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In Their Own Words: Why Is Shakespeare Relevant Today?

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In their own words

Why is Shakespeare relevant today?



Shakespeare is alive and well at Linfield College. Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, assistant professor of English at Linfield, is the scholar-in-residence for the Portland Shakespeare Project and has published articles about Shakespeare in *The New Yorker*. Here, Linfield students and alumni share their own views about the Bard's relevance today.

Tricia Castañeda-Gonzales '09 Theatre arts

Actor and teaching artist, Kaiser Permanente's Educational Theatre Program in Collaboration with Oregon Children's Theatre



During these long winter months, I eagerly wait for hot, midsummer nights. Nothing is more heavenly than listening to the sound of the Bard's words spoken aloud under the stars. Shakespeare can be intimidating and may even sound like a foreign language if one is unfamiliar. But, if an actor's homework is done, Shakespeare can easily become music to one's ears. In his text, the Bard has so meticulously left a multitude of clues to guide an actor along in performance. His themes are universal. From love and loss to war and politics, it isn't hard to apply his themes to contemporary times. He has mastered the art of poetry and scriptwriting, directly influenced the language that is spoken to this day and

continues to influence people around the world. Here is to many Shakespearean summer nights! Give you good morrow!

Kristie Castanera '14 Creative writing

Social media and reputation specialist at Easy Media



Shakespeare delves deftly into shared human experience – his pop culture references may be archaic, yet we are riveted by his depiction of love, of loss, of guilt. *Othello* is brilliant because we have all felt Othello's burning jealousy, can cower and cry with Desdemona as her husband rages. This universal draw is most easily seen when Shakespeare is performed. Though many of us slog through half-page footnotes, when we watch these plays onstage, the language barrier drops away. At its core, Shakespeare's work delves deep into the mine of human emotion – time can never render that obsolete.

Robert Murphy Jackson '17

Theatre

Performed in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*
Linfield Theatre



Shakespeare matters to modern society because he understood people. As an actor, my job was to tell the story the playwright wrote, so people could connect and empathize with at least some part of the performance.

What makes Shakespeare brilliant is that he wrote things that everyone could feel. Even modern audiences can understand forbidden loves, plotted vengeance, and, in our play, forgiveness. A testament to his work is how long it has survived and the many shapes it can evolve into in order to fit the needs of the audience. Shakespeare is relevant because we still feel for him and his stories.

Sammi Palmer '15

English

English teacher at Powers High School
Dramaturge intern, Portland Shakespeare Project



As much as we like to think that humanity has changed in the last 400 years, we really haven't. We still grapple with the issues that plague Shakespeare's vivacious characters: love, loss, racism, betrayal, greed, envy,

remorse... People of all ages and professions can relate to the feeling of Shakespeare's work, if not the obscure references. And for students, it offers a world of glittering language so unlike modern English that it's almost magical. I love working through his plays with my students. Last fall, I taught a *Tempest* unit with tie-ins to Linfield's recent production. I shared the department's photos with my class and snagged some cast and crew interviews to give my students a "behind the scenes" view of the play. That's the power of a small college!

Joanna Buchholz '16

English literature

Dramaturge for several Shakespeare productions



There's a reason that Shakespeare's works have stuck around so long, and it's because they are adaptable to new contexts. After working as a dramaturge for two productions this year – *Twelfth*

Night, put on by the Portland Shakespeare Project, and Linfield's *The Tempest* – I was struck by how different they both were. One was a historical piece set in Elizabethan England, while the other took place in a post-apocalyptic future deeply affected by climate change and technocracy. I am fascinated by the way you can take any Shakespeare play, and then warp and twist it to fit whatever vision or agenda you might have. Shakespeare coined over 1,700 of the words and phrases we use every day, so not only has the Bard had a profound impact on the history of theater, but also on the development of literature, writing, and the way we think.

Antoine Johnson '19

Theatre

Played Caliban in *The Tempest*
Linfield Theatre



Shakespeare is still relevant today for many reasons. His plays and poems teach society how to not only love, dream and hate all at the same time, but they're also used as a message.

I say this after having a firsthand experience in *The Tempest* directed by Janet Gupton. His flexible writing style gave her the ability to alter the show in several ways to relay our school's message to the community – that we can create great things if we recycle and reuse the right materials.