Magic Tree House: Showtime with Shakespeare
January 23-24, 2020

Applause Series Inquiry Guide
The Show Must Go On!

No matter what the show must go on! That’s what Jack and Annie learn when the Magic Tree House whisks them back to Elizabethan England. There, the daring sibling duo meets William Shakespeare himself—one of the greatest writers of all time! The performance is infused with clever hip-hop rhyme schemes, energetic dance numbers, and fun musical arrangements based on the critically acclaimed Magic Tree House series.
Following a shooting star, Jack and Annie find the Magic Treehouse and a book about Merry Olde England. They are whisked away to year 1601!

The two follow some jolly Londoners to the Globe Theater, but first encounter a caged dancing bear. The bear tells them a story about how he was separated from his family and ended up in the clutches of his greedy and cruel master.

They arrive at the Globe and meet (gasp!) Shakespeare himself! He wants to cast Jack in his new play. When Jack gets a case of stage fright right before curtain, Annie says she can act with her brother. They discover that in 1601 it’s against the law for females to act in plays, so Annie pretends to be a boy named Andy in order to be in the play.

With appearances by a bear disguised as a lion, a star debut, and an audience with Queen Elizabeth who helps them solve their riddle, the performance is worthy of Shakespeare. And the story has to wrap up in time for Jack and Annie to be home for dinner!
5 facts about Showtime with Shakespeare

The Book

01. The musical is based on the book, *Stage Fright on a Summer Night*, part of the Magic Tree House series created by children’s book author Mary Pope Osborne.

02. Mary Pope Osborne’s Magic Tree House books have sold more than 130 million copies all over the world and have been translated into more than 30 languages.

03. The author studied theater, mythology, and comparative religion at the University of North Carolina.

The Artists

04. *Magic Tree House: Showtime with Shakespeare* the musical was adapted for the stage by Will Osborne and Jenny Laird. Will is also the husband of Mary Pope Osborne! They have collaborated on many Magic Tree House books over the years.

05. The music and additional lyrics are by Randy Court, an award-winning composer and lyricist. He is also married to Jenny Laird, co-creator of the musical!
Enduring Understandings

Overarching (aka, "big") ideas that are central to the core of the theater discipline and may be transferred to new learning beyond the performance.

People use theater to express themselves - across time and region.

Shakespeare and many other authors and artists use wordplay and inventive language to entertain and tell a story creatively. Hip-hop artists and poets (among others) use many of the same techniques contemporarily.

Compelling Questions

Found in the following inquiry pages, COMPELLING QUESTIONS deal with curiosities about how things work, invite interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts, and address unresolved issues that require students to construct arguments in response.
Inquiry 01

How does any art connect to the place and time it is made?
How are artists influenced by history and the environment and community?

Goals:
Activating Prior Knowledge
Connecting History and Expression

Consider:
Would Shakespeare still write his plays in the same way if he lived in 2020?
Survey students on their responses in a class discussion.

Research:
Students can explore visual art in the National Gallery of Art on topics like Westward Expansion, People and Environment (related to the creation of the National Park System), and the depiction of the Iowa tribe among many others. The material explores the reciprocal relationship between art and public opinion and how art is impacted by social movements. Includes grade-level appropriate Powerpoints and expansion lessons.

These collections of art help us consider the connection between the artist, the art and the time to work is created. While there is no “right answer” to whether Shakespeare would have written the same plays in 2020, it is helpful to consider the ways in which art is bound to time and geography in the examples above. Invite students to consider a work of art, a song, film or television show that is connected to a time in the past and feels out of step.

Connect:
If you were an artist and were asked to make art (visual art, writing, music, film, theater, dance) that reflected your life in this place and time what you make, what would it be about?
Shakespeare is still important for students to read now? Agree or Disagree?

Goals:
Understanding Shakespeare’s cultural significance
Using evidence to Support a Claim

Read:
This selection of books brings Shakespeare to kids and adapts to modern readers.
Click here for titles and description.

Research:
Learn more about Shakespeare’s life, his plays, the Globe theater, a compilation of insults, a portrait gallery and list of modern adaptations of his work by clicking here before you weigh in.

Watch:
Video from the British Council with biographical information
Video of “Shakespeare” visiting a modern London classroom from Horrible Histories

Connect:
Ask students to record their researched opinions into an editorial for the school paper.
Click here for an example.

Note: Students may be more familiar with Shakespeare than they think. The Lion King is based on Shakespeare’s Hamlet, West Side Story and Gnomeo and Juliet is based on Romeo and Juliet and 10 Things I Hate About You on The Taming of the Shrew.
Goals:
Conducting Research
Connecting to New Perspectives

Have students explore the resources below while tracking their findings on the printable Venn diagram on page i.

