

# Shakespeare on Trial

*By*  
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**DEDICATION**

*This play is dedicated to the director, Lisa Ludwig, and the students of Iroquois High School in Elma, NY, who first gave life to these characters.*

**STORY OF THE PLAY**

With graduation fast approaching, two groups of students of Bellefonte High confront each other in an attempt to influence the next year's curriculum of the school. With recollections of past bullying, revealed secret lives, hinted-at romances, and numerous quotations from Shakespeare's most famous plays, these teenagers set up a mock trial to decide if Shakespeare should be studied next year. Like current day Montagues and Capulets, the students do plenty of verbal fencing -- with a little Romeo and Juliet romance thrown in -- to ultimately decide if the Bard is worthy of teens' time!

The cast ranges from the class clown to the valedictorian who lapse into Shakespearean characters. The flexible casting provides opportunities for some wonderful soliloquies as well as smaller roles for actors seeking less responsibility. Additionally, members from the audience may play some of the jurors.

**PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

*Shakespeare on Trial* had its premiere at Iroquois High School in Elma, NY, on March 13, 2009 under the direction of Lisa Ludwig.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(Approx. 9 m, 6 w, 3 flexible, extras)*

**GROUP 1**

Shane (M)  
Renaldo (M)  
Parker (F)  
Tequan (M)  
Butch (M)  
Jenny (F)  
Bobby (M)

**GROUP 2**

Adam (M)  
Jose (M)  
Mary (F)  
Roberta (F)  
Latiffa (F)  
Albert (M)  
Jonathan (M)  
Olivia (F)

**OTHERS**

Principal Johnson *(Flexible part)*  
Margaret *(Optional Bailiff, flexible part)*  
Juror Number 12 *(Has ending monologue)*

**EXTRAS** *(Either actors or audience members)*

Juror Number 7  
Juror Number 8  
Juror Number 9  
Juror Number 10  
Juror Number 11

**A note on casting:**

Romantic interests  
Butch - Olivia  
Jose - Roberta  
Tequan - Latiffa  
Adam - Parker

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

It would be helpful if there were a podium and a gavel for the principal. The gavel could be used again for the judge.

Initially the actors are seated in the first few rows of the audience. Seats should be been saved for the cast who will enter and take them once the lights are down for Scene 2.

Jurors Numbers 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 may be either randomly selected from the audience or actors who are seemingly randomly selected from the audience.

*If they are randomly selected audience members, they can be selected by drawing from raffle tickets distributed to the audience that night. There will need to be the appropriate verdict cards placed on their chairs prior to their getting to the stage.*

*If they are actors who just appear to be randomly selected, they will be given their verdict when assigned the part.*

Juror 12 must be an actor though he appears to have been randomly selected. He has a soliloquy that needs to be memorized.

**QUOTATIONS:** Many quotations from Shakespeare are used throughout the script. One exception is “The world will little note nor long remember” which is a sentence fragment from President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

## Scene 1

*(AT RISE: PRINCIPAL JOHNSON walks up to the stage from the back of the auditorium. HE carries a bowl with the ticket stubs which will be used later to select the jurors from the audience. HE is also carrying a copy of the "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.")*

**PRINCIPAL:** May I have your attention... Thank you. We're here for the annual senior class free raffle. This year it's a copy of the *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, and the board of education has asked for your opinion *(Under his breath.)* -- who knows why -- as to what the senior English curriculum should be next year.

**SHANE:** Like you care!

**PRINCIPAL:** Shane, might I remind you that finals aren't graded yet and you might get to take advantage of the new curriculum next year? Graduation is not a right...

**ENTIRE CAST:** *(In unison with PRINCIPAL JOHNSON.)*  
...but a privilege.

**PRINCIPAL:** ...but a privilege. Well, at least you're listening.

**ADAM:** We always listen, sir!

*(SHANE is sitting behind ADAM and slaps him in the head. ADAM cries out.)*

**ADAM:** *(Cont'd.)* Ow!

**PRINCIPAL:** Shane, did you just hit Adam?

**SHANE:** Me? I would never do such a thing.

**PRINCIPAL:** Adam, please come up and take a seat on stage... *(ADAM moves to the stage and takes a seat.)*  
Those selected to be on our panel will represent the entire graduating senior class.

**RENALDO:** Hey, Adam, I'll bet you had a lot of time on Friday nights to do some reading...read anything interesting about girls?

**PRINCIPAL:** Renaldo, the senior class clown. Have you any opinions on...anything other than cars?

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**RENALDO:** I ain't read too much this year...been kind of busy.

**JOSE:** "Methinks he doth protest too much!"

**RENALDO:** You making fun of me? Is he, Shane?

**JOSE:** Must thou ask thy fellow to know if thou art insulted?

**PRINCIPAL:** Enough...perhaps we should have Jose come up and join the panel.

**SHANE:** No. Renaldo.

**PRINCIPAL:** Renaldo?

**SHANE:** Yeah, we need someone from our side up there.

*(GROUP 1 start chanting "Renaldo, Renaldo." RENALDO stands and holds his arms up as a boxer might.)*

**PRINCIPAL:** Why not? Renaldo, I must admit I was shocked to see you on the graduation list...you must have passed English. So, it might be interesting to see what you have to say. How do you feel about English literature? What do you think of the Brontë sisters?

**RENALDO:** I don't much care for books but if the Brontë sisters are hot, I still need a date for the prom....

**PRINCIPAL:** I'm afraid they are otherwise engaged, Renaldo.

**RENALDO:** Hey, as long as they ain't married they're fair game, right, guys?

*(RENALDO goes on stage, but before taking a seat he first goes up to the PRINCIPAL and says the following quietly. Because the principal's microphone is really on, Renaldo can be heard by the audience.)*

**RENALDO:** So, if I do this, you gonna hook me up with the Brontë sisters?

**PRINCIPAL:** Renaldo, they're dead, they've been dead for some time now.

**RENALDO:** What kind of freak are you? I don't date dead girls.... You're a lot sicker than I thought!

**PRINCIPAL:** Just sit down. Let's have Mary and also ... Roberta come up on stage to round out the group.

## **End of Freeview**

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