

Primary Shakespeare Blog

Primary Shakespeare Company 2014 Season

This year, the Primary Shakespeare Company is working with more schools than ever before. 21 schools across five boroughs are coming together to investigate and explore Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet. Each classroom teacher attends an INSET session, each child watches a performance of the play and each class works towards creating their version to be performed with their other local participating schools.

Have your say! How has the Primary Shakespeare project worked for you?

What activities have you participated in?

Why are you doing it?

If you are a teacher, pupil, workshop leader or parent and you are participating in the Primary Shakespeare Company Festival 2014 we need to hear from you. This is your space to connect with your fellow Shakespearean colleagues, share ideas, raise questions and most importantly to share your triumphs and celebrations.

We look forward to hearing from you and good luck!

Comments:

The Primary Shakespeare Company's Ealing production of Romeo and Juliet was absolutely stunning. I have been involved with primary school productions for many years as a parent and volunteer and I have never seen one so well executed. In this production every single child was important. The main roles were shared by several children which sounds odd but worked brilliantly. Everybody who wanted a speaking part got one and the whole cast were involved in acting. As well as their weekly session with the facilitator from Primary Shakespeare the classes also worked on their production by themselves and our school added dances, songs and live music. The level of commitment by these year 5 children was incredible - everyone remained in character throughout and the Shakespearean language tripped off their tongues like urban slang. They loved it. This is what education should be about!

Madeleine Stevens

27 June 2014

Just writing to say that the Ealing schools put on a brilliant production of Romeo and Juliet last week. My daughter was part of the cast from Southfield and during the lead up to the play it was pretty much all she talked about. She particularly liked the director, Leonie, who really encouraged and inspired the children. I helped on the day, and was impressed at the enthusiasm and dedication of the children - every child seemed to realise that they were a valued member of the production, no matter how big or small their role. What a fantastic experience for all of them!

Caryn, parent

24 June 2014

My son was in the Southfield Primary School edition of Romeo and Juliet at the Hammersmith Academy on 13 June. It was fantastic and just showed how facilitation by a group like Johh Lyon's Charity can add so much value. Thank you all.

*Sally Chacatte, parent
22 June 2014*

The Westminster primary schools combined performance of Romeo and Juliet was brilliantly achieved, amazing. My daughter loved the actor who linked up the scenes as Mercurio, but mainly was thrilled to be part of such a professionally organised production in front of quite an audience. It was moving and funny, and I think they've learned a huge amount about being on stage, use of minimal props and - perhaps above all - working as a team. Bravo to everyone concerned!

*Katharina, parent
17 June 2014*

The performance of Romeo & Juliet at the new Goldstar Centre last week was mind blowing! Well done to all the children, teachers and directors who took part and worked so hard to bring my favourite Shakespeare play to life. The quality of the performance was outstanding, the children were simply amazing and I was a very proud teacher standing watching. Well done to you all!

*Mrs Thakker, teacher
Goldbeaters Primary School
16 June 2014*

I was in the performance with my son to see my daughters act. We enjoyed very much. It was amazing performance WELL DONE

*Vegeun Boick
Goldbeaters parent
12 June 2014*

My daughter was part of the Project through Goldbeaters Primary. I really enjoyed the show. It was amazing to see young children act and sing. A very well done to everyone that workded so hard to make this show come to life. Some of the childrens acting and singing was outstanding and shows like this will build their confident even more for the future. Hope there is more project like this in the near future. My daughter loved taking part in this show and i as a parent loved the whole show, it was very entertaining. Well done guys!

*Jeshmi, Parent
9 June 2014*

I have been directing scenes for the Westminster Festival at Soho Parish and St Clement Danes Primary Schools. It was a truly inspiring day and the children approached their performances with such maturity and proffessionalism. They also sat and listened to the other scenes with real focus

and attention. Many people think Shakespeare is "above" primary aged children, but this project shows how accessible, creative and enjoyable Shakespeare can be when done in the right way! The variety of styles presented over the festivals show how imaginative interpretation, physicality, clarity of language and a sense of ensemble can transform Shakespeare into wonderfully exciting theatre for and by children.

