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Mack to the Past

By MJ Long

Synopsis: Mack, a teen from Elizabethan/ Shakespearean England, is transported forward in time by none other than the mischievous Puck from Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to a 21st Century middle school. He must get help from the students to travel back to the past where and when he belongs.

Setting: A Middle School hallway, an English teacher's classroom

About this play:

This is a 30 minute comedy. It includes some Shakespearean Quotes and Shakespearean type language and a lot of allusions to the 1980s movie *Back to the Future*. It can be cast with as few as 11 actors, or it can be expanded to include more. Many of the roles can be adapted for boys or girls. It was written for the 2019 Virginia Beach Public Schools' One Act Play Festival, and was performed by a cast and crew of 18 students from Virginia Beach Middle School. The judges' panel was very impressed with the performance and ranked it Superior.

About the author:

I have been an English teacher at Virginia Beach Middle School for 31 years. I live in Virginia Beach, Virginia with my loving and supportive husband, my two artistic and dramatic daughters, two cats, a spoiled rotten rabbit, a hermit crab, and a bearded dragon, and a tortoise. I enjoy reading, teaching, and acting crazily in front of my students during the school year.

About the artist:

The cover art for this play was drawn by my daughter, Megan C. Long, a graphic design graduate of Radford University. She acted in the One Act Play at Virginia Beach Middle School when she was 12 and 13 years old.

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Characters

Mack – A young man from Shakespearean England who travels to the 21st Century

Robin – aka Puck -- a mischievous, magical creature

Students and Faculty:

Viola – twins with Sebastian

Sebastian – Viola's twin

Kate – difficult and opinionated

Portia – smart and funny

Caius – loyal and honest

Rosaline – stuck up and narcissistic

Orlando – in love with Rosalind

Principal Midsummer

Ms. William – an English teacher

Notes on Sets, Props and Costumes

Set:

Wall Pieces -- signs on one side, Shakespeare posters on other side

Bench or boxes
Teacher Desk and chair

Costumes and Props:

Signs and posters with the year on them:

- Under the Sea Dance (Be sure to put the year of the performance in large numbers on the poster)
- All's Well that Ends Well Coming Soon (current year)

Shakespearean Insults Handouts (available on the Folger's Shakespeare Website https://www.folger.edu/sites/default/files/QuotesScripts_Insults.pdf)

Pillows

Chromebook/laptop covers -- 1 per student, teacher

Mack -- Medieval Costume, Sword Belt and Foam Sword

Puck -- Clothes of many colors, tunic or a blazer in silver or other bright color

Rosalind -- Regular clothes, heartbreaker shirt?; Mirror or cell phone

Orlando -- Heart classes and heart shorts or shirt

Portia -- Regular clothes

Sebastian and Viola -- Should be wearing the same color or style of clothes

Kate -- Jeans, Rock Band T, funky hat

Ms. William -- teacher clothes, skirt, Shakespeare Shirt?, flats

Principal Midsummer -- principal clothes -- pant, collared shirt, tie?; bullhorn

Sounds -- traveling in time sound effects, songs -- *Power of Love*, *Back in Time*

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By M.J. Long

Scene 1 – In School Foyer or Hallway

Set: The scene is set minimally with a bench and some walls (set pieces) that have typical posters or flyers advertising upcoming events in middle school (dances, clubs, etc. One or more should have the current year on them in BIG numbers.)

The curtains open to a blacked-out stage. There are sounds of electricity, wind, etc. – reference The Terminator transporting. The lights come up slowly on Mack who is alone on the stage flat on his back or crouched in the Terminator Pose. Mack is dressed in a loose tunic and leggings perhaps with a brown vest and boots, and a sword and sword belt. He is holding the sword and as he rises, and he drops the sword as if it is hot. Mack sits up moaning and gets unsteadily to his feet. Holding his head, rubbing his back, Mack, looks around in confusion, going up to some of the posters and staring at them in confusion. Eventually, Mack moves front, center of the stage. He faces his audience and speaks directly to them.

Mack:

What place is this? The air itself feels wrong!

Where once I was, I find now, I am not

'Tis strange, I feel, my head pounds like a gong.

I pinch myself, and find that I'm awake.

These signs, they speak not words I know, for I

Am weak, so lost in fear my knees do knock

Something's amiss, I know not when -- nor why

The light -- the sound – my heartbeat quakes with shock

This must be no more than a 'noxious dream

I have not travelled far from home -- I sleep

And dance alone on the night's moon beams

It is impossible in time to leap!

