

The Comedy of Errors



This packet contains classroom activity suggestions and worksheets to reinforce concepts from the Playbook® story and to go beyond the story into the content areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art, Health, etc., as well as Character Development.

Activities range in age appropriateness and skill level so that teachers can choose activities that best suit their particular students. An Answer Key is provided on the last page.

Sources:

- 1) Teacher Resource Guide by Paul Michael Fontana, with The Acting Company (New York)
- 2) 2007 Study Guide by Artistic Director Richard Monette, with Stratford Festival of Canada
- 3) Study Guide by Utah Shakespearean Festival Education Department
- 4) Online Course on Acoustics: <http://www.kemt.fei.tuke.sk>

Symbols: Name Your House



In Shakespeare's time, few people could read. Stores, taverns, and other businesses used signs symbolizing their type of business. For example, a red and white striped pole was the symbol for a barber; three golden balls identified the pawnshops. The signs depicted the name of the company much like corporate logos do today.

Action in *The Comedy of Errors* takes place around the market square (“The Mart”) in the center of the city of Ephesus. 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 porcupine). Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio stay at an Inn called “The Centaur.” Antipholus of Ephesus and his business associates eat lunch at an Inn called “The Tiger.”

In-class Discussion: As a class, discuss the images students associate with each house name. What are the ideas and emotions each of these names evokes?

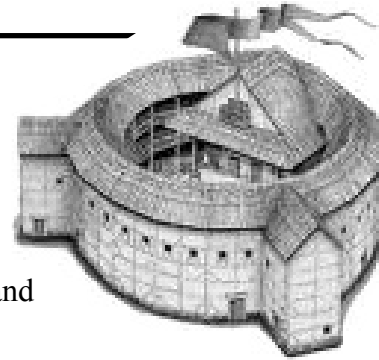
Assignment: If you were to name your own house after an animal, real or mythical, what would you choose and why? Use the space below to write your answer.

[illegible]

Current Theater Etiquette

To make the theater-going experience more enjoyable for everyone, a code of behavior has been established by theater patrons. 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 all people near you and on stage can hear you.
- Showing appropriate responses to the performance, such as laughing and applauding, is appreciated.
- Act with maturity during romantic scenes.
- Keep your feet off chairs around you.
- Practice good personal hygiene before arriving, but do not comb your hair or applying make-up during the performance!
- 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!



Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

Extra Credit: Find in the newspaper or on the Internet a play that will be performed in your area, and fill out the information below. If possible, plan to attend the play with your family or friends!

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____



Wild Will:

An Internet Scavenger Hunt

Directions: Use the Internet to help you answer the questions below. There are many websites about William Shakespeare. Start with a general search using a major search engine and go from there.

1. When and where was Shakespeare born? _____
2. What were his parents' names? _____
3. Who did William Shakespeare marry and what was the age difference? (Mrs. Shakespeare is not an appropriate answer.) _____
4. How many children did they have? _____
5. Shakespeare was part owner of a theater company. What was the name of it?

6. Did Shakespeare ever attend a university? _____
7. How many plays did he write? How many sonnets? _____
8. What was ironic about his death date, April 23, 1616? _____

9. What two things about him did you find interesting? _____

10. What four facts did you learn about him through this hunt that you didn't know before?

a) _____	c) _____
b) _____	d) _____

Shakespeare's Language



Part A: Shakespeare often wrote in verse that rhymes. To let an audience, actors, and stage crew know when the scene is over, Shakespeare many times ends the scene with a couplet, or two rhyming lines. In the rhyming couplet below, underline the words that rhyme.

Dromio of Syracuse: Master, shall I keep watch over the gate?
Adriana: Yes, and let no one enter, or I'll break your pate.
Luciana: Come, come, Antipholus. We dine too late.

In the space below, describe what takes place in the scene that ends with this couplet.

Part B: Find one other rhyming couplet from the Playbook® text and write it below. Underline the words that rhyme and identify the act and scene where you found the rhyming couplet.

Part C: Shakespeare frequently uses imagery by having his characters speak in metaphors, similes, and personification. For example, in Act 1, (page 4 in the Playbook® text) Antipholus of Syracuse compares himself to a drop of water.

