

20
STORIES
HIGH

Supported by **UNITY**
Theatre

who the f-k is
shakespeare?



Resource Pack

Primarily created with teachers, youth workers, facilitators and educators in mind



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Introduction

This resource pack is designed for youth leaders, teachers or workshop facilitators to explore the themes of the show, *who the f—k is shakespeare?* (WTFIS), with your group, class or individuals.

Within it, you will find information about the show, why it was made, information about the art forms and subject matter. You will also find resources and information around signposting.

The pack is designed to equip youth leaders and teachers to explore the themes further with their group, before or after your visit to the show.



About 20 Stories High

20 Stories High believe that “everybody’s got a story to tell... and their own way of telling it.”

We create bold, excellent theatre, music and art experiences with culturally diverse, working-class communities, emerging artists, and world-class professionals.

We tell stories that bring joy, empower, and enable social change.

We inhabit a wide variety of spaces: from theatres, community centres and schools to digital spaces, living rooms and bus-stops.

Our heart is in Liverpool, but our reach is universal.

20 Stories High an Arts Council England National Portfolio funded organisation.

www.20storieshigh.org.uk



About *who the f—k is shakespeare?*

Lady Macbeth - murderous.

Cleopatra - conniving.

Viola - witty.

Ophelia - tragic.

The so-called ‘facts’ of their stories; stories steeped in racism, patriarchy, and violence. But the facts are untrue, these stories just won’t do.

These five characters have had enough. They’re breaking the paper ceiling of Shakespeare’s Complete Works to tell their own stories and repurpose old tales for the next generation.

Watch them blow the dust off the classics, tear out the pages, and stage a multi-art form political occupation of Shakespeare with punchy verses, punky attitudes, and whole lotta wit.

“We stand here now, to speak but for ourselves
Our lives will not be stories on your shelves.”

Get with it, or get the f—k out the way.

Content Warning

Loud noises, haze, and fake weapons. Discussions around gender, violence, patricide, suicide, war, murder, racism, patriarchy, I mean, listen, it’s Shakespeare. It will also be funny, light, and just a bit tongue-in-cheek.

Age Guidance 14+

Themes

The themes within the show include:

- Patriarchy & Sexism
- Racism & Misogynoir
- Self-Love & Self-Discovery
- Gender Identity & Queerness

Meet the Team

Viola – Beca Barton (they/she)



Beca Barton is a queer actor currently based in East London. Originally from Ireland, they moved to London in 2018 and graduated from QMUL with a first-class degree in Drama. Recent credits include: Offie nominated Perverts (King's Head Theatre), Our Last First (The Space) and other productions at the Arcola Theatre, Theatre503 and the Cockpit Theatre.

Photo Credit – Olivia Spencer

Cleopatra – Harriett O'Grady (she/her)



Photo Credit – Samuel Black

Harriett O'Grady is a multi-disciplinary creative, with her work spanning many artistic forms. Having trained as an actor on Rose Bruford's BA(Hons) Acting course, she has taken her experience and branched into several creative disciplines, now working as a director, facilitator, movement director, singer, dramaturg and creative problem-solver.

As an actor, Harriett's career has been extensive in the 5 years since graduating - she has worked with classical text, children's theatre, commercials, training guides for the UN, international performance (working in Shanghai 2019-2020), voiceovers and research & development projects.

Ophelia – Jada-Li Warrican (she/her)



Photo credit – Kate McDonald

Born and raised in the heart of Birmingham, Jada-Li Warrican is a BA Hons Acting Graduate from Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. Theatre Credits include *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe* at The Rep, *Sky Comedy Rep* at The Rep, *We Could All Be Perfect* at Sheffield Theatres, *Our Town Needs A Nando's* at Liverpool Everyman, *Generations* at The Crescent Theatre and Nottingham Arts Theatre; and *Uni Slam 2024: National Poetry Collective Show* at The Hippodrome. TV Credits include BBC's *Doctors* and *Champion* on Netflix.

Lady Macbeth – Mary Savage (she/her)



Photo credit – Yellow Belly

Mary Savage is an actor, singer, musical theatre performer and director. Her credits include: *Richard, My Richard* (Shakespeare North Playhouse and on tour); *who the f--k is shakespeare* (20 Stories High & Unity Theatre); *The Boy and The Bird*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (Liverpool Theatre Festival); *Playtime* (Edinburgh Fringe & Hope St Theatre); *Mother's Ruin* (Hope St Theatre). Mary directed Florence Keith-Roach's dark comedy *Eggs* at the Everyman Theatre as part of her involvement with the Young Everyman Playhouse (YEP) Director's scheme (2021). Training includes: The National Youth Theatre, North West End, Young Everyman and Playhouse (YEP), Rare Studio

and Act Up North and 20 Stories High's Actors Lab.

