

# **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**

**BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**



**A SHAKESPEARE IN THE RUINS**

**STUDY GUIDE**

# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

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## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2014 season of Shakespeare in the Ruins! Now 21 years old, Shakespeare in the Ruins has come of age.

In the words of this year's director, Ron Jenkins:

*We invite you to one of the greatest comedies ever written, Shakespeare's first play, **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**, complete with romance, lost love, mistaken identities, witchcraft, slapstick, shipwrecks, and a cast of characters you won't soon forget!*

Inspired by the architectural ruins of the Trappist Monastery Provincial Heritage Park, Mr. Jenkins and the company will take us back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a time period familiar to fans of Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo. Long distance travel was by sea, the wealthy folks had servants to do their dirty work, people commonly believed in witchcraft and the supernatural, and expectations about proper behaviour were high.

In this setting, Shakespeare's comedy becomes a challenging exercise in seeing how long the *proper* characters can maintain decorum and tamp down their passions, until the entire convoluted plot explodes in farce and slapstick, all motivated by long lost and newly discovered love.

Come and join Shakespeare in the Ruins for **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**, and don't forget to dress for the weather and for promenading at the Trappist Monastery Provincial Heritage Park.



# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** CAST OF CHARACTERS

**SOLINUS, DUKE OF EPHEBUS**

**AEGEON, MERCHANT OF SYRACUSE**

**(LOST TO EACH OTHER)**

**AEMILIA (WIFE TO AEGEON,  
AND AN ABBESS AT EPHEBUS)**

**ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

**TWIN BROTHERS  
(UNKNOWN TO EACH OTHER)**

**ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS**

**DROMIO OF SYRACUSE  
(ATTENDANT TO A OF S)**

**ALSO TWIN BROTHERS  
(UNKNOWN TO EACH OTHER)**

**DROMIO OF EPHEBUS  
(ATTENDANT TO A OF E)**

**ADRIANA  
(WIFE TO ANTIPHOLUS OF  
EPHEBUS)**

**LUCIANA  
(SISTER TO ADRIANA)**

**Luce  
(SERVANT TO ADRIANA)**

**A COURTESAN  
(ACQUAINTANCE OF  
ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS)**

**BALTHASAR  
(A MERCHANT)**

**ANGELO  
(A GOLDSMITH)**

**DR. PINCH  
(A SCHOOLMASTER AND A CONJURER)**

**JAILER**

**OFFICERS**

**ATTENDANT**

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** FARCE AND SLAPSTICK

Dictionary.com defines **farce** as:

a light, humorous play in which the plot depends upon a skillfully exploited situation rather than upon the development of character.

Vocabulary.com adds that:

a farce uses improbable situations, physical humor and silliness to entertain.

The freedictionary.com summarizes by explaining that a farce is:

a light dramatic work in which highly improbable plot situations, exaggerated characters, and often slapstick elements are used for humorous effect.

In 2012, the Tim Horton's Coffee chain changed their coffee cup sizes causing some confusion among regular customers. Here's a **This Hour Has 22 Minutes** sketch that exploits that awkward situation. The sketch starts out with a fairly straight forward explanation from the clerk, but quickly escalates to farce as the dogged customer questions him.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtWje9-kN0#aid=P-VmUHnpE6g>

When the Canadian Government decided to eliminate the penny, **This Hour** demonstrated again how a simple change could precipitate another farcical exchange between these two characters.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mS5Q52N43c>

Again, the scene starts out with a simple explanation, but the situation becomes increasingly complicated as the customer questions the policy. Additional farcical elements are added with the Nickelback reference and the penny loafer comment, pushing the scenario into silliness, and increasing the teller's frustration to the point where "Get out!" is the only solution. We can almost imagine the teller wanting to inflict physical harm on the customer.

The physical harm he would like to inflict is **slapstick**, a common element in farce.

Dictionary.com defines slapstick as:

broad comedy characterized by boisterous action, as the throwing of pies in actors' faces, mugging, and obvious farcical situations and jokes.

Vocabulary.com and thefreedictionary.com add that slapstick is

a boisterous comedy with chases and collisions and practical jokes.

Slapstick often involves a significant level of physical violence, but in slapstick, like professional wrestling, **the victim does not actually get hurt**. In the following video, you will see some classical film examples of slapstick. In real life, many of these situations would cause serious injury, but we know we can laugh because no one is actually getting hurt.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhaqJXHIXiA>

Here's Dick Van Dyke explaining how modern American Comedy no longer needs slapstick in order to be funny. During his lecture, he "accidentally" demonstrates one slapstick gag after another until the lecture itself becomes increasingly ridiculous, and a perfect example of farce.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRaF4gk1yhY>

Here's the plot of **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** as described by the Folger Theatre. In it, we find the perfect example of a farce. In fact, the description of the story is, in itself, farcical.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laDptmMgWQk>



## **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE COMEDY OF ERRORS BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY**

Aegeon, a merchant of Syracuse, is condemned to death in Ephesus for violating the ban against travel between the two rival cities. As he is led to his execution, he tells the Ephesian Duke, Solinus, that he has come to Ephesus in search of his wife and one of his twin sons, who were separated from him 25 years ago in a shipwreck. The other twin, who grew up with Aegeon, is also traveling the world in search of the missing half of their family. The twins, we learn, are identical, and each has an identical twin servant named Dromio. The Duke is so moved by this story that he grants Aegeon a day to raise the thousand-mark ransom that would be necessary to save his life.

