

SHAKES
PEARE
FESTIVAL

The Comedy of Errors

2026-27 Study Guide

ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival will soon send actors to your school as part of a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project. This study guide is a resource for you, whether you are an administrator, counselor, teacher, or student. Our program is most successful when schools have prepared in advance, so we encourage you to use this study guide to connect the material to your curriculum. Shakespeare offers a wonderful opportunity to explore meaningful questions, and we encourage you and your students to engage deeply with those questions.

This study guide was written and edited by Dr. Amanda Giguere and Dr. Heidi Schmidt, with input from Colorado Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education, Colorado Department of Education, CU Boulder's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Safe2Tell, CU Boulder's Department of Theatre & Dance, and Josue Miranda (Spanish translator).

ABOUT SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The **Colorado Shakespeare Festival (CSF)** partners with CU Boulder's **Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV)** and the **Department of Theatre & Dance** to create a touring program that increases awareness of Shakespeare and violence prevention.

Our actors will visit your school to perform an abridged three-actor version of *The Comedy of Errors* that explores the cycle of violence, using research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. In a 30-minute performance and 50-minute classroom workshops, we draw parallels between Shakespeare's world and our own. We recommend the performance for grades 3-5.

Theatre is about teamwork, empathy, and change. When your students watch the play, they will observe misunderstandings, mistreatment, cruelty, and reconciliation. They'll see examples of unhealthy and destructive relationships, as well as characters who become "upstanders"—people who make the choice to help. This play is intended to open up the dialogue about the cycle of violence and mistreatment—and to remind us all that change is always possible.

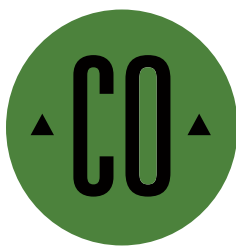
The post-show classroom workshops use theatre activities to increase your students' ability to work as a team and be upstanders. We employ empathy-building and team-building activities, key elements in creating a positive school environment.

Our short visit to your school aims to inspire your students with live, professional theatre, but the work does not end when our actors depart. We encourage you to continue this conversation after our visit in order to create positive change in your own school setting.

COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

This program was developed with a standards-based focus in multiple content areas. Content areas addressed by the performances, classroom workshops, and the contents of this study guide include:

- Reading, Writing, and Communicating
- Drama and Theatre Arts
- Comprehensive Health
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Colorado Essential Skills
- School Counseling Standards



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ABOUT THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

Why this play?

The Comedy of Errors shows characters choosing violence or a verbal attack when faced with conflict or confusion. How would things change if the characters stopped, took a breath, and thought before they reacted? We all have a choice in how we respond when the going gets tough -- and this play highlights plenty of these moments of choice.

Three-Person Cast

Shakespeare's version of this play has over 20 characters. We combined some roles and eliminated others but we still have 8 characters - including two sets of identical twins - all played by only 3 actors. The challenge becomes how we differentiate these characters—look out for different costume pieces (such as hats)!

Gender and Casting

In Shakespeare's time, only men were allowed to perform publicly, so Shakespeare's plays feature a LOT of male characters. These restrictions don't make sense in today's world, so we have changed the gender identity of some of these characters. We hope to carve out new possibilities within these 400-year-old plays, so that they reflect our own time.

Bilingual Shakespeare

In this production, some characters speak in both English and Spanish. Shakespeare belongs to all of us, and we hope that when you see a Spanish-speaking character this helps you see Shakespeare's ability to cross boundaries and connect people from different backgrounds. Whether or not you speak Spanish, how does this choice impact the way you listen to the play?

KINDNESS IS NEVER A SIGN OF WEAKNESS

Land Acknowledgment

We honor and acknowledge that the Colorado Shakespeare Festival resides on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations. We recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous people have developed in relationship to their lands and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. You can learn more about the original inhabitants where you live by searching your (or your school's) address at native-land.ca



SAFE2TELL provides students, parents, and community members a safe and anonymous way to report information about any issues that concern their safety or the safety of others. You can use your voice to make the life of someone else better. Sometimes if YOU don't speak up for someone, no one else will. You can make a difference. Safe2Tell will not ask for your name or contact information when you make a report. Safe2Tell sends the report to the school who then looks into the safety concern.

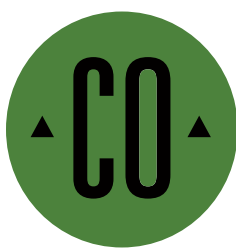
REPORT: (877) 542-7233 | safe2tell.org | Mobile app | Text S2TCO to 738477

Colorado Shakespeare Festival Education Programs

coloradoshakes.org/education
csfedout@colorado.edu
(303) 735-1181

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

colorado.edu/cspv
(303) 492-1032



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How Do I Prepare?