But here I am adrift, alone, and yet –

(hears the sound of students coming in to the school)

It seems they come, but are they ally or threat?

A school bell rings and Mack jumps. He picks up his sword and puts it into the sheath then moves off to the side or by one of the set pieces and watches, with mouth open and eyes wide as the students enter the stage. The students enter in small groups talking to one another and are dressed in typical middle school attire – jeans, etc. They carry backpacks, notebooks, and Chromebooks or computer cases.

Viola: *(She addresses Caius, Portia and Kate)* This weekend was THE WORST! Did you guys see that storm on Saturday? It came out of nowhere. Seb and I were stuck out on the Bay --

Sebastian and Viola together: on our dad's boat.

Sebastian: *(leads his group of friends – Rosalind and Orlando over from where they were talking. Joking Viola)* You turned green, and I thought you were going to pass out, Sis! *(He and Orlando laugh and high five)*

Viola: *(glares at her brother)* YOU are one to talk, Seb! You were crying for our mommy curled in a fetal position at the bottom of the boat! *(Laughs with Rosalind, and they make a face at Sebastian)*

Sebastian: *(He looks embarrassed and starts to snarl at Viola, but is interrupted by Portia)* Well, Vi, at least I –

Portia: *(She is dressed stylishly, and she speaks while examining her nail polish)* Children, please! The two of you could argue for hours! You obviously got back safely, right?

Viola: Well, it WAS touch-and-go there for a few minutes, but right when we thought we were all going to end up capsized in the water, the storm died out. It was –

Viola and Sebastian together: Really strange.

Caius: There wasn't anything but sunny weather at my house. Orlando and I were camping all weekend. Not a drop of rain, right Lando?

Orlando: *(He has been looking dazedly at Rosalind and inching closer to her. He might have heart shaped sunglasses on which he takes off when Caius hits Orlando on the upper arm, and Orlando jumps and clears his throat.)* Huh? *(Runs over to Caius)* Oh, yeah, no rain, right. *(He looks away toward Rosalind longingly and walks over)* Heeeeeeeeeeeey, Rosalind.

Rosalind: *(Rosalind is oblivious to the whole thing as she looks at herself in a mirror or takes selfies with her phone)* Hmm? Did you say something?

Orlando: I was wondering if you'd like to g -- *(Rosalind interrupts the rest of the line which is left unsaid-- you'd like to go out with me?)*

Rosalind: *(interrupting)* No.

Orlando: I just thought maybe?

Rosalind: It's not gonna happen. *(She turns away and ignores him completely)*

Orlando sighs and looks dejected and sad.

Kate: *(She is dressed in jeans and a band t-shirt, and she wears a hat. She sighs and rolls her eyes at Orlando)* You are pathetic! She only loves herself, Orlando!

(Orlando shrugs) Why does love turn everyone into saps?

(The others continue to talk quietly while Kate stalks off toward Mack and bumps into him accidentally, knocking him down)

Kate: Hey! Get out of my way!

Mack *(jumps up and brushes himself off and bows to her expansively in a courtly way):* Your forgiveness I implore, mistress!

Kate *(gets angrier):* What did you call me? Who do you think you are?

Robin enters wearing shiny metallic colored clothes or clothes in multiple colors and patterns. She is meant to look magical and mysterious, but definitely modern. She flicks her fingers toward Mack and Kate and they freeze.

Robin: *(speaks to the audience)* Mayhap she asks that question of me? Good morrow! *(bows)* "I am that merry wanderer of the night." I'm sure my name is familiar to you -- I am Robin Goodfellow. *(She bows to the audience and then unfreezes Mack and Kate.)*

Mack:

Milady, I do apologize. But I know not how I misspoke.

Your ire I did not intend to raise.

He rises from his bow to standing and holds out his hand. Kate reaches out to shake his hand at the same time he tries to kiss the back of her hand. She whacks him on the head again with her hat.

Kate: Were you going to kiss my hand? What is wrong with you!? *(she shoves him a little)*

Mack: Me thinks you are a shrew!

Kate: A WHAT? How dare you! *She whacks him over the head again.*

They begin to fight and chase one another in the background.

Robin: *(speaks directly to the audience)* "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" . What's that I hear? Have none of you heard of me? Perhaps this will jog your memory?

"I am that merry wanderer of the night.

