

BRINGING SHAKESPEARE TO THE SUNSHINE STATE, this book gathers together a talented group of teachers, choreographers, directors, set designers, musicians, costumers, actors, and artists to discuss how they have adapted monologues in Miami, assassinated Julius Caesar on the steps of Tallahassee's Capitol, trained students to duel in Florida's Panhandle, placed Shylock on trial in Orlando, and transformed Gainesville into Puck's magical forest.

This guide for teachers and lovers of literature and theater is a collection of original essays exploring the idea that Shakespeare's plays are best approached playfully through performance. Based on their wide-ranging experience as theater professionals and teachers in Florida, New York, London, and Stratford, the authors celebrate Shakespeare's continuing appeal.

The essays include reflections on acting by the Royal Shakespeare Company's longest-serving member. And there's practical advice on acting; directing; staging fights; designing costumes; and integrating music, dance, masks, and puppets into performances from teachers and others who have refined their methods by performing Shakespeare in the classroom.

"I wonder how many teachers there are who would like to gather some of their students ... and allow them to 'speak what they feel' and love them into being more than they ever dreamed possible."

—from the Prologue "At Play in the Neighborhood" by Fred Rogers

"Shakespeare Plays the Classroom will convince even the most intimidated student or jaded scholar to get off the couch and enter stage right."

—Connie May Fowler, author of *Before Women Had Wings* and *Remembering Blue*



**Stuart E. Omans**, a professor of English at the University of Central Florida, where he teaches Shakespeare and drama, is founding artistic director of the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival, founder of the Young Company, and cofounder of the Drey Shakespeare Institute.

**Maurice O'Sullivan** is the Kenneth Curry Professor of Literature and chair of the English Department at Rollins College in Winter Park and cofounder of the Florida Center for Shakespeare Studies and the Drey Shakespeare Institute. He is the author of *Shakespeare's Other Lives* and has coedited *Florida in Poetry* and other books.



Pineapple Press, Inc.  
Sarasota, Florida

Front cover photo by Dominic Clemence  
courtesy of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

Cover design by Shé Sicks

ISBN 1-56164-277-0



9 781561 642779

# Shakespeare Plays The Classroom



Stuart Omans and Maurice O'Sullivan  
Editors

Copyright © 2003 by Stuart E. Omans and Maurice J. O'Sullivan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Inquiries should be addressed to:

Pineapple Press, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3889  
Sarasota, Florida 34230

www.pineapplepress.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shakespeare plays the classroom / edited by Stuart E. Omans and Maurice J. O'Sullivan.—1st ed.  
p. cm.

ISBN 1-56164-277-0 (alk. paper)

I. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Study and teaching. I. O'Sullivan, Maurice, 1944– . II. Omans, Stuart E., 1940– .

PR2987 .S486 2003  
822.3'3—dc21

2003001168

First Edition  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Design by Shé Sicks  
Printed in the United States of America

Front cover photo: Rehearsal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from *William Shakespeare: The Extraordinary Life of the Most Successful Writer of All Time* by Andrew Gurr. Photographs by Dominic Clemence. Copyright 1995 by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

## Contents

### Introduction

- ↪ *On Play and Plays*  
by Maurice J. O'Sullivan and Stuart E. Omans 5

### Foreword

- ↪ *Play's the Thing*  
by John F. Andrews 9

### Prologue

- ↪ *At Play in the Neighborhood*  
by Fred Rogers ("Mr. Rogers") 13

### Act I: Playing with Shakespeare

- ↪ *Though This Be Madness, Yet There Is Method in It: Common Questions and Answers about Shakespeare in the Classroom*  
by Betty Donald 25
- ↪ *Stand up, Listen, Whisper, Whistle, and Shout Your Way to Shakespeare: An Approach to a Three-Dimensional Read-Through*  
by Stuart E. Omans 30
- ↪ *Oh, Had I but Space Enough and Time: Rethinking Space*  
by Ben Gunter 40
- ↪ *What's Reality Anyhow? Puppets and A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
by Ellie Conde, Lindsay Hunter, Heather Williams, and Lauren Yarborough 57
- ↪ *Playing Games with People: Fifteen Steps Towards Ensemble*  
by Judith Rubinger 64

### Act II: Playing with Language and Character

- ↪ *Speaking Shakespeare*  
by Tony Church 77
- ↪ *He's Alive!: Making Shakespeare Compelling in the Classroom*  
by Bruce Miller 82
- ↪ *Adventuring Between the Lines*  
by Sybil Lines 92
- ↪ *Speak the Speech Trippingly on the Tongue: Reading Shakespeare Aloud*  
by Bruce Miller 105



Copyright © 2003 by Stuart E. Omans and Maurice J. O'Sullivan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Inquiries should be addressed to:

Pineapple Press, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3889  
Sarasota, Florida 34230

www.pineapplepress.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shakespeare plays the classroom / edited by Stuart E. Omans and Maurice J. O'Sullivan.—1st ed.  
p. cm.

