



**DO IT ON
YOUR
FEET**

**SEE IT
LIVE**

**START IT
EARLIER**



‘Shakespeare wrote plays and young children are geniuses at playing. Ask them to comment on a great work of literature and they will shrink away. Give a child the part of Bottom, Tybalt, Lady Macbeth or Viola and watch them unlock their imagination, self esteem and a treasure trove of insight into what it's like to be alive that will feed them for a lifetime.

Shakespeare remains the world's favourite artist because his living dilemmas of love, mortality, power and citizenship remain unresolved, vivid and urgent today’.

**Michael Boyd,
RSC Artistic Director**

‘My dad said Shakespeare was boring, but he’s got it wrong! I’m gonna tell him about Hamlet. It’s got murders and ghosts and castles and stuff and that’s not boring. What are we doing next?’

Ben, age 8, Stokeinteignhead Primary School, Devon after doing a unit of work with his teacher on *Hamlet*

Some 400 years after they were written, Shakespeare's plays are read and studied with undiminished interest all over the world, with every culture bringing its own distinctive perspective to his work.

Shakespeare can still speak to young people, inspiring them to articulate their feelings, develop their ideas and gain new insights into the world around them. It's no surprise that he remains the only writer studied by all young people in England and Wales.

We want to ensure that young people feel Shakespeare belongs to them and that they have the opportunity to explore his work in the most enriching way possible.

Many young people first encounter Shakespeare as readers in their English classroom, often in preparation for tests or examinations. In contrast, actors and theatre practitioners work with his plays actively and collaboratively, in preparation for live performance. We believe that this practical approach is the most engaging way for young people to develop a real understanding of Shakespeare's stories, characters and language.

Over the last year we have worked with hundreds of teachers, students, policy-makers and theatre companies to explore what makes Shakespeare exciting and accessible for young people of all abilities and backgrounds. Overwhelmingly we have seen that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do it on their feet
- See it live
- Start it earlier

**DO IT ON
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Explore plays as performers do.

**SEE IT
LIVE**

Participate as members of a live audience.

**START IT
EARLIER**

Experience Shakespeare from a younger age .

'Do we get to do Shakespeare at GCSE? He's mint.'

Year 9 student, Sir Robert of Newminster School, Newcastle upon Tyne during a scheme of work on *The Tempest*

DO IT ON YOUR FEET

Many students who find Shakespeare boring say that sitting at desks and reading the plays, rather than performing them, is one of the main frustrations.

The best classroom experience we can offer is one which allows young people to approach a Shakespeare play as actors do – as an ensemble, using active, exploratory, problem-solving methods to develop a greater understanding and enjoyment of the plays.

Some of the most successful Shakespeare classrooms we have seen are ones where:

- Young people are up on their feet, moving around, saying the text aloud, exploring the feelings and ideas that emerge
- There is a focus on physical and emotional, as well as intellectual, responses to the text
- An edited text is used to allow students to gain confidence with language
- Active approaches are used to inform and test critical analysis
- Pupils investigate a range of interpretive choices in the text and negotiate these with their teacher
- Drama techniques are used to explore language, meaning, character and motivation
- Understanding of the play is assessed through a combination of creative oral and written responses

These active, **theatre-based approaches** acknowledge the importance of kinaesthetic learning – learning through doing and feeling. By engaging directly and physically with the words and rhythms of the text, complex thoughts and language start to make sense to young people and invite instinctive and personal responses.

Active techniques ensure that experiences of Shakespeare are inherently inclusive since they embrace all age ranges and abilities. They also mean that Shakespeare is collectively owned as participants collaborate and build a shared understanding of the play - with the whole class becoming 'co-owners' and 'doers'. Active work promotes a way of engaging with Shakespeare as a playwright who still speaks to young people from all cultures and backgrounds.

Schools that *Stand up for Shakespeare*:

Ensure that introductory teaching of Shakespeare is rooted in active, exploratory approaches.

Maintain these approaches with older students.

Give young people the chance to create their own performances of Shakespeare's plays.

'One week we knew nothing and the next we'd learned all this difficult language and could say it.' 13-year-old student participating in an RSC schools' performance project

SEE IT LIVE

A script is like a musical score, telling only half the story. The text comes alive with the physical dynamic of the actors and the information which the set, lighting and music provide. Shakespeare was an artist working through the most collaborative of art forms – theatre. He understood the power of the spoken word to move and persuade and the unique thrill and delightful complicity experienced by an audience at a live performance. The sensory act of hearing, seeing and feeling the sounds, rhythms and words aids comprehension in a way that reading the play cannot. The characters become vivid, and the humour – so crucial to Shakespeare’s plays but often so difficult to access on the written page – comes alive. There is no substitute for the shared experience of seeing Shakespeare live.

The live experience can include performances created by the students themselves and shared with their peers as well as professional productions in school or at the theatre. Theatres must make sure there are appropriate and accessible performances for young people to attend and recognise that some schools will need greater support to access live shows.

