

The Acting Company

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The Comedy of Errors

By William Shakespeare

Music for the RSC 1976 Production by Guy Woolfenden

Lyrics by Trevor Nunn

The Acting Company 2001 production Directed by John Rando

Teacher Resource Guide
by **Paul Michael Fontana**

Welcome

To The Teacher:

Since its founding in 1972, **The Acting Company** has taken great pride in performing classic plays for student audiences.

This **Teacher Resource Guide** has been designed to help you uncover elements of *The Comedy of Errors* that you want to teach. It is our hope that you will take the exercises and shape them to your needs and the needs of your students. Many of them employ drama-based activities that can be adapted to other material. If you have any questions about the activities in this guide or need other resources, please call the Education Department at **The Acting Company**: 212-944-5517 or e-mail us at mail@TheActingCompany.org.

Enjoy!

Paul Michael Fontana
Director of Education

This **Teacher Resource Guide** for *The Comedy of Errors* has four parts:

Section One, **Getting Your Students Started**, has lesson plans for starting to read *The Comedy of Errors* with your students, including a four-week schedule for reading the play.

The second part focuses on reading and viewing *The Comedy of Errors*, and is entitled **The Play: Things to Look For**.

Section Three of the Guide is about **The Playwright: William Shakespeare**. You will find an outline of his life and career and information about the Elizabethan Era.

The fourth part focuses on **The Theater** and the people who create it.

Getting Started

- **Overall Objective:** The students will have an introduction to the world of William Shakespeare's play, *The Comedy of Errors*

Brainstorm from the Title: Shakespeare's Play

Objective:

- The students will explore the plot of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*

It is strongly suggested that students read at least some of *The Comedy of Errors* before seeing the performance if possible.

Facts: Shakespeare's plays, including *The Comedy of Errors*, are written in five acts. It is not known whether, during performances at Elizabethan theaters, there were intermissions during these acts, brief musical interludes or if the play went on for two hours with no pauses.

Exercise: Have the students brainstorm a list of the types of characters, situations, emotions, themes, locations, and images they think might be included in a play called *The Comedy of Errors*. Write the list on newsprint. Post it before seeing *The Comedy of Errors*.

Discussion: Judging a Book by its Cover

Objective:

- The students will discuss their expectations of *The Comedy of Errors* from looking at the words and images on the cover of the play script.
- The students will discuss the choices made by publishers and executives to put the images and words on the cover.

Exercise: Bring in copies of the script of *The Comedy of Errors*. Ask the students to look at the cover of their copy and the other copies in the room.

Ask them to share with the class images on the covers. What function do those images have? Note too the colors on the cover. What do the colors mean and why were they chosen? Do these images help sell this edition?

What words did the publishers choose to put on the cover? In what font is the title of the play? What other words or phrases are on the cover? Do these words and phrases help sell this edition? Are you more likely to buy a book or magazine based on images or words? Are there images and words on the back cover?

Why did Shakespeare choose this title? Did he feel the title would help sell tickets to the play?

Post Performance follow up: Ask the students to create a poster or book cover for *The Comedy of Errors*. They can cut images out of magazines and newspapers or draw them. What words will they include and why?

Synopsis: This play is about the separation, then reunion, of Aegeon and Aemelia (husband and wife); their twin sons, Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse; and their twin servants, Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse. The family was separated at sea during a storm, 33 years before the action of the play. Aegeon, Antipholus of Syracuse, and Dromio of Syracuse survived together in the city of Syracuse in Sicily.

Seven years before the play, they have decided to search, separately, for their lost family members. Aemelia survived the shipwreck with her son Antipholus of Ephesus and slave Dromio of Ephesus, only to have fishermen steal the boys from her. In sorrow, she became a nun in the town of Ephesus in Turkey. By a twist of fate, Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus moved to Ephesus too, though they didn't know Aemelia was there. Antipholus of Ephesus married Adriana, and her sister Luciana lives with them. That's all before the play even starts...

All of the action of *The Comedy of Errors* takes place in one day. In Act 1, scene 1, the now elderly Aegeon, who has arrived in Ephesus (where people from Syracuse are forbidden by law), tells the sad story of the sea storm and shipwreck to Solinus, the Duke of Ephesus. Unfortunately, Aegeon must be executed at sunset unless he can pay a large fee.

Soon after Aegeon's speech, his son, Antipholus of Syracuse, and servant, Dromio of Syracuse, enter the city, searching for their long-lost twins. The citizens of Ephesus easily confuse the sons and their servants with their identical twin brothers. Angelo, the goldsmith; the Courtesan; various merchants; Nell, Adriana's cook and fiancée to Dromio of Ephesus; and the citizens are bewildered. They all think Antipholus and Dromio are either insane or possessed, since they say bizarre things to everyone, act strangely, and seem to be able to move from place to place like magic. Doctor Pinch, an exorcist, even tries to get the devil out of Antipholus of Ephesus' body.

At sunset, the hour of Aegeon's execution, the old father recognizes his son Antipholus of Ephesus. Of course, Antipholus of Ephesus does not recognize his father, not having seen him since he was a baby. Simultaneously, Aemelia appears from the convent with Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse, who have taken refuge there, and the family is reunited. The Duke pardons Aegeon for entering the city, Antipholus of Syracuse who has fallen in love with Luciana (much to the confusion of Adriana and Luciana) begins to woo her for marriage, and Aemelia holds a feast to rejoice the family's reunion.

Exercise: Relate the plot synopsis above to your students. Discuss the title of *The Comedy of Errors* in relation to its story. Discuss the brainstormed list. Were any of the items on the list included in the synopsis? After seeing *The Comedy of Errors*, check how many items from the list were in the play.

Post-Show Text Analysis: The Origins of the Play

Objective:

- The students will know the classical origins of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*.

Facts:

Titus Maccius Plautus (c. 254 – 184 BCE) Plautus came from a Roman peasant family and worked for a time as a stagehand in a traveling theatrical troupe. He wrote 130 comedies, of which 21 have come down to us. He drew on Greek comedies as sources of inspiration. He used stock characters such as merchants, misers, courtesans, crafty servants, and identical twins. His play *The Brothers Menaechmus* (called *Menaechmi* in Plautus' language, Latin) is the basis for Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*.

Terence (c. 186 – 159 BCE) Terence was a native of North Africa, and was brought to Rome as a slave. He wrote six comedies, all of which survive. His plays were clever, refined, and witty. He was a learned man and his learning impressed his master, a Roman Senator, who granted him his freedom. *The Brothers* by Terence was probably also an inspiration for *The Comedy of Errors*.

Exercise: After seeing *The Comedy of Errors*, present your students with the following text from *Menaechmi* and have them identify the scene that most closely corresponded in the play.

Menachmus

Hah – my wife thinks that she hurts me, when she shuts the door on me.
But, as far as entering, I've got another, better place.
You don't like me? I'll live through it since Erotium here does.
She won't close me out, she'll close me tightly in her arms, she will.

Text-based Improv: Insult-Building

Objective:

- The students will explore Shakespearean language by constructing insults.

Exercise: Give each student a copy of the Insult-building worksheet below. To construct a Shakespearean insult, ask them to combine one word from each of the three columns below, and preface it with "Thou."

