



August 1, 2019

Dear grant panel,

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks (MSIP) strongly supports Project Montana's application to the MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change Challenge. MSIP is an outreach program of the College of Arts and Architecture. Since 1973, Shakespeare in the Parks has brought free, professional productions of Shakespeare and other classics to mostly rural and underserved communities in Montana, Wyoming, and beyond. The flagship summer tour brings two fully-produced, professionally acted and designed plays to 61 towns in five states every summer. It also tours to schools K-12 with professional performances and workshops.

The fall tour brings an eighty-minute abridgement of a Shakespeare play – this fall, *Romeo and Juliet* – to a middle and high school audience. Four workshops accompany the production and are held in students' classrooms after the show. These workshops break down an element of the play and explore it through theatre games and exercises that connect Shakespeare's characters and themes to the students' lives. The workshops are designed to tie in with Montana's Common Core Standards.

The spring tour introduces students K-5 to Shakespeare through an adaptation of a Shakespeare play that makes students' first experience with Shakespeare fun, funny, and accessible. The accompanying workshops are age-appropriate and approach theatrical subjects in age-appropriate ways. A recent theatre design workshop allowed students to make paper doll costumes for the characters they had just seen in the play.

For most of our audiences, a visit from Shakespeare in the Schools may be the only theatrical performance they experience each year. There are many meaningful moments that occur during the course of the tour. The following are a few stories from the actors as reported by our touring actor-teachers.

From actor Sasha Kotyrko: "I connected with a student at about being in Speech and Debate. They told me their essay was about being transgender on a reservation and they shared to me that they wanted to move to Missoula and do their transition there. It was a really awesome conversation."  
~Wolf Point High School, Wolf Point, MT

A performance of our adaptation of *As You Like It* at Longfellow Elementary.



258 Black Box Theater  
P.O. Box 174120  
Bozeman, MT 59717-4120  
[www.shakespeareintheparks.org](http://www.shakespeareintheparks.org)

Tel 406-994-3901  
Fax 406-994-4501

From actor Marcus Cunningham: “A student walked up to me in the hallway and said “Okay I got a question for you? Was Caesar’s death justified?” And then we had a great conversation about what a leader means to people and what an action like that meant to breaking up the unity Rome might have found at the time. Then he said he was interested in drama and was going to audition for the school play the next year. It was pretty awesome.”

~Cody High School, Cody, WY



Actor-educator Jess Thigpen conducts a mirroring exercise at Chief Joseph Middle School

MSIP also sends surveys to each school the day after each performance to see how things went from their perspective. The following are a selection of comments received from teachers and students after a production of *Julius Caesar*.

“I think a lot of them realized the ambiguity of Shakespeare's works; oftentimes there is not a clear-cut message, and it's not always so easy to depict who the "bad" guy is, and who the "good" guy is - just like in life. I appreciated the talk-back that discussed our political climate, and I appreciated the workshops which covered an array of important topics relevant to our students' lives. Also, I know our Government teacher felt so happy to be involved this year! Thank you for all that you do. Seriously. Theater exposure in rural Montana is rare, and your company enlightens our students in ways they won't fully realize or appreciate until later in their lives. Bravo!”

~Teacher, Sweet Grass County High School, Big Timber, MT

“Many of our students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and would be unlikely to experience live, professional theater in any other setting. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for those students. For others, they love to see the plays brought to life as intended--not on the page or the movie screen, but on the stage. Our theater students positively rave about this experience--they get to help a little with the set and to have lunch with the actors, which gives them a little window into the life of someone who works with professional theater”

~Teacher, Helena High School



A performance of  
*Julius Caesar* at  
Chief Joseph  
Middle School

Schools pay \$800 for a day-long visit from MSIP’s educational outreach programs. However, each day on the road costs the company about \$3,000. If MSIP were able to be supported, in part, by the 100&Change grant, any funds received could help to underwrite the actual cost of production and touring not covered by school performance fees. Currently, MSIP bridges that gap through individual donations, regional grants, and small business sponsorships.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Miller  
Director of Marketing & Outreach  
Montana Shakespeare in the Parks  
406-994-3303  
[Susan@montana.edu](mailto:Susan@montana.edu)