Meanwhile, unknown to Aegeon, his son, Antipholus of Syracuse (and Antipholus' servant Dromio), is also visiting Ephesus where Antipholus' missing twin, known as Antipholus of Ephesus, is a prosperous citizen of the city. Adriana, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband and drags him home for dinner, leaving Dromio of Syracuse to stand guard at the door and admit no one. Shortly thereafter, Antipholus of Ephesus (with his servant, Dromio of Ephesus) returns home and is refused entry to his own house. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse has fallen in love with Luciana, Adriana's sister, who is appalled at the behavior of the man she thinks is her brother-in-law.

The confusion increases when a gold chain ordered by the Ephesian Antipholus is given to Antipholus of Syracuse. Antipholus of Ephesus refuses to pay for the chain (unsurprisingly, since he never received it), and is arrested for debt. His wife, seeing his strange behavior, decides he has gone mad, and orders him bound and held in a cellar room. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant decide to flee the city, which they believe to be enchanted, only to be menaced by Adriana and the debt officer. They seek refuge in a nearby abbey.

Adriana now begs the Duke to intervene and remove her "husband" from the abbey into her custody. Her real husband, meanwhile, has broken loose and now comes to the Duke and levels charges against his wife. The situation is finally resolved by the Abbess, Aemilia, who brings together the set of twins and reveals herself to be Aegeon's long-lost wife. Antipholus of Ephesus reconciles with Adriana; Aegeon is pardoned by the Duke and reunited with his spouse; Antipholus of Syracuse resumes his romantic pursuit of Luciana, and all ends happily with the two Dromios embracing.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/errors/summary.html>

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE COMEDY OF ERRORS DETAILED PLOT SUMMARY**

## Act I, Scene i

The play opens in the city of Ephesus, with Solinus, the Duke of Ephesus, leading a merchant named Aegeon to be executed. Aegeon talks with the Duke, and we learn that he is a native of Syracuse, Ephesus' great commercial rival. Because of strife between the two cities, any Syracusan caught in Ephesus must pay an indemnity of a thousand marks, a price that Aegeon is unable to meet, or face execution. He seems resigned to his death and declares that the execution will bring an end to his "woes". Curious, the Duke asks him to relate how he came to travel to Ephesus, and Aegeon complies.

The merchant describes how he was born in Syracuse, married, and prospered through trade with the neighboring city of Epidamnum. Eventually, however, his representative in Epidamnum died, leaving the business in disarray, and Aegeon was forced to travel there to set his affairs in order. His pregnant wife went with him and gave birth to identical twin sons. At the same time, a poor woman staying in the same inn also gave birth to identical boys, and Aegeon bought her newborns, intending to bring them up as servants for his sons.

Unfortunately, on their return journey to Ephesus, Aegeon recounts, their ship was broken apart by a storm, and the sailors abandoned them on the wreckage. His wife tied herself, with one son and one servant, to one of the masts, and he tied himself, the other son, and the other servant to a mast at the other end of the wreck. They floated for a time, while the sea grew calm, and then they saw two ships coming toward them--one from Corinth and one from Epidaurus. Before the ships reached them, however, they ran into a rock that split the wreckage in two, carrying Aegeon in one direction and his wife in the other. Eventually, the Corinthian ship rescued Aegeon and the one twin son with one twin servant, but they were unable to catch up to the Epidaurian ship, which had picked up his wife, his other son and that son's servant.

When the son who remained with him had grown up, Aegeon relates, the young man took his servant and set off into the world to find his brother and mother. Aegeon himself followed suit, and his wanderings eventually led him to Ephesus, where he was willing to brave arrest and execution in the hopes of finding the missing half of his family.

The Duke, hearing this story, is deeply moved, and although he cannot violate his city's laws, he offers Aegeon a day of liberty to find someone to ransom his life. Aegeon's despair does not lift, however, since the task seems hopeless. Nevertheless, he sets about canvassing the city, searching for assistance.



## Act I, scene ii

Aegeon's son, Antipholus of Syracuse, is also in Ephesus, although neither he nor his father is aware of the other's presence. A friendly merchant warns Antipholus about the law concerning Syracusans and advises him to pretend to be from another city in order to avoid arrest. Antipholus thanks him and sends his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, to the Centaur Inn with their money (a thousand gold marks) and luggage. Left alone, he muses on his unhappiness, caused by his fruitless quest for his brother and mother. Unknown to anyone, however, his missing brother is actually a prosperous citizen of Ephesus, served by his own Dromio of Ephesus. Antipholus of Ephesus is married to a woman named Adriana, and he is a favorite of Duke Solinus.