TEACHER CHECKLIST

This might be your students' first exposure to theatre and/or Shakespeare, so we recommend establishing some norms with your students to prepare for this program:

- In theatre, actors are vulnerable onstage; they step into the shoes of another character (metaphorically) and help us see the world from another person's perspective. For actors to do their jobs, they need to know that their audience will respect their work, their bravery, and their honesty.
- We will respect the actors, we will respect one another, and we will respect ourselves. How do we cultivate a classroom of mutual respect?
- Trying new things is hard! When the actors visit our classroom, we might be asked to step out of our comfort zone and participate in some activities with the actors. Let's support one another for being brave, being honest, and for trying new things.
- The Shakespeare & Violence Prevention post-performance workshops emphasize three key ideas: Teamwork, Empathy, and Change. What do these things have in common? How can we prepare ourselves to work as a team, practice empathy, and rehearse the change we'd like to see in our community?

How do I prepare my students for the play?

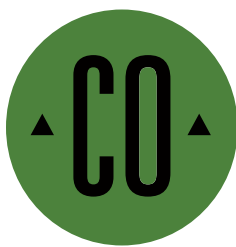
- ☐ Review Meet the Characters (pg. 4) and Things to Look For (pg. 6) with your students. You can print these pages as handouts to familiarize your students with the characters, plot, and some themes of the play.
- ☐ Use the Mini-Lesson Plan (pg. 5) and the activity (pg. 7) to help your students think through some of the big questions presented in *The Comedy of Errors* in advance of the performance.
- ☐ Discuss appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. Our performance is frequently interactive (like Shakespeare's original performances). Students are encouraged to laugh and applaud when they enjoy the show, though we ask them not to have private conversations, use cell phones, eat during the performance, or otherwise distract the performers or their fellow students. Remind them that just as they can see and hear the actors, the actors can also see and hear the audience.

How do I prepare for post-show workshops?

- ☐ Be ready to participate and co-facilitate with our teaching artist. The more involved you are, the more your students learn!
- ☐ Talk with your class about the upcoming actor-led theatre workshop. Set expectations about trying new things and respecting one another.
- ☐ Push desks/chairs to the side of your classroom to create an open, movement-friendly space.
- ☐ At the end of the workshop, our teaching artist will step out of the room while you conduct an anonymous, 3-question survey with your students. Don't worry about preparing - they'll give you a card with the questions pre-printed.

What should I do after the visit?

- ☐ Take the 5-minute survey in your thank you email to let us know what you thought.
- ☐ Use the Discussion Questions (pg. 8) to have a follow-up discussion with your students about the performance and the workshops.
- ☐ Look for ways to integrate the performance and workshop in your units throughout the year by tying your lesson plans back to the ideas and questions posed by the visit from the CSF actors.



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Meet the Characters

(and the actors who play them)



TEAM SYRACUSE: ANTIPHOLUS & DROMIO (THE AWAY TEAM)

Antipholus and Dromio were separated from their identical twin siblings as babies during a terrible storm. Now that he is an adult, Antipholus decides to travel the world in search of his lost brother, accompanied by his witty sidekick Dromio, who makes him laugh with jokes and pranks.

STAGE MANAGER / SWING

Our stage manager, Marisa, does a lot of work backstage to make sure this performance goes well. She is also a "swing," or understudy. She has learned ALL the roles in this production so if someone gets sick, Marisa can perform in their place!



TEAM EPHEBUS: ANTIPHOLUS & DROMIO (THE HOME TEAM)

Team Syracuse lands in Ephesus, where another Antipholus and Dromio live, unaware that their long-lost twins have just arrived on the scene. Antipholus of Ephesus and his wife Adriana mistreat this Dromio when they are unhappy, so he works very hard to please them both.

ADRIANA

Married to Antipholus of Ephesus and doesn't know that he and Dromio have twin siblings. When Team Syracuse arrives, a confused Adriana mistakes them for *her* Antipholus and Dromio, and thinks they've lost their minds.



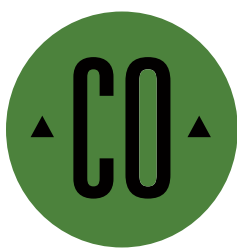
DOCTOR PINCH

Called in by Adriana to cure Antipholus' and Dromio's "madness," but Team Syracuse escapes the mad Doctor's clutches by hiding in an abbey.



THE ABBOT

Refuses to let Adriana inside the abbey, where Team Syracuse is hiding. Meanwhile, Team Ephesus is mad at Adriana for sending Pinch after them.



