

BRITISH  
SHAKESPEARE  
ASSOCIATION

A MAGAZINE  
FOR ALL  
SHAKESPEARE  
EDUCATORS

# teaching SHAKESPEARE

POLICY • PEDAGOGY • PRACTICE

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DEMAND MORE WHEELCHAIRS ON THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE WITH **CHLOE STOPA-HUNT**  
INCREASE SHAKESPEARE'S ACCESSIBILITY USING THE 'PLAYSHOP' MODEL WITH **KRISTIN HALL**  
INVITE ALESSANDRO DE' MEDICI TO TEACH YOU *OTHELLO* WITH **CATHERINE FLETCHER**  
EXPLORE SIXTH-FORM SHAKESPEARE EXPERIENCES WITH **TOM BARLOW**

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# NOTICEBOARD

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Don't forget to register for the biennial British Shakespeare Association conference, which takes place 3–6 July 2014 at the University of Stirling. The conference programme will include lectures, papers, seminars, performances, and excursions. There will also be special workshops and sessions directed at local schools. Keynote speakers will include: Professor Margreta de Grazia (University of Pennsylvania), Professor Andrew Murphy (University of St Andrews), Professor John Drakakis (University of Stirling), Dr Colin Burrow (University of Oxford) and Dr Michael Bogdanov (Director, The Wales Theatre Company). For further information, the latest programme and to register, visit the conference website: [shakespeare.stir.ac.uk](http://shakespeare.stir.ac.uk)

Other conferences just over the horizon include the inaugural Asian Shakespeare Association conference, Taipei, 15–17 May with the theme of 'Shakespearean journeys'. Find out more at [asianshakespeare.org](http://asianshakespeare.org).

Those completing postgraduate study may be interested in testing out their material or just contemplating the work of others at the 'Shakespeare and his contemporaries conference' at the British Institute in Florence, 10 April as well as the British Graduate Shakespeare conference (more widely known as Britgrad), at the Shakespeare Institute, Stratford upon Avon 5–7 June (see [britgrad.wordpress.com](http://britgrad.wordpress.com)).

## TES SHAKESPEARE

TES connect have recently launched a new collection of free Shakespeare teaching resources. The resources have been uploaded and shared by teachers and are free to download at [www.tes.co.uk/resource-collections/teaching-shakespeare-6400135](http://www.tes.co.uk/resource-collections/teaching-shakespeare-6400135)

## SHAKESPEARE IN JAPAN

Thanks to the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, and building on the BSA journal *Shakespeare's* recent special issue on Japan, issue 6 will focus on *Teaching Shakespeare* in that country's schools, colleges and universities. If you teach or have taught, study or have studied, Shakespeare in Japan – or have been inspired by Japanese productions, arts and culture etc. in your teaching or staging of Shakespeare elsewhere – please do get in touch. Equally, let us know if you are a teacher of Japanese students studying Shakespeare outside Japan or if you are a Japanese student studying Shakespeare in another country. Email [teachingshakespeare@ymail.com](mailto:teachingshakespeare@ymail.com)

## PRODUCTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Finally, a reminder of Shakespeare productions created especially for young people being staged this year. In March 2014, Shakespeare's Globe will be staging *The Merchant of Venice* as part of their ongoing Playing Shakespeare project with Deutsche Bank. On tour across English regional theatres until mid-March is *Taming of the Shrew*, as part of the RSC's First Encounter scheme.



**f**acilitating access for all to Shakespeare is one of the British Shakespeare Association's key concerns. While still celebrating work which realises this, issue 5 also acknowledges challenges and frustrations around access.

The origins of this issue of *Teaching Shakespeare* arose in 2012 with a group of my undergraduate dissertation students researching access to the playwright's work (and work inspired by the playwright) in the theatre. Their focus was honed in the context of London hosting, what its organising committee claimed to be, the most accessible Olympic Games ever; the multilingual Shakespeare productions staged for the Globe to Globe festival (including a British Sign Language *Love's Labour's Lost* by Deafinitely Theatre); but also Channel 4's 'No Go Britain' current affairs broadcasting, which revealed a definite lack of legacy in terms of access for all to public transport. With access being debated in relation to sporting arenas and local bus stops, one-off events and everyday life, the students felt motivated to explore access to Shakespearean theatre and their education programmes today, a realm still figured as elite and exclusive in spite of legislation (such as the Equality Act), funding requirements and campaigns such as the RSC's 'Stand up for Shakespeare'.

While this issue of the magazine looks at physical barriers to accessing the Shakespearean stage in Chloe Stopa-Hunt's article, its scope extends to discussion of socio-economic, geographic, racial, and of course pedagogic factors in accessing Shakespeare. This is in line with diverse definitions of accessibility by bodies such as ATG, the largest ticketing company in the UK, as "everything done to enable those with additional needs and access requirements to come to the theatre and have the best time possible" (Sarre). Arts Council England's definition is broader still, positing accessibility as about "eliminating barriers, physical, attitudinal and procedural, which may otherwise inhibit the involvement of the whole community". This is achieved by "proactively reaching out to involve and include groups and individuals

who may feel that what is offered is not for people like them" (Arts Council England). Hannah Bailey considers the successes and challenges in terms of accessibility achieved by the Royal Shakespeare Company's holiday-time family workshops, while Amelia Farebrother considers the conflicting explicit and implicit messages about who Royal Shakespeare Company productions are 'for' in an analysis of their theatre programmes.

Part of *Teaching Shakespeare's* mission is to share practice around Shakespeare in education across diverse sectors, with the aim of making him more accessible to teachers and students. In this vein, Kristin Hall gives readers an insight into the work of the Atlanta Shakespeare Company making the plays accessible through words and allowing student to build on the associations they create between Shakespeare and popular culture. Meanwhile, Catherine Fletcher offers school students a taste of the higher education using Othello's real-life, historical context. Tom Barlow's Vox Pop at All Saints School, East London, airs practices around access to Shakespeare at various ages and levels of achievement.

*Teaching Shakespeare* strives to be accessible in multiple ways. It is freely available online; readable on a screen or printed; uses sans serif font throughout, with serifs used alongside images to embellish the pieces; prioritises the likely interest in and quality of the work over authors' institutional affiliation. There is always room to be more accessible – so please do send your suggestions for accessibility and personal experiences of access to Shakespeare in the theatre to [teachingshakespeare@gmail.com](mailto:teachingshakespeare@gmail.com).