As Antipholus of Syracuse muses, Dromio of Ephesus appears and demands that his "master" come home to dinner. He has mistaken this Antipholus for Antipholus of Ephesus, and Antipholus of Syracuse, in turn, mistakes this Dromio for his own servant. Their misunderstanding leads to an argument: Dromio E. insists that Antipholus S. return to their house because his wife is impatient with him, while Antipholus S. demands to know what has become of their money and belongings. Eventually, the master slaps the servant, and Dromio E. flees, leaving his master to remark that Ephesus is reportedly full of sorcerers and that one must have bewitched his man. Fearing for the safety of his possessions, he hurries off in the direction of the Centaur Inn.

## Act II, scene i

The scene now shifts to a conversation between Adriana, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, and her sister Luciana. Adriana is anxiously awaiting the return of her husband and his slave, who she sent out after him. Luciana rebukes her for being impatient, saying that a dutiful wife should be a docile servant to her husband. Adriana retorts that Luciana speaks without experience, and that once she is married, she will have a different point of view. As they debate, Dromio of Ephesus returns and reports the bizarre behavior of his master (or rather, the man he mistook for his master), saying that Antipholus is mad and will talk about nothing but his gold. Furious, Adriana threatens to beat him unless he brings her husband back, and Dromio reluctantly goes out again. Once he is gone, Adriana tells her sister that Antipholus must have taken a lover: that is the only explanation for his absence and peculiar behavior.

## Act II, scene ii

Antipholus of Syracuse goes to the inn and finds that his servant did, in fact, bring his money and luggage safely there. Confused, he wanders the city until he encounters Dromio of Syracuse (his Dromio) who, of course, has no memory of telling him to come

home to dinner or anything else from Antipholus' earlier conversation with Dromio of Ephesus. Antipholus grows angry with him, but the servant manages to defuse his anger through a long, involved joke about baldness.

While the master and servant converse and jest, Adriana and Luciana come upon them, mistaking them for Antipholus of Ephesus and his Dromio. Adriana immediately accuses the man she believes to be her husband of infidelity and rebukes him for violating his own promise of love and faithfulness. Antipholus, confused, says (of course) that he has never met her, which only makes Adriana more furious. She insists on dragging her perplexed "husband" home to dinner, bringing Dromio with them, and the confused Antipholus decides to play along until he understands the situation better. They go into Antipholus of Ephesus' house, and Dromio is left below to guard the door during dinner.

#### Act III, scene i

While his double is upstairs eating, Antipholus of Ephesus returns from the marketplace, accompanied by Dromio of Ephesus, Angelo the goldsmith, and Balthasar the merchant. He asks his fellow businessmen to give Adriana an excuse for his tardiness and then mentions that his servant is behaving oddly. When he knocks at the gate, however, Dromio of Syracuse refuses to let the company in. Antipholus pounds and shouts furiously, bringing Luce, his maid, to the door, and then Adriana, but since both believe that their Antipholus is already inside, they refuse to admit him. In a rage, Antipholus is about to break down the door when Balthasar dissuades him, telling him that doing so will reflect badly on his wife's honor and that Adriana must have a good reason for keeping him out. Still seething, Antipholus leads his friends away, resolving to dine with a Courtesan at her house, the Porpentine. He asks Angelo to go fetch a gold chain, recently made, that he had promised to his wife. Antipholus of Ephesus now plans to present it to the Courtesan instead.

#### Act III, scene ii

Inside the house, Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse are alone together. Luciana rebukes the man she believes to be her brother-in-law for not treating Adriana well; if he must betray his wife, she pleads, he should at least do it secretly. Antipholus S., meanwhile, insists that he is not Adriana's husband and then professes his love for Luciana. Appalled, Luciana flees to find her sister.

Dromio of Syracuse joins his master and recounts how the kitchen maid mistook him for her husband (who is, in fact, Dromio of Ephesus). The maid, as the Syracusan Dromio tells it, is a prodigiously fat, ugly, and fearsome woman, and he and his master have a good laugh at her expense. Then, Antipholus S. tells his slave that he intends to depart from Ephesus immediately and sends him to the harbor to book passage. Once Dromio is gone, his master ponders the beauty of Luciana, but resolves not to be tempted to remain in the

city, since "none but witches do inhabit here"(III, ii, 154). As he stands in thought, Angelo the goldsmith, comes in, and, mistaking him for Antipholus of Ephesus, gives him the gold chain that the Ephesian Antipholus had ordered, promising to stop by later to collect payment.

#### Act IV, scene i

Angelo, we learn, is in debt to a Second Merchant, who threatens to arrest him unless the money is paid. The goldsmith promises to collect the sum from Antipholus of Ephesus, who he sees walking down the street with Dromio of Ephesus. Antipholus E. sends his servant off to buy rope, with which he plans to beat his wife and servants for locking him out of the house at the last meal. Next, he greets Angelo, who asks to be paid for his gold chain. Antipholus, of course, never received the chain, and refuses to pay, so Angelo has him arrested. At that moment, Dromio of Syracuse returns from the harbor, and mistaking Antipholus E. for his master, tells him which ships are ready to sail. Cursing, Antipholus orders him to be silent and sends him to Adriana to fetch a purse of money to pay his way out of jail.

