

More than 150 Chicagoland high school students
and teachers unite for

Chicago Shakespeare Slam

Celebrating the power of play and imagination using Shakespeare's language
and fostering the development of crucial social, emotional, and literacy skills

Final Bout at Chicago Shakespeare Theater TONIGHT



Chicago—December 9, 2024—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#) brings high school students from across Chicago and the wider metropolitan area together to celebrate the power of play, community, language, and imagination in the eighth annual [Chicago Shakespeare Slam](#). A series of workshops and regional preliminary bouts throughout the fall culminate in a spirited, fun-filled **Final Bout tonight, December 9 at 6:00 p.m.** on the stage of CST's Jentes Family Courtyard Theater. Cheered on by a full house of fellow participants, family, and friends, teams perform scenes from Shakespeare's plays and original pieces that pair Shakespeare's words with contemporary sources, ranging from Taylor Swift to the Oxford English Dictionary.

SLAM teams advancing to the Final Bout include: **Fenton Community High School** (Bensenville), **Kenwood Academy** (Chicago), **Lake View High School** (Chicago), **Little Village Lawndale High School** (Chicago), **Mundelein High School** (Mundelein), **Niles North High School** (Skokie), **Oak Park and River Forest High School** (Oak Park), **O-School** (Chicago), **Round Lake High School** (Round Lake), **Senn High School** (Chicago), **Thornton Fractional North High School** (Calumet City), and **Warren Township High School** (Warren).

The program helps students develop and refine crucial skills, such as social-emotional competencies, critical literacy, meaningful collaboration, and effective presentation. Each year, SLAM participants engage with Shakespeare's work through two rounds. In one, they stage a scene from a Shakespeare play, with this year's selections including scenes from *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It*. In the other, the "Dream Round," students devise performances that pair a particular character, theme, or plot point from a Shakespeare play with more contemporary texts. This year, students have cut, spliced, and re-imagined language from one of Shakespeare's most well-known comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, alongside the musical adaptation of *The Color Purple*, songs by Taylor Swift, and the Oxford English Dictionary, to name a few.

"In our digital world, it's critical for young people to have a brave space to explore their creativity, cultivate authentic relationships, build their capacity for empathy, and find strength in their voice through storytelling," said **Nora Carroll**, CST's Director of Lifelong Learning and Education. "Over several weeks, we witness students come out of their shells, wrestle with Shakespeare's 400-year-old language, and make it their own. It is truly a joy to witness their growth. Pairing Shakespeare with the works of Alice Walker or Taylor Swift requires incredible dexterity in language and critical thinking skills. The fact that their performances are not only smart and nuanced but also entertaining speaks to the rich cultural capital in our city and region."

SLAM encourages students to "Be Seen, Be Heard, Be Creative, Take Risks, and Play as an Ensemble." Student participants expressed how the program offers the opportunity to explore their relationship to Shakespeare's work and celebrate their own individuality. A student from Niles North High School said, "Everyone felt seen and heard performing the pieces they created," and a student from Tri-Point High School shared, "I stand on stage and it's okay for me to just be myself." A teacher from Round Lake High School shared that after experiencing SLAM, "My students became more confident to take risks & use their voices."

SLAM 2024 emcees are **Charence Higgins** and **Cage Sebastian Pierre**, who keep students laughing, dancing, and supporting one another in the high-energy party atmosphere of the bouts. Higgins returns after emceeing last year's Final Bout, with recent credits include Viola in CST's Shakes in the City production of *Twelfth Night*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* at Court Theatre, and *brother sister cyborg space* at Raven Theatre; Pierre is an actor and fight choreographer, with CST credits including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *A Q Brothers Christmas Carol*. In addition to Higgins and Pierre, three other educator artists have guided participants through the program: **Sonia Goldberg**, **Ariya Hawkins**, and **Kevin Long**.

SLAM is made possible with support from **Allstate Insurance Company** and **Kimberlee S. Herold**.

Chicago Shakespeare Slam is just one component of CST's award-winning [education programs](#), which have impacted approximately two million students to date. Recognized as a national leader in the field, the Theater's **Team Shakespeare** arts-in-literacy programs support the work in classrooms across the region for tens of thousands of students each year by bringing complex texts to life onstage and through a variety of professional learning opportunities for teachers. In Spring 2025, Chicago Shakespeare will welcome students to the Theater with [Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream](#), a 75-minute production of Shakespeare's comedy. Adapted and directed by artistic director **Edward Hall**, the production will be presented for weekday student matinees as well as 11:00 a.m. matinees for the public on Saturdays, **February 8–March 8, 2025**, in the Courtyard Theater. This year, Chicago Shakespeare also welcomed a new cohort to the [Bard Core](#) program: a year-long professional learning seminar that introduces Chicago Public School teachers to drama-based strategies for engaging students—including struggling and reluctant readers, and English language learners—with Shakespeare and other challenging texts. Educators can take advantage of professional development opportunities, free workshops, and digital classroom resources throughout the year.

To learn more, visit www.chicagoshakes.com/slam.

The schools participating in Chicago Shakespeare Slam 2024 include:

Fenton Community High School, Bensenville
Hyde Park Academy, Chicago
Intrinsic Schools – Belmont, Chicago
Kenwood Academy, Chicago
Lake View High School, Chicago
Lincoln Park High School, Chicago
Little Village Lawndale High School, Chicago
Mundelein High School, Mundelein
Niles North High School, Skokie
Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park
O-School, Chicago

Prosser Career Academy, Chicago
Round Lake High School, Round Lake
Senn High School, Chicago
Sullivan House High School, Chicago
Taft High School, Chicago
Thornton Fractional North High School, Calumet City
Tri-Point High School, Cullom
Universal School, Bridgeview
University of Chicago Lab School, Chicago
Warren Township High School, Warren

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER (CST)

A Regional Tony Award recipient, Chicago Shakespeare Theater produces a bold and innovative year-round season that includes Shakespeare, original plays, musicals, family programming, and international theatrical events. CST is committed to serving as a cultural center across its three stages—the 700+ seat Yard, 500 seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, and the 200 seat Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater Upstairs as well as in classrooms, neighborhoods, and venues around the world. CST has a deep commitment to education and lifelong learning with robust programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted theater—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that illuminate the complexities, ambiguities, and wonders of our world. www.chicagoshakes.com

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