ABOUT THIS PACKET

In December of 2014, The NOLA Project in cooperation with the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) produced TWELFTH NIGHT by William Shakespeare. The NOLA Project has gained notoriety through their co-productions with NOMA, often producing plays by Shakespeare. Season after season, thousands of New Orleans residents flock to the Great Hall of Museum and the Sydney and Walda Bestoff Sculpture Garden to see Shakespeare performed in a populist interpretation for the masses. The NOLA Project believes that a crucial component of our company’s artistic mission is to help audiences find connections between important plays and their own lives. We strive for audiences of all ages to have meaningful, fun experiences at the theater. This packet is designed to open up the theatrical process in the hopes of engaging students in the New Orleans area. What distinguishes this document from other TWELFTH NIGHT education packets is its focus on the performative aspect of Shakespeare. William Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed in a theater, not read in a classroom. In this spirit, we open up and share the process of performing Shakespeare. This packet is designed to bring theater-focused lessons into the regular classroom as a way to enhance the academic, literary understanding of the text.

— Alex Ates, Interim Education Director

IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT WORKING WITH SHAKESPEARE

1. Shakespeare should be performed! The text only comes alive when people are speaking the words on their feet. Do not just have students sit in seats and read! Create a stage, no matter how basic; let students move when they read. Little direction is required. The language will do the work. Trust us.

2. Go see professional Shakespeare! Watch professional, trained actors perform Shakespeare. The more you expose yourself to fulfilled productions of Shakespeare, the more you will appreciate the beauty of the text’s endless interpretations.

3. Remember Shakespeare wrote for the masses! We’re inclined to think Shakespeare wrote for the elite. Wrong! Shakespeare wrote for the populace. The people closest to the stage during original performances in Elizabethan England were the poor, the groundlings. Shakespeare wrote for them just as much as the royals and aristocrats.

4. Start young! Students are never too young to begin learning about common themes explored in Shakespeare’s dramatic literature: love, revenge, jealousy, rage, melancholy, and joy. The sooner you expose a student to the words of Shakespeare, the more proficient the student will be in unlocking the meaning of the most influential writer in the English language.
THEMES

The transcendence of love beyond gender
Duke Orsino’s love for Viola is realized even when Viola was disguised as a man, “Cesario”. Olivia falls in love with “Cesario” a “man” who is really a woman in disguise, Viola. Shakespeare realizes the ability for attraction between personalities, not genders.

The suffering caused by love
Olivia is in deep mourning because of the loss of her dead brother. Her sadness was so intense, she shut herself off to traditional methods of wooing from expected suitors. She became vulnerable to falling in love to a servant, “Cesario” (Viola).

Bullying
Malvolio, who is subject of a cruel prank, is led to believe that Olivia loves him. He goes to ridiculous lengths to appease her, which causes him to be considered insane and locked up.

Gender identity and disguise
In order to thrive in the new land of Illyria, Viola must disguise herself as a man. She can only survive in this new setting if she is to hide her true gender. Viola or “Cesario” spends most of the play navigating the love two separate people, of two different genders.

The revenge of time
Malvolio, while strict, is dutiful to his service and to Olivia’s estate. The drunken rascals Toby and Andrew conspire a plot with Feste and Maria to play a cruel prank on him. At the end of the play, after being jailed and embarrassed publicly, Malvolio pledges revenge, “on the whole pack of you.” Feste, in his final song, sings about how they have all had fun at someone else’s expense, but because of their antics, there will be a price to pay.

CHARACTERS


Sebastian: Viola’s twin brother.

Orsino: Duke of Illyria, a romantic young man.

Olivia: a rich countess.

Sir Toby Belch: Olivia’s drunken uncle.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek: Sir Toby’s pick for Olvia’s husband.

Malvolio: Olivia’s humorless head servant.

Maria: Olivia’s maid.

Feste: Olivia’s fool, or clown.

Antonio: An old sailor who follows Sebastian to Orsino’s court.

