

Schulich Children's Plays

# I Am William

Stratford  
FESTIVAL

2021 STUDY GUIDE

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TEXT BY RÉBECCA DÉRASPE  
MUSIC BY CHLOÉ LACASSE AND BENOIT LANDRY  
ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY LEANNA BRODIE  
DIRECTED BY ESTHER JUN

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# ***I AM WILLIAM* STUDY GUIDE**

## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

***I Am William***

**A Play with Music**

**Text by Rébecca Déraspe**

**Music by Chloé Lacasse and Benoit Landry**

**English Translation by Leanna Brodie**

**Directed by Esther Jun**

[I Am William House Program](#)

### **Grade and Curriculum Connections**

- Grades 3+
- Global Competencies: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/ Self-Awareness
- The Arts
- English
- Language
- Health and Physical Education
- Canadian and World Studies
- Social Sciences and Humanities

### **Content Advisory**

Deals with the impacts of living in a patriarchal society

### **Synopsis**

Margaret Shakespeare has a dazzling talent for writing, which she yearns to put to serious use. But in an age lethally suspicious of female intellect and literacy, how can she find a way to fulfill her authorial ambitions yet still survive? Fortunately, she has a brother, William, who isn't much of a writer but who wants to make it as an actor – and friends in high places have just the role for him.

Tapping into our fascination with the enigma of William Shakespeare's life and how he came to write those plays – and the seemingly endless speculation in some quarters about whether he really did – this lighthearted yet genuinely passionate interweaving of comedy, song and poetic fancy spins a playful and witty yarn that will delight younger audiences and adults alike.

## Themes and Motifs

- Power and Freedom
  - Gender Inequity
  - Self-Determination
  - Identity
- Collaboration and Change
  - Allyship
  - Family and Sibling Relationships
  - Subverting Inequitable Systems
- Love of Language
  - Writing
  - Performance
  - Poetry

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Pre-Show

- What do you already know about Shakespeare?
- What do you imagine Shakespeare was like as a kid?
- What's the relationship between history and truth?
- Who decides what goes down in history?
- Is there a historical moment, cultural event or personal experience that you think should be rewritten to tell a different story? What compels you to rewrite this story? What creative form would this rewrite take? (Now go and write it!)
- What enables people to follow their dreams?
- What are the reasons why writers choose to conceal their true identities? How does gender impact this decision?
- What does gender equity look like? What does it mean to you?
- What are the qualities of a good sibling?
- Why do people choose to write stories? What are the reasons people write plays?

### Post-Show

- What surprised you most about the production?
- Margaret loves writing more than anything and can't imagine her life without it. What in your life makes you feel this way?
- Margaret and William's father, John, treats his two children very differently because of gender. Why do you think he believes this is right? What might prompt him to change his views?
- The play is set at a time when Elizabeth I was Queen. How might having a female monarch have impacted the characters' attitudes toward women?
- In what ways does William demonstrate allyship in the play?
- What does Mary learn from her daughter, Margaret?

- Most plays printed during the time when Shakespeare was writing were anonymous or collaboratively created. Why do we know his name, but not the names of any women writers from the same era?
- If you are familiar with some of Shakespeare's plays and his life, what references did you notice during the play (e.g. John's glove making business, the little fairies, "one fell swoop," etc.)?
- How did the music and choreography in the play impact your experience of the story?

## MINDS ON

**Objective:** This exercise invites students to consider some of the key themes explored in the play: gender equity, writers/writing and history/fame.

**Materials:** Library and/or internet access

**Directions:**

- Set a timer for three minutes and invite students to brainstorm and record as a class all of the writers that they know.
- Notice how many of these writers are men. If there is a big gender imbalance, ask students to talk about why they think this might be the case.
- Next, invite students in pairs or small groups to research a woman writer of their choosing who writes under a pseudonym. Ask them to share a little bit about their writing and the reasons why they chose to conceal their identity.

**Debriefing Questions:**

- What were the common themes across all of your chosen writers?
- How many of these writers are contemporary and how many of them are historical writers?
- For those writing in the past, do you think they still would have chosen to write under a pseudonym today? Why or why not?

## CONNECTION TO THE ARCHIVES

William Shakespeare has appeared in some of our plays before, including in the 2000 production of *Elizabeth Rex* in which Peter Hutt played the character of Shakespeare. Based on the image below or on your experience of this production, how does this representation of Shakespeare compare to how this character was portrayed in the 2021 production? Did anything surprise you?



The Stratford Festival's Archives maintains, conserves and protects recent and historical records about the Festival and makes those materials available to people around the world. Our multi-media archival holdings date from 1952 and extend through to contemporary materials. We house correspondence, production records, Board minutes, photography, design artwork, scores, audio-visual records, costumes, props and set decoration, press releases and other promotional materials: these document the processes that bring a production to the stage and reflect all aspects of mounting a play, from the administrative to the creative and beyond.

In addition to visiting the Archives in person, you can explore our [online catalogue](#).

## RESOURCES

[85 Queen: Stratford Festival Presents \*I Am William\* – Interview with Director Esther Jun](#)

[The Hidden Women Writers of the Elizabethan Theater](#)

[I Am William Showstarters](#)

[Queen Elizabeth I: Elizabeth Tudor](#)

Contact us to book a streamed viewing of this production for your class: [groups@stratfordfestival.ca](mailto:groups@stratfordfestival.ca)