ISBN 1-56164-277-0 (alk. paper)

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Study and teaching. I. O'Sullivan, Maurice, 1944— II. Omans, Stuart E., 1940—

PR2987 .S486 2003  
822.3'3—dc21

2003001168

First Edition  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Design by Shé Sicks  
Printed in the United States of America

Front cover photo: Rehearsal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from *William Shakespeare: The Extraordinary Life of the Most Successful Writer of All Time* by Andrew Gurr. Photographs by Dominic Clemence. Copyright 1995 by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

## Contents

### Introduction

- On Play and Plays  
by Maurice J. O'Sullivan and Stuart E. Omans 5

### Foreword

- Play's the Thing  
by John F. Andrews 9

### Prologue

- At Play in the Neighborhood  
by Fred Rogers ("Mr. Rogers") 13

### Act I: Playing with Shakespeare

- Though This Be Madness, Yet There Is Method in It: Common Questions and Answers about Shakespeare in the Classroom  
by Betty Donald 25
- Stand up, Listen, Whisper, Whistle, and Shout Your Way to Shakespeare: An Approach to a Three-Dimensional Read-Through  
by Stuart E. Omans 30
- Oh, Had I but Space Enough and Time: Rethinking Space  
by Ben Gunter 40
- What's Reality Anyway? Puppets and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
by Ellie Conde, Lindsay Hunter, Heather Williams, and Lauren Yarborough 57
- Playing Games with People: Fifteen Steps Towards Ensemble  
by Judith Rubinger 64

### Act II: Playing with Language and Character

- Speaking Shakespeare  
by Tony Church 77
- He's Alive!: Making Shakespeare Compelling in the Classroom  
by Bruce Miller 82
- Adventuring Between the Lines  
by Sybil Lines 92
- Speak the Speech Trippingly on the Tongue: Reading Shakespeare Aloud  
by Bruce Miller 105

### Act III: Playing with Productions

- Suit the Action to the Word, the Word to the Action: Principles of a Good Director  
by Stephen Hollis 125
- Beyond Playing Pirate: Alternative Methods of Staging Violence  
by Ian M. Borden 129
- Where Shall This Music Be?  
by Daniel K. Flick 137
- If Music Be the Food of Love, Play On  
by John Carpenter 141
- Romeo Rocks: New Tunes in Old Jugs  
by Susan Baron, Patricia Hagelin, and Mike Zella 149
- The Soul of a Man Is His Clothes: Costume in Context  
by Sandria Reese 153
- Why Do You Dress Me in Borrowed Robes?: Creating Renaissance Costume  
by J. Ann Singleton 170
- We Will Every One Be Masked  
by Theo Lotz 184

### Act IV: Playing with Texts

- The Most Unkindest Cut of All: Editing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Classroom  
by Joyce Rose and Andrew Smyth 191
- What's in a Name? Behind-the-Scenes Language in *Romeo and Juliet*  
by Alan Nordstrom 201
- His Letters Bear His Mind: Re-Writing Shakespeare  
by Maurice J. O'Sullivan 211

### Act V: Playing with Challenges

- Words, Words, Words: Shakespeare for Students with Limited English Proficiency  
by Silvia Hurtado de Mendoza 221
- Setting the Stage for the Reluctant Reader  
by Noelle Morris and Andrea Moussaoui 227
- The Young Company: A Shakespearean Story of Transformation  
by Judith Rubinger 237

### Epilogue

- Shakespeare, Summer, and Kids  
by Sidney Homan 246

Index 267

## Introduction

### On Play and Plays

Maurice J. O'Sullivan and Stuart E. Omans

Maurice O'Sullivan is Kenneth Curry Professor of English at Rollins College and a cofounder of the Drey Shakespeare Institutes.

Stuart Omans is a professor at the University of Central Florida and codirector of the Drey Shakespeare Institutes. He was a founding director of the Orlando Shakespeare Festival.

IN 1997 CHARLOTTE GEYER AND DONNA MILLER of the Central Florida Branch of the English-Speaking Union talked with us about developing a summer program for teachers. After decades of providing scholarships that allowed Florida teachers to study in the United Kingdom and brought British teachers to Central Florida, the ESU wanted to use a generous bequest from Jessie and Eugene Drey to expand its support of education.

As a result of these discussions, we developed the English-Speaking Union Drey Summer Shakespeare Institute at Rollins College, a series of annual two-week, multidisciplinary workshops focusing on teaching Shakespeare through performance and based on our idea that at the heart of the plays lies the idea of play. Most contemporary American high school students look on studying *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as work. The plays' language, conventions, and complexity seem like the products of an alien, archaic, frustrating parallel universe. But offered a chance to interpret and perform scenes from those plays, these same students realize that they are engaged in a playfulness of extraordinary importance and come to understand the power of play to change lives.

