

This is Todd Benware. I was a member of the TSTP Summer Class of 2006. It doesn't seem possible that nearly two years have passed since our fantastic gathering in London. I am still raving about the quality and magnitude of my experience. I'd like to let you know how your program has impacted me and my students.

When I returned to school for the 2006-2007 school year, I continued to teach my British Literature course to seniors (12th grade, final year of high school). I integrated much of what I picked up at The Globe into our second semester coursework, which focused entirely on Shakespeare. My students responded with enthusiasm and wonder, but due to time constraints I was only able to scratch the surface of what I truly desired to do with them. That spring, I proposed to our principal that I teach a full-year course on Shakespeare in place of our British Literature survey course. He agreed.

Last week, I concluded that course. It was an incredible journey, both for me and my students. I titled the course "Living Shakespeare," for that was my intention – to bring Shakespeare to life by lifting him out of the textbooks and by encouraging my students to swim around in his material. I warned them from the first day that this course would destroy any preconceived notions that Shakespeare is inaccessible, boring, and akin to a slow hideous death. As a matter of fact, while my colleagues spent their first day of the year going over course outline sheets and expected behaviors, I had my students draw pictures representing their thoughts on Shakespeare, write down words associated with the pictures, gather in groups to construct a poem using those words, memorize it, and act it out (remember that one!?) Much like it energized me on one of my first days at The Globe, it had my students buzzing, and it definitely set the tone for the rest of the year.

During the next eight months we fooled around with Shakespeare every day. We learned how to breathe, how to walk, and how to talk. We danced and sang. We played hard, and we analyzed hard. As a result, we made amazing discoveries, not just about the material, but about ourselves. Many students said that as a direct result of actively engaging in our material, they no longer fear public speaking, and Shakespeare is now something they will pursue on their own. Others commented that they knew each day in Shakespeare would never be boring, and they had to be ready to try anything. I know the course would not have been as effective had it not been for my time spent with the wonderful staff at The Globe.

I would like to thank everyone at The Globe for what you do. Please know that your work literally changes lives. The tools with which you provide teachers possess amazing power to captivate students and to encourage them to take chances and to drop their defenses in ways they never before felt possible.

When friends asked me how my time at The Globe went, I struggled to give them an accurate depiction of what took place. How can one tangibly express an inner transformation and enlightenment? I could have told them how I discovered my voice (thank you, Stewart), or I could have let them watch me walk with a purpose (thank you, Glynn). But how could I make them experience the chill of stepping onto The Globe stage at 6 am, or the mind-blowing power of delivering Shakespeare's words on a hot summer evening? Somehow, those feelings manifested themselves within my students this year. If my friends were to make that same inquiry today, I would only need to point to how 50 kids are now "Living Shakespeare."

This note went on for much longer than I intended, and I certainly could continue. I hope I have impressed upon you how important your TSTP work is. Please know that I think of everyone over there very often, and I pray that all is well.

I hope to see you all again someday.

Sincerely,

Todd Benware