He that commends me to be happy
 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, failing to find his fellow there,
 Unseen, inquisitive, confuses himself.
 So I, to find a mother and a brother,
 In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

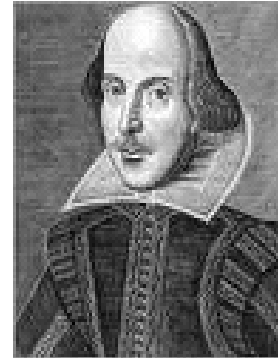
Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, write your interpretation of what Antipholus of Syracuse means in this passage. Limit your interpretation to one paragraph.

Part D: Sometimes Shakespeare's characters think out loud for the benefit of the audience. These speeches are called soliloquies. Find one example of a soliloquy in the play. On the same paper you used for part C, identify the scene and act where it is located, and write a short statement describing what the soliloquy is about.

Shakespearean Humanity

Part A: Class Discussion

Shakespeare's themes and characters are relational to current life, which is why Shakespeare is taught today. As a class, discuss why Shakespeare's plays are considered classic literature. How do you think Shakespeare could have such a grasp on the human experience? How was he able to understand life at such a deep level and communicate it so effectively in his writing? How did he recognize that people are so different, but at the same time inexplicably similar?



Part B: Art Project

In Shakespeare's time, all actors were males. Women were not allowed to act on stage. Female parts were often played by adolescent boys. Elaborate costumes including wigs, make-up, and full-body dresses made a convincing picture. Choose a female character from *The Comedy of Errors*. Now think of a famous actor in our society today who could play that character. On a separate sheet of paper, create a collage for your character and your modern actor. You can use magazine clippings, clip-art, photographs, or anything else to help you communicate why you think the actor could effectively portray Shakespeare's character. Put a picture of your modern day icon in the center with the character's name from the play under the picture. Then arrange all of your clippings around the center picture to illustrate your ideas. The collage should be filled with examples. Be prepared to share your work and explain your collage in a small group. The best collages will be highlighted in front of the class.

Shakespearean Karaoke



Directions: Pretend you have never heard anything about the characters in the play, *The Comedy of Errors*. As a class, discuss what each of the names makes you feel about them. What consonants are featured in their names? What vowels? Come up with at least two different ways to pronounce the characters' names.

The Characters in A Comedy of Errors

Antipholus of Syracuse	Twin son of Aegeon and Aemelia
Antipholus of Ephesus	Twin son of Aegeon and Aemelia
Dromio of Syracuse	Twin slave of Antipholus of Syracuse
Dromio of Ephesus	Twin slave of Antipholus of Ephesus
Adriana	Wife of Antipholus of Ephesus
Luciana	Adriana's sister
Luce	Adriana's kitchen maid
Aemilia	Abbess of Ephesus, Aegeon's long-lost wife
Solinus	Duke of Ephesus
Aegeon	Merchant of Syracuse, Aemelia's long lost husband
Balthazar	A gold merchant
Dr. Pinch	An exorcist

Assignment: Choose one character. It can be one you like or dislike. Find a piece of modern music (with lyrics or instrumental) that you feel suits the character perfectly. It might be the lyrics of the song that connect to the character's actions, or the rhythm and cadence of the music that follows the character's thoughts. Bring a copy of your music to class. Present your lyric or music piece to the class and tell the class five specific reasons why you feel the song or music you selected is a good match to the character. Turn in this assignment sheet with the following blanks filled in.

Character selected: _____

Name of music lyric or piece: _____

Music artist's name: _____

Five reasons this piece of music or lyric is a good match to the character.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Shakespearean Balderdash

For Teacher Use Only



Classroom Activity: Shakespeare's work provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn both outdated language and vocabulary still used today. Play a variation of Balderdash in your classroom, using words found in Shakespeare's plays. Divide your students into groups, cut out the words and definitions provided below, and hand out different words to each group. Instruct the students to write three made-up definitions for each word on a separate sheet of paper, in addition to the true definition. If there is time, have the students write sentences using the word. They should write a different sentence for each of the correct and made up definitions. Have each group ask the definition of their words of another group, giving their four answers as options, and reading their sentences. If the group answers correctly, they earn a point. After all the words' definitions have been asked and each group has had a turn to answer, the group with the most points wins, and everyone learns!

