

- Laura M.

My experiences in Stratford have been wonderful so far. We arrived Sunday evening and had a delicious dinner at Quilts and Croissants, a nearby bed and breakfast. Everyone has been so friendly to us, especially our Inn-keeper, Kate. Monday morning we discussed the play we would see that night, *Richard III*, in a class. As I knew absolutely nothing about the play, the talk was very helpful in understanding and appreciating the production when we saw it later that night. Of course I've heard the phrase, "a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" many times, but in the class I learned where it came from and the some context. After the discussion, we enjoyed an acting workshop, my first ever. I am not an actress. However, I feel I did get something out of it and enjoyed acting out a scene from the play.

That night we saw an excellent performance of *Richard III*. The actors were all amazing, particularly the one playing Richard, who we had a talk back session with the next morning.

Other activities we did include visiting Shakespeare's birthplace and having a wig and makeup demonstration. After seeing his plays, seeing where he was born and grew up was interesting.

The wigs and makeup demonstration was a first time experience for me. I really enjoyed seeing my friends dressed up in somewhat ridiculous costumes and then having myself made to look beaten up and bloody, as well as have my throat "cut" with a stage knife.

- *Maria D.*
- - Reflection of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Programs and RSC Shows:
- The Birthplace Trust Program gave me memories that will last a lifetime. I will never forget the drama classes, the costume demonstrations, the tea breaks, and the discussions. Everyone is very friendly and warm. This program gave me many opportunities in acting and understanding the English culture, which were my true intentions while visiting Stratford-upon-Avon.
- *Richard III* was the first performance I saw in Stratford; the Birthplace Trust allowed me to see a beautiful performance up close and personal with the actors. And the next morning, I got to speak to Jonjo O'Neill, *Richard III* himself. Jonjo O'Neill inspired me as an actress; he taught me the importance of knowing and understanding the roles in which I am cast. I think it was one of the most beneficial sessions throughout the whole trip.
- *A Soldier in Every Son* was one of the two contemporary plays I saw while I was in England. This show contained themes from some of Shakespeare's works, which I thought was pretty interesting. This play was modernized very well and very uniquely. Like *Richard III*, I was able to talk to some of the actors in this play as well. It was truly an amazing experience. The Birthplace Trust enabled me to see these amazing plays so close to the stage, and I am thankful for that. The summaries given before each play were also very helpful if I had not previously known the plot. The discussions helped me realize different perspectives of each play, and the talks helped me clarify some questions.

- The workshops were not only very helpful as an actress but also just fun in general. The drama workshop helped me learn new acting techniques, which I will definitely remember for future acting roles. The voice workshop made me realize the importance of iambic pentameter in Shakespeare's works and how it affects the vocal delivery and impact of the lines to the audience. The wigs and make-up demonstration was a lot of fun. I enjoyed learning about the process of making the fake decapitated heads that were used in the Royal Shakespeare Company's shows, such as *Richard III* and *A Soldier in Every Son*.
- It was an amazing experience to be able to learn about Shakespeare's life and works in the place where he lived and wrote. Stratford-upon-Avon is such a quaint, little town with so much to offer. The Birthplace Trust's workshops and the RSC's shows were some of my favorite experiences while in England. I'm glad I had the opportunity to come on this trip, and I truly think it is the best and most fun way to learn about Shakespeare and his plays.

7/10/12 Blog:

We have been in England for about five days now, and today is our second full day in Stratford Upon Avon. It seems like we've been here forever because of all of the landmarks we visited, the shows we have seen, and the memories that we have made.

We've started our day by reflecting on last evening's performance of *Richard III*. Shortly after, we got to meet and talk to Jonjo O'Neill, which was wonderful. Jonjo shared some of his acting techniques and opinions of last night's performance of *Richard III*. Then, we hopped on a bus to Warwick Castle, which is an authentic medieval castle. We explored the secrets of medieval kings' and queens' lifestyles, watched jousting performances, and took part in other activities of that time period.

Finally, we watched the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of *A Soldier in Every Son* (the only contemporary play we are seeing while in England). This play is about three, Mexican tribes who all want ultimate power. This play seamlessly includes scandal, death, betrayal, and war with love and emotion. This was my favorite piece and I could not stop talking about it.

Cheers.