*Emma Cater, Director
Primary Shakespeare Company
7 June 2014*

I attended the performance of Romeo and Juliet in Willesden on 4th June and was captivated by the professionalism and level of attention paid by the children of these local schools, having accompanied children from Gladstone Primary. The work done to reach this standard shows how worthwhile their effort was and the importance of funding the arts.

*Dr Jonathan A
7 June 2014*

The Shakespeare play of Romeo and Juliet that was performed at the new Gold Star theatre at Orion School on Thursday night was utterly amazing! There wasn't a dry eye in the room. It was like watching a truly professional play. You could see on the children's faces how much they enjoyed performing in front of such a large audience. If only Shakespeare was introduced to me in such a unique way that gets children involved in not only performing but understanding Shakespeare. What an experience for both the audience and the children involved.

*Jules
7 June 2014*

Went to see my granddaughter take part in the play it was wonderful very entertaining and i felt so proud of the children especially my granddaughter!

*Tracy Tew
Grandparent
6 June 2014*

Great Festival in Barnet yesterday - ran so smoothly it was hard to believe it was 5 different schools participating. The Head Teacher at Orion Primary was over the moon - it was the first performance in the school's new theatre. And it was great. The place was packed to the rafters - standing room only!

All the kids were involved and understanding of the story and there were some great performances. The singing in rounds is teamwork personified, and the way the script is directed gives every child a chance to be involved. The use of the professional actor to link the scenes is genius and really lends a professional quality to the production. In fact, the production levels generally - with the music and lighting - was great. I should think every child on that stage will now have a lifelong love of Romeo & Juliet and the experience of being an actor with the Primary Shakespeare Company is something that will stay with them.

So, enjoy the rest of the Festival!

Fiona Mallin-Robinson
Adviser to John Lyon's Charity
6 June 2014

My son performed in Romeo and Juliet with 5 Brent primary schools this week. I was really impressed by the professionalism of the performance - the way in which the children were completely focused, the fact that they needed no adult intervention, the imaginative design and direction and the pride and excitement the children gained from the experience. It was really inspirational and I only wish that all children could have an experience like this!

Judith Robinson, parent
6 June 2014

Absolutely amazing performance!!! Highly entertaining...took some talent, timing and practice. To gather five different schools together, who could all get on the same page was an accomplishment of itself. WELL DONE!!!

Goldbeaters parent
5 June 2014

I've been working with St Michael's in Camden and today was the last rehearsal before tomorrow's show. It was astounding. The class has pulled together and were clear and precise with everything. It's an amazing development for a class who sometimes find it difficult to focus. I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about how wonderfully they performed and how much they have developed and grown.

Mark Stevenson, Director
5 June 2014

I love watching plays and theatre shows, and it was lovely to see our own children perform for us. I think drama should be part of education in primary schools it helps and boosts their confidence for when they transition to secondary school. Each year could perform a play just like this. I loved it well done Salusbury Primary and all other Brent primary's. Would love to see what the Brent school can pull out of the hats. As a parent I would back a project like this. And who knows just like other theatre shows in the West End and around the city, primary schools could be the next big positive thing that catches London's eye. "Wow I did think I would say all this but words and ideas just kept coming into my head. If you have faith in your child/children you speak out to your children's primary school, start out small then see how it could progress.

Mum of Salusbury Primary school year 5
5 June 2014

As always, the show gets better and better every year. Hugely impressed by both the direction and the performance, sensitively and expertly tailored for a primary performance. The children came back on cloud 9 and parents have had nothing but high praise. Please keep up the good work, you have our full support.