I'm that Hobgoblin call me and sweet Puck,

I do their work, and they shall have good luck:" *(bows – looks at the audience and sighs. The fighting in the background moves off stage)*

Puck? No? Doesn't ring any bells? *(sighs again)* Once I was quite well known after I allowed that cheeky fellow William Shakespeare to write about my adventures in his little midsummer comedy. Oh well, you'll catch on soon! Humans are so much fun to torment, and the 21st century is so boring! Why not stir up a little tempest, *(Kate and Mac return to the stage still fighting. The other kids whisper and point, taking pictures with their phones, etc.)* enchant a person's dream, or start some time traveling drama? What? They can't see me anyway! It makes MY life ever SO MUCH MORE INTERESTING! *(Laughs)*

Robin walks toward the other group of kids and weaves through them around them poking them gently to raise their emotions as she wants. Kate storms away from Mack and off the stage. Mack sits down on the bench or on the floor by one of the set pieces. Robin gestures to Portia and she speaks --

Portia: It must be cool to have a twin! What's it like?

Sebastian: I always say TWIN stands for *(pause -- Robin taps his forehead)* Terrible Withering Irritating Nobody – that's *my*, sister, Vi. *(Looks a little surprised that he said that)*

Viola: To me, TWIN stands *(pause – Robin touches her nose)* for Tubby Wicked Instigating Nothing. Sebastian is the BEST! *(She says this sarcastically, and she pushes Sebastian who pushes her back.)*

Robin laughs and the fighting continues with a little hair pulling and fake slapping.

Portia: Oh, well, I guess NOT then.

Caius: *(aside to Portia)* They sure are acting strangely.

Viola screams. Sebastian has her in a headlock. She bites his arm and he yells.

Portia: *(aside to Caius)* I've never seen anyone fight like that!

Sebastian and Viola continue to fight in a humorous and Vaudevillian manner in the background. Kate comes back on the stage, but avoids Mack and goes to stand with Rosalind).

Orlando: *(He has been staring at Rosalind for most of this time. Robin gestures to him and he edges a little closer to Rosalind.)* Would you want to... umm, *(pause to watch the fighting and then hurriedly)* go to the Enchantment Under the Sea Dance with me?

Rosalind: *(taking selfies or and photos with Kate)* Hmm? *(Robin taps her on the shoulder)* Oh, ummm...NO. *(She turns her back on Orlando and moves to the other side of the stage.)*

Robin *(gestures and they all freeze. She laughs wickedly, but speaks to the audience)* "And those things do please me best! That befall" *(gestures to Orlando who falls into a puddle on the floor)* "preposterously." *(laughs again)* I am off to plan a plague of torment for them all. How amusing! *(she exits laughing and everyone unfreezes.)*

Viola *(hugs Sebastian):* Oh, Seb, I don't know what came over me!

Sebastian: Vi, I don't either. You aren't an Irritating nobody!

Viola: Just terrible and withering, eh?

Sebastian *(jokingly)* Well....*(they laugh)*

Caius: Lando, you all right? *(He puts down a hand to pull Orlando up)*

Orlando: I guess. It's just my broken heart is hanging out of my chest, bleeding on the floor. *(He looks toward Rosalind longingly)*

Rosalind: *(from behind her mirror or phone)* Gross! Still, no!

Orlando moans clutches his heart and sags against Caius

Portia: I mean this kindly, Orlando, you need to ---

Kate: *(interrupting)* Get over it!

Caius: Rude!

Orlando: "If you love and get hurt, love more. If you love more and hurt more, love even more. If you love even more and get hurt even more, love some more until it hurts no more." I read that on a poster once in Ms. William's room. It's by some guy named Shalespeer.

Caius: Do you mean Shakespeare?

Orlando: Maybe. But who cares if SHE doesn't love me? *(Starts crying on Caius's shoulder)*

Mack: *(still sitting on the floor)*

"Love goes toward love as school-boys from their books,

But love from love, toward school with heavy looks."

Orlando: This guy gets it! *(He goes over and gives Mack a hand up and they come over to the group)* He understands the power of love.

Kate: That guy doesn't GET anything!

Caius: *(gesturing to the sword)* Hey, cool. Is that a lightsaber?

Portia: Um, Caius *(She gestures for him to move away)* I think it's a real sword!

Everyone gasps and backs away from Mack.

Mack: This? *(He pulls his fencing sword out of the sheath and steps in front of Kate as if to protect her)* All gentlemen carry a rapier to fend off thieves and defend ladies.