Another list of Shakespearean insults is found as an appendix to this Teacher Resource Guide

Column 1**Adjectives**

artless
 bawdy
 beslobbering
 bootless
 churlish
 cockered
 clouted
 craven
 currish
 dankish
 dissembling
 droning
 errant
 fawning
 fobbing
 froward
 frothy
 gleeking
 goatish
 gorbellied
 impertinent
 infectious
 jarring
 loggerheaded
 lumpish
 mammering
 mangled
 mewling
 paunchy
 pribbling
 puking
 puny
 qualling
 rank
 reeky
 roguish
 ruttish
 saucy
 spleeny
 spongy
 surly
 tottering
 unmuzzled
 vain
 venomed
 villainous
 warped
 wayward
 weedy
 yeasty

Column 2**Adjectives**

base-court
 bat-fowling
 beef-witted
 beetle-headed
 boil-brained
 clapper-clawed
 clay-brained
 common-kissing
 crook-pated
 dismal-dreaming
 dizzy-eyed
 doghearted
 dread-bolted
 earth-vexing
 elf-skinned
 fat-kidneyed
 fen-sucked
 flap-mouthed
 fly-bitten
 folly-fallen
 fool-born
 full-gorged
 guts-griping
 half-faced
 hasty-witted
 hedge-born
 hell-hated
 idle-headed
 ill-breeding
 ill-nurtured
 knotty-pated
 milk-livered
 motley-minded
 onion-eyed
 plume-plucked
 pottle-deep
 pox-marked
 reeling-ripe
 rough-hewn
 rude-growing
 rump-fed
 shard-borne
 sheep-biting
 spur-galled
 swag-bellied
 tardy-gaited
 tickle-brained
 toad-spotted
 unchin-snouted
 weather-bitten

Column 3**Nouns**

apple-john
 baggage
 barnacle
 bladder
 boar-pig
 bugbear
 bum-bailey
 canker-blossom
 clack-dish
 clotpole
 coxcomb
 codpiece
 death-token
 dewberry
 flap-dragon
 flax-wench
 flirt-gill
 foot-licker
 fustilarian
 giglet
 gudgeon
 haggard
 harpy
 hedge-pig
 horn-beast
 hugger-mugger
 joithead
 lewdster
 lout
 maggot-pie
 malt-worm
 mammet
 measle
 minnow
 miscreant
 moldwarp
 mumble-news
 nut-hook
 pigeon-egg
 pignut
 puttock
 pumpkin
 ratsbane
 scut
 skainsmate
 strumpet
 varlet
 vassal
 whey-face
 wagtail

The First Performance

Objective:

- The students will know some details of the first production of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Facts: *The Comedy of Errors* was first performed December 28, 1594 for a law school (Gray's Inn, one of the Inns of Court). It was done, as were most of Shakespeare's plays, with a very simple setting, probably only three doors, as Plautus' *Menaechmi* was probably first done. The law school audience would have been familiar with Plautus' play in Latin – Greek and Roman culture was very popular in the Elizabethan era. They would have noticed the ways that Shakespeare altered the source play. He moved the action from Epidamnus (a Greek city) to Ephesus in Turkey – a city associated in Shakespeare's time with trickery and thieving.

Mapping: Ephesus and Syracuse

Objectives

- The students will examine a map of the Mediterranean Sea
- The students will explore choices made by an author

Exercise: Is Ephesus a real place or a fictional one? How about Syracuse? Help the students to locate these cities on a modern map of Mediterranean Sea. Point out London, where William lived. Remind them that Shakespeare probably never visited Ephesus or Syracuse. How did Shakespeare learn enough about the cities to write about them? Did he make some details up? Are Ephesus and Syracuse real places or a fictional one? A little bit of both. Brainstorm why Shakespeare might have set the play in Ephesus. Would the play be different if he had set it in China? Or Denmark?

Dramatic Irony

Objective

- The students will know the definition of the literary term "Dramatic Irony"
- The students will write a scene with Dramatic Irony
- The students will identify Dramatic Irony in TV shows and movies

Facts: Dramatic Irony occurs when the audience is aware of information in the story that is unknown to the characters. For example, in a horror film, when the audience knows that the killer is behind one of the characters, ready to kill him, but the character is unaware of the killer's presence. The Irony creates suspense and tension. Similarly, in *The Comedy of Errors*, the audience is aware very early in the play that the Antipholus of Syracuse is being mistaken for his long-lost twin brother. The comedy comes as the audience watches the havoc caused by the mistaken identity. If the audience was not aware of the presence of the twin brothers, the play would not be as funny.

Exercise: Working in pairs, ask the students to write a short scene that includes Dramatic Irony. One of the difficulties in creating Irony is informing the audience of information that is hidden from the characters. How does Shakespeare overcome that difficulty in *The Comedy of Errors*?

Provide extra credit to students who bring in examples of Dramatic Irony from television and films.

Characters in The Comedy of Errors

Objective

- The students will be familiar with the characters in the play.
- The students will make assumptions about characters based on their names.

Exercise: Reproduce the following page for the class.

Approaching it as if we have never heard anything about these characters, discuss what each of the names makes us feel about them. What consonants are featured in their names? What vowels? Ask the students to play with ways of saying the names.

Why doesn't the Courtesan have a name? What is a Courtesan? How powerful is Duke Solinus?"

Writing in Role: the First Scene

Objective:

- The students will analyze a scene from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will write in the voice of a fictional character
- The students will make assumptions about the fictional world of the play based on the list of characters

Exercise: Ask the students to read Act 1, Scene I of *The Comedy of Errors*. Based on that scene, each student should write an essay as the Travel Reporter for The Corinth Daily Times describing Ephesus and their treatment of foreigners. What type of vibe does the reporter get from the people? Is there any real danger? Do they really intend to execute Aegeon? What sort of person is Duke Solinus? The reporters should use quotes from the scene to describe what they have seen and heard.

In a related "These Are the People in Your Neighborhood" extension of the assignment, they can also refer to the cast of characters in their writing. What professions are found in Ephesus? What goods and services are available to the traveler?

The Characters in *The Comedy of Errors*

Solinus	Duke of Ephesus
Aegeon	Merchant of Syracuse, Aemelia's long-lost husband
Aemelia	Abbess at Ephesus, Aegeon's long-lost wife
Antipholus of Syracuse	Twin son of Aegeon and Aemelia
Antipholus of Ephesus	Twin son of Aegeon and Aemelia
Adriana	Wife of Antipholus of Ephesus
Luciana	Adriana's sister
Dromio of Syracuse	Twin slave of Antipholus of Syracuse
Dromio of Ephesus	Twin slave of Antipholus of Ephesus
Lucy (or Nell)	Adriana's kitchen-maid
A Courtesan	
Balthazar	A merchant
Angelo	A goldsmith
First Merchant	Friend to Antipholus of Syracuse
Second Merchant	
Dr. Pinch	An Exorcist
An Officer	
A Gaoler (Jailer)	Keeper of the Prison
Townspeople	Citizens of Ephesus

The Play: Things to Look For

- **Overall Objective:** The students will learn a variety of ways to analyze Shakespearean texts and find specific things to look for in **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Theme of the Play

Objective:

- The students will look for an underlying theme in *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will discuss themes in literature

Exercise: As the students read and/or see *The Comedy of Errors*, ask them to look beyond the comedy and find some deeper meaning in the play. Director John Rando suggests that the play is about the reconciliation of two cities, the reunion of a family, and the restoration of peace through the power of brotherhood and sisterhood. What are some of the themes that the students see in the play? Can a piece of art or literature have different meanings to different observers?

A Merchant Society

Objective:

- The students will look for references to getting and spending in *The Comedy of Errors*

Exercise: In *The Comedy of Errors*, the city of Ephesus is mercantile society. Everything, from Love and Sex to Food and Clothes, even human life itself, can be purchased. Ask the students as they read or see the play to look for incidents of getting and spending among the population of Ephesus. After seeing the production, discuss these interactions with the class.

Soundscape: Corrupt Ephesus!

Objective:

- The students will examine a passage from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will create a soundscape illustrating the description

Exercise: Almost as soon as he arrives in Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse reminds himself in a soliloquy of the bad reputation the city has. The description at the end of Act 1, scene II provides a world for the play. In Shakespeare's time, Ephesus was a city noted for its loose morals and high crime rate. Ask the students to read this description. Ask them to decide whether this is rhymed verse, blank verse, or prose. Assign each line of verse to a small group of students and ask them to create a "soundscape" of their line. Using sound only, they will convey the mood and meaning of the line. After a few minutes, read the passage aloud as they present the soundscape under it, adding each sound to the cacophony as you continue to read.

