



Newsletter Article: August 2021

## Shakespeare and Violence Prevention at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival

Since 2011, the Colorado Shakespeare Festival's has partnered with the CU Boulder Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence on an interdisciplinary project: a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention touring program for Colorado Schools. This program, which has reached more than 112,000 Colorado schoolchildren, typically consists of an abridged Shakespeare play, performed onsite at schools, followed by classroom workshops about the cycle of violence.

The aim of this program is two-fold: first, to introduce students to Shakespeare's work; second, to spark discussions in Colorado schools



about becoming an upstander, bullying behavior, school safety, and the cycle of violence. Theatre is a tremendous catalyst for self-discovery, and the project enables community members—students, teachers, parents, and administrators—to understand how violence works and how to reduce it.

After students view an abridged Shakespeare performance, CSF actors lead classroom workshops about violence prevention, in which students roleplay alternatives to violence, practice upstander behavior, and participate in empathy-building exercises. The workshop curriculum and the preparatory study guides are guided by the latest research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, and the project also draws on expertise from partners in suicide prevention, applied theatre, and education.

“At its core, this program is about building empathy,” says CSF’s Director of Outreach, Amanda Giguere. “When we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, we are more likely to advocate for them when they are

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mistreated.”

Violence research indicates that the role of the bystander is critical in preventing violence. 57% of the time, bullying stops in 10 seconds or less when a bystander becomes an “upstander” (someone who steps in to help). There are many ways of being an upstander: telling a trusted adult, confronting the situation directly, or reporting anonymously to programs like Safe2Tell.

“Upstander behavior is difficult to do without practice,” says Giguere. “In post-show workshops, students get the chance to step into a scene from a Shakespeare play as themselves, and they change the outcome through their own upstander strategies. This invites them to see how their actions can have a positive impact.”

### **Pandemic Impact**

The CSF troupe was touring *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* to Colorado schools when the COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person performances. In April 2020, the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention troupe facilitated a series of virtual training modules for Shakespeare Dallas, workshopped new scripts, and began envisioning a new format to deliver the project virtually. By the end of the summer, CSF’s widely acclaimed Shakespeare & Violence Prevention Program had gone virtual.

In August of 2020, CSF’s team gathered to rehearse, stage, and film two abridged performances for the 2020-21 school tour (a 30-minute *Comedy of Errors* and a 45-minute *Much Ado About Nothing*). All rehearsals were held outdoors, all company members wore masks, maintained social distance, and adhered to daily temperature checks and heightened sanitation processes. The filming was done over the course of two evenings, with a three-camera setup on CSF’s Mary Rippon Theatre, a 1000-seat amphitheatre that normally houses two full-scale productions each summer. After the filming wrapped, and during the editing/captioning process, the team returned to zoom rehearsals to train for workshop facilitation with violence prevention experts.

Throughout the 2020-21 school year, the Shakespeare & Violence

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Prevention troupe facilitated virtual workshops with schools across Colorado. Schools received a password-protected link to view the pre-recorded performance. After students viewed the performance, the actors led the roleplaying workshops virtually.

Although the form shifted to virtual, the content of the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project was still about connectedness (which is a key element of both theatre and violence prevention). When we feel connected to other people, we are more likely to take action to care for them when they need help. It turns out that connectedness can happen in a virtual classroom as well as a physical classroom.

The 2021-22 Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project will include two filmed productions for Colorado schools: a 30-minute *Twelfth Night*, directed by Rodney Lizcano, and a 45-minute *Julius Caesar*, directed by Wendy Franz. Both productions will be filmed on the Mary Rippon Outdoor Stage. After students view the pre-recorded performances, the actors will visit schools to lead in-person workshops (with virtual workshops available to any schools requesting that format).

“It’s been a long road to adapt this project,” says Giguere, “but we are thrilled that we have been able to continue employing actors, and connecting young people with the vital messages at the heart of this project: your voice matters, and you can make a difference.”

Information about the project can be found at:

<https://cupresents.org/performance/10050/shakespeare/csf-schools/>

This project is funded by many individual donors, as well as CU Boulder Outreach Awards, Boulder Arts Commission, Colorado Creative Industries, and Shakespeare in American Communities, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with Arts Midwest.

Questions about the project? [Amanda.giguere@colorado.edu](mailto:Amanda.giguere@colorado.edu)

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