Kate: Women take care of themselves! *(She shoves him out of her way)* Put that thing away. *(Mack does)* Why would you bring that here? You can get into a lot of trouble carrying a sword into a school!

Sirens go off. Principal Midsummer enters the stage—he/she could be carrying a flashing light or a bull horn with a siren on it.

Principal Midsummer: Hand over the antique replica sword before someone gets hurt! *(He gestures to Mack and the sword)* I saw it all on the cameras. You are in a lot of trouble.

Kate: Told you so!

Mack: *(Offering the sword in a deep bow. Midsummer takes the sword away from Mack)* Sire, I would eat a piece of my sword before I harmed a hair on any of these poor souls' heads.

Principal Midsummer: Well, aren't you an unusual one! I don't think you need to go that far. I'm confiscating this weapon, and we will talk about this in my office.

(The principal pulls Mack off the stage with him. Then he turns back onto the stage to speak to the kids.) Off to class now, children. You are going to be late.

A school bell rings indicating the start of class and all the students hurry off the stage in the opposite direction as the principal who also exits. The stage goes to blackout.

Scene 2 – English Class

The stage lights come up and Ms. William is standing alone in the center of the stage looking at her watch. There are pillows tossed around the floor of the stage and maybe a few beanbag chairs. The only piece of furniture is the teacher's desk at the edge of the stage. The students come in and look around as if expecting something different.

Ms. William – *(Wryly)* Glad you all could finally all make it. I know English comes second to your... ummm... personal lives.

The students all respond with a garble of insincere apologies.

Portia: *Oops, pardon*

Cauis: *Sorry, dude.*

Ms. William: Oh, pish posh! Let's proceed with class as usual. *(She turns away to get some papers off her desk as the students shift awkwardly into class, looking at the pillows stangely.)*

Caius – Ummm.. Ms. William? Where are the desks?

Ms. William – *(spinning around with a big smile)* I'm so glad you asked! Today we are starting our new unit on Shakespeare! *(Everyone groans)* I thought it would be more fun if we sat more in the round rather than in rows. *(Everyone groans again. Ms. William is frustrated)* Oh, just roll with it, kids! Have a seat.

The kids all take pillows or beanbag chairs and sit, piling backpacks and Chromebooks into piles next to them. Sebastian and Caius sit side by side, Portia and Viola sit together across the semi-circle from them, Orlando tries to save a pillow next to him for Rosalind, but she drags a pillow over next to Viola. Orlando lies down in defeat in the middle of the circle. Kate picks up her pillow and bops Orlando with it, and then sits alone to the side. Robin comes in after everyone is seated and takes a seat on the another pillow.

Ms. William: *(She says this line while passing out papers)* Shakespeare *(everyone groans)* isn't as hard as everyone thinks. Once you get used to it; it is actually kind of fun. I like to start out with an activity, I call Elizabethan Smack Down. *(Wrestling theme music)*

Caius: Shakespearean Wrestling?

Robin: *(waves her hand and a wrestling sound effect and a fight bell rings.)* I am the show stopper! I am the main event! *(The kids begin to imitate professional wrestler's catch phrases.)*

Sebastian: I'm not a bad guy. I'm not a good guy. I'm just *the* guy.

Rosalind: If you're gonna do it, do it with flair!

Orlando: I like your hair.

Kate: Don't you dare be sour. Feel the Power!

Portia: Dost thou smell what The Rock is cooking?

Orlando: Welcome to RAW is Jerhico!

Caius: *(Stands and goes to center stage)* Hey, I saw an interview with Chris Jericho and he said, "If Shakespeare was alive today, he'd be writing wrestling shows."

(Chris Jericho's entrance music comes on and he dances)

Ms. William: That's enough, Caius! Go sit down.

Viola: Are you saying those things are all scripted?! That's –

Sebastian and Viola: Just wrong!

Ms. William: *(She interrupts them and continues on firmly)* Everyone, settle down! Shakespeare *(everyone groans)* is all about the verbal parry of wits.
(pause)

(Cricket sound effect)

Ms. William: *(sighs and rolls her eyes, hands on her hips)* Arguing. Shakespeare loved a good argument, and his use of insults is both creative and humorous.

Portia: I don't find it funny when someone insults me.

Ms. Williams: No one does in reality, Portia, but this is acting! You are playing a part. Now try it, Rosalind. Take a word or phrase from each column and put them all together to make an insult.

Rosalind: *(reading off the sheet)* Poisonous.. bunch-backed...toad.

