



Shakespeare: trippingly on the tongue

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This isn't your boring high school literature class. Richard Carter of Lopez Island is applying the works of Shakespeare to teach confidence, relaxation techniques, self-esteem and communication skills in a fun atmosphere.

Carter's class, "Practically Speaking: Shakespeare Applied" met for six weeks on Wednesdays at the Port Stanley School House on Lopez Island in a course offered through Skagit Valley College.

The notion of "applied theatre" means using theatre "to learn effective techniques to improve public speaking and inspire self confidence," says Carter. Carter studied with Tina Packer, founding director of Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, whose book "Power Plays" describes how lessons from Shakespeare can be applied in the corporate board room and just as well in the juvenile court.

A typical class begins with warm-up exercises for the voice, face and body. "Many brave adults are taking risks to do uncomfortable and silly things in an attempt to learn new methods of speaking," said Carter. Students sight-read monologues in class and then take them home to read them in the context of the play. The following week the students re-read their assigned pieces aloud and describe who their character is, what he is trying to say and why he is phrasing it in that way.

In the context of learning about an individual character's speech, some students also develop a deeper understanding of the plays themselves. "I began to see the character's interacting with one another and the plays made sense," said student Donna Ince.

"Breaking down inhibitions, the use of relaxation techniques, proper breathing and projection, and improved diction are benefits of the course that can be used to better communicate in daily life," says Carter.

Richard Carter is the co-founder of the Community Shakespeare Company on Lopez Island (www.communityshakespeare.org) and the author of three adaptations of Shakespeare plays for children, as well as being a playwright himself. This summer he is teaching a play production class through the Lopez Island Family Resource Summer Workshops. (www.lifrc.org)