SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

the Liar
adapted by David Ives
from the comedy by Pierre Corneille
directed by Michael Kahn

FIRST FOLIO:
TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDE
Welcome to the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of  
**The Liar**  
Adapted by David Ives  
From the comedy by Pierre Corneille

Dear Teachers,

Consistent with STC’s central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide will prove useful as you prepare to bring your students to the theatre!

First Folio Guides provide information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. First Folio Guides contain material about the playwrights, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance.

First Folio Guides are designed as a resource both for teachers and students. We encourage you to photocopy articles you find helpful and distribute them to your students as supplemental reading.

Sincerely,  
The Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department

**Enjoy the show!**

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The First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide for The Liar was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department.

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ON SHAKESPEARE

For articles and information about Shakespeare’s life and world, please visit our website ShakespeareTheatre.org, to download the file On Shakespeare.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688 or visit our website ShakespeareTheatre.org.

Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production is part of *Shakespeare for a New Generation*, a national initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.
Arriving in Paris after finishing law school in Poitiers, Dorante hires Cliton as his serving man. Clarice and Lucrece enter, and Dorante flirts with Clarice—unaware that she is secretly engaged to his friend Alcippe—spinning an outrageous tale of military feats, and claiming he fell in love with Clarice a year ago. After they leave, Lucrece's maid Isabelle tells Cliton that the more beautiful of the two is named Lucrece. Dorante assumes that “Lucrece” is the woman he talked to. Alcippe enters, telling Philiste that he saw Clarice go out in the middle of the night with another man. Dorante invents a lavish midnight ride down the Seine with a lady, enraging Alcippe, who storms out.

Geronte, Dorante’s father, tells Clarice that his son is a perfect match for her. She does not realize Dorante is the same gallant she met earlier. Because Alcippe keeps delaying their marriage, Clarice agrees to at least look at Dorante. Clarice has Lucrece write a letter to arrange a midnight meeting with Dorante, at which Clarice will pretend to be “Lucrece”. As they send Clarice’s servant Sabine (Isabelle’s identical twin) to deliver the letter, Alcippe accuses an incredulous Clarice of having gone on a lascivious boat-ride.

As Clarice and Lucrece watch from a window, Geronte tries to convince Dorante to marry Clarice. But because Dorante thinks that Clarice is “Lucrece,” he vehemently refuses, making up a wild tale about a wife in Poitiers. Geronte departs, congratulating his son. Sabine delivers the letter to Dorante, and fends off advances from Cliton, who thinks she is Isabelle. Intrigued, Dorante agrees to meet Lucrece, and sends Cliton to gather information about her.

Alcippe challenges Dorante to a duel, but before Alcippe can draw his sword, Dorante conducts a mimed duel. Bewildered, Alcippe finally tells Dorante why he challenged him, and Dorante explains that his sailing mate was not Alcippe’s fiancée. They make up, and Philiste admits that the girl on the midnight boat-ride was not Clarice, but Sabine, whom Philiste has secretly been courting.

When Dorante arrives to meet “Lucrece ” that night, Clarice asks him about his “wife,” and Dorante explains that he lied to escape an arranged marriage. Dorante starts badmouthing “Clarice,” and Clarice leaves enraged. Isabelle kisses Cliton and tells him that the real Lucrece likes Dorante. A moment later, Sabine enters, slaps Cliton when he tries to embrace her, and tells him that Dorante should keep away.

The next morning, Geronte asks Dorante to bring his wife to Paris. Dorante stalls by saying that his wife is pregnant, and Geronte is delighted. Isabelle shows Dorante Lucrece’s diary, and Dorante sends Isabelle back with a letter to tell “Lucrece” that he’s similarly enthralled. When Lucrece receives his letter, she notices that it doesn’t correspond to her previous interactions with Dorante. Clarice arrives with the happy news that she and Alcippe will finally marry.

