

# SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

A notebook program that enlivens Shakespeare's works

JESSE HISE, the author of SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL, taught high school English in Phoenix, Arizona, for more than 30 years before retiring in 1989. In 1987-1988 he was honored as the first Christa McAuliffe fellowship winner for the state of Arizona. He has published numerous short stories and professional articles and has been a visiting lecturer at Arizona State University and a teacher-consultant with the Greater Phoenix Area Writing Project. During summers, Jesse teaches Shakespearience, techniques for using Shakespeare in the schools, at the Utah Shakespearean Festival. For **Interact** he has also written PATTERNS, the how-to-write-a-poem book for grades 6-12.

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## DEDICATION

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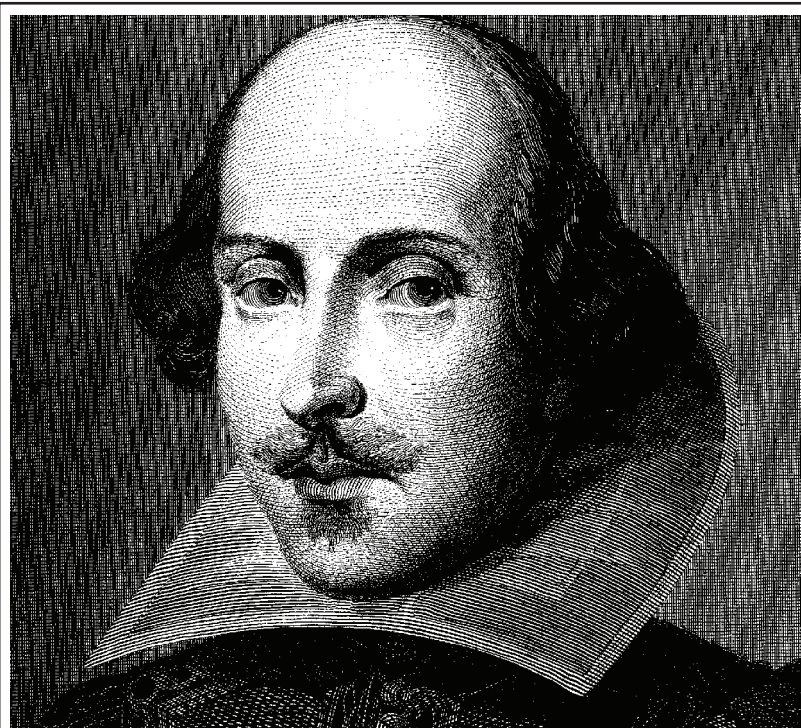
This resource guide is dedicated to those who made the success of my Christa McAuliffe Fellowship possible:

First, my wife, Barbara, who encouraged me to apply for the fellowship, convinced from the beginning that the Shakespeare Festival idea would succeed;

and second, the North High School English Department members, Phoenix, Arizona, who supported the festival with their enthusiasm and their work. Without them, the North High School Shakespeare Festival never would have blossomed. With them, the festival continues to grow and flourish. They are:

Joyce Aakhus  
Suellen Brahs  
Marilyn Buehler  
Cheryl Byers  
Jo Celis  
Vicki Coller  
John Corlett  
Richard Doria  
Diane Escalante  
Bonnie Fried  
Chris Hass  
Mary Hoiness  
Jeannie Johnston  
Perle Martinez  
Lori Mejdrich  
Debbie Ortiz  
Chris Reed  
Marcia Ulloa

*Thank You*



*William Shakespeare (1564-1616)*

Shakespeare is not dead. There are dozens of reasons for giving his writings a regular place in the special activities of a school year that extend beyond the classroom.

Shakespeare's plays continue to delight for all sorts of reasons, one of which is that he *is* entertaining. Today scholars examine his plays and can identify many of his sources: where he borrowed, how he changed. And they examine his language and other written records of the time to ascertain that his enormous power over language did result in dozens of words and phrases being added to the language.