#### Act IV, scene ii

Meanwhile, Luciana has told Adriana about how her "husband" declared his love for her and pledges her innocence of any illicit behavior. Adriana curses Antipholus furiously, but admits to still feeling some love for him. Dromio of Syracuse dashes in to report that Antipholus has been arrested and needs money; Adriana sends Luciana to fetch it and then orders Dromio to hurry and save her husband from prison.

#### Act IV, scene iii

Antipholus of Syracuse, exploring the city, remarks that people he has never met are continually greeting him, thanking him for favors, showing him goods he has ordered, and so on. Dromio of Syracuse dashes up to him, carrying the gold that Adriana sent to free Antipholus of Ephesus from jail. This Antipholus, of course, has no idea why his servant is bringing him money and immediately asks Dromio whether there are ships in the harbor on which they can book passage out of Ephesus.

As master and servant converse, the Courtesan, at whose home Antipholus of Ephesus ate dinner, comes upon them and asks Antipholus S. for a ring that he borrowed from her during the meal. He and Dromio decide that she is a witch and flee, leaving the Courtesan convinced that he is mad. She resolves to go to Adriana's home and tell her that her husband has stolen the ring and demand repayment.

#### Act IV, scene iv

Meanwhile, Dromio of Ephesus encounters Antipholus of Ephesus in an officer's custody. His master demands to know where the money is to pay his way out of jail; Dromio, baffled, replies that he has brought the rope that Antipholus had earlier sent him to buy. Antipholus flies into a rage and tries to assault his servant, halting only at the sudden appearance of Adriana, Luciana, the Courtesan, and a would-be sorcerer named Doctor Pinch. The women plan to have the doctor use exorcism to cure Antipholus' supposed madness. Antipholus protests, and he argues with Adriana: she claims that he dined at home, while her husband (supported by Dromio's testimony) tells her that he was shut out of his own house. Pinch declares that both master and slave are mad, and they are bound and taken to Adriana's house; Adriana promises the officer to make good on all her husband's debts. The officer tells her that Antipholus owes money to Angelo the goldsmith for a gold chain, and the Courtesan says that she saw Antipholus with the item; Adriana, of course, has never seen the chain. As they talk, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse rush in with drawn swords, and everyone else flees, mistaking them for Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, who, they assume, have escaped from Pinch. Remarking that even witches are afraid of swords, Antipholus of Syracuse orders his servant to take their belongings on board a ship.

#### Act V, scene i

Angelo the goldsmith and the Second Merchant are discussing how Antipholus of Ephesus claimed to have never received the gold chain from Angelo, when they encounter Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse. Angelo sees the gold chain hanging from Antipholus' neck, and they exchange harsh words that lead to drawn swords. Just then Adriana, Luciana, and the Courtesan come in, and Antipholus and Dromio flee into a nearby abbey. The Abbess (of the abbey), Aemilia, comes out and demands to know what is going on. Adriana describes her husband's madness, but after hearing the story, the Abbess blames Adriana's jealousy for driving Antipholus mad and denies everyone entry into her house, saying that she will cure the man herself.

It is now five o'clock, and Duke Solinus appears, leading Aegeon to his execution. Adriana, seeing the Duke, appeals to him for aid in removing her husband from the abbey, and she describes his madness and their attempts to control him. The Duke, remembering promises that he made to Adriana when she married Antipholus, agrees to think on it, but just then, a messenger comes in, with news that Antipholus and Dromio (of Ephesus) have escaped from Pinch's clutches. Adriana calls him a liar, saying that her husband is in the abbey, but then Antipholus himself rushes in, accompanied by his servant and demanding that the Duke grant him justice against his wife, who has locked him out of the house, allowed him to be arrested, and then placed him in the hands of Pinch. There is a flurry of charges and counter charges, and the Duke summons the Abbess, hoping that she can untangle the mess.

Aegeon, meanwhile, goes up to Antipholus of Ephesus and, mistaking him for the son he brought up, greets him happily. Antipholus E. is confused and says that he never saw his father in his life, and that he has always been a citizen of Ephesus. At this moment, mercifully, the Abbess enters, bringing with her Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, which causes general consternation. The Abbess greets Aegeon and declares that she is his wife, Aemilia, long separated from him, and that the identical Antipholi are their twin sons. The rest of the tangle is quickly explained: the ring is returned to the Courtesan, the gold chain is paid for, and the Duke refuses an offer of payment for Aegeon's life, declaring that the old man is pardoned. Finally, the entire company retires inside the abbey for a celebratory feast, with the two Dromios going last, hand in hand, "like brother and brother (V.i.427)."

