



# Heart of America Shakespeare Festival

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## En garde Bard! Stage Combat

### Teacher Guide

#### Shakespeare in Education

At the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival we present education programs that nurture an early appreciation for the art of theatre and the work of William Shakespeare. We teach Shakespeare through performance in order to enhance understanding of language arts, Renaissance history and theatre performance. For this class, teaching artists who are also trained combatants will come to your classroom or gymnasium and provide an interactive presentation of stage combat techniques. The safety elements of acting with combat will be fully explored utilizing scenes from Shakespeare's plays. Students will engage and bring the text to life with professional supervision.

“Part, fools! Put up your swords; you know not what you do.” Benvolio, *Romeo and Juliet*

“Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!” Lysander, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

#### Pre-Class Activities

**Eye contact is crucial in stage combat! Here are a couple of exercises that help establish good eye contact and trust.**

- **Mirror Exercise**  
Divide the class into pairs and have them face one another and let each pair decide who will lead first. The leader then does a series of slow, controlled movements while the other person follows. The key to the success of this exercise is to direct students to look INTO EACH OTHER'S EYES AND NOT AT THE HANDS! Have students begin by just doing arm motions. You may allow them to use their legs and feet if they seem ready.
- **Group Mirror Exercise**  
Have students sit in a circle. Have one student leave the room. Select a leader. Everyone in the class must follow one leader. Bring the student back into the room and have him or her see if they can determine who is leading the group. Hint: Only allow two students to watch the leader directly. Everyone else should watch someone else in the circle. Again, encourage them to keep the movements slow and controlled.

- **Zip, Zap, Zop**  
The group stands in a circle. The player who starts points across the circle to another player, makes eye contact, and says, 'Zip'. The receiving player points to another person, makes eye contact, and says, 'Zap'. The new receiving player points across the circle and says, 'Zop'. The game continues with the words passed in this order. Players should try to pass the proper word smoothly.

### **Post-Class Activities**

- **Building a Scene**  
Have students take the small fight they began creating and have them elaborate on it. What is the conflict? How is the conflict resolved? Does one person "win" the fight? Does the fighting make the situation better or worse? Once they have decided these things, have them also write dialogue for their scenes. Rehearse the scenes and share them with the class.
- **Incorporating Combat into a Scene**  
Select scenes for the students (or have them select them on their own) that have an element of stage combat within them. Rehearse the scenes and incorporate the necessary combat elements for the scene to be successful. Share the scenes with the class.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- Why is eye contact so crucial in stage combat?
- Why must you practice fights at a slower speed? Why must you rehearse them every day? (even when in performance)
- There are a lot of plays and movies that incorporate stage combat. Can you think of some examples?
- What do you think is the most important element of stage combat? Why?
- Sometimes fight sequences are done in slow motion. Why do you think directors do this? Do you think it is effective? Why or why not?

#### **Online Resources**

[www.kcshakes.org](http://www.kcshakes.org)  
[artsedge.kennedy-center.org](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org)  
[www.nosweatshakespeare.edu](http://www.nosweatshakespeare.edu)  
[nfs.sparknotes.com](http://nfs.sparknotes.com)  
[www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

For further questions or activities contact the Director of Education for HASF at 816-531-7728