Writer/ Director – Ameera Conrad (she/they)



Photo credit – Joss Ryder Photography

Ameera Conrad (she/they) is a theatre maker from Cape Town, South Africa, and the current Associate Artistic Director for 20 Stories High. She is an Associate Director for NT Connections, one of the visiting lecturers for Mountview's MA Theatre for Community and Education, and the former Associate Director for the Actors' Touring Company, and LAMDA.

Their theatre credits include *who the f—k is Shakespeare?* (Writer & Director, Unity Theatre), *Touchy & Anthology* (Associate Director – Regional Tour), *Leave Taking* (Staged Reading – Director – Curve, Leicester), *Rice* (Associate Director - National Tour, Orange Tree Theatre), *Emilia, Gloria* (Director - both LAMDA), *Family Tree* (Associate Director, Greenwich Docklands International Festival), *In These Four Walls*, *Totally Over You*, *Kate Spencer Did A Good Thing* (Director – all ArtsEd), *Pipeline* (Assistant Director - Arcola), *The Royale, Towers* (both Guildhall School of Music and Drama), *The Fall* (Co-Curator - Edinburgh International Festival Fringe, Royal Court, St. Ann's Warehouse, South African State Theatre, Galway International Arts Festival, Melbourne Arts Centre, Festival Arts Bordeaux, Studio Theatre), and *Reparation* (South African National Arts Festival).

She is an alumnus of the 2017 Lincoln Center Theater Director's Lab, and a recipient of the Theatre Arts Admin Collective's Emerging Theatre Director Bursary. They have won a Fleur du Cap Encore Award, Scotsman Fringe First Award, The Stage Edinburgh Award for *The Fall*. She has also won the Filipa Bragança award for best emerging solo performer at the Edinburgh Fringe (2019) and the Western Cape Department of Sports and Culture award for her contributions to theatre in South Africa (2018).

Creative & Production Team

Writer/Director

Ameera Conrad

Dramaturg
Composer
Design Associate
Lighting Designer
Creative Captioner
Audio Description
Consultant

Keith Saha
Mal Lidgett
Keshi Raghu
Xenia Bayer
Ben Glover

Mandy Redvers-Rowe

Production Manager
Company Stage Manager
Technical Stage Manager

Mike Dunn
Charlotte Jones
Jordan Barnes

Producer

Natasha Patel

An Interview with Ameera Conrad

Tell us about *who the f—k is shakespeare*?

who the f—k is shakespeare? is a radical reimaging of Shakespeare's works. It's a mash-up of modern language, spoken word, beat poetry, and iambic pentameter. Four of the most important characters in Shakespeare's writing; Ophelia from *Hamlet*, Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth*, Cleopatra from *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Viola from *Twelfth Night*, but not as you know them! They're cool, they're young, they're questioning their place in the world. All our lives we've been told what they are, who they are, but for the first time, they're getting a chance to figure that out for themselves. There are lots of opportunities for learning, sharing, and growing together.

What gave you the idea for the show?

I love Shakespeare – I always have – but I know that it can often feel really foreign and inaccessible. I wanted to create a piece which could speak to lovers and haters of Shakespeare to encourage people to question why Shakespeare is considered history's greatest playwright. I am so interested in female and femme characters who are put in a box, so I wanted to find a way to take them out of the box. I asked myself, if these characters were real people alive today, what would they think about what people say about them, how we teach them, or how we write about them in academic circles.

What was the starting point for the work?

A big part of my work as a theatre maker is around decolonising the canon of theatre. I do this in two different ways; the first way is by creating new texts from scratch that speak to themes of decolonisation, the second way is to (what I call) politically occupy pre-existing texts that would have excluded people like me. This show is a political occupation of 4 of Shakespeare's texts, I've taken his original writing and added some modern modes of storytelling to show you another side to the stories of these incredible characters. We're questioning Shakespeare, but still celebrating it!

Who are you working with to create the show?

We have an incredible team here at 20 Stories High who have been supporting the work as it moves from its initial previews that happened in December 2023 to its first national tour. We're also bringing on board a wonderful young designer, Keshi Raghu, who is graduating from LIPA this year and has a brilliant eye for space and costume. Our lighting designer is the resident tech-wizard at the Unity theatre, Xenia Bayer, who did the lights for our first run of the show. We're getting beats from the incredible talented Mal Lidgett, and some stunning creative captions from Ben Glover. We've got an incredible cast of performers from all over the UK! You'll hear Shakespeare in so many different accents, from Liverpool to Northern Ireland, and all the way through the Midlands to London.

What can audiences expect?

This is Shakespeare as you've never heard it – it's funny, raucous, angry, powerful, joyous and totally now! It's equally silly as it is serious, and can be a brilliant tool for exploring Shakespeare for lovers and haters alike!

Synopsis of the show

Note: the following description contains details of the show. Please see the content warning for information about subjects that may be mentioned.