The English and social science teachers we knew had a wonderful understanding of the plays as texts but few had extensive experience with theater. Our goal became to establish a series of dialogues between teachers and theater professionals and to turn teachers back



into students who would perform scenes from the plays. During the two weeks of each Drey Institute, teachers experience the same terrors and exhilaration, frustrations and victories as their own students do in convincing an audience to suspend its disbelief and imagine itself in Caesar's Senate, Juliet's bedroom, or Puck's woods. To explore the full potential of those scenes, we have the teachers interact with a wide range of experts—actors, directors, costumers, set designers, artists, musicians, and even a certified fight choreographer.

As the program evolved, our alumni recommended colleagues who brought to the institutes their energy and creativity. What they asked from us was information and direction, ideas and resources. Our consultants developed workshops to provide historical contexts and to allow teachers to experience the challenge of embodying a character, choreographing a duel, and building an ensemble. The performance-based pedagogy that participants have adopted for their classrooms has touched thousands of students and resulted in an explosion of theatrical productions, Renaissance fairs, student acting, and cross-disciplinary teaching. As teachers have brought back to us new ideas from their classroom experience, we have added them to the institutes. This constant reciprocity has kept the programs fresh and vital.

*Shakespeare Plays the Classroom* is an attempt to distill some of that experience by bringing practical, pedagogical, and historical information together with personal accounts. Our ultimate goal is to help teachers understand the many ways to make classical theater immediate and compelling for their students. To that end we have gathered essays from internationally known actors and scholars, from theater professionals who have worked with the English-Speaking Union Drey Institutes, and from teachers who have integrated these ideas into their classrooms.

These essays blend practical advice with personal stories to show how the ideas and techniques discussed here demonstrate the ways they have transformed the classroom experience for both teachers and students. A unique dimension of the book comes from the contributing professional artists who ordinarily restrict their insights to the private confines of a rehearsal space or behind-the-scenes technical working spaces. By offering an opportunity to eavesdrop on the backstage thoughts of a Royal Shakespeare Company actor, a Broadway actor, and one of England's most highly regarded designers and costumers, this collection can share with a far wider audience some of the experiences the Drey programs have made possible.

We have organized the essays into five sections or acts, all of

which emphasize the importance of play. The first, *Playing with Shakespeare*, introduces some of the preliminary issues of transforming students into performers. For the second section, *Playing with Language and Character*, a distinguished group of actors discuss ways of helping modern students speak and feel the language of the Renaissance. The third section, *Playing with Productions*, focuses on such technical aspects of production as music, costume, and duels. The fourth one, *Playing with Texts*, explores ways of editing and reimagining the texts. Finally, *Playing with Challenges* discusses the challenges of teaching Shakespeare in the complex, diverse cultural environment that Florida has become.

To extend the ideas *Shakespeare Plays the Classroom* explores, we have created a complementary web site, [www.shakespeareplaystheclassroom.com](http://www.shakespeareplaystheclassroom.com). It includes lists of educational programs available through Florida theaters, adapted versions of Shakespeare's plays, exercises created by Florida teachers, an annotated filmography, and announcements of additional programs.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our wives, Jan and Sue, for their continuing patience and support; our mothers, Bess Omans and Agnes O'Sullivan, for fostering our love of literature and the arts; our colleagues, the staff, and administrators at Rollins for encouraging us to pursue our interests in connections among all teachers and students; our board of advisors from the Florida Center for Shakespeare Studies; and the extraordinary group of teachers who have passed through the ESU Drey Summer Institutes and shown us again and again what is best about our schools. In particular, we would like to thank Karen Slater and her staff for their continuing work on the institutes; Alicia Stevens for her editing skills; Brianne Bergeron for her genius in indexing; President Rita Bornstein of Rollins for her constant enthusiasm and encouragement for our programs; Steve Briggs and Roger Casey for their steady support; and Charlotte Geyer, Donna Miller, Trudy McNair, Joan Leslie, and Bob Pittman of the Central Florida English Speaking Union for their advice and guidance.

Above all, however, we thank Jessie and Eugene Drey for their legacy and commitment to education and the Central Florida Branch of the English-Speaking Union for holding fast to its belief in the power and importance of language and education. To them we dedicate *Shakespeare Plays the Classroom*.

