

National Press Release

Up to 30,000 young people nationwide to gain crucial life skills in world's largest youth drama festival

Students from across the UK and from every school type take part in the world's largest youth drama festival this autumn, run by award-winning cultural education charity Shakespeare Schools Foundation (SSF).

SSF has recruited nearly 900 schools nationwide to perform as part of its annual Festival, which sees young people take on the challenge of performing abridged Shakespeare plays on professional stages. Up to 30,000 students will perform in one of 128 professional theatres across the UK between October and December.

The Festival process develops vital life skills in the young people involved. In 2017, **99% of teachers agreed that their students' confidence increased and 96% of teachers said that their students were more resilient. 86% of teachers reported improved academic attainment.** A Festival participant said that the SSF process made them feel like they had "just conquered the world." One teacher reported that the process had helped one of her students, a selective mute, discover "his lion's voice" through drama.

Actor and comedian Hugh Dennis, a patron of SSF, says he is amazed by the impact of the Festival:

"The enjoyment the children who take part show and the sense of confidence they gained from both performing and working with the words is palpable, and will surely help them both now and in later life."

SSF targets students and communities who stand to benefit the most from engagement with the arts. Instilling self-esteem, communication and teamwork skills, students are prepared for the next stage in their lives. Children access a unique creative arts project which broadens horizons and inspires a lifelong interest in culture across the whole community. 65,000 people watched Festival performances in 2017. Of those audience members surveyed, 64% had never been to their local theatre before and **99% said that the performance had positively changed their perception of young people in the community.**

Shakespeare Schools Foundation's Chief Executive Ruth Brock says: "Many of the young people performing - like many of us at school - have initially found Shakespeare boring or difficult or thought it's not for them. But working with us, they've learnt to tell these 400 year old stories to new audiences, discovered beautiful language and discovered that the themes of heartbreak and friendship, jealousy and corruption, war and love are as relevant now as they ever were. Shakespeare, in short, helps us to live life better and teaches us all more

about what it means to be human. In giving children and audiences new experiences, we know that Shakespeare has the power to transform lives.”

This year the charity celebrates its 18th Birthday. Since the year 2000, their work has transformed 300,000 young lives. To mark the anniversary, SSF are launching This Isle is Full of Noises, a digital campaign to share stories from 18 different people who have been a part of their work – from pupil to teacher, parent to donor. Representing places and perspectives from across the UK, the stories reflect the charity’s belief that Shakespeare, and the arts, are for everyone

To find a local performance visit <https://www.shakespeareschools.org/the-festival/whats-on>.

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Key information about Shakespeare Schools Foundation:

- Shakespeare Schools Foundation is a cultural education charity that gives young people across the UK the confidence to succeed in life.
- SSF's work has been recognised by several awards. It was the recipient of The Praemium Imperiale's 2018 Grant for Young Artists, a major global art prize which recognises outstanding contribution to and promotion of the arts for young people. The award includes a gift which is a small part of the £1 million the charity has to raise annually to make the Festival happen. In addition, the charity was named Educational Resource Provider of the Year at the 2018 Education Awards for its curriculum-aligned schemes of work. It was also recognised for excellence in fundraising practice by the Management Centre's coveted Emcee Awards, winning the trophy for 'Best Donor Love' for its 2017 Christmas card campaign.
- SSF has worked with 300,000 young people from primary, secondary and special schools since the charity was founded in 2000.
- SSF works with pupils from every community, background and school type nationwide. The charity engages diverse groups, including those with special educational needs (working with three times the national average) and from minority ethnic backgrounds, and is deeply committed to reaching those living in areas of deprivation.
- SSF uses Shakespeare as a catalyst for students to explore the most pressing themes of today such as racism, gender equality and mental health. As a result, confidence increases and friendships flourish.

- The annual Shakespeare Schools Festival is SSF's flagship project and the world's largest youth drama project. Six months of preparation, including student and teacher workshops, culminate in exhilarating performance evenings in professional theatres nationwide.
- Alongside the Festival, SSF offers curriculum resources and workshops for teachers and students from all school types.
- Through SSF, young people change their attitude to learning: 86% of teachers report improved academic attainment especially in literacy, literature and the performing arts and 90% of teachers say their students are more enthusiastic about learning.
- SSF gives young people crucial soft skills, including teamwork and communication. 93% of students say that they enjoy working as a team more having taken part in the Festival and 81% of students say they find it easier to understand how other people feel.
- For our latest impact report, visit <https://www.shakespeareschools.org/impact/impact-report>
- To find out more visit <https://www.shakespeareschools.org/the-festival>.