Antipholus of Syracuse

They say this town is full of cozenage,
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguiséd cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin:
If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.

Act 1, scene II

Text Analysis: Puns

Objective:

- The students will explore the use of **puns** as a literary device.
- The students will learn about the Elizabethan fondness for wordplay.
- The students will insult one another in Elizabethan style.

Facts: In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, verbal eloquence was honored above all other accomplishments. The Elizabethans were amused and fascinated by language especially by puns. They also loved insults. To have a friend yell “Roundly answered!” after a well turned phrase was a tremendous compliment!

A **Pun** is play on words based on the similarity of sound between two different words with different meanings. Puns are as common a source of jokes today as they were when Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*.

The Comedy of Errors contains many puns. Both of the Dromios are masters of puns.

Exercise: Have the students keep a running list of the puns they notice as they read *The Comedy of Errors* and who said them. What do the subject of the puns they use tell us about the characters who say them?

Text Analysis: A Drop of Water

Objective:

- The students will interpret a comparison from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will explore the concept of identity
- The students will write an essay about their first name

Facts: One of the most famous speeches in *The Comedy of Errors* comes in Act 1. Antipholus of Syracuse reflects on the state of being a twin brother who has lost his brother. He worries that he will lose himself in the process of finding his family.

Exercise: Have the students, working in pairs, examine and interpret the following passage. What is the tone of the speech? Is it addressed to another character or is it a soliloquy? Is the character still or in motion? What choices might the actor and director make based on the text?

After seeing the play, discuss with the students how Director John Rando and actor Corey Behnke staged the speech.

Antipholus of Syracuse

He that commends me to mine own content
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself:
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

Act 1, scene II

Exercise: Antipholus fears losing himself as he searches for his brother, and that is what happens in the play. Identity is one of the themes of *The Comedy of Errors*. It is a play of mistaken identity. Later in the play, Dromio of Syracuse asks his master “Do you know me sir? Am I Dromio? Am I myself? Am I your man?” Ask the students to write a paragraph-long essay on his or her first name. Where did the name come from? Do they like their name? Why or why not? Does it represent their identity? If they could change it, what would they change it to and why?

Behind the Scenes: Do the words of William Shakespeare come naturally to everyone? Todd Cerveris, Dromio of Ephesus in The Acting Company production of *The Comedy of Errors* says, “I didn’t always like Shakespeare. Then I realized that he does something that few other playwrights do – he uses the rhythm of the words, the sounds of the words and the size of the ideas that his words talk about to tell really big stories. It’s not just what they mean, it’s how they sound. That’s why the plays can sound so odd when you read them on the page. On the other hand, when you see a production, the actors are making choices about the text to make the poetry clearer for you. These are plays, they’re meant to be performed, to come alive. That’s why it’s exciting to do *The Comedy of Errors* for student audiences!”

Symbols: Name Your House

Objective:

- The students will identify houses named in *The Comedy of Errors* and explore the symbolism of the names.
- The students will create an animal name for their own houses and draw a sign for the name they chose.
- The students will identify some businesses that currently use symbols to represent themselves.

Facts: The Action of *The Comedy of Errors* centers around the market square (“The Mart”) in the center of the city of Ephesus. There is a door to Antipholus of Ephesus’ house, a door to “The Porpentine” where the Courtesan runs her

brothel, an abbey, and, in The Acting Company production, the city gate – the way out of town.

Exercise: In the play, four houses are given names. Antipholus of Ephesus and his wife Adriana live at “The Phoenix.” The Courtesan and her people live at “The Porpentine” (Shakespeare’s word for a porcupine). Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio are staying at an Inn called “The Centaur.” Antipholus of Ephesus and his business associates eat lunch at an inn called “The Tiger.” Ask the students what images each of those names conjures in their minds. What are the ideas or emotions each of those names evokes?

As a writing assignment, ask if they were to name their own house for an animal, real or mythological, what would they choose and why.

Facts: In Shakespeare’s time, few people could read. Stores, Taverns, and other businesses used signs symbolizing the type of business they were (for example, a red and white striped pole for barbers, three golden balls for pawn shops, etc) or signs depicting the name of the company (the corporate logo of the day).

Ask the students to draw signs for their houses based on the animal they chose in the first part of this exercise. You might want them, instead, to draw signs for the four buildings mentioned in *The Comedy of Errors*: The Phoenix, The Porpentine, The Centaur, and The Tiger.

Ask the students to identify other stores and businesses are identified by symbols? What are some corporate logos that are easy to recognize?

Movement: A Time and a Season for All Things

Objective:

- The students will compare a passage in *The Comedy of Errors* to another written work.
- The students will create a movement piece based on a piece of early 17th Century Literature.

Facts: In act one of The Acting Company’s production of *The Comedy of Errors* Dromio of Syracuse sings a song, taken from Antipholus of Syracuse’s line “Learn to jest in good time: there’s a time for all things.” This is likely meant to be a paraphrase of a passage in the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes. The selection below is from The King James Version of that passage. Some scholars think that Shakespeare may have been one of the poets who contributed to the creation of the King James Version, which was first printed in 1611.

Exercise: Joey McNeely, choreographer of *The Comedy of Errors* has many of the ideas in the song illustrated through movement. Ask the students, in small groups, to create images to go along with one of the numbered lines of the passage from Ecclesiastes. Give them two minutes to come up with a set of tableaux (frozen images) to illustrate their quote. When everyone has completed the process, read (or have a volunteer read) the entire piece and have the

students show their tableaux as their verse is read.

Ecclesiastes (Chapter 3, Verses 1ff)

To every thing there is a season,
And a time to every purpose under the heaven:

1. A time to be born, and a time to die;
2. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
3. A time to kill, and a time to heal;
4. A time to break down, and a time to build up;
5. A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
6. A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
7. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
8. A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
9. A time to get, and a time to lose;
10. A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
11. A time to rend, and a time to sew;
12. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
13. A time to love, and a time to hate;
14. A time of war, and a time of peace.

Exorcism and Witchcraft

Objective:

- The students will look for accusations of witchcraft and insanity in the performance of *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will look for different “cures” for demonic possession in the play

Exercise: Throughout *The Comedy of Errors*, because of the confusion and the mistaken identity, characters are assumed to be possessed by the Devil, in league with the Devil, witches, or crazy. Everyone has a different way of dealing with the situation. Ask the students attending or reading the play to watch for these references to demonic possession and the cures for it. After the performance, discuss the variety of accusations of and treatments, from “syrups and holy prayers” to tying the possessed and throwing him in a “dark and dankish vault” in the cellar.

Behind the Scenes: Corey Behnke who plays Antipholus of Syracuse in **The Acting Company** production of *The Comedy of Errors* says that when he is preparing to work on a play by Shakespeare, he looks up the unfamiliar words and allusions. “Sometimes it’s like learning a new language,” he says, “the more you study it, the easier understanding becomes. You need to be open to the words and have a vivid imagination.”

Verse and Prose

Objective:

- The students will discover the differences between **verse** and **prose** in *The Comedy of Errors*.
- The students will learn the literary terms **iambic Pentameter**, **Blank Verse**, and **Rhyming Couplet**.

Facts: Some of what Shakespeare wrote is in verse. Some of the verse is in iambic Pentameter. Pentameter is a line of poetry having five metrical feet (“Penta-” is the prefix meaning five; as in Pentagon). An iamb is a metrical foot having two syllables, the first one short, and the second long. So, iambic Pentameter feels like a heartbeat: Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**.

One example from Act 4, scene II of the play:

Adriana

Ah **Luciana**, **did** he **tempt** thee **so**?

Might **thou** **perceive** **austerely** in his **eye**

That **he** did **plead** in **earnest**, **yea** or **no**?