—Maurice O'Sullivan, Rollins College  
—Stuart E. Omans, University of Central Florida

## Foreword

Play's the Thing

John F. Andrews

*John Andrews, a former editor of the Shakespeare Quarterly, founder and CEO of the Shakespeare Guild, and Executive Director of the Washington, D.C. Branch of the English-Speaking Union, has worked with all the major Shakespeareans and presides each year over the international gathering that has presented the Sir John Gielgud Award to such distinguished figures as Sir Ian McKellen, Dame Judith Dench, and Sir Derek Jacobi. Here he recalls his experiences with the legendary Jonathan Miller as he went about the task of producing Shakespeare for the BBC.*

WHEN STUART OMANS AND MAURICE O'SULLIVAN told me about *Shakespeare Plays the Classroom*, and invited me to contribute a foreword to the volume, I immediately thought back to earlier occasions when I've had the good fortune to take part in, or provide a consultant's perspective on, their artistic and educational endeavors. I've always been impressed by how imaginative, well planned, and edifying they are, and I've invariably found them stimulating.

Several of the programs Stu supervised in the late 1980s and early 1990s were made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This was an agency with which I'd been associated both as a project director and as a division administrator, and I knew it as one that sought to invest its resources in exemplary initiatives whose benefits could be extended to multiple settings. Stu's programs have always met that criterion, and many of them have drawn supplemental funding from the Orlando Shakespeare Festival, which he established, and from the University of Central Florida, whose English department he'd headed prior to his bold decision to take on new challenges as a theater producer.

As a former editor of *The Shakespeare Quarterly*, I have also been aware of Socky O'Sullivan's books, especially his award-winning works on popular culture and his *Shakespeare's Other Lives*. With extensive experience in organizing workshops and programs with teachers and as a teaching consultant and department and division chair at Rollins, Socky



brings a wide range of talents to the Drey programs.

As I've observed the activities these inspiring and dedicated educators have overseen since the mid-'90s, I've become increasingly aware of another key partner in their ventures, a branch of the English-Speaking Union whose philanthropy has made a significant difference in one of America's most dynamic metropolitan areas. By happy coincidence I now devote a good deal of my own time to an ESU constituency that serves the National Capital region, and it pleases me enormously to commend the generosity of my associates in the Sunshine State and extol the impact their wise disbursements have had upon the teaching, performance, and appreciation of drama and literature, not only in their own locale, but in dozens of others that have been touched by the kind of energy that animates this anthology.

Its pleasures are rich and multifaceted, and I'm pleased to note that many of them derive from such unexpected juxtapositions as an essay on Shakespeare's concept of neighborhood by the inimitable Fred Rogers. That, for me, is a wonderful treat. And that is why I'm persuaded that *play* is so aptly singled out as the theme for this collection. After all, it focuses upon the writings of an author for whom *recreation* appears to have retained its primal link with *re-creation*. That link echoes through virtually all of the essays in this collection, as Ben Gunter shows ways to play with physical space. Ian Borden suggests how to stage safe fights with teenage actors, and the remarkable Tony Church, the longest tenured actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company, reflects on his life in theater.

A couple of decades ago, in late July and early August of 1981, I had the good fortune to look in on what an extraordinary polymath was accomplishing as producer of a *Troilus and Cressida* which would soon take its place as one of the highlights of a series that was being telecast over PBS as *The Shakespeare Plays*. During that London sojourn I made three visits to the BBC Television Centre on Wood Lane, and I spent most of my time there in a sound-equipped booth watching Jonathan Miller and several of his colleagues while they in turn were fixed upon a bank of video monitors that enabled them to manage traffic in a studio two floors down. Miller wore a microphone as he worked. This allowed him to communicate with cameramen, technicians, and actors, and it permitted me to eavesdrop not only upon what was taking place below but upon what a fascinating intellectual was thinking and saying and doing as he instigated and reacted to it. While Miller moved about the monitor area and occasionally descended to the set to interact more immediately with the personnel involved in rehearsals and taping, I had

an opportunity to observe him rearranging the composition of a particular shot, or making changes in the lighting or in the sound pickup, or suggesting that a different set of gestures, expressions, or vocal emphases be used by the performers in a given scene. Every once in a while he'd step into the producer's booth or invite me to walk around the set with him, commenting as he did so on what he was trying to accomplish and eliciting my opinions about how well his intentions were coming across. By the time I emerged from my privileged catbird seat, I felt that I'd learned a great deal about some of the problems a director faces in attempting to realize Shakespeare on television. And I came away reinforced in my view that Jonathan Miller is one of the true Renaissance men of our era, a genius whose creativity, intelligence, and sensitive wit are a continual source of astonishment for those who are lucky enough to spend some time in his presence.

