans
for seduction are never realized; the
English wives are, in fact, virtuous.**

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



WHAT'S IN A NAME? UNPACKING COMEDY

Comedy. The word conjures up images ranging from the wildly physical antics of The Three Stooges to the dry, academic humor of Sheldon Cooper—or the in-your-face raunchiness of Daniel Tosh. Our responses are as diverse as the comic spectrum itself, ranging from a simple, knowing smile to side-splitting laughter. More than anything else it sets out to do, comedy is meant to delight, to allow us to laugh at our own humanity despite shortcomings, bad judgment calls and inevitable mistakes.

Shakespeare forayed frequently into comedy, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* maintains a unique position among his results. Not strictly a romantic comedy like *Much Ado About Nothing* or *As You Like It*, and far removed from the disturbing so-called "problem plays" of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Merry Wives* is a domestic story that grounds itself in the everyday life of the middle-class world. *Merry Wives* is also Shakespeare's only English comedy, occupying a world apart from his more favored foreign (and one-step-removed) locales. It takes its cues from the idiosyncrasies of the citizens of Windsor, a small town near London, much like Shakespeare's own native Stratford. He characterizes as he dramatizes, embellishing upon classic character types such as the lusty gallant, the jealous husband, the town fool and the busybody housekeeper.

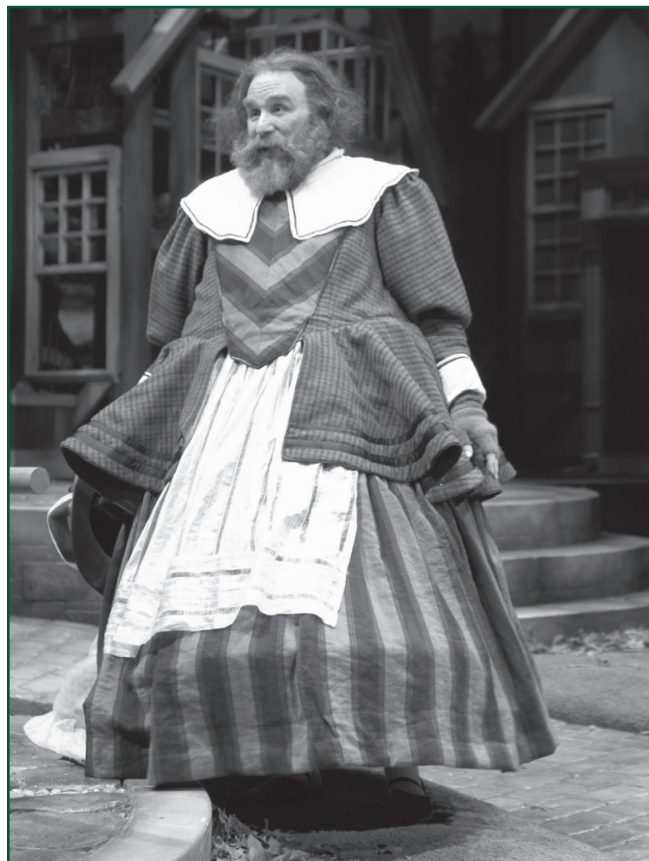
Most of the comedy in *The Merry Wives* is at the expense of "outsiders"—those characters not native to Windsor. The non-English residents of the town, Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, and Dr. Caius, the Frenchman, are at the receiving end of many of Shakespeare's comic jabs. The English visitors, Sir John Falstaff and his band of followers—Bardolph, Nym and Pistol—add a quartet of comics to the center of this romp with their deception and scheming.

Falstaff, the leader of this merry quartet, has perhaps generated more scholarly controversy than any Shakespearean character apart from Hamlet. H. J. Oliver called Falstaff "the finest comic character the English stage had yet known or was perhaps ever to know." But Falstaff's seemingly untouchable wit and his never-having-been bested status in the three Henry histories lead some to argue the character was "mishandled" in *Merry Wives*. H. B. Charlton accused Shakespeare of "parricide" for the alterations made to Falstaff in this play. Notwithstanding, the *Merry Wives'* Sir John deprecates himself just as much as he boosts his

own persona, often when speaking of his obvious girth. References to Falstaff's "swelling" and "portly belly" indicate a character who, despite his seemingly untouchable ego, knows exactly who and what he is.

Windsor's own residents do not escape Shakespeare's razor-sharp pen. Ford's irrational jealousy can't help but prompt laughter. Never easily pigeon-holed, Shakespeare's character is more than a simple comic device. His conviction that it is better to be jealous and wrong than to be oblivious and cuckolded prompts real questions about gender relations, self-esteem and other more serious matters. The foolish Slender always offers a quick return to a carefree, comedic world.

With such a richly textured cast of characters, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* stands as one of Shakespeare's most beloved comedies, a favorite on stage every century since it was first performed four hundred years ago. More than in any other of his comedies, the clash of cultures in an English setting, the inclusion of familiar place names, even the schoolboy's terror in coping with Latin, all suggest a kind of nostalgic return to a world like Stratford, the world of a small country town that Shakespeare knew well. 🌟



GREG VINKLER AS FALSTAFF IN CST'S 2004 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.

Photo by Dan Rest



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: A LOOK INTO WINDSOR

The world of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is one of constant cultural collision: men challenge women; women confound men; the old test the young; the young outwit the old; and citizens of all social positions share one municipal space. Some of the most significant and humorous contests involve outsiders that reside in or pass through Windsor, especially the two non-Englishmen in the play: Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, and Dr. Caius, the French physician. These men help reveal the powerful preoccupation Shakespeare's England had with the coming of foreign influence.

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the gap between the once-isolated British Isles and the European continent steadily narrowed. With the onset of the age of exploration, English boundaries became more permeable to merchant trade, outside invasion, and general foreignness in the way of ideas, lifestyle and culture. Such intrusions (as many English considered them) threatened the destruction of traditional English values. Anti-Italian scorn was particularly strong. As home of the Catholic Church, Italy was perceived by Protestant England to be decadent and corrupt, sentiments captured by many of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The word "Italianate" conjured up images of poisoned devotionals and chairs designed to trap unsuspecting sitters. France, too, was considered a hotbed of negative influence, especially concerning fashion. Outlandishly ornamented headdresses, pleated ruffs, padded doublets, puffed sleeves and richly decorated hose imported from France seemed designed to increase English expenses.

While the "sophisticated" welcomed new styles, conservative ranks desecrated vanity. The use of cosmetics, the smoking of tobacco, the drinking of imported wine, vices of every kind were attributed by to corrupt foreign influences. The moral debate between continental and English values, imbued with strong religious overtones, was bitter. Attacking the sinfulness of extravagant clothing became an integral part of the larger Puritan movement's condemnation of lavish, worldly living.

As potentially volatile as these issues were, *The Merry Wives* treats them all humorously. Neither the citizens of Windsor nor the outsiders are ever in serious jeopardy. Even when the out-of-town, worldly Falstaff introduces still more cultural influences, his threat is never really serious. The integrity of Mistresses Page and Ford renders his immorality impotent. And the foreign Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh Evans never duel because the community prevents it. We are, after all, in the world of comedy.

The playful ridicule of the "outsiders" may implicate the ways in which a culture—any culture—protects and maintains itself at the expense of those who speak, act and think differently from the "natives." The play certainly presents itself as fruitful ground for this examination. Ultimately, though, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ends with the joyous invitation that all "laugh this sport o'er." Here, there is room for everybody, cultural reconciliation on Windsor's terms. ✪

WINDSOR'S (AND ENGLAND'S) WOMEN

While debating the precise date of its genesis, scholars and historians agree that England at the writing of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was in the midst of profound social debate. The traditional picture of a highly ordered, stable society—for centuries the romanticized view of Elizabethan England—has been widely challenged. Instead, more contemporary scholars are in agreement that the world at the turn of the seventeenth century was a world in flux. Fundamentally incompatible social thoughts stood uneasily side by side as "new philosophy" undermined previously absolute values; old certainties were unforgivingly called into question. Drama, then as now, served as a medium especially suited to mediate divergent and incompatible points of view.

Central to this debate was the status of women in Elizabethan society. While there was no unified activity comparable to more recent women's rights movements, there were sixteenth-century women preoccupied with the role of women in marriage, the rights of women in the home, the education of women, and the laws and statutes that governed a woman's behavior.

Many marriages were still arranged and husbands exerted near-absolute authority over their wives. A woman's legal right to hold and dispose of property was strictly governed by pre-arranged marriage contracts. In the eyes of the law, man and woman became one entity at the time of their marriage, with the husband at the head. He executed control over his wife's property and could sell, give away or even destroy it at will. In a very real sense, a wife surrendered her liberty, her estate and her authority to her husband.

Nevertheless, during this same period now referred to as "Early Modern England," there was an increasing secular and religious emphasis on the importance of genuine emotional and intellectual companionship in marriage. So-called "companionate marriage" stressed the emotional tie between husband and wife and underscored the importance of partnership in childrearing and household management. As you might expect,

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



there was considerable tension between this egalitarian ideology and rigidly hierarchical marital traditions, a tension that can be seen in marriage “conduct books” of the time. How things played out in individual English households we can never know for certain, but as *Merry Wives* might suggest, no ideology can wholly resolve the complexity of wedded roles and relationships. What is certain is that this was a time of intense cultural debate, as England adjusted to vast and rapid religious, social and economic changes. Like so much else, gender roles, which had been dictated by medieval traditions for centuries, became the subject of deliberation and revision.

Of greatest influence during the mid-sixteenth century was the “Homily on Marriage,” which drove home (literally) the inferior status, rights and character of a wife. This weekly reminder, ordered by the Crown in 1562, revealed a weak creature lacking strength and constancy of mind, prone to weak affections and vain fantasies and opinions. The ideal woman was submissive, charitable, virtuous and modest. Some Elizabethans went so far as to revive Platonic doubts as to whether a woman could even be considered a reasoning creature. Does she, after all, have a soul?

Despite such negative attitudes, the sixteenth century also saw a steady stream of books praising women. Even so, many men remained doubtful of a woman’s worth beyond childbearing, child-rearing and household maintenance. Bishop Aylmer, in a sermon before Queen Elizabeth, steps very cautiously between two viewpoints:

Women are of two sorts: some of them are wiser, better learned, discreeter, and more constant than a number of men; but another and worse sort of them are fond, foolish, wanton, flibbergibs, tattlers, triflers, wavering, witless, without council, feeble, careless, rash, proud, dainty, talebearers, eavesdroppers, rumour-raisers, eviltongued, worse-minded, and in everyway doltified with the dregs of the devil’s dunghill.

—BISHOP JOHN AYLMER, 1577

Despite the Bishop’s conciliatory soft-stepping, his words reflect the prevailing attitude that existed in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Ironically, the sixteenth century saw more powerful queens on the throne than at any other time in English history: Henry VIII’s first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was a favorite of the pope and spiritual guardian of English Catholi-

cism; his two daughters, Mary I and Elizabeth I, ruled in succession for fifty years from 1553 until 1603.

The sixteenth century saw heated debate about the education of women. For a brief period, during the middle third of the century, there was a vigorous push by Renaissance humanists for classical female education. A handful of aristocratic women, such as Lady Jane Grey and Queen Elizabeth, were as expert as men in classical grammar and languages. Still, among the non-elite, domestic skills were the staples of a girl’s education; all the rest was ornamentation. In a widely told

story, King James I, who succeeded Queen Elizabeth to the throne in 1603, upon introduction to a young woman accomplished in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, asked, “But can she spin?”

In 1561, a translation of Castiglione’s *The Courtier* introduced a very different ideal of womanhood, whose primary qualities were the social graces—

skill in music, painting, drawing, dancing and needlework. Again, many women outside the upper classes hadn’t the opportunity to partake of “charm school” training, but eventually this new courtly ideal reached women of all classes. Education in the social graces did nothing to violate the Protestant, especially Puritan, ethic of woman as dutiful daughter or wife; skill in such “womanly” tasks posed no threat to male superiority.

In a sense, the controlling of women, whether in the father-daughter or husband-wife relationship, was perceived as suitable conformity to the authorities of Church and State. A woman’s subservience to her father or husband was likened to her submission to the Crown or God. These analogs between family, church and state were commonplace in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Changes in the roles and status of women were an implied challenge to traditional authority at all society’s levels. If a wife could challenge her husband, why could not a Parliament challenge the Crown?

Henry VIII’s establishment of the English Church and the shift from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism actually served to limit women’s chances for self-expression. Women lost the opportunity to vent their problems and frustrations to an objective third party in priestly confession outside the home. The result was greater confinement to the home than had been realized previously.



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Interestingly, control over women was least pervasive in working-class families. Mobility and fluidity of the family as a nuclear unit was greater because economic considerations did not so much shelter working-class families within the home. Fathers often were absent for long periods of time seeking work, resulting in wives exerting greater power. In addition, both male and female children were often apprenticed to wealthier families to learn a marketable trade. Consequently, husbands had less control over their wives, and parents, less control over their children. Driven mostly by practical concerns, the average English family was probably less rigid in its configuration than was posed by earlier scholarship about this period.

Besides, public rhetoric and sentiment did not always match private reality. Among all classes, many wives were true partners with their husbands and had considerable control over household life, sharing responsibility for the servants, children and household finances. (Mistress Ford did, after all, have "all the rule of her husband's purse.") During the latter part of the sixteenth century, women were increasingly visible outside the home, running counter to Puritan practice and threatening the control exercised by fathers and husbands. Despite the gradual emergence of women into English public life, the prevailing

attitude persevered: women's primary contributions to English culture were child-bearing, child-rearing, and household maintenance.

The Merry Wives of Windsor provocatively reflects some of the most negative Renaissance stereotypes of women and reveals how poorly they describe Shakespeare's housewives. Both Falstaff, confident he can seduce two Mistresses to restore his fortune, and Frank Ford, convinced of his wife's predilection for infidelity, reflect conventional English attitudes of the late sixteenth century. Surely it is the women who stand as protectors of traditional values in *Merry Wives*. It is the women whose virtue and integrity are never in doubt. And it is the women who never falter in their convictions or choices.

Was Shakespeare challenging the dominant beliefs of the time? Can women be both "merry" and virtuous? Is *The Merry Wives of Windsor* merely a nostalgic return to the setting of childhood, or is it a veiled, pointed commentary on the conservative, traditional values of late sixteenth-century England? We may never be able to answer these questions, but it's altogether possible these were questions Shakespeare often asked of himself. ✪



Photo by Dan Rest

FROM LEFT - JOEL HATCH AS MASTER PAGE, LISE BRUNEAU AS MISTRESS PAGE, ORA JONES AS MISTRESS FORD, ROSS LEHMAN AS MASTER FORD
IN CST'S 2004 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.

SCHOLARS' PERSPECTIVES



A LOCAL HABITATION AND A NAME



STEWART SHERMAN, Associate Professor of English at Fordham University, is a specialist in eighteenth-century literature and author of *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785*.

"The poet's pen," says Duke Theseus late in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "... gives to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name. Such tricks hath strong imagination..."

A few years after the *Dream*, Shakespeare's strong imagination would perform this trick with unusual specificity. In a play first touted as *Sir John Falstaff and the Merry Wives of Windsor*, he combined an emphatically local habitation—Windsor, a prosperous suburb thirty miles from his own playhouse—with the name of the most celebrated and resilient character he had yet created. Though he may at first have intended Falstaff for a comic turn in a single play (*Henry IV, Part 1*), he ended up featuring him in four, of which the *Merry Wives* may well (or may not) have been the last. According to legend, appealing but unreliable, Queen Elizabeth, enamored of Falstaff in the earlier plays, commanded Shakespeare to write "one play more," in which he was to show Sir John "in love." And that's what we get to see in this one play more: Sir John in love, or lust, or greed (neither he nor we can be quite sure which) with those merry wives.

But the play itself's in love with Windsor. Geographically, the *Merry Wives* is unique in Shakespeare's canon. Apart from the history plays, necessarily centered in London, no other Shakespeare play transpires in England, and even the histories travel far afield (France, Wales). Here then is Shakespeare's most local play of all; no other cleaves so assiduously close to home. Part of this play's point is that there's no place like it.

Windsor differs from other Shakespearean settings in what might be called its social tessitura, the pitch and spectrum of its characters. There's a lower proportion of higher-ups—no kings, queens, princes, dukes—and a wide diversity within the middle register: two prosperous bourgeois households, a genial innkeeper, a Welsh priest, a French doctor, and more small children running about than anywhere else in Shakespeare.

The variety makes itself manifest in language too. In this emphatically English play, the English tongue is twisted in ways innumerable, at the hands of an English playwright utterly intoxicated with it and infinitely capable of putting it through new permutations. Out of mangled oaths, preposterously protracted small talk, impenetrable foreign accents, cross-lingual double entendres and a Latin tutorial gone horribly awry, Shake-

speare constructs a deliriously comic tower of babble. (In a fine finishing touch, he names his luckless Latin pupil William.) One character remarks of Falstaff, "He loves the gallimaufry"—a stew made up of any and all ingredients at hand. Windsor itself proves such a melting pot, and in its capacious laughing way, the *Merry Wives* loves a gallimaufry too.

But what it may love best is the merry wives themselves: Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, witty, collusive, and indomitable. Appalled by Falstaff's adulterous advances, they giddily conspire in his punishment. Our pleasure in their company arises partly from their pleasure in one another's, partly from the ingenuity of their tricks and traps. They're clearly crazy about each other, an Elizabethan Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz, but without the end-of-show subordination to their menfolk, whom they best at almost every turn. And their inventiveness aligns strikingly with Shakespeare's: in their three attempts to foil Falstaff, they end up scripting, directing and starring in their own remarkably subtle play, via performances of ardor and alarm faked for the fat knight's benefit.

Their climactic stunt, involving a midnight rendezvous in a nearby forest, mingles the domestic and the fantastic with strong echoes from an earlier comedy. "I do perceive," Falstaff shouts as his distress peaks, "that I am made an ass"; in that last word audiences may well recall such another figure of fun. Like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Falstaff (wearing buck's horns as his prototype wore ass's ears) believes himself improbably beloved, and finds himself in the woods at night surrounded by what he thinks are fairies acting on the dictates of a formidable Fairy Queen. Unlike Bottom, though, Falstaff experiences pain, not passion—and in a markedly different, more down-to-earth context: the Fairy Queen is in ordinary life the doctor's housekeeper, the puckish chief sprite is in truth the Welsh priest; and the fairies themselves are Windsor children in masquerade. Shakespeare writes as though, this time round, the local habitation and its inhabitants can provide magic and mirth enough on their own, without supernatural intervention.

What then of the big name whom Shakespeare has transposed into this new milieu out of the history plays that first gave him birth, berth and girth? Falstaff fares badly, and Falstaff fares well. "[I've] suffered the pangs of three several deaths," he exclaims at one point, exasperated and exhausted by the punitive ordeals the merry wives have conjured up. (Hyperbole has always been his strong suit.) And during that final forest punishment, he appears to suffer rejection at the hands of the tight-knit community the play so deeply prizes.

But in Shakespeare's hands, the punishment readily enough transmutes into something more generous. When Falstaff complains of having suffered "three separate deaths," he may, from the vantage of Shakespeare's audience, be telling a subtle truth. In his three history plays, Falstaff "dies" three different ways. In the first, he cunningly (and comically) counterfeits death on the battlefield long enough for the audience to believe him actually dead, up



SCHOLARS' PERSPECTIVES

to the hilarious moment of his reanimation. In the second he suffers a rejection so painful that his friends fear he will shortly die of it—though the playwright, in an epilogue, promptly reassures his audience that their favorite will return in the sequel. In that sequel, though, the playwright potently breaks his promise: Falstaff never reappears; instead, he dies offstage.