**Sarah Olive**

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Photo © Kristin Hall

## ACCESSIBLE SHAKESPEARE AND THE 'PLAYSHOP' MODEL

From modern dress productions to iPad apps, it's easy to find almost as many strategies for making Shakespeare plays 'accessible' to students as it is to find different definitions of the word 'accessible.' The conventional wisdom that I've encountered over the years often advises teachers to begin by focusing on plot and character outlines when introducing students to Shakespeare, hoping that young people will relate to the characters' predicaments and, in doing so, connect with words written four centuries ago. Close reading of Shakespeare's text and poetry will hopefully follow, if time allows.

I was most familiar with this approach when I began teaching with the Atlanta Shakespeare Company, a professional theatre ensemble based at the New American Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, GA. Some of ASC's educational offerings to teachers across the Southeast – such as study guides for matinee productions, or multi-week school residencies

geared toward a final student production – fall in line with the 'overview first, textual analysis second' model. But the company's in-class workshops, dubbed 'play-shops,' approach the elements of Shakespeare's work in a slightly different order. This particular program works to break down students' unfamiliarity with Shakespeare's text and syntax first, focusing on the entire story second.

ASC bases its playshops on the model developed at Shakespeare and Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, where many ASC ensemble members have studied. Playshops are designed to ensure that students will approach Shakespeare's text as actors and will speak his language themselves before the class period has finished. The playshop model can adapt to different time lengths and to suit students from ages 8 to 18, but the essential playshop for a Shakespeare play includes six elements:

1. Students stand in a circle while a lead teaching artist guides them in an acting 'warm up.'
2. The lead artist gives the students a short selection of text from the Shakespeare play in question to speak together in unison.
3. Students each speak just one word of that text selection individually, going around the circle.
4. Students break into smaller groups, each group working with an artist to embody brief phrases from the play in the boldest, most outlandish, even silliest way possible, then performing those selections of text for the class.
5. Making the same kind of bold choices just used for the smaller text selections, each group works with an artist to embody scene selections from the play.
6. All student scenes come together to form one class 'production' of the play, linked by narration by the lead artist.

Of all these steps, I find step 5 the most pedagogically fascinating. The text selections for scenes are presented to students simply as lines of imagery-laden words and phrases, not attributed to any particular characters. These lines of text from each scene have been chosen with an eye not to story

Photo © Kristin Hall





or character development, but rather to imagery full of strong emotion and rich with potential for physical enactment and illustration. Titania and Oberon's first scene in *Midsummer*, for instance, is represented not by their marital argument but by Titania's speech beginning "His mother was a votress of my order..." (II.1.491–507). Depending on a particular teaching artist's style or student familiarity with the play in question, a student group discussion might occasionally begin with a brief summary of the scene's place in the larger story. Just as often, however, the students will jump right into examining the words in front of them context-free, connecting each Shakespearean word, phrase or emotion to their own particular experiences and then using that connection to physically illustrate the text. Artists often answer the question "What does this mean?" with further questions ("What other words do you know that sound like this one?" "What does this word remind you of?") Within the space of the playshop, any connection students make is valued and accepted in the hopes of breaking down student fear of Shakespeare's language.

**“these lines of text from each scene have been chosen with an eye not to story or character development, but rather to imagery full of strong emotion and rich with potential for physical enactment and illustration.”**

This 'free-wheeling' approach always leads back to the students speaking Shakespeare's text in front of classmates, and any produce a wide range of performances. Some student groups might insist on having a Romeo and a Juliet perform text from the balcony scene. In other groups, all of the students might stand in a line and either deliver one line per student or speak in unison, enacting each separate image as they come to it. In others, one or two students might speak most of the lines while fellow students help to illustrate the text physically. Some interpretations can be quite literal while other student groups pile in as many contemporary references as possible. I have seen the Macbeth line "Where we lay/ our chimneys were blown down" (II.3.823–4) illustrated in varying examples: by all of the students speaking the line, whistling like the wind then falling to the ground in unison; by one student reading the line as others pretended to be distressed homeowners lacking chimneys; and even by a group of fifth graders who decided the line reminded them of the popular smartphone game 'Angry Birds,' and decided to enact a famous image from that game.

The theory behind 'free-wheeling' Shakespeare exploration hopes that when students next read or hear the lines from their particular scenes, they will process those lines not with bafflement but rather with a sense of ownership. And it works. For students in Georgia's government-funded public

schools, where budget cuts in the poorest urban districts have all but eliminated in-school drama programs and reduced field trips to see plays, a free-wheeling approach to Shakespeare's text can be particularly powerful. Playshops based on a curriculum Shakespeare title might be economically disadvantaged students' first experience not just with Shakespeare but with theatre in general.

**“WITHIN THE SPACE OF THE PLAYSHOP, ANY CONNECTION STUDENTS MAKE IS VALUED AND ACCEPTED IN THE HOPES OF BREAKING DOWN STUDENT FEAR OF SHAKESPEARE’S LANGUAGE.”**

These children might not identify immediately with the characters in *Julius Caesar*, but they do readily connect their own cultural touchstones to particular Shakespearean words and phrases when given a pressure-free opportunity. They do love popular songs and relish the opportunity to sing, in one example, a line of Tiao Cruz's 'Dynamite' for their classmates as a way of embodying the line 'The night has been unruly' during a Macbeth playshop (II.3.823). The next time they hear or read that line, they'll look at it with a sense of fun instead of staring blankly at a page or stage.

Rather than asking students to connect with characters and plot before diving into Shakespeare's language, then, ASC's playshops tackle students' fear of the language in a playful way before building toward character and plot details.

**“if you’re going to make SHAKESPEARE’S plays accessible, it helps to make HIS WORDS feel accessible first.”**

Both plot and character are outlined in narration during the concluding class 'production' at the end of each playshop, drawing all the students' close reading exercises together to create an artistic whole.

As visiting guests, artists within a school, ASC never intends the 'free-wheeling' Shakespeare of playshops as a comprehensive approach to teaching a play, but rather provides this approach as a complement to the methods that teachers are already using to prepare students for essays and tests. The reaction of the teachers with whom we partnered during my time with the company was overwhelmingly positive. To me that makes sense: if you're going to make Shakespeare's plays accessible, it helps to make his words feel accessible first.