In some ways Miller's orientation to the BBC Shakespeare series—at least for a maverick of the type he'd been in the past—seemed remarkably conservative. He'd spent a good deal of time doing archaeological spadework—endeavoring to discover, for example, what a Renaissance portrait artist contemporaneous with Shakespeare would have considered an appropriate way of costuming Mark Antony, or what a European painter would have represented as the ambience of a domestic interior for such settings as the ones we encounter in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Even more importantly, Miller had extended himself to become acquainted with what he called the “mental furniture” of those who attended, and whose sensibilities are thus reflected in, Shakespeare's plays at the Globe. As he'd pointed out during an interview several months earlier, a director “has to have at his disposal readings in the philosophy and history of the period which can all be brought to bear upon the unlocking of the themes that a complex imagination like Shakespeare's is working with. To assume that you can unlock that imagination merely by intuition,” he'd gone on to say, “is to bring down Shakespeare to the level of a television hack writer. Here was a writer who was immersed in the themes and notions of his time. The only way in which you can unlock that imagination is to immerse yourself in the themes in which he was immersed.”

In *Troilus and Cressida*, as in the earlier plays he had produced for the BBC sequence, Miller had given careful thought to every detail of setting, costume, and thematic emphasis. As usual, he'd drawn heavily on materials with which Shakespeare might have been familiar. His Greeks and Trojans were attired, for the most part, in ways that would have made them at home in Elizabethan or Jacobean England. His rooms

were based on a perspective exercise book from Renaissance Italy. Amusingly, in keeping with the line sketches he admired in this tome, Miller had had his construction crew do everything possible to make the walls and edges of the set seem as unfinished and rough as they could be brought to look. His Grecian camp featured tents, weaponry, and other military paraphernalia of the sort that one would find depicted in such contemporary sources as German artillery manuals and English guide-books on battlefield tactics. In most respects, then, one found in the visual aspects of Miller's *Troilus and Cressida* the same kind of attention to historical nuance that had characterized his earlier experiments in the series.

Upon closer inspection, however, one saw in this production a degree of inventiveness that was new to *The Shakespeare Plays*. Over to one side in the Greek camp, for example—and never shown on camera so overtly as to make it more than a tongue-in-cheek footnote—was a bit of carpentry that would eventually become the Trojan Horse, at this point in its early stages of execution as the undergirding for a giant hoof. In the tent of Ajax was a pinup, wittily supplied from an art-book reproduction of Lucas Cranach's portrayal of Eve. On the breast-pockets of a few suggestively modern-looking olive-drab uniforms one saw hints of a name-tag of the sort that viewers would associate with the soldiers who appeared in the American television series *M\*A\*S\*H*. Could it be, I asked, that Jonathan Miller really wanted us to think of that popular sit-com when we watched his *Troilus and Cressida*? Yes, indeed. He perceived a strong affinity between the lassitude and purposelessness of the Trojan War as depicted by Shakespeare and the boredom and cynicism with which the sensitive men and women in *M\*A\*S\*H* approached their daily routines during a Korean Conflict that was clearly meant to suggest analogies with the Viet Nam War. What we got, in short, was a multi-layered vision, superimposing images and ideals from antecedents as diverse as Homeric epic, Chaucerian romance, Shakespearean coterie drama, and 20th-century political and military satire.

To my mind, the recipe that Jonathan Miller had concocted for his production of a seventeenth-century problem play was a delicious blend of whimsy and high-seriousness. And what it taught me was that we should never get so caught up in solemnity about the world's most influential dramatist as to forget that, as successful as they became, he and his fellow thespians never ceased to think of themselves as “merely players.” That is the central motif of this volume, and it is a message that would have received wholehearted endorsement from the “sweet Swan of Avon.”

## Prologue

### At Play in the Neighborhood

Fred Rogers

*One of America's cultural icons, Fred Rogers, creator of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, visits Mr. Shakespeare's neighborhood to reflect on the timeless and crucial value of play and its ability to transform lives. The piece has been edited from a conversation Mr. Rogers had with Stuart Omans and Alan Nordstrom, which turned out to be his last interview and thus perhaps his last words on play.*

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
—King Lear V.iii.324

SHAKESPEARE CERTAINLY KNEW THE UNPARALLELED VALUE of authenticity. Personally, I think that the greatest teacher in the world is the person who can be authentic in front of his or her students . . . in front of anybody! I remember when I worked at the Family and Children's Center of the University of Pittsburgh. The director of that child development center was Dr. Margaret McFarland and she once invited a well-known sculptor from the faculty of Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) to come to our nursery school. Dr. McFarland said to him, “I don't want you to teach sculpting. All I want you to do is to love clay in front of the children.” And that's what he did. He came once a week for a whole term, sat with the four and five year olds as they played, and he “loved” his clay in front of them. The adults who have worked at that center for many years have said that not before nor since have the children in that school used clay so imaginatively as when they had those visits from that sculptor who obviously delighted in his medium. Yes, he loved it, and the children caught his enthusiasm for it, and that's what mattered. So, like most good things, “teaching” has to do with honesty. In fact, I think the greatest gift (the only unique gift) we can give anybody is the gift of our honest self, be it in teaching or in any other relationship.