For Shakespeare's first audiences, subjected in the histories to this piquantly orchestrated sequence of delight, death and disappointment, the *Merry Wives* may well have figured as an all unlooked-for resurrection. Here Falstaff remains alive, self-admiring and reasonably cheerful (despite the occasional sputtering complaint) from start to finish. And perhaps beyond. Some of the final scene's homespun enchantment rubs off on him. Dressed, at the merry wives' instructions, as a horned figure out of folklore, he may attain a measure of that immortality befitting what Shakespeare's strongest imagination had already made of him: a mighty and anarchic English myth. ♣

WINDSOR WASHING



WENDY WALL, is Professor of English at Northwestern University, specializes in Early Modern English Literature and Culture, 1500–1660 and is the author of *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama*.

We don't often think about high art as concerning itself with things like grease and dirt: these are the realities of daily life, not the subject of Shakespearean drama. But *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is an extraordinary play because it makes us reconsider the importance of what we deem trivial. Shakespeare's only comedy set in an English small town is also the comedy boasting the most prose and the most references to household life. The play explores social standing, jealousy, civic order and the struggles of courtship. These issues are worked out in a plot rife with attention to practices and objects that are strikingly familiar: brewing, baking, dressing meat, mending clothes, canning preservatives, puddings, pippins, cheese, and most importantly, laundry; for laundering becomes an important metaphor for the baptismal cleansing that needs to take place in the town.

The play was probably written in 1597-98, after Shakespeare had created the character of Falstaff for his *Henry IV* history plays. If banished from the world of politics and history, Falstaff emerges resurrected in the most unlikely place: the bourgeois town of Windsor, where he is up to his old tricks of creative scamming. Here he comes up against the formidable power of both shrewd wives and a middle class citizenry sensitive to aristocratic intrusion.

When the jealous Mr. Ford intrudes upon his own home to search for his wife's presumed lover, he turns an everyday chore into a nightmarish confusion of tricked husbands, thanks to the women's handiwork. Spying a "buckbasket" (laundry basket), he rants, "Buck? I would I could wash myself of the buck..." Playing on the word "buck" as a symbol of a horned, cuckolded husband, as well as a lustful animal, Ford hilariously misses the fact that the wives have secured Falstaff within their own goods—in that same buckbasket.

The battle of the sexes surfaces in many of Shakespeare's plays, but never are women so clearly victorious over their male counterparts. "I'll exhibit a bill in the parliament for the putting down of men," says Mrs. Page upon receiving Falstaff's insulting duplicated love letter. Yet Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford turn to domestic rather than political action, as the play shows the women, using their housewifely authority to straighten out matters in the community at large.

The play deflates Falstaff's pretensions by making him into gross fat puddings, whale oil and cooking grease. The wives' attempts to purge him of lust consolidate their role as cooks, home doctors and housecleaners. Imagining themselves as almost supernatural launderers, they punish seducers and jealous husbands by becoming clever playwright figures: most tellingly they script Falstaff as dirty laundry; dress him as a gossiping woman, and finally have him pinched by fairies who set out to scour literal and moral filth. One character commands the fairies, "to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap;/ Where fires thou find'st unrak'd and hearths unswept." The dirt of the community can only be swept away, it seems, by attentive houseworkers; and the wives lead the men in creating order in Windsor where official authorities fail. As illusory projections, the fairies extend the merry wives' domestic power beyond the household into the reach of the court, forest and myth.

On the perimeters of the play, pushed to the margins, is the majestic court at Windsor, reminding the audience of another powerful woman in the period—Queen Elizabeth. But the citizens don't directly pay homage to the crown; they readily nominate the comic mis-speaker Mistress Quickly as their own workaday "fairy queen."

Merry Wives suggests that people's deepest emotions and fears are expressed in relation to the concrete things that they know best. If the play is successful, we not only laugh at Falstaff's woes, Ford's doubts, and the women's victory, but we also start to contemplate the reassuring if trivial features of our own lives that allow us to forge order out of disorder. At the end, everyone in Windsor joins by the fire to laugh at their "sport" and share a moment where differences in the community (marked by foreign accents as well as by gender and generation) fade in the spirit of merry England. We close immersed in powerful myth of the nation, a fantasy world that never strays far from the joys of home. ♣

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY



THE 20TH CENTURY LOOKS BACK AT *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*

The Merry Wives is a woman's play, written for a woman and emanating from a genius that knew as much of the womanhood of the world as he knew of its manhood. Falstaff's personality looms large on the horizon, and some can see nothing but Falstaff. The ton of corn that lies behind his ton of chaff may need looking for but it will still be there when the chaff has been all blown away, and the tact and integrity of these merry wives will take firm hold as the years go by.

—ROSA LEO GRINDON, 1902

[Falstaff] was ruthlessly trampled into extinction by Henry V: casting him off, the King killed his heart. Even more cruelly, so too did Shakespeare. It was murder in Hal; in Shakespeare, the crime worse than parricide—the slaughter of one's own offspring.

—HB CHARLTON, 1938

*The old man who once had missed nothing now misses everything; he has toppled from his balance, he is unintelligent...His dignity was never touched in Henry IV. In *The Merry Wives* he has none to lose...Shakespeare has written the part with great talent but without love.*

—MARK VAN DOREN, 1938

*The Merry Wives of Windsor is a very dull play indeed. We can be grateful for its having been written, because it provided the occasion of Verdi's *Falstaff*, a very great operatic masterpiece. Mr. Page, Shallow, Slender, and the Host disappear. I have nothing to say about Shakespeare's play, so let's hear Verdi.*

—W.H. AUDEN, 1947

*[Falstaff] is the spirit of festive inconsequence: self-indulgent, amoral anarchic, a reveler who is out to disrupt the everyday social order. This order refuses, however, to capitulate or be changed by him in the slightest. It simply closes ranks and reaffirms its original values against an outsider who, like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, is made ridiculous...*

—ANNE BARTON, 1974

Falstaff's principal fault at the time of the play, aside from some petty poaching and keeping of disreputable company, is that age has caught up with him...His instincts are now for survival only, and the objective of his assault on the wives of Windsor is not the satisfaction of lust but satisfaction of the belly.

—J.A. BRYANT, JR., 1974

The Windsorites consider themselves accomplished stylists, working imaginative effects with words. But words more often work against them. Language escapes the speakers' intended meaning and breaks free to lead a wayward life of its own. Punning is endemic in Windsor because words are slippery.

—WILLIAM CARROLL, 1977

*We must recognize that one of the major subjects of *Merry Wives* is the use and abuse of imagination. In its relation of Ford to Falstaff, in its inventive verbal style, and in its metaphors of playacting, the play first qualifies and then vindicates the power of the imagination to shape, even to transform 'reality,' and identifies this power with the more obvious power that every dramatist wields.*

—WILLIAM CARROLL, 1977

In this play, and this play alone, we meet Shakespeare at home...The play is solidly and comfortably bourgeois; it belongs to the new society of late Elizabethan times. The scene at Windsor is very close to the scene at Stratford."

—MURIEL C. BRADBROOK, 1979

[The Merry Wives is]...a true domestic drama, focused on marriage—the problems of achieving it and the perils of maintaining it. The enemies of good marriage which he singles out are greed, lust, jealousy, and stupidity.

—JEANNE ADDISON ROBERTS, 1979



WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

...farce is the exploitation of fears and resentments, conscious and unconscious—the fear that man is essentially only an animal and that chance totally controls the universe; the resentment of the repressions and frustrations of a social order. Comedy, on the other hand, is the literary equivalent of the theology of hope. It reinforces our confidence in social forms and asserts that there are orderly and beneficent forces at work in them however weak, imperfect, and absurd or cruel to the individual parts. The latter is an exact description of the tone of The Merry Wives.

—JEANNE ADDISON ROBERTS, 1979

In terms of Policy, Falstaff must go. He is a demon of jest, subversive to the State. No custom, no institution is safe from him. He will absorb or undermine all. The commonwealth casts its scapegoat Forth... Shakespeare who understands Hal, politics and reality, understands that his Falstaff is leading him along a royal road to a radical and anarchic non-conformism; he is nevertheless (or possibly therefore) reluctant to let him go...

—RUTH NEVO, 1980

Shakespeare's New Comedy inverts traditional feminine roles, thus transforming a male-oriented, male-dominated perspective into its antithetical opposite. And it is this transformation...that yields in place of the disjunctive alternatives of polarization, new sexual identities, new resolutions and new horizons.

—RUTH NEVO, 1980

To be very specific about the setting could limit [King Lear's] universality, its message. You cannot say the same thing about The Merry Wives of Windsor, which is essentially a comedy of social and sexual manners, which I believe needs the specific containment of a society. You have to perceive the way people interact with each other, their little habits, their manner of walking, their manner of speech, the places where they live, the things they do, the kind of society they had, in order to make that play work. It's hopeless to conceive of some vaguely universal version of The Merry Wives...

—BILL ALEXANDER, 1981

The setting is bourgeois, settled, prosperous and imbued with a moral complacency...The major themes of the play are the cornerstones of bourgeois life: possession of property, possession of women, and fear of theft...The host is jealous and possessive about his property; Caius is jealous and possessive about his house and closets; Ford is jealous and possessive about his wife; Page is jealous and possessive about his daughter, whom he sees as property to be disposed of as he chooses.

—MARILYN FRENCH, 1981

Falstaff's intended 'misuse' of Mistress Ford seems almost lighthearted when compared to her husband's self-centered hysteria.

—JAN LAWSON HINELY, 1982

Falstaff in Windsor is a stranded leviathan, a man hopelessly out of his element, beached and floundering.

—ANNE BARTON, 1985

Windsor itself, as a corporate entity, is the true protagonist of the comedy, not Falstaff, the shadowy young lovers, or even the merry wives themselves, who uphold its values so well.

—ANNE BARTON, 1985

The Merry Wives, is, in fact, not merely concerned with revenge: it is obsessed with it. Nearly every character in the play vows revenge on another, three separate revenge plots are carried out, and those who are not practicing their own revenges are frequently aiding others'. This alone would seem enough to create interest in a play whose author was soon to deal with the same them in tragedy; but for the most part critics have been unable to see beyond the bulk of the play's central character...Revenge in Shakespeare's comedies becomes a positive force, providing entertainment while restoring social harmony.

—LINDA ANDERSON, 1987

To the Queen's class function, the play raises no objection; the injustice of class divisions is not a serious concern for the play. On the other hand, Elizabeth symbolizes female ascendancy and this gender function becomes a source of misogynist discomfort...Like Elizabeth, the wives use love as a political device to shape, contain, and deny male desire.

—PETER ERICKSON, 1987

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY



And yet, as germs can be most threatening because their genetic make-up mirrors something in the organism they attack, so Falstaff...simply clarifies, parodies and exaggerates tendencies already existent in Windsor. Ford is just as culpable as Falstaff in equating love with possession. His jealousy is simply the other side of Falstaff's desire to possess women in both sexual and commercial senses....

—R.S. WHITE, 1991

The real danger of Falstaff is that he represents traits that already lie within the society of Windsor and must be kept under close control. His worst crime is to display in a kind of distorting mirror what all are like beneath the carefully maintained façade. This, more than his 'outsider' status, leads to his firm ejection from the society...

—R.S. WHITE, 1991

If Falstaff is defeated in The Merry Wives of Windsor, he is the same Sir John still, unsinkable in any water, irrepressible in any difficulty, impervious to discouragement because he knows and loves his own ability to slip from the grip of any adversity. He is a scapegoat whose own weight of sin is so great that he can bear all of Windsor's in addition without noticing the difference.

—ACE G. PILKINGTON, 1992

The Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor is not, of course, in love. If that is what Elizabeth demanded, she was not obeyed.

—ANNE BARTON, 1994

Falstaff fares as badly as he does in The Merry Wives of Windsor partly because the Shakespearean heroine is a phenomenon not dreamed of in his philosophy.

—ANNE BARTON, 1994

The community at Windsor has its flaws and delusions...but at heart it is sound, stable, and remarkable well defined...it represents the polar opposite of Falstaff's Eastcheap world, which is one of rootless individuals, separated from their family contexts and sometimes, like Prince Hal, in active rebellion against them.

—ANNE BARTON, 1994

The Merry Wives of Windsor is about love as it relates to the practicalities of life. The play exists within the mores of a social environment, not a poetic one like the woods of A Midsummer Night's Dream or As You Like It. Those woods are magical, mystical, murky, libidinous and Jungian. Windsor is quite different: it's a town, with tap water and mil and wine and chickens and buck-baskets. Love here is seen the way most of us experience it after the age of Romeo and Juliet: as something negotiable. It's part of a bourgeois barter, not a great mystical soul-bonding.

—RICHARD MONETTE, 1995

Shakespeare is always concerned with what is irrepressible in human nature. In the case of Merry Wives, it's jealousy, love and lust. They're the same ideas we see in Othello, told from a comedic point of view.

—DANEIL FISH, 1998

AND ANOTHER MILLENNIUM OF VIEWS...

Falstaff is the embodiment (and a very large body it is) of the hope and pleasure that make life worthwhile. It is hard to imagine anyone of Falstaff's obvious intelligence and sophistication being deceived not once but three times. Harold Bloom, who can't imagine it, calls the Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor 'a nameless imposter.' However, Falstaff is not taken in by the deceptions of the merry wives so much as he is lifted up by his own imaginations. He hopes and believes that some good, some great pleasure will come to him today, tomorrow, or the day after.

—ACE G. PILKINGTON AND ANGEL M. PILKINGTON, 2000

If Mistress Page had been born in another era, she would have made a perfect suffragette: her unshakable adherence to traditional values is no obstacle to her forthright and energetic determination to avenge herself and her sex for wrongs done by men...

—RHONA SIVERBUSH AND SAMI PLOTKIN, 2002



WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

I see the play's references to Windsor, in a sense, as a decoy, for Merry Wives insists on shared language and values, rather than courtliness, as the community's central means of cohesion... Instead of an unhampered celebration of the court, the Folio's final fairy scene – which is campy, stylized, and clearly over the top – parodies courtly values...

–WENDY WALL, 2002

Not only was the economic and commercial structure of England undergoing changes (from aristocratic to mercantile, from country to town, from landed estates to commerce and trade), but so, too, was the language (or languages) spoken and written in the court, the towns, the streets—and on the stage. We might say that 'translation' in the widest sense is at the heart of this play, whether it is Falstaff's translation from knight to buck and from man to 'woman,' Ford's translation from jealous man to wiser husband, or Evans's Caius's, and William Page's earnest efforts to speak be understood.

–MARJORIE GARBER, 2004

We don't often think about high art as concerning itself with things like grease and dirt: these are the realities of daily life, not the subject of Shakespearean drama. But The Merry Wives of Windsor is an extraordinary play because it makes us reconsider the importance of what we deem trivial.

–WENDY WALL, 2004

The battle of the sexes surfaces in many of Shakespeare's plays, but never are women so clearly victorious over their male counterparts. 'Ill exhibit a bill in the parliament for the putting down of men,' says Mrs. Page upon receiving Falstaff's insulting duplicated love letter. Yet Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford turn to domestic rather than political action, as the play shows the women using their housewifely authority to straighten out matters in the community at large.

–WENDY WALL, 2004

Here are all the ingredients of English humor—a continual bawdiness of intention, a salacious narrative, and a man farcically dressed in 'drag' as Falstaff escapes detection by posing as the fat woman of Brentford. There is also a comic Frenchman and, in true native style, a sudden turn towards supernaturalism at the end. More importantly, perhaps, sexual desire is continually transformed into farce. It is the stuff of a thousand English comedies...

–PETER ACKROYD, 2005

Others have noticed how in the play the English language is twisted and turned in a hundred different ways, in the mouths of a Frenchman and a Welshman, but this is only another aspect of the variability and variety of Shakespeare's style when he is writing at the height of his invention. Words themselves become farcical in a world where improbability and incongruity are the only standards.

–PETER ACKROYD, 2005

The Quarto has fundamentally little to say about the human condition and in general lacks intellectual heft. The Folio text addresses all of these shortcomings and emerges as a more coherent and cohesive satire on the economic mores of Shakespeare's contemporary society.

–PETER GRAV, 2006

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a startling anticipation of the multiple-plot drama of Jonson and Middleton, the "city comedies" which would make London manifest on stage precisely through showing how a bustling city can contain so many different kinds of activity at once.

–PETER HOLLAND, 2006

Parson Evans provides a more complex and richly integrated illustration of ways in which ethnic difference, materialized as dialect, is not only conducive but vital to community coherence.

–ALLISON M. OUTLAND, 2011

...by the clever deployment of homely customs and traditional folk practices, rather than appeals to monarchical authority or civil law, the less powerful members of the community—ultimately and most notably, the domesticated Welshman—valiantly defend Windsor from Falstaff's attempted transgressions... Throughout this domestic fantasy, the emphasis remains on the vital importance to social cohesion of the agency and volition of the politically disenfranchised.

–ALLISON M. OUTLAND, 2011

A PLAY COMES TO LIFE



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR IN PERFORMANCE

Whether his dramas should be taken as plays or as literature has been disputed. But surely they should be taken as both. Acted, or seen on the stage, they disclose things hidden to the reader. Read, they reveal what no actor or theater can convey.

—HAROLD C. GODDARD, 1951

The *Merry Wives of Windsor*, its rich humor and its comic Falstaff have been favorites of theatrical producers and audiences for centuries. So beloved, the comedy has invited countless interpretations, revisions and adaptations, aligning it to the particular tastes of diverse times and places.

Although little is known about the early production history of *Merry Wives*, we do know it was presented by Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, sometime between 1597 and 1601. Shakespeare's own script was presumably used either at the Globe Theatre or at the court of Queen Elizabeth, perhaps both. Revived at court for King James I in 1604, its final audience prior to the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 included Charles I among its audience at London's Cockpit Theatre in 1638. But in 1642, the Puritan faction gained control of the city early in the Civil War and ordered the closure of the London theaters in September. And until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the theaters remained shut for the next eighteen years. During the interim years, many actors fled to France, where they participated in continental theater to maintain employment.

When Charles II—the son of the beheaded Charles I—was reinstated and the theaters reopened, English actors brought back many of the practices they'd learned in France. (It was not until then, for example, that women appeared on the English stage.) English tastes had grown to embrace permissive, lighter dramas, rejecting the strict Puritanism of the Commonwealth that had governed from 1642 to 1660. The comedy of manners became a staple of Restoration drama, as did heroic love stories. In fact, many of Shakespeare's plays were rewritten to satisfy these tastes—including a happily ending adaptation of *King Lear*.

We know little of the awkward character of the *Merry Wives* performed by the King's Company. Samuel Pepys, who saw the play three times between 1660 and 1667, found the country gentlemen and the French doctor well done but be-

lieved the rest went "but very poorly, and Sir J. Falstaff as bad as any." Restoration audiences, having developed a taste for French theater, would have thought a play privileging Windsor's country virtue over Falstaff's more cosmopolitan nature to be rather rustic. *Merry Wives*, like so many other Elizabethan plays, was now considered old-fashioned and ripe for adaptation.

The result was John Dennis's adaptation, entitled *The Comical Gallant*, which opened in 1702 at Drury Lane. Dennis reshaped the original text, introducing the kind of comedic unity that the rational, enlightened eighteenth-century audiences expected. His plot centered on young Fenton's love interest with Anne Page. Mistress Ford became Fenton's aunt and go-between with Anne, eliminating the need for Mistress Quickly. It is Fenton in Dennis's adaptation who comes up with the Falstaff plot and enlists the Host of the Garter Inn to instigate a quarrel between Sir Hugh Evans and Dr. Caius to upset their suits.

As the eighteenth century progressed, theaters returned to productions increasingly closer to Shakespeare's original. Still, variety was not wholly lost on audiences of the 1700s. Cuts were made to tighten up the play, sometimes leaving out the Latin grammar lesson, sometimes ignoring the business with the Germans and the horses and other times close-to-entire acts were excised. Women were cast as Falstaff, to varying degrees of success. The play was staged in the American colonies, playing in Philadelphia in 1770 and New York in 1773.