Sea captain: a man who helps Viola become “Cesario”
SYNOPSIS

With a hilarious (and heartfelt) plot full of trickery, confusion, and foolery, TWELFTH NIGHT has delighted audiences for centuries.

Viola and a sea captain, who have been survived a shipwreck, land on the coast of Illyria; and Viola believes that her brother, Sebastian, has been lost in the wreck. In a new, uncertain land, Viola decides to disguise herself as a young man and seek employment with the famously-kind duke of Illyria, Orsino. However, little does she know that Sebastian has, indeed, been rescued by another sea captain, Antonio. Sebastian and Antonio have landed on a coast in a state above Illyria. Sebastian makes his way to Illyria with Antonio.

Under the name of “Cesario”, Viola befriends Orsino and falls in love with him. Orsino uses “Cesario” (Viola) as a go-between himself and the noblewoman he loves, Olivia. However, Olivia is not interested in Orsino, as she is mourning the loss of her dead brother. In Olivia’s household, her head servant, Malvolio, enforces strict mourning and contemplation. Olivia’s uncle, Sir Toby Belch and his odd friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek spend their nights at Olivia’s residence drinking, singing, and carousing with the help of Olivia’s maid, Maria. Toby wishes Andrew to be wed to Olivia.

“Cesario” (Viola) arrives to deliver “his” master’s pleas of love to Olivia. Upon receiving unwanted messages from Orsino, Olivia falls in love with “Cesario”. Additionally, Orsino finds himself feeling an affection towards “Cesario”.

One night, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and Feste (Olivia’s fool) drink and revel. Malvolio disrupts their midnight merriment and reprimands them for their immaturity. Upset with Malvolio, they decide to exact revenge on him. Maria forges a love letter in the handwriting of Olivia directed to Malvolio. In the fake love note, Malvolio is instructed to wait in the garden wearing yellow stockings. They plant the fake love note for Malvolio to find. He does.

“Cesario” once again arrives at Olivia’s estate with wooing words from Orsino and Olvia opens tells “him” that she does not love his master, but has fallen in love with him (“Cesario”).

Sebastian enters Illyria. Olivia finds Sebastian and professes her love (thinking he is “Cesario”), gives him gifts, and invites him to stay with her.

Malvolio, excited by the idea of Olivia being in love with him, follows the instructions of the letter and genuinely performs the commands of the prank forged by Toby, Andrew, Feste, and Maria. His odd behaviors get him placed into a dark cell.

Sir Toby, setting up more mischief, organizes a duel between Sir Andrew and “Cesario” on the pretext that “Cesario” is the rival suitor to Andrew for Olivia’s hand. As “Cesario” and Sir Andrew cowardly fight each other, Antonio rushes in, believing that “Cesario” is Sebastian. Officers of Illyria rush in and seize Antonio, realizing that he is a long-lost enemy to Illyria.

Orsino and “Cesario” return to Olivia’s house. Olivia enters and speaks lovingly to “Cesario”. Orsino is angry about this, as he assumes “Cesario” has been secretly working to steal his love and win Olivia for “himself”.

Sir Andrew and Sir Toby have inadvertently picked a fight with Sebastian (believing him to be “Cesario”) and both enter wounded and bleeding. However, when Sebastian appears all the characters realize they have been dealing with two persons who look identical. Sebastian and Viola identify themselves to each other and embrace.

Matches are made all around: Sir Toby agrees to marry Maria, Orsino offers to marry Viola (formerly “Cesario”), and Olivia and Sebastian marry. Everyone is happy except Malvolio. Who, realizing he has been made subject of a prank, pledges revenge on the whole group.
RESOURCES ABOUT THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The First Night of Twelfth Night by Leslie Hotson