*Even an East Berlin theater, still behind the infamous Berlin Wall when I visited, was producing Hamlet!*

Shakespeare is not just a writer of importance in the English speaking world. I have seen posters advertising productions of his plays in various languages all over Europe. Shakespeare is the one English language writer that students who come to us from other countries already know.

We started a festival at my school because we hoped the students would see Shakespeare as more than another boring, hard to understand writer. We felt we could make Shakespeare *live* for today's students if we could get them involved in activities other than classroom reading. The story of how we got started is included in this notebook. If you want to read it before you start your planning, turn to the section titled DIARY OF A FESTIVAL on pages 1:6 through 1:9.

*Once they are involved, students wish to continue an annual festival.*

Or you may want to turn immediately to the section of notebook devoted to the type of Shakespeare Festival or the kinds of activities you wish to do. As you begin your plans, think big, but be realistic. A large festival requires many helpful teachers and many enthusiastic students. The festival can begin small and grow each year, for it is almost a guarantee that once students have been a part of the festival (classroom or all-school), they will want to do the project again.



In any case, remember that a festive atmosphere is the essential ingredient. Even after three hundred years, Shakespeare will still speak to students today when they are actively involved with his words and with his times.

Producing a Shakespeare Festival, however small, however large, requires time and effort beyond the daily routine, yet the enthusiasm and participation by students that the festival generates make all the work worthwhile.

Consider this notebook a jumping off place for your own approach to celebrating Shakespeare. I have tried to do two things:

- gather as many ideas as possible that I have used or would like to use as our festival grows;
- and present them in a manner that will make them work for you.

*Add your own ideas in order to make this notebook **your** festival resource.*

You will want to keep written records of your own ideas and modifications and place them in the appropriate tab section for later reference. Thus, the notebook will become *your* notebook, an extension of your own personal response to Shakespeare.

Best of all, think Shakespeare! Get a mindset on the man, his work, and his times. Suddenly you will see him mentioned in the daily newspaper, you will read references and quotes from his plays in everyday news articles, you will see Elizabethan style clothing in garage sales, and you will find stacks of items and materials that make a festival fun and worthwhile.

When it's all over, you will find yourself saying,

“Oh wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful, wonderful!  
And yet again wonderful, and after that, out of all hooping!”  
*As You Like It*, Act 3, Scene 2.



“Are you sitting down?” came the voice over the phone, a staff member at the Arizona State Department of Education.

No, I wasn’t, but I quickly seated myself because her question implied what was going to follow. I had been awarded Arizona’s first Christa McAuliffe Fellowship, a \$25,300 grant from the U.S. Office of Education, to produce a Shakespeare Festival at my high school.

In my proposal, I had set my goal as creating a festival that would touch every single student in the school of 1,800. After the euphoria of learning I had been awarded the fellowship, I quickly disintegrated to panic.

To state it mildly, I didn’t exactly have a strong background in Shakespeare Festivals. I was an English teacher with no training in teaching drama. The year before, our English Department had agreed to attempt to build a Shakespeare Festival, but we had almost no money and few ideas as to how to really get started.

That festival turned out to be two events: an hour-long Shakespeare presentation by a local professional theater, viewed by about half of the student body. The other portion of the festival consisted of all English teachers presenting their Shakespeare units in the same time period, so that every student who was studying Shakespeare (freshman, sophomore, seniors) received the message that Shakespeare was somehow important.

Now I had an award which would give us the financial base to do almost anything, but it was already late August and school was beginning. Because the grant announcement had come along in the summer time, only two department members knew I had applied for it, and no one knew I had won it. The official presentation would be made in early September, but there was no exact promise as to when the funding would arrive. I lived on the expectation that my fellow teachers would be as eager to participate as I was, since their help and cooperation was essential to the success of the project. I knew that it was impossible for a single teacher to produce a school-wide Shakespearean festival. Much other assistance was going to be essential.

