FIRST FOLIO:
TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDE

by William Shakespeare
directed by David Muse
September 9–October 12
Welcome to the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare!

This season, the Shakespeare Theatre Company presents seven plays by William Shakespeare and other classic playwrights. Consistent with the Shakespeare Theatre Company’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!

For the 2008-09 season, the Education Department will publish First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guides for our productions of Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night and Ion. First Folio Guides provide information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. First Folio Guides include 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.

Enjoy the show!
A brawl breaks out in the streets of Verona between the feuding houses of Montague and Capulet. The Prince breaks up the fight, announcing that he will punish another such disturbance with death. Romeo, Lord Montague’s love-sick son, arrives to tell his cousin Benvolio of his infatuation for the beautiful Rosaline.

Lord Capulet discusses a marriage between his young daughter Juliet and a gentleman named Paris. Capulet invites Paris to a party he is throwing that evening and sends his servant with a list of guests to invite. The illiterate servant asks Romeo for help reading the list, and Romeo decides to attend the party in disguise when he learns that Rosaline will be there. When he arrives, however, Romeo sees Juliet and falls in love with her. Only later do they learn that they are the children of rival families.

On the way home, Romeo slips away from his friends to search for Juliet. When Juliet comes to her window, she and Romeo confess their love for each other and make plans for a secret marriage. Romeo begs his confidant Friar Lawrence to perform the ceremony, and the Friar agrees in the hope of unifying the families.

After marrying, Romeo and Juliet depart separately to conceal their union. On Romeo’s way home, Juliet’s cousin Tybalt challenges him to a duel; Romeo refuses to fight but cannot yet tell Tybalt why. Romeo’s friend Mercutio takes Tybalt’s challenge, and when Romeo tries to step between them, Tybalt fatally wounds Mercutio. Enraged, Romeo kills Tybalt. Romeo flees the scene in horror, only to be banished by the Prince in absentia. Juliet’s nurse tells her of Tybalt’s death and Romeo’s banishment but agrees to facilitate a meeting for the newlyweds that night.

After spending the night together, Romeo and Juliet part. Because of Tybalt’s sudden death, Juliet’s parents hasten her marriage to Paris. Distraught, she hatches a frantic plan with Friar Lawrence to stop her marriage to Paris. The Friar gives Juliet a potion that will put her body into the Capulet tomb. In the meantime, Friar Lawrence will send word to Romeo to return and take Juliet away.

The next morning, the nurse finds Juliet’s seemingly lifeless body. The guests arriving for Juliet’s marriage to Paris instead mourn her death as she is prepared for burial.

Romeo, now in exile in Mantua, hears of Juliet’s death but does not receive the Friar’s letter detailing the plot. Romeo buys a deadly poison and arrives at Juliet’s tomb, where he finds Paris mourning her loss. Paris provokes Romeo and dies in the ensuing fight. Romeo goes to Juliet’s side, drinks the poison and dies. Juliet wakes to find Romeo dead beside her and refuses a horrified Friar Lawrence’s offer of escape. The Friar flees as Juliet stabs herself with Romeo’s dagger.

After discovering the bodies, Capulet and Montague agree to end their bloody feud and erect statues in honor of their children.
David Muse’s production of Romeo and Juliet will present one of the world’s greatest love stories with a theatrical twist: an all-male cast. Having an all-male cast is a traditional way of performing the play. During Shakespeare’s lifetime women were not allowed onstage, which meant that all of the female roles were played by boys and possibly, in the cases of older female roles, men. The tradition of boys playing female roles was readily accepted by Elizabethan audiences. Since women had never been allowed onstage, Elizabethan audiences would have expected Juliet to be played by a boy. They wouldn’t have found it shocking or distracting, although it was a source of concern for Puritans who questioned the morality of the theatre as a whole.

Boy actors were generally apprenticed to older actors in the cast, which allowed them to learn the craft and business of acting. They performed female roles until they were no longer able to believably portray women, namely once their voices broke and their physical appearances became more distinctively masculine (for example, when they began to get facial hair). It is likely that adult male actors may have played older female roles (such as the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet) but no one knows for certain. Shakespeare even poked fun at the practice of boys playing women, as he does in Hamlet’s teasing of a young actor whom he hasn’t seen for a while by worrying that his voice has broken: “Pray God your voice like a piece of uncurrent gold be not cracked within the ring.” Another famous reference appears at the end of Antony and Cleopatra, during which Cleopatra realizes that she will be portrayed by a “squeaking” boy when her story is dramatized (which would have reminded the audience that the actor speaking the line was indeed a boy).

