

**Title of Session:** Alt/Correctional Ed Forum-Shakespeare Behind Bars

**Moderator:** BJ Berquist

**Guest Speaker:** Curt Tofteland

**Title of File:** 20050519altedSSB

**Date:** May 19, 2005

Room: After School Online

**BJB2:** Curt, can you explain to David what your project is?

**CurtT:** where 2 or 3 are gathered . . .

**DavidWe:** I once was Demetrius in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

**BJB2** . o O ( and how the documentary came about )

**CurtT:** ah, the not so nice young man . . .

**CurtT:** gold digger

**CurtT** smiles

**CurtT:** the documentary about my Shakespeare behind bars program was made by an independent film company based in LA

**CurtT:** it is 92 minutes

**BJB2:** how did they find out about it?

**CurtT:** they read an article about it in American theatre magazine

**BJB2** smiles. Cool

**DavidWe:** Can one rent a copy to see it?

**CurtT:** then the Christian Science Monitor's 2 stories

**CurtT:** not yet

**DavidWe:** When was it released?

**CurtT:** it is currently making the film festival circuit

**CurtT:** started with Sundance in January

**DavidWe** . o O ( Cannes? )

**DavidWe:** Very cool

**CurtT:** and has since been to Nashville

**CurtT:** Boston, where it won a jury award

**DavidWe:** Congratulations.

**BJB2:** PBS is interested?

**CurtT:** Columbia. Mo

**CurtT:** yes

**DavidWe:** When did you start your Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB?) program?

**CurtT:** itvs will broadcast on pbs in 2006

**CurtT:** as will the bbc

**DavidWe:** Great

**CurtT:** 1995

**DavidWe:** What was the impetus; how did you get the idea?

**BJB2:** Curt was a guest speaker here in TI about SSBB a few years ago

**CurtT:** I have worked with at-risk populations for 25 years

**DavidWe** nods

**CurtT:** and Shakespeare for 17 of those years

**CurtT:** natural progression for me to go to the prison system

**BJB2** . o O ( there is nothing natural in the prison system! )

**CurtT:** the greatest human behavior laboratory on earth

**DavidWe:** What got your started working with at-risk populations 25 years ago?

**CurtT:** I have always been for the underdog

**CurtT:** for the oppressed

**CurtT:** the disenfranchised

**DavidWe:** Where did you go to high school?

**CurtT:** North Dakota

**DavidWe:** I'm in New Jersey, near New York City. I went to Swarthmore College and I've mostly lived around Philadelphia since college

**DavidWe:** I've been to Devil's Lake, ND

**CurtT:** I was raised about 60 miles from dl

**DavidWe:** In a blizzard - the power went out at Grand Forks airport

**DavidWe:** Impressive weather

**CurtT:** I went to undergrad in grand forks

**DavidWe** nods

**CurtT:** we are the best at blizzards

**DavidWe:** flat

**CurtT:** in the east yes

**BJB2:** can you tell us some of the hurdles you had to overcome to get SBB into the prison system, Curt?

**CurtT:** but the topography changes every 50 miles

**DavidWe** . o O ( BJ is good at getting things back on topic )

**DavidWe** nods

**BJB2** tries to keep us on track

**CurtT** smiles

**CurtT:** what do you do David?

**DavidWe:** I help math and science teachers, for the most part, learn how to implement technology

**CurtT:** ah

**CurtT:** I need lessons from you

**CurtT** smiles

**DavidWe:** 13 years ago, we got a big National Science Foundation grant at Swarthmore College to start what is now The Math Forum - [www.mathforum.org](http://www.mathforum.org)

**DavidWe:** We had to recruit teachers in and around Philadelphia and teach them how to do email - we bribed them with food and free Internet access

**CurtT** smiles

**BJB2:** Curt, you should think about having a digital quilt square on the Peace Blanket

**DavidWe:** I met Bj (when was that, at the Hershey Hotel, Bj, do you recall?) because The Math Forum and Tapped In collaborated as fellow NSF-funded projects

**CurtT:** you will have to tell me more about that

**BJB2** nods. Curt, you should join the TI group Blanket the World with Peace

**CurtT:** I have been asked to teach an on-line theatre class

**BJB2:** it's a digital quilt built on the theme of peace through the resolution of conflict.

**CurtT:** cool

**BJB2:** cool, Curt. Where would you do the teaching?

**CurtT:** I would like to know more about it

**CurtT:** Jefferson community college

**BJB2:** we're trying to make the peace quilt a clearing house of sorts for peace projects...there are so many great ones. And having a theater presence would be great