Alderliefest dearest of all	Abet to encourage or support, especially in wrongdoing	Ducat type of gold coin of varying origin and value	Aspersion sprinkling (of dew or other liquid)
Lither lazy	Madrigal short lyrical poem	Shrewish badly behaved	Neif hand
Mallecho mischief	Palmy victorious	Pate head	Statute formal, written law of a country or state
Capon meat from a male chicken whose reproductive organs have been removed	Tarriance delay	Prostrate Lying face down in submission or adoration	Orgulous proud
Quip a sharp taunt	Forgetive inventive or imaginative	Dearn lonely	Canton a song

Shakespearean People and Time



Part A: *A Comedy of Errors* represents one of the very few of Shakespeare's plays that follow the classical unities of time and place. This means all the action takes place in one day and in one place.

On a separate sheet of paper, construct a time chart, similar to the one below, to help you sort out the action of the play. Indicate the order in which main events take place.

1. Antipholus of
Syracuse sends
Dromio of Syracuse
to the Centaur Inn,
and then meets
Dromio of Ephesus.

/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Part B: Using the chart below as a template, create a character web for each character on a separate sheet of paper. Write the character's name inside the circle. Think of different ways to describe the character and write your ideas on the lines. Make sure to include the character's relationship to the other characters in the play.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

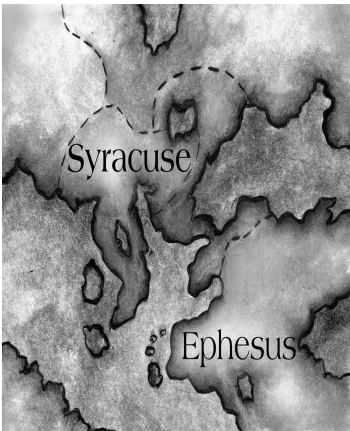
Part C: After completing Parts A and B, discuss as a class the complexity of the characters' relationships and how they affect the progression of the play.



Assignment: In the space provided, write a one page essay discussing the meaning of the title in connection to the play and your own life experience. How does the title reflect in the play? When have you had an experience or moment that was “a comedy of errors?”

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a margin at the top, followed by several rows of lines, and another margin at the bottom. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a set of legal pads.

Pun Intended



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 a 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*.

Part A: Read through the Playbook® text and make a list of puns and insults that you find. Write down why they are funny in the context of the play. Use an additional sheet if necessary.

Pun or Insult	Why is it funny? (What does the pun mean?)

Part B: How do the Shakespearean puns and insults you found tell us about the characters in the play who said them?

Discussion Questions

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Directions: Divide the class into small groups of four students. Assign each group one of the discussion activities below. The group is to discuss the assignment. Activities range in level of difficulty. Choose questions based on age appropriateness and students' strengths. At the end of the small group session, the group will share their response with the rest of the class.

1. Is the play, *The Comedy of Errors*, a comedy or a tragedy? Why? What makes it comic and what makes it tragic? Are comedy and tragedy closely linked? Why do tragic things make us laugh?
2. If some of the comic elements within the play were to happen today, they would be quite tragic (accusations, mistaken identity, identity theft). Create a story concept using a current situation that follows Shakespeare's themes. How would you tell your story?
3. Would you enjoy having a twin brother or sister? Create a story about what a day would be like with you and your twin. Include going to breakfast, lunch, dinner, attending school, going to an after school activity, etc. Describe what happens during your day and how a twin could help or hinder you.
4. What is the relationship like between the Dromios and their masters? If you were a servant, what would you do to serve your master?
5. Create a story about being separated and reunited with your family or someone you love. What happens when you are reunited?
6. Aegeon and Aemelia's family were separated after being shipwrecked at sea after a storm. How would you protect your family in this situation? What could you have done to prevent your family's separation? What would you do after you lost your wife and son? How would you raise two boys (Antipholus and slave, Dromio)? Enact a news report about the event and interview the participants.
7. How are Luciana and Adriana different from one another? How do they relate to men? How do they react when they confront problems? How are Luciana and Adriana similar and different to women today?
8. How would you feel if you woke up and you were not allowed to do all the things you normally do? Would it make you appreciate them? Would you miss these things? Would you do other things? Create a story describing a day that is turned topsy-turvy, or completely upside-down. Include your reactions to such a day.
9. Are Antipholus and Dromio friends? How do they act as friends toward each other? When strange things start happening to them, does it drive them together, apart, or both? Does this happen to you? How?
10. Ephesus and Syracuse were two countries in fierce competition with each other. What are some things that make countries compete? Does this help or hinder a country? Create two fictional countries. Describe their different industries, how they will cooperate and how they will compete. Create a brief constitution with laws they will enact.