Prologue

The stage is set with 4 different chairs arranged in an arch with microphones next to each one. There is a defaced picture of William Shakespeare hanging at the back of the stage in a gold frame.

Four actors enter the stage and take a seat in their chairs. They all breathe and begin a sonnet asking who the f—k is William Shakespeare? Saying he is one of the most famous playwrights, but they want to put a spotlight on some of his female characters as they weren't all treated as they should have been.

They talk about 90s and 00s teen romantic comedies that Shakespeare has inspired: *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's The Man*, *Romeo + Juliet*, *Gnomeo & Juliet*, *West Side Story*, the remake of *West Side Story*, *Warm Bodies* (the zombie version), *The Lion King* and *Mean Girls*.

They are four of Shakespeare's most iconic characters and they explain that they are going to be stepping out of their stories, rewriting their narratives and showing new perspectives.

Each character introduces themselves: Cleopatra, Ophelia, Viola and Lady Macbeth. They describe themselves as The Last Queen of Egypt (Cleo), The Witch (Lady M), The Twin (Viola) and The Virgin (Ophelia), words which have been used to describe these characters over the years. And they are done with it.

Part 1: Cleopatra (from Anthony and Cleopatra)

Cleopatra walks to her chaise lounge and stands on it, the rest of the characters sit at her feet. Cleo speaks into a microphone to tell her story - she is the last Queen of Egypt, leader of an army, took back her throne and helped Caesar to take over Rome. She is powerful. She ends the talking about her love for Anthony.

We go to a scene from Anthony and Cleopatra. Cleo calls for Charmian (played by Ophelia), her handmaiden, and the cast bring her chaise lounge to her. She drapes herself onto the chaise, asking Charmian for a drink to help her sleep while Anthony is away. In this scene, we see how much Cleo loves and cares for Anthony. A messenger (played by Lady M) enters and gives her a pearl that Anthony kissed several times as a gift.

Cleo speaks about her political standpoint, where she smuggled herself into Caesar's chamber in a carpet and the two conspired and murdered her brother so she could take the throne. She then talks about how she presented herself to Anthony when he summoned her, she was on a golden barge, dressed as Aphrodite. We see some of the cast fan her with golden leaves. She asks about how Anthony could possibly choose another woman over her?

We go to a scene from Anthony and Cleopatra, she is sitting on her chaise when a messenger (played by Viola) enters. He delivers the news that Anthony is betrothed to Octavia. This makes Cleo really mad, and she threatens the messenger.

Cleo talks about how she has been double crossed by Octavian Caesar by making Anthony marry his sister. She is angry at men grabbing for power and back stabbing her. She talks about all the cruel things people say about her behind her back but she will not take it, she is strong and she will stand against Octavian Caesar if he declares war against her.

The rest of the characters are in awe of Cleo's strength but talk about how it didn't last long. They explain how Cleo fought alongside Anthony, but they were defeated. Anthony was told Cleo had taken her life, so he did the same. He didn't die immediately so was carried to her temple so he could die in her arms.

We see Cleo mourning for the loss of Anthony and her worry that Caesar will come for her and her people. She does not want to appear weak and so she cannot let him take her.

In a scene from Anthony and Cleopatra, Caesar (played by Viola) states that he will show Cleo generosity if she lets him take her, but if she tries to kill herself, as Anthony did, her people will receive no kindness.

Cleo sees no benefit in joining with Rome, she talks of the future, how the Roman Empire will rise and fall and the important part Cleo played. She talks about how even today people will still talk about the Roman Empire, as though it is still the most important thing humanity has ever done. She tells her maids to dress her like a Queen and put a gold robe around her and a gold crown on her head. She is handed a golden snake, which she wraps around her arm. She stands and declares that she is fire and air.

The rest of the cast surround her and congratulate her on speaking her truth.

Act 2: Lady Macbeth (from Macbeth)

Lady Macbeth scoffs at the talk of people speaking their truth because the truth is gory. She takes the microphone and introduces herself as the original Girl Boss, the biggest, baddest Shakespeare character, the one with the plans and the schemes. Known as a bad guy because she's a girl, but she won't back down no matter what.

We go to a scene from Macbeth, where a messenger (played by Viola) delivers a letter to Lady M. She speaks of how Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis and Cawdor and he will be King next, but she is worried about his character and that he lacks ambition. The messenger enters again to tell her that the King is on his way to stay with them. Lady M calls upon the spirits to help her with her plan of murder, she wants to be stripped of regret and guilt so she can do what needs to be done. Macbeth (played by Ophelia) enters, and she tells him that the King will not live to see tomorrow, she

encourages him to be charming but be ready to strike when he least expects it. She will concoct the perfect plan.