Eventually, Victorian sensibilities found Falstaff too gross for their tastes, and the successful *Merry Wives* productions



Photo by Liz Lauren

HEIDI KETTENRING AS MISTRESS FORD AND KELLI FOX AS MISTRESS PAGE IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

were the refined, operatic ones, and therefore the nineteenth century's major adaptations were not British, but German and Italian. Both Nicolai's 1849 *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Verdi's 1893 *Falstaff* resonate with the aesthetic concerns of John Dennis, emphasizing the Fenton-Anne love interest and condensing the rest of the story. Shakespeare's easy translation into musical settings attests to his master wordcraft, his resonance with multiple generations, and his adaptability to various theatrical forms.

Compared to the attention usually given to Shakespeare's works, *Merry Wives* received little critical study in the twentieth century. There have been some particularly memorable productions, though few challenges to its fundamental theatrical form. Oscar Asche produced a wintry *Merry Wives* at the Garrick Theatre in 1911, tapping into William Page's note of a "raw rheumatic day." His 1929 return to the play featured Anne Page "riding pillion [passenger] on Fenton's motor-bicycle" in a modern-dress take. Glen Byam Shaw, in 1955, followed in the wintry *Merry Wives* vein and, like Asche, was uniformly criticized for it. More recently, the creative team behind *Cats* mounted a 1979 *Merry Wives* production. Bill Alexander's 1985 Stratford production set the play in the 1950s—its iconic image that of the "New Elizabethan" Mistresses Ford and Page in a salon comparing love letters under

hooded hair dryers. The last ten years of performance history have seen a 1940s post-war take, a new musical rendition of, a modern-day sitcom lens for the *Merry Wives* from the Royal Shakespeare Company, and California Shakespeare Theater took on a puppet *Merry Wives* adaptation in 2006.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater Artistic Director, Barbara Gaines, first directed the *Merry Wives* in 1997 at the Ruth Page Theatre with a setting of the late 1600s, donned in the regalia of *The Three Musketeers*. Her second take in 2004 was set in New England in the late 1700s, with Falstaff's followers resembling our friendly, recognizable minutemen. Each time that Gaines, or any director, takes on this play, they're faced with the same questions that have confronted directors since Shakespeare's death. Do I privilege the ensemble or particularly strong individual characters? What are Falstaff's motivations: vanity, greed, defeat? Is this a particularly English play or can the specificity of place and culture play less important roles? How will I tap into the historical setting and the role of the middle-class? Does it dwell primarily in the world of romantic comedy or outrageous farce? Each choice affects the vision that the director brings to stage, the way in which they communicate the energy and vitality that is so much *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. ★



Photo by Liz Lauren

FROM LEFT: HEIDI KETTENRING AS MISTRESS FORD, JAMES HARMS AS JUSTICE ROBERT SHALLOW, GREG VINKLER AS DR. CAIUS, KEVIN GUDAHL AS MASTER PAGE, ROSS LEHMAN AS MASTER FORD, AND STEPHEN SUTCLIFFE AS SLENDER IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.

A PLAY COMES TO LIFE



A CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTOR



CST Artistic Director Barbara Gaines met with Director of Education Marilyn Halperin to discuss her production of The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Let's begin with your decision to stage this *Merry Wives* in post-World War II England.

The first time this play, it was set in mid-seventeenth-century England, which was beautiful but didn't necessarily serve the play as well as I might have wished. The last time in 2005 I set the play in post-Revolutionary War New England. This time, I wanted to find a time and place where life was returning to some kind of normalcy following a long war. Windsor—in the late 1940s in postwar England was still a small town on—and so that time after World War II seemed ideal. You have Falstaff and his followers as British soldiers who have returned from battle, out of work—and needing cash. And you have a society that is trying to separate itself from the horrors of war and rebuild itself. Hope and optimism are in the air—and the music of the period reflects that. The women will be dressed in those beautiful prints of that period, in fabrics that move as they do. I love the music of this time; the songs that will fill our production are mostly from America, which is what they were listening to in England at the time. It's turning into this beautiful swing musical romp through Windsor.

And Americans after the war in England were their heroes.

Yes, but I've decided to make Fenton, who Anne Page falls in love with against her parents' wishes, an American "fly boy"—so he's not part of the Windsor community and, like the other outsiders, he'll speak in his own dialect that distinguishes him from all the other characters.

Yes, in this play, Shakespeare makes the various dialects of his characters a topic of discussion—and humor.

We are dealing with a lot of people here who mangle the "pure," beautiful, British spoken word. They make fun of the Welsh Parson's accent, and Dr. Caius's accent—and they'll probably make fun of Fenton's American accent, too. Mocking others is all part of the fun in Windsor.

Barbara, what do you think this story is saying about Windsor and its relationship to outsiders? Is "protectionism" too strong a word to describe some of the characters' behaviors?

I think that provincialism can happen *anywhere* there is a tight, defined society, and up to a point I think there's a kind of protectionism, yes. We are protecting our English language. We are protecting our customs. We are protecting our children from the outside world. But in Windsor, they may make fun of you, they can mock you in a witty—and occasionally hurtful—way, but in the end, they're going to say, "Enough of this. Come over for dinner and we'll laugh at all our faults." That's one of the reasons that I would love to live in my fantasy Windsor, because I could feel very comfortable and feel forgiven for all my faults. Perhaps this Windsor is the Stratford-upon-Avon where Shakespeare grew up. He knew how small towns worked. He knew the inside bickering. He knew the pettiness. He knew how people could make fun of anyone who is remotely different. But he also knew that forgiveness is probably the only thing that would let mankind survive—and it's a theme he returns to time and time again throughout the canon.

When you directed this play before, you talked about the theme of forgiveness as being central in your understanding and appreciation.

I'm not doing this play now because it's a play about forgiveness—I'm doing it because I absolutely love these characters, who are all so idiosyncratic. It's like one, giant nuclear family. All of them could be sitting around any of our table at Thanksgiving dinner: you see your Uncle Harry, your Aunt Maude. As we get older, time becomes more precious. We realize that there is such glory in the moment, and I want to celebrate that part of life.



A PLAY COMES TO LIFE



Photo by Liz Lauren

SCOTT JAECK AS SIR JOHN FALSTAFF AND ROSS LEHMAN AS "MASTER BROOK" IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.

Well, certainly the wives are having a really good time, but Mr. Ford?

He's got "crotchets" in his head, as Mrs. Ford declares. Meaning that there are some people who just go to the dark side before they go anywhere—and he's one of them. His wife can always cheer him out of it, but he doesn't have the inner stability that Mr. Page does. They are very different men. One has a generosity of soul that encourages him to adopt Falstaff's young page into his family—Page wants everyone to have a home. Mr. Ford is more neurotic. He loves his wife so much that the mere thought of somebody trying to seduce her is agony—as it would be for many of us. He makes these assumptions without first going to her—much like Othello does in a much more serious story. Neither Ford nor Othello trusts his wife the way Mr. Page does because neither one of these men trusts himself. But Mrs. Ford loves him so much, and she is a great deal wiser than he.

So the Fords' family is a very different one from the Pages'?

There's certainly more stability in the Pages' home, but there's great warmth and love in the Ford family, as well—it's just a little bit more inflammable because the emotions are closer to the surface because Ford doesn't have the confidence that Mr. Page does.

Unfounded, irrational jealousy is a recurrent story line in Shakespeare's plays—but this time, we're inhabiting the world of comedy, instead of the tragedy of *Othello* or the romance of *Cymbeline*.

Since it's a comedy, the ramifications are not nearly so profound. Right away, you're transported to a completely different world. Even the couple that is plagued by the husband's jealousy ends up healthier in the end because the guy learns a lesson. This is jealousy that makes people laugh. One that will not kill. But I do think that at the root of all jealousy is self-doubt.

Do we end up identifying with the jealous husband of comedy in a different way, then?

Comedy has to come from the most intimate, true place, or it will not be comedy and no one will laugh. It's essential that we feel the pain in comedy, that we identify with the pain of Ford's jealousy. And we'll be able to laugh not only at him, but at ourselves.

A PLAY COMES TO LIFE



We've met Falstaff, of course, in the *Henry IV* plays already. Is this the same Falstaff, or is he notably altered as many critics contend?

I know what all of the critics say, and it's true: two wives do get the better of him this time. But that says a great deal, too, about the strength and intelligence of these two women—and the strong bond of friendship that ties the two of them together in this “conquest”! And what's wrong with women pulling a fast one over men? But as far as Falstaff himself is concerned, I do feel like he's the same character—he is still greedy to live every moment to the fullest. His lust for living is as immense as he is—and in that respect he is very much the same person as we came to know in *Henry IV*. Yes, you can argue that his wit and psyche don't have the same depth, but this comedy doesn't require that of him. He never, ever stops believing in himself—and his sexuality. I think that instead of being disappointed in Falstaff, people have to let their heads give way to their hearts.

Based on what you've said about the wives, is Shakespeare doing something a bit subversive as he gives the women the upper hand in Windsor?

There's no doubt about Windsor being a male-dominated society. But as married women, they're ruling their own homes. They decide to make the best of a bad situation—and they do. These are not two women who are going to run for Parliament or start a riot for women's rights. They're going to manipulate in the subtle ways that women have for thousands of years.

Going back to your decision to choose post-war England as your setting for this production, were there other reasons that informed your choice?

The first thing you read in books about *Merry Wives* is that it is a “middle-class play.” When Shakespeare wrote this play, a middle class was evolving out of earlier feudal days, where a chasm existed between the aristocracy on the one hand and the peasants on the other. With the rise of mercantilism, people—like Shakespeare's own father who was a glover—could earn their way to respectability and property. And for me there was a strong parallel in postwar England and so it seemed like an ideal time and place. Year by year after the war ended, factories that had been converted to manufacturing airplanes and munitions returned to making the stuff of day-to-day living. Shops reopened, and the middle class began slowly to flourish once more.

What can you tell us about the overall look of the show?

The period following the war is still characterized in our minds by the most fabulous prints for women. There will be lots of music and dancing, and so they'll have those great, swing dresses for the women. The men will be in tweeds and warm corduroys and wool jackets. It will be a snowy winter in Windsor, with the shops and homes decorated for Christmas as the play opens. I've asked our lighting designer to give us a chilly winter that looks as warm and welcoming as our Windsor is! The streetscape of Windsor is of a small, quintessentially English town which, unlike London and Coventry, was untouched by the war. In the center of this row of shops is the haberdasher, with the Pages' tea shop and a barber shop along the way. The stage opens up, and units are revealed in full color—the Garter Pub, Dr. Caius's veterinary office and the Fords' kitchen. This is a place we'll all want to spend our winter, spring, summer and autumns! ✨



photo by Dan Rest

FROM LEFT - ORA JONES AS MISTRESS FORD AND GREG VINKLER AS FALSTAFF
IN CST'S 2004 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*,
DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

BEFORE YOU READ THE PLAY AS A CLASS

1

BARD BOARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Create the beginnings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* blog on your class website that you can continue to develop as you read and discuss the play. (To the teacher: Don't yet have a class blog? Check out Kidblog at www.kidblog.org, a free, safe and simple website for teachers to create class blogs).

Before you read the play, start by posting images or words that represent anything you already know or think about *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. As you study the play, add videos, headlines, articles, songs, etc. that remind you of characters, events, key objects, words or anything else you feel is relevant to your reading.

Here are some more ideas to get your blog started:

✦ In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare uses language as a means of "marking" characters—that is, the language spoken by individual characters is one way of defining who they are in relation to other characters. In a small-group brainstorming session, discuss ways in which language can define us as individuals. Reflect on one of the following discussion questions. Reply to others' post and share how you might agree or disagree.

- How can the way we use language generate others' respect?
- Can you think of individuals whose spoken language demands attention? Why?
- What is there about a person's use of language that elicits humor, or perhaps even ridicule?

✦ The romantic entanglements that Shakespeare dramatizes in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are the source of much of the play's humor. It's the age-old story of the battle of the sexes with a few unique twists. The participants in this battle feel the same kind of jealousy and the need to "get even" that we experience in modern relationships. In small groups, generate ideas about whether you feel there are differences between men and women in their approach to romantic relationships. If you heard a story about an irrationally jealous individual, would you assume that the person was male or female? Why? In terms of the idea of revenge, do you think there are differences between men and women in the ways that they "get even"? How might the media reinforce societal expectations of gender norms, particularly when it comes to relationships? Share your thoughts and reply to your classmates' posts to share how you might agree or disagree.

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W6, W10

2

EXPLORING STATUS THROUGH LANGUAGE

To the teacher: Select lines from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that reflect the different social groups within the play; for example, the Fords and Pages as middle-class families, Mistress Quickly and Peter Simple as members of the working class, Falstaff and his cronies (Pistol, Nim and Bardolph) as war buddies and visitors to Windsor, and Doctor Caius and Sir Hugh Evans as foreigners. If helpful, see our suggestions on next page. Distribute a line to each of your students on a slip of paper not revealing the character who spoke it or the social group he or she represents. Since the students have not yet begun to read the play, the focus here is not on the characters themselves but rather on the language that the characters speak. It is not important at this point that students know the characters who speak these lines.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Here are some suggestions:

Wife, bid these gentlemen welcome. Come, we have a hot venison pasty to dinner. (Page, 1.1)
And there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it. (Evans, 1.1)
Sir John and master mine, I combat challenge of this latten bilbo! Word of denial! Froth and scum, thou liest! (Pistol, 1.1)
O, diable, diable! Vat is in my closet? Villainy! Larron! Rugby, my rapier! (Caius, 1.4)
Thou art the Mars of malcontents. I second thee. Troop on. (Pistol, 1.4)
To desire this honest gentlewoman, your maid, to speak a good word to Mistress Anne Page for my master in the way of marriage. (Simple, 1.4)
I may call him my master, look you, for I keep his house, and I wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink, make the beds, and do all myself. (Mistress Quickly, 1.4)
If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my head. (Page, 2.1)
O, that my husband saw this letter! It would give eternal food to his jealousy. (Mistress Ford, 2.1)
Would any man have thought this? See the hell of having a false woman! (Ford, 2.2)
I am damned in hell for swearing to gentlemen my friends you were good soldiers and tall fellows. (Falstaff, 2.2)
How melancholies I am! I will knog his urinals about his knave's costard when I have good opportunities for the 'ork. Pless my soul! (Evans, 3.1)
I pray you let-a me speak a work with your ear. Verefore vill you not meet-a me? (Caius, 3.1)
I think if your husbands were dead, you two would marry. (Ford, 3.2)
My daughter, I will question how she loves you, and as I find her, so am I affected. (Mistress Page, 3.4)
Well, I must of another errand to Sir John Falstaff from my two mistresses. What a beast am I to slack it! (Mistress Quickly, 3.5)
I thank your worship. I shall make my master glad with these tidings. (Simple, 4.5)
I will never mistrust my wife again till thou art able to woo her in good English. (Ford, 5.5)

Look at your line(s), and as you begin to walk around the room, say it aloud again and again without addressing anyone. Let the nature of the line and the way you say it affect the rhythm and pace at which you walk around the room. Say your line for at least five other people and listen closely as they share their line with you.

Continue walking around the room, silently, making eye contact with each person you pass. Now begin investigating different ways of moving with these prompts:

- ✪ Pick up and slow down pace. If “1” is slow motion and “5” is running, start at a “3.” Each time you take on a new pace, say your line to at least one other student. Slow down to a “2.” Speed up to a “4.” Back to “3.” Down to “1,” etc.
- ✪ Alter your posture. Walk upright with your chest out. Hunch your shoulders. Strut with swagger. Shuffle your feet. Fold your arms. Swing your arms freely by your side. Each time you explore a new posture, say your line to at least one other student.
- ✪ Change your status. If “1” is the lowest status in a society and “10” is royalty, begin walking at a “5.” Now change to a “10.” What does a “1” feel like? Continue repeating your line to a fellow student each time you switch your status.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Now regroup in a circle, each student in turn delivering his or her line to a classmate opposite him or her in the circle, at the pace, posture and status level that feels best to you. Sit down as a group and discuss the lines. Remember that this is an idea or brainstorming session; let your imagination go as you think about the world of the play you've just entered.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Do the lines allow you to imagine anything about the characters who speak them?
- ✦ Are there lines that might possibly have been spoken by the same character?
- ✦ Do any of the lines suggest a status or occupation?
- ✦ Which of the lines do you think were spoken by men? By women?
- ✦ Which specific words might be clues into a character's social group or status?
- ✦ What pace felt best with your line? What size? What status?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL1

3

COMEDY IN DIALECTS

As Shakespeare scholar David Bevington has pointed out, "Shakespeare's comic types endear themselves chiefly through their verbal traits." Can you think of characters from film or television who make us laugh by their use—or misuse—of language? Watch, this YouTube montage, www.tinyurl.com/gloriasmisuses, of the popular sitcom *Modern Family* that highlights Gloria's many misuses of the English language. Discuss how and why her dialect and mispronunciations bring about comedic moments.

Many of the characters' use of the English language in the *Merry Wives* also provides an abundant source of comedy – namely from the non-Englishmen who reside in Windsor. Both Dr. Caius, a French physician, and Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson, speak English as a second language. But differences in the way we each speak English may also reflect the part of the country—or even the part of the city—we come from. People "native" to the eastern United States, for example, pronounce words differently from those raised in the Midwest. Southerners speak a regional dialect that is very different from the English of the Rocky Mountain states.

In *The Merry Wives*, one of Parson Evans' most noticeable speech patterns is his use of the letter "p" instead of "b" at the beginning of words, so that the word "brain" becomes "prain," and "better" becomes "petter."

- ✦ As an exercise in language variety, take a commonly known speech, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, and substitute the letter "p" for the letter "f." You might want to write out the pledge first and then try reciting it in the new "dialect." Here are the first two lines to get your started:
 - I pledge allegiance to the plag op the United States op America,
 - And to the republic por which it stands...
- ✦ Now try it a second time, changing all the p's to b's.
- ✦ Then create your own language rules and apply them to the Pledge of Allegiance once again.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What humor comes from replacing one letter for another?
- ✦ What are some of the sound changes (vowels or consonants) we hear within American accents?
- ✦ How might our society reinforce one way of speaking as the “right” way?
- ✦ Does language-based humor in contemporary sitcoms ever cross the line into inappropriate stereotyping?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARD L3, R4

IN SMALL GROUPS

4

FOCUSED FREEWRITE AND COLLABORATIVE POEM

The characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* represent a variety of social groups: noblemen, middle-class citizens, servants and followers, and non-natives living in or visiting Windsor. Each of these groups has its own way of speaking and behaving that is unique.

Whenever each of us communicates with others in our everyday lives, our speech patterns reflect the situation that we’re in. We speak in different “registers” depending on who our listeners are. Our ability to “switch codes” determines to a large degree whether our language is considered appropriate or inappropriate. For example, most of us would not speak to a person of authority or respect (such as a clergyman, a family doctor, or a grandparent) in the same way that we speak to a close friend or a younger brother or sister. Everything changes in our speech: the grammar, the vocabulary, the topic, even our body language.

Now think about the groups that are a part of your own lives. These groups cover a wide range of people. One may be a group based on family. Another might be the friends you see at school or work. Still another is the racial or ethnic group that you belong to. There are many more that touch us on a daily basis. Some of these groups we are born into or assigned to; others we choose for ourselves.

Free-write based on the following questions: Which groups in your life do you identify with most strongly? Is there one group that seems to define who you are as a person? Is this a group that you were born into or one that you chose for yourself? What values or beliefs seem characteristic of this group? Are there certain words or phrases that only fully make sense within the group and would not make sense to an outsider? How do the language “rules” of this group conflict with the other groups you identify with?

