



"Our purpose is to unlock Shakespeare... to take him from his glass case, that he may live among us again, so that he may question, challenge and provoke us"

John Doona
Founder of the Children's Shakespeare Festivals

Information for Schools 2026/26

Image by Andrew Billington Photography

About the Children's Shakespeare Festivals

We're incredibly proud of the huge success of the project which is now its 17th year. In 2025/26 our family of creatively minded schools continues to burgeon, and in "The Readiness is All" we stalk the corridors of Elsinore castle in Shakespeare's epic story of life and death - Hamlet.

What are our plans for 2025/26?

For 2026/27, the Children's Shakespeare Festivals will roam the sweltering streets of Verona in "Did My Heart Love 'til Now?", as we explore Shakespeare's most famous play - *Romeo and Juliet*. You can expect to experience our tried-and-tested model of high quality CPD in drama, compelling classroom activity and performance by your pupils in professional theatre spaces. Our acclaimed scheme of work features brand new material for this year.



"DID MY HEART
LOVE 'TIL NOW?"

Trouble is brewing on the hot and dangerous streets of Verona, as an old feud between two rival families threatens to burn the city to the ground. When two young people meet and fall in love, the world seems to melt away. But their families are sworn enemies and they can never be together. Desperate for a way to defy their reality, a plan is hatched to escape the lives they were born into. But fate has other ideas...

You can find more information on what is included in the project fee and the current cost of participating on pages 6 and 7.

What are the Children's Shakespeare Festivals?

"Shakespeare knows what it is 'to be' the king, the servant, the child, the monster. And to find what is human in all of them. That is where we begin"

Edward Bond

Playwright and Patron of North West Drama

The **Children's Shakespeare Festivals** are large scale, inter-school festivals which aim to inspire an excitement for Shakespeare's plays and develop the use of educational drama as a tool for deep and active learning. This unique project combines high-quality CPD in drama and cross-curricular classroom activity with performance by your pupils in high profile professional theatre spaces. Since our first festival in 2009, the project has grown to work with over 80 primary schools each year.

The project aims to **develop commitment to learning**, **raise attainment** and **build confidence** in your children, making them the owners of their learning and of Shakespeare's texts. Through the **powerful and sustained CPD** embedded in the project, your teachers will develop their skills and expertise in the use of drama in the classroom and become, in time, your own in-house expert of this potent teaching approach.

The Children's Shakespeare Festivals were the brainchild of our much-missed friend and founder, John Doona, who sadly passed away in 2014 after a long illness. The project has gone on to engage more than 20,000 children (plus their families and friends) and 500 school staff members with Shakespeare.



Images by Andrew Billington Photography



Why participate in the Children's Shakespeare Festivals?

The best learning comes from compelling experience; from experiences that are physically, intellectually, linguistically and emotionally rich. Our schemes of work, some of which are also published by Routledge, are just such rich learning opportunities. They are tailored for the primary classroom and fully accessible to the willing teacher who is ready to explore the creative possibilities of themselves and their pupils.

Our use of performance on professional stages is the final additional motivating element of the project; once our explorations are complete, we have the material ready for building exciting and original performances to be seen by their peers, teachers, families and friends.

In 2022/23 there are 83 participating classes from 56 schools across 14 individual festivals.

What impact does the project have?

The project has four key aims; to **raise pupil aspirations**, to **increase confidence and improve well-being**, to **increase engagement with the arts** and to **improve the use of drama in the primary classroom**.

North West Drama undertook a major evaluation of the project against these aims*:

96%

of pupils told us they now enjoy school and learning more because of taking part in the CSFs.

93%

of pupils told us they now like Shakespeare and want to read more of his plays since taking part in the CSFs.

98%

of teachers told us that the project had positively impacted on their teaching and had raised attainment, particularly in writing

95%

of teachers told us that their class had clearly developed in confidence and become more cohesive as a result of taking part in the CSFs

**400 pupils and 24 teachers took part in a pre and post-project comparison, all of whom were participants in our Royal Exchange Theatre Children's Shakespeare Festivals in 2016-2019.*

What do people say about the Children's Shakespeare Festivals?

"Without doubt the best educational project I have been involved in"

*Participating teacher
New Vic Theatre CSF 2022*

"The richness of the experience, the confidence it builds, the impact on writing... this is a wonderful project"

*Keith Powell, former headteacher
St Saviour's Catholic Primary School*

"It has given lots of the children in my class a real confidence boost and many who thought they weren't 'into drama' now love it"

*Amy Harding, teacher
Middlewich Primary School*

"It was an amazing experience for me as a teacher and for my class, not only academically but the impact it has had on their personal development"

*Tim Lonsdale, teacher
St Anthony's Catholic Primary School*

My class have gained confidence, enthusiasm, creativity, empathy, excitement, courage, striving to achieve something they thought impossible, inclusion ...the list goes on!

*Deborah Binns, teacher
Mersey Drive Primary School*

"When we did Shakespeare, that was when I found my confidence"

Pupil, the New Vic Children's Shakespeare Festival



What is included in the project fee?

INITIAL CPD PHASE

- Attendance at the initial launch meeting for all staff attending the residential
- Places for 2 x school staff per class on the 26-hour teacher residential
- Delivery of the scheme of work in full by the North West Drama team
- Overnight accommodation for school staff during your residential
- Evening meal, breakfast and lunch during your residential
- Refreshments (tea, coffee) during your residential

EXPLORATION PHASE

- Full access to the scheme of work and all necessary resources
- Support from your festival director by phone or email as required
- Half day launch workshop per class with your festival director

DEVISING PHASE

- Attendance for 2x school staff per class at the half-day midpoint meeting at the theatre venue
- Full access to music and sound effects to support devising and rehearsal
- Support from your festival director by phone or email as required
- A half day directing visit per class from your festival director prior to your final performance

PERFORMANCE PHASE

- Possible run through with all performing classes at a local venue prior to performance day
- Technical meeting with the theatre team to finalise sound, lighting and music
- Technical rehearsal on stage for each class prior to their final performance
- Risk assessment documents to support your own planning for the performance day
- A live musician during your technical rehearsal and final performance
- Exceptional professional photography of your class's performance, which is made available only to you



Images by Andrew Billington Photography

Are you ready to become a Children's Shakespeare Festival school?

Over the last 16 years, the project has grown exponentially, but one thing remains unchanged: the compelling nature of the work. The Children's Shakespeare Festivals are truly exciting opportunities for primary school teachers and pupils to become immersed in Shakespeare's stories through engaging and powerful drama experiences. Our success is built upon a highly accessible model of involvement and our unique approach to the text through drama.

If you are looking to provide significant and creative professional development for your staff alongside landmark experience for your pupils, then there has never been a better time to join this highly acclaimed project. We know that following the pandemic, many schools are looking to offer opportunities such as these to their pupils. As such we will do our very best to accommodate all schools who wish to take part, but places *are* limited so we encourage you to register your interest as soon as possible to join the project next academic year.

For 2025/26, the cost of the project is **£2070 (plus reclaimable VAT)** for one class to participate. Additional classes are **£1035**

We are sometimes able to offer discounts for schools who join together, small schools or schools in areas of greater need, for whom the cost is a prohibitive factor.

Contact:

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A project by North West Drama in association with theatre partners:

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