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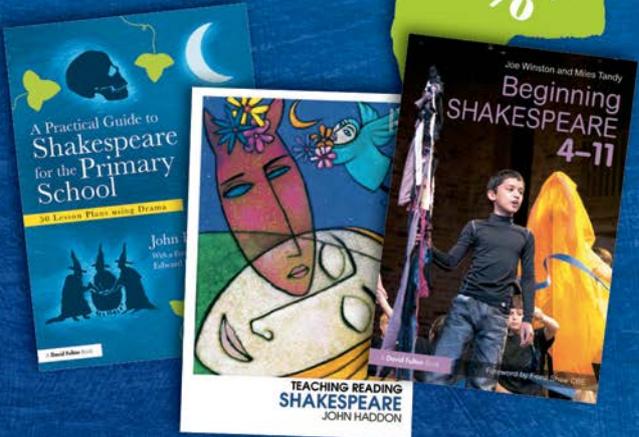
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**C**ATHERINE FLETCHER is Lecturer in Public History at the University of Sheffield. Her first book was *The Divorce of Henry VIII: The Untold Story* (Vintage), about the Italian diplomatic skulduggery behind Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. She has also published research articles on many aspects of European history.

## PROJECT ALEX: SOME HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR OTHELLO

**Project Alex is an initiative from the University of Sheffield's Department of History that explores the life of Alessandro de' Medici. Ruler of Florence from 1531 to 1537 and the first 'black' head of state in the modern West, Alessandro was acknowledged as the illegitimate son of Lorenzo de' Medici, duke of Urbino. He was probably the child of an African slave or ex-slave in the Medici household, Simonetta da Colvecchio. Alessandro was related to Pope Clement VII, whose manoeuvrings to make Alessandro ruler of Florence are part of the Italian back-story to Henry VIII's break with Rome.**

As one of the best-documented mixed-race individuals of his period, Alessandro offers an intriguing case-study for students assessing the representation of 'race' in *Othello*. It is only recently that Alessandro's ethnicity has attracted much serious discussion in the art world and among historians, but the debate has moved relatively quickly. The Victoria & Albert Museum, for example, now presents Alessandro in the context of 'Africans in Medieval and Renaissance Art'. In a newly-developed workshop for schools, we have used source analysis, debate and performance to explore Alessandro's life, allowing teachers to take the discussion on in subsequent classes relating more directly to Shakespeare's text.

The discussion is all the more relevant because Giovanni Battista Giraldi (Cinzio), author of *Un Capitano Moro*, Shakespeare's source text for *Othello*, was a contemporary of Alessandro de' Medici. Born in 1504, Cinzio was a university professor in Ferrara throughout the period that Alessandro ruled Florence. The city of Ferrara lay on the main route between Florence and Venice, and there was substantial correspondence between the two courts. It would be surprising indeed if Cinzio was not familiar with the stories about Alessandro – particularly after the duke's dramatic assassination by a relative in 1537.

Our workshops to date have been held in curriculum enhancement sessions and aimed to give participants:

- A better understanding of what university-level research and teaching look like
- New ideas about the past that they could apply to topics they were exploring in Sixth Form
- An experience they could discuss in university interviews/on UCAS forms
- Skills in independent research and team-work.

In our full-day workshop, we began with a brief introduction to Alessandro de' Medici's life: his promotion to the duchy of Penne at the age of ten, his relationship to two Popes, his rise to rule Florence and his assassination. We gave a brief explanation of the way Italy was divided into lots of competing small states in this period. We then put a question to the participants: we have told you that Alessandro was the first 'black' head of state in the modern West, but what do we mean by 'race'?

Through a brainstorm we aimed to get students thinking about the idea that 'race' is not a constant historical concept, but has changed over time. We used definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary to make the point that in the sixteenth century 'race' did not have its later meaning. Instead it referred to 'a group of people descended from a common ancestor' or a 'tribe, nation, or people'. While today Alessandro might be called 'black' or 'mixed race', sixteenth-century people were more interested in a person's social status – whether he was a slave, a peasant, a priest



Photo © Catherine Fletcher

or a nobleman – and in his religion than in the colour of his skin. Only in the late seventeenth century, for example, did Europeans 'begin to identify themselves as "white"' (Meisenhelder 52). When studying *Othello* it is worth considering this different historical context.

In the next section of the workshop, we set participants to examining a series of the visual and textual sources that have been used to establish Alessandro de' Medici's 'race'. This exercise makes the important point that in fact there's rather little comment *directly* related to race in the textual evidence. Like Shakespeare, Alessandro's contemporaries did not have the racial categories that were later developed in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. So, for example, Shakespeare calls Othello 'the Moor of Venice', but we cannot tell from the text whether Othello is meant to be from North Africa, or further south. The insults directed at Othello sometimes point in the direction of Arab ancestry ('Barbary horse', and sometimes to sub-Saharan origins ('old black ram', 'thick lips', 'sooty bosom' and simply 'black Othello'). Different productions make different choices.

**“we aimed to get students THINKING ABOUT THE IDEA THAT ‘race’ IS NOT A CONSTANT HISTORICAL CONCEPT, BUT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME.”**

Having explored the sources for Alessandro's rule, we then introduced Cinzio and the link to *Othello*. We asked the participants to read out a selection of extracts from *Othello* (Act 1, Scene 1, lines 87-145; Act 1, Scene 2, lines 112-121; Act 3, Scene 3, lines 430-440) and asked them to comment on how they might interpret these quotations.

There are a number of areas that can usefully be highlighted here. For example, we found an interesting parallel in the discourse around slavery. Othello is a former slave, captured by his enemies then redeemed. When Brabantio says angrily that if Othello gets away with marrying Desdemona 'bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be' his concern is with Othello's status and (supposed) lack of Christian religion. Othello himself emphasises his 'free condition'. Some writers who insulted Alessandro did so by saying that his mother was a peasant and a former slave. Alessandro's upbringing at the papal court, and Medici blood, usually trumped his mother's status.