**September** Award announced. No money arrives. Department meets anyway to brainstorm plans. Most department teachers agree to attend four Saturday morning workshops to be scattered throughout late September and October to hone our Shakespeare teaching skills





*Buying out virtually an entire performance—what an exhilarating experience!*

*Generating as many student involvement ideas as possible was our constant goal.*

*Who says money doesn't help?*

under the direction of a Shakespeare scholar from Arizona State University. I offer modest stipends for all attending.

Local professional theater announces a spring production of *The Tempest*, to be performed right in the midst of our proposed festival. I call and attempt to buy out the entire theater, but another school has beaten me to the phone and ordered 30 seats. I take the remaining 250 seats, promising payment “any day now.”

**October** No money arrives. Professional theater group gets nervous. I get nervous. Saturday morning Shakespeare sessions going great. We study a specific play, brainstorm teaching techniques, then spend additional time on festival plans.

Orders written up for various Shakespeare items to build an exhibit which will be set up in the lobby of the auditorium during the festival. Orders not mailed since no money has arrived.

Activity and contest ideas floating around. What sort of things can we do to get the most student involvement?

**November** A portion of the grant money arrives. I mail off for exhibit materials. Producers of *The Tempest* overwhelmingly delighted to receive their money and are able to add another student performance for other schools. We decide to build a Shakespeare video collection, particularly of the plays we teach. Costume Day plan begins to build. We will have an Elizabethan costume day on the Ides of March. Students will come dressed either Elizabethan style or as a character from a Shakespeare play or with a self-designed Shakespeare T-shirt.

**December** I start to panic again. Materials arriving slowly. Great plans, but nothing seems to be shaping up. I work off and on during winter vacation, knowing time is getting short.

**January** Money at last is arriving on a regular schedule. The fellowship is a personal stipend on which the recipient has to pay taxes (rules have since been modified), and I discover that I am going to have *more* money for the project than I had anticipated. We add an Elizabethan banquet. Students will earn free tickets by participating in some aspect of the festival. Poster contest completed and the winning poster is printed for later distribution all over the campus. Shakespeare Recitation Contest announced. We will run two categories: individual and group. A department member finds out we can arrange to bring





the Utah Shakespearean Festival to our school for a costume show. We add it to the festival calendar!

**February** I start working six and a half days a week. The school- required book work on the festival is almost overwhelming: travel requests, permission slips, room requisitions, cajoling of other departments to convince them that disrupting their programs for almost two weeks will be worth it. Teachers in the department continue work on their committees for the exhibit, the banquet menu and entertainment, and the contests. Grant money supplies Elizabethan costumes for each English teacher. We work on showing students how to dress for an Elizabethan effect without spending much money.

*Yes, Virginia,  
Shakespeare  
can be fun!*

Utah Shakespeare people present their entertaining, informative costume show, which is a smash hit with the students. I receive comments such as, "I never thought Shakespeare could be fun."

**March** I am in a frenzy. Can it all be done in time? Will I forget something essential? Now working seven days a week. Will the students participate? Students obviously not eager to come to school dressed in Elizabethan style. Costume Day forecast not good. Elizabethan Banquet seems a weird concept. "What is it?" they ask. Can a food event in the school cafeteria be worth attending? My nerves are saved only by the memory of success of the Utah Shakespearean Festival costume show.

*An English tea helps  
spread the festival  
idea to  
non-English  
teachers.*

**Thursday before two-week festival begins** English Department sponsors an after school English tea for the faculty and staff. We serve tea and fresh baked scones (with the cooperation of the Home Economics teacher) to thank faculty members for their cooperation. Several non-English teachers commit to dressing in Elizabethan style on costume day.

