



PANOPLY THEATRE COLLECTIVE

CLOWNS READING SHAKESPEARE



CLOWNS READING SHAKESPEARE STUDY GUIDE

Created by Panoply Theatre Collective
Directed & Designed by Kenzia Dalie
Performed by Brendan Kinnon, Callan Forrester,
Paige Madsen, Sienna Singh, & Alyssa Pothier
Stage Managed by Kenzia Dalie & Mitchell Graw



PROLOGUE
PERFORMING ARTS
ARTS DE LA SCÈNE

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Clowns Reading Shakespeare

Synopsis: A trio of eager Clowns has arrived to audition for a Shakespeare play! What play, you ask? One of William Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, of course! Which one, you ask? Well...Can these Clowns handle Hamlet, the famous drama about a grief-stricken son? Or how about Romeo & Juliet, the beloved tale of star-crossed romance? Or maybe Macbeth, Shakespeare's spooky play about witches and kings? Can this intrepid group choose a play? The show must go on! Improv and mischief occurs as the Clowns make each play their own, following the unusual whims of the Director. The Clowns prove that focusing on teamwork and following your instincts leads to wonderful art.

This show is comedic, heartfelt, and extremely fun! This piece engages its audience with Shakespeare outside of the boundaries of language, exploring multiple classic plays in a hilarious new context. Whether or not you're a fan of Shakespeare, this show has something for you, since the story emphasizes literacy, creative thinking, confidence, and teamwork! This performance runs 45 minutes with no intermission, followed by a 15-minute question and answer session with the artists.

Show Trailer Video: <https://youtu.be/RNgSIll4waM>

CONTENT ADVISORIES: This show includes theatrical/stylistic depictions of cartoonish blood/violence (red fabric and umbrella swords, etc) in reference to events in the Shakespearean canon. Use of music & heightened noise throughout. This interactive, improv-based show encourages guided, voluntary audience participation throughout.



Top L to R: Alyssa Pothier as dinKEE, Callan Forrester as HotDog, Paige Madsen as The Director.
Bottom L to R: Brendan Kinnon as Cowfeet McHooves, the full cast, and Sienna Singh as Puff.
Photos by Liz Bragale at Full Haus Productions.

Panoply Theatre Collective

Panoply Theatre Collective - CLASSICS. CREATION. COLLABORATION!

Pan·o·ply / 'PAN. uh. plee':

a complete or impressive collection of things; a splendid display

Panoply is a Toronto-based charitable non-profit arts organization that prioritizes collaborative creation of new plays and inclusive adaptations of classics. Founded by Paige Madsen, Alyssa Pothier, and Sienna Singh in 2018, Panoply produces full-scale productions of original plays and classical adaptations, youth productions, educational workshops and programs, audio dramas, and staged readings. Beyond our productions, we actively engage with our community through partnerships with local community centres, libraries, and youth education facilities. We also foster emerging talent through our plays-in-development program, providing a platform for theatre creators to workshop new scripts. Follow us @panoplycollective or at www.panoplycollective.com

Our original Canadian theatre-for-young-audiences show *Clowns Reading Shakespeare* has been presented at the Toronto Fringe Festival, at the St Lawrence Shakespeare Festival's Spotlight Series, at Tarragon Theatre's Sally Stavro Family Series, at Toronto Youth Theatre's Wychwood Theatre, through the Toronto Arts in the Park program, at the Richmond Hill Public Library, at the Richmond Hill Centre for Performing Arts, and at Ovation! Performing Arts Academy.



L to R: Panoply Artistic Directors Paige Madsen, Alyssa Pothier, and Sienna Singh.
Photo by Graeme Jokic.

Artist Biographies



Brendan Kinnon (“Cowfeet McHooves”) he/they

Brendan is an actor, producer, and director who is inspired every day by the beauty of the natural world. They are the founder of *Riot King*, an artist hub producing theatre and arts-community events - and have produced and performed in a variety of projects across the country including new-Canadian plays, audio dramas, short films, and festivals! Selected performance credits include: *First Date: A Musical Comedy* and *Pinnochio* (County Stage Company); *Red* (Riot King), *The Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals* (Playhouse Collective), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Panoply Collective).



