

WCT

WESTERN
CANADA
THEATRE

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS



January 26 to February 4, 2017
SAGEBRUSH THEATRE

STUDY GUIDE

The Comedy of Errors

A Study Guide

Production Personnel

Cast

Andrew Cownden
Tess Degenstein
Anand Rajaram
Jamie Robinson
Ella Simon

Aegeon / Strongman / Angelo / Courtezan
Adriana / Duchess / Officer
Dromio of Syracuse / Dromio of Ephesus
Antipholous of Syracuse / Antipholous of Ephesus
Luciana / Nell / Dr. Pinch / Abbess

Production Team

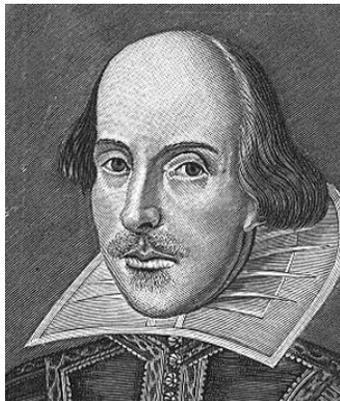
Daryl Cloran
Drew Facey
Louise Guinand
Jonathan Lewis
Mark Limacher
Holly Lewis
Nicholas Wallace
Tracey Power
Melissa Thomas
Heather Cant

Director
Set & Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Sound Designer and Composer
Additional Piano
Dramaturge
Magic Consultant
Choreographer
Fight Director
Assistant Director

Skylar Nakazawa	Stage Manager
Christine Leroux	Assistant Stage Manager
Madison Henry	Apprentice Stage Manager
Roya Mole	Technician
Liam Befurt	Technician
Robin Arundel	Technician
Joel Feenstra	Technician

Playwright – William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (April 26, 1564 – April 23, 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet, and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.



Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, which has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, and religious beliefs and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, and these are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular, and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Setting

The story takes place during the turn of the 20th century Vaudeville era. Ephesus is a Vaudevillean Island – almost all of the inhabitants are vaudeville performers of some kind. The Duchess runs the town (like a big-time producer). The Syracusans (Antipholus, Dromio and Aegeon) are all merchants and are out of place in Ephesus.

Characters

Antipholus of Ephesus	“The Amazing Antipholus” a vaudeville magician and entertainer.
Antipholus of Syracuse	A merchant, newly arrived in Syracuse.
Dromio of Ephesus	Magician’s Assistant to Antipholus of Ephesus.
Dromio of Syracuse	Merchant’s Assistant to Antipholus of Syracuse.
Adriana	Wife of Antipholus of Ephesus. A vaudeville singer/entertainer.
Luciana	Sister of Adriana. A chemist/mechanic who creates the magic tricks/effects for Antipholus of Ephesus.
Aegeon	Merchant. Father of both Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse.
The Duchess	“Ringmaster” of Ephesus. She runs this town and all the performers living in it. A vaudeville performer in her own right (a fantastic knife thrower).
Angelo	Songwriter and ventriloquist. Often seen with his ventriloquist dummy, Captain Charlie.
The Abbess	Discovered to be Aemelia, mother of Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse.
The Courtezan	A “lady” of the night.
Dr. Pinch	A Spiritualist or Mentalist.

- The Strongman** A performer newly arrived to Syracuse for an audition.
- Nell** A large, loud cook who works at the home of Antipholus of Ephesus. Wife of Dromio of Ephesus.
- Cops** Incompetent law enforcement. Like the Keystone cops.

Synopsis

Ephesus and Syracuse are at odds. Any Syracusan found in Ephesus will be executed unless he can pay a ransom of a thousand marks. Aegeon, an old Syracusan merchant, has been arrested. He explains how he has come to Ephesus: he and his wife Aemelia had identical twin sons and identical twin slaves. In a shipwreck many years ago, he was separated from his wife, one son, and one slave. The survivors are renamed in memory of the lost ones: Antipholus for the son and Dromio for the slave. Once grown to manhood, Antipholus of Syracuse, with his Dromio, had set off in search of his brother and mother. Aegeon is now in search of them. The Duchess gives him until evening to find the ransom money. By chance Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse have also just arrived in Ephesus. The other Antipholus and Dromio have been living there since the wreck. And so the comedy of errors ensues. The locals constantly mistake the visiting twins for the natives—even Antipholus of Ephesus' wife Andriana and her sister Luciana are fooled. The confusions result in Antipholus of Ephesus being arrested for debt and declared mad, while Antipholus of Syracuse takes refuge from his brother's angry wife in a Priory—where the abbess turns out to be Aegeon's long-lost wife. All is resolved and Aegeon is freed.