Lady M cuts the scene by calling for a history lesson. The cast all tell of the date their play was written, which were between 1600 and 1606. This was during the time when Queen Elizabeth was on the throne, she was the first and only unmarried Queen. Although she was on the throne and ruling a country and an empire, regular working-class women had no rights at all. Women weren't even allowed to perform so all the characters would have been played by men in wigs. This play was also being performed for the first time right after the Gunpowder plot, which feels especially odd! Viola sets the scene; Macbeth is waiting for the King to finish his dinner so he can stab him in his chamber. We then go to a scene from Macbeth, with Lady M encouraging Macbeth (played by Cleo) to kill the King and he is having doubts.

Viola calls out SHOTS and the cast gather round to do a shot together 'to the death of the King!'. Lady M makes a joke about gender being the only difference between being bitchy and ambitious. She takes the bottle and walks away, pouring more shots for herself as she talks about how her legacy has been tarnished as being an evil character when all she did was support her husband and encourage him and what is wrong with that? The rest of the cast creep up to her and take the bottle and shot glass from her. They try to calm her, but she is drunk, bold and excited.

We go to a scene from Macbeth. Lady M is waiting while Macbeth is upstairs killing the King. She is on edge every time she hears a noise. Macbeth (played by Viola) comes down and tells her he has done it. He is shaken and Lady M tries to soothe him when she sees the daggers in his hands. She tells him to take the daggers back upstairs but he cannot do it, so she takes them from him and gets blood on her hands.

She is looking at the blood on her hands and asking the rest of the cast for some water. Ophelia and Cleo sit her down on a seat whilst Viola goes offstage to get a vase for her to wash her hands in the water. She talks about how she feels no guilt for now she is Queen.

Lady M starts describing the effect this has had on Macbeth, that the guilt will keep him up all night, eat away at him, he will make rash decisions and become paranoid. Lady M is a state, it is clear this is starting to influence her too. She is talking about the blood that has been spilled, the blood is everywhere, and it is on her hands.

We go to a scene from Macbeth, Lady M is rubbing at her hands to try to get the blood out, nothing she can do can get the blood out. Cleo, Viola and Ophelia set her down for a lie down. Cleo says that she needs to have a little rest. Lady M talks about how she didn't have a death scene, a messenger delivers the news of her death in six lines: 'The queen, my lord, is dead' and Macbeth has a monologue about it. The cast comforts her. Lady M talks about how she wishes she had her own identity as she was never given a first name, if she could have one it would be 'Kellina' and that would be what she would like on her gravestone.

Act 3: Viola (from Twelfth Night)

X looks to Viola and asks if they are feeling ok. Viola takes the microphone and walks to centre stage, saying that if they're going to talk about the role of gender, they can't do that without Viola. They set the scene of Viola's story, being a maiden in a shipwreck with no sign of her twin brother Sebastian or any other members of her family. She has an idea and asks the Sea Captain for some help.

Viola gets a Captain's hat out of their pocket and puts it on an audience member's head. They say their lines from a scene in Twelfth Night, where Viola asks the captain to disguise them as Cesario so they can become Duke Orsino's servant.

Viola talks about how this was the perfect opportunity to reinvent themselves, that when they were young, they would dress up as their twin brother all the time and cause mischief and there was always something so freeing about that. Being a woman is restrictive and boring. Lady M interrupts to say that some women like doing that stuff and Kat and Cleo interject to say they understand what Viola means, they aren't all good little ladies. Ophelia declares that she was a good obedient girl. Viola nods along with the discussion, questioning what a good little lady even is. They talk about a crossroads, in one direction there is a mountain, and the other is a river. Some people make it to the top of the mountain, or swim in the stream but others struggle or find the paths dangerous. There is also a meadow in between the two paths, with many different paths coming off it. Viola sees herself as the meadow. That is who Cesario is. We go to a scene from Twelfth Night. Viola is talking to Duke Orsino (played by Cleo). The Duke asks for Cesario to woo Olivia, Cesario agrees.

Viola talks about how they appear in 8 of the 16 scenes in Twelfth Night, and of those 8 scenes, they are Cesario in 7 of them. They begin to question their identity. They talk about how in lots of Shakespeare's plays, there are lots of female characters dressed as men and male characters dressed as women. They question why this is and wonder if it's because people want to explore gender expression.

Ophelia wants to talk about something joyful like love, and so asks Viola if they love Orsino. They say they do, but that he loves Olivia and wants Cesario to woo her for him. We go to a scene in Twelfth Night where Cesario is talking to Olivia (played by Ophelia) to woo her. Cesario is kind to Olivia and she begins to take a liking to Cesario. She asks her what their family status is. Cesario replies that they are a gentleman and Olivia tells them that they must tell Orsino that she isn't interested in him.

Ophelia asks if this is a sticky situation and Viola agrees. It's sticky because Olivia fancies Cesario because she thinks he's a boy, when in fact it's Viola, who is in disguise and who's gender is more complex than the black and white. They talk about when the play was first being performed, all characters would have been played by men, including the female characters. So, when the female characters disguise themselves as men, it was boys dressed as girls dressed as boys. When the audience see Olivia professing her love to Cesario/Viola, they knew that she was saying she loved someone they know isn't a boy, and when they see Cesario/Viola saying they love Orsino, they're seeing someone who a 'boy' saying they love another man. Viola says that the whole thing feels very Queer-coded.

