

The Folger's Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

The Folger Shakespeare Library is a hotbed of education staff, scholars, actors, directors, curators, librarians, and digital geeks in Washington, DC teamed up with teachers all over the country--in an endless collaboration focused on your classroom and schools everywhere.

What do we believe about teaching and learning? Read on:

1. We believe that teachers are the most important and the most powerful people on earth. Period.
2. *All* students should have access to Shakespeare's rigorous texts and compelling ideas. Students at all grades and all levels of proficiency can and should engage deeply with these plays.
3. You and *all* of your students can dive into, engage with, and make sense of these complex texts with great success. This work will enhance your students' close reading and analytical skills. Yours, too. And all of you will have an enormous amount of fun in the process!
4. **It's all about the language.** Approach, connect with, and befriend Shakespeare's language head on. Your students' direct connection with his language is the key to unlocking the plays – and everything in them. We don't mean you, as teacher, translating for them. And we don't mean using those "made easy" books. We mean THEM speaking and moving and figuring out HIM . . . words, lines, scenes, plays. His language in the mouths of your students is splendid and exciting all on its own. And it is the essential step that results in sending his ideas into their brains.
5. So . . . if you are teaching Shakespeare the way you were taught, you might need to give that up. If you are teaching Shakespeare from those dumbed-down versions of the plays created by publishers who believe that both you and your students are not smart enough to understand the real thing, throw them out. Right now.
6. The Folger continues to produce – with and for teachers – ever-evolving sets of language tools, active close reading strategies, performance techniques, and pathways through the plays that are energizing and fun, and that *relentlessly* focus on text. In DC and all over the place, we teach teachers how to do this work. A poorly kept secret: teachers use these tools and strategies to teach all kinds of literature, and subjects way beyond English.
7. Using these tools and strategies, you and your students work in the plays rigorously and vigorously in the way that scholars and actors do. Your students make their way actively – reading closely, thinking deeply, and citing textual evidence all over the place. They build their skills and their knowledge. And you do too. Research has shown us that learning this way dramatically increases students' confidence – in their ability to tackle something hard, to figure it out, to "own" this playwright and his plays – and boosts their enthusiasm for learning the next hard thing: August Wilson, reconstruction, *Lear*, calculus, Arabic.
8. Any teacher can teach this way. You don't have to know anything about acting or directing or any of that stuff. In fact, it's better if you don't. He knew how to write. You know how to teach. And if you're worried about this last part, we can help you with that.