Most of Shakespeare’s plays include far more male roles than female roles, which is probably the result of a combination of factors. The fact that female roles were played by boy actors doubtless influenced Shakespeare’s decisions about characters—if he had a great boy actor, it may have led him to create some of his more substantial female roles like Viola in Twelfth Night, Rosalind in As You Like It, and, as mentioned earlier, Cleopatra. Women didn’t begin appearing onstage until 1660, when King Charles II allowed the practice.

In an interesting reversal of the all-male cast idea, the role of Romeo was frequently played by women in the 19th century. In 1845, American actress Charlotte Cushman played Romeo to great critical acclaim opposite her sister Susan’s Juliet.

The tradition of all-male casting continues as directors seek to explore all aspects of Shakespeare’s language and period practices. In recent years, several noteworthy all-male productions of Shakespeare’s work have been produced in the United States and abroad, including director Joe Calarco’s four-person adaptation, Shakespeare’s R&J. In 1997, England’s Propeller Company, led by Artistic Director Edward Hall, was founded. Propeller is a theatre company devoted to all-male productions of Shakespeare’s plays.

NEXT STEPS
1. What was a day in the life of an Elizabethan boy actor like? Do some research (using at least one online and one print resource—see “Suggested Resources” for ideas) and present your findings in an essay.

2. What does the term “theatricality” mean? What elements of theatre (lighting, costumes, sound, etc.) does it relate to? How does theatricality influence a director’s decisions about how to present a play? For example, how is David Muse’s concept for Romeo and Juliet theatrical?
Akiva Fox: What led to your decision to direct *Romeo and Juliet* with an all-male cast?

David Muse: Of all the plays Shakespeare wrote, *Romeo and Juliet* seems to me the one that’s most stuck in our heads. It’s the one we can quote the most lines from, and it’s been done in stunning fashion in iconic film and stage versions. So the all-male convention is in part an attempt to make the play fresh and surprising for me and for our audiences. Also, some of the most influential productions of Shakespeare I have seen have been all-male.

AF: What struck you as the effect of an all-male cast in those productions?

DM: The production immediately becomes an event that has to do with performance and theatricality, the acknowledgment on the part of the actors and the audience that this is a play that we’re watching. In a way, it unlocks this world of imaginative collaboration between the audience and the actors.

AF: How do you think the all-male convention illuminates *Romeo and Juliet*?

DM: This is a play that’s very centered on love, when gender matters so much. Now, I’m not doing this because I’m interested in putting a gay male relationship on the stage, but I do think that Shakespeare was pushing some interesting boundaries when it came to gender in Elizabethan England. This play is set in a very consciously constructed masculine world, and a lot of what propels the grudge and the violence between these two families is masculine bravado. And juxtaposed against that are Romeo and Juliet, who behave in ways that are a little atypical for people of their gender in that world. Also, when both of these roles are played by men, a lot of the performance of their love needs to live in the language that they speak. And Shakespeare was a writer of gorgeous poetry, but the reason that the love poetry in this play is so glorious is in part because Shakespeare knew that two young men would be performing it. You couldn’t just count on two actors looking at each other and realistically being in love in a way that the audience was going to buy. And so the actors need to jump into the language and make its power convince us of the power of this love.

AF: Do you have anything to say to people who might be wary about an all-male *Romeo and Juliet*?

DM: Doing a production this way raises a lot of eyebrows. But having seen a number of very successful all-male productions, I can say that it’s less of a big deal than you think it is. You sit down in the theatre, and you give over to it. It’s also odd to me that this feels to people like such an innovative and risky decision, because in a way it’s the most traditional way to do this play. It is at the same time something that we’ve never seen before, but also returning the play to the conditions under which it was created.

Glossary Exercise

Create a glossary of vocabulary words found in David Muse’s interview. Use a dictionary to look up words you don’t know. Some words to start with: iconic, bravado, convention, theatricality and juxtapose.
A feud is an ongoing cycle of violence between two groups of people that continues because of acts of retaliation and vengeance. In order for a feud to end completely, both sides must agree to stop the violence. The desire to avoid appearing weak or shameful kept most ancient feuds, like the one featured in *Romeo and Juliet*, going strong. Prince Escalus, who threatens both the Capulets and the Montagues with death at the beginning of the play (“If ever you disturb our streets again, / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace”), is not in a position to end the feud because, although it disrupts the life of his city, he is not a member of either opposing family. We know few details about this particular feud, except that it is “ancient” and that both families are of similar social status (“both alike in dignity”).