Schools that *Stand up for Shakespeare*:

Recognise the importance of young people seeing live theatre.



Chuk Iwuji as Henry VI. Photo by Ellie Kurttz

'I really enjoyed the play and I like Shakespeare now!'

Chandra, age 15, Nottingham Theatre Royal, RSC *The Comedy of Errors* tour 2007

START IT EARLIER

Most primary pupils are comfortable with the drama techniques regularly used by actors and directors. They can engage with the stories and dilemmas and find delight in using new and unusual language long before formally studying texts or seeing live performances.

The later Shakespeare is introduced the harder it can seem. Perhaps the most challenging time for first contact is early teenage years*, when self-consciousness can inhibit the active ways of working most likely to foster a positive initial understanding. Teenagers with no earlier experience of Shakespeare are at greater risk of forming negative opinions; many secondary teachers report that starting Shakespeare with 13 or 14 year olds means unpicking prejudices that his plays are “too hard”, “boring” or “irrelevant”.



Students in Mini Complete Works Festival, The Dell, Stratford-upon-Avon



Theatrelink Performance Project, 2006, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Schools that *Stand up for Shakespeare*:

Explore Shakespeare’s plays at primary school.

Introduce Shakespeare’s plays no later than 11 years old.

Guarantee continuity and progression across each Key Stage.

‘Lots of people have done the play for 400 hundred years, but no one’s done it quite like us!’

11-year-old student participating in an RSC schools’ performance project

* State schools in England have to teach Shakespeare during year 9 (Key Stage 3), when the majority of students are aged 14.

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Approaching Shakespeare's work in these ways perfectly complements existing **educational priorities** including **Every Child Matters**. They encourage cross-curricular working within schools and can lead to greater personal and educational achievement by students.

The **new secondary curriculum** gives weight to 'compelling learning experiences' and the Department for Children, Schools and Families' **Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto** calls for every child to experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of their education. The *Stand up for Shakespeare* principles offer a great way to achieve these aims.

The Children's Plan sets out a vision for establishing a universal cultural entitlement for young people. In 'doing' Shakespeare and 'seeing it' and 'starting it earlier' we give young people access to a cultural heritage that can otherwise feel alien and irrelevant. Shakespeare's genius is in harnessing the power of language and crafting it to tell stories which reflect us, our preoccupations and our relationships. We can learn *about* the plays and learn *through* them.

In exploring Shakespeare's work actively and playing with language, young people begin to see how words shape and change the world around us. In experiencing the living dilemmas in the plays, they have the chance to test out their responses to them. It is the powerful combination of story, language and ideas that gives us an extraordinarily exciting teaching and learning opportunity both now and for the future.



Tamsin Greig in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Photo by Simon Annand

**'Can we do
more
Shakespeare?'**

Harry, age 10, The Mosley Primary School, Staffordshire after doing a unit of work with his teachers on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

JOIN US BY SUPPORTING THE RSC MANIFESTO FOR
SHAKESPEARE IN SCHOOLS

VISIT www.rsc.org.uk/standupforshakespeare

**Stand up for Shakespeare,
an RSC manifesto for Shakespeare in schools,
was created in consultation with:**

Mick Connell, *School Improvement Advisor,
English Drama and the Arts, Rotherham MBC*

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Andrea Ellis, *National Programme Coordinator
for English, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust*

Rachel Gartside, *Education Associate Practitioner, RSC*

Shakespeare's Globe, *Education Department*

Mary Johnson, *Education Associate Practitioner, RSC*

National Association for the Teaching of English

National Theatre, *Education Department*

National Union of Teachers

Professor Jonathan Neelands,
Director of Graduate Studies, University of Warwick

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Shakespeare Schools Festival

Shakespeare 4 Kidz

Dr James Stredder, *Author, The North Face of
Shakespeare: Activities for Teaching the Plays*

Miles Tandy, *Advisor, Educational Development Service,
Warwickshire*

Touchstone Shakespeare Theatre

Watermill Theatre, Newbury

*'I saw a production of Macbeth when I
was a very small girl. It completely
hooked me on Shakespeare.
That was 63 years ago.'* Judi Dench

*'When I was at school the name
Shakespeare frightened me. I
thought it was for very middle class
people who spoke posh. Reading it
made no sense to me. Years later
when I was auditioning for drama
school, I had to **do it**, otherwise I
wouldn't get in. To my surprise it
was in the **doing of it** that it came
alive for me'* Ray Fearon

*'A seven year old told me, having
seen the RSC's latest Lear, it was
'the best play he had ever seen'
in his entire life. I'm glad that the RSC
is encouraging other youngsters to
share his enthusiasm'* Ian McKellen

*'Childhood experiences of studying
Shakespeare so often leave adults
with a stomach-deep aversion to
the boredom and incomprehension
they associate with the 'S' word.
But Shakespeare was not a writer,
he was a playwright. Give children
the chance to play with words and
ideas and stories, and boredom
has no place.'* Tamsin Greig