

For We Are Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On . . .

Shakespeare Players Visit Calder House

26th September 2016

I jumped at the opportunity to have a small theatre group perform at Calder House – and conduct a workshop – for our children. I LOVE Shakespeare's plays. So much so, I gave my daughter the middle name *Miranda* (from Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*).

As a boy, I could not claim to have understood what the players were saying.

That isn't the point.

The point is that I knew there was magic and music in words (in the same way I am a lousy French speaker, yet just love hearing French being spoken - with a good accent, anyway).

The magic comes first. Understanding later. Just look at the photographs I took of the children's faces during the performance. That's often the order in which 'life-long learning' (the best kind) happens. Good teaching doesn't force Understanding. 'Understanding' will come when it's good-and-ready. And that is what we saw during today's visit. This small band of just three 'players' NEVER said: '*Okay, this is what Shakespeare's plays are about. Learn it. Remember it.*' I cannot tell you how many times, as both a Primary and Secondary English teacher, I have seen theatrical companies say that kind of thing to children. I loathe it, I really do.

The thing is, if a textbook tells you: '*This is what Shakespeare is trying to teach us . . . this is the story he is telling us in this play,*' then there is a good chance the textbook is correct. HOWEVER, when people tell us: '*This is **EVERYTHING***

Shakespeare is trying to show us, well . . . that is definitely *incorrect*. It is incorrect because any story (or, in this case, a play) is what we bring to it. Do you think that – as Shakespeare sat writing his plays – he ever imagined that forty-one school children would be sat watching his plays unfold four hundred years later? He was a genius, true. But, he wasn't *that* clever! Even he could not imagine how his stories would impact dyslexic learners.

That's the thing. Our visitors never forced our children to see the plays from one angle. In the workshop, they encouraged our learners to see characters through their own eyes – nobody else's.

Why should Calder House have invested time in showing children Shakespeare? Well, the National Curriculum kind of demands it when it references our *literary heritage*. But, in all honesty, that is not the reason. Again, take a look at the photographs. **THAT'S THE REASON.**

Everyone loves a good story. Stories (and this includes plays) are fundamental as channels for making sure that we pass ideas, memories and emotions down the line to others. These plays may all be made up – fictional, but, as so many others have said, fiction is the lie that shows us true things . . . the truth about humanity.

So, what did our children learn today as they acted out character roles, learning to walk in a particular way . . . or raise an eye-brow at a certain angle? They learned that there is a lot the author or playwright DOESN'T tell us . . . the stuff we have to imagine and visualise for ourselves to fully bring ink to life.

They learned that they have the right to tell stories in their own particular ways, because not just the author (or playwright) gives a story its meaning. We do, too. And that is empowering stuff! Especially for a dyslexic learner.

Mr I J Perks