Look’d **he** or **red** or **pale**, or **merrily**?

What **observation** **madest** thou in this **case**

Of **his** hearts **meteors** **tilting** in his **face**?

Some of the verse is in **Rhyming Couplets**, pairs of lines of iambic Pentameter that rhyme. The last two lines of the passage above are a rhyming couplet. The rhyming couplet was often used at the end of scenes to indicate to the audience, the other actors, and the crew, that the scene is over.

Much of the verse in Shakespeare’s plays rhymes, however **Blank Verse** is a kind of poetry that does not rhyme, and is written in iambic Pentameter.

Some of the characters in Shakespeare speak in **Prose**. Prose is common language that does not necessarily have an underlying rhythmical sound to it. Usually servants or the lower classes speak prose in Shakespeare’s plays.

Exercise: Ask the students to look at the script of *The Comedy of Errors*. Point out the groups of lines that are indented on the left margin and are rough on the right margin. These are the lines of verse. Some of them rhyme, and some do not.

Exercise: In *The Comedy of Errors*, Adriana and Luciana, who are sisters, speak much of their dialogue in rhyming couplets. Ask two students to read Act 4, scene II (below, up to the entrance of Dromio) aloud. After they read it aloud ask few other pairs (don’t worry about having it read by two female students – it can be interpreted by male students as well). Have the class notice the iambic Pentameter in the scene. Discuss the feelings that speaking and hearing rhyming couplets spoken by two characters evokes. What do the half lines mean? What does Shakespeare want their speech pattern to imply about the intimacy between them? Notice what the women are talking about when the back-and-forth use of couplets ends.

Luciana: First he denied you had in him no right.

Adriana: He meant he did me none; the more my spite.

Luciana: Then swore he that he was a stranger here.

Adriana: And true he swore, though yet forsworn he were.

Luciana: Then pleaded I for you.

Adriana:	And what said he?
Luciana:	That love I begg'd for you he begg'd of me.
Adriana:	With what persuasion did he tempt thy love?
Luciana:	With words that in an honest suit might move. First he did praise my beauty, then my speech.
Adriana:	Didst speak him fair?
Luciana:	Have patience, I beseech.
Adriana:	I cannot, nor I will not, hold me still; My tongue, though not my heart, shall have his will. He is deformed, crooked, old and sere, Ill-faced, worse bodied, shapeless everywhere; Vicious, ungentle, foolish, blunt, unkind; Stigmatical in making, worse in mind.
Luciana:	Who would be jealous then of such a one? No evil lost is wail'd when it is gone.
Adriana:	Ah, but I think him better than I say, And yet would herein others' eyes were worse. Far from her nest the lapwing cries away: My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse.
	Act 4, scene II

Descriptions

Objective:

- The students will do a close reading of a description from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will create a scene or tableau based on a Shakespearean description
- The students will discuss “point of view” and “unreliable narrators” in reference to descriptions from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will analyze how the actors use other characters’ descriptions in making choices about a character
- The students will draw a picture of a character in *The Comedy of Errors* based on a description

Exercise: Ask the students to read Adriana’s description of Antipholus of Ephesus, above, and Antipholus of Ephesus’ description of Dr. Pinch (Act 5, scene I, line 237 ff.). Divide the class into two groups. Assign each group one of the descriptions. Each group will dramatize their description. The dramatization may be in a series of tableaux, a single tableau, a silent scene, or another theatrical form. Allow 20 minutes for the groups to rehearse their dramatization. Provide dictionaries for the groups who may need to look up words. Give a “one minute” warning and ask them to do a “final dress rehearsal” before they have to present the piece to the other group.

After both groups have presented, ask whether the students think the characters described are as bad as their describers indicate. If a description comes from an unreliable narrator, the audience can draw conclusions about the speaker, the person or thing described, and the relationship between them. Authors often write from a single point of view, whose understanding of the world is based on

their specific experience of emotional state.

Actors in a play must use descriptions by other characters to help create the character they are playing. Evan Robertson and Elliot Dash, who play Antipholus of Ephesus and Dr. Pinch respectively, used these descriptions in making choices about their characters. They also took into account that the speaker may be exaggerating, lying, confused, or otherwise wrong about their character.

Exercise: Ask each student to draw a picture of Nell, kitchen maid to Adriana and wife to Dromio of Ephesus, based on Dromio of Syracuse's description of her in Act 3, scene II.

Writing: Travel Supplies

Objective:

- The students will do a close reading of a passage from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will write, as the character Dromio, an entry from his journal

Exercise: When the visiting Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are eager to leave Ephesus, Dromio engages a ship to take them away. He rushes around buying supplies for the journey. Using his description below, ask the students to write, for homework, a short diary entry from Dromio's journal explaining his choices of supplies for the sea voyage. The students can share them with the whole class and they can discuss the perceived meanings of the strange supplies.

Dromio of Syracuse

Master, there is a bark of Epidamnum
That stays but till her owner comes aboard,
And then, sir, she bears away. Our fraughtage, sir,
I have convey'd aboard; and I have bought
The oil, the balsamum and aqua-vitae.
The ship is in her trim; the merry wind
Blows fair from land: they stay for nought at all
But for their owner, master, and yourself.

Act 4, scene I

Discussion: Sanctuary

Objective:

- The students will know the Medieval tradition of "Sanctuary"
- The students will discuss where people in the 21st Century find sanctuary
- The students will brainstorm games that include a safety zone

Facts: In medieval times, the church building was considered "Sanctuary," a place where people could seek refuge and be safe from civil persecution. Church doors were painted red so that they would be easy for people being chased to find them. Many churches still have red doors. In Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Esmerelda seeks sanctuary inside the cathedral in Paris.

Exercise: At the end of *The Comedy of Errors*, two of the characters run to an Abbey, or Convent, for “Sanctuary.” Discuss with the students where people feel safe in modern society. What sorts of sanctuaries are there for people today. For modern criminals? For modern refugees? For teenagers?

Exercise: Brainstorm games (sports, schoolyard games, and board games) that have a “sanctuary” or safety zone. Are there elements of sanctuary in games like statue tag and hide-and-go-seek?

The Letter to the Ephesians

Objective:

- The students will make comparisons between themes in *The Comedy of Errors* and in another piece of literature.

Facts: Shakespeare would have been very familiar with the biblical Letter of St. Paul to the Church at Ephesus, “The Letter to the Ephesians.” Chapter 5 and 6 of the Letter deal with some of the same issues that come up in *The Comedy of Errors*, which is set in Ephesus. Some of the themes include the relationship of husband and wife, the relationship between parents and children, and the relationship between masters and slaves.

Vocabulary

[A Mere] Anatomy - skeleton
Aspect - attitude show on the face
Bald - without hair, also without substance
Bark - Ship
Beads - Rosary, Dromio feels they will protect him from witchcraft
Bereft, 'Reft - lacking
Beshrew - curse
Bespoke - talked about
Bond - Contract, also restraint
Choleric - Grumpy, prone to be angry
Circe - Sorceress of Greek Mythology who had the power to transform men into animals
Coil - fuss
Cozenage - Cheating, deception
[Iron] Crow - Crowbar
Cuckold - Husband whose wife cheats on him, symbolized by his having horns
Disannul - to cancel
Ducats - gold coins
Excrement - That which grows out of the body, hair
Fallacy - Mistake, illusion
Flout - to mock or make a fool of
Forebear - to leave alone
Guilders - Money
Happy - Lucky, (Hap - luck)
Hie - go quickly
Horn-Mad - Acting like a crazed bull
[By] Inspiration - through magical means
Intestine Jars - deadly quarrels
Leagues - measurement of distance by water
Marks - a scar left on a person by something, or an Elizabethan coin
Mart - the main marketplace of a town
Maw - stomach
Mickel - much, a great deal of something
Minions - close friends or confederates
Mirth - happiness
Mountebank - poseur, quack
Niggard - stingy person
[A Husband's] Office - the duty of a husband to his wife
Pate - head
Rancorous - evil
[Common] Rout - Crowd
Sanctuary - a religious place used as a place of safety for the persecuted
Sauciness - full of sass, impudent
Sconce - head, small fort, or protective screen
Shrew - brawling, troublesome woman (Shrewish - badly behaved)
Spurn - kick
Strumpet - woman of low morals
Wherefore - why

The Playwright: William Shakespeare

- **Overall Objective:** The students will know the facts of the life and career of William Shakespeare and his continuing impact.

