

Lakeside Summer School Programs
Shakespeare Stratford-upon-Avon Class
Reflections 2014

Carly S

Although my favorite site to visit was Anne Hathaway's cottage, with its beautiful gardens and grounds; my favorite play to watch was *Henry IV Part 1*, because it was amazing to see such a great production and interpretation of a work that we've read; and I loved being in scenic, quaint Stratford, my favorite moment might have to have been the Q&A with Elliot Barnes-Worrell. Going into the discussion, I was a little disappointed that we weren't going to meet a headliner for the Royal Shakespeare Company, but Elliot completely erased those concerns. Not only was he extremely eloquent, but I thoroughly enjoyed learning about his past in acting, how he acts and what acting means to him. It was so eye-opening to learn how actors perform Shakespeare and how they handle different roles. The way that Elliot presented it was so well-done that I wanted to drop everything and learn acting! The session with him allowed me to learn the depth of understanding and technique that actors work to apply to Shakespearian roles. Even though there were many wonderful elements to the Stratford-Upon-Avon trip, I believe that being able to listen and ask questions to such a well-spoken and engaging actor lended us invaluable insight on such an important element of Shakespeare's plays.

Danyelle D

I most thoroughly enjoyed my time in Stratford, and believe it is a vital part of the course. It felt amazing to be standing where Shakespeare once stood, hearing about his life and how it might have influenced his works. It was also amazing to step into the theatrical part of Shakespeare. His plays were meant to be performed. I didn't like *King Henry IV* when we read it in class, but on the stage I loved it. What was even more amazing was learning about how the voice coaches, actors, makeup artists, and directors bring Shakespeare to life. The behind the scenes look at the theatre was incredibly insightful. I had no idea how much influence the way a particular line was performed had over its meaning; how the setting can add themes. The plays, no doubt, were the best part of the trip. My only regret is not being able to stay in Stratford longer.

Devin C

Looking back at the trip to Stratford, one of my favorite moments was going to a different play every night. After we finished our daily routine at the Shakespeare Birth Trust, we would walk home and immediately get ready for dinner, put on our nice clothes, and leave for the plays. We got the opportunity to dress up and every one of us took that occasion to look our best, which was probably why we took a nightly picture outside the theatre. But more than that, going to the performances gave us a chance to experience world-class actors that we might otherwise not be able to see again. By watching the plays, I gained a deeper understanding of the material and grew a deeper respect for the actors that took on those roles; especially after hearing them deliver a 50-line speech, when I struggled with memorizing one of only 15 lines in class. The final highlight happened on our last night when we stayed outside the theatre after the show to meet some of the actors as they came out. We praised

their performances and even got pictures with a few of them, which made both them, and us very happy! Overall this experience in Stratford is one that I would love to take again in the near future and it has made me want to read even more of Shakespeare's plays and learn about them.

Jonah W

The highlight of the trip for me was seeing the productions of *Henry IV*, particularly part 1. It ended up being the only play we saw that we had studied extensively and I had a great time comparing the interpretations of various characters that I developed when reading the play to those of the RSC director and actors. I had heard people say that seeing the plays performed live was a completely different experience from reading them or even watching a movie version, but I was not completely convinced until I actually saw one. And I have to say that I was totally blown away. Not only was the acting and set design great, but something about the thrust stage and the fact that we were right there watching the live actors left a strong impression on me. I also gained a healthy respect of the RSC actors and actors in general upon seeing it. Not only do they have to memorize their lines, but they also have to figure out their character and learn their cues and remember blocking and on top of all that they have to be able to feel and express their character dozens of times of the run of the play. If their character is surprised by something they have to be surprised, even after performing the same scene countless times. Overall it was a great trip and I had a lot of fun!

Leslie K

When we read *Henry IV* in class, I distinctly remember disliking Falstaff. After arriving in England, I was shocked to find out that this lying, drunkard was considered one of Shakespeare's greatest characters, and an honor to play on stage. I, like many of my peers, was surprised by this.