Callan Forrester (“Hotdog”) they/them

Callan is a non-binary, multi-disciplinary artist originally from Montreal. They moved to Toronto in 2019 to attend Randolph College for the Performing Arts, where they graduated in 2021. To Callan, theatre is a way to connect with our community and spark creation. They hope their work will inspire you to tell stories of your own. Selected credits include *The Leading Player Project* (EveryBODY on Stage), *The Storyteller* (No Strings Theatre) and season 4 of *Drag Heals* (OUTtv).



Kenzia Dalie (Creator/Director/Designer) she/they

Kenzia Dalie is a multidisciplinary Dora-award nominated artist, designer, director, and producer currently based in Tkaronto. She is the co-founder of Full Haus Productions, a company dedicated to archival filming of Canadian theatre, producing films highlighting women and queer folk, and creating events that uplift emerging artists. Previous Panoply collaborations include production designing for *LoveSick*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Prove a Villain*, and *In Your Own Backyard*.



Mitchell Graw (Stage Manager) he/him

Mitch is a comedic actor and writer hailing from Cranbrook, BC. Select credits include *Good News Toronto* and *We're All In This Forever* (TOSketchfest), or on screen in *Toronto Apartment* (Cut-Up Films) and *Independence Dawn* (Go Button Media).



Paige Madsen (“The Director”) she/her

Paige Madsen is a co-founding Artistic Director of Panoply. She is an actor, playwright, director, and producer, with a BFA in Performance Acting from TMU. Paige is an arts educator with Ovation! Performing Arts Academy and a frequent collaborator with Education Arts Canada. Select credits: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *LoveSick*, *Prove a Villain*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Falling Sickness* (Panoply Collective); *Pride & Prejudice* and *A Christmas Carol* (Wren Theatre); *Women Beware Women* (Shakespeare BASH’d); *Sappho Fragmented* and *The Haunting of Hill House* (Shadowpath); *Mouse on the Move* (Toronto Youth Theatre).



Sienna Singh (“Puff”) she/they

Sienna is a theatre artist and co-founding Artistic Director of Panoply, and a graduate of TMU’s performance acting program. Select theatre credits include: *Mass Exodus* (BadFox Collective); *LoveSick*, *The Bacchae*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo & Juliet* (Panoply Collective); *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (Shakespeare Bash’d) *Queen Margaret*, and *Portia’s Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare in The Ruff). Select Film/TV credits: *Fingernails* (Apple TV); *Locke & Key* (Netflix); *Death She Wrote* (Champlain Spring Prod); *Grand Army* (Netflix).



Alyssa Pothier (understudy) she/her

Alyssa is an actor, writer, and producer based in Toronto, and co-founding Artistic Director of Panoply. She is a graduate of the acting BFA at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is passionate about challenging audience perceptions of storytelling through both classical reimaginations and new contemporary work. Select acting credits include: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *LoveSick*, *Peter Pan*, *The Bacchae*, *Macbeth* (Panoply Theatre Collective); *Henry IV* (Shakespeare BASH’d); *Street Hamlet* (emerGENce Theatre); *Deep End* (New Story Productions, Toronto Fringe).



Glossary/Program Context



L to R: Sebastian Biasucci, Kenzia Dalie, Sienna Singh, Alyssa Pothier, Callan Forrester, Paige Madsen.
Photo by Liz Bragale at Full Haus Productions.

William Shakespeare (c. 23 April 1564–23 April 1616) was an English playwright, poet and actor. He is often called "the Bard", a nickname that comes from a historic term for a professional poet, singer, or storyteller. He was the author of around 39 plays and around 155 sonnets and longer poems. His works range from comedic to tragic, with many historical, fantastical, and innovative elements (he loved to invent his own words!). He often wrote in a style called 'blank/rhyming verse', with metered lines of speech ('iambic pentameter') that mimic the sound of a heartbeat. His works continue to be studied, performed, and adapted today.