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/errors/>



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** SHAKESPEARE'S INSPIRATION

For his source material Shakespeare looked, not to the Greeks, but to the Roman, Titus Maccius Plautus, and his play, **The Menaechmi** also known as **The Brothers Menaechmus** or **The Twin Brothers**. Unlike many of his fellow playwrights, Plautus did not merely copy Greek plays, but he also shifted the settings to Rome and based his humour on Roman customs and manners. The comedies of Plautus were among the most popular dramatic works of their day. <http://www.bloomsbury.com/author/plautus/>

In **The Menaechmi**, the plot centers on twins, Menaechmus and Sosicles. After Menaechmus is abducted at a young age, Sosicles is renamed Menaechmus. When Sosicles, now named Menaechmus, grows up, he sets off in search of his lost brother. Eventually, without knowing it, he arrives in the city where his twin lives. Due to his resemblance to his brother, as well as the fact that they both have the same name, inhabitants of the city mistake one for the other, and a series of comedic misadventures ensues as people make plans and deals with one brother, then attempt to follow up with the other brother, who has no knowledge of those events. Eventually, the two brothers meet and realize what has been happening, all of the challenges are resolved, and the brothers return to their homeland together.

For a more detailed plot summary of **The Menaechmi**, see the following link:

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/ancient/plautus003.html>

For a complete script translation, see:

<http://www.salisbury.edu/theatreanddance/AUDITION/The%20Brothers%20working%20script.pdf>

In **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**, Shakespeare undoubtedly borrows freely from **The Menaechmi**, but he adds characters and complications, and motivates his characters not only with misunderstandings and frustrations, but also with love. For an assignment comparing the two plays, see **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS FOOD FOR THOUGHT** on page 27 of this guide.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE COMEDY OF ERRORS ANTICIPATION GUIDE**

1. How unlikely is it that two sets of twin brothers get separated soon after their births, and don't see each other for the next 25 years? Is this a believable situation?
2. The opening scene includes a lot of exposition: necessary background and history information. How will SIR make these long speeches interesting and accessible to the audience while still providing all of the important information?
3. How will SIR get away with casting one actor to play both of the Antipholus brothers? What will happen when both brothers are on stage together in the final scene?
4. How do you suppose that SIR will pull off the other set of twin brothers who are played by two actors who are not twins? How will they use costumes to help complicate or resolve the issue?
5. What will it be like to watch the play outside in the ruins of the Trappist Monastery? What do I need to wear to dress appropriately for an outdoor performance? How will the outdoor setting enhance the performance of the play?



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** JUMP INTO THE SCRIPT

Here's an adaptation of an exercise that comes from the Folger Institute.

Create a large open performance space in your classroom by placing chairs in a circle. Make the appropriate number of copies of each short "script" and distribute each to a student. Give the students five minutes to practise and stage their scene in their separate casts. Now return to the seats in the circle. Each cast, in turn then jumps up and performs their scene in front of the larger group. Try it again without anyone sitting down, and make it fast paced.

An interesting variation of the exercise is to use each short script as the student's first opportunity to memorize and fully prepare the scenes. This approach might be especially useful if the students have already read or seen the play. It's their chance to perform a manageable piece of Shakespeare, a piece that can empower students to determine meaning and staging on their own.

### 1. Act One Scene One (2 characters)

**Duke:** Again, if any Syracusian born  
Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies,  
Unless a thousand marks be levied,  
To quit the penalty and to ransom him.

**Aegeon:** Yet this is my comfort, - when your words are done,  
My woes end likewise with the evening sun.

### 2. Act One Scene One (2 characters)

**Aegeon:** For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,  
We were encount'ed by a mighty rock,  
Which being violently borne upon,  
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;  
Her part, poor soul! seeming as burdened  
With lesser weight, but not with lesser woe,  
Was carried with more speed before the wind;

**Duke:** Try all the friends thou hast in Ephesus;  
Beg thou, or borrow, to make up the sum,  
And live; if not, then thou art doom'd to die.



## 3. Act One Scene Two (3 characters)

**Merchant:** There is your money that I had to keep.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Go bear it to the Centaur, where we host,  
And stay there, Dromio, till I come to thee  
Within this hour it will be dinner-time;  
Till that, I'll view the manners of the town,

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Many a man would take you and your work,  
And go indeed, having so good a mean.  
(Exit Dromio.)

## 4. Act One Scene two (2 characters)

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?

**Dromio of Ephesus:** To me, sir? Why, you gave no gold to me!

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Come on, sir knave, have done your foolishness,  
And tell me how thou hast dispos'd thy charge.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** My charge was but to fetch you from the mart  
Home to your house, the Phoenix, sir, to dinner:  
My mistress and her sister stay for you.

## 5. Act Two Scene one (2 characters)

**Adriana:** Why should their liberty than ours be more?

**Luciana:** Because their business still lies out o' door.

**Adriana:** Look when I serve him so, he takes it ill.

**Luciana:** O, know he is the bridle of your will.

**Adriana:** There's none but asses will be bridled so.

**Luciana:** Why headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.

## 6. Act Two Scene one (2 characters)

**Adriana:** Go back again, thou slave, and fetch him home.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** Go back again! And be new beaten home?  
For God's sake, send some other messenger.

**Adriana:** Back, slave, or I will break thy pate across.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** And he will bless that cross with other beating:  
Between you I shall have a holy head.

