

# Introduction and Orientation

WELCOME, TEACHERS!

## Prologue

PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE GIVES YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE TO DO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY.

All children crave challenge. There is a desire within us all to excel at something difficult, to go for “great” instead of “good enough.”

The plays of William Shakespeare are a wonderful vehicle for this quest for excellence. They’re dynamic, fun, compelling; they engage a student on many levels at once – intellectual, physical, social, even emotional.

As master 5th grade teacher Rafe Esquith makes clear in the documentary *The Hobart Shakespeareans*, shown recently on PBS, those of us who do Shakespeare with elementary students are not in the business of training young actors; instead, we are seeking, in the short time we have with these children, to give them the most powerful and passionate learning experience we can offer.

To do Shakespeare well requires discipline, teamwork, concentration, and hours of study.

It requires courage, for stepping up onto that stage is not easy, no matter how old you are. It asks children to be generous, to listen carefully, and to seek understanding and empathy for others – not just for their classmates, but also for the “others” in the plays, these strangers who become friends, these amazing characters who seem as real as you or me.

In short, it demands many of the core values we all seek to nurture in young students as they prepare for that perilous journey into adolescence and adulthood.

As many excellent teachers have shown dramatically – from Esquith in inner-city Los Angeles to Dr. James “Doc” Ayres here at the University of Texas – when these demands are placed upon young people in a loving, playful, and disciplined way, the students respond whole-heartedly. For many, performing Shakespeare with an ensemble of classmates becomes a life-changing experience.

It is our great pleasure to be able to share some of that experience here with you today through the pages of this website.