



2012 ESU National Shakespeare Competition

The English-Speaking Union of the United States
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To: Schools interested in the ESU National Shakespeare Competition
From: Karen Jeff, Director of Education

Re: National Shakespeare Competition Helps Students Meet Language Arts Standards

The increased emphasis on the importance of student performance on standardized tests that measure proficiencies in English Language Arts has prompted the English Speaking Union of the United States to examine the National Shakespeare Competition in terms of how it can be helpful to students in their study of English Language Arts. Two of the leading educational organizations, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA), have adopted *Standards for the English Language Arts*. A review of their *Standards* (a complete listing of the twelve standards can be viewed by visiting the NCTE's web site: www.ncte.org), reveals how participation in The English-Speaking Union's National Shakespeare Competition can help students develop English Language Arts proficiency.

According to the *Standards* document, "The vision guiding these standards is that all students must have the opportunities and resources to develop the language skills they need to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society." The NCTE/IRA standards are recognized across the country as guidelines in the development of curriculum and instruction.

In terms of the ESU's National Shakespeare Competition, many of the NCTE/IRA standards have a direct or indirect relevance to the Competition. They include the following:

- x Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

The universality of Shakespeare's plays and the commonality of his themes, his exploration of the human condition, from stories of unrequited love and betrayal to politics and war, have continued to attract modern audiences.

- x Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

In their classrooms and throughout Branch competitions, teachers and their students employ a variety of strategies to help make meaning of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets and to master his language and to communicate that understanding through the performance of his works.

- x Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

As a result of their studies of Shakespeare's work, students become participants in a variety of literacy communities—as students in their classrooms, as contestants at their school and Branch competitions, and then as semifinalists at the National Shakespeare Competition. Students go on to continue their membership in a growing literacy community through technology as they stay in contact, via the internet, with their fellow competitors across the country. It can even be said these individuals are part of a global literacy community that has existed for more than four centuries as students worldwide continue to find meaning and relevance in Shakespeare's works.

Here's what our competitors had to say about the competition:

- ? “[Shakespeare] offers us a record of the same trials we face now as his generation did. By studying him, we study humanity as a whole.”
- ? “Studying Shakespeare helps with listening and research.”
- ? “[The Competition] broadened my understanding and allowed me to meet peers with a common appreciation.”
- ? “The situations [of the plays]...resonate amazingly well today.”

We hope that this information is helpful as you seek to involve students in the ESU National Shakespeare Competition. We hope you will agree that the competition can be an effective instructional activity that engages students in reading and performing Shakespeare's plays, and that students can become better readers of literature as a result of their participation.

Good luck with this year's competition.