

William Shakespeare's
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
STUDY GUIDE



Adapted and directed by Sean Graney

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SchoolFest student matinees and the accompanying materials fulfill the following standard objectives:

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS *cont.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.1-3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

PLOT

In Sean Graney's modern adaptation of Shakespeare's classic play *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse arrive in Ephesus to seek out their respective long-lost identical twins. However, the city of Ephesus has barred the entry of any Syracusians, and they must hide their true identities, causing them to be repeatedly mistaken for Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus (their twins!). Chaos ensues as both sets of twins sort out who they are, fall in and out of love, and reunite with their family along the way.



Adriana and Luciana in Court Theatre's production of *The Comedy of Errors*

CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1:

Antipholus of Syracuse: Antipholus of Ephesus's twin, Egeon and Emelia's son

Antipholus of Ephesus: Antipholus of Syracuse's twin, Egeon and Emelia's son

Egeon: Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus's father, Emelia's husband

ACTOR 2:

Dromio of Syracuse: Antipholus of Syracuse's servant, Dromio of Ephesus's twin

Dromio of Ephesus: Antipholus of Ephesus's servant, Dromio of Syracuse's twin

Emelia: Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus's mother, living as an abbess in Ephesus

Harvester of Souls and Heads

ACTOR 3:

Adriana: Antipholus of Ephesus's wife

Boatswain

Angry Merchantess

ACTOR 4:

Luciana: Adriana's sister

Juce: the cook, Dromio of Ephesus's wife

Zlata Duchenko: a courtesan

ACTOR 5:

Angelo: the gold merchant

Dr. Pinch: a conjurer

Watchman

ACTOR 6:

King Solinus IV: ruler of Ephesus

Balthazar: a random merchant

Poodle: the bounty hunter

SETTING

The Comedy of Errors is set in Ephesus – a rather unwelcoming city that has banned all Syracusians.

ABOUT SEAN GRANEY: WHO AM I?

I am a Chicago-based theater artist who passionately cares about the audience.

For over twenty years, I have concentrated on adapting and directing stories to create relevant theatrical pieces for our contemporary society.

In November of 2014, after a three-year hiatus, I returned to being the Artistic Director of The Hypocrites, a Chicago theater company I founded in 1997.

In 2013, I was fortunate enough to be a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University where I completed writing *All Our Tragic*, a twelve-hour adaptation combining all thirty-two surviving Greek Tragedies. It garnered six Joseph Jefferson Awards, including best Director and Best Adaptation.

I have four other Joseph Jefferson Awards for directing and adaptation.

I am also the director and co-adaptor of three Gilbert & Sullivan operettas, which have been playing at many great theaters across the country.

In 2013, I was honored with the Helen Coburn Meier and Tim Meier Arts Achievement Award.

From 2004-2006, I was a participant in the NEA/TCG Career Development Program for Directors.

I attended Emerson College (a long time ago) and have taught at University of Chicago, The Theater School at DePaul University, Columbia College Chicago, and Lake Forest College.

I have two works published:

Sophocles: These Seven Sicknesses. Broadway Play Publishing, 2013

The 4th Graders Present an Unnamed Love-Suicide. Playscripts, 2010

My work has been seen at American Repertory Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Berkeley Rep, Chicago Shakespeare, Goodman Theatre, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, Court Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Steppenwolf for Young Audiences, Chicago Children's Theatre, and in February 2016 at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

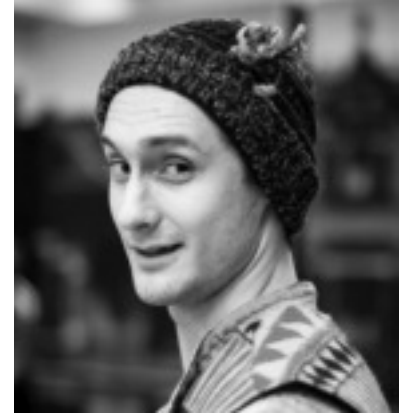


Sean Graney, Director and Adaptor
of *The Comedy of Errors*

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANE McMICHAEL, ACTOR PLAYING THE DROMIO TWINS

The director, Sean Graney, has adapted Shakespeare’s classic play to include some very modern text. What is it like to perform a Shakespearean play with updated language? Is it more or less challenging than performing Shakespeare’s plays as they are originally written?

This is actually my first time doing a Shakespeare play with updated language; I’m very excited to be trying it! The language feels different, in that sometimes Shakespeare will use very heady double-meanings, rhetorical devices, and poetic structure to help convey an idea or, my personal favorite, to tell jokes. However, with those devices removed, the challenge lies in taking Shakespeare’s ideas, thoughts, and jokes and making them as concise (or funny) as possible with nothing but your own wit and physicality. So, I would say that both versions are quite difficult, but I love the challenge of using Shakespeare’s original words and devices. It’s exhilarating.



Dane McMichael, the actor playing the Dromio Twins

This play requires you to switch back and forth between two characters very quickly. How do you differentiate between them and keep yourself on track?

Well, I like to approach it with the idea that no two people are exactly alike: they talk differently, they walk differently, and they think differently. I like to identify how different the characters I’m playing are from each other. I then put those differences into my body and mind. Hopefully, after some rehearsing, the two feel so different from each other that I couldn’t possibly mix them up because the characters will actually feel different in my body! Additionally, it’s crucial to find what each character wants, because no two characters have an identical want. Knowing that helps me separate them further. Although, at the end of the day, the costume designers are the real heroes; it’s SO much easier to feel like a different person when you’re wearing different clothes.