Our next exercise, prior to the lunch break, asked participants to present arguments for and against Alessandro's rule of Florence. This debate was based on a real historical event in Naples, 1536, when Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, heard a dispute between Alessandro's supporters and opponents, eventually ruling in Alessandro's favour. This was something of a preparation for the afternoon activity: a masquerade performance.



Masquerade, cross-dressing and pretence are of course well-known themes within Shakespeare. We gave students a list of masks and costumes that are known to have been in Alessandro's wardrobe in 1532, and invited them to construct their own short masquerade sketch, using a selection of commercially-available party masks, false beards and fabric swatches along with props found around the room. The masquerade characters included the Ottoman admiral Barbarossa, some Turks, a hermit, some peasants and some women.

This exercise prompted some remarkably creative output from the participants. One group cast themselves as characters from Alessandro's court in turn playing the 'masquerade' characters. Another group decided to enact Alessandro's tyranny and (bloody) assassination. Not only was this activity rated highly by the participants in their evaluations, but it has prompted me, as a historical researcher, to ask new questions about how such events may have functioned in practice. We are currently working on a bigger masquerade performance project and hope to have more details about that soon.

*I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Emma Newman, Leyla Yilmaz and Linda Billam in creating Project Alex. Funding has been provided by the University of Sheffield SURE and Arts Enterprise schemes. You can follow the project on our blog, where you'll also find suggestions for further reading. We're on Twitter @AlexMediciDux or you can 'like' us on Facebook. We're continuing to pilot these workshops on a small scale and would love to hear from schools that would like to host one. Please get in touch: [catherine.fletcher@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.fletcher@sheffield.ac.uk) [www.projectalexblog.wordpress.com](http://www.projectalexblog.wordpress.com)*

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Photo © Chloe Stopa-Hunt

## ACCESSING THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE

In our age of ramps and equality legislation, audience access to theatres is improving fast. Yet wheelchair-using characters onstage remain a rare sight in Shakespearean productions, and there is virtually no critical discourse examining the wheelchair's potential as either a staging choice or a teaching tool. Wheelchair-users who watch, teach or study Shakespeare may be asking 'How we can get more chairs up on the stage, and why is it taking so long?', but the answering questions from doubtful directors and cautious, able-bodied audiences are likely to be 'Why should we want to? And is it really *Shakespeare*?' Wheelchair integration is one of relatively few lingering frontiers in staging. All-male and all-female Shakespeares continue to deliver resounding successes; queered Shakespeares have been staged and filmed and staged once more; actors of colour, though still under-cast, have seen improved representation since the turn of the century, when David Oyelowo became the first black actor to play an English monarch (King Henry VI) for the RSC. Wheelchairs pop up from time to time, but they are almost always inhabited by a King Lear or a John of Gaunt: they seem to be inexorably married, in the collective mind of Shakespearean directors, to old age and imminent death.

The cultural shorthand whereby chairs signal nothing but decrepitude is tired and glib and uncreative: it is also inaccurate. Young chair-users study Shakespeare at school and at university, but we do not see ourselves onstage, although there is no reason why Hamlet – or Portia – or Juliet – cannot roll out of the wings in a Kuschall K-Series. The most obviously challenging roles in which to cast wheelchair-users are these young protagonists, whose activity levels (and, often, romantic plots) are at odds with stereotypical conceptions of disabled people's dependence, passivity and sexlessness. In practice, though, accomplished chair-using actors are perfectly capable of playing, for example, the final scene of *Hamlet*: wheelchair fencing dates back at least to the 1950s, and is now a paralympic sport; wheelchairs are, equally, no barrier either to effective legal advocacy or to ill-fated love (*The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and*

*Juliet*, respectively), nor to the practice of medicine and the performance of pilgrimage (*All's Well That Ends Well*). There is no reason why aged Gaunt should be denied a wheelchair, if he wants one, but the British stage can do better, and should do better: not least because, by closing off the creative and educational possibilities of wheelchair-friendly stagings, its production teams are ignoring a territory of human experience which holds huge dramatic potential.

**“WHEELCHAIRS POP UP FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT THEY ARE ALMOST ALWAYS INHABITED BY A KING LEAR OR A JOHN OF GAUNT: THEY SEEM TO BE INEXORABLY MARRIED, IN THE COLLECTIVE MIND OF SHAKESPEAREAN DIRECTORS, TO OLD AGE AND IMMINENT DEATH.”**

The essence of continued, life-long learning about Shakespeare is open-minded re-engagement with the text, both on- and off-stage, and the defamiliarising effect of casting wheelchair-users in 'non-sick' roles has the potential, quite apart from its desirability for purely egalitarian reasons, to generate radical new questions about the relations between well-known characters. What if, instead of Lear, it is his favourite daughter, Cordelia, who moves about the stage in a wheelchair? Is his preference more explicable, or



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more perverse? Lear presents the disinherited daughter to Burgundy as a bad bargain:

*Sir, will you, with those infirmities she owes,  
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,  
Dowered with our curse and strangered with our oath,  
Take her, or leave her?’ [1.1.203–206]*

His words already seem wilful, irrational, born of unjust self-love; might an embodiment, and therefore effectively a doubling, of Cordelia’s ‘infirmities’ tip the balance into irredeemable cruelty? In 1999, Gregory Doran’s production of *The Winter’s Tale* introduced a wheelchair and in doing so opened a valuable seam of dynastic anxiety. Doran cast Emily Bruni as both a wheelchair-using Mamillius and as (apparently able-bodied) Perdita, creating an authentic family resemblance between Leontes’ progeny and hinting at an archetypally effeminate conception of the disabled male child. Bruni’s wheelchair exemplified the production trope known to disability studies as ‘crip drag’ (abled performers playing disabled characters), a practice which limits the work available to actors with real-life disabilities. Yet it also allowed Doran to draw out innumerable subtleties in the relatively slight role of Mamillius, whose boyish bravado formed a bittersweet contrast to the frailty suggested by his old-fashioned chair. Visually, Bruni’s Mamillius recalled nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century child invalids, both fictive and actual; like neurasthenic Colin Craven in *The Secret Garden* (1911), or the haemophiliac Tsarevich Alexei (1904-1918), he is a dangerous scion upon whom to depend. Disability takes to the stage as an embodied threat to royal heredity, entwined with the equal or greater peril of Mamillius’s possible illegitimacy. Doran’s staging amplifies the sense within the text that Mamillius is a problem: the production’s Russian aesthetic even hints at a physical heritage analogous to that of the Romanovs. The ‘blood o’ the prince my son’ [1.2.330] comes to seem risky on every level, and it is Mamillius’s wheelchair which serves visually to bring that risk constantly to our attention.