In groups of three, read what you wrote to your classmates. After each reading, underline the words or phrases that stood out to your fellow classmates. Choose one of these underlined phrases to donate to a collaborative class poem. Sit in a circle or U-shape and speak the lines in turn, with a contribution from each student.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What kinds of behavior changes do you notice when moving from one social group to another?
- ✦ What are some of the language “rules” within your social group?
- ✦ Were there any repeated ideas or themes in the collaborative class poem?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, SL6, W10



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

5

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

Drama requires that we use our imaginations to fill in parts that directors and writers don't show us. Shakespeare's work is full of descriptive language that may be difficult to understand at first, but it can help the audience to form a rich mental picture of the scene.

Try creating some of your own descriptive language. Working with your partner, choose a photograph or painting. Don't allow your partner to see it. Stand back to back, and describe the picture while your partner tries to draw what he or she is imagining from your words. Show your partner the picture. How did you both do?

Working in pairs, stand back to back again. Choose one of three descriptive speeches from *The Merry Wives*:

- ✦ Mistress Quickly's description of the gifts Mistress Ford has received (2.2) – from "*Marry, this is the short and the long of it*" to "*but, I warrant you, all is one with her.*"
- ✦ Falstaff's description of being tossed into the Thames (3.5) – from "*Nay, you shall hear, Master Brook, what I have suffered*" to "*think of that, --hissing hot,--think of that, Master Brook.*"
- ✦ Mistress Page's description of Herne the Hunter (4.4) – from "*There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter*" to "*This tale of Herne the hunter for a truth*"

Using the speeches above, one student speaks their passage aloud while the other listens carefully without reading along. Make a list of the words or phrases that stick in your mind. Listen to the speech again. Try drawing the images the speech conjures up. Swap roles and repeat with a different passage.

Individually, choose a place to sit and write for ten minutes. Try to select a location that is active, such as a school hallway, cafeteria or outside. Don't stop writing until the time is up. Just write the things you see, what you hear, how the place feels, even what you smell. Make your writing as descriptive as possible. Poets like Shakespeare rely on metaphors—comparisons of seemingly dissimilar things, like love and food—to describe abstract emotions and sensory experiences. Test out your metaphorical skills. Volunteer to share your piece with the class and see if they can tell where you were.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What are the most vivid images you saw as you listened to your partner's passage?
- ✦ How did listening closely without the text in front of you affect your ability to visualize the images?
- ✦ Based on these speeches, what initial ideas do you have about the town and people of Windsor?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4, SL2

6

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Shakespeare has given some of the minor characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* names that are an everyday part of our language: Quickly, Shallow, Slender, Pistol, and Simple. An actor preparing for one of these roles knows that such names usually indicate something about the character's personality or behavior. In short, the actor has to "make the name come alive."

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



In groups of five, choose one of the five names from previous (page 37) so each person has a different one. Then select a simple everyday activity, such as combing your hair, tying your shoe, or brushing your teeth. Take turns making each word come alive by performing the everyday activity to illustrate "quickly," "shallow," "slender," "pistol," and "simple." Be as creative as you can. Physicalize the word so that your classmates can determine which character you are portraying.

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ Do any of these words have both a positive and negative connotation?
- ✪ Can you think of any characters in TV or film whose name reflects their personality or stature? Who?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4,

7

INSULTS AND IMPROV

In groups of four to six, practice aloud—at each other with feeling!—the insults below that characters from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* sling at each other. If the meaning of a word is not clear, don't get stuck! Keep repeating the insult and you'll be closer to the meaning than you might think. Take Hamlet's advice to the Players: 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action' and choose a physical gesture to accompany the insult as you say it.

In your group, improvise a two-minute scene portraying your situation and incorporating two insults and gestures. Act out your scene for other groups in the class, and discuss the choices each group made in interpreting their quotation. Take a guess at the events of the scene in which the insult might appear in the play.

You Banbury cheese!

[You] latten bilbo!

Froth and scum, thou liest!

I say the gentleman had drunk himself out of his five sentences!

O base Hungarian wight, wilt thou the spigot wield!

Rogues, hence, avaunt, vanish like hailstones; go

Let vultures gripe thy guts!

Thou art the Mars of Malcontents!

His guts are made of puddings.

I will find you twenty lascivious turtles ere one chaste man.

King-Urinal

Monsieur Mock-water

I will knog his urinals about his knave's costard.

This same scall, scurvy, cogging companion!

I'd rather be set quick i'th'earth, and bowl'd to death with turnips!

[You] mountain of mummy!

Well said, brazen-face!

He shall die a flea's death.

You witch, you rag, you baggage, you polecat, you runnion!

I'll provide you a chain, and I'll do what I can to get you a pair of horns.

*I think the devil will not have [you] damned, lest the oil
that's in [you] should set hell on fire.*

Vile worm, thou wast o'erlook'd even in thy birth.

Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English?

She's a great lubberly boy.

Bardolph, 1.1

Pistol, 1.1

Pistol, 1.1

Bardolph, 1.1

Pistol, 1.3

Falstaff, 1.3

Pistol, 1.3

Pistol, 1.3

Mistress Page, 2.1

Mistress Page, 2.1

Host, 2.3

Host, 2.3

Sir Hugh Evans, 3.1

Sir Hugh Evans, 3.1

Anne Page, 3.4

Falstaff, 3.5

Ford, 4.2

Mistress Ford, 4.2

Ford, 4.2

Mistress Quickly, 5.1

Falstaff, 5.5

Pistol, 5.5

Falstaff, 5.5

Slender, 5.5



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What might this insult indicate about the events in the plot?
- ✦ What do you learn about the characters in the play from the insults—both that are said about them AND that they themselves say?
- ✦ How can gestures and movement enhance meaning for audience members?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, R1, SL1

ON YOUR OWN

8

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING: LANGUAGE, GENDER AND SOCIAL GROUPS

(To the teacher: Follow up on previous discussion-based activities exploring language and social groups with this argumentative writing assignment).

With the information that you exchanged in previous discussions on language and social groups, select one of the following topics and prepare a short essay:

- ✦ Topic #1: Does the way we use language affect our perception of those around us?
- ✦ Topic #2: Are there differences in the way males and females approach the term relationship?
- ✦ Topic #3: Does identification with a particular group determine our individual behavior?

NOTE: Remember that for most writers of nonfiction—essays, editorials, biographical and autobiographical works, descriptive pieces, and so forth—it is a critical question that gets the writer going. The critical questions above are designed to generate argumentative responses; that is, the questions serve as prompts to generate your opinion and point of view on the topic. Support your point of view by giving reasons why you believe, for example, that the way we use language does (or does not) affect our perception of those around us.

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W1



TEACHER RESOURCE CENTER

If you have an activity or lesson plan that was a classroom success with your students, we want to hear about it! Consider donating your lesson plan to the Teacher Resource Center, and become part of our ever-growing, permanent collection! Need inspiration? If you are looking for the perfect activity or “proven” lesson plan, visit the Center and see what other educators have offered us. **Call the Education Department, 312.595.5678, to make an appointment.**

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



AS YOU READ THE PLAY AS A CLASS

9 BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

As you begin to enter Shakespeare's text, continue building on your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- ✦ Choose a character to follow throughout the play and write diary entries from that character's point of view. Share your thoughts and feelings as the character, incorporating quotations from the text whenever you can. Be creative! Rather than observing him or her from the outside, try to get at the heart of your character. Check out an example of one from another Shakespeare play at www.hermiasdiary.blogspot.com/.
- ✦ At the end of each act, list five of the major characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Write a single sentence for each that begins, "What I most want is..." Take a risk—there's not just one right answer! Then write a sentence for each character that begins, "What I'm most afraid of is..." (Is there ever a situation when what one most wants is also what one most fears?)
- ✦ At the end of each act, post a popular song that explicitly connects to the action of that act. Explain your choice, quoting lyrics from the song and providing textual evidence from the play.

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R6, W3, W6, W10

ACT I AS A CLASS

10 CHARACTER, COMEDY AND FASHION

Shakespeare enriches *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by including in the play minor characters whose idiosyncrasies are a source of their humor. The play, in fact, opens with three of these minor characters: Justice Shallow, his nephew Abraham Slender, and Sir Hugh Evans. As you read through Act 1, what about these three characters' behavior would you consider idiosyncratic? Does the way these characters speak or the way they are dressed seem unusual in any way?

Considering what is hot and what is not in contemporary fashion, discuss items of clothing that may have been hot five years ago but now are considered out of style. Pick one of the three minor characters from the opening scene. Design a costume that encapsulates that character for a production of *Merry Wives* that takes place today. Use images from magazines and the internet to dress the character in fashion trends (or fashion faux-pas!) appropriate to character. Write a paragraph that explains your fashion choices, connecting your knowledge to the text of the first scene. Publish your fashion design to the Bard Blog.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Are there fashion trends that you consider unusual or unique in any way?
- ✦ How can being "unique" in one's dress be perceived by others?
- ✦ Are there elements of present-day fashion that you consider humorous?
- ✦ How can costuming choices help to communicate a character's personality?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL2, W2

11

STAGING ENTRANCES

We can often learn a great deal about a character by taking note of what is said about him or her by other characters in the story. Read through the opening scene of the play up to Sir John Falstaff's entrance. Uncover each reference to Falstaff, taking notes as you read. Where is Falstaff as the three gentlemen are talking? How do you think these men feel about Sir John? Pick out the lines that justify your assertions.

While the playwright decides when a character will begin speaking in a scene, it is the director and actors for each production who decide how each character's entrance will be staged. Staging is the transformation from the words on the page into the performance choices made by the actors and director.

In small groups of two or three, look at Falstaff's entrance in Act 1, scene 1, "*Now, Master Shallow, you'll complain of me to the King?*" With a student in each group serving as director, stage Falstaff's entrance. Explore variations that help the audience to understand this new character and his relationship to the others. What is Falstaff's pace as he enters? Does he enter quickly or lumber on? Is he aware that the others have been talking about him? Is he holding any props? Come back together as a large group to present a few of the staged entrance variations.

Extension Activity: Repeat the activity for Dr. Caius's entrance in Act 1, scene 4, "*Vat is you sing? I do not like dese toys. Pray you go and vetch me in my closet une boîte en vert...*" Is Caius a likeable and comical Frenchman? Or detestable? Foolish? Experiment with the delivery of his lines in addition to the staging.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Why do you think Shakespeare has Falstaff enter the play as he does—or when he does?
- ✦ What do we immediately learn about Falstaff from his entrance and the few lines of dialogue that follow?
- ✦ How is Falstaff mocking Evans' Welsh accent? Shallow's complaints?
- ✦ What elements of the scenes presented do you find the most effective? Why?
- ✦ How can costuming choices help to communicate a character's personality?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL2, W2

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



IN SMALL GROUPS

12 ACTING THE OPENING SCENE

Using the play's opening sequence ("Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star-chamber matter of it: if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire."), read the scene aloud in groups of three. Sit in a circle as you read, making as much eye contact as possible with the person that you are addressing. Then repeat the reading, each taking different roles until everyone in your group has the opportunity to read at least two of the three roles.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Where might the conversation among these three gentlemen take place?
- ✦ What can we deduce about the relationships between these three men based on the opening scene alone?
- ✦ Did you notice any changes in your reading as you spoke the lines of two or three different characters? How?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL2

13 WORD PLAY AND COMEDY

Shakespeare is a master of "word play." (*To the teacher: Consider introducing students to word play in comedy by viewing the Abbott and Costello clip of "Who's on First," www.tinyurl.com/abbottandcostelloshosonfirst*) For example, his frequent use of homonyms (words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings) contributes to the general confusion and misunderstandings prevalent in comedy. Take a look at the two lines between Shallow and Falstaff in Act 1, scene 2 and notice Shakespeare's use of the words council and counsel.

SHALLOW *The Council shall know this.*

FALSTAFF *'Twere better for you if it were known in counsel. You'll be laughed at.*

Look up the meanings of these two words in a Shakespeare lexicon, or use the online lexicon created by David and Ben Crystal at www.shakespeareswords.com.

In small groups, brainstorm as many homonyms as you can think of in three minutes. Here are a few, to get you started: aisle/I'll/isle, break/brake, bare/bear, and discussed/disgust. Choose your favorite homonym pair, and create a one-minute improvised scene that incorporates your pair. Explore the possibilities for confusion and humor when two characters speak in homonyms.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What assumptions might we make about a character who misuses or misunderstands homonyms?
- ✦ How does word play add humor to a scene? In addition to homonyms, what other kinds of word play can be found in Act 1 (such as double entendre, puns, telling character names, etc.)?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, L5, R4



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

14 MALAPROPISMS

The term “malapropism” describes the substitution of a word for another word that sounds similar, but means something entirely different. Young children do this all the time when they beg you, for example, to read the “destructions” and help them assemble a new toy! Many of the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* fall into a lot of malapropisms and generally confused speech throughout the play. In Act 1, scene 1, Slender mangles a speech about his potential marriage to Anne Page. Work through that speech in small groups and identify as many malapropisms and general absurdities as you can. Then discuss how you would direct the actor performing this part to deliver such lines. Cast a Master Slender from your group and stage the results for the class. Try playing the speech for laughs—then again in a completely serious manner. Discuss the results.

SLENDER *I will marry her, sir, at your request: but if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married and have more occasion to know one another; I hope, upon familiarity will grow more contempt: but if you say, 'Marry her,' I will marry her; that I am freely dissolved, and dissolutely.*

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How did the humor change when Slender's lines were delivered for laughs versus in a serious manner?
- ✦ After watching the different interpretations, what style of delivery seems most truthful for the character of Slender? What style of delivery is most humorous?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R4

15 ACTING AND DIRECTING: SLENDER AND ANNE PAGE

Abraham Slender and Anne Page close the first scene of Act 1 (Anne, “Will't please your worship to come in, sir?”... Slender, “I'll rather be unmannerly than troublesome. You do yourself wrong, indeed, la!”). Working in groups of three, with one student serving as the director and two others as actors, stage this exchange between Slender and Anne. Present several of the scenes for the class.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How would you describe these characters' behavior toward one another? Which lines support your description?
- ✦ Where, physically, might Anne and Slender stand in relation to each other as they get ready to enter the house for dinner?
- ✦ After viewing several stagings, how would you describe the relationship between Slender and Anne Page?
- ✦ If you were casting these two parts for a stage or film version of the play, what actors and actresses would you consider for the roles of Abraham Slender and Anne Page?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



16 CHARACTER CLUES

The study of character contributes much to our understanding of a play. More often than not, we learn about an individual character's personality and temperament by way of: 1) what the character says about himself or herself; 2) what others say about the character; 3) what the character does; and 4) what the character says about others. Look, for example, at the opening of Act 1, scene 4, between Mistress Quickly, Dr. Caius's housekeeper, and John Rugby, Dr. Caius's servant. In groups of three, read the scene aloud. Underline or highlight any lines that offer new information about a character. Discuss what you discovered. Try this whenever a new character is introduced in the play...

MISTRESS QUICKLY

What, John Rugby! I pray thee, go to the casement, and see if you can see my master, Master Doctor Caius, coming. If he do, i' faith, and find anybody in the house, here will be an old abusing of God's patience and the king's English.

RUGBY

I'll go watch.

MISTRESS QUICKLY

Go; and we'll have a posset for't soon at night, in faith, at the latter end of a sea-coal fire. An honest, willing, kind fellow, as ever servant shall come in house withal, and, I warrant you, no tell-tale nor no breed-bate: his worst fault is, that he is given to prayer; he is something peevish that way: but nobody but has his fault; but let that pass. Peter Simple, you say your name is?

SIMPLE

Ay, for fault of a better.

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ What do Mistress Quickly's words about John Rugby tell us about Rugby—and about Mistress Quickly herself?
- ✪ What are your first impressions of Mistress Quickly based on her own distinctive language and way of speaking?
- ✪ To which social groups do you think the characters in this scene belong?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL2

17 DRAMATIC PROGRESSION THROUGH SCENE TITLES

One of the best ways to get at the "through-line" or dramatic progression in a play is to give each scene a name or title that captures the heart of the action. Directors often use this technique to help actors (and themselves) during the rehearsal process. In your small groups, give each of the scenes in Act 1 a name or title that you feel gets at the essence of the scene. Be as creative and specific as you can in naming each scene. Then share your titles with the other groups. (*To the teacher: Consider repeating this activity through each act as you read the play.*)

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ How do the titles clarify and summarize the dramatic progression?
- ✪ What themes become more apparent when writing the titles?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W10



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

ON YOUR OWN

18 TRANSLATE INTO YOUR OWN WORDS

A true wit who is never at a loss for words, Sir John Falstaff reveals to Nym and Pistol in Act 1, scene 3 his plans to seduce both Mistresses Page and Ford. Falstaff recounts to his two followers the amorous looks that Mistress Page has directed his way and what he plans to do about it:

FALSTAFF *I have writ me here a letter to her: and here another to Page's wife, who even now gave me good eyes too, examined my parts with most judicious oeillades; sometimes the beam of her view gilded my foot, sometimes my portly belly....O, she did so course o'er my exteriors, with such a greedy intention, that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass! Here's another letter to her: she bears the purse too; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be cheater to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me; they shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both. Go bear thou this letter to Mistress Page; and thou this to Mistress Ford: we will thrive, lads, we will thrive.*

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the above lines as they might be spoken today. Don't just summarize Falstaff's speech. Try as much as possible to do a word-for-word rewrite, using contemporary language. You may choose to recast his speech in either (1) modern standard English or (2) how you speak with friends in informal settings that may include slang or text lingo. Volunteer to present your monologue aloud to the class or publish it on the Bard Blog.

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ Do you think the modernized versions work as well as Shakespeare's original?
- ✪ What do you understand more clearly in Shakespeare's text after translating the speech?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL6

ACT 2

AS A CLASS

19 ACTING SUBTEXT

The concept of revenge is a common thread both in Shakespeare's comedies and in his tragedies. In the comedies, however, the nature of the revenge is a good deal "sweeter" than in, for example, a play such as *Hamlet*. When Mistresses Page and Ford come together to reveal the letters that Falstaff has sent them, they resolve to get even with him. Take a look at the speeches of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford in Act 2, scene 1—see the passages below—in which the two wives express their feelings about Falstaff and the letters. The two women are angry and want to teach Falstaff a lesson. But in a comedy, anger is often played for laughs. With several students volunteering to read the speeches of Mistresses Page and Ford, experiment with different acting subtext, the inner feelings beneath the words. Explore different subtext by trying the following variations:

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



- ✧ Young women who have just received their first love letters
- ✧ Women who are offended by such inappropriate behavior
- ✧ Women who find the letters extremely humorous

Then after the readings, discuss which approach contributes more to the humor of the play.

MISTRESS PAGE

What a Herod of Jewry is this! O wicked world! One that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age to show himself a young gallant! What an unweighed behavior hath this Flemish drunkard picked--with the devil's name!--out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me? Why, he hath not been thrice in my company! What should I say to him? I was then frugal of my mirth: Heaven forgive me! Why, I'll exhibit a bill in the parliament for the putting down of men. How shall I be revenged on him? for revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings.

MISTRESS FORD

I shall think the worse of fat men, as long as I have an eye to make difference of men's liking: and yet he would not swear; praised women's modesty; and gave such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness, that I would have sworn his disposition would have gone to the truth of his words; but they do no more adhere and keep place together than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of 'Green Sleeves.' What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many tuns of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor? How shall I be revenged on him? I think the best way were to entertain him with hope, till the wicked fire of lust have melted him in his own grease. Did you ever hear the like?