An interesting aspect of the Montague-Capulet feud is the way that it extends all the way down to the servants of the two houses. The action of the play begins with a brawl between Gregory and Sampson, servingmen of the Capulets, and Abram, a Montague servingman. The fierce loyalty of servants to masters gives us an indication of how strongly servants were linked to the families they worked for in this society.

The play’s feud ends only with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, making it easy to wonder whether or not the feud could have been ended with their marriage. Capulet and Montague exchange words that signal the peaceful end of the feud, brought about by their shared grief at the deaths of their children: “O brother Montague, give me thy hand,” a statement that would have been unthinkable at the beginning of the play.

Can you think of any examples of modern-day feuds similar to the one found in *Romeo and Juliet*? How does the feud impact the entire city of Verona, including those citizens not directly involved in it? Based on evidence from the text, do you think that the feud could have been ended peacefully if Romeo and Juliet were to come forward with their proposed marriage? Why or why not? Look closely at act 1, scene 5 and analyze Capulet’s response to Tybalt when he informs him that Romeo is at the banquet. How does he respond? Who wants Romeo out? In modern adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as the musical *West Side Story* or the Baz Luhrmann film *Romeo + Juliet*, how is the feud presented? Compare and contrast the different ways in which these directors represent the feud. What weapons do they use? What is the setting of the banquet? How does the crowd respond?
Italy and Italians dominate so many of Shakespeare’s plays that it’s clear that Shakespeare, together with many English people in his day, loved Italy—or what they thought was Italy. Some scholars think that Italy represented everything that England was not: a warm, easygoing place where discipline was lax and people ate, drank and were merry all day. Italy, then, was a stage where anything could happen.

More than a dozen of Shakespeare’s 37 plays take place in Italy: All’s Well that Ends Well, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado about Nothing, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew, Titus Andronicus, The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Winter’s Tale. Some scholars believe that Shakespeare may have visited Italy in 1591, when the plague swept through London. The Black Death was so terrible that theatres were ordered closed to stop the spread of the disease. While some members of Shakespeare’s acting company went to Italy, there is no firm evidence that Shakespeare himself ever did. These plays, however, are full of vivid detail and knowledge of Italian cities, names and customs, as if written by one who had spent a great deal of time there.

Much of what English people “knew” about Italy was based on exaggerated travelers’ tales and stories. Many people from England traveled to Italy to see the ruins of ancient Rome and to enjoy warm weather and good food and wine. The English saw the Italian personality as fiery, passionate and temperamental. So even if Shakespeare never left his home country, Italian characters, culture and literature were a strong presence in the literature and drama of the day.

Additionally, Italy was a Catholic country during Shakespeare’s lifetime, while England was a Protestant nation. Queen Elizabeth I reinstated Protestantism as the national religion when she took the throne in 1558 (it had been a Catholic country under her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots) but religious turmoil remained an issue throughout Shakespeare’s lifetime. The most direct reference to Catholicism in Romeo and Juliet is the character of Friar Lawrence, a Franciscan monk who serves as Romeo’s sympathetic advisor. It is Friar Lawrence who secretly marries Romeo and Juliet and tries to help them stay together. The Franciscan order of monks emphasizes service in the community and still exists today.

Shakespeare makes great use of Italian architecture in his plays and other works. He set some of his plays in walled cities, within which characters assume different identities, or from which someone could be banished. Intimate scenes frequently take place in lush gardens that allow for privacy. Marketplaces and large, open piazzas were natural gathering places where people could gather to gossip about a character’s reputation, or to discuss the latest events.

As in Shakespeare’s England, Italian ports and cities attracted travelers from around the world, and many people were drawn to the great cities to seek their fortunes, a spouse, money or higher learning.