William Shakespeare's Life

Objective:

- The students will learn about Shakespeare's life
- The students will write an essay about writing.
- The students will assess what makes a good story and a good play.
- The students will write a will based on Shakespeare's will.

Facts: William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, on or near April 23, 1564. Church records from Holy Trinity Church indicate that he was baptized there on April 26, 1564. William's parents were John Shakespeare, a glover and leather merchant, and Mary Arden.

The next documented event in Shakespeare's life is his marriage to Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. William was 18 at the time, and Anne was 26 – and pregnant. Their first daughter, Susanna, was born on May 26, 1583. The couple later had twins, Hamnet and Judith, born February 2, 1585 and christened at Holy Trinity Church. Hamnet died in childhood at the age of 11, on August 11, 1596.

For seven years, William Shakespeare pretty much disappeared from all records, turning up in London circa 1592. By 1594, he was not only acting and writing for the Lord Chamberlain's Men (called the King's Men after the ascension of James I in 1603), but was a managing partner in the operation as well. With Will Kempe, a master comedian, and Richard Burbage, a leading tragic actor of the day, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became a favorite London troupe, patronized by royalty and made popular by the theater-going public. When the plague forced theater closings in the mid-1590's, Shakespeare and his company made plans for The Globe Theater in the Bankside District, which was across the river from London proper. While Shakespeare could not be accounted wealthy, by London standards, his success allowed him to purchase New House in Stratford and retire there in comfort in 1611.

When Shakespeare lived in London in the late 1500's, England was a rich and powerful nation under the leadership of Queen Elizabeth I. Moreover, the Theater was thriving! Shakespeare joined a theater company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men (which was later known as the King's Men when King James I took the throne) and was successful as an actor, poet and a playwright. He wrote 37 plays. In writing his plays, he would often use a plot he already knew or read about, convert it, add to it, and make it his own. Seven years after his death, his friends John Hemings and Henry Condell published a book containing 36 of Shakespeare's plays, called the "First Folio." His work covered many subjects and styles, including comedies, tragedies, romances, and historical plays. Shakespeare was a well-loved writer in his lifetime; and now, 400 years later, he is the most produced playwright in the world.

William Shakespeare wrote his will in 1611, bequeathing his properties to his daughter Susanna (married in 1607 to Dr. John Hall). To his surviving daughter Judith, he left £300, and to his wife Anne left "my second best bed." This bed is one of the mysteries of Shakespearean scholarship. William Shakespeare allegedly died on his birthday, April 23, 1616. This is probably more of a romantic myth than reality, but Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity in Stratford on April 25, 1616.

Exercise: Each of us knows many stories. In writing his plays, Shakespeare adapted plots he already knew or had read. Which stories are the students' favorites? Ask them to choose one story that they have read and write a one-page paper telling why it would make a good play or film. In a discussion after the assignment, ask the class to assess what makes a good story and what makes a good performance piece. What elements from their list are in *The Comedy of Errors*?

Exercise: *The Comedy of Errors* is a play about, among other things, marriage and family. Have your students write (either for homework or as an in-class assignment) a fictional letter, dated April 23, 1616, from one towns person of Stratford-upon-Avon to another. In the letter, the towns person reflects on Shakespeare's life and speculates on the "second best bed" mentioned in Will's will.

Biographically-based Text Analysis: Twins

Objective:

- The students will reflect on the autobiographical nature of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Facts: William Shakespeare and his wife were the parents of twins, Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare who were born in 1585. Hamnet died in 1596 at 11 years old. This was two years after the first performance of *The Comedy of Errors*. Like the Antipholuses (Antipholi?) and Dromios, the twin characters in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* are also separated.

Exercise: Discuss with the students how having twins Judith and Hamnet may have influenced Shakespeare to ponder the relationship between separated twins.

Exercise: Dromio says at the end of *The Comedy of Errors*, "Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother." In pairs, ask the students to work as mirrors for their partner. Without words, they should try to get "in sync" with their partners. Scientifically, many sets of twins experience non-verbal communication.

Theater in the Time of William Shakespeare

Objectives:

- The students will compare modern theatrical convention with theater in the time of Shakespeare

Exercise: Review the list below with the students. After **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*, ask the students to compare the conventions of the theater in Shakespeare's day to the performance they have just seen. For example, as in Shakespeare's time, **The Acting Company's** production used no scenery.

Theater in the Time of William Shakespeare

- The theater building was open air.
- Performances started at 2:00 to make the most of daylight.
- The stage was usually bare.
- Elizabethan theaters held 1500 - 3000 people
- There was a balcony, called the "inner above" to be used if needed, but most of the action took place downstage.
- When Shakespeare moved to London, he met with actor/manager Richard Burbage and became a prompter, then he became an actor, and later he became Burbage's star writer.
- Richard and Cuthbert Burbage opened "The Globe Theatre" in 1599.
- Shakespeare produced most of his plays in The Globe and became part owner.
- After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, Shakespeare had to write plays that would please the new King James I who had come from Scotland (one of these is *Macbeth*).
- The Globe burned down in 1613 during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, but then was rebuilt in 1614.
- Characters usually tell us where they are and what time of day it is in their lines.
- Acting was not a well-respected profession at this time.
- Women were not allowed to perform on stage, so boys would perform all female parts, including Juliet and the Nurse in *The Comedy of Errors*. Boys were apprenticed to the acting companies between the ages of 6 and 14.
- Actors would have to learn many parts of a play, since up to three different plays would be performed in the same week by a company.
- Actors usually wore their own clothes unless they were portraying someone evil, royal, or female.

Humours

Objective:

- The students will know about the belief in Bodily Humours in Elizabethan medicine
- The students will create scenes involving the Humours.
- The students will look for references to the Humours in *The Comedy of Errors*

Facts: In the time of Shakespeare, people believed that, in the human body, the *humours* were natural bodily fluids that corresponded to the four elements (air, earth, fire, and water) and had various qualities: cold, dry, hot, and moist.

Element	Humour	Quality	Nature
Fire	Choler (yellow bile)	hot and dry	Choleric (angry, temperamental)
Air	Blood	hot and moist	Sanguine (jolly, lusty)
Water	Phlegm	cold and moist	Phlegmatic (sluggish, slow)
Earth	Melancholy (black bile)	cold and dry	Melancholic (sad, lovesick)

Many people believed that when the humours were all in balance in a person, he or she is completely healthy. If they got out of balance, illness resulted. Doctors would *bleed* their patients to restore the balance, because blood was considered to have pre-eminence over the other humours.

When a piece of drama involves people with extreme emotions, indicative of imbalances of the Humours, it was considered a “Humourous” piece. Often a modern comedy contains people with heightened emotions and we dub it “humorous.”

Exercise: Divide the class into four groups and assign each one of the four Humours. Ask the students to create short scenes in which one or more of the characters are showing signs of an excess of their assigned bodily humour. As they prepare to see the play, they should listen for references to the Humours in *The Comedy of Errors* and in other literature.

Slavery

Objective:

- The students will know facts about slavery and servitude in Elizabethan England
- The students will examine a primary source document
- The students will write in character as an Elizabethan servant

Facts: In the Ancient Roman period in which Shakespeare’s play *The Comedy of Errors* is set, slavery was common. Aegeon describes buying the Dromios from their “exceeding poor” parents. Free people could sell their children into slavery.

