LESSON TITLE: All the Globe’s a Stage: Shakespeare’s Theatre

GRADE LEVEL: Grades 9-12

TIME ALLOTMENT: One 45-minute class period

OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students will develop their understanding of how Shakespeare’s plays were influenced by the physical space in which they were originally produced, the Globe Theatre. At the beginning of the lesson, students will examine the prologue from Henry V to find clues about what Shakespeare’s theater was like. Then, they will view segments from the PBS series Shakespeare Uncovered to learn more about the Globe’s history and see how modern-day actors use the same kind of space at the reconstructed Shakespeare’s Globe in London. Students will then deepen their knowledge about theaters in Shakespeare’s day by participating in an online scavenger hunt in which they visit web resources and gather facts about the physical space where Elizabethan actors performed. After discussing their findings, students will compare the theaters of Shakespeare’s day to today’s theaters and cinemas, and write a paper in which they imagine what it would be like for one of Shakespeare’s contemporaries to visit the theaters of today. This lesson is best used as an introduction to or during the reading of any play by Shakespeare.

SUBJECT MATTER
English/Language Arts

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the theater buildings of Shakespeare’s time.
- Compare the physical theater and acting style of Shakespeare’s era with theatrical practice of the modern day.
- Explain how the theatrical space of the Globe Theatre and the practices of the theatrical production in Elizabethan England influenced the writing of Shakespeare’s plays.
- Review online resources to gain information about Shakespeare's theatre.

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncte-ira

Standard 2

Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
Standard 7

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Standard 8

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Common Core Literature Standards for Grades 11-12

http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

MEDIA COMPONENTS

Video

Shakespeare Uncovered: Henry IV and Henry V with Jeremy Irons, selected segments.

Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.

Segment 1: “The History Behind the Globe”
A discussion of how the Globe was first built and a glimpse into what performances might have looked like.

Segment 2: “Playing in the Globe - Henry IV”
A look at a production of Henry IV as it would have been performed at the Globe.

Segment 3: "The Globe and its Audience"
A visit to the stage of the reconstructed Globe and a discussion of how Shakespeare's audience behaved in the theater.
MATERIALS

For the class:
- Computer, projection screen, and speakers (for class viewing of online video segments)
- “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer Answer Key

For each group:
- Computers with internet access (enough so that each group has access to one computer). Note: if you don’t have access to more than one computer, you can perform the activity as a class as you navigate through the websites on your classroom computer.

For each student:
- Henry V, Prologue
- “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Checklist of Online Resources
- “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer

PREP FOR TEACHERS

Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to:

Preview all of the video segments used in the lesson. Prepare to watch them using your classroom’s Internet connection.

On each computer in your classroom, bookmark the Web sites listed on the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Checklist of Online Resources. Using a social bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us or diigo (or an online bookmarking utility such as portaportal) will allow you to organize all the links in a central location.

Print out and make copies of the prologue from Henry V, the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Checklist of Online Resources, and the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer for each student. Print out one copy of the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer Answer Key.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Tell your students that although Shakespeare's plays have been popular since they were first written 400 years ago, they were actually produced for a type of theater that's very different from our own. Understanding the theater that Shakespeare was writing for can help us appreciate his plays.

2. Explain that in today's lesson, students will be learning more about Shakespeare's theater, the Globe. Tell them there aren't any original surviving examples of this kind of theater today, so we don't know exactly what they were like. However, there are some sources, such as drawings, written accounts, theater records, and archeological excavations, that give us a general idea of what the Globe looked like, and what it would be like to attend a play there.
3. Explain that one of the first sources you can look at to get a sense of what the theater was like in Shakespeare's day are the plays themselves. They often give hints of what the stage was like, and what the audience's expectations were. Tell students that you're going to look at one speech that offers these kinds of hints.

4. Distribute *Henry V, Prologue*. (Your class does not have to be reading *Henry V* to do this exercise.) Provide context for the speech by explaining that it comes at the very opening of one of Shakespeare's most famous history plays, *Henry V*. This play tells the story of King Henry V of England, who launched a successful invasion of France. Tell them this speech is not spoken by one of the characters in the play, but rather is spoken by a figure called the Chorus. This person is like a narrator, who provides information to help the audience understand the action.

5. Tell your students that you are going to read the speech out loud together several times. During the first reading, ask them to pay attention to the general meaning of the speech.

6. When you are finished reading, ask the students to offer a short summary of what the Chorus is saying. (*The Chorus asks for the help of the audience's imagination to present the scenes in this play. The Chorus acknowledges that it would be impossible to show the huge battles, present the kings' glorious robes, and to span the huge amount of time covered in the play, so the audience will have to help fill in the blanks in their minds.*)

7. Once you have agreed upon the general meaning of the speech, ask for a volunteer to read the speech aloud. Instruct the rest of the class to follow along and to look for clues about what the theater the Chorus describes was like. Suggest they circle or underline the phrases that seem relevant as they are reading along.

8. After the reading, ask students to share the clues they have uncovered about the theater and the way plays were performed in Shakespeare's time. Some points they should note are:
   - The theater has a stage ("unworthy scaffold," line 10).
   - The theater is used for other kinds of displays ("cockpit," line 11).
   - The theater is made of wood, and it is circular ("this wooden O," line 13).
   - The playing space is not very large (You'll need imagination for it to seem like two forces are battling there, lines 20 and following).
   - The players aren't always able to have everything on stage they need for the scenes; the audience must rely on descriptions of the setting rather than actually seeing those things ("Think when we talk of horses that you see them," line 26).
   - Costumes are not necessarily as elaborate as needed ("For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings," line 28).
In this style of performance, an actor may come out and address the audience directly; they may not always be sustaining a "naturalistic" or "fourth-wall" style of performance. (This is suggested by the general presence of the Chorus, who explains the action directly to the audience.)