Hamlet - a tragic play written by William Shakespeare. Prince Hamlet is a son who is grieving the loss of his father, the King of Denmark. Hamlet struggles with indecision as he seeks revenge against his uncle and tries to reconnect with his mother. *Hamlet* is often considered to be one of the greatest plays of all time, with its most famous speech "to be, or not to be" often called the greatest speech in English drama.

Romeo & Juliet - a tragic play written by William Shakespeare. Romeo and Juliet are young people from fighting families who fall in love against their family's wishes. Their youthful hope and impulsive actions contrast with the violence and hate of the other characters, and lead to their early deaths. Famous scenes include the 'masked ball' scene where they first meet, the 'balcony scene' where they confess their love, and the tragic end scene of the play.

Macbeth - a tragic play written by William Shakespeare. Macbeth is a brave Scottish general who meets a trio of witches, who predict that he will become King of Scotland. Eager to see this come true, and encouraged by his wife Lady Macbeth, he takes the Scottish throne, but he becomes an evil ruler. War breaks out, and Macbeth is defeated when the witches' final prediction, that he will lose the throne when the nearby forest moves to his castle, comes true as the heroic army marches to him with tree branches.

Clowns/Clowning - Red-nose clowning is a style of comedic performance with a focus on vulnerability, curiosity, and playfulness. The *clown* character developed out of the *fool* characters of commedia dell'arte theatre in Italy and the *fool* characters of ancient Greek and Roman theatre. The more recent Canadian style of theatrical clowning focuses on heightening a performer's naturally occurring emotions and impulses, and then channeling that into performance. Modern clowning is connected to audience interaction and improv, allowing for a spontaneous and authentic comedic performance.

Director - The leader of a production (play/musical/movie/etc.) who is responsible for the overall quality and vision of the piece. The director collaborates with their team of creative individuals to work on all performance and technical aspects of a show, including acting, stagecraft, costume design, properties (props), lighting design, set design, sound design, etc.

Stage Manager - The person who is responsible for the smooth running of a theatrical production. Their job includes a variety of activities such as overseeing the rehearsal process and coordinating communication, noting and tracking all elements of production, etc. Stage management requires a general understanding of all aspects of production and complete organization to make sure things run safely and efficiently.

Producer - The person who is responsible for providing or finding financial resources for developing a theatre production. The producer oversees the financial aspects of the production, such as budgeting and managing contracts with venues, people, and investors, and is connected to marketing, promotion, and sales of the show.

Pre-Program Learning



Clowns Reading Shakespeare is a show about a trio of clowns auditioning for a diva director's Shakespeare show...but they haven't decided which play to do! Should they do Hamlet? Romeo & Juliet? Or Macbeth? You'll laugh along with the clowns as they interact with the audience to try to find the best show for their troupe.

This performance runs 45 minutes with no intermission, followed by a 15-minute question and answer session with the artists. The clowns can be very silly, so you are encouraged to laugh, clap, and cheer along! But remember to also listen well when the clowns are performing. The clowns might pick people in the audience to interact with or even ask you to come up on stage! If you'd rather not participate, you can always just say no or shake your head.

Discussion Questions teachers can prompt beforehand:

- What's something that makes you LAUGH OUT LOUD? (A movie/TV show/book/comic/joke/story/etc.)
- What do you think would be the most fun part about performing a play?
- Do you think it's easier to achieve your goals by yourself, or as part of a team?
- Have you ever performed onstage (play/musical/concert/etc)? How did you feel?
- Have you ever heard of William Shakespeare? If so, what have you heard about him or his plays or his characters?
- What is your favourite kind of story? Mystery, comedy, drama, action etc.? Why?
- If you had the chance to perform in a talent show, what talent would you show?

Related Classroom Activities:

- Perhaps engage students in an improv activity, such as:
 - "The One Word Story" - students work together to tell a story based on a theme or prompt, using one word at a time
 - "Remember When?" - students split into 2 teams; 1 team improvises a story using the prompt 'remember when...?' and the other team acts out (silently) the story as the first team makes it up!
 - "Freeze" - 2 students at a time go 'onstage' and act out a scene (dialogue, characters, setting, etc), until the instructor calls "Freeze", at which point, another student is swapped in, taking the frozen position of one student, and then using that pose to start a brand-new scene.