The Twelfth Night of Shakespeare’s Audience by John W. Draper

Shakespeare’s Theatre by Peter Thomson

The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642 by Andrew Gurr

FACTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

• Shakespeare was the son of a shoe-maker and never went to college
• Shakespeare was also an actor and acted in many of his plays
• Shakespeare eventually became the manager of the acting company which performed his plays, causing him to be shrewd and to write for commercial appeal
• Shakespeare used prominent, well-known plots from prior dramatic works
• Shakespeare’s plays were performed, often times, in an outdoor theater during the daytime with a simple set and few props
• Shakespeare coined more phrases used in modern vocabulary than any other English writer
• There were many other popular playwrights in Elizabethan England, Shakespeare’s texts were better preserved
• There is no strong evidence to prove that Shakespeare did not write his own material

REHEARSING SHAKESPEARE

The NOLA Project rehearses in the Great Hall of the New Orleans Museum of Art to help find inspiration for meaningful ways to incorporate the untraditional space into the performance.

Here are the steps for rehearsing Shakespeare:

STEP 1: Designate a slice of a scene to work on.

STEP 2: Have the actors read the text. As a group, discuss what’s going on in the scene and what the characters are saying. Figure out what is at stake in this scene. Why this scene is important to the story?

STEP 3: Have a director give simple directions for where actors enter and stand from. Simple staging is the most effective.

STEP 4: Actors and the director make personal connections to the situations in the scene.

STEP 5: Actors and the director add detail to make the scene feel real.
NOLA PROJECT’S CONCEPT

In this production of TWELFTH NIGHT, The NOLA Project added a prologue to help explain the circumstances of Viola landing on Illyria’s shore. This artistic choice is explained below:

“The concept for the show is very physical. I think the movement that actors can bring to the table is something that is often overlooked. When I’ve seen Shakespeare the focus has only been on the text and we miss a lot of those moments where there is no dialogue. So we decided to actually show the shipwreck and the sinking and Sebastian and Viola being separated by the waters. It’s going to be really interesting to actually show what happens before everything starts happening and I think having the actors as the set and as the storm and as the water is really going to bring forth the main point of an ensemble show, which is essential to The NOLA Project.”

—Kali Russell, Assistant Director

THOUGHTS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Why is it important to do Shakespeare on its feet and not only read aloud in class?

“I would say a great deal of Shakespeare—especially Shakespeare’s comedies—is the physical interpretation that the actors bring to the text. There’s a lot of physical humor in TWELFTH NIGHT. There’s a tremendous amount of staging that occurs with no dialogue at all and I think that gives the theater artist the opportunity to say a lot about the character—strong statements about the characters—the help tell the story in ways that just sitting and reading the text as if it were a novel never does. I think it’s fun to hear the words come out of different mouths, different voices, and see them embodied by different bodies and that’s part of the joy of watching and experiencing a Shakespeare play. Furthermore, Shakespeare’s plays are very interactive with the audience themselves and you don’t get—
THOUGHTS FROM THE DIRECTOR CON’T.

that when you’re reading it off the page. Characters have genuine moments of confusion that they share with the audience. They ask the audience what they think and what they should do and there’s nothing like having an actor really go up to a person and genuinely pose the question. And you never know what’s going to happen in the theater, sometimes people talk back, sometimes people laugh uncomfortably, it’s different every night! I think the human experience of being in a crowd and watching Shakespeare is something that can never be replicated.”

—A.J. Allegra, TWELFTH NIGHT Director and Artistic Director of The NOLA Project

WHY WE LOVE PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE

“Language is my favorite part. To feel the words, these unusual words, in your mouth as you say them as if they’re your own thoughts rolling off your tongue the moment you think them…it’s so much fun!”

—Sam Dudley, Sir Andrew Aguecheek

“My favorite part about performing Shakespeare is translating Old English and these disgusting, bawdy words for modern audiences with my voice.”

—Jared Gore, Sir Toby Belch

“My favorite thing about performing Shakespeare is that the words are so rich and inventive and the way they’re constructed is so important that if you just learn them and just say them, so much of the work is already done for you. The words have a different taste, a different texture, and a different sound. Shakespeare’s doing the work for you!”

—Cecile Monteyne, Olivia
ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: TWINS
(Grades 3-12)

Have students walk around a room. Tell students they must find their twin in response to certain questions.

