



SUSANNA SHAKESPEARE



For Booking:

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William Shakespeare's elder daughter on their family life and how it is reflected in her father's work.



Created and performed by Elizabeth H. Robinson

With text by William Shakespeare

Costumes by Sherry Frost

This, the first in the Susanna Shakespeare series of plays, makes her father's writing accessible by introducing it through a character with similar life experience to a modern teen audience. William Shakespeare left their family to work in another city, only returning many years later. Susanna was brought up in a single parent home with a sister with whom she did not get along.

By utilizing this connection Ms. Robinson breaks down the perceived barriers that new listeners to verse speaking can erect.

This first play introduces a variety of Mr. Shakespeare's plays – some familiar, some slightly less so – inspiring students to explore Shakespeare's work on the page and on the stage.



The Susanna Shakespeare plays are a succinct introduction to Shakespearean language and performance that also addresses universal themes to which audiences young and old can easily relate.

In Susanna Shakespeare we learn that William Shakespeare left his wife and family in Stratford Upon Avon to pursue a writing career in London. His elder daughter, Susanna, followed him in hopes of adding herself to the writer's new life. Though her father sent her back to Stratford to live out her life the trip sparked her interest in his writing. After his death she studied all of his work and used those words to deduce her father's thoughts and feelings about their family life.

When we learn to speak we need to have speech modeled for us. The same is true for learning a different type of language. Susanna Shakespeare's live performance of her father's words model verse speaking for the audience as the first step to becoming comfortable with it.

William Shakespeare wrote his plays in a largely illiterate society. He expected his words to be performed and passed down orally not to be read silently to one's self. These plays provide an opportunity for audiences to learn this language the way it was meant to be taught.

Text Used

Hamlet Act III, scene ii
Two Gentlemen of Verona Act II, scene vi
As You Like It Act I, scene iii; Act V scene iv
Twelfth Night Act I, scene ii
Richard III Act I, scene ii
Othello Act IV, scene ii
Two Noble Kinsmen Act II, scene iv
Henry V Prologue
Sonnets #130 & #116
King Lear Act I, scene I
Antony & Cleopatra Act V, scene ii



Themes addressed:

Broken homes
Sibling rivalry
Difficulty relating to parents
Creativity
Talent
Balancing work with family
Role of women in family

An excerpt from Susanna Shakespeare:

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say the whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshews and noise: I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it.

My father wrote that. William Shakespeare. It's from one of his plays. He wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, a complaint of a woman who went wrong, 2 pornographic narrative poems on classical themes and a threnody lamenting the death of a pair of chaste birds and I have read every word. And that is, I presume, why you are all here. To learn about his writing. Why, where, how and so forth. And I suppose I am the best person to tell you. A poor substitute for the real thing but the best thing left. That bit, from Hamlet, I actually heard my father speak. He stood in front of a whole stage full of actors. Someone had done something he didn't like and this was his version of an acting lesson





Technical Requirements

Time: The performance is 30 minutes long plus a question and answer period with the actress for up to 15 minutes after the show. Workshops will be tailored to available class time.

Space: Space needed: at least 8' x 8'.

Sound: No sound amplification is provided. For audience over 200 members a wireless microphone and amplification system will need to be provided. If you would like us to provide the microphone system there will be an additional charge.

Cost: Assembly performance (up to 500 students) - \$1000
Residency (1-5 in-classroom performances or workshops) - \$1500/day



Testimonials

Elizabeth has created a show, which will inspire students' interest in theater and the Bard. Their comprehension of the written texts will be improved by having seen a live portrayal of selections. The show puts Shakespeare in a context that students can identify with. Elizabeth conveys a love of the language and of dramatic presentation. She creates a character that makes the work accessible on many levels.

- Heather Lee; Artist, Educator

First of all, I loved it. I enjoyed it so much because you're an amazing actress. I like how you humanize him. The fact that Shakespeare has this daughter and he fights with his wife makes him relatable and I like how you show his sense of humour too. I was SO proud about the stuff that I recognized! I think that after seeing that play I can now read Shakespeare and realize that he was person, and that does make me want to read more.

- Jane Berg; Student, Friends Seminary, New York, NY

What an enjoyable evening. This is the sort of thing I want my kids' schools to be providing for them and I'm going to make sure they know it.

- Barbara Berg; Parent, New York, NY

Elizabeth Robinson's "Susanna Shakespeare" is a carefully crafted, engaging show that appealed to me on many levels. I am both a mother and an English teacher, and I am excited about anything that gets kids thinking in new and interesting ways about "boring school subjects." Ms. Robinson's imagining of William Shakespeare's daughter works to do just that. The agile performance combined just enough poetry with exactly the right amount of history spiced with ample humor. The end result is a balanced work that engages both young people and adults while sneaking in a good dose of the classic work of the Bard. I would highly recommend the program to middle and high school English teachers, especially at the opening of a Shakespeare unit. Ms. Robinson's show serves as a means of making the sometimes daunting subject of Shakespeare accessible and fun.

- Sherry Frost; Parent, Educator, Dover, NH

Susanna Shakespeare could be someone you've known all your life. As Author and Performer, Elizabeth H. Robinson has a rare and exciting approach, and is one of the best speakers of the verse I have ever encountered. Her clear and engaging style makes the language accessible to a modern audience, bringing the words and world of Shakespeare to life in a way that makes you feel comfortable and want to know more.

- Jim Butterfield, Actor

ELIZABETH H. ROBINSON is an actor, writer, singer, dancer and teacher based in New York City.

Ms. Robinson is the creator of *Susanna Shakespeare*, her acclaimed one-woman touring show about the life and time of Shakespeare's daughter. She has performed in theatres around the country, including HERE Arts Center, New Perspectives Theatre, Phoenix Theatre Circle, Brooklyn Arts Exchange, Troubador Productions, Kitchen Sink and many others.

As a singer, she created and performed the shows *Always a Bridesmaid* and *Canine Replacement Therapy*, both of which were featured at NYC's famed Don't Tell Mama piano bar.

Her dance theatre performances include many self-created works, including *An Amethyst Remembrance*, about the life and writing of Emily Dickinson, and *Dove Tale*, a fantasy on the humanity in people and animals.

Ms. Robinson received a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where she studied at the Playwrights Horizons Theatre School. She received a postgraduate diploma from the London Academy of Performing Arts, where she studied the classics, concentrating on Shakespeare and Chekhov.