Joffy Conolly
Headteacher, Soho Parish School
5 June 2014

Thank you for a wonderful 'Romeo & Juliet' performance yesterday, the children were incredible and seemed very excited to be part of this project. My 8 year old daughter is so inspired by Shakespeare and drama that she asked us to visit the Globe Theatre, has spent £15 of her own money on a children's book of Shakespeare plays (which she has already read twice), and regularly stands on the armrest of the sofa, reciting lines with a grave facial expression to an imaginary audience! You guys are amazing, please keep going so that many more children will benefit from your excellent work!

Conny, mother of Yuki
Year 3 Soho Parish School
5 June 2014

I was in the performance yesterday with my other daughter, we enjoyed very much. was beautiful and exciting for us

Jacqueline, Mevil Gabriela's mother, student year 5
St Luke Primary School

Just watched romeo and juliette performance by westminster primary schools was an excellent show really enjoyed it. Well done to everyone who participated and helped make it a great performance.

Sarah Baisim
4 June 2014

This is my first year taking part in the Shakespeare project and it has been fantastic! Endy (our superb director) managed to inspire my year 5 class from the very first session. Even the more reluctant actors have come out of their shell, voting the workshops as their favourite lessons this year. The dynamic games and infectious enthusiasm that Endy brings to the sessions have brought Romeo and Juliet alive for the class and made it accessible to all. Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity, this is an experience that we will remember for years to come.

Kathryn Parrott
Assistant Head St Mary and St Pancras Primary School
3 June 2014

Well we've just had our fourth rehearsal with Jon (Eastman) and he's amazed me once again! Though they were a bit shaky at first, my year 4 students have now shown impressive growth in their acting ability and professionalism. I've been blown away by some very unsuspecting students. The kids are truly enjoying the experience and their faces lit up today when Jon mentioned that costumes were to be discussed next week. Hope everyone else's rehearsals are going well.

Laura Partington
Year 4 teacher Derwentwater Primary School
16 May 2014

I'm currently working with 3 schools in Brent, Westminster and Barnet on 3 different acts and each school is bringing energy, imagination and commitment to the rehearsal sessions. We've got dynamic fight scenes, bhangra drumming, charleston and samba dancing and naive folk rounds to master, lines to learn and anxieties over 'lurve' to conquer! However, there's lots of excitement about the festival and great support from staff in each school - I can't wait to see what other schools have been up to!

John McCraw
Director
11 May 2014

My year 3 class attended the Westminster storytelling performance of Romeo and Juliet last week at St Lukes, and they were absolutely gripped! "It was great that we were able to get involved!" said one (who had been selling his wares in the marketplace at the beginning), and "I really liked the way they showed the deaths of the characters by putting their hats down in slow motion," commented another child. Since then they have had their first session directed by Emma, and after getting over some initial over-excitement(!) they settled down to some really lovely work on building an ensemble and starting to approach text and characters. I am grinning broadly as I type this, knowing that there is so much more to come!

Carole Carpenter
Year 3 teacher - Soho Parish Primary School
9 April 2014

"Out of all the productions of Romeo and Juliet I have ever seen, this was by far the most child friendly and entertaining I've ever seen."

Nya A, Year 4 student Derwentwater Primary School

"Amazing actors, they should be famous! I couldn't believe it was possible to do such good acting with only 3 people."

Ruby H, Year 4 student Derwentwater Primary School

"Absolutely brilliant. I liked the way they got us into it, not just the actors."

Maddy F, Year 4 student Derwentwater Primary School

I think my students' quotes say it all. An absolutely fantastic story telling session by Sam and the two actors. I agree with Maddy in that having the students involved in the performance made for a truly engaging show. The attention of students from my year 4 class, along with those from Beaconsfield and Southfields, never wavered. It really helped to get the students pumped up for the upcoming rehearsals.