All children are creative; nevertheless, some are damaged from the



moment they're born by being told or shown (or both) that they're not wanted. That can destroy much of their ego and creativity. On the other hand, there are those who have been devastatingly hurt yet have used their innate creativity to survive. If we are willing to search for it, all of us can find a spark that longs to be nurtured. Life is remarkable and the human spirit absolutely wonderful to behold.

Both the title and first sentence of our book *Playtime* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2001) focus on the importance of play. "Child's play" is sometimes considered a phrase that means "trivial," but of course it's just the opposite. There's a great deal of work that goes into a child's play. For children to know that "what comes naturally" is something to be respected by those who happen to be their whole world—yes, their parents are their whole world—and to be able to look into their parents' faces and recognize that they're loved exactly as they are will make the greatest difference for good in any child's life.

As someone who has communicated with the very young throughout my life, I find that sometimes it can be hard for children to differentiate between what's real and what's pretend. There are two universal things that a child of any age brings to any activity (any "production"): that particular child's personal history as well as that child's developmental tasks! Reading Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (rev. ed. 1993) could be very helpful for anyone considering the different stages of a human being's development. How wonderful it would be if people who are exploring "performance" for students could work more closely with child-development programs. How enriching for everyone it could be to encourage—through drama—some kind of dialogue or triologue among people in the disciplines of English literature, child development, and education!

When I started work in television, I was blessed to be able to study with Margaret McFarland and Ben Spock as well as with visiting professors Erik Erikson and Helen Ross and others. Margaret developed the university's "family and children's center" where we all worked. It was invaluable for me to have an ongoing conversation with these people so I could hear what the young people they had in school or in therapy were going through.

I remember one time I wanted to produce a Neighborhood program about fire. I took my ideas to Margaret (as I did with most Neighborhood themes). We met about three times a month reviewing my ideas for upcoming scripts, lyrics, props . . . everything. This particular time I said, "Margaret, I'd like to do something on the air about fire." She helped me to realize that it was essential to deal with control of fluids before even

introducing anything about fire. I learned, for instance, that most children's dreams about fire center around their control of their own body fluids! That's how personal a "fire" can seem to a child.

So we produced films of children damming up streams and looking at waterfalls. We showed all kinds of things with the bathtub. And then, finally . . . a tiny fire—and I mean tiny—in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. We didn't show flames, just some smoke; and the fire was put out in half a minute by the make-believe fire people.

When that Neighborhood week of programs aired (dealing with control of fluids on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday and a little fire quickly being put out on Thursday and talked about on Thursday and Friday), we still had seven calls of "complaint." I took every call that came in. Each parent told me that their child was very frightened by the fire in make believe. As gently as I could, I "interviewed" these parents on the phone. It turned out that every one of them had children with urinary difficulties. I was fascinated. If I hadn't had the developmental insight, I wouldn't have been able to begin to understand the obvious tie between what was presented on our program and the children's personal developmental concerns dealing with anything related to fire. Some of the stories I heard from those parents who called revealed that when their children went to the doctor for urinary examinations, the examinations themselves felt like "burning." All that reconfirmed my belief that it is absolutely essential to talk with professionals who are in touch with children regularly before planning a production that's meant to be of help.

During my university child development training, I worked with one boy in "play interviews" who really "stretched" me. We called our private sessions with children "play interviews" because Margaret told us, "You all are not trained therapists; you are trained observers and listeners." The things that children would play about in our "safe presence" were exceedingly helpful to our own professional development. Usually what they were playing about (with puppets or blocks or costumes) had to do with what was going on in their own lives. At any rate there was this one little boy who did everything he could to turn every man he met into an abusive father. Because of his home situation, that's all that he knew from men so that's what he had learned to expect. That boy was a master at being able to get me just to the edge of being very angry. Then I would remember, thanks to my supervision, that this is exactly what he was trying to do, and I must never give in, because one of the best things I could do for that boy was to let him know that all men are not abusive. He and I did a lot of puppet play together. That happened to be one of my mediums. After a while, he was able to use

those puppets to talk through his hands. (Just that little bit of distance helped him to work things through.) That boy has since grown up to be a healthy man. He certainly taught me a lot. We helped each other grow. How fortunate we both were to have had such a nursery school and kindergarten with professionals who understood his personal developmental needs and my continuing educational needs.

Even though I had been accepted at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary right out of Rollins College, I decided to go to NBC in New York instead, because I had looked at television for the first time and thought, "This medium could be used for so much good. I'd like to learn how to work with it." Since I had a music degree from Rollins, the people at NBC assigned me the *NBC Opera Theater*, the *Voice of Firestone*, and the *Kate Smith Hour*. Eventually I became a floor manager for all three. I learned production from "behind" the camera. Two years later when I heard that educational television was starting in Pittsburgh, I applied. My friends at NBC thought I was crazy. They said, "That educational station isn't even on the air yet; and here you are in line to be a network producer, director, anything you want." But something (someone) kept encouraging me to make the move.