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Mini-Lesson Plan

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS | BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Rationale: This activity will introduce students to foundational themes in *The Comedy of Errors* and encourage them to develop their own thoughts prior to a violence prevention workshop with a Colorado Shakespeare Festival actor.

Objective: Students will be able to propose alternative behaviors for characters in *The Comedy of Errors* by drawing on their own experiences to evaluate the consequences of acting out in anger. Students will analyze how they would react if they were bystanders to the events in this play in order to brainstorm positive solutions to confrontational situations.

Instructions: Print pgs. 6-7 for your class. Use any relevant information from this Study Guide to introduce plot, characters, and themes to prepare your students.

COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards>

Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening

- Prepared Graduates: collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully; pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others; and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective

Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes

- Prepared Graduates: read a wide range of literary texts to build knowledge and to better understand the human experience

Drama and Theatre Arts: Standard 3: Critically Respond

- Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- Connect artistic experiences to our world; past, present and future

Comprehensive Health: Standard 4: Prevention and Risk Management

- Prepared Graduates: apply knowledge and skills that promote healthy, violence-free relationships

ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS

SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Core Competencies <https://casel.org>

- Self Awareness
- Self Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making
- Relationship Skills

Colorado Essential Skills

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/essentialskills-pdf>

- Self-awareness
- Personal responsibility
- Adaptability / flexibility
- Perseverance / resilience
- Critical thinking / problem-solving
- Creativity / innovation
- Inquiry / analysis
- Informed risk taking
- Collaboration / teamwork

School Counseling Standards (American School Counselor Association www.schoolcounselor.org)

- Mindset standards: Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being / Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment
- Behavior Standards: Ethical decision-making and social responsibility / Social Skills / Empathy Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them

NAME: _____

As you watch *The Comedy of Errors*, look for:

A POWER IMBALANCE

Example(s) _____

A GUT REACTION (ACTING ON IMPULSE WITHOUT STOPPING TO THINK)

Example(s) _____

SOMEONE ASKING FOR HELP

Example(s) _____

ONE CHARACTER TREATING ANOTHER AS INFERIOR

Example(s) _____

SOMEONE USING VIOLENCE OR MEANNESS INSTEAD OF KINDNESS TO GET WHAT THEY WANT

Example(s) _____

A BYSTANDER WHO CHOOSES NOT TO HELP

Example(s) _____

AN ACT OF KINDNESS

Example(s) _____

What is Bullying Behavior?

Before you see the play, review the definition of bullying:

1. There is an intention to harm (they do it on purpose)
2. It is repeated over time (and often escalates)
3. There is a power imbalance (when one person has more power than another)

As a class, discuss what this means. How is bullying different from other kinds of conflicts? Could some bullying be prevented if we put ourselves in the shoes of others? What do you do when you see bullying behavior?

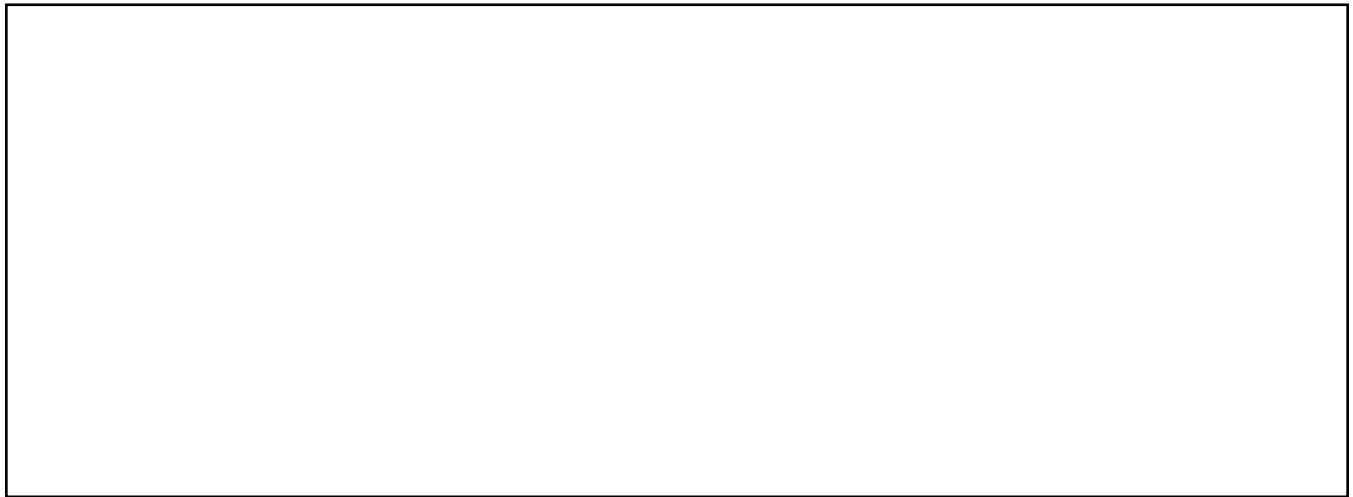
NAME: _____

Before you see *The Comedy of Errors*: Imagination Activity

*Actors from the Colorado Shakespeare Festival will be putting on a play for you called *The Comedy of Errors*. Answer the following questions, and remember your answers as you watch the play.*