Guiding Questions:

- ✧ Based on the text alone, do Mistress Ford and Mistress Page react similarly to Falstaff's letters? If so, how are their reactions similar? How are they different? Be specific in citing your evidence!
- ✧ Which subtext variation suits each of the wives best? Why?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R6

20 ACTING VARIATIONS: FALSTAFF AND FORD-BROOK

In an attempt to trick Falstaff, Mr. Ford dons a disguise and poses as "Mr. Brook," a gentleman supposedly in love with Mistress Ford. His plan is to pay Falstaff to act as a go-between. Present the scene between Falstaff and Ford-Brook in front of the class (Act 2, scene 2 – "*Troth, and I have a bag of money here troubles me...*" through "*...thou, Master Brook, shalt know him for knave and cuckold. Come to me soon at night*"). Randomly select one of the slips of paper for your character—Falstaff or Ford as Brook. The slip will have an acting choice for you to play—take it to its extreme. But don't share your scripted variation beforehand with the character that you are playing opposite—or the class! Present several of these scenes to the class as a whole. Then discuss which intentions seem to work most effectively together. (*To the teacher: Prepare slips of paper ahead of time with acting variations written for the characters of Falstaff and Ford disguised as Brook. See suggestions below.*)



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Suggestions for Falstaff:

- ✧ *A man bragging to another man about his romantic conquests*
- ✧ *A humble gentleman intent on helping a fellow gentleman*
- ✧ *A money-grubbing man interested only in earning a few extra bucks (or coins)*
- ✧ *An astute man deciphering whether Brooks' plan is suspicious or earnest*
- ✧ *An arrogant man looking for flattery*

Suggestions for Mr. Ford disguised as Brook:

- ✧ *A lost soul who has loved Mistress Ford from afar for a very long time*
- ✧ *A jealous man willing to lose his entire fortune to find out if Mistress Ford is virtuous*
- ✧ *A creepy old man plotting to satisfy his physical desires*
- ✧ *(Attach "obviously exaggerated acknowledging that the audience is in on the joke" or "as convincingly as possible so Falstaff doesn't suspect anything" to the intentions above to add to Ford's variety).*

Guiding Questions:

- ✧ What variation makes the most sense for Falstaff? For Ford?
- ✧ Which variations were the most effective in drawing out the humor in the scene?
- ✧ Do you find certain lines work better with one interpretation, while other lines call for another?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, SL6

IN SMALL GROUPS

21 UNROUND ROBIN

In Act 2, scene 1, Falstaff's followers, Pistol and Nym, reveal to Master Ford and Master Page that Falstaff is pursuing both of their wives. Silently read the exchange between Ford and Page after learning of Falstaff's plans:

PAGE	<i>How now, Master Ford?</i>
FORD	<i>You heard what this knave told me, did you not?</i>
PAGE	<i>Yes, and you heard what the other told me?</i>
FORD	<i>Do you think there is truth in them?</i>
PAGE	<i>Hang 'em, slaves! I do not think the knight would offer it. But these that accuse him in his intent towards our wives are a yoke of his discarded men: very rogues, now they be out of service.</i>
FORD	<i>Were they his men?</i>
PAGE	<i>Marry, were they.</i>
FORD	<i>I like it never the better for that. Does he lies at the Garter?</i>
PAGE	<i>I, marry, does he. If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my mind.</i>
FORD	<i>I do not misdoubt my wife, but I would be loath to turn them together. A man may be too confident. I would have nothing lie on my head. I cannot be thus satisfied.</i>

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



In pairs, reread the scene using the variations below to unravel the meaning of their exchange and their differing perspectives with each close reading:

- ✦ **Punctuation Marks:** At every new punctuation mark, switch readers. Circle any unknown or confusing words or phrases as you read.
- ✦ **Full Stops:** Read through the script again but this time, only switch speakers after a complete sentence ending in a period, exclamation or question mark. Again, circle any words or phrases that are confusing during this second read-through.
- ✦ **Back to Back:** Now choose who will be Ford and who will be Page. Stand back to back with the text in front of you, reading your character's lines. Listen closely to what your partner says.
- ✦ **Whispered Reading:** This time, read the passage again (same roles) whispering—and make sure that your partner can hear all the words. Whispering facilitates close listening as well as an emotional connection to the language.
- ✦ **Full Volume Reading:** Standing about ten steps apart, read the passage again at “full” volume, sending your voice to one another.

After you and your partner read through the scene with these variations, share the discoveries you've made about the characters' perspectives at this moment in the play.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Are there moments when whispering feels instinctively right?
- ✦ Are there moments when this elevated volume “fits” the meaning?
- ✦ How did re-reading the same exchange alter your understanding of the characters?
- ✦ Based on what we learn about Ford and Page in this passage, what actions do you predict Ford and Page might each take next in the story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, L4, SL3

22 PUNCTUATION: TAKING ON THE EDITOR'S ROLE

Take a look at Ford's passage from Act 2, scene 2, printed below without punctuation or proper capitalization. As a class, read the passage once through for sense. As you listen, individually mark places you think punctuation should go. Remember to think about exclamation marks, question marks, commas or dashes at places where you think a brief pause is needed, and periods at points where you think a single thought ends. Then, in groups of three or four, agree on punctuation. Read the monologue again, emphasizing your punctuation choices. Read your newly punctuated monologue for the rest of the group. Discuss what is clearer now that you have added your own punctuation marks. Now, open your text and read the same passage through again with the punctuation as noted in your edition. Compare your group's choices to those in the published play. Discuss how the meaning may change with altered punctuation.

FORD *What a damned epicurean rascal is this my heart is ready to crack with impatience who says this is improvident jealousy my wife hath sent to him the hour is fixed the match is made would any man have thought this see the hell of having a false woman my bed shall be abused my coffers ransacked my reputation gnawn at and I shall not only receive this villanous wrong but stand under the adoption of abominable terms and by him that does me this wrong terms*



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

names Amaimon sounds well Lucifer well Barbason well yet they are devils' additions the names of fiends but cuckold wittol cuckold the devil himself hath not such a name page is an ass a secure ass he will trust his wife he will not be jealous I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese an Irishman with my aquavita bottle or a thief to walk my ambling gelding than my wife with herself then she plots then she ruminates then she devises and what they think in their hearts they may effect they will break their hearts but they will effect God be praised for my jealousy eleven o'clock the hour I will prevent this detect my wife be revenged on Falstaff and laugh at Page I will about it better three hours too soon than a minute too late fie fie fie cuckold cuckold cuckold

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How is reading the speech with your punctuation different from the first time you read the passage without any punctuation?
- ✦ How do your punctuation choices compare to the edition you are reading? Are there places where you would argue that your punctuation choices make the meaning more clear?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L2, RL1, RL5

ON YOUR OWN

23 EXPLORING "HUMORS" THROUGH TABLEAU AND WRITING

Nym's use of the word "humor" is like an obsession, one that amuses Master Page in Act 2, scene 1, "*And this is true. I like not the humor of lying. He hath wronged me in some humors. I should have borne the humored letter to her...*" Other characters reference the four humors to describe another's personality. For example, Mistress Quickly tries to calm Dr. Caius down in Act 1, scene 4 when she says, "*I beseech you, be not so phlegmatic.*"

The concept of humors (or "humours" in the British spelling) really has two meanings. One is the notion of personal idiosyncrasies that help to define dramatic characters and their behavior. In medieval and Renaissance medical thinking, the humors were also believed to be the four fluids that made up the constitution of the human body. Based on their proportions to each other, these four fluids were thought to determine, to a great degree, a person's general health and temperament and thus amounted to a type of early psychology. For Renaissance medical practitioners, the four humors, or body fluids, were blood, said to produce a "sanguine" temperament; phlegm, which was associated with a "phlegmatic" temperament; yellow bile, which gave rise to a "choleric" temperament; and black bile, which produced a "melancholic" temperament.

- ✦ Look up the meanings of sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic in a modern dictionary.
- ✦ Now get up on your feet and strike a pose that you feel represents each of these four Renaissance temperaments or personalities.
- ✦ Then discuss which characters from the play you feel best represent each of the four humors.
- ✦ Prepare an essay in which you take one or more of the four Renaissance humors and discuss how they might relate to a modern public figure today. In your opening paragraph, try to "hook" the reader by relating a brief anecdote about the public figure and how he or she exemplifies the humor or humors that you are discussing. Give examples of how this humor is illustrated in your chosen figure.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What is it about the character's actions or behavior that makes him or her sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholic?
- ✦ How might we describe the personalities associated with the different humors today?
- ✦ What pop psychology exists today that sorts and names personalities? (Hint: your category depends on when you were born!)

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, L6, W2

ACT 3

AS A CLASS

24 RELATIONSHIP WEBS

In addition to the main plot—the wives' plans to teach Falstaff a lesson—*The Merry Wives of Windsor* maintains an important subplot—the pursuit by several suitors of Mr. and Mrs. Page's daughter Anne. As a class, create a word web on the board with Anne Page in the center. Draw a circle around her name. Then connect with a straight line radiating from the center the names of characters who come into contact with her, either through direct dialogue or through what you know about the story as it unfolds. Then create a second web with Falstaff in the center. Connect with lines those characters who come into direct contact with Sir John. Now look at the two word webs. Discuss what importance the connecting characters have to plot.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Are there characters included in both word webs?
- ✦ Are these overlapping characters important to both plots of *Merry Wives*? If so, how?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R7, SL2, SL5

25 BROAD COMEDY

(To the teacher: Watch the YouTube clip, www.tinyurl.com/duelingcavaliers, of the dueling cavalier scene from *Singing in the Rain* to show an example of broad acting to your students). *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a "broad" comedy that at times approaches farce. Farce is a genre of comedy typified by exaggerated characterizations, buffoonery, abundant physical humor, and absurdly improbable plots. In farce, the deception as a means of "getting even" or "pulling the wool over one's eyes" is exploited as much as possible for comic purposes. Act 3, scene 3 does just this. In small groups, choose one of the humorous moments in the scene to explore.

- 1) Falstaff and Mistress Ford (Falstaff, "Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel?" and continue until Mistress Page's entrance).
- 2) Mistress Page, Mistress Ford and Falstaff (Mistress Ford, "What's the matter? How now?" and continue through Falstaff's hiding in the basket upon learning of Ford's approach).
- 3) John, Robert, Ford, Mistress Ford, Page, Caius, Evans and Falstaff (Mistress Ford, "What, John!")



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Robert! John! through the end of the scene).

Read through your scene excerpt and circle any “signals” that Shakespeare wrote into the lines. Signals are stage directions embedded into the script, informing a character’s choices—either in his/her own lines or those spoken by another character. Get up on your feet and reread your scene, exploring possible variations in speaking and movement. Are there signals that can be exaggerated (think over the top “bad acting” found in melodrama and old films, full of swoons, gasps and large gestures)? React to what is happening, even when you may not be speaking. It may be helpful to use as props in the scene an oversized cardboard box to represent the “buck-basket,” a sheet or two for laundry, and a rolling whiteboard as the “arras,” or a large tapestry.

Present your scenes for the class. Discuss the different ways groups found humor in the language and character choices. Some considerations for each of the scene excerpts:

- 1) Falstaff and Mistress Ford: Make the falseness obvious, delivering the extravagant language in an exaggerated way. Use gestures and actions help convey meaning.
- 2) Mistress Page, Mistress Ford and Falstaff: If playing the wives, put on an elaborate show for Falstaff, who is in earshot standing behind the “arras.” Falstaff may not have any lines, but consider how he might react to their lines in ways that the audience would see or hear.
- 3) John, Robert, Ford, Mistress Ford, Page, Caius, Evans and Falstaff: Ford is in a frantic state—jealous, angry and eager to catch Falstaff. How might those emotions be expressed in how he says “buck” seven times in one line? John and Robert may not have many lines, but their movement with the basket and reactions to Ford could lend to laughter. Though hidden in the basket, does Falstaff give any sign that he is there? How about the wives? What kind of fun are they having in being the ones pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes? How are Caius, Evans and Page responding to Ford’s outbursts?

Guiding Questions:

- ✧ Are there particular words or phrases that work well with an exaggerated acting style?
- ✧ How can physical movement enhance the humor in the scene?
- ✧ Who deceives whom in the scene and for what purpose?
- ✧ Is self-deception (or delusion) apparent in *Merry Wives*? If so, which character or characters do you think delude or deceive themselves in the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R4, SL1

IN SMALL GROUPS

26 MISTRESS QUICKLY’S ROLE

If there is one character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* whose actions are connected to all of the scheming, conniving and deceiving in the play, it is most likely Mistress Quickly. In small groups, sketch on paper (stick figures work!) a tableau using the main characters in the play. Put Mistress Quickly in the center of the picture. Then decide how you would place the main characters in relation to Mistress Quickly. Which characters do you position closest to her in the picture? Which stand the farthest away from her? Then come together as a large group. Choose several students to be the main characters of *Merry Wives* and create the tableau of each of the small groups in front of the class.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What factors did you consider when placing the characters in relation to Mistress Quickly—how much control Mistress Quickly has over each character? How much interaction she has with a particular character? Other reasons?
- ✦ At this point in the play, what motives might you attribute to Mistress Quickly's actions? Why is she so involved in everyone's business?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL4

ACT 4

IN SMALL GROUPS

27 COMEDY IN WORDS

The first scene of Act 4 is a long "schoolbook" section during which Mistress Page asks Parson Evans to test the Pages' son William on the young man's knowledge of Latin. During Shakespeare's time, Latin was the universal language of scholarship and training in the basics of Latin grammar was a major focus of an English schoolboy's education. Even though many of the people in Shakespeare's audience perhaps knew little Latin themselves, the exchange between Sir Hugh Evans and William—which Mistress Quickly repeatedly interrupts by comically translating the Latin words into English—undoubtedly provoked laughter because it is a scene in which the language of common folk confronts the pretentious language of the scholar. This same type of linguistic confusion exists in our own society between different generations. In small groups, come up with examples of words and phrases that mean very different things to you from what they do to your parents or grandparents. Then come together as a class and share your examples with the other groups.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Can you recall any confusing (and perhaps humorous) moments when someone of a different generation did not understand the meaning behind your words and misinterpreted what you were saying?
- ✦ What does an activity like this suggest about language as a "permanent" construct?
- ✦ Why do you think Shakespeare chose to include this seemingly disparate section in the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, W10

28 WITCHCRAFT IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

When Mistresses Ford and Page trick Falstaff for the second time, they dress him up as the fat woman of Brentford, the aunt of Mistress Ford's maid. Believing the old woman to be a witch, Mr. Ford reacts with an almost unnatural sense of horror and beats the old woman out of his house. In small groups, reread Ford's description of the maid's aunt of Brentford from Act 4, scene 2:



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

FORD

A witch, a quean, an old cozening quean! Have I not forbid her my house? She comes of errands, does she? We are simple men; we do not know what's brought to pass under the profession of fortune-telling. She works by charms, by spells, by the figure, and such daubery as this is, beyond our element; we know nothing. Come down, you witch, you hag, you! Come down, I say!

Now read an excerpt from chapter three of a book published in Shakespeare's time on the subject of witchcraft, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot found here: history.hanover.edu/course/excerpts/260scot.html. (Some scholars believe that Shakespeare may have consulted this text when writing the infamous witches in *Macbeth*.) In small groups, read the excerpt aloud, underlining all of the words and phrases that stand out to you as "juicy" descriptions of Renaissance attitudes towards witchcraft. Afterwards, take turns donating a "juicy" phrase to the group and discuss how these phrases help to explain Ford's behavior when he discovers the "old woman" in his house.

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ What similarities does your group observe between Ford's description of the "old woman" and Reginald Scot's description of witches? Do they use similar words or ideas?
- ✪ In a modern-day interpretation of the play, would Ford's behavior still make sense? If not, what alternative reasoning might an actor playing Master Ford choose to explain his behavior?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R9, SL3

29

PLAYWRITING

At the end of Act 4, Mistress Quickly accompanies Falstaff to his chamber where she must convince him to go to the park at midnight. Interestingly, after Falstaff's second duping at the hands of Mistresses Ford and Page, Shakespeare does not attempt to show us how exactly Mistress Quickly persuades Falstaff to "risk" a third meeting with Mistress Ford. But, in fact, she does convince him. In your small groups, brainstorm what you think Mistress Quickly says to Falstaff to get him to Windsor Forest. Write out the dialogue using contemporary language between the two characters as she encourages him to meet Mistress Ford for the third time. Then present each of the short scenes to the entire class.

Guiding Questions:

- ✪ Consider what you've learned thus far about Falstaff's personality and values. Given Falstaff's traits, what new strategies could Mistress Quickly utilize to convince him to attend yet another meeting?
- ✪ How can you continue to incorporate humorous moments into this meeting that match the humor found in the rest of Shakespeare's play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL1, W3

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



ON YOUR OWN

30 THE MARRIAGE PLOT

By the end of Act 4, Mistresses Ford and Page have informed their husbands of Falstaff's letters and their plans to teach him a lesson. In a sense, the main plot is pretty much resolved. However, there remains the subplot: Who will win Anne Page's hand in marriage? Three suitors are pursuing Anne Page: Abraham Slender, Dr. Caius, and the young Fenton. Imagine that you are Anne Page. Given what you know about these three men, compose the following as a private entry in a journal or diary: a letter to one of these three suitors in which you tell him in honest terms why you will—or will never—marry him. Remember to use evidence from the text – and even quotations – to support your narrative.

Guiding Question:

- ✦ How much of a voice does Anne Page seem to have in choosing her husband?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, W10

ACT 5

AS A CLASS

31 SCENE ACTING: FALSTAFF

With seven students reading aloud Falstaff's long speech at the end of the first scene of Act 5, each reads a line up to a full stop: a period, question mark or exclamation point. Try several readings of the speech, increasing the emotional intensity in each successive line. You might begin as an angry Falstaff, building each line until the speech ends in a fury. Then try a reading with Falstaff as a man "twice beaten," intensifying each successive line until we see Falstaff as a whimpering fool. Then as a class, identify several other possible emotional responses to his situation and read the speech using each one.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How does each reading contribute to the comedy of the play?
- ✦ Do any of the readings seem more appropriate than others in the context of Act 5?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R1, R3

32 INTERACTIVE READING: AT HERNE'S OAK

Act 5, scene 5 finds the townsfolk gathered at Herne's Oak tree, the designated place for Mistresses Ford and Page to play one final prank on Falstaff. The Queen of the Fairies (sometimes played by the character of Mistress Quickly, other times by Anne Page) dramatizes this fantastical story with a speech in which she instructs the "fairies" on their duties for this special night.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Explore the Queen of the Fairies' monologue with "jump-in reading," an interactive and playful way to read closely and mark text (described below). Synthesize your thoughts with a free write. Scaffold with "pointing" (also described below), which leads to the creation of a "found poem" and a new interpretation of the passage.

QUEEN OF FAIRIES *About, about!*
Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out.
Strew good luck, oafs, on every sacred room,
That it may stand till the perpetual doom
In state as wholesome as in state 'tis fit,
Worthy the owner and the owner it.
The several chairs of order look you scour
With juice of balm and every precious flower.
Each fair instalment, coat, and several crest,
With loyal blazon, evermore be blest!
And nightly meadow-fairies, look you sing,
Like to the Garter's compass, in a ring.
Th' expressure that it bears, green let it be,
More fertile-fresh than all the field to see;
And Honi soit qui mal y pense write
In em'rald tufts, flowers purple, blue, and white,
Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee.
Fairies use flowers for their charactery.
Away, disperse! – But till 'tis one o'clock,
Our dance of custom round about the oak
Of Herne the Hunter let us not forget.

Part One: Jump-in Reading

- ✦ Read the Queen of Fairies monologue aloud as a class, switching readers at each punctuation mark. While listening, mark at least one line or phrase that stands out for you.
- ✦ As a class, reread the speech—this time switching readers randomly without assignment or seating order. You can choose to jump in for any length of text you wish to read. Anyone can volunteer to jump in when the previous reader stops. Proceed until the passage has been read a second time.
- ✦ Return again to the text. Take a few minutes to mark any lines, phrases, or individual words that stand out after this second reading.
- ✦ Choose one word, phrase or line and free-write about why it stands out to you.