By invoking the conventional literary figure of the invalid child, however, Doran is still perpetuating a stylised and restrictive notion of the role disabled characters should play onstage. Critical literature repeatedly refers to Bruni’s Mamillius as ‘wheelchair-bound’ (Jacobs 2008, Tatspaugh

2009, and others) – a term likely to be anathema to most disabled actors, teachers, readers and watchers of Shakespeare – while Mark H. Lawhorn (2003) suggests that Mamillius’s wheelchair has ‘a deadening effect’ [95]. This is a needless and negative stereotype when, in fact, wheelchairs enable inventive movement by performers in all artistic fields. The physical innovation which forms part of the daily life of a wheelchair-user would be a perfect match for Shakespeare’s wits, his verbal jousts, his quick-thinkers: wheeling as beautifully as she argues, *Much Ado’s* Beatrice could not fail to be a commanding and thought-provoking stage presence. The courage and grace and self-assertion that she displays in Act II, scene i – refusing Don Pedro’s proposal, then laying claim to her fair fate: “then there was a star danced, and under that was I born” [2.1.315–316] – would be freshened once more by the concurrent visual story told by a wheelchair: another strain of difference in Beatrice, but one far more likely to strengthen her (and to render the production that finally takes this risk more memorable) than to weaken her.

Disabled actors need to become part of all major Shakespearean productions. There should be wheelchairs onstage at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Swan, at the National Theatre and Globe. We should be surprised if a production includes no disabled actors: we should be angry. Disabled actors need to be in schools, running workshops, asking children to think about movement, and power, and freedom, and constraint. These are high Shakespearean themes, but they are themes you learn differently, if you move through the world at waist-height, if your way is barred, if you need help – or conversely, if you do not need help, but it is thrust upon you. A wheelchair-user, like a monarch, has two bodies: one is flesh; the other is not-flesh. How many Shakespearean texts deal in doubles? How many deal in kings? Opening the panoply of experience that constitutes disabled embodiment to full, free and open scrutiny – both in education and in production – cannot fail to enrich our understanding of Shakespeare immeasurably. That disability remains an almost perpetually closed book on the Shakespearean stage is a waste of resources: it damages disabled audiences, readers and students most of all, but it impoverishes everyone.

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**“WE SHOULD BE SURPRISED IF A PRODUCTION INCLUDES NO DISABLED ACTORS: WE SHOULD BE ANGRY. DISABLED ACTORS NEED TO BE IN SCHOOLS, RUNNING WORKSHOPS, ASKING CHILDREN TO THINK ABOUT MOVEMENT, AND POWER, AND FREEDOM, AND CONSTRAINT.”**

**H**ANNAH BAILEY is currently studying a PGCE in English at the University of Cambridge. Inspired by existing research into the effects of parent-initiated cultural activities on children's educational attainment, she undertook a research project on parents' reasons for participating in five of the Royal Shakespeare Company's family Shakespeare workshops during the 2013 Easter holidays. The workshops ran on three topics: 'Hamlet: text to words'; 'Story Garden'; and 'Blood, Guts and Gore'. Here, she shares some of her findings with the editor.

## PARTICIPATION IN RSC FAMILY WORKSHOPS... AND BARRIERS TO IT

### WHAT DO PARENTS IDENTIFY AS THE MAIN REASONS FOR ATTENDANCE AT RSC FAMILY WORKSHOPS?

Parents participating in the research unanimously believed that it is important to expose children to cultural experiences. The potential for workshops to contribute to children's personal growth was the main motivation given for attending. Certain key phrases occurred in multiple responses: over 40 per cent of workshop attendees used the verbs 'broadens' or 'widens' when referring to the benefits of cultural experiences on their children's minds and education. Many referred to their belief that these experiences would open their children's hearts and minds beyond their everyday lives and that theatre is 'fun, interesting, enriching, broadens possibilities, opens up different worlds'.

Attendance at the workshops was also strongly linked by parents to more formal academic aspirations for their children – helping their children gain an academic advantage in the classroom, as well as meeting their desire for their children to learn more about Shakespeare outside the classroom. 85 per cent of parents identified 'education' as a main reason for attending. Furthermore, the Shakespearean content of the workshops was more frequently identified by parents as a factor in attending (62 per cent) than drama or musical content generally (26 per cent).

Parents' reasons for attending resonate with RSC's articulations of the educative purpose and value of the workshops in its marketing. The workshops use dramatic techniques to develop acting, directing and linguistic skills. Some workshops focus on understanding and interpreting scripts, as well as developing knowledge of Shakespeare's language, plays, historical context and realisation in the theatre (e.g. through make up and costume). The RSC highlights the way in which the workshops cover several key aspects of

the secondary English curriculum and this was recognised by some parents as influencing their decision to attend.

Given their parents' commitment to the educational nature of the workshops, it is fortunate for the children involved that enjoyment was the second most identified factor in the decision to participate. 79 per cent of parents identified 'recreation' as one of their main reasons for attending them. Both parents and the RSC see the workshops as combining learning opportunities with experiences that are 'fun' and 'exciting'.

### DO PARENTS' REASONS FOR ATTENDING RSC FAMILY WORKSHOPS VARY DEPENDING ON THEIR THEME?

Yes. There was a significant difference in the reasons given by parents for their attendance depending on which workshop they were participating in. 'Blood, Guts and Gore' focused on stage makeup and costume design for all ages, 'Hamlet: text to words' used a dramatic approach to explore scenes from Hamlet with older children (aged 8+), and the 'Story Garden' workshop used costumes and props to introduce *A Winter's Tale* to younger children (aged 4–8). Just 25 per cent of parents whose families attended the 'Blood, Guts and Gore' and 31 per cent of those who attended the 'Story Garden' workshops indicated that education was an important factor. Apart from being less identifiably curriculum-related, the latter was aimed at the youngest children, for whom the pressure to achieve at high-stakes examinations might be expected to be less relevant. Parents' did, however, reveal that while recreation was the immediately sought outcome for these workshops, they hoped they would play a positive role in introducing their children to Shakespeare ahead of their encountering him in formal education.