Laura Partington
Year 4 teacher Derwentwater Primary School
4 April 2014

On Tuesday I saw the performance for the Westminster schools, and what a perfect first step for the project it is. As well as being an absorbing piece of theatrical storytelling it was a stimulating introduction to Romeo and Juliet, bringing it to life in a very accessible yet engaging way. I loved the way the Shakespearean text was spoken so clearly by Sam, Nadia and John. I have since been in to lead workshop 1 at both St Clement Danes and Soho Parish and both classes had grasped the story, understood the character's journeys and were largely un-phased by the language. We had great fun in the workshop and even sang the "Rose" song in a round - thanks Sam!

Emma Cater
Director for St Clement Danes and Soho Parish Primary Schools
3 April 2014

Went to see the performance at Ashburnum School this morning. It was brilliant! Sam is a magical storyteller and the way she weaved in text and performance was stunning. Nadia and John were fantastic, adding dynamism and class to the show. One more show in Ealing tomorrow, then it's over to the schools- can't wait to see what they come up with and what the teachers do in their lessons. A great start, well done everyone.

Neil Carter
Programme Director, Primary Shakespeare Company
2 April 2014

The Primary Shakespeare Festival 2014 Romeo and Juliet: Storytelling/Performed presentation.

I went along to Kentish Town this morning -thought it was really excellent. Having the children involved at the start with the creation of the market and then it segueing into them acting the scenes worked beautifully. By the time we got to the moment Tybalt stabbed Mercutio and Romeo stabbed Tybalt, the children were completely in there. Great for the children to have seen and experienced some 'acting' which I thought was beautifully pitched by all three actors. The simplicity was a real strength - the signifiers, the hats, the scarves worked very well. I only thought, with more time to prepare, it would perhaps have been good to have more music - also, there were lights in the hall and it would have been lovely to have used them.(totally get why it might have been one thing too many to organise, but it would help make it an even more magical event for the children) But a great job all round, a good new model . And the teachers seemed very happy.

Crispin Letts
Director for Primary Shakespeare Co. working with Orion Primary School and St Mary's Primary School
1 April 2014

Festivals

After weeks of rehearsals and sessions with professional theatre practitioners, the time has finally come for all of the schools to come together with the other participating schools from their borough to perform their sections of the play. These Festivals give a fantastic opportunity for all participating schools in a local area to share what they have been working on and watch their peers perform. First up was the Brent Festival on 23 May 2013.

Luke Williams, Artistic Director of the Primary Shakespeare Company:

"Well, after last year, I didn't think the standard could get any higher.....but I was **wrong, wrong, wrong**. I don't know whether the extra amount of rehearsal time JLC helped us to fund has paid off, or whether it's just that schools, teachers and directors are increasingly finding their feet with this way of working, but Thursday's Festival at **Capital City Academy** was breathtaking. The level of performance was exceptionally high, with several moments genuinely raising hairs on the back of my neck.

The set design (a collaboration between Artist Becky Baur and children from all of the schools) was a great success. We've moved away from a naturalistic style of representation with the backcloths to a much more 'art driven' outcome - closer to book illustrations than conventional scenery. The colours and lines are bold and striking. I love it, and would like to go further with this direction next year.

Alongside the Brent Primary Schools that were represented, Neil and I were also delighted to be able to welcome **Derwentwater Primary, who are the first Ealing school** to join us - to be joined by others next year, when they will hold their own mini-Festival.

I'll write more next week, once the next round of performances are under way - but I'd just like to close by saying a big thank you to Capital City Academy (and Louise Munro in particular) for hosting the Festival. We couldn't have done it without you!"

Comments:

Yesterday Soho Parish School's year 3 class took part in what was a truly magnificent performance of Pericles, the Westminster Shakespeare Festival. I was blown away by all the schools' imaginative interpretations of the play, their energy, the way they listened to each other and worked together, and their sheer relish for the story. I was hugely proud of my children's achievement, and think it is something that will stay with them, boosting their confidence, understanding and creativity. Thank you so much to John Lyon's Charity, and to Luke and Neil, and everyone else who made this wonderful event possible. I really hope to be involved again.