Explore:
Use a Padlet (www.padlet.org) or post-it notes to ask students to consider what connections they can find, if any, between their idea of Shakespeare and their idea of Hip-Hop. After researching, have students complete another entry or post-it to expand their initial impression.

Research:
Use the following video and article to learn more about the connection between the Bard and rap.

For younger students:

Listen
Play clips of actors reciting Shakespeare and then play some (school approved) hip-hop from the Spotify playlist here.

For older students

Watch
Ted Talk on Hip-Hop & Shakespeare

Read
Read the article on page ii to consider the connection between hip-hop and Shakespeare.
Use this chart to connect the elements of theater to what you see on stage. Choose one aspect to focus on or take some mental notes to reflect on after the performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THOUGHT</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>SPECTACLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The big picture of the play</td>
<td>The events of a play; the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means.</td>
<td>These are the people presented in the play that are involved in the perusing plot.</td>
<td>The word choices made by the playwright and the enunciation of the actors of the language.</td>
<td>The spectacle in the theatre can involve all of the aspects of scenery, costumes, and special effects in a production.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GENRE: relating to a specific kind or type of drama and theater such as a tragedy, drama, melodrama, comedy, or farce</td>
<td>CONFLICT: the problem, confrontation, or struggle in a scene or play; conflict may include a character against him or herself, a character in opposition to another character, a character against nature, a character against society, or a character against the supernatural</td>
<td>BELIEVABILITY: theatrical choices thought to be true based upon an understanding of any given fictional moment, interpretation of text, and/or human interaction</td>
<td>DIALOGUE: a conversation between characters</td>
<td>NON-REPRESENTATIONAL MATERIALS: objects which can be transformed into specific props through the imagination</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES: the underlying actions and events that have happened before the play, story, or devised piece begins</td>
<td>OBJECTIVE: a goal or particular need or want that a character has within a scene or play</td>
<td>CHARACTER TRAITS: observable embodied actions that illustrate a character’s personality, values, beliefs, and history</td>
<td>IMPROVISE: the spontaneous, intuitive, and immediate response of movement and speech</td>
<td>PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: technical elements selected for use in a specific production, including sets, sound, costumes, lights, music, props, and make-up, as well as elements specific to the production such as puppets, masks, special effects, or other storytelling devices/concepts</td>
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<td>FOCUS: a commitment by a participant to remain in the scope of the project or to stay within the world of the play</td>
<td>PLOT: a narrative as revealed through the action and/or dialogue; traditionally, a plot has the elements of exposition, inciting incident, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution or failing action</td>
<td>GESTURE: an expressive and planned movement of the body or limbs</td>
<td>SCRIPT: a piece of writing for the theater that includes a description of the setting, a list of the characters, the dialogue, and the action of the characters</td>
<td>STAGING: patterns of movement in a scene or play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMAGINARY ELSEWHERE: an imagined location which can be historical, fictional, or realistic</td>
<td>INNER THOUGHTS: the underlying and implied meaning or intentions in the character’s dialogue or actions (also known as subtext)</td>
<td>MUSIC: Music can encompass the rhythm of dialogue and speeches in a play or can also mean the aspects of the melody and music compositions as with musical theatre.</td>
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<td>THEME: the aspect of the human condition under investigation in the drama; it can be drawn from unifying topics or questions across content areas</td>
<td>MOTIVATION: reasons why a character behaves or reacts in a particular way in a scene or play</td>
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<tr>
<td>THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS: practices and/or devices that the audience and actors accept in the world of the play even when it is not realistic, such as a narrator, flashback, or an aside</td>
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Discuss

Use the glossary to select a few elements to focus on during the performance and then talk about what you saw on stage.
Guide Sources
Content adapted from the NJPAC Study Guide

Information on Mary Pope Osborne and the Magic Tree House series
Mary Pope Osborne interview
Mary Pope Osborne on how she writes Magic Tree House books
www.youtu.be/e7kFwGLLW9Q
Magic Tree House series
www.magentreehouse.com
Showtime with Shakespeare sneak peek
www.youtu.be/eh_u89Cj2i4
Showtime with Shakespeare rehearsal footage
www.youtu.be/4d7y6GPT8R0

Websites on William Shakespeare and his works
Complete works of William Shakespeare, MIT
shakespeare.mit.edu
Folger Shakespeare Library
www.folger.edu
Teacher: Why it is ridiculous not to teach Shakespeare in school, Washington Post article

Videos on Shakespeare
William Shakespeare mini-bio
www.youtu.be/geev441vbmI
BBC tribute to William Shakespeare
www.youtu.be/2BqNUg1atC0
Tour of the Globe Theater
www.youtu.be/m3VGa6Fp3zi

Books on William Shakespeare
• Aagesen, Colleen and Blumberg, Margie—Shakespeare for Kids: His Life and Times, 21 Activities (For Kids series)
• Ludwig, Ken—How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare.