Ask “Find the person with…”

The same eye color as you
The same palm size as you
The most similar nose to yours
The same kind of shoes you have

Add extra items

ACTIVITY 2: STORYTELLING THE SHIPWRECK
(Grades 6-12)

Once students are familiar with the plot in the beginning of TWELFTH NIGHT, have students sit in a circle. Instruct students to work together by imagining the shipwreck that separates Sebastian and Viola. Then, as an ensemble, they must tell the story of the shipwreck going around the circle, using only one sentence at a time. The story of the shipwreck must have a beginning, middle, and end. The story must also be cohesive. Encourage details and vivid descriptions. Students will have to use their imagination, concentration, and listening skills. Discuss how actors must use their imaginations to understand how characters feel, what they think, and what experiences have influenced the character’s life.

ACTIVITY 3: MALVOLIO
(Grades 4-12)

On a board, have students identify the actions Malvolio takes and the reactions that other characters have to them. Organize responses into two columns. Have students consider whether the reactions were appropriate to Malvolio’s actions. Have students draw two comic strips based on Malvolio’s actions: one comic strip should depict Malvolio as a character that audiences should feel sympathy for, another depicting Malvolio as a character audiences should laugh at. Discuss how actors and directors make choices in their interpretations.

ACTIVITY 4: MAKE IT YOUR OWN STORY
(Grades 9-12)

Even though Shakespeare wrote for an audience in a world that is very different from our world now, his themes still resonate. The reason why Shakespeare’s plays have persisted for so long is because artists and audiences still find connections between the way the characters feel and the way they feel. Think about how Twelfth Night is a holiday in New Orleans, marking the beginning of Mardi Gras revels. Ask students to think about the progression of Mardi Gras and how, in the Catholic cultural tradition, it is designed for celebrations and carelessness before Lent, where sacrifice is made and actions are accounted for. How does the idea of these holidays relate to the plot and structure of the play? Ask students to come up with their own adaptation of TWELFTH NIGHT set in New Orleans. Have students identify a time period to set the play, design a model or sketch for the set. Challenge the students to think creatively about how different plot points can make sense when set in New Orleans. Encourage students to think about the way of life in New Orleans, the importance of music, and the celebrations we have. Have students present their set and give a presentation of their interpretation.
ACTIVITIES CON’T.

ACTIVITY 5: SEEING THE WORDS
(Grades 9-12)

When performing Shakespeare, actors always need to see what they’re saying. This is how actors convey the poetry of Shakespeare’s language to audiences in clear ways. Take Feste’s final song and have students create a visual journal where they find or draw images for every word in the song. Students can annotate the images or they can re-write the song emblematically, using only the images they create/find. Explain that the images an actor chooses represents their personal interpretation of a character.

When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.
But when I came to man’s estate,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
’Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,
For the rain, it raineth every day.
But when I came, alas! to wive,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
By swaggering could I never thrive,
For the rain, it raineth every day.
But when I came unto my beds,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,
For the rain, it raineth every day.
A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.
But that’s all one, our play is done,
And we’ll strive to please you every day.

ABOUT THE NOLA PROJECT

Mission: The NOLA Project is an ensemble-driven theater company that strives to challenge, entertain, and engage diverse New Orleans audiences through high-quality and innovative performances of relevant great works, the development of new plays, and comprehensive educational opportunities for aspiring theater artists.

About us: The NOLA Project is a theater company made up of actors inspired by the energy of New Orleans. While studying at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, Founding Artistic Director Andrew Larimer assembled a company to create in New Orleans a theater with the highest dramatic standards. The company enlisted the expertise of James Tripp, Head of Acting at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York, to advise and direct for the company. Additional actors from New York and New Orleans were brought in to create a versatile stable of talented actors in New Orleans to produce with the highest standards the great classical, contemporary, and new plays. Today, the company is one of the most innovative and vibrant nonprofit theater companies in the Gulf South.

This packet has been produced by The NOLA Project’s Education Department.