In England, slaves were part of the fabric of English society throughout the Anglo-Saxon era and the twelfth century. However, by Shakespeare’s time, slavery had given way to “indentured service” in England. People would sign on to a household to become Indentured Servants for a period of time or for a lump sum of money. When they could pay back the master his original sum, plus interest, they would become free. African slaves were seen in England, but not to the extent that they were in the colonies in America and on the European continent.

Ordinary household servants were hired at an annual wage and paid once a quarter (every three months). Most such servants earned between £2 and £5 per year. Servants, even in other people’s houses, were tipped in cash. Below are some rules for the servants in a typical upper-class household of Shakespeare’s time:

Some fines and rules in Sir John Harington's house

- A servant must not be absent from morning or evening meals or prayers lest he be fined 2 pence for each time.
- Any servant late to dinner would be fined 2 pence.
- Any man waiting table without a trencher in his hand, except for good excuse, would be fined 1 penny.
- For each oath [profanity], a servant would be fined a penny.
- Any man provoking another to strike, or striking another, would be liable to dismissal.
- For a dirty shirt on Sunday or a missing button, the fine would be sixpence.
- After 8:00am no bed must be found unmade and no fireplace or candle box left uncleaned, or the fine would be one penny.
- The hall must be cleaned in an hour.
- Any man leaving a door open that he found shut would be fined one penny unless he could show good cause.
- The whole house must be swept and dusted each Friday.

Exercise: Ask the students to write a letter from a household servant in Sir John Harington's house to his or her family back home. In the letter, the servant should describe the breaking of one of the house rules (either by the servant him/herself or by another servant). What is the servant's attitude towards being a servant? How long does he/she plan to stay?

Research: 1600 – life in London

Objective:

- The students will use technology to uncover information about London at the time of the first performance of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Exercise: Divide the class into three teams. Each team will explore one aspect of Life in London around 1600, the time *The Comedy of Errors* was written. One team will look only at economy, one at maps of the city, and the last at politics. The teams should focus their research on the myriad Internet sources that deal with the 1600's in England. The research will be presented in an oral presentation, which must include some visual aids. If there is access to technology in the classroom, this assignment may be used as classwork.

Discussion: No Girls Allowed!!!

Objective:

- The students will know the Elizabethan stage practice of having males play female roles.

Facts: In the theater of Shakespeare's time, the custom was for men and boys to play all the female roles. The acting was considered an unfit career for women. Actors, playwrights, and managers (like today's producers) were thought to be a notch above thieves.

Exercise: Discuss with your students this tradition. Many of them will have seen "Shakespeare in Love." Remind them that the character Viola in the film wants to

be an actor but is forbidden by the “Men Only” tradition. In order to be in the theater, she must disguise herself as a young man. Ask the students if they can name any female characters in Shakespeare that disguise themselves as men. Does knowing that Lady Macbeth, Juliet, Titania, Portia, Desdemona, and all the other female characters were played males change the students’ understanding of the characters?

Behind the Scenes: Michele Tauber, who plays Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*, has been on tour with **The Acting Company** before. She says, “I love the diversity of the audiences across the country. I found it interesting to perform in all different kinds of theatrical spaces. One of the most rewarding parts of touring the country is talking with our audiences and getting to hear from them what in the play affects them, changes them, moves them.”

We are all unwitting Shakespeare quoters, sometimes **"without rhyme or reason."** If you are **"in a pickle"** because you have been **"eaten out of house and home"** and even your **"salad days"** have **"vanished into thin air,"** you are quoting Shakespeare. You've been **"hoodwinked"** and **"more sinned against than sinning."** No wonder you're not **"playing fast and loose"** and haven't **"slept a wink"** and are probably **"breathing your last."** It's **"cold comfort"** that you are quoting Shakespeare. If you **"point your finger"** at me, **"bid me good riddance"** when you **"send me packing"** and call me a **"laughing-stock,"** **"the devil incarnate,"** a **"sorry sight,"** **"eyesore,"** and a **"stone-hearted,"** **"bloody-minded"** **"blinking idiot"** and wish I were **"dead as a door-nail"**, then I would say that you possess neither a **"heart of gold"** nor **"the milk of human kindness,"** especially considering that we are **"flesh and blood."** Now that we have gone **"full circle"** and you are still waiting with **"bated breath"** since I have not been able to make you **"budge an inch,"** it is **"fair play"** for me to quit this sermon since Shakespeare himself taught me that **"brevity is the soul of wit."** After all, it is a **"foregone conclusion"** that we all speak Shakespeare's language!

adapted from

Take My Words:

A Wordaholic's Guide to the English Language

by Howard Richler

The Theater

- **Overall Objective:** The students will have a stronger understanding of the art of the Theatre.

Brainstorm: Creating a Theatrical Production

Objective:

- The students will identify careers in the theater.
- The students will know the collaborative nature of theater.

Exercise: Ask the students to name some of the people who work to put a theatrical production like *The Comedy of Errors* on stage. Write their answers on the board. As the brainstorm continues, present information about the various professions.

Producer or Producing Organization

The producers raise the money needed to produce the play - the money allows the Creative Team to build its vision of the play. Producers oversee all aspects of the production and make sure that the play sticks to their artistic standards. They often put together the package of Script, Director, Designers, and Cast. **The Acting Company** is a not-for-profit organization, which means that money to produce the plays comes from fund-raising through grants and donations rather than from investors.

The Playwright

A "wright" is a type of artisan who makes things that people can use. A wheelwright makes wheels. A playwright makes plays. Plays are of use to other artists - Actors, Directors, Designers - who use the script to make their own artistic statement.

The Director

After reading the playwright's script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production. The director meets with the Creative Team to assemble a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal, often with the help of Assistant Directors and Stage Managers.

The Actor

The Cast is the group of men, women, and children who perform the play. Many people now call all the performers "actors," since this is the professional term that applies to people of both genders. The members of the cast may be seasoned actors or new to the stage. They may have trained at different theater schools that teach acting in various ways. They draw on their own experiences and understanding of life to create believable characters.

Actors usually audition for the parts they play. This means that they had to work on the part and read, sing, or dance for the director and producers before they were given the role. All of the actors had to memorize their lines and attend many rehearsals, including some with costumes and props, before opening night.

The Voice Coach

The plays of William Shakespeare are very complex. Often a Voice Coach acts as an advisor to the actors and director on the play. She is an expert on the text, the meanings and nuances of the words, and their pronunciation. She can assist the actors with the verse. She is an expert in the period style of the script and helps the actors approach the text from a unified angle.

The Costume Designer

Costumes in a play must help the actors as they create the characters. The costumes should not restrict the movement of the performers. The costume designer and her staff work within the vision of the director for each character.

The Fight Choreographer

In the script of *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare refers to characters fighting. As the Director stages the play, he calls on an expert in Stage Combat to help organize the fight scenes. Each fight is choreographed, like a dance. Actors are educated in Stage Combat as part of their actor training.

The Staff and The Crew

The theatre staff - house manager, ushers, box office people, and others - assist the audience in many ways and support each performance. Backstage the Stage Managers and the running crew run the lighting equipment, move the scenery and make sure the technical aspects of the performance are perfect. In the office, Marketing people work to make sure people know about the performances and the Development staff makes sure the producers have money to put on the play.

Performance: The Open Scene

Objective:

- The students will create a scene based on a neutral text.
- The students will endow the words with meaning and convey that meaning through their body and voice.

Exercise: Present the students with the following exchange of dialogue. Ask them, in pairs to work on them. They should create characters. They should choose a location and a topic of conversation. Why is the conversation important to the characters? Remind the students to use their voice and body to create the characters, the location, and the meaning of the scene. Give them five or six minutes to work on the scene, then a one-minute warning to run through it once more. Invite pairs of students to present the scene to the class. After all groups have presented, discuss the variety of scenes the students created from the script.