Reflection:

- This day was packed with fun events (like always). Meeting Jonjo was incredible. It's cool to learn about how a great performer's mind functions. We learned acting and improvisation techniques.
 - Personally, I know I will take away his notebook idea.
 - He keeps a journal and writes down questions that he has about his character. I feel like it's a good way to really get to know your character (in performance).
- Warwick Castle had beautiful architecture. The castle showed how kings and queens lived by recreating wax sculptures.
- *A Soldier in Every Son* had mixed reviews from the seven of us.
 - Personally, I think it was my favorite performance so far. We had front row seats, so Itzcoat's (Buckingham's) scene with his dead mother's head was extra intense.
 - The costumes and stage were very well done. Some liked the images that were projected on the back wall of the stage.

- *Torie R.*

From the moment I arrived to Stratford the life and works of Shakespeare have surrounded me. I have always enjoyed Shakespeare's plays, but I never really understood his true impact on the world until coming to Stratford. Thus far, I have enjoyed every aspect of my Shakespeare study course.

Group discussions both before and after each performance have truly enhanced my understanding of each play and each characters' impact on the production. I had not previously studied *Richard III* so getting some background information about what the play was about and whom the characters were, helped me thoroughly enjoy watching the performance.

Having the question and answer session with Jonjo O'Neill was a particularly pleasurable aspect of my course, because I love meeting actors and actresses after watching them perform. I especially enjoyed meeting the lead of the play. Asking him specific questions about the show helped me to better understand what it takes to be a true performer and gave me a deeper insight into the script.

Both the drama workshop and the wig and makeup demonstration have been informative and entertaining. I have never done a drama workshop before, and I was able to fully understand and participate all aspects of the workshop. It shows that the workshop is useful to actors and actresses with all levels of experience. The wig and makeup demonstration was incredibly fun. All members of the group were able to try on different outfits and quite literally step into the shoes of a Shakespearian character. I found the way people get "killed" on stage particularly interesting. The "killings" always looked so real and I was also curious on how they were able to make it look so realistic and now I understand how.

Lastly, the general Shakespearian history that surrounds the town adds so much to the course because one becomes so immersed into the life of Shakespeare. It does not become a lesson in a history book, but it instead becomes real.

Overall, I have truly enjoyed my time in Stratford and the lessons that I have learned through the Shakespeare Centre and Royal Shakespeare Company will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Lauren S.

Although I have always loved New York for its exciting, hustle and bustle lifestyle, Stratford has a quaint charm of its own, and I am now a major fan. Since being in a Shakespeare show last spring, I have been eager to learn more about Shakespeare and his legacy. This program has gone above and beyond my hopes and expectations, teaching me something new everyday and feeding my enthusiasm for acting. Nick Walton immediately excited me by clearly expressing his love for Shakespeare as he engaged us in discussions that thoroughly set the stage for me to enjoy *Richard III*. Getting the opportunity to speak to Jonjo O'Neill was priceless; I loved hearing his take on the play and on acting as a whole. He was so friendly and open to all of our questions. Despite the contrast between *Richard III* and *A Soldier in Every Son*, the people in this program consistently led successful conversations about the plays. I deeply appreciated their respect for and genuine interest in our opinions. I found myself enjoying both of the shows even more after hearing their thoughts and evaluations. The Wigs & Make-Up and Drama workshops were great supplements to the shows that we saw, bringing to light other vital factors of acting and enjoying theatre. I cannot wait to spend the next two days attending more workshops and plays and becoming even more of a Shakespeare buff!

-Tess F.

Driving in to Stratford I was able to see all the houses and shops in the town and I was quick to realize how quaint and sweet everything was. It really is a perfect place to study Shakespeare and I was so excited to get started. Our first meeting with Nick Walton was a great start to the program, he really got me excited to see *Richard III* (which I was actually not too eager to see before). Then the drama workshop was so much fun! I loved the tiny games that got us energized; I will be volunteering at a children's theater next week and I would love to show the kids some of those games. I loved how he incorporated the show that we were seeing that night and made me want to see the scenes we did really badly. Walking around Shakespeare's birth place was interesting. I did like the media tour though, that was pretty interesting. *Richard III* is my favorite play thus far, it was funny and tragic and I hated that I loved King Richard so much. The discussion with Nick the next day was fun and it brought up some great conversations. I was so excited to hear that we were going to meet Jonjo O'Neil who played Richard! He was a bit quiet in the beginning, but after some time he loosened up and became really funny. *A Soldier in Every Son* was very interesting and I kept on having mixed feelings about it. In the end, I decided to give it about 3 stars for the costumes, staging, and acting was amazing but the story line felt way too jumbled and a tad over dramatic with all the plot turns. The discussion the next day with Anjna Chouhan was great because hearing others opinions on the show gave me some new opinions or thoughts on the show. The wigs and makeup demonstration was so much fun! I loved how she brought each of us up to do a demonstration of what the actors would wear or what makeup was required. This really made me want to be an actress even more. It was so interesting to learn how blood was used in plays because I have always wondered how they were able to bleed on stage and now I have the answer. So far, this trip has been great!

