



Education Resources Pre-Production

STC Ed presents

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

By William Shakespeare



PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

- About Sydney Theatre Company **2**
- About STCEd **2**
- About The Residents **2**
- Creative Team and Cast **3**
- Themes **3**
- Synopsis **4**
- Historical and social background **5**

PRE-PRODUCTION EXERCISES

- Shakespeare wants to be your friend on Facebook **6 – 7**
- Em-PHA-sis **8 – 10**
- Last word standing **11 – 12**
- Casting Couch **13**

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KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2010

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

ABOUT THE RESIDENTS

Sydney Theatre Company's permanent ensemble of performers commenced work at the Company's home base, The Wharf, in June 2009. The Residents, formed as an evolution of the original STC Actors Company, are nine actors employed full time by Sydney Theatre Company with a particular focus on the development of theatre while working across all aspects of the Company's program.

Audiences have the opportunity to enjoy the work of the ensemble in a variety of ways. The Residents are occasionally seen in their own Main Stage shows and just as importantly they work in the Company's Next Stage, Back Stage and Education streams, moving regularly between these different areas.

With the exploration, shaping and fine-tuning of new works as a guiding objective, it is anticipated that The Residents will provide an invaluable resource to playwrights, and directors and that the results of their pioneering work will benefit the whole Australian theatre scene.

The Residents occupy a central role in the day-to-day operations of the Company and work very closely with Associate Director Tom Wright as well as Artistic Directors Andrew Upton and CateBlanchett. The actors were chosen after a lengthy round of auditions and interviews, and were selected for their range of skills, their history of devising new work, their abilities to collaborate with writers and directors, and their innate curiosity.

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CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Charmian Gradwell

Sydney Theatre Company’s Voice and Text Coach, Charmian Gradwell, has worked as an actor, director, voice/text specialist and movement director on productions worldwide. Prior to joining Sydney Theatre Company, Charmian worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company's Voice and Text department in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, from 2005-2008. She is a strong advocate for bringing the power of Shakespeare's language into different environments, including schools, prisons, private gardens, market squares and puppetry festivals.

CAST – THE RESIDENTS

Alice Ansara

Cameron Goodall

Ursula Mills

Julia Ohannessian

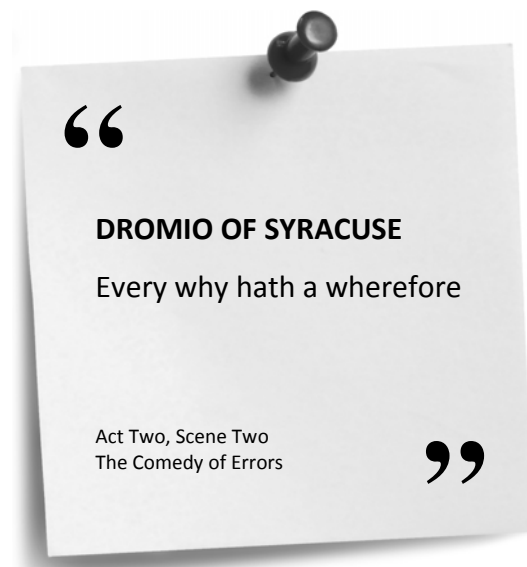
Zindzi Okenyo

Richard Pyros

Sophie Ross

Tahki Saul

Brett Stiller



THEMES

Identical twins, mistaken identity, self-awareness, family ties, belonging, jealousy, time, love independence, master/servant relationship, financial debt, marital obligation, coincidence

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The play opens with Aegeon, a merchant of Syracuse, being arrested in Ephesus because of enmity between Ephesus and Syracuse. Aegeon tells Solinus, the Duke of Ephesus, his tale: he was shipwrecked many years ago while sailing with his wife, Aemilia, and two pairs of identical twins—their twin sons, both named Antipholus, and twin servants, both named Dromio. In the course of the storm, his wife, one of their sons, and one their servants, were lost. At eighteen, Aegeon allowed the remaining Antipholus and Dromio to leave Syracuse for Ephesus to search for their long-lost twins, at which point both of them disappeared as well. After five years, Aegeon has come to Ephesus to find them.