Soundscape: Corrupt Ephesus!

Some of what Shakespeare wrote is in verse. Many of these verses rhyme. However, **blank verse** is a kind of poetry that does not rhyme and is written in iambic pentameter (“Penta” is the prefix meaning five). Pentameter is a line of poetry having five metrical feet. 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**.

Here’s an example of iambic pentameter from the
Original Text, Act 4, Scene II.

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**?



Prose is the form of speech used by common people in Shakespearean drama. There is no rhythm or meter in the line. It is everyday language. When a character in a play speaks in prose, you usually know that he or she is a working class member of society. However, many important characters also speak in prose at times, often symbolizing an unusual state of mind.

Assignment: The class will be divided into small groups. Each group should read among themselves the following soliloquy from the original play text and determine whether this passage is written in **rhymed verse**, **blank verse**, or **prose**. Each group will be assigned one line of verse from the passage and they are to create a “soundscape” with their line. Using sound only, they will convey the mood and meaning of the line. After the groups have developed their “soundscape,” the groups will take turns presenting their creation to the class. A reader from each group will read the passage aloud while the rest of his or her group members present the “soundscape” under it, adding each sound to the cacophony as the speaker continues to read the passage aloud.

Original Text – Act 1, Scene II
Antipholus of Syracuse:

Upon my life, by some device or other
The villain is o'er-raught of all my money.
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,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin:
If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.
I'll to the Centaur, to go seek this slave:
I greatly fear my money is not safe.

Theater Acoustics



Acoustics refers to the characteristics of a room which determine the quality of sounds in it. In theaters with good acoustics, plays are more easily heard by the audience. The Globe Theater, the home of Shakespeare's acting company, had poor acoustics, making the actors' jobs more difficult. In order for their words to carry, they needed to speak very loudly and enhance their lines with exaggerated gestures to help the audience understand what was happening. Modern theaters and stadiums are designed with acoustics in mind, so that the sound quality will be the best possible.

There are several requirements a theater must meet in order to have good acoustics:

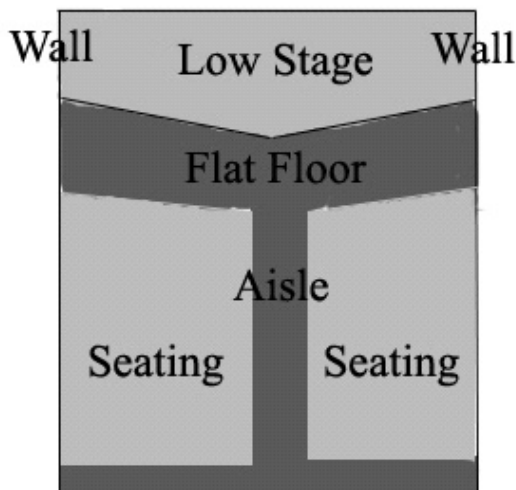
- Sound should be loud enough to be heard well in all parts of the auditorium, including seats farthest away.
- Sound levels should be equally distributed throughout the room.
- There should be no obvious echoes.
- Background noise should not be heard.