Ophelia asks if that means Shakespeare was progressive and the characters discuss this. They agree that some characters are, some are not, and some are a bit of both.

Viola wonders what Orsino would say if they revealed they love him as Cesario, not Viola disguised as Cesario.

We go to a scene from Twelfth Night where Cesario tries to hint to Orsino (played by Lady M) that they are in disguise, but the rest of the cast interject to say they didn't make it very clear at all!

Viola thinks Orsino loves them but doesn't know if he loves them for their mind, their body or their disguise. Cleo declares that they should go on Love is Blind because then they can fall in love with each other's personalities and not their gender, but Viola wants to be loved for who they are and that includes the way they express their gender. Viola sets some context that their twin brother Sebastian is alive, Olivia mistook him for Cesario and married him. What they must do now is come out as both Viola and Cesario.

We go to a scene in Twelfth Night with Sebastian (played by Lady M), Olivia (played by Ophelia) and Orsino (played by Cleo). Viola reveals their disguise and Orsino asks them to marry him. Viola says how free it feels to finally have the truth out there, and to be loved as both Viola and Cesario.

Act 4: Ophelia (from Hamlet)

Ophelia is shy at first and talks about how she hasn't done anything of real meaning, that all the other characters are known for doing something important such as ruling countries, killing kings, breaking gender norms and going against the status quo. Ophelia always did what she was told by her brother Laertes and her father Polonius.

We go to a scene from Hamlet. Ophelia is talking to Laertes (played by Cleo). They discuss Hamlet, and he tells her that even if Hamlet does have feelings for her, he cannot be with her because of his duties to the throne. Laertes exits and Polonius (played by Lady M) enters. Polonius asks Ophelia what she was discussing with Laertes and Ophelia tells him that it was about Hamlet. Polonius dismissed the idea that Hamlet would have feelings for her and tells her that she is not to see him and to reject his advances. Ophelia reluctantly agrees.

Ophelia talks about how she is always obeying her father and her brother. She explains that she did as she was told, but it still didn't help. The cast encourage her to explain further, and she sets the scene, telling them she was sewing in her room when Hamlet enters looking all mad. His shirt was unbuttoned, his socks were down his ankles, and he had no hat.

We go to a scene from Hamlet, with Ophelia explaining what had happened to Polonius (played by Lady M). Ophelia tells him how Hamlet grabbed her by the arm, and stared at her for a long time. The act was frightening and upsetting to her. Polonius believes it is an act of love that has driven him to madness.

Cleo is angry that Ophelia is being told that and keeps trying to explain why she is so furious but can't get it right. Viola steps in and tells Kat to do a lap to cool off. Viola walks around the stage and Cleo and Lady M tell Ophelia that it wasn't right what her father told him. They tell Ophelia that she is not at fault for men behaving badly and encourage her to say it out loud until she means it.

Ophelia wants to move on to the next scene and gives the context that she was told to give Hamlet his letters back. We go to a scene from Hamlet where Ophelia approaches Hamlet (played by Viola) with a bundle of letters. She says she wants to give them back and Hamlet denies ever giving them to her. In the scene, Hamlet pushes Ophelia down and tells her that he never loved her, insults her and tells her to go to a nunnery.

Ophelia is on the floor grieving the loss of Hamlet and is upset at the way she has been treated by him. She is confused as she doesn't know what she did to deserve it. She is upset because she didn't do anything wrong, merely followed what she was told to do, and she was the one who has suffered. She questions her identity; she's lived her whole life following orders, never speaking out, never thinking for herself but now she wants to have autonomy over her own head, heart and voice, but she doesn't really know who she is. The other characters interject, telling her she is funny, powerful, outspoken and ambitious but Ophelia replies that she isn't, she is soft and gentle and that's ok too. She is a work in progress and she's ok with that. She wants to spend some time figuring it out and the other characters support her, telling her they will be there for her while she does.

Epilogue

The cast stand in a line on stage saying one final sonnet. They talk about how there are so many more stories to be told; new, old and stories that don't even exist yet. The characters encourage the audience to go find those stories and tell them in their own unique ways.



Artistic Style

Who the f—k is shakespeare? is made up of a combination of performance styles and techniques.