Solinus, moved by the old man's tale, postpones Aegeon's sentence; Aegeon has until nightfall to produce a ransom, or he will be put to death. At this point, Antipholus of Syracuse arrives in Ephesus, and the farce commences as everyone—including the twins themselves—confuses the identities of the twins. Antipholus of Syracuse ends up invited to dinner at the home of Antipholus of Ephesus and dines with his twin's wife, Adriana. Meanwhile, Angelo, a merchant, gives a gold chain commissioned by Antipholus of Ephesus to Antipholus of Syracuse by mistake, telling him he'll come back later for payment. When Antipholus of Ephesus refuses to pay later on, Angelo has him arrested. All this time, Adriana and her sister, Luciana, are convinced that Antipholus and Dromio (of Ephesus) have gone mad, which leads them to forcibly restrain them and take them to a doctor.

Of course, when Adriana later encounters Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, she thinks they've escaped from the doctor. The pair from Syracuse are forced to flee into a nearby abbey for refuge. In the meantime, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus do escape from the doctor, and arrive to petition the Duke as Aegeon is being led to his death. In the midst of everyone trying to tell their varying accounts of the day, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse arrive with the abbess—who turns out to be Aemilia, Aegeon's long-lost wife. The twins all sort out their stories in the presence of the Duke. In the end, Aegeon is released from his death sentence and reunited with his wife and sons, Antipholus of Syracuse is set to marry Luciana, and all has been put to right. www.bardweb.net/plays/errors.html

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Shakespeare's comedies, as well as providing entertainment, reveal customs, traditions, prejudices, specific modes of thought and behaviour and beliefs typical of the Elizabethan period. While analysing the structure of *The Comedy of Errors*, you cannot avoid historical and political connotations. In order to understand how Shakespeare's society as a whole was regarded and what the gender roles were, it is necessary to research the history of the period.

Shakespeare's comedies indicate there was a clear division between men and women. Their obligations were strictly subdivided. Men were given drive and power while women had to content themselves to be obedient and submissive.

On the surface, Shakespeare's comedies seem to prove that in the Renaissance it was obligatory for a woman to marry well, be faithful and obedient to her husband and procreate children – preferably boys rather than girls.) In contrast, a man in that period had to be well-educated, have refined manners and grace, air his wit and intelligence, have high standards of proper behaviour and know the arts and sciences. Both men and women had to be elegant and be of noble birth.

A detailed study of *The Comedy of Errors* reveals that the situation was not that simple!

Consider

- The main action of *The Comedy of Errors* is about love.
- The would-be lovers overcome obstacles and misunderstandings before being united in harmonious union – marriage.
- The ending of Shakespeare's comedies involves a parade of couples to the altar and a festive celebration.
- Shakespearean comedy frequently contains elements of the supernatural, the improbable or the miraculous.
- Often there is a philosophical aspect involving weightier issues and themes, personal identity and the importance of love in human existence, for instance.

SHAKESPEARE WANTS TO BE YOUR FRIEND ON FACEBOOK



AIM: To learn more about William Shakespeare himself: the man behind the plays.



FACEBOOK

Facebook is a modern networking tool that connects people from all over the world.

Make a Facebook page for William Shakespeare.

Research and create the following sections of Shakespeare's Facebook page.

Remember that Shakespeare loved language and gave a lot of in-depth descriptions in everything that he wrote.

ABOUT ME

Home Town

Birthday

Gender

Political Views

Researching the British Monarchy will help here.

Religious Views

There was major religious conflict during Shakespeare's lifetime. Where do you think Shakespeare stood in this conflict, and why?

Biography

How would Shakespeare describe himself?