So when I was hired in Pittsburgh to help start that educational television station, the general manager said, "Fred, you'll be the program manager for all the programs." So I said, "Fine, and we must be sure to do something for the children." Well, you know, fools rush in! We decided to do an hour a day five days a week. Imagine—five hours a week live for children! It was not *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* then, it was *The Children's Corner*. I voiced and manipulated the puppets and played the organ for the hostess, Josie Carey.

During those eight years of *The Children's Corner* I decided to take some courses at Pittsburgh Seminary on my lunch hour. With only one course a semester, little by little I was able to study systematic theology, Greek and Hebrew, church history, homiletics, everything. I never expected that I'd be able to complete the Master of Divinity course; but finally, after eight years, I did. And with some encouragement from our presbytery I thought I might be able to produce a series for the Presbyterian Church. But at the last minute the media department of the national church discovered it didn't have enough money to do any programs at all. I was convinced, though, that I'd be used in some way; and sure enough the very next day after I heard the Presbyterian news, I got a call from the head of children's programming at the CBC in Canada asking if I would consider producing a daily program for their network—in Toronto! So Joanne and our two young sons and I moved

to Toronto and lived there for over a year. In fact, it was there that I was encouraged to be seen on the air. "I've watched you talk with children, Fred," the supervising producer said. "I'd like to translate that kind of care to the television screen. Let's call this program 'MisterRogers!' And we did! What a big change for me!

When we came back home from Canada, I wanted to know more about children, so that's when I signed up for the masters course in child development at the University of Pittsburgh and started working with Dr. McFarland and the rest of the Family and Children's Center staff.

When people ask me what I believe to be the most important contribution *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has made, I think it may be dealing as creatively as we know how with the developmental tasks of childhood. Such common things as grief or separation and return. These are enormously important challenges for people of all ages. After all, feelings from childhood (the pleasant and the tough) never go away. They may get hidden, but they're always part of who we are.

Several years ago, I happened to be watching a television cartoon program with some children. The animation was simple yet clear. There was a deep sea diver who dove to the bottom of a lake where he found a huge plug (like a bathtub drain plug!). The diver pulled the plug loose and water started surging down the hole at the bottom of the lake. Finally everything in the lake: the fish, the plants, the boats, the diver, EVERYTHING was sucked down the hole. Now I don't think that the creators and animators and producers of such a cartoon set out to frighten children with their work; nevertheless, any child who had any concern about being sucked down a bathroom drain (and most very young children do!) would certainly have found that cartoon horrifying. Those who created it were probably operating out of their own unresolved childhood fears; however, that is not the place from which to operate in order to create healthy productions for children. If those people (adult producers) had been well versed in the developmental themes and needs of childhood, they would have never produced such a cartoon for preschoolers. And what's more, there wasn't even an adult on the screen at the end of the cartoon saying, "That's just pretend. Something like that could never happen . . . except in pretending. Nobody could ever get sucked down a bathroom drain."

Responsible programming for children grows out of an understanding of what children are dealing with in their own lives . . . in other words, a deep respect for childhood.

I remember when we produced a special program for families after Robert Kennedy was killed. His assassination was the third in a row



and the country was in deep grief. It felt very much like the September 11<sup>th</sup> events. After Kennedy's death, I said, "We've got to do something on the air." And so we went into the studio and produced a half-hour program. In it, little cars became one metaphor for "loss." As you watch children play in the film, cars go away and come back. We wanted to help with a wide range of separation themes: moving away, going to school, divorce, death. We knew the atmosphere of the country and we knew the kinds of concerns children had in their inside growing. Both were indispensable for producing responsible programming. That special was also a plea for parents to include their children in their own ways of handling sadness: some might take a walk in the woods, others might pray, others might make up stories or read books. Whatever was helpful in the family could become the beginning of a child's tradition of dealing with grief.

Early this year, I was talking about our book *Playtime* on the *Today Show* and said that I felt it was important for parents and caregivers of young children first to discover what children know about tragic events such as assassinations and the terrorism of the World Trade Center. From the children that we've talked with, there seem to be many exaggerated fantasies associated with September 11th. It's much more important to find out what they really "know" and go from there, because naturally they're going to bring their own life history to any current event. Some will say ten thousand daddies were killed, or a hundred little children flew out the windows.

After the *Today Show* time, one of the hosts came up to me and said she'd like to talk with me a little about September 11th. She said, "I found that it was very helpful with my kids to let them know about heaven." She said that those children whose parents were killed will not be separated from them forever, that they have some of them already inside. And she said, "I just wanted to share that with you." Isn't that interesting: a newscaster delivering terrible news each day, holding Heaven in her heart! My hunch is that her own parents helped her with that belief early in her life. Now she's helping her child.

