

## Shakespeare for the Schools brings literature to life for kids

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The New Orleans Shakespeare Festival at Tulane welcomed thousands of schoolchildren to Tulane's campus this year to watch comical, fantastical stagings of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

On a weekday in January, hundreds of schoolchildren took their seats at Dixon Hall on Tulane's uptown campus. As the velvet curtains on stage parted, faeries, lords and ladies whisked the students away to a fantasy world where they laughed, oohed and ahhed through "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

"The play helped me to attach memories and feelings to different scenes I had read," said Nyleaj R., a student at Morris Jeff Community School in New Orleans who

came to the performance. “There was also a better understanding in hearing the emotion in character lines that you might not hear when reading.”

Nyleaj had a chance to see the play performed live thanks to [Shakespeare for the Schools](#), an initiative spearheaded by the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival at Tulane (NOSF). Every January for the past 29 years, the theatre company founded by Tulane faculty stages productions of the Bard’s plays in Dixon Hall for elementary, middle and high school students.

This year, seven performances offered more than 4,500 students from all across the Gulf South a rare opportunity to see live professional theatre. For many of them, it was their first time watching Shakespearean plays in person.

“I loved the production and the actors,” said Darin G., also a student at Morris Jeff. “The actors really brought the characters to life, and now I’ll never unhear them when reading — especially Nick Bottom,” he said of the comical weaver who drew many laughs from the crowd.

For Graham Burk, artistic director of NOSF and lecturer in Tulane's Department of Theatre and Dance, the experience is an annual reminder of the importance of the arts for young minds. “They aren’t just watching a play. They’re building empathy, curiosity and a lifelong relationship with art,” he said.

“Those moments shape the next generation of artists, audiences and advocates, and at Tulane, we’re incredibly lucky to help nurture and shape that future,” Burk added.

NOSF offers study guides and educational materials to accompany the performances. But the Q and A sessions that follow each show are where the children truly connect with the actors.

“They knock our socks off with their thoughtful questions,” said Julia Delois, a Tulane alum and performer.

“You haven’t performed Shakespeare until you’ve performed for 900 screaming students,” she added. “The kids go wild for every little moment, hooting and hollering, exactly how Shakespeare was meant to be performed.”

The festival will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Shakespeare for the Schools program with a staging of “Macbeth” in January 2027. The Scottish play was the show that first launched the program in 1997.