Styles used in the show:

Spoken Word / Beat Poetry

Shakespearean Acting

Rap / Hip Hop

Top tips for Shakespearean Acting:

- Questions to consider:
 - What does the character want in this scene? How are they going to get it?
 - Where does one thought end and another begin? This is probably where you should breathe!
 - Who are you talking to? If it's to the audience, come up with what your relationship is to the audience; are they your friend? your diary?
 - What is the context of the play? Where does your scene/monologue come within the context?
 - What is the character feeling? How can you take that into a bigger emotion? Most Shakespeare characters aren't "sad" but they might be "grieving" or "betrayed"?
- Be specific – any answer you come up with should be clear and performable
 - It's not useful to think too abstractly, try to keep it rooted in the real
- Remember, these are real people (even if they're fictional) - their lives are real to them, what they're going through is real to them

What is Spoken Word / Beat Poetry?

- Both are forms of poetry that do not necessarily adhere to the traditional rules of poetry
- They are largely free verse (i.e. they don't rhyme) but still have a rhythm to them
- They are influenced by the rhythms and cadences of jazz, hip hop, and soul music
- They often emphasize personal stories, free-thinking, and spontaneous writing
- They often don't have a set structure, rhyming pattern, or metre
- They are written to be performed, not only read

Which plays are the characters from?

who the f—k is shakespeare? looks at women and femme characters in some of Shakespeare's works. These are:

- Cleopatra from *Antony & Cleopatra*
- Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth*
- Viola/Cesario from *Twelfth Night*
- Ophelia from *Hamlet*

You may have studied some of these plays at school, or have seen adaptations (versions) of them. Some or all of them may be new to you.



Links to the Curriculum

The themes and content explored in the show can be linked to Drama and Theatre Studies, English, and Critical Theory. Here are some examples of how the show can inspire exercises in the classroom.

Drama and Theatre Studies

Going to see a live performance is a great way to get ideas for devising and improvisation! It allows students to explore theatrical devices and interesting themes.

An original piece of theatre can also be a great inspiration for creating discussions or writing a review.

Discussion ideas:

- What was unique about *who the f—k is shakespeare*?
- What techniques could you identify that the director and cast did in the show?
- How did the performers use their voices and movement to tell the story?
- Did the set, costume & design compliment the production?

Activity ideas:

- Perform a monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays. Break down the text – can you tell it in 'modern' English as well?
- Choose one of the characters from the play. Explore 'what would happen next' or 'what could've happened' to the character.
- Create a review of your experience: what was it like from start to finish to attend *who the f--k is shakespeare*? What did you like? What did you find challenging? What did you learn?

English

who the f—k is shakespeare? is a really great show to see for English studies as it features characters from Shakespeare's plays that you may have studied before, being framed differently. It also includes key cultural references, is political and provokes new ways of looking at marginalised characters to the audience.

Discussion ideas:

- What did you like about the writing of *who the f—k is shakespeare*? (Or a section of it!)
- What journey did the character(s) take you on during the show?
- What techniques could you identify in the structure (or narrative) of the writing?
- What was effective about switching between Shakespeare's text and modern English?

Activity ideas:

- Create (and perform) a piece of spoken word, poetry or a monologue
- Critical writing: create a written review or blog of your experience: what was it like from start to finish to attend the show? What did you like? What did you find challenging? What did you learn?
- Critical review: Review & reflection: choose one specific element (e.g writing, performance, music) from the show and explore in an essay.

Shakespeare and Critical Theory

who the f—k is shakespeare? is a great stimulus for discussions around Critical Theory, including Postcolonial, Feminist, and Queer theories.

Feminist theory

Feminist theory looks at the idea that women are oppressed and/or disadvantaged by society and institutions. It looks at discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, objectification, economic inequality, power, gender role, and stereotypes. Feminist theory also looks at patriarchy: a social system or practice in which men oppress, dominate and exploit women. Theorists look at the fact that gender roles and inequalities are usually socially constructed, and that these can create conflict between men and women.

Feminists support equality for men and women, however, throughout history, there have been many different approaches to feminism. These have been called 'waves'. You may hear or read about 'Second Wave Feminism' or 'Third Wave Feminism'.

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory looks at the impact of European colonial rule around the world. This impact is political, economic, historical, social and artistic. This could mean the British Empire, or other European countries invading other countries. This means that, within the context of postcolonialism, it is impossible to think of 'European Literature' or 'European History' without considering Europe's invasion, colonisation and oppression of countries around the world.

Queer theory

Queer theory looks at the idea that gender and sexuality are social phenomena rather than inherent facts about people, and disputes the idea that heterosexuality is the 'default' setting. They study concepts of sexuality and gender as social phenomena through analysis of the categories, language and binaries that people use to present them in.

Discussion ideas:

- Can you link one or more of the critical theories to each of the characters in the play? In what ways have they been impacted by the oppression they face?
- What are the distinctions between sex, sexuality and gender? How do Feminist, Postcolonial and Queer theory link to each one?
- Do you agree with Viola that the fact that Shakespeare uses the narrative trope of twins dressing as each other, particularly between genders, is very Queer-coded? Why? Why not?
- Do you agree with Ophelia that Shakespeare is woke? Why? Or why not?

