AUSTRALIAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY INCURSION

The English faculty have just wrapped up our annual incursions from the Australian Shakespeare Company, most lately on Wednesday, 4 September, with Year 10 being treated to interactive performances of scenes from 'The Tragedy of Macbeth'. The students have just started a critical study of this most bloody of Shakespeare's plays, and it once again helped them greatly to show the early modern English dialogue being performed in real time by experienced actors. The fight scenes were also well-received.

Amidst performances of key scenes, the visiting Shakespearean players shared with the student audience valuable insights into plot, character and the conventions of Shakespearean tragedy, along with some important explanation of contextual influences. It is widely accepted that 'Macbeth' was composed as a propaganda piece for the newly crowned King James I, after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. The central message: don't depose God's appointed king unless you want to be ruled by a blood-thirsty tyrant!

Of course, while the professional actors were fantastic, the occasion was topped off by the student participation. So, a big "Bravo!" goes out to Isabella M. and Justin F., for their worthy amateur performances as Scottish lords, as well as the three boys who played the weird sisters – just as it would have been in Shakespeare's day, when no women were allowed on the dramatic stage.

The Australian Shakespeare Company had also visited the College a fortnight earlier – Tuesday, 20 August – at that time to entertain and inform students in the Year 11 English Advanced course. This prior interactive performance was of scenes from another of Shakespeare's tragedies, 'The Tragedy of the Moor of Venice, Othello', and was similarly designed to enhance students' understanding of the text and the motivation of characters. It served to ensure that those students renew their familiarity with the tragedy genre after experiencing a performance of Shakespearean comedy, last year.

While they were learning about 'Othello' as a critical study for their Final Examination in Week 9, familiarity with the genre is also crucial for their next critical study in Year 12, which focuses on William Shakespeare's 'King Henry IV, Part 1'. While that is a history play, its mixed genre includes comedy, tragedy and other elements as presumed prior knowledge.

We look forward to giving students at the College similar opportunities to experience the Shakespearean drama that they are studying for English, through further incursions in 2025.

With thanks to Mrs Guthrie for organising and Mrs Mattiello for assisting, the Year 11 English Standard cohort attended a separate excursion event during the 'Othello' incursion. They attended a Nature Walk around the Western Sydney Parklands, reflecting on the themes of their poetry study regarding John Foulcher. The Gabragal Trail provided an opportunity to contrast the urbanised landscape of the houses around Austral with the natural parklands. This was equally engaging and relevant for their current and future learning. It will prove to be a valuable experience as they study the poetry of Robert Gray in a similar module for Year 12.

Isabella M in Year 10 - "*The Macbeth show today was a lot of fun. It was very entertaining and engaging from the beginning; the actors would use Scottish accents when acting as the characters - true to the original setting of the play - and explain what was happening and the history of when the play was written. Their acting was entertaining and took volunteers from the audience to engage us in a different way. When I was chosen to play Ross, the actors explained what was happening and made sure I was comfortable. I also noticed that even while it wasn't*

their line or the focus wasn't on them, they acted with each other and kept acting, which I thought was very fun and professional. All in all I thought the show was a lot of fun and I'd like for it to happen again next year and for other years as well."

David Gawthorne
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