Philiste tells Geronte that Dorante probably invented the story of his wife, and so Geronte confronts his son on the matter. Dorante admits that it was all lies, but that he is in love with another girl – “Lucrece.” When Lucrece and Clarice arrive, Dorante passionately declares his love to Clarice, much to both ladies’ bewilderment. Finally, Dorante realizes his mistake, and pretends he knew all along. Lucrece explodes in anger at Dorante, but Dorante explains how everything he did was out of love for her, and in an honest outburst, begs for her hand. She agrees, and all of the betrothed couples depart together.
As the eldest son and namesake of Pierre Corneille, a lawyer and administrator in the French city of Rouen, the young Pierre Corneille was expected to become a Rouen lawyer and administrator himself. Born in 1606, he showed tremendous academic promise and dutifully studied law in college. But he was a tongue-tied lawyer and felt more inclined to write poetry than to practice law, so he went to work for the Rouen Department of Forests and Rivers.

Bored at work, he began to write plays in his spare time. His first, a comedy called *Mélite*, was a surprise hit, and he followed it up with five more successful plays. These plays gained him a very powerful patron in Paris: Cardinal Richelieu, Chief Minister to King Louis XIII. The Cardinal invited Corneille to join “The Society of the Five Authors,” a group of playwrights commissioned to write exclusively for the Cardinal. Expected to produce plays that expressed the Cardinal’s moral standards, however, Corneille felt stifled by the restrictions and returned to his hometown of Rouen in 1635.

Freed from constraint, Corneille experienced a burst of creativity. He wrote his first tragedy, *Medée*, the wildly experimental comedy *Theatrical Illusion*, and his masterpiece, the genre-defying history play *The Cid*. A colossal success with audiences (including the King), this play about the tension between love and duty nevertheless drew the ire of Richelieu’s newly-incorporated French Academy, which attacked it for not conforming to moral standards or to the so-called “classical unities.” The hailstorm of criticism drove Corneille from playwriting in 1637, and he resolved to return to his old post in Rouen and to start a family.

By 1640, however, Corneille began to write for the theatre again. His new works were almost exclusively tragedies, and they hewed much closer to the Academy’s established rules. *Horace*, *Cinna*, and *Polyeucte* all told stories from Ancient Rome, and followed the classical conventions by transpiring over a single day at a single location. These serious-minded tragedies promoted honor and virtue above all else.

In the midst of this more serious turn, Corneille unexpectedly produced his comic masterpiece, *The Liar*, in 1643. Based on *The Suspicious Truth* by the Mexican-Spanish playwright Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, it also seems drawn in part from Corneille’s own life. Just as Corneille left the law in provincial Rouen for the romantic life of an artist in Paris, so the young liar/lawyer Dorante leaves his legal studies in Poitiers for romance in the big city.

Now married to Marie de Lampérière, with whom he would have seven children, Corneille saw his popularity slowly wane. In 1652, after his newest play flopped and he lost his patronage, Corneille left the theatre. The promise of a new patron finally drew him back to writing plays in 1659. Heartened by the success of his tragedy *Oedipe*, Corneille moved his family to Paris. In 1663, he began to receive a pension from the king, and he wrote new tragedies nearly every year. Beginning in 1664, he gained a formidable rival, the brash young playwright Jean Racine.

Though Corneille’s later plays met with little success, he remained a respected figure, and his early plays were frequently revived. His influence on the course of French play-writing can not be ignored. The same year Corneille wrote *The Liar*, a 21-year-old Parisian named Jean-Baptiste Poquelin founded his first theatre. When he later wrote his own plays (under the name Molière), he absorbed many of Corneille’s techniques to craft hilarious and cutting satires on French society. Corneille’s comic subjects and style influenced not only Molière, but also his great successors Marivaux and Beaumarchais. Corneille died in 1684, but his legacy lived on.
Several years ago, we received a grant from the Beech Street Foundation that allowed us to commission five adaptations of lesser known plays. These would be plays by great writers that are not done enough, or that truly need a new translation for revival in the 21st century. Pierre Corneille’s play *The Liar* was the first of these commissions, and it embodies everything this project is about: to bring to light a play that should be in a classical theatre’s repertory.

I fell in love with *The Liar* when we read it for our ReDiscovery series. It was a revelation to me, because I know Corneille from his famous tragedies, but I didn’t know that he was such a great comic writer. It was a tremendously funny and clever play, and in a way also a very touching play. It’s the story of an amazing character who lies all the time. He’s an incredible storyteller in the spur of the moment. So we read it for ReDiscovery and it made for an enchanting evening. But as well as that first reading went, it was also quite clear that a new translation and adaptation would serve the play better.

