

Shakespeare Festival

Cornerstone Christian Academy
ACSI Region: Rocky Mountain



PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

to immerse students in the writings and themes of William Shakespeare, while preparing a festival event shared by the school families and the larger community as well

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM

SCHOOL PROFILE

GRADE LEVELS

K-6

ENROLLMENT

173

YEAR FOUNDED

1998

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR

Tom Askew

SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION

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The entire population of Cornerstone Christian Academy devotes the month of March to studying Shakespeare. Younger grades hear summaries of Shakespearean tales in read-aloud form, and they memorize sonnets and dialogues. Middle-grade students read prose abridgments of plays, and fifth and sixth graders venture into the original texts. Hands-on activities spotlight the culture of Elizabethan era, including its architecture, clothing, food, pastimes, and occupations. Timelines enable students to relate incidents in the plays to real-life events from various epochs of history.

This celebration of the Bard of Avon culminates during the final week with a daylong festival. In the early years of the school, this event was only an evening performance, in which students in every grade appeared on the stage, either singing, dancing, reciting, or performing a play. In its current form, the festival begins outdoors in a mock Elizabethan marketplace where students may visit booths ranging from brass rubbing to archery. Town criers and jugglers wander the festival grounds as students perform Maypole dances, Punch-and-Judy shows, and one-act vignettes in the outdoor amphitheater. The evening concludes indoors with performances by the older grades of parodies such as *Caesar Salad* or a film-noir version of *Macbeth*, and the grand finale is an abridgment of a complete play. Plays produced in recent years include *Richard III*, *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Tempest*.

Although the major plays are abridged, the language is not dumbed down. Students at all grade levels are exposed to the richness of Shakespeare's poetry and are excited to find out how many everyday English expressions have their origins in Shakespeare's writings.

The teacher who abridges the plays not only makes them briefer but also adapts them to be more age appropriate for elementary children. In the recent production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the adultery episode was tastefully minimized without damaging the thematic illustration of the consequences of deceitfulness. Lively discussions about the damage of gossip ensued among the students who performed this play.

Because Shakespeare wrote from a Christian worldview, there is little difficulty in helping students see God's truth in these plays. Witnessing the ruthless acts of Richard III brought up comparisons to some Old Testament kings, and the courage of Henry V reminded some students of the exploits of King David.

Last year for the first time, we invited sixth graders from the neighborhood public middle school to our dress rehearsal. Their teachers were complimentary and grateful as well as amazed that their students listened attentively.

One year a teacher realized that a new student had untapped potential and suggested that he be cast in a significant role. A formerly quiet and passive young man blossomed on stage, eventually assuming a place of student leadership.

According to play director Alicia Fodor, "The academic benefits are equaled by the life-changing perspectives given to the participants by the rich stories that touch their hearts and encourage them to want to reach others within the school community and outside as well. The faces at the end of a show well done are priceless to behold. Shakespeare's faithful depiction of the superiority of good over evil is clearly imprinted on their little hearts and minds."