**Monday of the first week of festival** Actor's Lab Arizona presents a Shakespeare collage to all freshman. Exhibit opens, displaying sections on Shakespeare's life and times. Students may have a Polaroid picture taken beside a life-sized Shakespeare. Two mini-theaters are set up, one with a video on Shakespeare's language, the other on the Globe theater. T-shirt design contest winners are on display, along with original art work of the winner and runners-up in the poster contest. One area displays clippings, mostly from local newspapers, that have referred to Shakespeare and/or his writings in the last nine months. There is an amazing amount of references. The British flag



and Shakespeare's coat of arms fly from the school flagpole (with the cooperation of ROTC).

**Tuesday through Friday: first week** Speech contests held after school. More than 80 students participate as contestants. Shakespeare T-Shirt Design Contest held.

**Monday: second week** Count down to banquet coming up on Thursday. Most English classes tour Shakespeare exhibit.

**Tuesday: second week** The Ides of March Costume Day. More than 400 students show up in some form of Shakespeare costume or T-shirt. (The day before, in a last minute lack of faith, I promise that English teachers will be out on campus passing out dollar bills to students in costume. It worked.) Planned entertainment consists of an Elizabethan recorder quartet and juggling contests.

**Wednesday: second week** Two hundred and fifty students off to see *The Tempest*. Junior American literature teachers want to participate with something Shakespearean, so *The Taming of the Shrew* is shown to juniors.

**Thursday: second week** The banquet. I break down into a mass of sick exhaustion and fever and am ordered to bed by doctor. Other department members pick up the ball and have a hugely successful banquet. They tell the students I am out with the plague!

**Friday: second week** Exhibit taken down, costumes put away, and plans begin for the next year's festival as we build from our experience.

**Postscript** A larger, more successful festival was held the following year with even more student participation. The budget necessary was much smaller since we started charging for the banquet and no Shakespearean production was available. Puppet shows, a costume contest, and a performance of a take-off of *Julius Caesar* were added to Costume Day. It was now "okay" for a student to participate in the festivities. Boys walking around in tunics no longer attracted cat calls.

**Postpostscript** As I write this in fall 1989, we are well into our plans for a still larger, expanded festival next spring. A tradition has been established.

*Involving other teachers saves the day.*

In an all-school festival, the participation of teachers from every department is essential. You, as the organizer, should be prepared to show other teachers how to participate and to give suggestions. (See Classroom Festival on page 2:1 for ideas on a single teacher involving other classrooms as audiences.)



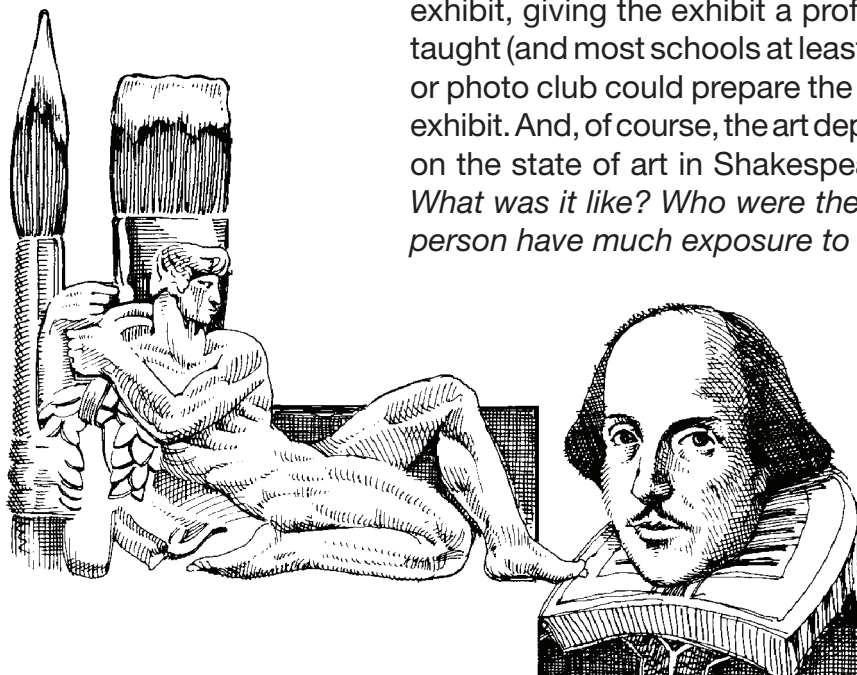
First, offer costume ideas well in advance of the festival. Give those who sew an opportunity to prepare their own costumes. Have a list ready of rental places for those who are simply going to go out and rent a costume. We found one place in our area that makes costumes to order, with choices of Elizabethan king or queen, whose costumes are easily modified to make them more ornate or less ornate. Jester costumes are also readily available. Showing your faculty drawings of specialized areas of dress—the average person, specific occupations, and so on, might get a wider participation by non-English teachers.