Part Two: Pointing (*Sheridan Blau, 2003*)

- ✦ Pick a line or phrase from the same passage to read out loud—a line that is compelling, interesting, fun, etc. No one "owns" a word, phrase or line, and there is no prescribed order in which lines are to be spoken. Begin reading chosen lines and phrases, listening closely to one another to avoid speaking on top of one another. The same line can be read again and again, creating a choral effect in a type of "found poem."

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ During which reading did you need to listen most closely?
- ✦ How did your understanding of the passage change with each successive reading?
- ✦ While listening to each reading, what images did you visualize most clearly in your mind?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R5, R6, W10

33. CHARACTER FAMILY PORTRAIT

Although we never get to see the wedding of Anne Page and Fenton, a stage portrait, or "tableau" of the wedding party might be the perfect curtain call for a production of *The Merry Wives*. Splitting the class into groups of ten to fifteen, two students in each group take on the role of photographer, and the remaining group members each choose a character from the play. (Begin with the main characters and then add additional characters up to the number of students in each group.) The photographers then place each character into the picture, creating a portrait that tells a clear story about the characters' relationships to one another. Each group presents its portrait to the rest of the class, who then must identify each character and share their reasoning. If a character is difficult to identify, give the group a chance to revise on the spot, choosing a more specific stance or placement for that character.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Where will Falstaff be placed in the picture, given his relationship to the others at the end of the story? Where might you place Anne's two other suitors, Dr. Caius and Abraham Slender, to help tell the story of their lack of success?
- ✦ How does a person's physicality or proximity to other characters help tell a specific story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R7, SL2

AFTER YOU'VE READ THE PLAY AS A CLASS

34 BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

After you've finished reading the play, continue adding to your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- ✦ Looking back and reflecting on the play, choose one question that's still puzzling you about *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It could be a question about character, plot, theme, relationship, or anything else that's still on your mind. Does Shakespeare leave any plot points unresolved? Do any resolutions in the final act leave you asking questions? What ambiguity does the play leave for us to question? Feel free to revisit your blog post after seeing the performance, and add any new insights you might have.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

✦ "Why is Falstaff fat?" is a question that for a long time has intrigued scholars, many of whom have written at length on why Shakespeare made the decision to create a character of such rotund proportions. With this question in mind, generate some ideas on how Western culture perceives the concept of body weight. You might consider the following: Can you think of examples of the "fat person" as a "jolly old soul"? How does our perception of food relate to the notion of happiness or unhappiness? Have American perceptions of body size and shape changed since your parents or grandparents grew up? Is there evidence to prove this? Does Falstaff's size influence the way we feel about him in the play? If so, why?

✦ Imagine a new housing subdivision being developed in Windsor. Come up with a billboard or write a radio advertisement that tells potential home buyers what type of a community Windsor is. What kinds of things are encouraged or endorsed? What kinds of things are forbidden or discouraged? Who would be the ideal target audience for this advertisement? Feel free to let your imaginations go with this exercise!

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W3, W6, W10

IN SMALL GROUPS

35 FALSTAFF'S CHARACTER ARC

Each time that Falstaff fails in his rendezvous with Mistress Ford, Master Ford appears as "Brook" to find out what has happened. And each time, Falstaff assures Ford (disguised as Brook) that the meeting will take place. However, the Falstaff of Act 5, after he has been beaten "as a woman," is perhaps a different Falstaff from the one we encounter in Act 2, prior to his first encounter with Mistresses Page and Ford, or in Act 3, after he is thrown from the laundry basket into the Thames. In groups of three, chorally read the following lines of Falstaff from the scenes outlined above. Think about the journey that Falstaff takes from the beginning to the end of the play. Try different emotional intentions for each of the three lines, keeping in mind that the audience should be able to see and hear any transformation that takes place in the character. Each of the lines below is said to Mr. Ford, disguised as Brook.

FALSTAFF *Hang him, mechanical salt-butter rogue! I will stare him out of his wits. I will awe him with my cudgel; it shall hang like a meteor o'er the cuckold's horns. Master Brook, thou shalt know I will predominate over the peasant, and thou shalt lie with his wife. Come to me soon at night. (Act 2, scene 2)*

FALSTAFF *Nay, you shall hear, Master Brook, what I have suffered to bring this woman to evil, for your good. Being crammed in the basket, a couple of Ford's knaves, his hinds, were called forth by their mistress to carry me in the name of foul clothes to Datchet Lane... it was a miracle to 'scape suffocation. And in the height of this bath...to be thrown in the Thames and cooled, glowing hot, in that surge, like a horseshoe—think of that, Master Brook! (Act 3, scene 5)*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



FALSTAFF

I went to her, Master Brook, as you see, like a poor old man, but I came from her, Master Brook, like a poor old woman. That same knave Ford, her husband, hath the finest mad devil of jealousy in him, Master Brook, that ever governed frenzy. I will tell you he beat me grievously, in the shape of a woman; for in the shape of a man, Master Brook, I fear not Goliath with a weaver's beam...Follow me; I'll tell you strange things of this knave Ford, on whom tonight I will be revenged, and I will deliver his wife into your hand. (Act 5, scene 1)

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ After listening to several trios of Falstuffs, how does the character change as he moves from the beginning to the end of the story?
- ✦ Can you describe the emotional responses that you saw and heard that would distinguish the Falstaff in Acts 2, 3, and 5?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R3

36. CHARACTER QUARANTINE

(To the teacher: Divide your class into five small groups, providing each group with five slips of paper or blank index cards – you can increase or decrease the number of groups depending on the size of your class. Assign each group a major character from The Merry Wives of Windsor. Designate a corner of the room for each of the five characters.)

In your small groups, identify five lines spoken by your assigned character that demonstrate his/her journey within the play. Chart those moments to make sure those lines best correspond to the character's development. Write each line on a strip of paper or index card, notating the character's name. Delegate tasks among the group: dueling Quote Seekers, Arc Charter, Scribe, and Time-keeper. When finished, turn your cards in, face-down, with one pile for each of the five groups.

Pull a card from another pile at random. Read the quote quietly to yourself and move to the corner/location of the room designated to the character who speaks your line, joining others who have lines from the same character. In this new group, read your lines aloud to one another. Do this a few times rearranging yourselves until you are confident you are speaking the lines in the sequence they appear in the play, beginning to end.

Create five “living statues” – or physical unmoving stances – that represent your character in the moment he/she speaks each line. Present your character's story arc with the rest of the class confirming the order or suggesting changes.

Want an extra challenge? Omit the character name from the quotes and see if you and your classmates can determine who the speaker is before moving to the appropriate corner of the classroom.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How does each line connect to a defining moment for your character?
- ✦ How do the “living statues” help us to understand the character's arcs?
- ✦ Which characters arguably undergo the biggest transformation from the beginning to the end of the story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1, SL4



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

IN SMALL GROUPS

37 THE STORY IN TWENTY LINES

In small groups, look through the script to choose the most important lines (up to twenty!), making sure to illustrate all aspects of the plot. What scenes must be represented by a line to move the story along? What actions will you use to help your audience understand what's going on? Prepare a script connecting your selected lines with brief, over-the-top narration in the style of a movie trailer. Act out your trailer for your classmates, or consider filming a montage of clips or still photos to play under the recorded sound of the trailer. *(To the teacher: For a visual example of this activity, check out this movie trailer, www.tinyurl.com/taftmovietrailer, for another Shakespeare play performed by students at Taft High School in Chicago!)*

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What are some strategies you can use to select lines?
- ✦ What becomes clearer in the plot when selecting only twenty lines to tell the entire story? What would you argue are the most important elements of the story?
- ✦ How can you use this concept for future use in reading?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL1, SL2

38 THE LANGUAGE OF FOOD

The citizens of Windsor are middle-class people whose lives revolve around domestic concerns. Much of the language of Windsor's citizens centers on words, phrases and expressions that mirror the everyday aspects of their lives. For example, images of food and the kitchen appear frequently in the speech of Windsor's inhabitants. In your small groups, choose one act from the play and, as you trace through the act, list the food and kitchen images that you discover.

Now create a menu for The Windsor Inn in which you make use of each of the character names and the food or kitchen items that you have associated with that character. A good place to start: the Abraham Slender Banbury Cheese Sandwich!

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How are these images used by the characters? As compliments? As insults?
- ✦ How do you think such images help to define the character who uses them?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, W3

39 REVISITING THE WEDDING PORTRAIT

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a comedy, and all ends well for the citizens of Windsor. But according to some Shakespearean scholars, like H. J. Oliver, "The joy of the majority is never achieved without the unhappiness of one."

Who do you think might be the "unhappy" character or characters at the end of the play? Do you sympathize with any of them? Why or why not? Could your responses change depending on how the characters are portrayed on stage? If so, how? Revisit the wedding portraits that you created as your curtain call (see *Activity #33*) and reflect on these particular characters in your picture.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Where were these particular characters positioned in the portrait? What was the spatial relationship between them and other, happier characters?
- ✦ Given your thoughts about the characters whom you see as unhappy at the end of the play, would you now change this wedding tableau in any way?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R7

ON YOUR OWN

40 THEMES AND BIG PICTURE IDEAS

Reflect on one of the themes from the play below, using your personal experience to write an essay:

- ✦ **Society and Class:** Windsor's middle-class members, like the Pages and Fords, expend great effort to maintain the status quo of the town, especially when somebody from the upper-class like Falstaff seeks to interrupt it. Share a time when you experienced a clash with someone that was the result of being part of different classes or groups in society.
- ✦ **Insiders and Outsiders:** Windsor has a culture of its own, with norms, and social roles—and even social deviance—all informally defined and taken in stride. Then various visitors land there, and the townspeople respond to their presence. How do these tensions play out in Windsor? Do you see analogies with the dynamics between insiders and outsiders in our own social, ethnic and religious groups (among others)? How are these tensions and differences accommodated for in Windsor?
- ✦ **Gender:** In *Merry Wives*, the women in the play inevitably teach the men of Windsor a thing or two, and they often help one another to execute their crafty plans. What is the importance of long-term friendships versus romantic relationships in your life? What do these friendships provide for you that a romantic relationship can't necessarily provide?
- ✦ **Lies and Deceit:** Mistresses Page and Ford must withhold information from their husbands in order to deceive Falstaff not one but three times throughout the play. Is there ever a time when lying or deceiving someone is justifiable – for instance, if you were trying to teach someone a lesson?
- ✦ **Marriage and Wealth:** Falstaff tries (and fails) to woo two ladies of the town to gain access to their husbands' wealth, and in the same play, Anne Page, the daughter of one of the wealthier men in town, finds herself being courted by not one but three gentlemen. In your opinion, are marriage and wealth still as inextricably connected today as they were when this play was written?

Extension Activity: Connect your chosen theme to a young adult book you have read. Make a graphic organizer to compare and contrast the characters, plot, conflict and resolution of the novel with that of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What big idea from the play resonates most closely with you?
- ✦ What young adult novels grapple with similar themes?
- ✦ What are the most relevant themes from the play in modern society?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R9, W2



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

THE PERFORMANCE: PREPARING AND REFLECTING

This section will help you begin to imagine what it might be like to see the play, especially if you've never seen a play at Chicago Shakespeare Theater before, and to reflect on your experience after seeing the play. Many activities will also ask you to watch the performance with a particular element of the production in mind—director's vision, concept, design, casting, acting style—with guidance on how to reflect meaningfully back in the classroom post-performance.

41 BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Before and after you see the performance, continue adding to your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

✦ Select one of the quotations from the “What the Critics Say” section of this handbook. Do you agree with the writer? Blog an argument about this quotation. Cite specific examples from the play to support your assertions. Does your argument still hold up after seeing the performance?

✦ Each actor brings his or her own unique quality to a character. They make specific choices based on the director's vision, chemistry with the ensemble of other actors and their own interpretation of what motivates their character to action. Choose a character to follow closely when you see CST's performance (if you already began a character diary, stick with your same character.) As you watch the actor playing your chosen character, note the acting choices he or she makes through voice, movement and “subtext”—the inner feelings beneath the spoken words. Compose a free-write of your thoughts on the actor's interpretation of the character. How does the actor in CST's production differ from what you had imagined? What choices did the actor make that enhanced your understanding of the character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W6, W10

AS A CLASS

42 THE STORY IN SHORT

If you have not had a chance to read *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in class, use these resources to become acquainted with the story and follow the performance more easily:

✦ Refer to the dramatis personae and the synopsis in the beginning of the handbook.

✦ Listen to Director Barbara Gaines' comments from the first rehearsal of CST's production to learn about her feelings on the strong community that exists in Windsor at www.chicagoshakes.com/merrywives.

✦ Use the “Before You Read the Play” activities in this handbook to become more familiar with the story, setting, characters, themes and language.

Imagine you are on the bus heading to CST's production and have one minute to fill someone in on the storyline. Based on what you know about the story, write what you would say to clue the listener in on key character names, setting and plot points without spoiling the ending.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What images come to mind when you hear "*The Merry Wives of Windsor*"?
- ✦ What do you already know about plays as an art form?
- ✦ What are you looking forward to seeing on stage in CST's production?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R7

43. THE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

The audience in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's courtyard-style theater is always in view of each other. The experience of theater is one of community. We are all present together, watching a story that has been acted countless times for hundreds of years and in hundreds of cities around the world. The thrust stage is much like the stages of Elizabethan theaters and situates the action of the play in the midst of the audience, allowing audience members to watch both the actors and each other! After you see *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, share when you became aware of other audience members. How did this affect your own experience? Were there times during the performance that you found yourself watching other audience members rather than watching the stage action?

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How does the audience experience at a play compare to a sporting event? A movie?
- ✦ How did the actors interact with the audience?
- ✦ What other art forms can you see live as an audience member? How are they similar to theater?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1

IN SMALL GROUPS

44 DIRECTOR'S VISION

When we read, we are told to visualize the story as if a movie reel were playing in our heads. In other words, we "see" the story in our minds as it unfolds on the printed page. Experienced readers may stop, "rewind" the reel, and "watch" it again—just to see if they missed something the first time through. Directors do just this, reading the words and then bringing the images from their mind – their interpretation of the play – into reality.

Before you come to see CST's production, think about how you would bring *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to life in performance. How would you choose to combine the following design elements to bring the play to life on your stage? Design and produce a poster or diorama of your production that addresses the following areas to demonstrate your overall vision:

- ✦ **Setting:** What will the setting of your play look like? What do you want your audience to see when they first enter the theater? Create a visual representation of your set. Consider furniture, buildings and interiors included in the play. What will the Ford's house look like? The Garter Inn? What about the final scene in the forest at Herne's Oak?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

★ **Sound and Music:** Music is often added to a production to evoke mood, location, and the historical period in which the play is set – Barbara Gaines production will be no exception! Additionally, certain scenes might call for sound effects that help to clarify the story. Can you think of types of songs you would use to enhance the audience experience? How would the music choices differ from one act to the next? Add a playlist of the music and any special sound effects you would include on your poster. (*To the teacher: Visit www.soundjunction.org, a web resource where you can explore music by historical period, location in the world, genre, and even listen to the sounds of individual instruments.*)

★ **Costumes:** Directors work closely with costume designers to convey a particular mood and historical time period for a play. Professional costume designers present their early ideas to the director on a “costume board,” containing clippings from books and magazines, fabric swatches, and images from art or history. Hair and make-up also add to the overall design. How might you incorporate wigs and any other special makeup into your costume design? Create costume designs for a few of the main characters.

★ **Lighting:** Lighting is an important element of live theater that works hand-in-hand with scenic design. It evokes mood through color, brightness, texture and shadows. Lighting often sets the time of day. It can enhance a location with special pattern and design effects like stars, water, leaves in trees or clouds. Spotlights and “specials” can isolate actors on stage to stand out to an audience. Think about how you would want lighting to evoke mood in your production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*? How could you bring the world of the play to life through lighting? Select an important moment you would want the lighting to highlight. Explain how you would wish to highlight the location, time of day, and mood of the scene.

Guiding Questions:

- ★ Who is the target audience for your production?
- ★ What can you use to evoke a mood in your design?
- ★ How will you convey the most important themes of the story through design?
- ★ What was the most vivid scene in your mind as you read the play? How can the design elements bring this scene to life on stage?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL5, R7, W9

45 ENTERING THE WORLD OF WINDSOR

In Shakespeare's time, the text of a play was a fluid and changing thing with each performance. Directors of Shakespeare follow in his footsteps when they modify parts of the text in an effort to make the play more understandable to its audiences. One of the main tasks of the director is to “theatricalize” a printed text—that is, to make clear visually what appears on the page. To Director Barbara Gaines, the opening lines of a play are particularly critical to theatricalize effectively, because the audience is not yet used to the world of the play or its language.

You will see in CST's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that Barbara Gaines immediately immerses us in the atmosphere and world of the play from the moment the lights come up. Before you see Gaines' vision for this important first impression, create your own. Imagine that you want to develop a brief, wordless vignette that will help your audience sink into the world of the play before the first word of Shakespeare's is spoken.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Which characters should appear in the opening scene and what's the action that we first see?
(The characters don't have to be in the first scene or even the main characters of the play.)
- ✦ If you were to add a song to your opening, which one might it be?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W3

46 CULTURAL COLLISION

The idiosyncracies of language in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are a source of laughter and a sign of social and cultural differentiation throughout the play. Dr. Caius, the French doctor, and Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, are characters that would have been recognizable to Shakespeare's audiences because Wales bordered England and France was just a trip across the English Channel (on a clear day you can see the French coast from Dover Castle!). Thus, elements of both cultures had made their way to England—and were poked fun at by the natives.

Similarly, Justice Shallow is a "country" judge who seems somewhat out of place in the more urbane town of Windsor. As we have seen, Shakespeare very carefully distinguishes characters by their use of language and creates humorous situations from a clash of cultures and social classes.

In your small groups, create twenty-first-century American counterparts for the characters of Dr. Caius, Sir Hugh Evans and Justice Shallow. How would they speak and act? Write a few lines of dialogue for each character you create. Share these lines with your classmates, asking them to guess which character you are depicting.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Do you think that humor which pokes fun at different ethnic groups or social classes necessarily stereotypes people from these groups or classes? And, if so, how do you feel about it being a source of humor?
- ✦ Is there any way in which this type of humor serves as a critique of the dominant class or culture? If so, how?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W10

AS A CLASS

47 DEVELOPING A BACK STORY

For the two to three hours that we as audience members spend in the theater watching a performance, we witness only a small part of each character's life. Actors working in a production, however, must create the whole back story of a character's life. That is, each character has a history that extends well beyond what we see on stage, but this back story is essential in helping the actor to present a believable character to the audience.

Choose a favorite character from *The Merry Wives* and imagine that you are the actor creating the role for performance. Write out a character history that will help you prepare for your role on stage. Think about the following as questions for you to answer for yourself: What was the character like as a child? In what kind of family did the character grow up? What does this character do in his or her free time? What is the character's favorite food? What is the character's favorite color? If the character could choose a modern-day profession (other than the one he or she has in the play), what would it be? What was the character like as a young student at school? Who in the play could be the character's best friend?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

You may be as creative as you wish in this activity, but keep in mind that what you decide about the character's personal history should be consistent with what Shakespeare has given us in the text of the play. For example, given what we know about Falstaff, it would probably not be true that he was a somber, quiet child who just suddenly became a great wit as an adult! In other words, use what you know from the play itself to create your character's history.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ What kinds of text clues can provide insight into your chosen character's imagined childhood?
- ✦ What is one defining moment of your chosen character's back story that has contributed to the person they are today?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, W3

48 A LETTER TO THE EDUCATION TEAM AT CST

Write a letter to Chicago Shakespeare Theater expressing your opinions about the play. What was your favorite part? What part, if any, didn't you like? Share your experience.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ Did seeing the play performed affect your understanding of any of the characters or scenes?
- ✦ How did you feel about the choices the director and designers made about the time period, which influenced the costumes, set, and music in the play?
- ✦ Were there any interpretations of characters or scenes with which you especially agreed or disagreed? Why?
- ✦ What surprised you about the performance?
- ✦ How does seeing the play performed live compare to reading a play in class?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, W2, W4

49 DRAMA CRITIC

You are a drama critic for your school newspaper. Write a review of the performance for your paper. Briefly recount the plot, without giving away the ending! Discuss the parts of the production—including the casting, acting, setting, music, costumes—you thought worked particularly well, or did not work well at all and explain why you thought so. Consider "publishing" your piece in a school newspaper or your classroom Bard Blog.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How easy (or difficult) was it to understand Shakespeare's language?
- ✦ How much did you believe what was happening?
- ✦ Did the comedic moments make you laugh out loud? Were there any moments that moved you?
- ✦ Which performances surprised you most? (For instance, were there characters who were funnier on stage than on the page?)

