

What You Will

An Introduction to Shakespeare



This production starts off with a shipwreck, the one that opens **The Tempest**. We find ourselves cast ashore in the strange land of the Elizabethan Theatre. And we encounter some of the characters that populate this world.



In **The Comedy of Errors** Antipholus gives his servant, Dromio, some gold to look after. Dromio's identical twin suffers the consequences of mistaken identity.

In **Henry IV Part One**, we meet the wayward Prince Hal and his companion, the drunken, cowardly knight, Jack Falstaff – one of the great comic characters. At the end of **Henry IV Part Two**, Hal, now King Henry V, publicly rejects Falstaff, whose death at the beginning of **Henry V** is described by the Hostess of the inn.

A major theme in the history plays is the question of who has the right to be king. In **Henry VI Part Two**, Jack Cade stages a rebellion, and in **Richard III**, Richard tricks, cajoles and murders his way to the throne.

When **Macbeth** murders King Duncan and seizes the throne himself, Scotland is thrown into turmoil.



Where you sat, or stood in the Elizabethan theatre audience was dictated by your wealth and social status. Malvolio aspires to higher social status in **Twelfth Night**. Tricked into wearing yellow stockings and cross-garters, he becomes a figure of ridicule.



In the famous balcony scene, **Romeo and Juliet** swear their love for each other. But Juliet's father has other plans for her.

In 1613, during a performance of **Henry VIII** or **All is True**, disaster struck the Globe. As the actors and audience watched the playhouse burn to the ground, they might have recalled Prospero's words in **The Tempest**: "The great globe itself... shall dissolve... We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep." Shakespeare died three years later in 1616 at the age of 52.

Our production ends with Puck, from **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. He makes a request of the audience. He says the actors were merely shadows, and if the audience haven't liked the play, they should think of it as having been nothing but... a dream.