



great river SHAKESPEARE festival

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SHAKESPEARE COMES TO EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Company members from the Great River Shakespeare Festival in Winona, Minnesota, conducted a two-day long workshop for students and teachers on April 21 and 22, at Delong Middle School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where approximately 180 students are preparing to stage adaptations of seven Shakespearean plays. Utilizing techniques from their annual Teachers Workshops, offered to educators each July during the GRSF season, the five guest artists interacted with workshop participants in a variety of settings and helped reduce barriers between students, teachers, and Shakespeare.

On the first day of the Eau Claire residency, GRSF Associate Directors Doug Scholz-Carlson (Minneapolis) and Alec Wild (St. Louis) were joined by acting company member Nick Demeris (Chicago). Wild and Scholz-Carlson met with 20 teachers in multiple disciplines from across the district. The directors offered tools for bringing Shakespeare alive in the classroom and helping middle school students explore language. Demeris presented a workshop making connections between Shakespeare's language, hip-hop, and current pop culture uses of the spoken word. Many activities were excerpted from GRSF's annual summer season Teacher's Workshop, in which teachers study acting and directing as well as writing and rhetoric under the guidance of GRSF staff.

On the second day of the residency, GRSF text coach Gale Childs Daly (Milwaukee) and acting company member Evan Fuller (Chicago) joined Wild, Scholz-Carlson, and Demeris to present a full-day workshop to the students participating in Delong Middle School's Shakespeare Festival. Topics included Shakespeare's language and verse, stage combat, acting techniques and hip-hop. The students rehearsed their plays under the guidance of the GRSF staff, received feedback and heard Shakespeare spoken by the professional actors of the company.

The two-day residency was a first for GRSF, now entering its sixth season. The company supports a broad array of education and community outreach programming, designed to make Shakespeare fun and accessible for playgoers of all ages, with special attention given to students. GRSF hopes to extend its education programs into the off-season school year with an artists-in-residence performance/workshop program.

The residency was funded by Milwaukee-based Arts at Large and organized by Delong Middle School teacher Kathleen Trzecinski, a GRSF Teachers Workshop veteran. According to Trzecinski, "This was a wonderful opportunity to have actors of this caliber work with us and our students. It is thrilling to see middle school students become excited about Shakespeare's plays. The Great River Shakespeare Festival Acting Company members took that excitement to a whole new level for our students." Scholz-Carlson commented, "It is thrilling to see the passion with which these students attacked their work on Shakespeare's plays."

GRSF's 2009 season plays June 26 - July 26, with productions of "The Tempest" and "Love's Labour's Lost." All performances take place at the Performing Arts Center on campus at Winona State University. For tickets and information about all GRSF events, performances, and education programs: www.GRSF.org, 507-474-7900.