On the Neighborhood we continue to talk about separation and return. There are many other concerns. And that's why play and playing, teachers and drama are essential. We all need to learn to be gentle, especially in working with children. Some people have a gentle core but haven't learned to express it in a gentle way.

Another exceedingly important subject for children is honesty about the future. Children love to be told what to expect. One of our Neighborhood songs says:

I like to be told  
When you're going away,  
When you're going to come back,  
And how long you will stay.  
How long you will stay.  
I like to be told.

I like to be told  
If it's going to hurt.  
If it's going to be hard,  
If it's not going to hurt.  
I like to be told.  
I like to be told.

It helps me to get ready for all those things,  
All those things that are new.  
I trust you more and more  
Each time that I'm  
Finding those things to be true, true.

I like to be told  
'Cause I'm trying to grow,  
And I'm trying to learn,  
And I'm trying to know.  
I like to be told.  
I like to be told.

© 1968 Fred M. Rogers

This is a song for a child to sing to an adult. Again: authenticity! Helping people deal with their feelings is one of the greatest contributions any of us could ever make. We at Family Communications, Inc., now have a project of workshops throughout the country called, "What Do You Do with the Mad that You Feel?" In our world there are many people who seem to be enraged. Shakespeare certainly knows rage. Look at (and listen to) Othello and Iago and Richard III! What a theme to base some creative work on with children! Children know about being small and scared and wanting to lash out. How "easy" it would be for them to learn about those in history and/or literature who had some of those same feelings!

Although many people believe that the kind of open or even disguised fury that Shakespeare so often portrays is more widespread

today, I don't think so. Most of us know more people today, and some of them are angry because they don't have the kinds of material things that others seem to "have." If you don't have enough to feed your family, that would certainly enrage you. And one of the most difficult things is that people don't feel appreciated. The less anyone feels appreciated, the angrier that person can become. (Of course, if you're a person who is not going to allow yourself to be appreciated, you're going to be naturally miserable.)

When we learn to operate from "a gentle place" in relation to others, we can experience a wonderful mystery. In fact, I feel that's what God does. After all, God is the Creator of all and delights in being able to find whatever there is to "appreciate" about each one of us. I think the most important way children get to grow is to be in touch with that kind of appreciation. When Henry James's nephew was about to go off to school for the first time, he came to his uncle and asked, "Do you have any advice for me?" Henry James answered, "I have three pieces of advice. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind." What memorable advice! Especially coming from someone like Henry James!

Although the educational system seems to be shifting to a philosophy that focuses on test test test, our little nonprofit company, Family Communications, Inc., has concentrated on developing creative training materials to help in interpersonal and developmental areas. A new project which people have asked us to create is called *One Kind Word*. This is an intervention program that is starting with a Pittsburgh grocery store chain with 35,000 employees. The employees sometimes see adults hurting children in the stores, and some of those employees want to try to do something about it. What we've discovered is that someone can often defuse such a potentially volatile situation just by offering one kind word or sentence such as, "It's really tough some days, isn't it?" It's amazing what can happen when an angry person feels "understood" and "appreciated."

Another FCI project is the *Safe Havens* project. These materials are for people who might be in the classroom when a child would say something like, "My mommy shot my dad last night." And that happens! The first phase of the project is completed, and we're filming the second phase of it, which features policemen and policewomen who are often seen in neighborhoods as surrogate parents. It's wonderful to witness how opposite such relationships are to the stereotype. I've seen some of the raw footage. It's astounding to witness how certain police officers might see a kid or a group of kids starting a fire in a vacant lot, and take

that as a hint to visit those children at home. The officers don't arrest the children, they just go to the home and talk as gently as they can with the families. They're trying to reach—early on—young people who might be particularly susceptible to crime.

I went to a session in which members of our staff were training some of the trainers. There was one woman practically in tears because she felt so deeply for the children in her classes. She has them in the daytime, but she said, "I know what they go to at home." She added, "All I can do is to let them know that I love them all the time, and that I'll be there for them the next day." I wonder how many teachers there are who would like to gather some of their students and take them home . . . and allow them to "speak what they feel" and love them into being more than they ever dreamed possible.

Here we are, all on this boat together . . . this floating planet . . . together. I feel so blessed even in times of trouble. I wonder how human beings get that feeling? I guess it comes from a long line of people in our life who have, in one way or another, "sung" that song:

It's you I like  
It's not the things you wear.  
It's not the way you do your hair,  
But it's you I like.

The way you are right now,  
The way down deep inside you,  
Not the things that hide you  
Not your toys—they're just beside you.

But it's you I like.  
Every part of you—  
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings  
Whether old or new.

I hope that you'll remember  
Even when you're feeling blue  
That it's you I like, it's you yourself  
It's you. It's you I like.

© 1971 Fred M. Rogers

And I think all of us long to hear that we are accepted as we are. That kind of message can draw the world together.