



SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

One of Shakespeare's early plays, *The Comedy of Errors* is a humorous situation comedy about mistaken identities and misadventures between two sets of identical twins! Below you will find resources to examine this play to your students.



Looking At Adaptations

Let's start by reading a piece from "About Shakespeare" an online source by Royal Shakespeare Company on *The Comedy of Errors*:

The most obvious source for *The Comedy of Errors* is Plautus's comedy *The Menaechmi*. In 16th century Europe, Plautus was perhaps the most popular of the dramatists of ancient Rome and this was certainly one of his most popular plays.

Shakespeare makes many changes and additions to the story of *The Menaechmi*, but the most striking of Shakespeare's additions is that of a second pair of identical twins - the servant Dromios. Shakespeare's knowledge of another of Plautus's plays, *The Amphitruo*, gave him the germ of this idea. In this play, Jupiter and Mercury impersonate a mortal master and servant so that Jupiter can make love to the mortal's wife.

In both Plautus and Shakespeare's plays, much comedy is found in seeing the rightful master denied access to his own house. In Shakespeare's hands, the play becomes not just a dazzlingly confident manipulation of fiendishly complicated plot twists, all set within one day and one place, but a poignant story of love, from the conjugal to the fraternal and parental.

Shakespeare takes Plautus's comedy and adapts it in his own way by adding new characters and a more complicated plot line. In 2019, Santa Cruz Shakespeare's production of *The Comedy of Errors* adapted Shakespeare's version by switching gender roles of both the twins, Antipholus's wife into a husband (Adriana to Adriano), plus a few more characters:

Played as a Woman

- Antiphola of Syracuse, a merchant
- Dromia of Syracuse, her servant
- First Merchant, of Ephesus
- Antiphola of Ephesus, a merchant
- Dromia of Ephesus, her servant
- Angela, a goldsmith
- Balthasar, a merchant of Ephesus

Played as a Man

- Adriano, husband of Antiphola of Eph.
- Luce, a cook



This allowed for a whole new perspective on the lives of the characters - a stay at home husband waiting for his wife to come home for dinner, and a queer love interest between Antiphola of Syracuse and Luciana (sister-in-law of Antiphola of Ephesus), to name a couple.

Another abstract adaptation of this play comes from The Flying Karamazov Brothers. Their performance of *The Comedy of Errors* debuted in 1987 and involved clowns, juggling, acrobatics, and rarely a line from the original play in its entirety. Interestingly enough, The Flying Karamazov Brothers started busking on the streets of Santa Cruz while attending UCSC!

You can watch the whole performance for free on youtube, links below.

Part 1: youtu.be/dwYyrbX9LUY

Part 2: youtu.be/IQCjhuHcAiA



Create Your Own Comedy

Now it's your turn to write a comedy! Here are some helpful tools to get started:

- [Insider's Guide: The Comedy of Errors & The Building Blocks of Comedy](#)
 - [Developing Stock Characters](#)
 - [Shakespeare's Comedic Plot Points](#)
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Contact Us

SCS Education Coordinator Alexi Carr

Phone: 831-460-6396 x5

Email: education@santacruzshakespeare.org

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SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE
500 Chestnut Street Suite 250
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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THE GROVE AT DELAVEAGA PARK
501 Upper Park Road
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500 Chestnut Street, Suite 250, Santa Cruz, CA 95060