Participants in the *Hamlet* workshop cited 'education' as their main reason for attendance, with words relating to 'education' and 'school' found in 83 per cent of parents' answers. 'Shakespeare content' was also a very important factor at 66 per cent, whereas 'interest and enjoyment' were of minor importance – only 5 per cent of their answers

contained words such as 'fun' and 'entertainment'. Parents brought their children to this workshop with specific, pressing educational circumstances in mind. These included 'Son writing piece on Shakespeare' and 'Daughter studying Shakespeare at school'.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN RSC FAMILY WORKSHOPS?

The 34 parents participating in the workshop, all of whom completed the questionnaire, had almost identical demographic backgrounds. They were white, straight, forty-somethings in high-earning jobs, who had their children later in life than the national average. Two of the respondents' partners were Asian, the remaining thirty-two were identified as White British. Only one set of parents were unmarried. A small number of grandparents and carers were present.

74 per cent fell into the three highest levels of the Office for National Statistics' Standard Occupational Classification. These are 'managers and senior officials', 'professional occupations' and 'associate professional and technical occupations'. This indicates that the majority of workshop attendees had jobs that required high levels of skill, specialist knowledge and responsibility, and suggests that they receive remuneration commensurate with such roles. The four parents responding who defined themselves as 'stay at home parents' were primarily attendees of the 'Story Garden' workshop: their answer reflects the young age of their children. Income levels were assessed by asking respondents to indicate their average annual household income. Over half of all participants indicated that their household income was over £65,000 (see figure). The next largest percentage was £35,001 to £45,000 at 18 per cent. To put this into context, the average net income of families with dependent children in the UK is currently £27,000 per annum. Participants on or below this income were markedly in the minority.

In addition to their relatively high occupations and above average levels of income, 84 per cent of parents completing the questionnaire and 68 per cent of their partners were educated to either undergraduate level, postgraduate level, or possessed a professional qualification. The majority of parents who indicated that their highest qualification was GCSE or A-Level had partners educated to a higher level.

**“WHILE RECREATION WAS THE IMMEDIATELY SOUGHT OUTCOME FOR THESE WORKSHOPS, THEY HOPED THEY WOULD PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN INTRODUCING THEIR CHILDREN TO SHAKESPEARE AHEAD OF THEIR ENCOUNTERING HIM IN FORMAL EDUCATION.”**

Again, this is well above the national average – recent national statistics suggest that around 30 per cent of the UK adult population are educated to degree level.

The demographic was described by the workshop organiser as typical, although they expressed a desire to engage participants who haven't engaged with the RSC previously, indicating an awareness of the restricted demographic profile of workshop attendees.

### DID THE RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT ANY ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES REGARDING RSC FAMILY WORKSHOPS?

Through the research, it became apparent that there are some situational barriers to participating in the workshops such as time or cost of travel. The cost of the workshops, at two pounds per child and three pounds per adults seems relatively small, in comparison to other popular leisure pursuits outside the home. However, a fifth of parents mentioned that the distance of the RSC from home (and implicitly time and cost of travelling that distance) could be a possible deterrent factor. The time and cost of travel as well as Stratford's perceived poor public transport were mentioned in explaining the participants' lack of socio-economic diversity.

**“THERE WAS SOME ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THE WORKSHOPS' IDENTIFICATION WITH A WELL-ESTABLISHED, ELITE, CULTURAL INSTITUTION CAN STILL BE INTIMIDATING FOR SOME FAMILIES.”**

While much has been done through the RSC's marketing to ameliorate institutional barriers relating to perceptions of who the organisation is 'for', and dispositional barriers relating to the attitude of the participant, there was some acknowledgement that the workshops' identification with a well-established, elite, cultural institution can still be intimidating for some families. At the same time, those very characteristics of the company constitute much of its appeal to others, suggesting the difficulty of a radical rebranding.

The demographics of the families participating in the workshops suggest the enormity of the challenge facing the RSC in its quest to engage a demographic for these activities beyond white nuclear families, where parents have above average occupations, incomes and educational backgrounds. However, the positivity of parents about the workshops' benefits suggest it is a challenge worth overcoming.

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# ADVERTISING accessibility at the RSC

**a** MELIA FAREBROTHER graduated from the Language and Literature in Education degree programme at the University of York in 2013. She now works for Deloitte in their consulting division. Amelia is part of the customer team and works with a wide range of clients in the public, private and FSI sectors.



Photo © Amelia Farebrother

**T**his research into accessibility at the RSC started in 2012–13 by looking at the company's long history of attempts to engage hard to reach groups including the "RSC Club", "Actors Commando", and "Theatregoround". A host of schemes exist today, outlined on the website, such as captioned performances for the hard of hearing, touch tours for those with visual impairments, reduced price tickets for the disabled, young and older people, and families.

However, upon visiting the RSC theatres in Stratford, no literature regarding accessibility was on display and when information was requested it was presented in regards to the narrowest sense of the word i.e. disabled access, rather than less physical barriers such as socio-economic status, level of formal education or ethnicity. I decided then to look at the messages about accessibility communicated in RSC programmes, which were prominently available for browsing or purchasing, past and present.

In answer to the question 'Does the RSC market itself as universally accessible in their programmes?' I found that there were explicit messages incorporated within the texts which identified and promoted ways in which the company

is inclusive and accessible. The first page of every programme available during the 2013 season sets an inclusive, even friendly, tone. The dynamic verb 'welcome' creates the idea of warm institution, coupled with the capitalisation of the word and the graphology chosen to make it stand out in a red font larger than the rest of the text. The phrase 'thank you for joining us' also highlights the way in which the RSC is trying create a sense of belonging among all those who see the programme and lessen the hierarchical division between the prestigious producer and everyday consumers of its theatrical provision. This paragraph further projects and evidences the RSC's accessible image by including statistics; 'sold 6.3 million tickets, over one million of those to people under 25 and worked on educational programmes with over 250,000 young people and teachers'. This complex sentence suggests variety in their audience and reinforces the image of an all-inclusive environment by highlighting the RSC's educational work with young people and children.