Honestly, I was slightly frustrated that this would be our focus play; I had never encountered it before my class, and, knowing that it was a big anniversary year for Stratford, expected to see many great titles being performed. I was shocked to see not one, but two *Henry IV* characters portrayed in the Gower memorial to Shakespeare. There were only four characters represented, including Hamlet and Lady Macbeth, two of the greats! Perhaps I was missing something, I concluded. However, at dinner that night, most of the group concurred with my confusion; no one else was extremely tied with this play or this character, Falstaff.

When we read *Henry IV* in class, I distinctly remember not spending too much time discussing it, so perhaps this is where my disconnect was rooted. We would learn about and see the play in England, so we figured that we would spend our energy delving into the play there. During our lectures, I learned about why the play was so great and why many critics consider it Shakespeare's greatest work. *Henry IV* contains all the elements of a great play: comedy, tragedy, history, rebellion, all classes of people, and a good sword fight or two, just for excitement's sake. I started to believe what I was hearing, finally understanding many of the jokes and speeches of the play. The one thing I was still missing, however, was why Falstaff was so great.

The night of *Henry IV* Part One, I was excited to see how they'd bring this story to life, and how Falstaff would be portrayed. I had heard that Sir Antony Sher, one of the best actors in the world, would be playing Falstaff, so I had high expectations coupled with prejudice and preconception. Sher blew away all expectations. He was so hilariously funny, but so human that I kept waiting for him to come on

to stage. Falstaff used humor to disguise his loneliness and insecurity, which made me feel for Falstaff more than any other character in the play. From this performance, not did I only get to watch one of the greatest actors of our time, but I got to experience a full change of heart. I love Falstaff now, he is one of my favorite and most human characters, so much so that words do not do it justice. Sher made me like Falstaff, and Falstaff made me understand why Henry IV is considered one of William Shakespeare's greatest works.

McKaulay K

I can't believe that the week in Stratford is already over and I'm back in the United States. I was so amazed and surprised by the differences from England to the US. Aside from getting used to having cars flying down the opposite side of the street, there are so many other peculiarities and things I learned. The *dépaysement* I felt in England was unbelievable. Even when we were far away from Stratford, I imagined Shakespeare's inspiration as I peered into the dense forest on both sides of the busy motorway. I recalled a line in *Much Ado About Nothing* where Benedick proclaims "I will hide me in the arbor." This is something he would have little problem accomplishing in the lush English countryside. Shakespeare's many houses were wonderful. It's quite impressive that the Birthplace House fits right in with the rest of the town. This entire little city on the river full of amazing half-timber and brick houses is unlike anything I've seen before. I was glad to walk beside the Avon and eventually meandered into the church where Shakespeare is buried. This building was wonderful. The stained glass in it glowed almost with as much color as Shakespeare's words. I liked being able to see both the church spire and the tower of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre from all around town. I was amazed about how much I learned about Shakespeare, his plays, and the Elizabethan context of all at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Everyone knew so much about the Bard and it was great to be able to act out scenes from both *Henry IV, Part I*, and *Part II*. I also enjoyed the breaks and being able to continue our discussions with the people from the Birthplace Trust over a nice cup of tea. I greatly enjoyed all of the plays, especially the ways that the RSC uses the thrust stage space in both the RST and the Swan. My favorite sights were going to Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Visiting Warwick Castle. The Cottage and gardens reminded me of Alice in Wonderland, and the castle was amazing because of the 1100 years of history, from battles to nobility to the amazing architecture that is so well preserved. This has been a wonderful experience for me and I'm so thankful that I was able to take the course!