I knew David Ives’ work from many productions, including his adaptation of Mark Twain’s *Is He Dead?* that ran on Broadway in 2007. David had tuned that newly rediscovered comedy, and I thought he could transform this wonderful farce as well. David is brilliant linguistically, a masterful writer of puns and rhymes and situations, so we were delighted when he agreed to translate and adapt *The Liar*. And he’s done just an amazing job. He’s kept the spirit of Corneille, including keeping it in rhymed verse. I think it’s a great rediscovery of the play for American audiences. We just started rehearsal, and I’m already having a wonderful time. It’s great to have David working on this script with us, and I welcome him every day that he’s involved in the rehearsal process.

Since I work mainly in classical theatre, I usually deal with dead playwrights. When I make adjustments to a play by Shakespeare—adding or cutting text or rewriting a line—I’m “asking” him, “Is that a good idea for your play?” I hope that if he were here now, he would say yes. So having a playwright that I can talk on the telephone with or eat lunch with (and not have to channel) is pleasant.
When my agent called and asked if I'd be interested in translating Corneille's *The Liar* for the Shakespeare Theatre Company of Washington, I had never heard of the play. Nor had he. As it turned out, I needn't have been ashamed of my ignorance in the case of *The Liar*. I doubt there were 500 people in this republic of 300 million who knew the piece or even the title. In any case: “Send the script along,” I told my agent. “I'll take a look at it.” He sent, I looked, and several hours later, with the help of a fat French dictionary, I found myself astonished. Exhilarated. Giddy. For, lying on the desk before me, was one of the world's great comedies. I felt as if some lost Shakespeare festival comedy on the order of *Twelfth Night* or *Much Ado About Nothing* had been found. This particular Shakespeare comedy was unfortunately locked away in French (the French have a way of doing things like that), but I could remedy that. The prospect of Englishing this play made me feel like Ronald Colman distantly sighting Shangri-La. Everything about it spoke to me. The rippling language. The rich simplicity of the premise. The gorgeousness of the set pieces. The seeming insouciance of the treatment alongside the classical rigor of the plotting. The way the play's wide understanding and humanity was nicely seasoned with several large pinches of social satire.

*The Liar* is one of those plays that seem to be made out of almost nothing, yet end up being about so much. *The Importance of Being Earnest* comes to mind, and *Hay Fever*. It's one of those plays that are both a view on our world and their own separate world, one that we would happily inhabit. Corneille wrote *Le Menteur* in the middle of his great career as a return to comedy, and it shows. The play has all the ease of a successful playwright completely in control of his powers. He seems to be improvising this divertissement before our eyes, riffing on the Spanish play he stole the basic plot from (and which he vastly improved). Though written in Corneille's middle age, *The Liar* sparkles with youth.

All that being said, I have to add that my *Liar* is not exactly Corneille's *Liar*. For, having been bowled over by the play, I had to consider how to render this luminous world in English. There was one thing that I knew right away: it had to be in verse, just as it is in Corneille. *The Liar* is a portrait of a brilliant performer and, language being the wire Dorante dances upon, the language had to match his agile mind at every turn. Prose would have turned this into a "Seinfeld" episode and made it banal. Only rhyme would do. Next question: translate the whole play, translate some of the play, or make another play "based on" Corneille? Frankly, there were elements of the plot that did not satisfy me, and which I doubted would satisfy anybody else either: Lucrece was a cipher, indeed virtually a non-speaking role for most of the action; the servant Cliton's relationship to Dorante and to the play's underlying themes wasn't clear; the two maids were thankless parts; and the wrap-up was cursory in the extreme. Not good enough.

My version of the play is what I call a translaptation, i.e., a translation with a heavy dose of adaptation. For what I have realized in translating plays is that, in an odd way, the language of a play is of secondary concern. In translating a play, I contend, one must think as a playwright, not as a translator. One must ask: what is the play underneath the words, what is going on beneath speeches rather than on their surface, who are these characters and what drives them, and finally, what is this play actually all about? What was on Corneille's chest and how can I use what's on mine to create something with dramatic and comedic integrity? It seems to me that that's the only way a translated play can ever have what every good play has to have: a voice. In other words, you have to write the play Corneille would have written today, in English. In the end, I did to *The Liar* what Corneille had done to his Spanish source: I ran with it. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as refracted in a theatrical fun-house mirror. Welcome to *The Liar*. 