Favourite Quotations

Work

Education

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LIKES AND INTERESTS

Use this section to discover what people got up to for fun in Elizabethan times.

Activities

Interests

Music

Books

Links to other pages

You can invent your own pages, but they must be based on research.

Groups

You can invent groups that Shakespeare may have joined, also based on your research.

Friend list

Think about who Shakespeare associated with, his contemporaries, his fans, his enemies.



CONTEXT OF RENAISSANCE AND ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Write an Elizabethan newspaper for the Renaissance audiences of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Include

1. A full-page ad announcing a new folio performance of *The Comedy of Errors*.

For example, "Shakespeare actually wrote this one – following on from the rumour that Christopher Marlowe wrote The Gentlemen's Company production of *Measure For Measure*."

2. A column with all the latest Royal gossip on Queen Elizabeth I
3. Classified advertisements for available jobs at the Globe Theatre
4. A What's On page for other plays at the Globe and Swan Theatres – make sure you advertise some genres besides comedy, such as a pastoral, tragedy, history plays, sonnet readings etc.
5. A positions vacant notice for a Town Crier needed around London to alert Londoners of current events of the day.
****Compose** a catchy and repetitive speech for the towncrier to learn for his/her audition.
6. Good Elizabethan Living supplement to promote a Feast Day in Hyde Park featuring a food and drinks fair for the times – a real banquet for one and all.



AIM: To explore the way Shakespeare used language, including iambic pentameter.



SHAKEAPEARE'S METRE

Metre refers to how a word or sentence is said. It dictates which syllables are emphasised and which are not.



Say your name out loud.

Emphasise different syllables as you repeat your name aloud.

Think about how different it sounds when you say it in an unusual way.

Divide your name into syllables and write it on a piece of paper.

Capitalise the syllables you normally emphasise.

For example, WILL-iam SHAKES-peare.

Then

Use the internet to find the lyrics to a song that you are familiar with.

Copy the lyrics in the fashion that they are sung, by capitalising the syllables that are usually emphasised.

Imagine that you have never heard the song and that you are reading rather than singing it.

Consider

1. What syllables would be emphasised if the song were spoken normally?
2. Does the placement of stresses change the meaning of the words?

“

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Let's go hand in hand,
Not one before another

Act Five, Scene One
The Comedy of Errors

”



IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Much of Shakespeare's drama is written in iambic pentameter. This means that every line is made up of ten syllables and every even numbered syllable is stressed.



Log on to the internet and find one of Shakespeare's sonnets.

Read it out loud.

Listen to where you naturally put the stresses.

Find a partner to work with.

Split one of your sonnets into syllables.

Take it in turns to read a syllable each.

Read the syllables that should be stressed, using as much emotion and emphasis as you like.

Your partner reads the odd numbered syllables as flatly as possible.

Repeat this process until your poem runs so smoothly that the timing between syllables makes it flow enough to read it to the group.

Discuss

1. How is the overall meaning affected by the placement of the stresses?
2. How does stressing more or different syllables change the emotion or tone of a sentence?



Compose your own sonnet for a loved one.

Use iambic pentameter



Remember that each line should contain 10 syllables.

Share your composition with the group.



Compose a song about deceiving love for a Shakespearean comedy. Sarah Blasko has done this for *Hamlet*, now you try.



Remember, it doesn't have to rhyme. It can be in free or blank verse.



PUNCTUATION PERAMBULATION

Choose a soliloquy from *The Comedy of Errors*.

Mouth the lines while walking through the space.

Turn at a right angle on any punctuation.

Stop on a full stop (and start again as you begin the next line!)

Discover the length and speed of your character's thoughts.

Repeat the exercise, this time whispering the text.

Pay attention to how the words make you feel.

Consider

1. Do you want to move quicker, slower?
2. Are their long thoughts or short ones?
3. What can this tell us about the character's emotional state?

Repeat the exercise, this time speaking quite loudly.

Again, **allow** the words to affect your tempo, speed and style of your walk.

