

STAGE RIGHT'S Bravo Company Bravely Brings the Bard to the Crighton Stage

By: Carolyn Corsano Wong & Jillian Nolan

"Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."

"Better a witty fool than a foolish wit."

"Expectation is the root of all heartache."

"Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice."

"Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once."

Who wrote these famous sayings? William Shakespeare. Did you understand them? Are the words and sentiment still relative today? Certainly. Then why is it we are all afraid to approach Shakespeare? Tell an adult they are going to a Shakespeare play and they roll their eyes,



Bravo Company Executive Director Amy Sowers with students.



Bravo Company on the stage of the Crighton Theatre with Amy Sowers.

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groan and come up with any excuse not to go. Why? The actor Kevin Kline, who has performed Shakespearean classics many times, once said of his first Shakespeare experience: "An English teacher brought us to a local production of King Lear and after ten minutes of people doing 'Shakespearean acting,' I tuned out and started making out with my girlfriend in the back row. We left at intermission." Why are we as audience so scared and/or turned off by him? My guess, it's due to the image of stiff 'Shakespearean acting' and the language. To get past those obstacles; it's best to start young.

One of the mission goals of STAGE RIGHT is to train the next generation of theatre actors, technicians, producers and ultimately, audience members. That's why we have hired a young theatre graduate named Jillian Nolan to join us. As part of the summer program Jillian has chosen to teach Shakespeare to kids (if you must, insert groan here). While Shakespeare can appear intimidating, our aim is to make it accessible and alive. Shakespeare himself wrote for the ordinary people of his day. His plays were the newspapers and journals of the time. The key is to teach kids how to make Shakespeare's writing alive and meaningful to us today as it was when he wrote it. William Shakespeare was one of the most prolific, influential, and extraordinary writers of all time. Five hundred years later and we still talk about him, admire and praise him, and of course, still perform his plays. He wrote for the 'common man' and deserves a second look.

Why teach kids and teens Shakespeare? Why not? They should learn about the greatest bard ever to have graced this Earth. Like it or not, they will learn about it in school eventually and this way they will be one step ahead of the others having already explored the language in our workshop and in performance. They will have the opportunity to discover that they have nothing to fear. So many people claim, "I don't go see Shakespeare. I don't understand it." Or, "I don't want to audition for a Shakespearean play. The language is too much for me." If only they had been educated as children, they would understand that while Shakespeare's language can seem poetic and complicated, when you break it down, it can also be effortless and straightforward. The actor Al Pacino said of Shakespeare's language that you don't need to "get" all of it, just the gist of what is going on and the 'gist' contains timeless themes; love, power, greed (sounds like the evening news). About teaching a Shakespeare class, Pacino noted "When I first let the students know I was going to read Shakespeare, they were reluctant to listen to it. But we would talk informally about the play and then I would read an excerpt. Soon, they found the equinox from their world to the world of Shakespeare."

People assume that if it is difficult for an adult that means it will be twice as difficult for a child. Wrong! Research has shown that the minds of children are like sponges. They are in their prime for learning. In fact, kids can perform Shakespeare better than some adults! They haven't learned the 'stiff Shakespearean' acting they think they are supposed to do. If you take the time to

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help them understand what they are reading or performing, they can become so passionate about it. That passion enables them to take the words off the page giving them fluid movement and thus more truthful acting. Even if they don't go on to perform as adults, their early exposure to the language will make them more likely to be an informed and accepting audience member in the future.

Programs that encourage children to learn and perform Shakespeare are so important. Not only do kids end up enjoying the workshop immensely, they also come away with a greater knowledge of and appreciation for classic literature. Many schools around the nation are seeing a dwindling desire for the arts—not by the students, but by administrations. School districts push the core academics, and even sports, before the arts. Core academics exercise the left side of the brain or the logical side. The arts exercise the right side or the creative side. The learning and thinking process is enhanced when both sides of the brain participate in a balanced manner. Exploring Shakespeare is an opportunity to exercise both sides: the logical with study of the language and the creative with interpretation for performance.

Children from ages 8-18 will have the opportunity to participate in one of two Shakespeare workshops. The purpose is for kids to better understand the language of Shakespeare; learn what goes into putting on a production (from auditions, to set, to costumes, etc); and finally culminate with two performances open for friends and family.

The first workshop, sponsored by Bravo Company of Stage-Right in Conroe, will take place June 8th-26th, Monday through Friday, with performances being June 27th & 28th. Each rehearsal will be two and a half hours long. The age groups are split 8-13, and 14-18. The younger group will meet in the mornings and the older cast in the early afternoons.

The second Shakespeare workshop is being sponsored by ACE Theatre in Houston. It will run July 13th-August 7th, Monday through Thursday, with performances on August 8th & 9th. Again, class sessions are two and a half hours long; same age set up.

Encourage your kids to come out and see what Shakespeare has to offer. Both you and your kids will be pleasantly surprised. Shakespeare has that effect on people! It has "such stuff as dreams are made of." ♦

MY FRIEND
BUNNY



George