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, W1, W9

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



50 REIMAGINING THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

After you see *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, discuss what you saw on stage, including the costumes, wigs, props and scenery. Reflect on how these design elements represented the chosen time period of the late 1940s in Windsor, England.

CST often reimagines plays and sets them in different time periods, as with this production. When Artistic Director Barbara Gaines directed this same play in 2004, she staged it in 1770s Maine. Though the setting changed, the language stayed true to the original text. Choose another historical time period and location in which you could imagine this story taking place. Explain how you can connect the play's characters, events or themes to a different setting.

Guiding Questions:

- ✦ How could you connect the play's themes to a different time period?
- ✦ What would be some of the potential challenges in setting the play in a different period?
- ✦ What would it be like to set *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the present day?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL2



Photo by Liz Lauren

CRICKET AND GREG VINKLER AS VETERINARIAN DR. CAIUS CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

EXPLORING THE MERRILY DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES OF WINDSOR THROUGH A SITCOM LENS

MARY T. CHRISTEL taught AP Literature and Composition as well as media and film studies courses at Adlai E. Stevenson High School from 1979 to 2012. She has published several works on media literacy including *Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom* with Ellen Krueger (Heinemann) as well as contributing articles to *Teaching Shakespeare Today* (NCTE), *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century* (U of Ohio), *For All Time: Critical Issues in Shakespeare Studies* (Wakefield Press). Ms. Christel has been recognized by the Midwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for promoting media literacy education.

Does contemporary genre television owe a debt to William Shakespeare? Can *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Devious Maids*, or ABC's recently debuted *Trophy Wife* trace their roots back to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*? Whether reality shows, dramedies or sitcoms, they all rely on elements that echo Shakespeare's comedy. A group of women, bound together by family ties or friendship, navigate the travails of love and marriage, envy and jealousy, as well as the perils of gender politics. Sound familiar? While that may sound like the stuff of tragedy, it treads on the giddy knife's edge of comedy rather than tumbling toward a tragic downfall. And, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was created in a manner that many television series are developed: take familiar, well-loved characters and place them in a commonplace environment; allow their proclivities to mix and mingle into frothy conflicts; resolve their comic calamities into satisfying conclusions all the while playfully commenting on the social conventions of the times.

LEARNING THE RULES OF THE SITCOM GAME

The term "sitcom" generally refers to the broad category of half-hour television comedies, which includes among other subgenres the "situation comedy." In modern television terms, a situation comedy relies on a simple set of conventions:

- ★ the characters are typically middle class.
- ★ each episode is set in the same or a limited number of settings.
- ★ the recurring group of characters are clearly defined as families, friends or co-workers.

Since a situation comedy is confined to its thirty-minute time slot (with approximately twenty-two minutes of show content), it must introduce a complication to the series' basic premise, develop the ensuing conflict, and present a satisfying resolution without a great deal of nuanced plot or character development. To keep situation comedies running over many seasons, their beloved main characters fall into predictable patterns of behavior, which become part of the pleasure of watching the show. Situation comedy characters tend not to grow and change much, if at all, over the run of the series and lean toward stereotypes or stock characters.

When considering *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as a supersized episode or a series of episodes of a "situation comedy," we might argue that one of the particular pleasures of Shakespeare's comedies is his central characters, who are drawn as dynamic characters that do indeed grow and change. In Shakespeare's comedies, it falls to the supporting characters to remain comically static to be the necessary foils that provide contrast.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Comedy, whether on a Renaissance stage or on modern television, relies on similar “rules.” In order for students to be able to analyze or construct a comic scenario, they need to have the proper vocabulary. Any comic scenario begins with a premise, a set of circumstances that includes: a group of characters, a place for them to gather, and a reason for bringing them together. This premise should allow a variety of complications, conflicts and satisfying resolutions to develop with easy comic logic. The group of characters need to include a comic protagonist, who traditionally tends to suffer from naiveté, vanity or ignorance, which a comic antagonist or nemesis easily exploits. The antagonist can be a force that either is external (another character) or internal (a personal flaw). A comic protagonist is usually supported by a comic ally, who doesn’t suffer from quite the same level of naiveté, vanity or ignorance as does the protagonist. That ally might even be the “straight man” who provides a contrast to the “zanier” protagonist and supporting characters, offering the reader or audience a character with a more sensible view of the unfolding conflict and one that is closer to how the reader or audience would react in a similar situation. Early Mickey Mouse shorts like “Steamboat Willie” or “Plane Crazy” serve as good models of how this formula unfolds. Since these shorts run approximately eight minutes, they are easy to screen, rescreen and discuss in a single class period.

APPLYING THE RULES TO A CLASSIC TELEVISION SITCOM

Love Lucy may not look quite like any of the sitcoms that students see on network television today, but in many respects it relies on the verbal and physical humor present in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. (Lucy Ricardo’s antics might bring to mind Sofia Vergara’s character Gloria on television’s *Modern Family*, for instance).

It is helpful for students to view a classic television sitcom to analyze how one operates: the shenanigans of Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz might come to mind. Generally an episode of *I Love Lucy* revolves around Lucy (the protagonist) and Ethel (her ally) in the first half of the episode scheming to get something accomplished behind the backs, or in spite, of their husbands. This first part usually is set in the Ricardos’ home, the domestic sphere of the two women. Often Lucy is hoping to break into showbiz, the domain of her bandleader husband, Ricky. Lucy’s manic energy is occasionally tempered by the older, and possibly wiser, Ethel, but Ethel generally can’t hold Lucy back or is caught up in her friend’s enthusiasm despite Ethel’s slightly better judgment. The second half of many episodes moves to the club where Ricky performs to set the ladies’ scheme in motion. Lucy and Ethel’s comic humiliation or comeuppance plays out in that public arena. Ultimately some kind of male authority, usually in the form of Ricky and Fred, finds a way to set things right by sending the women back into their domestic sphere. The cycle begins anew in subsequent episodes, sending the hapless women to settings as varied as a candy factory, a department store and a winery.

If you choose to view an episode of *I Love Lucy*, here is set of questions to establish a purpose for student viewing. A classic, even groundbreaking, episode to use for this activity is “Lucy Is Enceinte” (season two episode 15, and available online at www.tvduck.com or www.sitcomsonline.com among other online video providers), where Lucy is faced with the dilemma of how to break the news to her husband that she is pregnant. A visibly pregnant woman on television was taboo in the 1950s, and some of the episode’s humor comes from the network censors forbidding any utterance of the word “pregnant.” The episode uses the show’s two basic settings—the home and the club—to good effect. The absence of Ethel in the club scenes is the only difference in how it approaches the basic formula previously outlined. Before the episode begins, ask the students to pay special attention to the “laugh track” (off camera audience reaction) and note what kind of behavior (visual or verbal) the laughs emphasize. The “laugh track” can be considered a participating character in the show’s overall scheme and impact.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

HERE ARE SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO CONSIDER AS THEY WATCH THE EPISODE:

- ★ When the episode opens, how do Lucy and Ethel establish their relationship and their ambitions to accomplish a specific goal?
- ★ How are both Lucy and Ethel developed as a comic protagonist and her ally? To what extent are they stereotypes or stock characters?
- ★ How does the opening of the episode establish the overall premise of the series, *I Love Lucy*, as well as the premise for this specific episode?
- ★ What complications arise that threaten to derail Lucy's (and possibly Ethel's) objectives established in the opening of the episode?
- ★ How are the women's husbands defined by similar or different stereotypes of male authority? To what extent are the husbands the comic allies or antagonists of the women in this episode?
- ★ How is the appearance of Fred and Ethel in the middle of the episode essential to escalating the conflict between Lucy and Ricky? Why are they no longer needed to resolve the conflict at the end of the episode?
- ★ How does the scene involving both couples rely on visual humor (sight gags) to expand the episode's comedy?
- ★ How is Lucy portrayed behaving in a childlike manner (her signature characteristic)? What motivates her to behave that way? And, what are the results of that strategy?
- ★ The actor who plays Ricky Ricardo was a famous bandleader in "real life." How and why are his talents showcased in this episode? (Share with students: the musical numbers that seem like padding or filler were part of the show's conventions.)
- ★ To what extent is the episode's conflict resolved by Lucy's ability to select the right strategy or by Ricky's (male authority's) intervention?

PUTTING THE SITCOM RULES IN "MERRY" ACTION

By looking at *The Merry Wives of Windsor* through the "sitcom lens," students can gain insight into the construction of a comic scene. This activity can serve as a means to introduce the basic premise of the play to students before they attend the live performance at Chicago Shakespeare, or as a post-reading/viewing activity to deepen students' understanding of the characters.

Begin the activity by presenting students with a set of character cards representing the play's scope of characters, which includes the wives, Falstaff, the lovers, the townsfolk, and Falstaff's posse. If students have not read the play, provide traits for each character on the cards. If students have read or viewed the play, ask them to write down the key attributes that define each character as a "type" but also help to differentiate characters that get lumped together in students' minds, like the wives, townspeople or Falstaff's posse. Once the students have a set of characters (no more than four to five), ask them to:

- ★ determine a setting for their character;
- ★ establish a reason for those characters being together in the specific setting;
- ★ introduce a complication (inciting incident)...
- ★ ... leading to a simple conflict involving all the characters...
- ★ ...which can be easily and fully resolved.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



Their scenario can be created either as a scripted or an improvised scene depending on their comfort level and skill with improvisation. To nudge students toward considering the strict format of a sitcom, instruct them to create a scene in the three-part format of a thirty-minute television show script:

- ★ Part One: introduce characters, setting, and the complication they face despite their familiarity with each other and their environment (cut to commercial break)
- ★ Part Two: escalate the complication into a conflict that presents the characters with a limited set of options to create a resolution (cut to commercial break)
- ★ Part Three: facilitate the resolution in a satisfying manner that doesn't leave loose ends (since situation comedy episodes are "self-contained" narratives).

If students have viewed the episode of *I Love Lucy* with attention to the laugh track, they might want to plot where they would "place" the laugh track reactions within the script. Students also could create several thirty-second ads for each commercial break promoting products and services that would be found in Shakespeare's London (or, in preparation for Barbara Gaines' production, in post-World War II England) to create a complete broadcast package.

Want to make this activity more challenging? In addition to handing out the set of character cards, students could select randomly a setting and a prop that figures in the conflict or resolution. These newly created scenarios could also move the action of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to a modern-day setting adapting Shakespeare's characters to a contemporary conflict retaining the traits that make them identifiable with their Elizabethan counterparts.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a play teachers can easily overlook as an accessible comedy from Shakespeare's canon. Since the play provides a means to connect its basic comedic formula and characters to a very familiar aspect of contemporary popular culture, it is easy for students develop an understanding and appreciation that Shakespeare's plays were indeed popular culture of his time and not dusty, musty texts that reside on the remote altar of high culture. And students can detect very direct and delightful influences of these Renaissance "wives" on their modern "sisters" featured in today's situation comedies and reality television. No better proof of enduring Shakespeare's legacy!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- **Media in Culture and Society: Situation Comedy** by Richard Dover
www.glyndwr.ac.uk/rdoover/med-stud/situatio.htm
- **Sitcom: What It Is, How It Works** by Richard F. Taflinger
www.public.wsu.edu/~taflinge/sitcom.html
- "Aspects of Sitcom Explained"
www.slideshare.net/guest17b7a0/sitcom-conventions/
- **Pioneers of Television: "Sitcom"** (PBS series)
www.pbs.org/wnet/pioneers-of-television/pioneering-programs/sitcoms/



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

THEATER WARM-UPS

Unlike many of the classic works studied in the English classroom, Shakespeare's plays were written to be spoken out loud and heard by an audience. Introducing drama-based activities into the classroom can be a powerful tool for increasing fluency and comprehension, encouraging empathy, building community, and exploring character perspective and choices. Learning to read Shakespeare can be compared to learning music, sports or other "learning by doing" classes. How does a music class usually begin? With a warm-up. How does one start a physical class? With a warm-up!

A brief physical and vocal warm-up—approximately five to seven minutes—can help students move from a "classroom mode" to a "studio mode." It sets the tone for a student coming to understand Shakespeare as a *living script*, as well as a piece of great literature. And you will find that after the first couple of times, your students' trepidations—and yours—will be unseated by energy and focus. If this is your first time incorporating warm-ups with your students, a few rehearsals in the privacy of your own home can do a lot to bolster your courage! You might also want to check out this video of actors practicing through physical and vocal warm-ups shared by the National Theatre in London at www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/vocal-warm-up-1-breathing. Every actor develops his/her own set of physical and vocal warm-ups. Warm-ups help the actor prepare for rehearsal or performance not only physically, but also mentally. For the actor, warm-ups create a mental and physical space to focus on the work at hand, forgetting all the day-to-day distractions of life, and to begin to assume the flexibility required to create a character.

PHYSICAL WARM-UPS

GETTING STARTED

- ★ creates focus on the immediate moment
- ★ develops body awareness
- ★ helps reduce tension

Push desks aside to create an open area where students can spread out and move. Begin by taking a comfortable stance with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead, knees relaxed, and arms down by your sides. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs deep into your abdomen, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this a few times.

WARM-UP FROM THE TOP OF THE BODY DOWN

(approximately seven to ten minutes)

- ★ increases circulation, flexibility, and body readiness through gentle movement
- ★ increases physical and spatial awareness

- Begin by doing head-rolls to the left and to the right, about four times each way, very slowly. Then do a series of shoulder rolls to the back and to the front, again very slowly, and emphasizing a full range of motion.
- Stretch each arm toward the ceiling alternately, and try to pull all the way through the rib cage, repeating this motion six to eight times.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



- c) Next, with particular care to keep knees slightly bent, twist from the waist in each direction, trying to look behind. Again, repeat six to eight times.
- d) From a standing position, starting with the top of the head, roll down with relaxed neck and arms until the body is hanging from the waist. Ask the students to shake things around, making sure their bodies are relaxed. From this position, bend at the knees, putting both hands on the floor. Stretch back up to hanging. Repeat this action about four times. Then roll back up—starting from the base of the spine, stack each vertebra until the head is the last thing to come up.
- e) Repeat the deep breathing from the beginning of the warm-up. Ask the students to bring their feet together, bend their knees, and keeping their knees together ask the students to rotate their knees in a circle parallel to the ground six to eight times. Repeat in the other direction. Return to standing.
- f) Pick up the right foot, rotate it inward six to eight times, and then do the same with the left foot. Repeat with outward rotation of the foot. Take a few moments and shake out the entire body.

VOCAL WARM-UPS

Vocal warm-ups can follow your physical warm-up. Some of these exercises may seem strange, but can be made silly and fun, while accomplishing the necessary vocal warm-up. Once students see their teacher looking completely foolish going through the vocal warm-ups, they are much more likely to smile and go along with it. So take a risk! Go for it. They will get on board and begin to embrace the silliness when they see you can too.

★ helps connect physicality to the voice

★ begins to open the imagination to performance possibilities

- a) Begin by gently massaging your jaw muscles in a downward motion on either side of your face. This will help wake up the facial muscles.
- b) Stick your tongue out as far as possible—repeat this with the tongue pointing up, down, and to each side. Repeat this exercise once or twice.
- c) Ask students to put their lips gently together and blow air through them, creating a “raspberry.”
- d) Next, hum - quietly, loudly, and across the entire vocal range. The vocal instrument loves to hum. Humming helps to lubricate the vocal chords.
- e) Create the vowel sounds, overemphasizing each shape with the face –A, E, I, O, and U—with no break.
- f) Choose two or three tongue-twisters—there are some listed below. Again, overemphasize the shape of each sound with the lips, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles. Begin slowly with each tongue-twister, and gradually increase speed, repeating until the speed is moving along so quickly that the enunciation is lost.

Actors have described the experience of acting Shakespeare as the “Olympics of Acting.” Shakespeare’s verse demands a very flexible vocal instrument, and an ability to express not only the flow of the text, but also the emotional shifts, which are suggested by the variations in rhythm and sound. In light of the sheer volume of words—some rarely or never used in our contemporary language—the actor must also be prepared to help the audience with his body, as well. An actor preparing to perform Shakespeare must go through each word of his text, determine its meaning, and then express it clearly to his audience. Shakespeare requires a very physically demanding style. The physical and vocal warm-up is the actor’s basis for each performance.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

TONGUE TWISTERS

Tongue twisters and other drama-based activities provide a great forum for us to help shy adolescents and those who struggle with articulating aloud in the classroom to build self-confidence in public speaking. Foster a safe and encouraging environment to cultivate this life skill that will benefit them beyond their adolescence.

- ★ red leather, yellow leather
- ★ unique New York
- ★ rubber, baby, buggy, bumpers
- ★ Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
- ★ the lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue, the tip of the tongue, the teeth, the lips
- ★ I carried the married character over the barrier
- ★ toy boat, toy boat, toy boat

Guiding Questions for Physical and Vocal Warm-ups:

- ★ Why is a warm-up important for actors before a rehearsal or performance?
- ★ Why is breathing included in a theater warm-up?
- ★ As we begin to explore this play in class through performance, what do we need to do vocally to be understood by our audience—and by our classmates?
- ★ What other activities/professions require a warm-up to begin?
- ★ How might those activities be similar to acting?
- ★ How is acting a physical activity? How is it a mental activity?

COMMUNITY BUILDERS

Each of these exercises is meant to open and expand our imaginations, increase our sense of “ensemble” or teamwork, and encourage being “in the moment.” These are some of the most fundamental and crucial elements of an actor’s training—and, of course, they are fundamental, too, to the learning process in the classroom. Incorporating community builders into your classroom routine builds the trust and safety needed for risk-taking and creativity. Allow five to ten minutes to include one or two of the exercises suggested below to follow a physical and vocal warm-up.

MIRRORING

- ★ helps build trust within the ensemble/classroom
- ★ encourages the students to “listen” with all their senses
- ★ helps the students reach a state of “relaxed readiness,” which will encourage their impulses and discourage their internal censors

With a partner, sit comfortably facing each other in relatively close proximity. In each pair, one person will move while the other moves as their reflection. Begin by using smaller, slower movements, and work up to the maximum range of movement (in size and speed) that your partner can follow. Make eye-contact with your partner to take in the whole person, rather than following each other’s small motions with your eyes. Switch leaders and repeat. After both partners have taken a turn, stand and increase your range of movement. Switch leaders and repeat. Now, keep going, but there is no leader. See what happens, and then discuss. *(To the teacher: Consider playing music softly in the background to help your students get lost in the activity and dispel self-consciousness. The music will help inspire movement, too!)*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



FOUR UP

- ★ helps the ensemble/classroom work together
- ★ helps to slowly introduce physical activities in the classroom
- ★ brings focus to the classroom

For this exercise, everyone stays seated at desks. The goal is to have four people standing at all times. There are a few rules: anyone can stand up whenever they want, but only four can be standing at a time and they can only stand up for a maximum of five seconds. Everyone should participate and try to stand with a group of four.