In addition to a fascination with Italy, there was another good reason for Shakespeare to set his plays abroad. Censorship was strong in England during his lifetime and theatres whose works offended the queen could be shut down. It was safer to set the plays in Italy—a symbol to the English of corruption and lost ancient glory—than to set them in England. Audiences could both admire Italy’s classical foundations, its economic energy and cultural richness, and also hold the people in contempt for their hypocritical behaviors. By setting his plays abroad, Shakespeare could write more freely about what he thought of class differences, hypocrisy, religion and politics in his own country since his barbs were not directly aimed at his country or queen. By setting his plays in a very different country, Shakespeare gave his audience distance, both literally and figuratively, to reflect on its own society’s ills.

NEXT STEPS

1. How did the Elizabethans develop their stereotypes about the Italians? How are stereotypes created? Can stereotypes be both positive and negative?
Choose your own ending
As a class, make a timeline of all of the major events in *Romeo and Juliet*, such as “Romeo meets Juliet at the masquerade ball” and “Romeo and Juliet are secretly married.” Break up into small groups of four or five students and have each group rewrite the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, having the characters make different decisions at the crucial moments during the major events outlined earlier. Have students present their alternate versions of *Romeo and Juliet* to the class and discuss how these changes would affect all of the characters in the play.

Page to Stage: What’s your concept?
As a class, discuss potential design concepts for the play. Where would you set *Romeo and Juliet* to make it the most relevant for your audience? Think about different historical settings that might work for *Romeo and Juliet* and have students research famous past productions of the play. Remind students that the concept must work for the entire play—not just certain scenes.

Consider showing excerpts from the Baz Luhrmann film and the Franco Zeffirelli version and have students compare and contrast each director’s interpretation, keeping in mind the specific time periods during which each was produced. Which film feels more relevant to the students and why?

Who’s to blame? Letters to the editor
As a class, discuss the various characters who could be held responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet (including, of course, the young lovers themselves). Have each student pick a character (or assign each student a character) and argue in a persuasive letter to the editor of the *Verona Times* that he or she is directly responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet and should be tried in court. Have students find examples that support their claims (i.e. Capulet’s decision to force Juliet to marry Paris). Letters MUST include supporting evidence from the text! To promote presentation skills, have students read their letters out loud, encouraging them to use their voices and delivery to be as persuasive as possible.

To take it a step further, have students work in pairs and present closing arguments in the trial against their character (i.e. Friar Lawrence) debating his or her innocence or guilt. The other students will serve as a jury.

Share your opinion: theatre criticism
Now that your students have seen the STC production of *Romeo and Juliet*, have your students write reviews of the performance. Encourage students to highlight the production elements (costumes, set, fight choreography, actor performances, etc.) and themes that made an impression on them, either positively or negatively. Focus on being as specific as possible; instead of saying “I didn’t like the lights” or “I loved the costumes,” add details to explain why.

Once students have written their reviews, find others from outside sources (i.e. *the Washington Post*, *City Paper*, etc.) and analyze them. How do their reviews compare? Do they agree or disagree with the outside critics?

After reading the reviews, ask students to evaluate their own reviews for style and content. What changes, if any, would they make to their writing and why?
Books on Shakespeare


Books on Teaching Shakespeare


Websites

- *In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom* — http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/
  - The companion website to Michael Wood’s four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare,* this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare’s life and works, as well as interactive features.
- *Folger Shakespeare Library* — http://www.folger.edu
  - Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.

**STANDARDS OF LEARNING**

The activities and question sequences found in the Folio supports grade 9-12 standards of learning in English and theatre for the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

- Classical Literature
- Argument and persuasive writing
- Questioning and Listening
- Vocabulary and content development
- Research
- Inference
- Stagecraft
- Performance
- Analysis and Evaluation

**Specific examples include:**

**Activity: Page to Stage**
Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation, and evaluate the techniques used to create them.

VA—content strand: Traditional Narrative and Classical Literature
10.LT-TN.12.

DC—content strand: Media 10.M.3

MD—content strand: 2.1.4

**Activity: Whose to Blame**
Write persuasive essays that structure ideas and arguments in a sustained and logical fashion; engage the reader.

VA—content strand: Research 10.11
DC—content strand: Writing 10.W-E.5

MD—content strand: 3.3.1 ADP A, B

**Activity: Share Your Opinion**
The student will describe personal responses to theatrical productions in terms of the qualities of the production as a whole.

VA—content strand: Aesthetics TII.15
DC—content strand: Drama 10.LT-D.9

MD—content strand: 3.1.3 ADP B6
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. With that in mind, 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.

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.

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.”