



faction of fools
THEATRE COMPANY, INC.



Curriculum Guide

Dear Teachers,

Faction of Fools Theatre Company is devoted to preserving and promoting the classical style of Commedia dell'Arte.

Curriculum Guides are designed as a resource both for teachers and students. We encourage you to photocopy articles you find helpful and distribute them to your students as supplemental reading.

This curriculum guide contains material about Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the characters and masks of Commedia dell'Arte, and theatre-going etiquette.

We hope that this curriculum guide will prove useful as you explore this classical art form and prepare to bring your students to the show!

Sincerely,
Faction of Fools

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Contributors

The Faction of Fools Curriculum Guide includes articles and activities contributed by Denise Perrino, Vanessa Buono, and Matthew R. Wilson.



In School Programs

To bring a show or workshops to your school, please contact

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Mission Statement

Faction of Fools Theatre Company celebrates Commedia dell'Arte in Washington, DC and around the world. We preserve and promote this Renaissance theatre style by both respecting its heritage and exploring its future. We embody the spirit of Commedia, which is traditional yet innovative, international yet familiar, and classical yet accessible. In our performances, actor training, international initiatives, and educational outreach, Commedia dell'Arte is theatre at its best: physical discipline, spontaneous imagination, collaborative energy, and joyous wonder.

Faction of Fools is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.



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THEATRE COMPANY, INC.

presents

A Commedia

Romeo and Juliet

Text by **William Shakespeare**

Adaptation by **Paul Reisman & Matthew R. Wilson**

Director **Matthew R. Wilson**

Costume Designer **Lynly A. Saunders**

Scenic Designer **Daniel Flint**

Lighting Designer **Sarah Tundermann**

Mask Designer **Aaron Cromie**

Production Stage Manager **Miriam L. Yoder^x**

Assistant Stage Manager **Sarah Conte**

Co-Producer **Tyler Herman**

Co-Producer **Sarah Bartlett Wilson**

Cast

Juliet, Prince, Lady Montague **Gwen Grastorf**

Romeo, Abraham, Montague **Drew Kopas^x**

Nurse, Paris, Sampson, Benvolio **Toby Mulford^x**

Mercutio, Capulet, Gregory, Friar John **Paul Reisman^{*}**

Tybalt, Lady Capulet, Friar Laurence **Eva Wilhelm^x**

* This production is being presented under the auspices of the Actors' Equity Association Members' Project Code.

^x Denotes Equity Membership Candidate.



Cover photos by Clinton Brandhagen.

Director's Notes

It is no accident that Shakespeare's *R&J* is set in Italy—in fair Verona where family rivalries bring a tragic end to ideal love. Tales of thwarted love were the mainstay of Commedia dell'Arte players whose touring shows arrived in London by the end of the 1560s. Shakespeare knew their style, their characters, and their conventions. And, as all good artists do, he borrowed liberally from their material in crafting his own work. Hence, Lords Capulet and Montague are like *il Dottore* and *Pantalone*, the patriarchs of two houses whose disputes wreak havoc all over town. Their children are young Lovers (*Innamorati* in Commedia terms), and their bumbling Servants borrow from the slapstick routines of Commedia's *Zanni*. Meanwhile a host of Capitano-style braggarts (Tybalt, Mercutio, and Paris—boasters in three different veins) further complicate the plot with their bravado.



The "Queen Mab" Speech

Photo by Clinton Brandhagen

Comedy ends with a wedding. A traditional Commedia play begins in chaos but progresses to an orderly happy ending. Shakespeare knew this formula, and almost all of his comedies abide by it. Ultimately, love prevails, and marriage rites announce the play's end! In *R&J*, however, the Bard has other plans. This couple gets married *too soon*, before the curtain is ready to fall, and their story continues past a promised happily-ever-after. In *R&J*, the comedy ends with a wedding. Then the tragedy begins. No sooner are vows sealed than bodies fall, and starry lovers find their destinies crossed.

Shakespeare's audience would have recognized that this play is a comedy set on edge. The text is riddled with jokes and humorous excess; the characters are fantastical. Though we think of this play as "romantic" or "tragic," Shakespeare wanted his audiences to laugh. Then in the midst of laughter, the knife falls. Tragedy shows up when we least expect it, and the mournful tear is all the harsher because it has been matched with joy.

Our project is to emphasize the Commedia that first inspired Shakespeare to write his play. By bringing out the humor that pervades the original text, we believe that we are complimenting tragedy, not competing with it. Shakespeare was smart enough to know that loss is all the sadder when it comes with laughter.

Matthew R. Wilson
Artistic Director, Faction of Fools

The Characters

The Commedia dell'Arte characters recorded in history fit into four main types. Examples of each type are as follows:

Zanni

Zanni are the servant characters. These characters try their best to serve their masters, despite their lack of wit. Here are a few common zanni characters:

Truffaldino—a standard, long-nosed “second zanni,” “second” in the sense that his dim wits are often complemented by a slightly craftier friend who plays the “first” role in the comic couple.

Scapino—whose name is derived from the Italian verb “to escape,” is the classic, crafty “first zanni,” available for all projects of intrigue and also to make decisions for his servant friends...though not necessarily good ones.

Pedrolino—the fussy domestic serving man to La Signora, the young wife of one of the Old Men. Pedrolino’s status is heightened by his clean clothes and indoor accommodations, but suffering the constant abuse of La Signora is no easy task. The character is traditionally played in white make-up rather than a mask and thus is known as “*infarinato*” (“floured”).

Coviello—from the southern tradition, a typical first zanni.



The Old Men

Pantalone—a wealthy old man who has finally achieved status near the end of his life, he is greedy and self-interested after years of struggle. He is often the husband of the young and violent La Signora, who cuckolds him every chance she gets.