Carole Carpenter - Soho Parish Primary School, Westminster
5 June 2013

Congratulations to St Luke's Primary and all other participating Westminster schools on a dazzling festival full of imagination and commitment. I was particularly struck at this festival by the great teamwork on show and the myriad ways a boat can be represented on stage. A special mention for one school's use of Adam Ant to soundtrack Pericles courtship of Thaisa - Prince Charming indeed! Looking forward to Barnet on Thursday...

John McCraw - theatre practitioner and Director
5 June 2013

Directing a group of young year 4's (Derwentwater PS) this year was one of the most enjoyable experiences I have had recently.. Our section, Act 4, made it possible for us to experiment with narration, interesting tableau, unwilling assassins, heroines, scurvy pirates (who cheekily added the odd line, and a most unusual nightclub, destination unknown! When a school really get behind a project, everyone benefits, and at Derwentwater, I was lucky to have Laura's enthusiasm for the performance; as well as a very gifted class.

John Eastman - theatre practitioner and Director
31 May 2013

Wow! Where to start - with my utter delight at both a wonderful festival day at City Academy for Brent schools (I worked with Stonebridge Primary) - or the rewarding process of working with the enthusiastic and talented performers of Year 5. I was blown away with how this class picked up the story of Pericles and completely owned it, relishing in the telling and playing of their section of the story. Our performance was atmospheric, focused and had real clarity - sometimes challenging for the profession to achieve let alone children.

Patrick (teacher) and myself (director) set the challenge for the children first and foremost to think of themselves as an acting ensemble whose aim was to storytell this story. We did it! And received congratulations from all at the festival who also gave exceptionally high performances and a day for us all to remember!

I am so convinced that this programme offers so much more than the experience of performing, let alone collaboration and confidence building. I also feel the effects will be lasting! I wonder if some further post evaluation at the end of the summer term or the beginning of the autumn to record how the pupils feel about their experience looking back might be fruitful. Here's looking forward to the festival next week at Barnet, can't wait!!!

Samantha Adams - theatre practitioner and Director
30 May 2013

Rehearsals

Following the storytelling performance, professional theatre practitioners lead the children in a workshop that investigates the play and explores the work of Shakespeare. The play is broken down into sections and each school in the borough is allocated a different segment. After this, the theatre practitioners become 'Directors' and during a series of rehearsals, work with the children on their section of the play and prepare it for performance.

Comments:

We had our last session with our director, Leonie, today. The children have been working so hard and showcased all of their hard work to the rest of the school in the form of a dress rehearsal. They were fantastic. The sessions with Leonie have been invaluable and together we have watched the children grow as actors. There have been lots of surprises along the way, all good ones! Year 5 have really immersed themselves into the story of Pericles, especially Act 1, and this can be seen in their amazing creative writing. Looking forward to the Brent Festival on Thursday now.

Jane Palmer - Harlesden Primary School, Brent
21 May 2012

T-minus 2 days until the big show! Our director John Eastman has been working tirelessly with my year 4 class in order to ensure we are ready for Thursday's performance (even coming into the school for extra rehearsals.) It was amazing to watch the students progress over the 6 weeks. I was frequently surprised by the confidence and talent many of them displayed during rehearsals. With the costumes, music and perfected lines (fingers crossed) this should be a great show. "Break a leg" to all schools participating!

*Laura Partington - Derwentwater Primary School, Ealing
21 May 2013*

My year 3 class are eagerly awaiting their final session with Neil, our director, on Wednesday. We've been working on finding our characters and understanding what we're saying, putting movements to our song, and bringing the play to life by listening and reacting to what is going on around us. It has been an amazing process, and we can't wait for the performance at Marylebone School!