Read the speech aloud without moving.

Embody what you have discovered about the character's internal state through gesture and posture.



COUPLE THAT

Shakespeare often let the audience, actors, and stage crew know that a scene was over by using a couplet.



Research couplets.

Identify two couplets used in *The Comedy of Errors*.

Write your own couplet, based on one of the themes of the play.



AIM: To provide alternatives for listening and understanding Shakespeare's text.

The way Shakespeare wrote his plays made it as easy as possible for his audience to understand what was happening. Don't let large chunks of text scare you away. If you look at a longer soliloquy, you can usually get the gist of what is being talked about by looking at the last word of each line. This idea works on the principle that Shakespeare chose carefully the last word of each line as these hung in the audience's ear, and therefore carried the most meaning. If you haven't read the play, this is a handy short cut!



Read aloud the last word of each line of the soliloquy below.

Guess and **infer** what the speech is about.

Consider

1. How do these words link?
2. What idea/s is the character talking about?
3. Do you know who the character is talking to?
4. What do you think has happened before this speech?
5. What do you think will happen as a result of this speech?

Read the whole speech aloud, with the information you have inferred from the final words.

Test this activity on any of Shakespeare's longer speeches and see if it works.

Use just the last words from the soliloquy as a template to write your own composition.

Share your soliloquy with the group.

Discuss

1. How close was your composition to the original text?
2. How similar was yours to the rest of the class?
3. How has this affected the way you will listen to Shakespearean dialogue?

Act One, Scene One

DUKE SOLINUS

Merchant of Syracuse, plead no **more**;
I am not partial to infringe our **laws**:
The enmity and discord which of **late**
Sprung from the rancorous outrage of your **duke**
To merchants, our well-dealing **countrymen**,
Who wanting guilders to redeem their **lives**
Have seal'd his rigorous statutes with their **bloods**,
Excludes all pity from our threatening **looks**.
For, since the mortal and intestine **jars**
'Twixt thy seditious countrymen and **us**,
It hath in solemn synods been **decreed**
Both by the Syracusians and **ourselves**,
To admit no traffic to our adverse towns Nay, **more**,
If any born at Ephesus be **seen**
At any Syracusian marts and **fairs**;
Again: if any Syracusian **born**
Come to the bay of Ephesus, he **dies**,
His goods confiscate to the duke's **dispose**,
Unless a thousand marks be **levied**,
To quit the penalty and to ransom **him**.
Thy substance, valued at the highest **rate**,
Cannot amount unto a hundred **marks**;
Therefore by law thou art condemned to **die**.



AIM: To explore the complex casting requirements and restrictions of *The Comedy of Errors*.

In Shakespeare's time, all actors were males. Women were not allowed to act on stage and elaborate costumes including wigs, make-up, and full-body dresses were used to convince the audience.



Imagine you are a casting agent, restricted to Shakespearian 'rules'.

Identify the famous actors in our society today who you would cast in the roles of



Antipholus of Ephesus

Emilia

Antipholus of Syracuse

Luciana

Dromio of Ephesus

Adriana

Dromio of Syracuse

Give your reasons.



The Comedy of Errors becomes a classic in terms of what people are always saying about his stories. It is about twins, mistaken identities, people hiding their true motivations, search for identity and parents losing children, mystery and good and bad and everything that makes great and terrifically fun theatre.



The play calls for two set of identical twins.

Imagine you have to cast the play with a set ensemble – that doesn't have any twins in it!

Consider your group, or look at photos of The Residents at Sydney Theatre Company.

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about/artistic/the-residents

Come up with several ways to cast your group or The Residents in *The Comedy of Errors*.

Discuss

1. What is it about the play that can lead you to consider alternatives?
2. How does the suspension of disbelief work with Shakespeare?
3. What other contingencies and conventions outside of realism exist in *The Comedy of Errors*?
4. Can we do Shakespeare by doubling roles – is it expected almost?