**Adriana:** Hence, prating peasant: fetch thy master home.

## 7. Act Two Scene two (2 characters)

**Dromio of Syracuse:** But I pray, sir, why am I beaten?

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Dost thou not know?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Nothing sir, but that I am beaten.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Shall I tell you why?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Ay, sir, and wherefore; for, they say, every why hath a wherefore –

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Why, first, - for flouting me; and then wherefore,  
For urging it the second time to me.

## 8. Act Two Scene two (4 characters)

**Luciana:** When were you wont to use my sister thus?  
She sent for you by Dromio home to dinner.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** By Dromio?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** By me?

**Adriana:** By thee; and this thou didst return from him, -  
That he did buffet thee, and in his blows  
Denied my house for his, me for his wife.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** Did you converse, sir, with this gentlewoman?  
What is the course and drift of your compact?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** I, sir? I never saw her till this time.

## 9. Act 3 Scene one (3 characters from either side of a closed door)

**Dromio of Ephesus:** What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the street.

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch cold on's feet.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** Who talks within there? Ho, open the door!

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Right, sir; I'll tell you when an you'll tell me wherefore.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** Wherefore! For my dinner: I have not dined today.

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Nor today here you must not; come again when you may.

## 10. Act 3 Scene two (2 characters)

- Luciana:** What, are you mad, that you do reason so?
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** Not mad, but mated; how, I do not know.
- Luciana:** It is a fault that springeth from your eye.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** For gazing on your beams, fair sun, being by.
- Luciana:** Gaze where you should, and that will clear your sight.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** As good to wink, sweet love, as look on night.
- Luciana:** Why call you me love? Call my sister so.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** Thy sister's sister.
- Luciana:** That's my sister.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** No.

## 11. Act 3 Scene two (2 characters)

- Angelo:** Master Antipholus?
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** Aye, that's my name.
- Angelo:** I know it well, sir. Lo, here is the chain;  
I thought to have ta'en you at the Porpentine:  
The chain unfinish'd made me stay thus long.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** What is your will that I shall do with this?
- Angelo:** What please yourself, sir; I have made it for you.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** Made it for me, sir! I bespoke it not.

12. Act 4 Scene one (2 characters)

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** I answer you! What should I answer you?

**Angelo:** The money that you owe me for the chain.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** I owe you none till I receive the chain.

**Angelo:** You know I gave it to you half-an-hour since.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** You gave me none; you wrong me much to say so.

**Angelo:** You wrong me more, sir, in denying it.

13. Act 4 Scene two (2 characters)

**Luciana:** First he denied you had in him no right.

**Adriana:** He meant he did me none; the more my spite.

**Luciana:** Then swore he that he was a stranger here.

**Adriana:** And true he swore, though yet forsworn he were.

**Luciana:** Then pleaded I for you.

**Adriana:** And what said he?

**Luciana:** That love I begg'd for you he begg'd of me.

## 14. Act 4 Scene three (3 characters)

- Courtesan:** Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner,  
Or, for my diamond, the chain you promis'd,  
And I'll be gone, sir; and not trouble you.
- Dromio of Syracuse:** Some devils ask but the paring of one's nail,  
A rush, a hair, a drop of blood, a pin  
A nut, a cherry-stone; but she, more covetous,  
Would have a chain.  
Master, be wise; an if you give it her,  
The devil will shake her chain, and fright us with it.
- Courtesan:** I pray you sir, my ring, or else the chain;  
I hope you do not mean to cheat me so.
- Antipholus of Syracuse:** Avaunt, thou witch! Come, Dromio, let us go.

## 15. Act Four Scene four (3 characters)

- Antipholus of Ephesus:** Say wherefore didn't thou lock me forth today? –  
And why dost thou deny the bag of gold?
- Adriana:** I did not, gentle husband, lock thee forth.
- Dromio of Ephesus:** And, gentle master, I receiv'd no gold;  
But I confess, sir, that we were lock'd out.
- Adriana:** Dissembling villain, thou speak'st false in both.
- Antipholus of Ephesus:** Dissembling harlot, thou art false in all.

## 16. Act Five Scene one (4 characters)

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** This day, great duke, she shut the doors upon me,  
While she with harlots feasted in my house.

**Duke:** A grievous fault. Say, woman, didst thou so?

**Adriana:** No, my good lord; - myself, he, and my sister,  
Today did dine together. So befall my soul  
As this is false he burdens me withal!

**Luciana:** Ne'er may I look on day nor sleep on night  
But she tells to your highness simple truth!

## 17. Act Five Scene one (5 characters)

**Angelo:** That is the chain, sir, which you had of me.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:** I think it be, sir; I deny it not.

**Antipholus of Ephesus:** And you, sir, for this chain arrested me.

**Angelo:** I think I did, sir: I deny it not.

**Adriana:** I sent you money, sir, to be your bail,  
By Dromio; but I think he brought it not.

**Dromio:** No, none by me.

## 18. Act Five Scene one (2 characters)

**Dromio of Ephesus:** Will you walk in to see their gossiping?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** Not I, sir; you are my elder.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** That's a question; how shall we try it?