- Perhaps have students read aloud one of the 'mechanicals' scenes from *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*:
 - [Act I scene ii, starting their play](#)
 - [Act III scene i, rehearsing their play](#)
 - Or [part of Act V scene i, performing their play](#)
 - If time/space allows, have students get up on their feet and try out the scenes, and discuss what the characters are doing/saying, look for familiar words/actions, and consider where the comedy comes from.
- Perhaps share with students [this brief clip from Hamlet \(2012\)](#), showing Hamlet giving advice to actors he's hired to perform a play, and discuss. What advice does Hamlet give? Why?

Specific Elements for students to watch/listen for during the performance:

- Listen for when you think the performers are saying words written by Shakespeare - what does it sound like? Can you hear the 'heartbeat' of the poetry? Can you hear any rhyming sounds?
- Listen for when you think the performers are improvising (making it up!)
- Think about which parts of the show you found the funniest, and why?
- Think about which character(s) in the show you enjoyed the most, and why?
- Watch for elements of stagecraft - blocking/movement, costuming, props, sounds, & lighting - how did these affect the performance?

Resource Links:

- <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone> is a fantastic site from the Royal Shakespeare Company with full learning resources for each Shakespeare play, where you can access and download their Activity Toolkits for independent and home learning, offering creative and exploratory activities for students! Explore each play's offerings of story, key facts, key scenes, pictures from past productions, videos of actors and directors working on and performing the plays AND find out about all the main characters and how they relate to each other etc.
- <https://www.shakespeareswords.com/Public/Glossary.aspx> is a great resource for all Shakespeare words and terms
- <https://panoplycollective.com/video-archive> you can explore videos of previous Panoply productions including *Romeo & Juliet* (2019)



Post-Program Learning

Discussion questions to review the performance:

- Did you enjoy the performance? What stood out to you?
- Was there a moment in the show that made you laugh?
- Was there a moment in the show that made you think?
- Was the show like what you expected? Why or why not?

Questions to explore from the pre-show learning:

- Did you listen for when you thought the performers were saying words written by Shakespeare - what did it sound like? Could you hear the 'heartbeat' of the poetry? Could you hear any rhymes?
- Did you listen for when you thought the performers were improvising? What about that part made you think it was spontaneous?
- Were you able to watch for elements of stagecraft - blocking/movement, costuming, props, sounds, & lighting - how did these affect the performance?

Questions to explore students' performance content comprehension:

- What was the stage managers'/directors'/actors' job?
- Did the auditions for Hamlet go well? Why or why not?
- Did the scene work for Romeo and Juliet go well? Why or why not?
- Which characters were friends?
- Which characters had to learn to get along?
- What play did they choose to do, in the end?
- Who was William Shakespeare?

Questions to explore students' reactions, connections to their lives:

- Do you think you'd most enjoy being an actor, a director, or a stage manager?
- Did any of the characters (the clowns, or the Shakespeare characters they played) feel familiar? Did they remind you of anyone in your own life?
- Why do you think Shakespeare is still famous today?
- Do you think clowning is easy, or difficult? Why?
- Do you prefer to plan things out, or to make quick decisions on the spot?
- Do you prefer to be in charge of a group, or to listen and participate?

Activities/Resources for continued learning

- Read/act out appropriate scenes from the plays explored in *Clowns Reading Shakespeare* (perhaps the witches' opening scene in *Macbeth*, or the thumb-biting scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, or the ghostly opening scene of *Hamlet*)
- Follow Panoply's work at www.panoplycollective.com or @panoplycollective

Panoply Land Acknowledgement

We at Panoply recognize that the land on which we create our work is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. We are grateful to be able to create art on this land. Please visit our website or FOH for information on how you can support Indigenous peoples and causes.

Let's Connect!



admin@panoplycollective.com

www.panoplycollective.com

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416-591-9092

www.prologue.org

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If you post photos on your school or organization's social media, don't forget to tag us!