Before working on this production, you were a member of the Acting Fellowship Company. How has your time at ASF informed your work as a professional actor?

Being an ASF Acting Fellow helped me in several regards. First, I always had an incredible amount of work to do: I had to learn lines for four different productions, memorize the blocking or “track” for multiple different characters (including understudying characters), as well as learning and writing music. This helped me practice balance and prioritizing in my everyday life, which allows me to stay more calm and cool when things get stressful.

Moreover, it helped me become a better team player. I spent months on tour doing the same thing, with the same people in a small van, while being up VERY early in the morning (one time it was 3:30am!) and moving heavy set pieces. These conditions helped to further teach me how to work quickly, effectively, and with consideration for my co-workers and their needs. I became a stronger co-worker and co-creator with every week, and I still remain in touch with the other Fellows.

Finally, it gave me new appreciation for every single person that works in a theatre. During my time at ASF, I loved to stop and chat with whoever would listen to me and, through that, found myself with an overwhelming appreciation for how every single person in a theatre is absolutely vital to its survival and success. I’ll never forget that.

What do you hope audiences take away from this performance?

My biggest hope is that audiences have a fun time: I think Shakespeare is incredibly funny and incredibly entertaining, so getting to share this absolutely mad-cap and silly adventure with an audience gives me great joy. So, I sincerely hope that an audience member, especially those who may not particularly enjoy Shakespeare, will be able to have as much fun with the Bard as I do, at least for one night.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. Sean Graney adapted Shakespeare's classic play to include modern speech and references. How do you think this will change your experience watching the play? Why do you think he chose to adapt it this way?
2. In this production, one actor will play both Antipholus twins and another actor will play both Dromio twins. How do you think the director might handle this challenge given that one twin will frequently enter immediately after the other twin exits? What do you think is gained by having one actor play both twins? What might be lost?

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the play, we hear the Watchman announce that no Syracusians may enter Ephesus. What do you think may have caused this fear of outsiders? Do we see any evidence presented during the play that Syracusians are immoral characters? Can you think of any modern examples in society of a fear of outsiders, also known as xenophobia?
2. At the end of the show, Dromio of Syracuse remarks, "I think my brother, my true brother, was by my side the whole time." How does the relationship between Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse change throughout the show? How does the servant-master dynamic impact their friendship?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **On Your Feet:** As a class, explore the different characteristics that tie twins together. On as many notecards as you have students, write the name of a famous twin with a brief description of their life and their relationship to their sibling. These names could include Apollo & Artemis, Romulus & Remus, Mary Kate & Ashley Olsen, Chang & Eng Bunker, Jenna & Barbara Bush, Dylan & Cole Sprouse, Jacob & Esau, and Ann Landers & Abigail Van Buren. Students should not share their notecard with anyone. After they have read their cards over, prompt students to move around the classroom in character as their famous twin and strike up conversations with other students. Their goal is to eventually locate their twin by interacting with and questioning other students, however they are at no point allowed to reveal their name. After everyone has found their pair, ask students how they determined who their partner was. What kinds of relationships did these different twins have? What are the ways in which you and your partner are distinct characters? In what ways are you interchangeable? Think back to the play. In what ways did the actors make the similarities of the twins clear while still portraying them as two different people with unique personalities?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES cont.

2. At Your Desk: As we've mentioned, Sean Graney adapted this play from Shakespeare's original text. Below are two versions of the same scene from *The Comedy of Errors* – one written by Graney and the other by Shakespeare. Read both scenes and write a short response comparing and contrasting them. What choices does Graney make to update the text? What effect does it have on your interpretation of the scene and its characters? What are the different tactics Graney and Shakespeare use to get their point across?

Sean Graney's Adaptation:

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

This is the last time I'm going to ask you.
Where are the thousand marks of gold I gave you?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

You gave no gold to me, sir.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Tell me how you have disposed your charge.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

My charge was but to fetch you home.
To the Fiery Phoenix.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

The Fiery Phoenix?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Yes, the Fiery Phoenix, your home.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

My home?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Yes, sir, to dinner, sir.
My mistress and her sister stay for you.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Your mistress? What mistress?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

My mistress, your worship's wife, My mistress at
the Fiery Phoenix. She that waits to eat till you
come home to dinner.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

I don't condone violence, but you flout me.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

No, I do not flout you.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

You do flout me, and as you flout me, take this!

Shakespeare:

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Come, Dromio, come, these jests are out of season;
Reserve them till a merrier hour than this.
Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

To me, sir? Why, you gave no gold to me.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Come on, sir knave, have done your foolishness,
tell me how thou hast disposed thy charge.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

My charge was but to fetch you from the mart
Home to your house, the Phoenix, sir, to dinner:
My mistress and her sister stays for you.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

In what safe place you have bestow'd my money,
Or I shall break that merry sconce of yours
That stands on tricks when I am undisposed:
Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

I have some marks of yours upon my pate,
Some of my mistress' marks upon my shoulders,
But not a thousand marks between you both.
If I should pay your worship those again,
Perchance you will not bear them patiently.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Thy mistress' marks? What mistress, slave, hast thou?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Your worship's wife, my mistress at the Phoenix;
She that doth fast till you come home to dinner,
And prays that you will hie you home to dinner.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

What, wilt thou flout me thus unto my face,
Being forbid? There, take you that, sir knave.