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**The Whole Truth About *The Liar***

By David Ives

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Family Life and Marriage in 17th Century France

In all time periods, family and marriage are closely linked, however attitudes toward family in 17th-century France differed greatly from our modern notions of family. During this time there was rarely overt affection in the family unit; rather, family was an important social structure. Wives depended on their husbands for financial support, and husbands counted on their wives for domestic responsibilities. Children were vital to the preservation of the family name, as well as business and fortune. The family also served a larger social function as well. Prior to the 17th century, France was plagued by political upheaval and social disorder. The structure of the family—which was unquestionably patriarchal—represented a smaller version of what authorities hoped for in France. Just as the father ruled over his dutiful wife and children, so did the reigning monarch rule over his loyal subjects.

In keeping with the hierarchical family structure, marriages were arranged by parents as a financial or business transaction. A good match could bring wealth and honor to a family, and a poor match could bring ruin. Marriage “for love” was a rarity, to which some historians attribute high rates of adultery.
The 17th century is perhaps one of the most important centuries in the shaping of the modern world. It was during this time that France began to rise as one of the greatest powers in Europe. The century began under the leadership of King Louis XIII, who took the throne after his father’s assassination in 1610. At age nine, Louis was too young to rule so his mother, Marie de Medic acted as regent until Louis turned 16. In 1615, Louis XIII married the Spanish Infanta Anne of Austria. The union, which was an arranged marriage that had been settled by the Treaty of Fontainbleau, was an unhappy one and they spent many years apart. Although declared of age to rule in 1614, Louis XIII was barred from affairs of the state by his mother. In 1617 he, along with one of his favorites, was accused of bringing about the assassination of his mother’s minister Concino Concini, thereby forcing Marie de Medici into exile. He eventually reconciled with his mother and entrusted the government to his advisor Cardinal Richelieu. Marie de Medici, noting the influence that Cardinal Richelieu had over her son, urged Louis to get rid of him. Instead, Louis XIII sent his mother yet again into exile.

Louis XIII relied heavily upon Cardinal Richelieu during his reign; under Richelieu’s influence, Louis became one of the first examples of an absolute monarch, meaning that he held all control over his citizens and country with few or no legal restrictions on his power. Richelieu strengthened the power of the royal authority and kept the nobility in check by limiting the power of the sovereign courts. Richelieu’s control extended to media and the arts. Richelieu was briefly the patron of playwright Pierre Corneille (see “about the playwright,” p. 4). In 1635, Cardinal Richelieu founded the Académie Française with the primary goal of establishing a French dictionary. The Académie Française also supervised literature, art and architecture.

Anne of Austria gave birth to the royal couple’s first child, Louis XIV, on September 5, 1638. Louis XIII died shortly thereafter and the great Sun King, Louis XIV, assumed the throne of France in 1643 at the age of four. The longest reigning monarch in European history, Louis XIV ruled as King of France and King of Navarre (a small country situated between France and Spain) for the next 72 years. Because of Louis’ young age, his mother ruled as regent along with her advisor Cardinal Mazarin for 18 years. It was during the years of Mazarin’s rule that the French civil war, known as the Fronde, began. Mazarin, continuing where Richelieu left off, attempted to increase the power of the crown at the expense of the nobility through taxation and other financial edicts. When Cardinal Mazarin arrested members of Parliament for not paying taxes in 1648, Paris broke out into rioting and Louis XIV fled Paris along with his court. The rioting was led first by the nobility and then by commoners.

Anne’s regency ended when Louis XIV turned 13, but Louis continued to allow Cardinal Mazarin to control the affairs of state until the Cardinal’s death. When Louis finally took over full control of the throne in 1661, he chose to rule as an absolute monarch without a chief minister. Louis XIV believed that his power came from God and therefore took the sun as his emblem, hence his nickname “The Sun King.”

