

How Has Performing Shakespeare Helped You Appreciate His Work?

Developing an Ear for Shakespeare

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Every time I heard the name “Shakespeare” on TV, the only thing that popped into my head was *Romeo and Juliet*, that powerful love story that is famous in every language, including Arabic. When I lived in Yemen I heard about *Romeo and Juliet*, but Shakespeare was just a name attached to *Romeo and Juliet*. He never rang a bell in my head; I never really understood the point of the story, either. That changed in the fall semester of 2007, when I started my Theater Art class with Ms. Ann.

The first project we did was on Shakespeare. We researched about him, where was he from, what he did, and his famous books and poems. The only thing I knew about him before was that he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, and apparently I wasn't the only one. We read a version of *Romeo and Juliet* and we also watched two different movies. Soon it was our time to act it out.

The language was so different from what we speak right now, and therefore it wasn't easy to memorize. But I felt the words and their meanings. They were so powerful and I understood why they weren't common like many other stories. It gave Shakespeare's work a unique taste for me and a great connection. His words made me feel what *Romeo and Juliet* was really about.

Fortunately, we were lucky to have a dancer come in and teach us an Elizabethan line dance. We practiced it and it was different from what we dance

now, but it had a fresh flavor even though it was old. We also had a stage combat with the Shakespeare Society teaching artists. They talked to us about Shakespeare and his work and we acted a small performance of scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Acting out the play allowed me to understand the whole story better, and I still wonder, Is the story really true? Was there ever a love this strong? And if not, can Shakespeare be this dramatic and write this magnificent story from the top of his head? After I acted out a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, I understood it more. I actually felt the story. That also changed the way I think about Shakespeare and it made me realize why his work is so famous and important.

I remember watching TV recently with my little sister, and we were watching the Disney Channel's *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. They mentioned a phrase that Shakespeare once said, and they also explained the phrase in the English we use today. But now to my ears they didn't have to; it sounded more beautiful and romantic the way Shakespeare said it. Thanks to that theater class, I could give Shakespeare the credit that he deserves.

Acting Shakespeare

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When I first read a Shakespeare play, I was not sure what to make of it. The letters looked familiar, but the words they formed were confusing. I admit that I was only eleven years old, but I was a prolific