The prioritising of information about physical accessibility to the RSC observed on visiting its Stratford location was mirrored in the programmes. All the RSC programmes sampled for this research included information on disability provisions as well as a simple, unequivocal statement that 'The RSC welcomes disabled patrons to the theatre'. Yet only one out of the ten recent programmes sampled explicitly foregrounded other areas of accessibility. This programme highlighted that there were £5 tickets for 16–25 year olds and that, for others, the starting price of tickets was £14. By advertising the 16–25 scheme along with the normal ticket price in the same font and colour scheme, the RSC does not separate this scheme out and create divisions between itself and the full price, therefore arguably breaking down the stigma that may be associated with using accessibility schemes. The idea of the RSC being accessible for groups, in terms of age, is supported by RSC programmes including adverts for events such as "playing with puppets" for 3–6 year olds.

Moreover, the programmes from the World Shakespeare Festival (WSF) promote inclusivity regardless of race, nationality of linguistic background: they announce that "wherever you come from and whatever language you speak, we welcome you to this great Shakespeare celebration". However

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this language may reflect, not the RSC's ethos around access specifically, so much as the WSF's place within the Cultural Olympiad. This series of events had its own particular remit, including to "celebrate internationalism and conversation between people of different nationalities" (Arts Council England, 2011).

The language of accessibility in RSC programmes was, however, interestingly interspersed with material which debatably presumed, but certainly addressed a wealthy audience. This is highlighted by the company's sponsors, Moët and Jaguar, both luxury brands and whose target market is upper-middle class, professional people. It is further reinforced in the programmes' advertisements. One seen in several programmes was for the premium watchmakers Patek Philippe. The tag line on the advert immediately suggests it is a high quality brand 'You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation'. The advert is clearly targeting a person who can afford to invest in luxury goods for family heirlooms: a Patek Philippe watch can cost anywhere between £12,000 to over a million. It is certainly not the watch of your average-income wo/man. Such exclusive brands have long characterised RSC (not to mention other arts organisations) advertising: their programmes from the 1950s and 60s include, among others, adverts for the Waldorf hotel, London, with its 5-star rating and restaurant famed for steak and lobster suppers.

Companies sponsor or advertise with the RSC because they expect a return on their investment. In so doing, they are relying on the programmes reaching their target market i.e. consumers who can afford to drink high-end champagne and drive a luxury car. The RSC's website indeed openly advertises for corporate sponsors and offers them this opportunity saying that they can 'target specific audiences'

**“PROJECTING a HIGH END IMAGE THROUGH THE ADVERTISING IN PROGRAMMES MAY WELL MAKE YOUNGER AUDIENCE MEMBERS AND THOSE FROM a LOWER-SOCIO ECONOMIC BACKGROUND FEEL EXCLUDED, IN SPITE OF THE EXPLICITLY INCLUSIVE MESSAGES IN THE BODY OF THEIR TEXTS.”**

and 'build your brand image' (RSC 2013f). The image of an RSC audience projected by the advertising arguably contributes to widespread perceptions of the RSC as a prestigious and elite organisation. While such sponsorship and advertising offers a positive message in terms of perceptions of the quality of the RSC's provision, it also risks conveying the notion that the RSC exists *for* the elite: the 'privileged' and 'well off' identified in a survey I conducted of audience-goers' perceptions of a typical RSC audience.

For the RSC to be truly accessible the programmes need to reflect the diverse audience it wants to attract. Projecting a high end image through the advertising in programmes may well make younger audience members and those from a lower-socio economic background feel excluded, in spite of the explicitly inclusive messages in the body of their texts. Current models of better practice in terms of clearly communicating wide-ranging access schemes beyond the company's website, such as the Birmingham Rep, could offer some inspiration.

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## SHAKESPEARE: TEXT, POWER, AUTHORITY

THE BSA CONFERENCE 2014  
3-6 JULY 2014

The 2014 biennial conference of the British Shakespeare Association will take place on the beautifully landscaped main campus of the University of Stirling.

The programme will include lectures, papers, workshops, seminars, performances, and excursions to the Library of Innerpefferay (Crieff), Stirling Castle, and a local whisky distillery. There will also be special workshops and sessions directed at local schools.

A highlight of the programme will be an outdoor performance of a Shakespeare play by the Glaswegian theatre company Bard in the Botanic.

**CONFIRMED KEYNOTE SPEAKERS ARE:** Professor Margreta de Grazia (University of Pennsylvania), Professor Andrew Murphy (University of St Andrews), Professor John Drakakis (University of Stirling), Dr Colin Burrow (University of Oxford), and Dr Michael Bogdanov, co-founder of the English Shakespeare Company.

To register for the conference visit [shakespeare.stir.ac.uk](http://shakespeare.stir.ac.uk)

## HOW TO TEACH SHAKESPEARE AT A-LEVEL

**ALL SAINTS SCHOOL** is a mixed comprehensive in East London. Tom Barlow, English teacher and A-Level coordinator, asks colleagues about their thoughts on effective strategies for teaching Shakespeare to sixth form students.

### DO YOU THINK THAT SIXTH FORM STUDENTS STRUGGLE WITH FINDING THEIR OWN, INDEPENDENT VIEWPOINTS ON SHAKESPEARE? IF SO, WHY?

- ▶ "Initially, yes – because of the time pressures of covering the play in detail. They also struggle with a mental block around the language – expecting not to understand anything. But I think they sometimes surprise themselves once you've broken it down." (JB)
- ▶ "A key barrier to overcome is the belief that there is one *right* interpretation. I try to get them to argue against criticism or show them conflicting viewpoints and ask them to pick which one they agree with." (AV)
- ▶ "The GCSE courses do not allow for much time to develop independent view points/discussion/research. So much content and then practice of the content is required due to exam pressure. Nevertheless, some students do develop a more independent viewpoint – particularly those that are motivated." (SB)
- ▶ "Yes, but partly I blame the teachers! At A-Level we're so anxious to teach them the right answers. We sometimes deprive them of the right to experiment with the text. So we lead them down the paths of cautiousness and the non-controversial." (PH).
- ▶ "Students can and do find their own voices. The key at A-Level is to transfer to approaches that are less led, directed or dependent on the teacher." (KW)

### WHAT STRATEGIES WORK BEST FOR YOU IN THE TEACHING OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE SIXTH FORM?