For a more indepth summary and synopsis, as well as a translation visit:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/errors/>

Activities in the Classroom

Activity #1 – A Debate over Marriage

Marriage and unions are a major theme in *The Comedy of Errors*. In the play, the characters of Luciana and Adriana have differing opinions on marriage. While Adriana's marriage to Antipholus of Ephesus is managed by compromise and is heavily worked on, Luciana represents an ideal view of marriage in which a wife patiently bears her husband's flaws and mistreatment.

Have your class do some research into the role of marriage at the time to help prepare them for the debate.

Divide your class into 3 groups. One group will represent Luciana's view of marriage and another group will represent Adriana's views. (Feel free to have fun and actually role play the entire debate based in that time. This would involve more research into the play and the characters involved). The third group will serve as the judges. The judges will have to come up with specific points in the script that discuss marriage and create questions for the two groups debating. This third group, of course, can decide the winner, if you choose to have one.

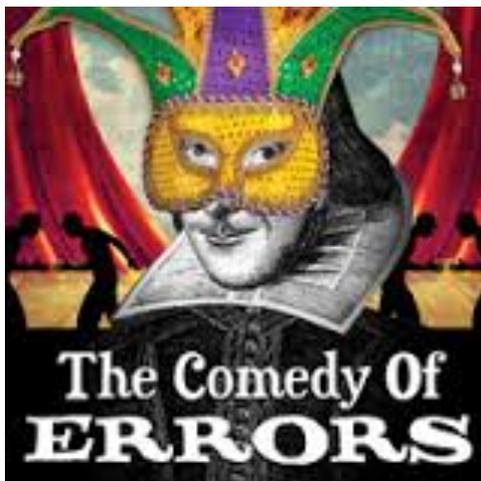
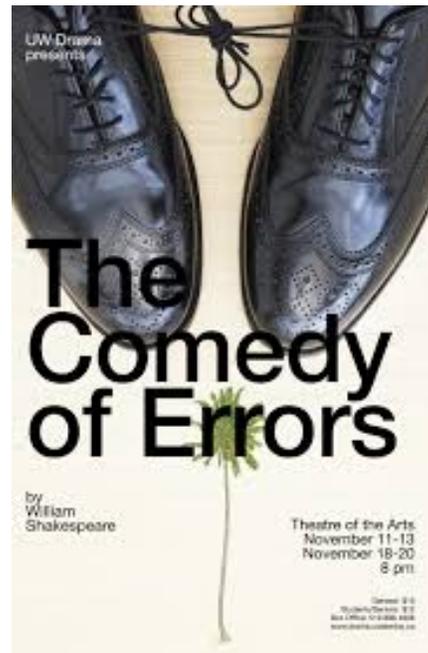
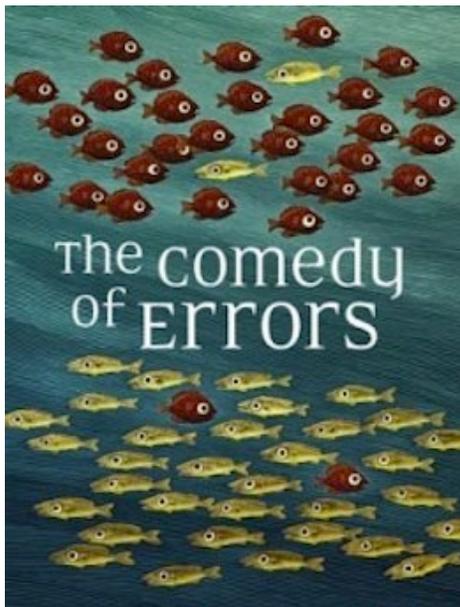
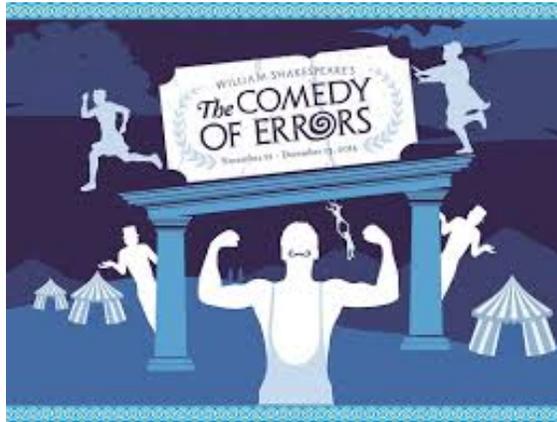
Activity #2 - Takes on Shakes

William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* has been adapted many times since its first recorded performance on December 28, 1594 in London, England. *The Comedy of Errors* has been written as an opera, a musical, prose, as well as adapted to film and television. Of course, its most common genre is the stage.

