Teaching Colleagues,

*Shakespeare Uncovered*, a six-part series airing on PBS beginning on January 25th, is a teacher’s dream come true. Each episode gives us something that we teachers almost never get: a compelling, lively, totally accessible journey through and around a Shakespeare play, guided by brilliant and plain-spoken experts—all within one hour.

I’m not given to endorsements, but oh, I love this series. Why will we teachers love it and why do we need it?

- Because, as we learned from the very start of the Folger Library’s Teaching Shakespeare Institute, teachers tend to be more confident, better teachers if they have greater and deeper knowledge of the plays themselves.
- Because no matter what our relationship with the plays—we love them, we struggle with them, we’re tired of teaching the same ones, we’re afraid of some of them—we almost never have the time to learn more about them. We are teachers, after all: always under a deadline, we’re reading, grading, prepping, mindful of the next deadline. (And then there’s the rest of our lives . . .)

*Shakespeare Uncovered* is your chance to take a deep, pleasurable dive into a handful of plays—ones you know well, others that may be less familiar to you.

In six episodes, *Shakespeare Uncovered* takes on eight plays: *Macbeth, Hamlet, The Tempest, Richard II, Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It, Henry IV, Part I, and Henry V*. The host of each episode has plenty of Shakespeare cred—Ethan Hawke, Jeremy Irons, Joely Richardson and her mom, Vanessa Redgrave, for example—but each wants to learn more about the play. They investigate: they have lively conversations with actors, directors, literary scholars, historians, and even psychologists on both sides of the Atlantic. They watch rehearsals at Shakespeare’s Globe in London, and talk through aspects of performance with actors and directors. They head to libraries and examine the earliest printed versions of the plays. They ask questions of everyone.

They ask lots of questions we would ask. They learn. And we learn.

Please see *Shakespeare Uncovered* as a series of splendid “short courses” for you. WNET makes it easy: the episodes are available for streaming on the PBS website, and a robust collection of lesson plans and classroom resources provide a variety of ways to bring the learning to your students.

O this learning, what a thing it is!

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MACBETH with Ethan Hawke

The Gist: Actor Ethan Hawke is thinking about playing Macbeth, and feels he needs to learn a lot more than he already knows about the play and the character. “I want to seek out some truth,” he says, and he knows how to go about that: “If you want to find out about something, surround yourself with smart people.” In his denim jacket and baseball cap, Hawke works sources in New York and London, and is full of questions. He’s focused on a few big ones:

- Is the play’s action driven by Macbeth’s human-ness or by supernatural evil?
- Does Lady Macbeth turn her husband into a killer, or does he possess that power himself?
- What is the psychology of grief?

He has many more questions besides these. He wants to know how scholars see all of this, how actors and directors would play the characters, how the original audience in Shakespeare’s time would have felt about the witches and a play that features the killing of a king. And more. We have a front-row seat as he investigates and begins to put the pieces together, trying to work out the multiple meanings of Macbeth.

Not To Miss:

- Hawke’s lively, compelling introduction to the character of Macbeth. You will like it, and so will your students.
- Gail Kern Paster (Folger Shakespeare Library) and Marjorie Garber (Harvard University) on the Macbeths’ marriage
- Views of various Macbeths, with extended commentary from Anthony Sher
- Professor Justin Champion (University of London) on the witches, the “real” Macbeth, and a trip to Dunsinane Hill
- Hawke’s session with Richard Easton, an actor who has played Macbeth, in which they break down the dagger speech together

After Watching, Keep On Talking (with colleagues or students):

- Many scholars agree that the Macbeths have the best marriage in all of Shakespeare. Really?! What’s good about their marriage? What’s not?
- How do our reactions to Macbeth differ from those of Shakespeare’s original audience, and why?
- Does thinking through the character of Macbeth offer us any insight into the mindsets of the serial killers we have seen far too much of in the United States recently?
THE COMEDIES: TWELFTH NIGHT and AS YOU LIKE IT
with Joely Richardson

The Gist. Joely Richardson—whom you will know by face if you don’t immediately know her by name—is an English actress whose broad range of work speaks for itself (The Tudors, Nip/Tuck, Anonymous, The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo), and whose family has been acting Shakespeare for generations: she is the daughter of Vanessa Redgrave and director Tony Richardson, and the granddaughter of Sir Michael Redgrave and Rachel Kempson. Richardson is investigating Shakespeare’s comedies because, as she says, “The comedies are all about new life, new laughs, new loves, and they are driven by strong, comic heroines.” Her driving question is: “How is it that the comedies still have to power to entertain us, enthral us, and move us?”

Focused particularly on Twelfth Night and As You Like It, she moves through London querying scholars, directors and actors, and observing rehearsals and performances at Shakespeare’s Globe. She watches different filmed productions of these two plays, and chats about the heroines in wonderfully personal and illuminating conversations with her mother. We are her colleagues as she travels through each play, exploring the characters of Viola and Rosalind more deeply to be sure, but thinking through other aspects of the comedies as well:

• The significant role that twins play, in Shakespeare’s comedies and in his life
• The real and delightful complexities for actors and audience of cross-dressing in Shakespeare’s day . . . in the case of Rosalind, for example, the actor was a boy playing a girl who plays a boy pretending to be a girl.
• Shakespeare’s true feelings about women, and his obvious love and respect for strong women.

Not To Miss:

• Richardson’s visit to the National Portrait Gallery to learn about the first women who played Shakespeare on stage, and when and why they did
• Mother and daughter (Redgrave and Richardson) breaking down the scene in which Rosalind offers to cure Orlando of his love (III,ii). Redgrave calls this “the most wonderful, teasing, merry, heartfelt scenes that were ever written for a woman”
• Bits about the wild popularity of Twelfth Night, and who thought the play should be named Malvolio
Not To Miss: (continued)

- Germaine Greer’s thoughts on what motivated Shakespeare to leave home and family in Stratford and head for London
- Examples from an all-male production of As You Like It in the discussion on cross-dressing
- Snippets from a range of Twelfth Nights and As You Like Its, including Rosalinds played by Vanessa Redgrave (1963) and Helen Mirren (1978), and a bit of Kevin Kline’s Jaques (2006)

After Watching, Keep On Talking (with colleagues or students):

- Several female scholars state that Shakespeare’s women are older, more worldly-wise, and “smarter than the boys.” True? False? Can you cite evidence from the plays themselves to support your view?
- Now that women play women’s roles on stage, have we lost something in the theatrical experience? Why or why not?
- Joely Richardson concludes that one reason the comedies maintain their freshness and relevance for us is because they are all tales about one person trying to love another. Do you agree or disagree? What are other reasons that the comedies still speak to us?