Louis XIV was a great supporter of the arts and under him France became the cultural center of Europe. During his reign, the five basic steps of classical ballet were established, the architecture of Versailles influenced numerous buildings and the French Academy dictionary was completed. Theatre was an important form of entertainment and the plays of Racine and Molière were extremely popular.

While Louis XIV placed France at the forefront of the European powers, amassing land and wealth, the nation was quickly becoming bankrupt toward the end of the 17th century. Louis’ constant wars, extravagant palaces and high taxes took their toll on the people of France. While the royal court lived in lavish excess, the common people suffered extreme hardships. The peasantry also opposed the royal absolutism established by Louis, a factor that would greatly influence the French Revolution in 1789.
Who’s Who in The Liar

Setting: Paris, 1643

GERONTE
Dorante’s father

DORANTE
A young man just arrived in Paris, Dorante is a newly trained lawyer and a liar

PHILISTE
Alcippe’s friend

CLITON
Dorante’s servant

ALCIPPE
Clarice’s secret fiancé

CLARICE
A young lady of Paris

SABINE
Clarice’s puritanical servant

LUCRECE
Clarice’s best friend

ISABELLE
Lucrece’s outgoing servant

KEY

= family

= servant

= love interest

= friend
What’s in a lie?

Break your students up into small groups and have them answer the following questions: What is a lie? Why do people tell lies? What is the difference or is there a difference between a white lie, a half truth and an out and out lie?

In these same groups, ask them to come up with scenes to show the following:

- Their definition of a lie and reasons that people tell lies
- The differences between a white lie, half truth and out and out lie

After each group presents, discuss as a large group the different types of lies that were shown. Ask students if it is possible to live in a lie free society and challenge them to go a day without telling a white lie, a half truth or an out and out lie.

Truth in advertising

Is there really such a thing as truth in advertising? Do advertisers simply stretch the truth or do they really lie about the capabilities of the products they sell? Why are they allowed to do this and why do we as consumers continue to buy into messages that they give us? Find examples of products where advertisers either stretch the truth or lie to get us buy into “mystique” of their products, determine what is fact or fiction and discuss with the class.

Ask students to think of a time when they purchased something based on the advertisement and were then disappointed once they owned it. Have students write a persuasive letter to the manufacturer explaining how the product was misrepresented and why they demand a refund.

Who gets to lie?

Ask students if it is it ever alright for an elected official to lie to his constituents? Is keeping the truth from the public the same as lying? Under what circumstances would it be permissible to lie?

Ask students to find four circumstances when an elected official lied.
- One official in history who was justified to lie
- One official in history who was wrong to lie
- One official in the 21st century who was justified to lie
- One official in the 21st century who was wrong to lie

Have students write a 2 page essay explaining the different situations that these leaders were in and why in their opinion the lie was or was not permissible.
The Lying Cycle

“All the world’s a lie, and all the men and women merely liars.”

- The Liar

When we first meet Dorante in The Liar, he creates a new and improved identity for himself. For each problem that he believes to solve with a lie, he creates two new ones for himself. Throughout the rest of the play, we see Dorante struggle to keep all of his lies straight.

After seeing the play, break your students up into small groups and have them answer the following questions:

- Have they ever told an innocent lie which then turned into a cycle of lying to cover up the initial lie. Was it worth it?

- Knowing how the play ended, would they have done anything differently than Dorante?

- Does the objective of a lie matter? If Dorante wasn’t intentionally trying to hurt someone with his lies, is he responsible for any pain that his lies cause?

- Is anybody else to blame for lying? Are the people who believe the lies at all responsible for the outcome?

A good memory is needed once we have lied. -- Pierre Corneille
Theatre Etiquette: A Guide for Students

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below.

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Here are some important things to do before you go inside the theatre:

♦ Turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.), or better yet, leave them in coat check. It is very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The light from cell phones and other electronic devices is also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.

♦ Spit out your gum.

♦ Leave all food and drinks in the coat check. NO food or drinks are allowed inside the theatre.

♦ Visit the restroom before the performance begins. Unless it is an emergency, plan to stay seated during the performance.

During the performance:

♦ React to what’s happening on stage: Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it… You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”