1. In the play, Antipholus of Syracuse comes to a new land where he doesn't know anyone. When characters in the play mistake him for the twin brother he doesn't know lives there, he becomes confused and angry, and takes his anger out on his sidekick, Dromio. How do you think Dromio feels when he is mistreated?

2. We have all felt angry or confused and sometimes when we are angry, we act or speak before we think. What if Antipholus took a moment to stop and think before reacting in anger? Imagine what could happen differently and draw a picture of it.



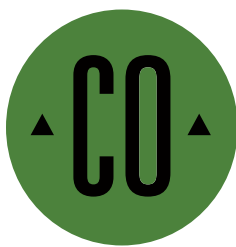
3. If you were standing nearby when Antipholus was mistreating Dromio, what is one way you might be able to help as a bystander?

If I saw Dromio being mistreated, I would help by... _____

I would do this because.... _____

4. As a class, discuss the following questions:

- a. Can we create some class agreements about how to be upstanders and look out for one another?
- b. How do we react to mistreatment in our community? Remember that when we hurt other people, it's often because we're hurting, too. How do we include both the person being mistreated and the person who is doing the mistreating?



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After the Performance: Discussion Questions

- What is empathy? Why is it important? Was there ever a time when you “stepped into someone else’s shoes”? What did it teach you?
- Actors use teamwork to trust one another when they are onstage. How is teamwork useful in school?
- How do the characters change from the beginning of the play to the end? What causes these changes? Have you ever noticed a change in your own behavior?
- Think of a moment in the play when two characters were equals. How about a moment in the play when two characters were NOT treated equally? What did you notice about the difference between these two moments?
- Why do you think actors are still performing the plays of Shakespeare? What do the stories have to teach us today?
- What was the most memorable part of the performance?
- How could you apply what you learned from this play here in your school? How about outside of school?

Tips from the Center for the Study & Prevention of Violence

HOW TO BE AN UPSTANDER

- Refuse to join in if someone tries to get you to taunt and torment another person.
- Get a teacher, parent, or other responsible adult to come help. This isn’t snitching. It’s helping. You are saying that you don’t think bullying is acceptable and don’t want anyone to get hurt.
- Try to get the person being bullied to tell a trusted adult. Offer to go with them.
- Tell a trusted adult yourself if the person being bullied is unwilling to report it. Do not let the person behaving as a bully know so that they do not become aggressive toward you.

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

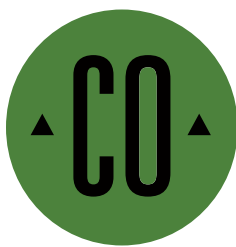
One of the most important components of a safe school is a climate where youth feel secure and supported in their learning environment. As part of the Safe Communities Safe Schools (SCSS) project, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence offers school climate surveys, at a low cost, with options for students, staff, and parents. For more information about our surveys or to administer any of the SCSS Surveys at your school, please contact us via email at cspv@colorado.edu or by phone at 303-492-1032. <https://cspv.colorado.edu/what-we-do/surveys/>

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT BULLYING AND YOUTH VIOLENCE

- 5% of students in this country miss school each day because of bullying. That translates to 160,000 students missing school daily.
- 57% of the time, bullying stops in 10 seconds or less when a bystander becomes an upstander.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT LOWER RISK OF VIOLENCE

- Supportive relationships
- Connections with peers, school, family, and community
- Involvement in prosocial activities



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Program Sponsors

"I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."
- *Twelfth Night*

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival is deeply grateful for the support of these generous sponsors, who make the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention program possible.



Dorothy & Anthony
Riddle Foundation

SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS



Shakespeare
& VIOLENCE PREVENTION
A Practical Handbook for Educators
AMANDA GIGUERE



Want to learn more about Violence Prevention and Shakespeare? This new book, authored by CSF Director of Outreach Amanda Giguere, explores 8 Shakespeare plays through the violence-prevention lens. Discover new strategies to approach Shakespeare as you learn about the overlaps between preventing violence and studying Shakespeare. The book includes an appendix of exercises, discussion questions, and activities to implement in the classroom.

Order a copy for your classroom [here](#). Use code **CSFSVP2627** to save 40%!

For bulk orders, educator, and special sales, contact Beth Svinarich, beth@upcolorado.com