

Magic Tree House: Showtime with Shakespeare

January 23-24, 2020



Applause Series Inquiry Guide

Performance



Photo by: Yasmeen Fahmy

[Click here for a preview of the work.](#)

Magic Tree House: Showtime with Shakespeare invites the audience inside the Magic Tree House back to the Elizabethan era conjured by New York Times Bestselling author Mary Pope Osborne.

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.

The Story



Photo by: Yasmmeen Fahmy

It starts with a riddle:

“To find a special magic,
you must step into the light
and without wand, spell, or charm
turn daytime into night.”

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?



Photo by: Yasmeen Fahmy

Inquiry 02

Shakespeare is still important for students to read now? Agree or Disagree?

Goals:

Understanding Shakespeare's cultural significance
Using evidence to Support a Claim



Credit: National Gallery of Art

As his fellow author Ben Jonson wrote of him, Shakespeare is "not of an age, but for all time." But is that true? Does Shakespeare still feel important to readers in the year 2020?.

Read:

This selection of books brings Shakespeare to kids and adapts to modern readers.
[Click here for titles and description.](#)

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*.

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.](#)

Inquiry 03

How do Shakespeare and the performance of his plays and the world of Hip-Hop music connect?

Do the two art forms made in very different times have anything in common?

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.



Photo by: Yasmeen Fahmy

For younger students:



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

For older students



Ted Talk on Hip-Hop & Shakespeare



Read the article on [page ii](#) to consider the connection between hip-hop and Shakespeare.

Reflection

Talk Back

Listen to music while responding to these questions in whatever format makes sense to you - writing, drawing, recording a video or a responding with technology.

- What did you see? What was your favorite part?
- What did you hear?
- What did you imagine? What idea came to your mind?
- What do you wonder about?

We love to hear from you. Please send any of your responses to the performance to us at education@dmpa.org. We'll share the responses with actors and Applause Series donors.

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.

THEATER GLOSSARY

THOUGHT

The big picture of the play

GENRE:
relating to a specific kind or type of drama and theater such as a tragedy, drama, melodrama, comedy, or farce

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES:
the underlying actions and events that have happened before the play, story, or devised piece begins

FOCUS:
a commitment by a participant to remain in the scope of the project or to stay within the world of the play

IMAGINARY ELSEWHERE:
an imagined location which can be historical, fictional, or realistic

THEME:
the aspect of the human condition under investigation in the drama; it can be drawn from unifying topics or questions across content areas

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

ACTION

The events of a play; the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means.

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

OBJECTIVE:
a goal or particular need or want that a character has within a scene or play

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 falling action

CHARACTERS

These are the people presented in the play that are involved in the perusing plot.

BELIEVABILITY:
theatrical choices thought to be true based upon an understanding of any given fictional moment, interpretation of text, and/or human interaction

CHARACTER TRAITS:
observable embodied actions that illustrate a character's personality, values, beliefs, and history

GESTURE:
an expressive and planned movement of the body or limbs

INNER THOUGHTS:
the underlying and implied meaning or intentions in the character's dialogue or actions (also known as subtext)

MOTIVATION:
reasons why a character behaves or reacts in a particular way in a scene or play

LANGUAGE

The word choices made by the playwright and the enunciation of the actors of the language.

DIALOGUE:
a conversation between characters

IMPROVISE:
the spontaneous, intuitive, and immediate response of movement and speech

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

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.

SPECTACLE

The spectacle in the theatre can involve all of the aspects of scenery, costumes, and special effects in a production.

NON-REPRESENTATIONAL MATERIALS:
objects which can be transformed into specific props through the imagination

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

STAGING:
patterns of movement in a scene or play

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

www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/mary-pope-osborne-interview-transcript.html

Mary Pope Osborne on how she writes Magic Tree House books

www.youtu.be/e7kFwGLLW9Q

Magic Tree House series

www.magictreehouse.com

Showtime with Shakespeare sneak peek

www.youtu.be/eh_u89Cj2i4

Showtime with Shakespeare rehearsal footage

www.youtu.be/4d7y6GPT8RO

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

washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/06/13/teacher-why-it-is-ridiculous-not-to-teach-shakespeare-in-school/?arc404=true

Videos on Shakespeare

William Shakespeare mini-bio

www.youtu.be/geev441vbMI

BBC tribute to William Shakespeare

www.youtu.be/2BgNUg1atCO

Tour of the Globe Theater

www.youtu.be/m3VGa6Fp3zl

Books on William Shakespeare

- Agesen, Colleen and Blumberg, Margie—Shakespeare for Kids: His Life and Times, 21 Activities (For Kids series)
- Ackroyd, Peter—Shakespeare: The Biography. Anchor, 2006.
- Aliko—William Shakespeare & the Globe. HarperCollins, 2000.
- Bryson, Bill—Shakespeare: The World as Stage (Eminent Lives Series). Harper Perennial, 2007.
- DK—The Shakespeare Book (Big Ideas Simply Explained). DK, 2015.
- Greenblatt, Stephen—Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare. W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.
- Ludwig, Ken—How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare.
- Shakespeare, William—Love Poems & Sonnets of William Shakespeare. Doubleday, 1957.
- Shapiro, James—A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599. Harper Perennial, 2006.
- Williams, Marcia—Tales from Shakespeare. Candlewick, 2004.