- ▶ "Having a very thorough knowledge and grasp of the text so references and quotations can be plucked out at need; using humour; visiting externally provided revision sessions where students can see masses of people in the same situation as themselves and hear a variety of critical viewpoints." (JB)
- ▶ "Making the content accessible – often by relating it to modern day events. Focusing on philosophical issues – e.g. the nature of power/ love etc." (AV)

▶ "I think it's essential for them to see some Shakespeare at the theatre. We taught *Antony and Cleopatra* this year and there were no live performances. Instead we saw *Macbeth* played by James McEvoy and had some great discussions about how different the two plays are, (even though they were very possibly written one immediately after the other). Students loved the idea that the same boy actor 400 years ago might have played Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra!" (SB)

▶ "Strategies that really make students understand the characterization are much more likely to be physical than cerebral. The tragedy of teaching Shakespeare is that so often it's examined and taught as if it's a novel. All versions are incomplete without a director, an actor or a reader's interpretations." (PH)

▶ "Sometimes students need to free themselves from freezing or isolating meaning into an appealing particular context (e.g. historical generalisations) at the risk of shutting off their minds to other contexts (e.g. psychoanalytic theory or Marxism) which may help to enlarge their critical capacity." (KW)

### IS THERE ROOM FOR THE USE OF ACTIVE, PERFORMANCE-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE TEACHING OF A-LEVEL, OR IS THIS MORE APPROPRIATE FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS?

▶ "It has an absolutely indivisible place. If you study Shakespeare in a desk-bound way you are doing the plays a great disservice. You have to get people up – to speak things aloud. And also that helps to tap into the relevance. Because Shakespeare will always be relevant on an emotional level." (PH)

▶ "Yes, active approaches do work, but strangely I often find the A-Level students are much more reluctant or reserved than younger pupils." (AV)

▶ "I remember doing *Hamlet* with a new A-level group and getting them to read the opening scene on the battlements standing on all the tables pushed together to make them feel like they were on the castle wall. I wouldn't make any major claim for such a stunt, but it did make the students see the text beyond the page and took them to a point of accepting that they were going to have their conventional thinking and expectations challenged, albeit in a humorous way." (JB)

▶ "I tend to use very little drama at A-Level, but I think it does have a place in terms of interpreting action and emotion in Shakespeare." (KW)

▶ "Active approaches are crucial – but it's also important to use creative modes such as student blogs to engage A-Level pupils." (SB).

**C**AROLYN BOOTH is a teacher of Drama and English at St John Fisher Catholic High School in Harrogate. In October 2013, Carolyn directed students in a production of *Hamlet*, performed at the Carriageworks Theatre, Leeds, as part of the Shakespeare Schools Festival.

**m**y starting point for the production was to refer to live productions of *Hamlet* as research, including the three productions I've seen in recent years: the RSC 2008 *Hamlet* with David Tennant in the title role; the Globe's 2011 production featuring Joshua McGuire as a more youthful Hamlet; and my most recent *Hamlet* experience, which was entirely different. I attended the Festiwal Szekspirowski (Gdansk 2012) and saw a puppetry *Hamlet*, directed by Adam Walny (Walny Teatr, Poland) where puppets of the characters were suspended in glass cases filled with water, and one actor manipulated the puppets whilst narrating the dialogue himself (in Polish) and squeezing a pump so that bubbles would come out of the character's mouths when he was speaking their lines. The only character not suspended in water was Hamlet, "as he exists partly in the spiritual world and partly in the material world." It was bizarre, wonderful, and surprisingly easy to follow!

I took inspiration from each version of *Hamlet*: the slick, modern dress of the RSC, Patrick Stewart's callous, calculating Claudius; the youthful innocence of McGuire's Hamlet as a confused, temperamental boy; and the comic preposterousness of Polonius from the puppetry *Hamlet*, helped by bubbles coming out of his mouth every time he spoke. My Hamlet therefore became a boy, thrust into this wealthy, glamorous court, straight out of University, feeling lost and confused, and isolated from everyone around him.

I did, however, also take some valuable texts into the rehearsal room with me. I took in my copy of *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*, edited by David Crystal and Ben Crystal (Penguin 2004). I absolutely believe that the students need to understand every word they are saying, or else how can they communicate any truth? I did my homework before rehearsals started, looking up every word I didn't understand, annotating my script, and feeding this into rehearsals.

I also brought into rehearsals the words of Jonathan Neelands and Jaqui O'Hanlan from their essay 'There is some soul of good: an action-centred approach to teaching Shakespeare in schools', promoting the need for a 'rehearsal room pedagogy' for schools (*Shakespeare Survey* 64). I have used this approach

in the classroom, and followed this pedagogy for *Hamlet*, planning a workshop which allowed the students to develop a "deeper and more challenging felt-engagement with the textual, theatrical and intellectual elements of the play."

Another useful text which helped me was the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers*. This resource is packed full of practical activities to actively engage with Shakespeare's text. I started my rehearsal process with a Story Whoosh, a fast-paced, active introduction to the plot and characters. It was a great success and helped the students bond as a cast.

A final valuable resource I used in preparation was music. I often use music in my lessons to set the right tone, as a stimulus, or to create and maintain focus. I realised that due to the script being edited, the final scene presents a problem in that everyone dies on the same page. The first run through was almost farcical. Gertrude, Claudius and Laertes died within ten seconds of each other and poor Hamlet couldn't move for dead bodies. We took the blocking slowly, the fencing was choreographed, but still the final moments lacked any real impact.

I hunted for the perfect music to communicate the events of the play spiralling ferociously out of control for Claudius and Hamlet, and found Taiko – a piece by the Cirque du Soleil, a rhythmic, pulsating piece from *Mystere*. The piece starts slowly and builds to a tremendous, crashing climax, and I played this in rehearsal, asking the students to give me their responses. The words "energy", "frantic", "chaos", "tension", "exciting" were thrown around. The whole piece is no more than two minutes, and it underscored the fencing scene and the deaths of Gertrude, Claudius and Laertes. The students' response in their acting was extraordinary, they were crackling with energy. The scene now had real pace but maintained pathos, and it packed a real punch. The subsequent silence after the drumming was mesmerising, and Hamlet's dying words reduced me to tears! Shakespeare must be active, and we have access to wonderful resources to make it so.

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