**Dromio of Syracuse:** We'll draw cuts for the senior: till then, lead thou first.

**Dromio of Ephesus:** Nay, then, thus:  
We came into the world like brother and brother;  
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** A DOORWAY INTO THE TEXT

When approaching any Shakespearean text, two major challenges face students and teachers:

- How do we make sense of the text?
- What is the best way to fully appreciate the play?

On the surface, the answers to these questions are obvious. To make sense of the text, read and re-read, seek out scene summaries, look up archaic language, and don't panic. Appreciation is even more obvious: see the play, which, if you're reading this, you are hopefully planning to do, and do the play, which requires some bravery, perseverance, and that same instruction again: don't panic.

Here's a way to approach the play that makes use of Sparknotes. For each Shakespearean play, Sparknotes offers two different tools: 1. an overview of the background, setting, plot, characters, and a scene-by-scene breakdown of the action of the play,

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/errors/>

and 2. No Fear Shakespeare, the original text of the play alongside a "modern text" version.

<http://nfs.sparknotes.com/errors/>

In **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** the most challenging part of the play to understand is the beginning because of the need to set up the situation so that the farce can build on that set up. Give your students the "summary and analysis" of Act 1 Scene 1 from Sparknotes.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/errors/section1.rhtml>

Now give them the side-by-side text of the scene from No Fear Shakespeare.

[http://nfs.sparknotes.com/errors/page\\_2.html](http://nfs.sparknotes.com/errors/page_2.html)

Divide your students into small groups and instruct them to use both texts to create a third **plain language version** of the scene. On the next page is an illustration of how that might work:



THE COMEDY OF ERRORS		NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE	
← Act 1, Scene 1 →		← Act 1, Scene 1 →	
<p>ORIGINAL TEXT</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Enter the DUKE, EGEON, JAILER, and other attendants</i></p> <p><b>EGEON</b> Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, And by the doom of death end woes and all.</p> <p><b>DUKE</b> Merchant of Syracuse, plead no more. I am not partial to infringe our laws. 5 The enmity and discord which of late Sprung from the rancorous outrage of your duke To merchants, our well-dealing countrymen, Who, wanting guilders to redeem their lives, Have seal'd his rigorous statutes with their bloods, 10 Excludes all pity from our threatening looks. For, since the mortal and intestine jars 'Twixt thy seditious countrymen and us, It hath in solemn synods been decreed Both by the Syracusians and ourselves, 15 To admit no traffic to our adverse towns. Nay, more, if any born at Ephesus Be seen at any Syracusan marts and fairs; Again, if any Syracusan born Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies, 20 His goods confiscate to the Duke's dispose, Unless a thousand marks be levied To quit the penalty and to ransom him. Thy substance, valued at the highest rate, Cannot amount unto a hundred marks; 25 Therefore by law thou art condemned to die.</p> <p><b>EGEON</b> Yet this my comfort: when your words are done, My woes end likewise with the evening sun.</p>	<p>MODERN TEXT</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The DUKE, EGEON, and the JAILER enter, with other attendants.</i></p> <p><b>EGEON</b> Continue, Solinus, and bring on my downfall. Give me the death sentence and end all my troubles.</p> <p><b>DUKE</b> Merchant of Syracuse, stop your begging: I'm not inclined to bend our laws. The hatred and discord between our two cities is the result of the bitter offenses your duke has perpetrated against the merchants of Ephesus, our well-behaved countrymen. Lacking the money to ransom themselves, these merchants were executed under your duke's harsh laws, and this has erased all looks of pity from my face. Ever since these deadly conflicts erupted between your violent countrymen and ours, both you Syracusians and we Ephesians have held serious councils and decided not to permit any travel between our two hostile towns. No—the law goes further: if anyone born in Ephesus is seen in Syracuse's marketplaces or if anyone born in Syracuse comes to Ephesus, that man dies, and his possessions will be confiscated by the Duke, unless he can raise a thousand marks to pay the penalty and ransom himself. Your possessions, even if we calculate their worth very generously, don't even add up to a hundred marks. Therefore, by law, you are condemned to die.</p> <p><b>EGEON</b> At least I have this comfort: when you finish speaking, my troubles will also end, at sundown.</p>		
← Act 1, Scene 1 →		← Act 1, Scene 1 →	

The modern text, on the right, does a good job of clarifying the meaning of the original, but ask your students, “Would you actually say that? Without changing the meaning, what would you say if you were that character?” As well, encourage your students to pare down the language to its essence. There's no need to say in a paragraph what you can say in a sentence. What is the character really saying? After they work on it, the scene might end up looking something like this:

**Aegeon:** Get it over with. Just give me the death sentence.

**Duke:** Look, I've got to follow the rules. Our two cities have a history of bad blood, so we've decided that no one from either town can travel to the other. The penalty for doing so is death or the payment of one thousand marks. We can see you don't have the money.