Dottore—from Bologna, the center of fine cuisine and the university system, he is an expert in everything...especially food. Sometimes a know-it-all, sometimes a charlatan, he loves to ramble on.



The Lovers

The Lovers are typically the son and daughter to the Old Men. They are highly emotional and passionate. They will do anything to marry the person they love. Their most typical names are:

Flavio—lead male lover.

Isabella—lead female lover.

The Captain

This braggart soldier is usually from a foreign country other than Italy. He boasts and brags of his strengths, abilities, and triumphant battles but in reality cowers in the face of conflict. This exotic attention-seeker often arrives in the scenario just when things start to go badly, and he only makes them worse. The Captain is a lover of war and a lover of women—but mostly a lover of himself!

Examples of names for the Captain include:

El Capitán del Corazón Solitario (from Spain)

Capt. Maj. Brig. Gen. Montgomery John Wells Smith (from England)

Capitaine Jean Grammelot (from France)



The female counterpart to the Captain is the young, vivacious La Signora.

La Signora—usually a young, opportunistic wife of one of the Old Men. She has married for wealth, not love. Typically she has grown tired of waiting for her husband’s inheritance and more tired still of his advances. Despite being married, she continues her pursuits for love, usually with a Captain.



Who's Who in A Commedia *Romeo and Juliet*

Each actor has been to cast to play multiple roles. Based on the characters and masks of Commedia dell'Arte, the audience can identify each the different roles. Here is a guide to help you. Note that everyone gets a chance to be Peter!

Gwen Grastorf

Juliet—Innamorta
Balthazar—Zanni
Prince—Brigella
Lady Montague—Unmasked Magnifica
Peter—Zanni (Pulcinella)

Toby Mulford

Benvolio—Arlecchino
Nurse—Zagna/Ruffiana
Paris—Unmasked Capitano/Lover
Sampson—Zanni
Peter—Zanni (Pulcinella)

Eva Wilhelm

Lady Capulet—Innamorata Vecchia
Tybalt—Capitano
Friar Lawrence— il Dottore
Montague friend—Zanni
Peter—Zanni (Pulcinella)

Drew Kopas

Romeo—Innamorato
Abraham—Zanni
Lord Montague—Pantalone
Peter—Zanni (Pulcinella)

Paul Reisman

Mercutio—Capitano
Lord Capulet—il Dottore
Friar John—Pantalone
Gregory—Zanni
Peter—Zanni (Pulcinella)

Further Resources

Online:

- www.factionoffools.org
- www.commediabyfava.it
- sites.google.com/site/italiancommedia/plays-and-scenari
- www1.american.edu/IRVINE/jenn/home.html
- www.delpiano.com/carnival/html/commedia.html



Bring a Faction of Fools show to your school *today!*

The Great One-Man Commedia Epic

1 Actor. 10 Characters. 1000 Catastrophes.

Artistic Director Matthew R. Wilson transforms a bare stage into a raucous world of young lovers, squabbling old men, boasting soldiers, and dim-witted servants.

A Commedia

Romeo and Juliet

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Classroom Activities

Emotion Levels

Have students line up at one end of the room. Call out an emotion, like "sad." Ask students to take one step forward and show us with their bodies, faces, and voices someone sad at level 1. Then have someone else step forward and show us sad at a level 2. Have them increase their portrayal of sadness by exaggerating it and stepping forward at a level 3, then 4, and so on up to 10. By 10, encourage students to be over the top and dramatic, perhaps screaming and crying on their knees. Go through this progression several times with different emotions, like happy, jealous, or heart-broken. Discuss how the emotions change as they increase. If you were sad at a 1, what emotion were you portraying at a 10? Despair? Distraught? Once students get the hang of exaggerating the emotions step-by-step, this can become a game by calling out the numbers and emotions out of order. The facilitator can call out "Joyful at an 8," "Anger at a 6," and "In love at a 10!"



Simple Scenarios

Partner students into pairs of two. Give each pair a simple scenario from the list below. Have them improvise the scene once without masks. Encourage them to find three different ways of doing the task of their characters. The first time students typically rely on their voices and facial expressions to communicate the scenario. Once they have created their scenario, have students do it again, this time wearing a mask of some kind. This will require students to find ways of showing us who the characters and how they feel with their whole body.

Scenario #1: An Old Man and his Servant

Zanni, the servant, is very hungry. Every time he is about to eat his dinner, his master gives him a new task to complete.

Scenario #2: The Lovers

A young boy and a young girl fall in love at first sight. They discover their fathers are enemies and will never let them marry. They decide to run away together.

Scenario #3: The Captain

A soldier comes to a foreign city with his servant. He brags about how he has fought bravely in a war. The soldier then sees a mouse, and they are both scared away.



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Theatre Etiquette: A Guide for Students*

Remember:

Just as you can see and hear the actors on stage...they can see and hear you. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below.

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance. Here are some important things to do before you go inside the theatre:

- **Turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices** (iPods, games, etc.). It is very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The light from cell phones and other electronic devices is also a big distraction, so do not send or receive text messages.
- **NO food or drinks** are allowed inside the theatre. (Make sure to spit out your gum.)
- **No photography** is permitted inside the theatre.
- **Visit the restroom before the performance begins.** Unless it is an emergency, you should stay seated during the performance. There will be no intermission for this performance of *A Commedia Romeo and Juliet*.

React to what’s happening on stage!

Please feel free to have *honest* reactions to what is happening onstage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance.

However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors.

Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre, you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way. As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it... You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh or grieve with as well as to understand people, lives, and cultures different from your own.”

—Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

* Adapted from The Shakespeare Theatre Company’s “First Folio: Teacher Curriculum Guide”