*Carole Carpenter - Soho Parish Primary School, Westminster
20 May 2013*

I am nearing week 6 of my sessions and just wanted to say how much myself, the pupils and teachers are enjoying it. Myself and Jackie (from Manorside) continually share looks and conversations about how much her class of Y4's have been able to achieve. As with all good practice the success of this project is in the process, the doing and enjoying of it! Directing and bringing Pericles to life has been thrilling. Lessons for next time - keep surprising myself, teachers and pupils about what they can do!

*Sam - theatre practitioner and Director
20 May 2013*

Just over halfway directing classes in Barnet and Westminster. Both groups are looking at Act 4 - Jealousy, a murder plot, pirates and a slave market - and have created some thrilling work for the festival. This coming week should see our first runs and, I'm hoping, the children really seize the story and giving it a shake!

*John McCraw - theatre practitioner and Director
20 May 2013*

Storytelling Week - 15th April 2013

To kick off the project, each class is given the opportunity to see a performance of the play. This is a fantastic way to introduce the children to the story. Acclaimed storyteller Xanthe Gresham creates and performs the shows, together with musicians. The show tours a selection of the schools that act as hosts to other participating schools in their borough.

Comments:

I was at Goldbeaters today watching the storytelling performance and it was wonderful to see the pupils and teachers alike so engaged! I sat behind the class I will be with and I can't wait to work with them, at requests from Xanthe to play a character their hands shot up continuously!

Shakespeare's stories are universal and whilst Pericles is less formed than some it has jousting and pirates! Can't wait to get going, which for me is tomorrow at Mansorside!

*Sam - theatre practitioner and Director for Goldbeaters Primary School
17th April 2013*

My year four class and I have just returned from the story telling session at St Peter's Eaton Square PS. The story teller and musical accompanist emitted the same enthusiasm as Luke and Neil and really helped to instil that enthusiasm into my students. This is the first time our school has participated in the Shakespeare project and I feel incredibly lucky that we have been given this opportunity. John, our director, is coming tomorrow for our session. Needless to say, we all can't wait!

*Laura Partington, Derwentwater Primary School, Ealing
16th April 2013*

Inset Session - 27th March 2013

Neil and I have just finished our training session with teachers and - though I think both of us needed a long sit down, a cup of tea and several biscuits afterwards, we were really excited by what a fantastic group of teachers and directors we are working with. They were made to do a full hour of leaping around, pretending to be severed heads, famine victims, jousting knights and sailors trapped in a fearful storm. And we made them do it with a class of Year 5 children (actually, the children also deserve a lot of credit.... And they were brilliantly enthusiastic and positive - participating fully in every aspect).

I'm also delighted by some of the developments we've instigated this year. Two of our teachers (Trish and Emily, step forward) have written a wonderful guide on how to work in between sessions, and we've also introduced a set design competition that all children will take part in. The winners will have their work form part of the scenery during this year's festival. Onwards and upwards (once I've had one more biscuit!)

**Luke Hollowell-Williams, Artistic Director, Primary Shakespeare Company
27th March 2013**

Comments:

Thank you for a great day. It was great to see how confident at drama the Holy Trinity children are. The standard has been set!

*David Blott, St Mary Magdalene Primary School
17 April 2013*

I'm just starting to plan some of my class' work on Pericles next term, in the light of what must be described as an inspirational inset! I am so excited and know that the children at my school will get so much out of this project - I feel really lucky that we're participating. Thanks Luke and Neil, and thanks to the fabulous year 5s and 6s who took part on the day, you were amazing! :)

*Carole Carpenter, Soho Parish Primary School, Westminster
2nd April 2013*

A great day - it gave a real feel for what was possible with the play. I'm really looking forward to extending it to other areas of the curriculum next term, and getting the kids into some Shakespeare, thanks Luke and Niel.

*Oliver Kyle, St Michael's Primary School, Camden
27th March 2013*

I am aching in every muscle after participating in the workshop but so excited at all the possibilities I can't wait to start planning! - yes - I want to get down to planning - that is how enthused I am. Thanks for a great day.

*Nina Sedgwick, Gladstone Park Primary School, Brent
27th March 2013*