Use the Timeline beginning on page 3:4 to get ideas to offer other departments regarding Renaissance people who influenced history. I have tried to create a varied list for that section that might open possibilities to other departments. You may wish to duplicate these Timeline pages for interested faculty members.

Here are other suggestions that might help in **high school** or a departmentalized **middle school** or **junior high school**.

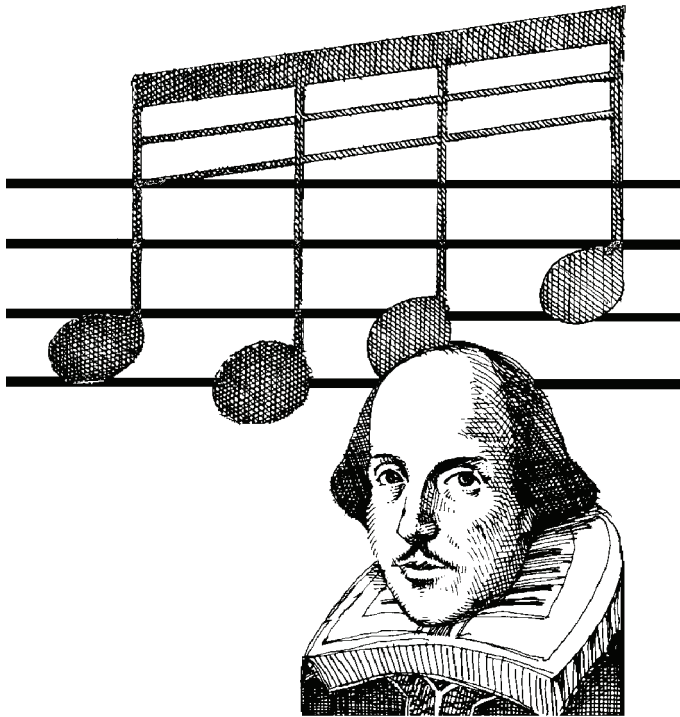
1. Invite **any department that wishes to participate** in the Shakespeare exhibit. If enough participate, you might even change the name to the Renaissance Exhibit or something like that. Ask the science department to prepare a display of, say, typical medical treatment during Shakespeare's lifetime, or an exhibit on the plague, or an exhibit on Elizabethan medical beliefs that we would call superstition or ignorance today.

2. The **art department** could prepare the graphics for the entire exhibit, giving the exhibit a professional look. If photography is taught (and most schools at least have a yearbook), the yearbook or photo club could prepare the instant picture taking during the exhibit. And, of course, the art department could prepare an exhibit on the state of art in Shakespeare's time: *Who purchased art? What was it like? Who were the great artists? Did the common person have much exposure to art?*



3. The **industrial arts department** could manufacture your exhibit stands and dividers. They might wish to prepare an exhibit on some of the very skilled craftsmen that existed in Shakespeare's time—some of the crafts we have since lost.
4. The **home economics department** could get involved with costume making. At our school, if the festival can furnish the money, the clothing teacher frequently purchases the material and costumes are sewn by students who cannot otherwise afford to purchase material for their own projects. Thus, they learn how to sew and we benefit by having more costumes.
5. **ROTC**, if your campus has one, can be a real help to the festival. We fly the British flag and Shakespeare's coat-of-arms (a special order flag or sew one yourself), and the ROTC raises and lowers them each day just as they do the American flag the rest of the year. One can have them involved with Elizabethan soldier costumes. With the appropriate Elizabethan costumes, ROTC can participate in Costume Day with a military marching display or as guards for the queen. (See Section 5: COSTUMES.)