Michael D

The Stratford-Upon-Avon trip is an essential component to the Shakespeare class. The multitude of knowledge I gained from is invaluable, and the trip was downright fun. It was my first time going to England, so I got to experience a new, different type of culture in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

My most enjoyable part of the whole trip was when Elliot, an actor from the Royal Shakespeare Company, visited us in a Q&A setting. I imagined it would be rather boring; however, Elliot was such an interesting person. I remembered our host mentioned that another group would meet the assistant director and we would meet an actor; I was bummed out a little because I thought meeting an assistant director would be a bit more engaging. I was completely wrong, and I enjoyed every minute of listening to Elliot. Actually, Elliot gave a most inspiring message through his answers: do what you enjoy and have fun with it. That's the special message I received, as Elliot spoke about his struggle with finding his niche as an actor. He spoke candidly, and was a stimulating man.

Finally, the intense, 5-day learning experience is necessary but not boring or tiring. I thoroughly enjoyed always having an activity to do; there was a perfect amount of work time and free time to explore the city of Stratford. Everything was downright wonderful about the trip, and the week finished with me wishing we could stay longer.

Shawna Z

My week in Stratford was absolutely lovely. Everything—the weather, the food, the hospitality, the lectures, and especially the plays—was wonderful. The first play we saw was *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, one of Shakespeare's first plays and a delightfully entertaining love-comedy. I think this was the perfect play to kick off our week, and it definitely set a high standard and left me enthralled. I had never been much of a theater enthusiast, but the production of *Two Gents* was incredible and the atmosphere left me wanting more. It was colorful, musical, funny, and engaging—I couldn't wait for the rest of the week!

The following day, we had the incredible opportunity of talking to one of the actors from *Two Gents*. This was easily one of the highlights of the trip for me. When we had our Q&A session with him, he was lively, eloquent, and very profound. I was so intrigued! Lucky for us, we got to see this particular actor in two more plays, *Henry IV parts I&II*, during our time in Stratford. It was really cool watching out for him in the *Henry IV's* after talking to him about his experience as an actor. Additionally, the *Henry IV's* were brilliant plays. In fact, I think *Henry IV part I* was my favorite play that we saw. The acting was great, the fight scenes were phenomenal, and Sir Antony Sher was the PERFECT Falstaff! Falstaff is regarded as one of Shakespeare's most lovable characters, and I didn't quite understand why until I saw Anthony Sher portray him on stage. This play was actually the only one we read during our course. Seeing it come alive on stage made me appreciate the characters and the story that much more. It was an incredible production and I was thoroughly impressed.

Our trip to Stratford-upon-Avon was so much fun. The days were long but they were exciting and never boring. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and The Royal Shakespeare Company made me infinitely more appreciative and enthusiastic about William Shakespeare. Although we don't know very much about the man himself, his works still touch people from all around the world 450 years later. Traveling to England was the perfect way to wrap up the Shakespeare English course. It truly was a fantastic opportunity and I'm very grateful. Shakespeare's legacy is preserved in Stratford, and I look forward to reading more of his plays in the near future!

Wesley Y

One of my favorite moments in the trip was when we got to meet one of the RSC actors, Elliott. The cool factor wasn't just from him being a professional Shakespeare actor (though that was cool too), it was also from just how cool of a person he was. The interview ranged from questions about how hard it was to memorize lines, to the meaning of life and what our own personal contribution is to the world around us. Seeing this man speak about life in such a down-to-earth way, relating his own experiences of life and acting to the world around us was strangely inspiring, and after the interview, I felt so motivated for some reason, like a burst of altruism had infected me and I had the unquenchable urge to spread good to the outside world.

In the 3 weeks that we completed this course in, we talked about the many modern themes and motifs that Shakespeare literature relates to. Though the course subject was fascinating in itself, it never

really put in perspective how powerful these concepts were, that is, until we arrived in Stratford. It was only here that I could see how integral a part Shakespeare played in these people's lives, and how wonderful a thing it was to celebrate this piece of culture. Elliott talked about how this career in Shakespeare had opened so many new doors for him; and though my future may not be in acting, I sure as heck want it to be as cool when I'm older.