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

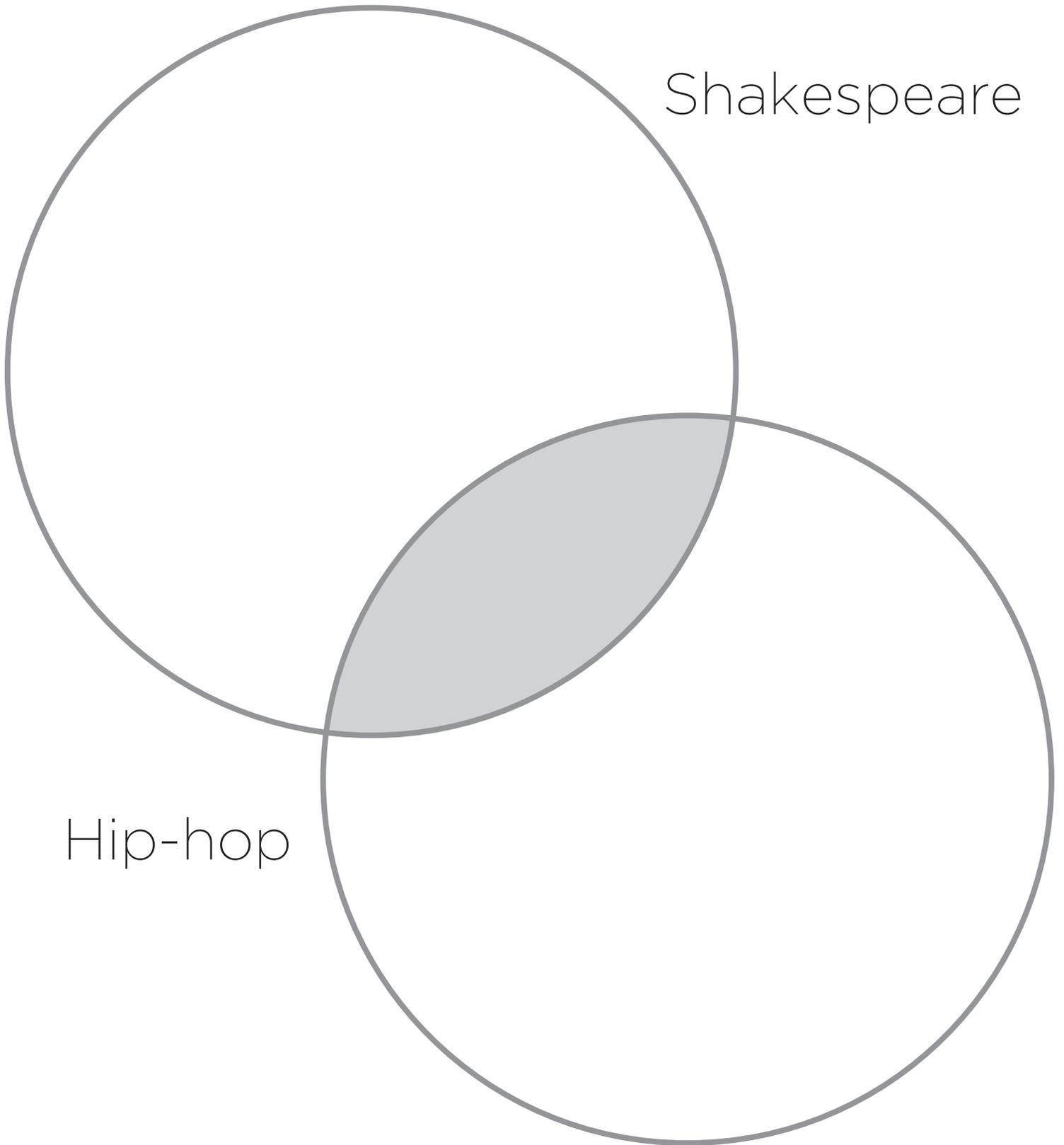
Hip-Hop & Shakespeare with Akala, TEDx Talk

www.youtu.be/DSbtkLA3GrY

The hip-hop of Shakespeare with MC Lars, TEDx Talk

www.youtu.be/1ucYtOk_8Qo

Venn Diagram (PAGE 7)



Shakespeare and Hip-Hop Article

(Refer to page 7)

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.

Shakespeare and Hip-Hop Article (con't)

(Refer to page 7)

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