6. The **physical education department** could get involved, particularly if you have a tumbling team. Again, in appropriate costume, they could be part of the entertainment on Costume Day. They could research the type of event that might take place at an Elizabethan street fair and present those. Well, maybe not bear baiting!
7. The **social studies department** could prepare exhibits on Elizabethan history, including the explorations to America. They could also focus on social customs in the wide sense: *Who was in prison? How did they get there? What crimes were punishable by death? What laws were enforced that must have influenced Shakespeare?*



8. The **music and drama department**, of course, can really be helpful. Elizabethan music (wooden recorders are readily available, if you can find the funds) adds to Costume Day and to the banquet. The chorus teacher can prepare Elizabethan music, both folk and formal. Fanfares could announce events, both on Costume Day and at the banquet. The drama teacher could become heavily involved, but get on his/her schedule well in advance! If the students are advanced enough, they might be willing to tackle a Shakespeare play. If not, perhaps scenes. If not that, specially written light presentations, perhaps satirizing some of Shakespeare's famous scenes.

9. **Math department** members are usually hopelessly addicted to their lesson plans, but perhaps you could at least get them into scholars' outfits. (See costume suggestions.) And check the Timeline entries for mathematical advances during Shakespeare's time.



- 
10. If you have a **special education department** that works with learning disabled students, emotionally handicapped, and so on, do include them. Many teachers may want to use class time to help students enter the T-shirt contest or one of the other contests. Or help students with a costume. You might also want to include these teachers in your video schedule.
  11. **Foreign language department** members may be willing to translate Shakespeare into other languages and perform short scenes or cuttings.
  12. In the **business education department** appropriate classes could study the enormous rise of commerce and world trade during Shakespeare's time.
  13. Have I left out any other areas or departments? Check the Timeline entries to see if you can find anything appropriate for them.

*When every staff member joins in, the spirit of the festival spreads more rapidly to the students.*

If you can find appropriate suggestions to offer other teachers and other departments, you will find that many are quite willing to join in. *And don't forget your various **school secretaries, clerks, and aides.*** Many of them will be delighted to join in on Costume Day by dressing appropriately if you get the information to them in time for them to plan.



## TIMELINE

### Shakespeare's Life and Times—Selected Events

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This brief timeline has been compiled mostly to give you ideas for involving non-English teachers in your festival. It suggests to them important people in their area who were alive during Shakespeare's time.

The items from Shakespeare's life are some of the documentary evidence, court records, house purchases, business dealings, and so on, that are on record. Because it is difficult to know exactly when each of the plays was first produced, I did not include that information.

Shakespeare's birthday is unknown. He was baptized on April 26, 1564. April 23 is traditionally celebrated as his birthday. He died on April 23, 1616.

- 
- 1564** William Shakespeare is born. Michelangelo dies.
  - 1565** St. Augustine, Florida, is established by the Spanish as the first European settlement in North America.  
  
Peter Bruegel the Elder paints "Hunters in the Snow."
  - 1566** One of the world's first newspapers is published in Venice.
  - 1567** The Solomon Islands are discovered by Spanish explorer, Alvaro Mendana de Neyra.
  - 1568** Jesuit missionaries visit Japan.
  - 1569** Shakespeare is five years old.  
  
The first part of a Spanish epic on the conquest of Chile, *La Araucana*, is published.
  - 1570** The Japanese open the port of Nagasaki to overseas trade.
  - 1571** Jesus College, Oxford, is founded.
  - 1572** Massacre of St. Bartholomew kills an estimated 50,000 French Huguenots.
  - 1573** The first German cane sugar refinery is established in Augsburg.