Hip-hop
The poetry of Hip-Hop: A playlist for your classroom
www.britannicalearn.com/blog/classroom-hip-hop-playlist

Hip-hop's new wave of lyricism, New Yorker article
newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/hip-hops-new-wave-of-lyricism

The Last Poets: the hip-hop forefathers who gave black America its voice
theguardian.com/music/2018/may/18/the-last-poets-the-hip-hop-forefathers-who-gave-black-america-its-voice

The Hip-hop Shakespeare Company
www.hiphopshakespeare.com

Hip-Hop & Shakespeare with Akala, TEDx Talk
www.youtu.be/DSbtkLA3GrY

The hip-hop of Shakespeare with MC Lars, TEDx Talk
www.youtu.be/lucYtOk_8Qo
Hip-Hop and Rap and William Shakespeare
At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much of a connection between Shakespeare and hip-hop music or rap. But a deeper look at the musical genre and its similarities to the Bard's work reveals how it makes perfect sense to stage Showtime with Shakespeare in rapping verse.

Human Condition
Shakespeare writes about the big themes that define the human condition: love, hate, jealousy, fear, sadness, etc. That's why so many artists refer back to his plays or mine them for inspiration for new works. "He was an extraordinarily gifted observer of the human condition who also happened to have the literary skills to put what he saw into words that resonated in Elizabethan England at first, and now across the globe," writes Will Gompertz, BBC arts editor.

Inspired by their Time and Place
From the very beginnings of the genre, hip-hop artists have been telling their stories and what they aspire to be in their own musical verses, much like Shakespeare. They take inspiration from the rough and tumble inner-city life of New York City to Compton, California, to what passionate love is like.

Wordcraft
Great rap artists known for their complex, inventive or vivid lyrical wordcraft include Rakim, KRS-One, Tupac Shakur, Eminem, LL Cool J, Lil Wayne, The Notorious B.I.G. aka Biggie Smalls, Common, and Talib Kweli. These rappers are consistently ranked by many critics to be in the top echelon of lyrical masters. The full repertoire of their songs details stories of how they overcame their personal demons, lyrics that hype their prowess as top MCs, and other aspects of their lives.

The 1994 song “Juicy” by The Notorious B.I.G. paints a vivid picture of his past life:

It was all a dream
I used to read Word Up magazine
Salt’n’Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine
Hangin’ pictures on my wall
Every Saturday Rap Attack, Mr. Magic, Marley Marl
I let my tape rock ’til my tape popped.

Compare this with Mercutio's famous monologue in *Romeo and Juliet*:

O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you
She is the fairies’ midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Over men’s noses as they lie asleep.

Both verses, separated by hundreds of years, are vivid in their imagery and use complex rhyming couplets to convey rhythm, meaning and intent. Rap and poetry use some of the same techniques to engage their audiences.
Complex Vocabulary
Atlantic magazine in 2014 wrote an article called, “How Kanye’s Vocabulary Stacks Up to Shakespeare’s—Plenty of hip-hop artists out-rhyme the Bard.” Megan Gerber writes about a data scientist, Matt Daniels, who analyzed the vocabulary of many rappers and compared them to Shakespeare. Check out the analytical graphic visualization here.

And lastly, let’s not forget the Broadway juggernaut Hamilton: An American Musical, which uses pop song conventions and rap to tell the story of Alexander Hamilton, one of our Founding Fathers. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the musical’s creator, was equally inspired by musical theater and rap legends, such as Biggie Smalls and Eminem, when he wrote Hamilton; he considers the biography of Hamilton a classic hip-hop story with tragic Shakespearean undertones. Miranda even quotes Shakespeare in Hamilton:

> My dearest, Angelica
> Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> I trust you’ll understand the reference to
> Another Scottish tragedy without my having to name
> the play.

If Shakespeare were born today, would he have been like Miranda or Common? No matter, he knew how to flow like a rap star and brought his audience with him on a cloud of witty rhyming couplets and compelling stories. If not convinced, listen to Antonio in The Tempest, who says: “I’ll teach you how to flow.”

Adapted from the NJPAC guide