A sense of community and having a strong focus can be the keys to a successful production (and classroom). This exercise can help to establish those norms in a fun way, which also gets the students up on their feet.

ZOUNDS! BALL

(This exercise requires a soft ball about 8-12 inches in diameter.)

- ★ helps the ensemble/classroom grow together
- ★ helps the students let go of their internal “censor” and begin tapping into their impulses
- ★ brings together the physical and the vocal actor tools

Many actors will tell you that learning the lines is the easy part; making it come out of their mouths as if they’re saying it for the very first time is the hard part, especially with Shakespeare. Shakespeare can sound like a song, but how do you make it sound like real people talking to each other? Actors listen to each other and try to respond to what they hear in the moment of the play. Listening is a very important part of acting; it keeps the moment real—and the characters believable.

Stand in a circle facing in. *(To the teacher: explain to your students that the ball carries energy with it. This energy is like a feedback loop that increases the energy, speed and focus of the entire group by the amount that each actor-student puts into the ball.)* The goal is to keep the ball moving in the circle without letting the energy drop. There should be no space between throw and catch. There should be no thought as to whom you will throw next. To keep the intensity of the energy, as the ball is thrown, make eye contact with the person you are throwing the ball to, and at the moment of release, call out “Zounds!”

“Zounds,” a frequent expletive on the Shakespearean stage, rhymes with “wounds”—and was, in fact, a contraction for “God’s wounds.” The 1606 “Act to Restraine Abuses of Players” prohibited the use of the word “God” on the secular stage of the playhouse.

Experiment with the way you say “Zounds!” It could be loud or soft, in a character voice, or in whatever way they wish, as long as it is impulsive and with energy. Shakespeare has love scenes, sword fights, betrayals and all sorts of relationships in his plays. Actors—in the classroom and on stage—must be able to experiment, follow impulses, and create character without the fear of failure.

ZOUNDS! BALL (WITHOUT A BALL)

- ★ encourages students to make their imagination specific and clear to the ensemble
- ★ focuses the students on physical detail

This exercise builds on Zounds! Ball. Take the ball out of the circle and set it aside. Take an imaginary Zounds! Ball out of your pocket. Grow this ball from a tiny rubber ball into a huge balloon. Using “Zounds!” toss the ball to someone in the circle, who must catch it with the same weight and speed with which it was thrown. Whoever holds this imaginary ball



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

must create the ball into a different weight and size, making it clear to the rest of the circle how they've changed it. As in *Zounds! Ball*, work around the circle. The wide range of vocabulary in Shakespeare's plays can often be intimidating as one reads the scripts. The actor's job is to make the language clear, and this is often accomplished by very specific physical gesturing.

ZIP ZAP ZOP!

- ★ facilitates mental focus
- ★ encourages eye contact and team work
- ★ builds a sense of rhythm and pace

(To the teacher: For a demonstration of this community builder, watch this video, www.tinyurl.com/zipzapzop, for a demonstration and instructions.) Stand in a circle, facing in. Bring your hands to your chest in a prayer pose. Make sure everyone can see each person in the circle. Eye contact is going to be very important! Point your hands like a laser, make clear eye contact at another person in the circle, and say "zip," "zap" or "zop," picking up your cue from the person before you. While maintaining the word sequence of zip, zap, zop as well as the rhythm, start slowly and eventually build speed.

WAH!

- ★ facilitates physical awareness and risk-taking
- ★ encourages vocal projection
- ★ helps actors increase their sense of timing and decrease their response time

(To the teacher: Want to see Wah! in action with a group of students? Watch this brief video, www.tinyurl.com/wahwarmup.) Stand in a circle, facing in. No one in the circle is a student or teacher any longer, but rather a fearsome warrior. Press the palms of your hands flat together to become a sword. To begin the game, one warrior raises his or her sword straight up, then brings it down, pointing at another warrior in the circle. Warriors must make excellent eye contact to avoid confusion. As the warrior brings down his or her sword, he or she utters a fearsome battle cry, by saying, "Wah!" (Be wary, warriors, of shouting, which comes from the throat and leads to laryngitis, a warrior's worst enemy. Using the good support and deep breathing from your vocal warm-up will help you keep your vocal chords in top fighting condition.) When you become the recipient of "Wah!," raise your sword up above your head. While your sword is raised, the warriors on either side of you slash towards her stomach, as they cry "Wah!" in unison. Then make eye contact with someone else in the circle, slash your sword towards them with a final defiant "Wah!" Each "battle" should therefore include three cries of "Wah!" As the group becomes familiar with the game, work to increase your speed and volume. This is a silly game; remember that warriors don't care about "looking cool" because they're too busy fighting unending battles. When a warrior misses his or her cue, stop the round and start it again until everyone is comfortable being loud and making big physical choices.

If at any point an activity breaks down or the group "messes up," try this: ask the class to raise their arms to the sky in unison with a big, "Yay!!!!" By making this a classroom practice, you can support risk-taking and celebrate the notion that making mistakes is part of the learning process of any activity. It also helps keep the energy of the activity moving forward. Instead of the class devolving into giggles and finger-pointing when a mistake occurs, you can quickly acknowledge the "mess up," celebrate it, and be ready to jump right back in without missing a beat. This will take some practice for students, but once they get it, these hiccups will become simply part of the activity itself—and a great way to build community and spirit in the classroom at the same time! *(Thank you to Professor Catherine Weidner, the School of Theatre at DePaul University, for this excellent ensemble-building tip!)*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Form two parallel lines, and enough room in between for “action” to take place. The first student in one line, Student A, steps into the empty space between the two lines and begins miming any action (ex. bouncing a basketball). The first student in the opposite line, Student B, steps out and addresses Student A, saying their first name (a good name reinforcer!) and asking, “[Name], what are you doing?” Student A then states any action that is not what they are miming (e.g. “baking a cake”). Student B then begins miming the action that Student A has just stated, and the next student steps out to continue the exercise. *(To the teacher: Once students feel confident with the exercise, ask students to choose actions found in a chosen text. For instance, if you are teaching The Merry Wives of Windsor, students might say, “I’m dressing up like an old woman” or “I’m reading an outrageous letter!”)*

Guiding Questions for Community Builders:

- ★ Why is a sense of trust and community important in theater?
- ★ Are there other activities where an ensemble is important? How might they be similar to theater?
- ★ How is acting in a play similar to being on a sports team? Or a classroom?
- ★ Why might mental focus be important in acting?



Photo by Liz Lauren

FROM LEFT: HEIDI KETTENRING AS MISTRESS FORD, SCOTT JAECK AS SIR JOHN FALSTAFF AND KELLI FOX AS MISTRESS PAGE IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's website

Access articles and teacher handbooks for eighteen of Shakespeare's plays, as well as information on introducing your students to Shakespeare in performance.

www.chicagoshakes.com/education

COMPREHENSIVE LINK SITES

Shakespeare in Europe Sh:in:E

Access an array of web links categorized into criticism, theater and film, music, adaptation, education, and more. Website created and maintained by Basel University in Switzerland

www.shine.unibas.ch/metasite.html

Touchstone Database

This website database identifies and maps significant UK Shakespeare collections. Created and maintained by University of Birmingham in the UK.

www.touchstone.bham.ac.uk

Absolute Shakespeare

Access a comprehensive collection of Shakespeare's work, including full texts and summaries, a timeline, and lists of film adaptations.

www.absoluteshakespeare.com

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

The Folger Shakespeare Library

This website features lesson plans, primary sources and study guides for the most frequently taught plays and sonnets

www.folger.edu/

Teaching Shakespeare with Technology – PBS

Learn more about incorporating digital media into your Shakespeare units.

www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/technology

The History of Costume by Braun and Schneider

View costume illustrations of different social classes and cultures from various historical times.

www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html

TECHNO SHAKESPEARE



THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Royal Shakespeare Company – Education Activities

This study guide provides activities that illuminate the process of creating a theatrical production of The Merry Wives of Windsor

www.rsc.org.uk/downloads/rsc_mww2012_education_pack.pdf

Folger Shakespeare – Curriculum Guide

This link provides selected activities from the Folger website that help bring The Merry Wives of Windsor into a modern context.

<http://pages.simonandschuster.com/images/ckfinder/26/pdfs/Folger%20Curriculum%20Guides/merrywives.pdf>

BBC Shakespeare – The Merry Wives of Windsor

Access the complete BBC Shakespeare film version of the play on Youtube.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dipmwaobQk4

SHAKESPEARE AND ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and birthplace through an extensive online collection of Shakespeare-related materials.

www.shakespeare.org.uk

The Elizabethan Theatre

Read a lecture on Elizabethan Theatre by Professor Hilda Spear, University of Dundee, held at Cologne University.

www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare

Queen Elizabeth I

Learn more about Queen Elizabeth and the people, events and concepts relevant to the study of the Elizabethan Age.

www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm

Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend

This web-based exhibit is a companion to The Newberry Library's 2003/2004 Queen Elizabeth exhibit.

www.newberry.org/elizabeth/

Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Shakespeare

An excellent resource for non-fiction companion pieces, find encyclopedia articles on Shakespeare, his works, and the Elizabethan period.

www.britannica.com/shakespeare



TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

TEXTS AND EARLY EDITIONS

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

Access the first online web edition of the complete works, created and maintained by Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
<http://shakespeare.mit.edu>

Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto

A copy of the quartos, available to compare side-by-side, as well as background information. This website was created and is maintained by the British Library.
www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html

The Internet Shakespeare Editions

This website has transcriptions and high quality facsimiles of Shakespeare's folios and quartos, categorized by play with links to any articles written about the play that can be found on the website.
www.internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Foyer/plays.html

Furness Shakespeare Library

This collection of primary and secondary texts and images that illustrate the theater, literature, and history of Shakespeare. Created and maintained by University of Pennsylvania.
<http://dewey.lib.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/>

What Is a Folio?

This page gives an easy to understand introduction to the Folio texts, part of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's website "Hamlet on the Ramparts."
<http://shea.mit.edu/ramparts/newstuff3.htm>

.....

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Shakespeare's Words Glossary and Language Companion

Created by David Crystal and Ben Crystal, this site is a free online companion to the best-selling glossary and language companion, Shakespeare's Words.
www.shakespeareswords.com

Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary

Part of Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library and created by Alexander Schmidt.
www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0079

Words Shakespeare Invented

This list compiled by Amanda Mabillard has some of the many words Shakespeare created; when you click on the word it directs you to the play in which it first appeared.
www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/wordsinvented.html

TECHNO SHAKESPEARE



SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE

The Internet Broadway Database

This online database of Broadway plays is a great place to search for 'Shakespeare' and learn about some of the different productions of the Bard's works. (Note: This will only give you information about shows performed on Broadway.)
www.ibdb.com

The Internet Movie Database: William Shakespeare

Similar to IBDB, utilize this online movie database to search for 'Shakespeare' and learn about the different cinematic versions of his plays.
www.imdb.com

Shakespeare's Staging: Shakespeare's Performance and his Globe Theatre

This website catalogues stagings (with images!) from the 16th century to today.
shakespeare.berkeley.edu

SHAKESPEARE IN ART

Shakespeare Illustrated

Harry Rusche, English professor at Emory University, created this helpful website that explores nineteenth-century paintings that depict scenes from Shakespeare's plays. Most plays have at least two works of arts accompanying them; you can search for works of art by both play title and artist name.
www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html

Absolute Shakespeare

View examples of paintings based on Shakespeare's works and features examples of text believed to have inspired the painting.
www.absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/shakespeare_pictures.htm

The Faces of Elizabeth I

Access a collection of paintings of Queen Elizabeth spanning her lifetime.
www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm

Tudor England: Images

Peruse paintings of royalty from the Tudor Era.
www.marileecody.com/images.html



Photo by Liz Lauren

FROM LEFT: ROSS LEHMAN AS MASTER FORD, KEVIN GUDAHLE AS MASTER PAGE, HEIDI KETTENRING AS MISTRESS FORD AND KELLI FOX AS MISTRESS PAGE IN CST'S 2013/14 PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, DIRECTED BY BARBARA GAINES.



SUGGESTED READINGS

SUGGESTED READINGS

Anderson, Linda. *A Wild Kind of Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies*. University of Delaware Press, 1987.

Anderson examines the device of "revenge" in Shakespeare's comedies and proposes that comic revenge was used as an "ethical social instrument" to establish or restore justice.

Barton, John. *Playing Shakespeare*. London, 1986. A bible for Shakespearean actors, this classic book by John Barton (of Royal Shakespeare Company fame) offers any reader with an interest in Shakespeare's words an insider's insight into making Shakespeare's language comprehensible.

Bevington, David. "Introduction," *The Merry Wives of Windsor in Shakespeare: Three Early Comedies*. Bantam, 1980. An introduction to *Merry Wives* by a Shakespeare scholar noted for his ability to write vivid clear critical companions to Shakespeare

Baldwin, Lacey. *Treason in Tudor England: Politics and Paranoia*. Princeton, 1986. This wonderfully entertaining and informative book tells the story of several would-be traitors during the Tudor period.



Bevington, David. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. New York, 1992. This comprehensive anthology is an easily accessible teaching resource that addresses the two main issues readers face while first reading Shakespeare – a lack of knowledge about the historical period and difficulty with the language of Shakespeare's plays -- through essays on both the plays and the historical context.

Brockbank, Philip, ed. *Players of Shakespeare, Volumes 1–6*. Cambridge (1988–2007). Written by famous actors about the Shakespearean roles they have performed on the English stage, this collection of personal essays offers the reader a privileged look inside the characters and the artist's craft.

Bullough, Geoffrey. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. New York, 1975. The classic reference detailing Shakespeare's sources. Out of print, this multi-volume resource is well worth searching for in a library.

Chrisp, Peter. *Shakespeare*. London, 2002. Part of DK Eyewitness Books' "children's series," this title, plus a number of others (Costume, Arms and Armor, Battle, Castle, Mythology) offers students of any age beautifully illustrated background information to complement a classroom's Shakespeare study.



Christel, Mary T., and Scott Sullivan. *Lesson Plans for Creating Media-rich Classrooms*. Urbana, IL, 2007. This book provides sample lesson plans for incorporating media literacy into the curriculum. Particularly interesting are Scott Williams' lesson plans for creating movie trailers.



Dakin, Mary Ellen. *Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults*. Urbana, IL, 2009. This book offers practical strategies for how and why to teach the Bard's work.



Davis, James E., and Ronald E. Salomone. *Teaching Shakespeare Today: Practical Approaches and Productive Strategies*. Urbana, IL, 1993. This text is similar in format to *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century*. In combination, they provide the greatest wealth of teaching ideas, including the use of film.

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. New York, 1981. French offers a feminist perspective on each of Shakespeare's plays, providing insight into attitudes toward men, women, love, and power in Western culture.

Gibson, Rex, ed. *Cambridge School Shakespeare: The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Cambridge, 2003. This excellent series, used extensively as a resource in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's education efforts, includes *The Merry Wives of Windsor* among its titles. Its "active Shakespeare" activities are easily adaptable to any play in the curriculum.




indicates a focus on methods for teaching Shakespeare through film.

SUGGESTED READINGS



Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge, 1998. As “missionary” and inspiration to the “active Shakespeare” movement worldwide, Rex Gibson compiles into one incomparable resource activities that encourage students to playfully and thoughtfully engage with Shakespeare’s language and its infinite possibilities.

 **Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago, 1951.** This classic critical analysis, which is both readable and humanistic, devotes a chapter to each play in the canon.

Grun, Bernard. *The Timetables of History*. New York, 1991. This book is a must-have resource for anyone who loves to place Shakespeare, his writing, and his royal characters in an historical context.


Hills and Ötchen. *Shakespeare's Insults: Educating Your Wit*. Ann Arbor, 1991. This fun reference guide catalogues insults from Shakespeare’s plays.

Mullaney, Steven. *The Place of the Stage*. Chicago, 1988. Mullaney examines the culture of popular drama in Elizabethan and Jacobean England by offering an original and historically grounded perspective on the emergence of popular theater.

Nevo, Ruth. *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare*. London, 1980. In this book, Nevo analyzes ten of Shakespeare’s comedies, interpreting them through theory of comedy, and tracing Shakespeare’s development as a comic dramatist.

O'Brien, Peggy. *Shakespeare Set Free*. New York, 1993. This excellent three-volume set does not include *The Merry Wives of Windsor* among its plays. But its “active Shakespeare” approach is easily adaptable to any Shakespeare play you may be teaching.


Oliver, H. J. "Introduction" in the Arden Shakespeare edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Routledge, 1994. This annotated version of the play is prefaced by a critical introductory essay.

 **Parsons, Keith and Mason, Pamela. *Shakespeare in Performance*. London, 1995.** A beautifully illustrated book detailing the performance history of Shakespeare’s plays, both on the stage and in film.

Partridge, Eric. *Shakespeare's Bawdy*. London, 2000. Not for the prudish, Partridge’s classic work offers an alphabetical glossary of the sexual and scatological meanings of Shakespeare’s language. It will help the reader (including even the most Shakespeare-averse) understand another reason for this playwright’s broad appeal on stage.

Peacock, John. *Costume 1066–1990s*. London, 1994. Among the many excellent costume books available, Peacock’s offers hundreds and hundreds of annotated sketches—an essential resource (from our point of view) for every English classroom’s study of Shakespeare.

Roberts, Jeanne Addison. *Shakespeare's English Comedy: "The Merry Wives of Windsor" in Context*. University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Roberts seeks to put *Merry Wives* in conversation with the rest of Shakespeare’s canon by showing how this is not a play that can be lightly dismissed.

 **Salomone, Ronald E., and James E. Davis. *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century*. Athens, 1997.** This collection of essays by high school teachers and college professors offers a wide range of strategies to teach Shakespeare, including several essays on the use of film and film adaptation in the classroom.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1800*. Harper & Row, 1979. Stone provides detailed analyses of family relationships from 1500 to 1800 in England, comparing family values of the past to those we have today.

White, R. S. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. New York, 1991. This annotated version of the play is prefaced by critical introductory essays.



indicates a focus on methods for teaching Shakespeare through film.



Chicago Shakespeare Theater
on Navy Pier
800 East Grand Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611

Shakespeare and the art of theater open up many and varied paths of learning. Through one of the largest arts-in-education programs in the entire country, Team Shakespeare brings Shakespeare's works to life for middle and high school students. Team Shakespeare is an expansive effort to share Shakespeare with young people and to celebrate the work of this great playwright, who embraced the limitless scope of imagination and the exploration of our complex human nature.

LEAD TEAM SHAKESPEARE PARTNER

CHASE  **J.P.Morgan**

MAJOR
PROGRAM
SUPPORT

A.N. and
Pearl G. Barnett
Foundation



POLK BROS FOUNDATION
a foundation for chicago families



PRINCIPAL ANNUAL SUPPORT FOR TEAM SHAKESPEARE IS ALSO PROVIDED BY Baxter International Inc., the Helen Brach Foundation, The Brinson Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies, The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, James and Brenda Grusecki, The Grover Hermann Foundation, Illinois Tool Works, K&L Gates LLP, KPMG, Northern Trust, Nuveen Investments, Shelia Penrose and Ernie Mahaffey, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, and Anonymous donors.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS COURTESY OF Joyce Chelberg, JCCC Foundation, Mazza Foundation, People's Gas, Dr. Scholl Foundation, Charles and M.R. Shapiro Foundation, Dick Simpson, The Siragusa Foundation, Stefani's Children's Foundation and Anonymous.

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency

MAJOR 2013/14 SEASON SUPPORTERS

American Airlines 



BMO  Harris Bank



ComEd

HYATT

J.P.Morgan



ROBERT R.
MCCORMICK
FOUNDATION

Lead individual and foundation support provided by Best Portion Foundation, Eric's Tazmanian Angel Fund, Susan and Lew Manilow, Raymond and Judy McCaskey, Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg and Donna Van Ekeren Foundation.