**Aegeon:** At least at the end of the day, I won't have anything to worry about anymore.

There are two significant benefits to this assignment: 1. Your students must **get inside the text** and think about what is really important in the scene, and 2. they now have a script with language that is their own, so it's much easier to learn and stage scenes with.

You may argue that we've now taken all of the poetic language out of the scene and therefore the essence of Shakespeare is lost. That's a reasonable argument, but remember too, that the reason why Shakespeare is so often performed today is not only just because of the poetry, but in this case, it's also because of the pure entertainment value of the play.

And, after some experience with this kind of pared down text work, students find when they watch an original text version of the same play, **they forget that they are watching Shakespeare** and they just enjoy the show. They come to you after the performance and proudly exclaim, "I understood every scene!" Some students even request that when they next perform a scene, they want to analyze the language the same way, but they want to perform it in **original text**.

There is **one final idea** about this paring down of the language method that might work especially well with **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**. Because it's not the characters and themes that are most significant in this play, but the plot, the situation, and the humour, why not encourage the students to pare the language down for a specific character that they already know. For example, what if Aegeon was an Arnold Schwarzenegger character? What if all the characters in a particular scene were in a **Modern Family** or **Simpsons** episode? What would the scene sound like then?



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS** SLAPSTICK CHOREOGRAPHY

So how do they do all that physical comedy stuff where characters get beaten, slapped, boxed, and thrown? The answer is the same as it is for most of the other challenges that face SIR: the company needs a high level of expertise, some careful planning, and a lot of practise and hard work. Slapstick, just like fight choreography or dance choreography, requires effort and repetition to make it believable, entertaining, and safe for the performers.

One of the Dromio slapstick beatings might require, for example, his being slapped by his master. It's a violent act, and although we want it to look real, we don't want the audience to think that Dromio is really getting hurt. So, the actor's might practise like this:

- Dromio stands with his back to the audience.
- Antipholus stands just far enough away so that he is unable to reach Dromio.
- Dromio holds out his right hand vertically with the palm open directly in front of his upper torso so that his master can easily clap his hand.
- Antipholus takes a big wind up to make it look good, and claps the hand of Dromio.
- After their hands clap together, Dromio lowers the clapped hand, turns away to the audience and uses his left hand to raise it to the cheek, the cheek that has apparently been slapped. Ouch!

Remember too that the audience isn't expecting it to happen, so even if the actors do this safe slap in plain view, the audience will often miss it and find the slap believable.

If you do want to experiment with fight choreography moves in slapstick, you'll find a lot of examples on the internet. These can be great resources, but, if you've never tried it before, be sure to find an expert to teach you (perhaps an expert from SIR), and follow these basic principles:

1. Just like stage combat, slapstick requires a coach to stand outside the action in order to be aware of what the audience sees, to properly execute the required moves, and to ensure the participants' safety throughout the slapstick.
2. Never do real hits or slaps even when encouraged to do so by your director or the person getting hit. Don't even consider it. Stage slaps and hits are always faked. Always.
3. Work on your reactions as much as you do on the actions and leave time for them. Most of the control in stage combat and slapstick actually goes to the person who receives the action.

The first three minutes of the following video show some basic slapping and punching moves that might be useful for when the Dromios are abused in **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**. Be sure to watch it until the end of three minutes (not the end of the video) to hear the Professor's step-by-step explanation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us0t1Gw21Xk>

Here's another demonstration by a number of high school students. This scene uses basic fight choreography techniques in order to generate a full blown slapstick battle with a great payoff at the end.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCTAMYOdxBo>

It should be obvious that safety is the most important characteristic of on stage combat and slapstick. If you'd like to explore combat and slapstick choreography further, why not contact SIR's Co-Artistic Chairs, Andrew Cecon and Kevin Klassen, and book a workshop?

[artisticchair@mymts.net](mailto:artisticchair@mymts.net)



**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE COMEDY OF ERRORS FOOD FOR THOUGHT  
OR WHAT TO THINK ABOUT AFTER SEEING THE PLAY**

1. Compare the story of **The Menaechmi** with Shakespeare's version in **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**. What characters and complications does he add to the story?

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/ancient/plautus003.html>

2. Many scholars suggest that **The Menaechmi** treats female characters as stereotypes and distractions easily dismissed by the men. Is that the case with Shakespeare's play? Consider the women in the play: Aemilia, Adriana, Luciana, and Luce. Even though Shakespeare was born over 450 years ago, did he have a modern perspective of gender equality? Do Shakespeare's female characters exist in today's world?
3. Explore the theme of love in the play. Consider who loves whom and how that motivates the action of the play. Remember to include Aegeon and Aemilia, Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana, Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana, Dromio of Ephesus and Luce, Aegeon and his love for his sons, and the two sets of brothers and their love for each other.
4. What would happen in the end of the play if the truth didn't come out, if the two sets of brothers never did manage to meet each other? Is a happy ending still possible?
5. Use one of the Entertainment Weekly theatre reviews below as model for writing a theatre review of your own.

[http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20364394\\_20807462,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20364394_20807462,00.html)

[http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20364394\\_20805123,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20364394_20805123,00.html)

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