Activity ideas:

- Do some research into writers, thinkers or influential people in each Critical Theory, e.g. Judith Butler's ideas on Queer theory, Edward Said's view on Postcolonialism. Write a paragraph summing up their ideas and how they link to the play.

- Hold a debate and examine each character through the lens of Feminist, Postcolonial and Queer theory. Have one side stand as Shakespeare, and someone as a student today. Is Shakespeare's view very black and white? How nuanced is the view of today?
- Write a persuasive speech arguing why the characters in the play deserve better representation. Link this to Feminist, Postcolonial and Queer theory.



Workshop Ideas

The following are simple workshop ideas that are linked to the themes in the show, that can be led by anyone. We encourage you to adapt as needed for the needs of your group.

1. Activity: Cross the Room

Resources: n/a

Aim: This activity aims to highlight the different lived experiences of the people in the room, to help the group get to know each other, and show that privilege can come in many different forms.

Themes: Identity, privilege, difference

Time: 20-30 mins

Relationship to the play: All four characters have different protected characteristics and different kinds of struggles and privileges. This is a way to explore your own privilege and lived experiences.

Assign one side of the room as strongly agree, the other side as strongly disagree, and the middle as no strong opinion. Ask the group to respond to the prompts by placing themselves in a spot which most accurately reflects their opinion on the prompt. Read the prompt and allow them to place themselves on the side of the room that they feel most accurately reflects their lived experience. Also note, if a young person does not want to respond to a particular prompt they are not required to.

Use the statements below as a guide, feel free to remove any and add your own! Allow time in between to ask further questions and open discussions;

- You like chocolate
- You like to watch or play sports
- You play an instrument, sing, beatbox, dj - anything musical really!
- You like Disney movies
- You have more than 50 books in your house (guess!)
- You take public transport or walk to school
- You have black or brown hair
- You feel comfortable or safe around police
- You identify as LGBTQIAP+
- You speak more than one language
- Your first language is anything other than English
- You are able to safely access a toilet of your choosing that aligns with your gender
- You like Beyonce
- You like to dance
- You don't need to worry about step free access at train stations

- You feel safe walking home alone at night
- You identify as Disabled or have an invisible illness
- You want to go to uni
- You like the way your identities are portrayed in the media (news, tv, movies, etc)
- You like hanging out with your friends
- You are proud of your heritage or culture
- You learn about your heritage or culture at school
- You are excited about what the future may bring

Alternative option: young people can choose where they would like to sit (more central the better), and ask the young person to either indicate with a part of their body which side they feel they agree with. Or if a young person can participate by sharing their opinion verbally or by writing it down. Whatever feels most comfortable.

Aftercare: Ask the group questions after the game has finished; Anything surprising that you've learnt about yourself? Someone else? Any things that have changed? Anything interesting come up?

Summarise: Explain that the game was a way to get us thinking about ourselves and what makes us different, but also what connects us. Ask the group to consider all of the aspects of a person's identity that makes them unique (such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, religion, postcode, favourite food, favourite music, etc), and how those things can be a way to connect to other people. With older groups, you may also want to discuss privilege and how it can exist within each of us in different ways (e.g. it is a privilege to have many books in your house, it is a privilege to feel safe walking home alone at night, it is a privilege to not have to consider step-free access while travelling, it is a privilege to speak more than one language BUT it is also a privilege to have English as a first language).

2. Performance & Writing Activity: Celebrating the Self & the Other through Praise Poetry

Resources:	Pens, paper, music
Aim:	To creatively express thoughts and reactions to the play and to the lived experiences of the participants. To develop creative writing and performance skills. To praise and uplift themselves and one another.
Themes:	Empowerment, celebration of self, identity
Context:	Praise poetry is an African form of oral history and storytelling, using the voice and body to tell the story of your ancestors in a way that highlights the positives and empowers you to talk about your lineage. It also offers us the opportunity to talk uplift and praise other people in the room.
Time:	1h - 1h30 (depending on group size)

Relationship to the Play: The characters are on a journey of self-discovery and celebration of themselves and one another.

Individual Exercise:

Each person should sit with a pen and paper and complete the following sentences;

- My name is...
- It means...
- It comes from...
- I was given my name because...
- I love my name because...
- I am...

e.g. My name is Luke. It means Light Giving. It comes from the Bible. I was given my name because my grandfather was called Luke and he raised my mother. I love my name because I get to honour my granddad even though I never met him. I am a young, white man and happy to be here.

Group Exercise 1:

Bring the group together in a circle. Play some nondescript music in the background; a good option is Lo-Fi hip hop. Each person in the circle should loudly and proudly read the sentences from the individual exercise above.

When the speaker says their name, the entire group should shout it back at them with excitement and love.

e.g.

LUKE: My name is Luke!

GROUP: Luke!

LUKE: It means light giving! It comes from... etc.