Exercise: Follow this exercise by assigning the students a scene from *The Comedy of Errors* and asking them to enact it. One suggestion is Act 4, scene IV. Even if they read it from their desks, encourage them to act it very quickly to heighten the comedy.

A: I do implore that thou will hear my plea.
B: I do refuse, because I choose it so.

A: Why do you feel that you must take this course?
B: I am intent to do the thing I must.
A: I ask of thee that thou will hear my words.
B: What canst thou say that I do not now know?

Fact: The script of a play is a starting point for the actor. They look for clues in the text about the person they are playing and from that develop their character. An actor has many different methods of creating characters.

Costumes from the 1970's

Objective:

- The students will know some of the fashions of the 1970's
- The students will speak to a person who lived in the 1970's
- The students will evaluate the use of 70's styles in **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*

Facts: The retro-70's look is in the year 2000. What are some of the fashions from the 1970's that are featured in TV's "That 70's Show" and in the costumes in **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*? Many clothing trends from the 1960's, including mini skirts, bell-bottoms, and long hair, lasted through the 1970's. Polyester knitted fabrics were part of the standard look. To dress up, men no longer wore the traditional suit and tie. The Leisure Suit (often cream or robin's egg blue) with an open, loudly-patterned polyester shirt was substituted. For casual wear for both sexes, there were denim blue jeans. Tight jeans were common. Women also wore skirts and carried handbags made of old jeans. Women's skirts came in three lengths in the 1970's, mini, midi, and maxi. Both men and women could wear long, flowing caftans. Shoes were chunky, including Earth Shoes, Clogs, and Platforms. The latter half of the decade's fashions were heavily influenced by Disco music and dancing by becoming less constricting and more flowing.

Exercise: Before seeing *The Comedy of Errors*, invite a fellow teacher who lived through the fashions of the 1970's to speak to the class about them. Students may have questions about the clothing styles of the period. Ask the entire faculty and students' parents to loan you photographs of daily life in the 1970's. Create a display in the classroom. Don't be embarrassed!

Exercise: After the performance, discuss the costumes in the show with the students. Did the choice of 1970's styles suit the play? Did it enhance the comedy in *The Comedy of Errors*? Which character had the funniest costume? Who had the best shoes? How did the 1970's costumes mix with the formal robes of the Duke, Balthazar, and the police officers?

Musicals

Objectives:

- The students will know who Trevor Nunn is
- The students will express their feelings about the songs in *The Comedy of Errors*

Exercise: Musicals are the most popular live theatrical events, other than Shakespeare, in the United States. Trevor Nunn, who wrote the lyrics for this production also wrote the lyrics for one of the most famous theater songs of all time, “Memory” from *Cats*. After seeing **The Acting Company’s** production of *The Comedy of Errors* ask the class if the songs added to the production. Why did **The Acting Company** choose to use a musical version of this play? Did the songs enhance the comedy in the play? How did they feel about having all the actors play instruments in the band?

Classical Unities

Objective:

- The students will know the three Classical Unities
- The students will identify them in *The Comedy of Errors*

Facts: The “Classical Unities” as derived from Aristotle’s Poetics, are the principles of structure that require a play to have only one action (plot) that occurs in one place, and within one day (usually sunrise to sunset). Shakespeare was not tied to the Unities when he wrote. This play, however, does adhere to the Aristotelian Unities. Director John Rando says that contributes to the comic mayhem, “The play happens so quickly, in the course of only one day, and everything happens so fast that no one steps back to think logically about what is happening.” Many mistakes, many errors, are made due to the play’s breakneck speed.

Word Power: The Courtesan’s Speech

Objectives:

- The students will do a close reading of a speech from *The Comedy of Errors*
- The students will evaluate the individual words in the speech
- The students will create a rhythmic version of the speech

Exercise: Provide each student with the Courtesan’s speech below. Ask 16 students to each take one of the lines. Standing in a circle, closed against the rest of the class, ask them to read their lines in order. They should do it a second time, faster. Now, ask them to choose one word from their line that they feel is most important. It’s all right for two people end up with the same word – line 1 and line 6 may both choose “mad.” The third read through should be just the words deemed most important in each line. A fourth time should be the same only faster.

Courtesan

1. Now, out of doubt Antipholus is mad,
2. Else would he never so demean himself.
3. A ring he hath of mine worth forty ducats,
4. And for the same he promised me a chain:
5. Both one and other he denies me now.
6. The reason that I gather he is mad,
7. Besides this present instance of his rage,
8. Is a mad tale he told to-day at dinner,
9. Of his own doors being shut against his entrance.
10. Belike his wife, acquainted with his fits,
11. On purpose shut the doors against his way.
12. My way is now to hie home to his house,
13. And tell his wife that, being lunatic,
14. He rush'd into my house and took perforce
15. My ring away. This course I fittest choose;
16. For forty ducats is too much to lose.

Act 4, scene III

Finally, they can do it once, in a line facing the other students. In a discussion following the exercise, both the 16 participants and the other students can talk about the speech and the exercise.

The Mart

Objective:

- The students will look for on stage characters' reactions in the play
- The students will compare different ways of performing the same scene

Facts: All the scenes in **The Acting Company** production of *The Comedy of Errors* take place in "The Mart," the main market square of Ephesus. That means that all of the personal business of the characters is being discussed with all of the town watching.

Exercise: To prepare them to see the play, ask the students to notice how many characters are on stage in the Mart during the various scenes. Watch what the characters do that have no dialogue in a scene and yet are on stage. Are they listening and reacting or minding their own business?

Exercise: After seeing the production, ask the students to compare how some

scenes like Act 1, scene I (Aegean's condemnation) and Act 3, scene I (Antipholus of Ephesus being locked out of his house) would have been different if set in a less public place.

Improv: "Ephesus One! Ephesus One!"

Objective:

- The students will be aware of a choice made by an actor and Director
- The students will discuss the production of *The Comedy of Errors* and the use of improvisation in it

Facts: Michael Thomas Holmes, who plays Dromio of Syracuse in **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*, is adept at improvisational comedy. Director John Rando allowed him to explore Dromio's description of the police officer in Act 4, scene III, through improvisation. In the time of *The Comedy of Errors'* premiere in December of 1594, the jokes about the police officer as "old Adam" and "a bass viol in a case of leather" were topical. To bring the humor up to date, Michael includes references to the modern police and to popular culture.

Exercise: After seeing the performance, ask the students to comment on the departure from Shakespeare's text. Was it appropriate? Did it make the jokes in the text funnier to hear them said in a 21st Century style? To further explore improvisation and its uses in the classroom look for Viola Spolin's book Theatre Games for the Classroom.

Slapstick Tradition

Objective:

- The students will define slapstick
- The students will trace the history of some elements of slapstick comedy.

Facts: "Slapstick" comedy is comedy stressing farce and physical horseplay. The name derives from a sixteenth century Italian sound making device (one is used in **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors*), although this kind of comedy is probably as old as the theater itself. It was the mainstay of silent film comedies with Charlie Chase, Buster Keaton, or the Keystone Kops. It can be seen as circus clowns paddle each other with demented delight. The Three Stooges were masters of it. This type of broad physical comedy is generally known as "slapstick."

The rough-and-tumble school of comedy dates back to the Greco-Roman theater, where heavily padded clowns got laughs by boisterously trading blows. The tradition of outrageous mock violence continued into the Renaissance, when it became a feature of the Italian "commedia dell'arte." This highly stylized school of comedy presented stock characters in familiar, typically absurd, situations. In "commedia," the comedians hit one another with a paddle that consisted of two slats of wood fastened together at one end. When used to hit someone, the two slats slapped together, producing a loud "THWAK!"

The slapstick became the symbol for the whole genre of broad physical comedy.