- *Kim C.*

Shockingly, the weather was amazing today (no rain!!), so it was a great start to a great day. We were served a yummy traditional English breakfast and walked over to Shakespeare's Birthplace, where one of the teachers in the program explained what our course entails. After tea and coffee, he then gave us a summary of *Richard III*, which we say tonight and unanimously loved! Though Richard had around 1,000 lines, he maintained consistent energy and believable acting throughout the play. We also attended a drama workshop today, which involved running around to build up our energy and experimenting with spacing, diction, and volume. Afterwards, we toured the house where Shakespeare was born and lived. In the garden outside, three actors performed scenes from any requested play, and we were able to witness snippets from *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Can't wait for another equally busy and exciting day tomorrow!

Day 4

We have been in England for about five days now, and today is our second full day in Stratford-Upon-Avon. It seems like we've been here forever because of all of the landmarks we've visited, the shows we have seen, and the memories that we have made.

We started our day by reflecting on the performance of *Richard III*. Shortly after, we got to meet and have a talk back session with Jonjo O'Neill (the actor who plays the title role of *Richard III*). We asked him questions about the role, working with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and preparing for such a demanding performance. Jonjo shared some of his acting techniques and opinions of Monday night's performance. Then, we hopped on a bus to Warwick Castle. An authentic medieval castle, the original structure was built in 914. We explored the secrets of past kings and queens, toured the home and furnishings of royalty throughout the ages, and watched jousting performances.

Finally, we attended the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of *A Soldier in Every Son* (the only contemporary play we are seeing while in England). This play is about three Mexican tribes who all want ultimate power. Based on the Shakespearean Tragedies, this play seamlessly includes scandal, death, betrayal, and war with love and emotion.

Day 5

Sorry we have been out of touch for a bit. We had some trouble with the WiFi in the B&B, but we are back up and running.

Wed. morning was filled with intense discussions about last night's performance of *A Soldier in Every Son*, a play about war, family conflicts and tribal obligation that was

presented and created by the National Theatre Company of Mexico. Commissioned by and performed along with the RSC, this is the only contemporary piece we will see during our stay. While the text and language are modern, the play is set in Mexico in the 14th century. Our varied opinions on the play started off the day in a very theatrical mood.

We continued these discussions during our post-show discussion with Anjna Chouhan. Anjna's review of the piece was similar to ours: she loved the costumes, staging, set, and we all agreed that the acting was fantastic, but the plot seemed to move too fast, and left many questions. After our usual tea and coffee break we had a wig and makeup demonstration. We were dressed up in many different costumes from Tess as Cleopatra and Lauren as Captain Hook, to Maria as Queen Elizabeth and Liz as Jack Sparrow. Torie was dressed in typical Elizabethan attire, while Laura had the opportunity to look bruised and bloody from just simple makeup tricks.

We dined at the oldest pub in Stratford-Upon-Avon, called the Garrick which was established in 1594. The food definitely proved why it has lasted so long.

Tomorrow we will do pre-show work on *Twelfth Night* and attend a voice class with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Pictures to follow soon.

Day 6

We began our day with a discussion of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in preparation for the performance. This was very helpful to everyone, specifically those of us who have not read the play. We learned about the nuances of the script and were able to discuss key scenes and characters before using certain areas of the script for further analysis.

This session was very helpful, and offered a nice segue into our voice and diction workshop. The voice workshop, run by a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company's vocal team, was intense and incredibly fun. We used selected scenes from *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* for vocal work. We learned about breath support, and enunciation, and worked in teams to deliver the lines using the techniques we had just learned.

After a break for lunch, we saw a number of historical locations in town, including Shakespeare's Grave, Holy Trinity (the site of Shakespeare's Grave, as well as the site of his baptism), Nash's House, and New Place (Shakespeare's last residence). Many of Greg Wyatt's sculptures are housed in these locations, and it was lovely to see the artist's work once again.

In the evening we attended a performance of *Twelfth Night*. We loved it! The setting was something of a dream, and staged in a distorted slightly worn hotel. The lead characters, Sebastian and Viola, rise onto the stage from a pool of water underneath, and,

minus a few exceptions, the acting was superb.

Tomorrow, after workshops, we are off to Oxford.