In Western Canada Theatre's production of *The Comedy of Errors*, director Daryl Cloran has decided to create this world in the Vaudeville era. Changes were made to the original script to include a play full of magicians, strongmen, comedians and singers all contributing to a distinct Vaudeville context and performance style. All changes were made to support the world of this play and the way in which the director wishes to tell the story.

Because Shakespeare is no longer living, his scripts have become **public domain**. This gives writers, adaptors and directors the liberty to change parts of the script, whether that be characters, setting or themes. *The Comedy of Errors* has seen many different tones, including everything from a traditional piece to a modern day version set in Portland, and even to a futuristic Victorian sci-fi take that used machinery, moody music and gas masks to illustrate that we are all just "cogs in the wheel" of life. Liberty, indeed!!

Below are 6 images that have existed for *The Comedy of Errors*. Show each to the class and discuss how the image may reflect a certain choice that was made by the director or writer. What does the art suggest?



Discuss with the class how they feel about directors and/or writers taking liberties with what many literary historians believe to be sacred. Is there a limit? Do we owe anything to William Shakespeare? Do we even know his original intention? How would Shakespeare feel about this?

Activity #3: Sources of Humour

William Shakespeare uses several sources of humour in *The Comedy of Errors*. With the class, go over the following types of humour. While in discussion be sure to ask for modern day examples of what you see below.

Language: puns, images, bawdy, images, jokes

Physical comedy

Mistaken Identity

Plot

Character

Misunderstanding

Coincidence

Timing

Surprise

Once all students understand these terms, have them find examples of them in the play (this will work well after seeing the play but still using the written play as well).

Activity #4: The Comedy of Magic

In the play, there are many instances of magic and enchantment. The script itself holds much talk of sorcerers and evil spirits, but the choice of the director has also added many elements of magic to the live showing of *The Comedy of Errors*. Have your class talk about the examples within the script as well as the examples they saw on stage. How did theatregoers of Shakespeare's time feel about the supernatural? What did its influence have on the people's lives? In the play, what commentary does the character of Dr. Pinch have the concept of magic?

Now, let's have some fun! Tell your students that you will be hosting a magic show. They can group together however they wish to put on a show of wonder! It doesn't mean everyone has to perform, but all students should be involved in the process. Students could learn simple magic tricks (cards are a good start!) or tell a tale of a crazy phenomenon, perform acts of contortion or amazement, or even perform ventriloquism! Students that don't wish to be up in front of the class can research an incredible wonder that was performed and retell it to the class. Be sure that students check in early with you on their idea to ensure safety protocols are being followed!

Activity #5: A Post-Show Discussion

1. Discuss the play with your class. What did they like, what did they find challenging? Why? Ask for specifics to generate a more intense conversation.
2. Discuss the idea of tragedy in comedy. Relate it directly to the play you have just seen. Talk about the presence of Aegeon in the beginning and end of the play. Why would Shakespeare write such seriousness in such a comedic play? Can you think of other examples of this kind of tragedy amongst comedy in a current play, movie or TV show?
3. Discuss the part played by material items in the play (money) and its effect on the characters.
4. What are some of the themes that are prevalent in this play? (some examples are: money and commerce, family and marriage, appearance and identity, coincidence, status, scapegoats). Which theme stood out the most to you and why?
5. If you and your students have read the play, discuss the adaptation of the play they just saw. Discuss some of choices that the director made and how it may have altered their original thoughts surrounding the play. What changes did you enjoy?

Curriculum Connections

Drama	Historical and Aesthetic Context Exploring, Drama Forms Performance Context
Arts Education	Social and Cultural Context
Music	Thoughts, Images and Feelings Context Historical
Language Arts	Oral Language, Reading and Viewing, Speaking and Listening
Social Studies	Society and Culture

Works Sited

The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works, The Royal Shakespeare Company, 2007.

Biography.com/people/William-shakespeare

Playshakespeare.com

Sparknotes.com/Shakespeare/errors/

Wikipedia.ca