The tradition of physical comedy that derived its humor from exaggerated, make-believe violence reached another peak with the American vaudeville of the late nineteenth century and the pie-throwing free-for-alls of silent film comedies of the early twentieth century. **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors* is heir to the slapstick tradition.

Exercise: In *The Comedy of Errors*, both of the Dromios take a beating. In this production, Dromio of Ephesus sings a song about his master called "He Beats Me." In the song, he describes the daily beatings he receives at the hands of his master. Ask the students how an audience is able to laugh at some characters' pain and be moved by the pain of others. Ask them to keep a log of violence they see on TV and note when it is "funny" and when it is serious. Discuss with them the quote: "Tragedy is when a brick falls on your head; Comedy is when a brick falls on someone else's head."

Casting

Objective:

- The students will create a cast list for a movie of *The Comedy of Errors*

Exercise: Ask the students, "If you were casting a movie of *The Comedy of Errors*, what stars would you get to be in it?" Ask each to work independently and cast the two Antipholus brothers and the Dromios. Remember, the sets of twins have to be played by actors similar enough to be confused for their brothers. Are there any actual sets of brothers that might be appropriate?

Behind the Scenes: In The Acting Company production of *The Comedy of Errors*, some actors have to play more than one character. Matt Hoverman who plays both the strict Duke Solinus and the friendly Balthazar says, "The hardest thing is keeping the Duke and Balthazar different from each other. Actors use their body and voice to convey age, authority, attitude and status." Elliot Dash, who plays both Dr. Pinch and the Gaoler (Jailer) agrees, "As we switch from role to role quickly, we have to remember how each one speaks, moves and how that reflects how he approaches life."

Types of Theater

Objective:

- The students will be able to identify different types of theaters.
- The students will weigh the benefits of each type of performance space.

Discussion: In which types of theaters have the students seen plays, concerts, or other live performances? In what type of theater was **The Acting Company's** production of *The Comedy of Errors* performed? What might be the benefits of each type of performance space? What might be the drawbacks of each?

Facts:

Three different types of performance space are most common in the theater:

- **The Proscenium Stage** is the most common. The play is performed within a frame. The frame is called a proscenium arch; the audience looks through this frame as if the performance was a picture.
- **The Thrust Stage** extends into the audience. Spectators sit on three sides.
- **Theater-in-the-Round** has the audience sitting all around the stage. The action takes place on a platform in the center of the room. Another name for a Theater-in-the-Round is an Arena Stage because it is similar to a sports arena.

Theater Etiquette

Objective:

- The students will know standard rules of behavior in the theater.

Note: This exercise is intended to be used **before** seeing *The Comedy of Errors*.

To make the theater-going experience more enjoyable for everyone, a code of behavior has been established. When attending theatrical performances, remember these simple rules of conduct.

- ❖ Be on time for the performance.
- ❖ Eat and drink only in the theater lobby.
- ❖ Turn off all cellular phones and pagers.
- ❖ Talk before and after the performance or during the intermissions only. Remember that the people near you and on stage can hear you.
- ❖ Appropriate responses to the performances, such as laughing and applauding, are appreciated.
- ❖ Act with maturity during romantic scenes.
- ❖ Keep your feet off chairs around you.
- ❖ Personal hygiene (e.g., combing hair, applying make-up, etc.) should be attended to in the restrooms.
- ❖ Once you are seated and the play has begun, stay in your seat. If you see empty seats ahead of you, ask the usher during the intermission if you can move to them.
- ❖ Never leave before the curtain call. After the final curtain, relax and take your time leaving.
- ❖ Open your eyes, ears, and mind to the entire theatrical experience!

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For the complete text of the play, *The Comedy of Errors* on the Web:
<http://www.theplays.org/Comedy>

Other cool online Shakespeare and Elizabethan resources:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/>

<http://www.navdeeps.com/shakespeare>

<http://renaissance.dm.net/compendium/>

Appendix

Shakespearean Insults

You puppet
You cold porridge
You living dead man
You untutored churl
You painted Maypole
You cream-faced loon
You worshiper of idiots
You dwarf, you minimus
You bloody, bawdy villain
You injurious, tedious wasp
You base, fawning spaniel
You infectious pestilence
You botcher's apprentice
You ugly, venomous toad
You base, ignoble wretch
You old, withered crab tree
You lunatic, lean-witted fool
You filching, pilfering snatcher
You tiresome, wrangling pedant
You impudent, tattered prodigal
You whoreson, clap-eared knave
You dull and muddy mettled rascal
You gross lout, you mindless slave
You base, vile thing, you petty scrap
You dull, unfeeling barren ignorance
You rank weed, ready to be rooted out
You irksome, brawling, scolding pestilence
You brawling, blasphemous, uncharitable dog
You ignorant, long-tongued, babbling gossip
You smiling, smooth, detested pestilence
You mangled work of nature, you scurvy knave
You caterpillar of the commonwealth, you politician
You juggler, you canker-blossom, you thief of love
You decrepit wrangling miser, you base ignoble wretch
You remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain

Adapted from a list in Robert Barton, *Style for Actors*

The Cast of *The Comedy of Errors*

Luciana	Beth Bartley
Antipholus of Syracuse	Corey Behnke
Dromio of Ephesus	Todd Cerveris
Gaoler / Doctor Pinch	Elliot Dash
First Merchant	Joe Domencic
Dromio of Syracuse	Michael Thomas Holmes
Duke Solinus / Balthazar	Matt Hoverman
Abbess / Aemelia	Grace Hsu
Second Merchant	Gregory Jackson
Angelo	Royden Mills
Antipholus of Ephesus	Evan Robertson
Courtesan	Erika Rolfsrud
Adriana	Michele Tauber
Aegeon	Jonathan Uffelman

About The Acting Company

The Acting Company, America's only nationally-touring classical repertory theater, was founded in 1972 by current Producing Director Margot Harley and the late John Houseman with a unique mission:

- By touring smaller cities, towns and rural communities of America, the Company reaches thousands of people who have few opportunities to experience live professional theater.
- By presenting superior productions of classic and contemporary plays, the Company builds a discerning national audience for theater, helping preserve and extend our cultural heritage.
- By providing continuing opportunities for gifted and highly-trained young actors to practice their craft in a rich repertoire for diverse audiences, the Company nurtures the growth and development of generations of theater artists.
- By commissioning and premiering important new works by America's foremost playwrights, the Company fosters a theater tradition in which storytelling, language and the presence of the actor are primary.
- By making the language of the theater accessible in performance, special classes and other educational outreach activities, the Company inspires students of all ages and helps them excel in every field of study.

The Acting Company has been fulfilling this singular mission since it was formed out of the first graduating class of the Juilliard School's Drama Division in 1972. Since then, it has traveled over 500,000 miles through 48 states and nine other countries, performing a repertoire of 77 plays for more than 2 million people. Every year, The Acting Company engages an ensemble of the best-trained, most talented young actors available to perform classic plays and contemporary works in repertory. This enables the actors to gain invaluable experience and develop their craft.

A roster of the Company's 263 acting alumni reads like a "Who's Who" of American theater. Lisa Banes, Frances Conroy, Keith David, Gerald Gutierrez, Harriet Harris, James Houghton, Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Jesse L. Martin, Mary Lou Rosato, Derek Smith, David Ogden Stiers and Jeffrey Wright stand among America's leading actors and directors whose work in theater, film and television offers proof of the value and versatility of the repertory tradition.

From its inception, The Acting Company has offered innovative educational programs. Doing so makes our performances more accessible to young people, illuminates the core curriculum and helps build the audience of the future. We work with presenting organizations and local schools throughout the year to design and implement the most effective education and outreach efforts in the communities we visit.

In recognition of its consistent level of excellence, The Acting Company has won several Obie Awards, Audelco Awards, the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and two Tony Award® nominations. The Company's long-standing commitment to multi-culturalism is reflected in the diversity of its repertoire, ensemble, staff, and audiences.