Group Exercise 2:

Each person in the circle should loudly and proudly say their name, what animal they describe themselves as, and why. Thinking about using positive adjectives to describe themselves.

e.g. I am Tankiso! I am a gazelle because I am graceful and quick!

Once each person has had a go, have them start again, this time, describing themselves and the person next to them. This does not have to be consistent from the round before, and nor does the next person have to self-identify as the animal they have been given; see example below. Again, using positive adjectives to describe themselves through the animals.

e.g. TANKISO: I am Tankiso! I am a graceful and quick gazelle! This is Maria, they are a proud and powerful tiger!

MARIA: I am Maria, I am a tiger, but I am also a rabbit, because I am sweet and funny! This is Luke, he is a fox because he is clever and resourceful!

LUKE: I am Luke, I am a fox, but I am also... etc.

NOTE: Encourage the participants to physicalise the animals as they describe their classmates, and the words that they are using to describe them. How does a graceful and quick gazelle physically take up space or move, versus a sweet and funny rabbit.

Once each person has had a go, have the group swap places. They will repeat the exercise. This time, when they speak, they will move to the centre of the circle, and choose someone that they have not yet described. They will then swap places, and the original speaker will stand just outside of the circle, to make clear who has not had a go.

e.g. MARIA: I am Maria etc. This is Bashir! etc.

Bashir will then take Maria's spot in the centre. Maria will then stand where Bashir was, but take a small step back so that it is clear that she has already had a go at being in the middle. Bashir will then pick another person to describe.

While encouraging the young people to speak loudly and proudly, recognise that their versions of loud and proud may be different, allow them to define what loud and proud means to them. When encouraging them to physicalise and embody the animals they are describing, allow them to do so within their own physical abilities, e.g. young people with mobility access needs should not be expected to leap around like a gazelle, but might use their arms or hands to indicate movement. Young people who do not wish to be in the centre may deliver their praise poetry from their position in the circle.

Aftercare: Ask questions about what they learnt about one another? How it felt to celebrate themselves? Each other? What are the bits they want to hold on to? How can they continue to celebrate themselves (their families, identity, culture) and each other day today?

Summarise: Explain that the exercise is a way to get to know one another, but also to celebrate your own and each others' culture and identity. Open a discussion about pride and self-love, asking them to consider what they might do to encourage themselves and their friends to love and appreciate themselves and each other. With older groups you might want to open a discussion about radical self-love/self-care (citing writers such as Audre Lorde, and bell hooks), and ask them to consider how self-care can also be group-care.

3. Activity: Shakespeare Mood-boards

Resources: Pens, paper, photos or old magazines, scissors and glue

Aim:	To help understand how Shakespeare's characters can be discovered today, to help make creative design choices
Themes:	Current events, Reading & Comprehension, Creative Arts & Design
Time:	30-40mins
Relationship to the play:	The play uses Shakespeare's text and original writing to create new ways of understanding Shakespeare and making it relevant today

Ask your young people to choose their favourite character from the play.
Go through some old magazines and have them cut out images or words that describe their character in their perspective (it does not have to look like the actors, or have the same design aesthetic)
Have them make a collage/mood-board of the images and words that they have selected and explain to the group why they have made those choices.

Wellbeing & Signposting

It is really important that you take the time to think about the wellbeing of the young people you are working with - before, during and after the performance - particularly for those who will connect with the lived experience of the characters in the play. You can find a full synopsis of the show on page 10 of this toolkit, we would suggest that you read through this and talk through anything that may be triggering, upsetting or uncomfortable for anyone in the space. If you'd like some more information or support from us on this, please contact Donna at donna@20storieshigh.org.uk or Leanne at leanne@20storieshigh.org.uk.

Signposting

Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS)

For:

- Mental health and emotional wellbeing services for 5-25 year olds

0151 707 1025

www.ypas.org.uk

Young Minds

For:

- Mental Health support

24/7 Text support: SHOUT 85258

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Liverpool Light

For:

- Crisis support for people with mental health needs.

Out of hours 7 days a week, 6pm - 1am

<https://www.liverpool-light.org.uk>

LDAS

For:

- Domestic Violence & Abuse support

<https://liverpooldomesticabuseservice.org.uk/>

GYRO

For:

- Sexuality, Gender & LGBTQ+

0151 707 1025

www.liverpoolcamhsfyi.com/service/gyro-ypas

Mermaids

For:

- Transgender Youth Support

0808 801 0400

<https://mermaidsuk.org.uk>

Anthony Walker Foundation

For:

- Race & Race related crime

0151 237 3974

www.anthonwalkerfoundation.com/hate-crime

The Mix

For:

- Help and advice on a wide range of issues for under 25s

0808 808 4994

www.themix.org.uk

Join Us Online

We are keen to connect digitally with our audiences, partners and participants. There are a whole host of ways venues and individual audience members can connect with us artistically and also engage in conversations about the show.

#WTFIShakespeare

Credits

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