Adequate sound levels can be reached by building a theater with the following design characteristics:

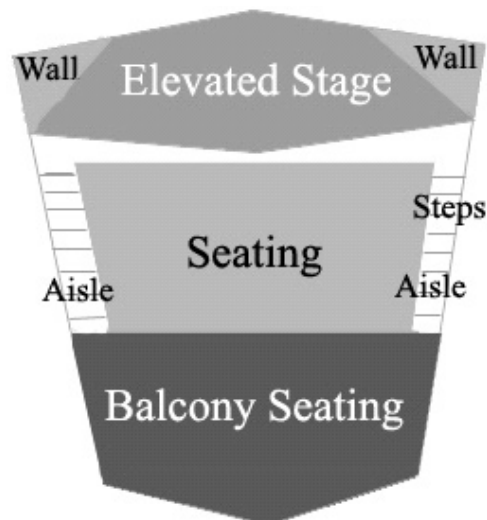
- The audience should be as close to the sound source as possible. Use of balconies can help with this.
- The location of the sound source (i.e., actors) should be raised above ground as much as possible.
- The floor for seating the audience should be slanted with steps.
- The sound source should be surrounded by large surfaces to reflect the sound into the audience.
- Walls facing each other should **not** be parallel, because they can cause echoes.
- Aisles should be located at the edges of the room, rather than in the center where viewing and listening is best.

Which diagram shows the room with the best acoustic characteristics? Circle the letter of your response.

A.



B.



Answer Key

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Wild Will: An Internet Scavenger Hunt

1. April 23, 1564, Stratford-upon-Avon, England
2. John Shakespeare and Mary Arden
3. Anne Hathaway (age 26 when Shakespeare was 18), difference of 8 years
4. 3 children: Susanna (the oldest), Hamnet and Judith (twins)
5. Lord Chamberlain's Men, later called the King's Men
6. No, he never attended university.
7. 38 plays and 154 sonnets
8. 1616, age 52, died on his birthday, April 23rd
9. Answers will vary.
10. Answers will vary.

Shakespeare's Language

Part A: gate, pate, and late

Act 2, Scene 2; Antipholus of Syracuse meets Dromio of Syracuse and believes he is the same person who had asked him to come home to dinner. Adriana joins them and thinks that Antipholus of Syracuse is her husband. Antipholus and Dromio go to her house for dinner.

Part B: Act 4, Scene 3: "This is the best course of action for me to choose/ Because forty ducats is too much to lose" (page 38).

Part C: Answers will vary.

Part D: Act 4, Scene 3; "There's not a man I meet ... sorcerers who inhabit this city" (page 35).

Shakespearean People and Time

(Can include additional events.)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Antipholus of Syracuse sends Dromio of Syracuse to the Centaur Inn, and then meets Dromio of Ephesus. | 2. Adriana and Luciana discuss wives' roles, and Dromio of Ephesus reports to them about Antipholus' madness. | 3. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse go to the Phoenix for dinner; Antipholus of Ephesus is locked out. | 4. Antipholus of Ephesus is arrested for failing to pay Balthazar. | 5. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse fear black magic in the town and prepare to leave. | 6. Aemilia takes care of Antipholus of Syracuse in the abbey. | 7. The family is reunited and they realize why the confusion arose. |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|

Pun Intended

Pun or Insult	Why is it funny? (What does the pun mean?)
Act 1: "She is so hot because the meat is cold" (page 4, Dromio of Ephesus).	"Hot" also means angry, and contrasts with the statement that the meat is cold.
Act 1: "I have some marks of yours upon my head" (page 5, Dromio of Ephesus).	"Marks" can refer to either money or bruises.
Act 2, Scene 1: "And he will bless that cross with another when he beats me again. Between you, I shall have a holy head" (page 9, Dromio of Ephesus).	The bruises left by the two beatings will leave the appearance of a cross on Dromio's head, which looks similar to the religious symbol.
Act 3: "I suffered many wrongs from you, blow for blow" (page 20, Dromio of Ephesus).	"Blow for blow" can literally refer to beatings, or can figuratively refer to other wrongs.
Act 4, Scene 4: "You senseless villain!" (Antipholus of Ephesus) "I wish I was senseless, sir" (page 40, Dromio of Ephesus).	Senseless can mean stupidity, or lacking sensation; Dromio wishes he could not feel the pain from being beaten.

Theater Acoustics

B. is the better designed theater.





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