9. Once your students have finished identifying the clues and drawing conclusions about the original space where Shakespeare's plays were produced, tell them that in the remainder of the lesson, they will be learning more about what the Globe may have been like. Explain that as they learn more about the Globe, you want them to consider how this kind of theatrical space may have affected Shakespeare's plays. Ask them to keep these questions in mind throughout the rest of the lesson: What kinds of limitations would this kind of theater present? What opportunities would it provide for a playwright?

LEARNING ACTIVITY

1. Tell your students they'll now be learning more about the history of Shakespeare's theater and seeing what this kind of theater would be like in action. Explain that although the Globe Theatre did not survive to the present day, historians have helped to guide a reconstruction of the Globe Theatre in London.

2. Introduce the video segments by telling students that in the reconstructed Globe Theatre, audiences have the opportunity to see what performances would have been like in Shakespeare's day. As they're watching the segments, ask your students to consider the following questions: How would you describe the theater you see in these segments? What do you notice about performance style in these plays? What is the relationship between the actors and the audience?


4. After viewing the segments, pose the questions you asked students to think about: How would you describe the theater you see in these segments? What do you notice about performance style in these plays? What is the relationship between the actors and the audience? Students' answers will vary, but they may note that:

- The theater building is circular (as the Chorus' speech suggested).
- The theater is open-air, the stage is exposed on three sides (a thrust stage), and has pillars on either side.
- As is suggested in one segment, there seems to be a close relationship between the actor and audience members. As Joely Richardson describes, the audience would respond loudly, and the actors may have acknowledged or played to the audience.
The audience isn’t in darkness - as one of the video segments notes, the actors can see the faces of the audience.

The audience is situated both on the floor in front of the stage and in several stories of galleries that ring the theater.

5. When the students are finished sharing their observations from the segments, tell them they are now going to deepen their understanding of Shakespeare's theater by doing some research about these spaces. Explain that you’re going to send them on a sort of scavenger hunt. They'll be breaking into groups and visiting a series of online resources you've bookmarked on the computers. As they visit the resources, they'll be recording the facts they learn on the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer. *Note: If you only have one computer, perform this activity as a class.*

6. Break the class into groups and assign each group to a computer. Distribute the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Checklist of Online Resources and the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer.

7. Tell students they should visit each resource listed on the checklist (and mark them off so they don’t lose track). At each resource, they should gather facts about the Globe and theaters like it, and record what they learn on their organizers. Tell them that although they are working in groups, each student should take notes, as they will need this information later.

8. When students have finished their explorations, ask each group to report its findings. Reference the “Globe Scavenger Hunt” Student Organizer Answer Key during your discussion.

9. When groups have finished reporting their findings, ask students what they’d expect to find when they're reading Shakespeare's plays based on what they know about the theater of the time. You can prompt their thinking by asking:

   - How do you think these plays will set the scene? How would they indicate it is night, or where the setting is? *(Actors could carry torches to indicate it is night, or they could mention it in the dialogue. They could identify where they are by the things they say to each other.)*

   - How do you think the relationship of the actors to the audience affects what Shakespeare wrote? *(Accept all answers. Students may note that Shakespeare may have been more likely to write scenes that would allow the actors to talk directly to the audience.)*

   - How would the features on the stage affect the kinds of scenes and lines Shakespeare might write? *(Answers will vary. Some points may include: Shakespeare might write a scene particularly to use various features on the stage, such as the balcony, which is used in the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet, or the graveyard scene in Hamlet, in which the trapdoor served as the grave.)*
10. When you are finished with your discussion, return to the questions you asked the students to keep in mind during the lesson: What kinds of limitations would this kind of theater present? What opportunities would it provide for a playwright? Answers will vary, and students should be encouraged to come up with their own ideas. Some ideas students offer may include:

- The theater probably couldn't show everything the playwright would want to - such as epic battle scenes - but this provided an opportunity for the playwright to create vivid lines of dialogue where characters describe these scenes.

- Since sets weren't elaborate and the audience was so noisy, you probably couldn't create scenes that were totally naturalistic. But this might inspire the playwright to create characters who would connect with the audience instead, including very funny comedic characters that audiences love (such as Falstaff, as shown in the video segments).

- Since the actors couldn't rely on a lot of visual effects, the playwright had to create beautiful language that would keep audiences interested.

When you are finished discussing these questions, point out that we can read Shakespeare's plays and enjoy them that way, but that understanding the theatrical space where these plays were first performed offers another way to appreciate Shakespeare's craft.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to your students that sometimes the best way to understand how things were in the past is to compare them to a similar experience today. Ask your students to think about the last time they attended a play or went to a movie theater. Invite your students to identify some of the ways these experiences might differ from or be similar to theatrical experiences in Shakespeare's time. Some points they should address are:

- The theater building: What shape is it? What areas are there within the building?
- The stage or screen: What does it look like? How is it located in relation to the audience?
- The setting of the scenes: Are they realistic? Do you notice they are "sets"? How elaborate are the sets?
- The audience: How do they behave? What "rules" do they follow? Where are they located? What are their seating areas like?
- The actors: How do they relate to the audience? Would you describe their performances as "true-to-life"? Or do they seem like they are in a play or movie?
2. Tell your students that for their final activity, you'd like them to imagine they are a person from Shakespeare's time who has traveled in time to the present day.

3. Either as an in-class exercise or for homework, students should write a short paper describing what it's like to go to a modern-day theater or movie (depending on with which of these the student is more familiar). In their descriptions, students should note how modern theaters compare to what they had experienced in the Globe, making reference to specific details of both settings. They should be sure to reference information both about Elizabethan theaters and modern theaters to make the comparison.

4. Collect the students’ papers for an assessment of the lesson.