**CurtT:** I am a bit intimidated by the idea

**DavidWe:** Did you study theatre in college, Curt?

**CurtT:** yes

**CurtT:** bfa & mfa

**CurtT:** performance

**BJB2:** <http://www.cedarnet.org/emig/peace/>

**CurtT:** thanks

**BJB2:** . o O ( that's the peace blanket )

**CurtT:** cool

**BJB2:** each digital square can be one link deep

**CurtT:** ah

**BJB2:** so all you'd have to do is create a digital square and have it linked to a webpage describing SBB

**CurtT:** yes

**CurtT:** thanks for the info

**BJB2:** have you finally gotten recognition from the prison administration, Curt?

**CurtT:** finally, after 10 years

**CurtT:** we are now on the state webpage

**BJB2:** cheers...you certainly earned it!

**CurtT:** they are very proud to claim us now

**BJB2:** smirks...nothing succeeds like success

**CurtT:** when some national & international recognition comes our way

**CurtT:** they claim us as theirs

**CurtT:** smiles

**BJB2:** will you be expanding the program to other facilities?

**CurtT:** you can visit our webpage [kyshakes.org](http://kyshakes.org) and click on Shakespeare behind bars

**CurtT:** I just finished teaching the first drama class ever in the women's facility

**CurtT:** it went very well

**BJB2:** <http://www.kyshakes.org/>

**CurtT:** I am planning to return to teach a writing class

**CurtT:** 10 minute play

**CurtT:** format

**BJB2:** wonderful! Are you familiar with What I want my words to do to you?

**CurtT:** I will then have the women perform them

**BJB2:** . o O ( POV )

**CurtT:** and create a new program: voices from behind the wire

**HoraceR** joined the room.

**BJB2:** <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/whatiwant/>

**BJB2:** hi, Horace. Welcome

**HoraceR:** Am I on time for the Shakespeare discussion?

**DavidWe** smiles

**CurtT:** never too late

**HoraceR:** Great

**DavidWe:** Where do you teach, Horace?

**HoraceR:** Philadelphia

**DavidWe:** I'm David Weksler. I work with math and science teachers, mostly in New York and New Jersey

**BJB2:** what is your interest in Shakespeare Behind Bars, Horace?

**DavidWe** knows Philadelphia schools pretty well

**HoraceR:** Well, I always look for new and interesting ways to teach Shakespeare

**DavidWe** nods

**BJB2:** <http://www.kyshakes.org/>

**CurtT:** do you teach Shakespeare now?

**CurtT:** what ages?

**CurtT:** as literature or performances?

**HoraceR:** I teach ninth and tenth graders. When I teach Shakespeare, it's as literature. I recently taught Julius Caesar, but it never really got off the ground.

**DavidWe** thinks it is great to act out the play, when possible

**DavidWe:** In which high school do you teach, Horace?

**CurtT:** we recently performed Julius Caesar in my prison program

**CurtT:** huge success

**DavidWe** smiles

**CurtT:** toured it to 2 other prisons

**DavidWe:** Do the inmates get to go to the other prisons?

**DavidWe** . o O ( for the performances )

**CurtT:** a very apt play for our modern times

**DavidWe** nods

**CurtT:** my group toured

**CurtT:** to the women's prison

**DavidWe:** And your group is composed of...?

**CurtT:** that was the first time in the country

**CurtT:** incarcerated

**DavidWe** nods

**CurtT:** men

**CurtT:** in a medium security adult male prison

**HoraceR:** I teach at Simon Gratz High School.

**DavidWe:** So, they are permitted to travel to other places, to do the performances

**CurtT:** yes

**DavidWe** knows Simon Gratz HS

**HoraceR:** How?

**BJB2** knows how hard and long Curt had to work to make the traveling possible

**DavidWe:** I did a lot of work (1993-1999) with high schools in and around Philadelphia

**DavidWe:** Good friend of mine used to teach at Gratz

**HoraceR:** Wow

**DavidWe** smiles

**DavidWe:** We spent a year working with folks at Strawberry Mansion HS

**DavidWe:** That seemed a bit like a jail, too

**HoraceR:** I know what you mean

**DavidWe** . o O ( lots of locked doors )

**DavidWe** smiles

**HoraceR:** Do you use the regular text or the easy reading translation?

**BJB2:** do you have your male prisoners write also, Curt?

**BJB2** wonders what they say about being incarcerated

**CurtT:** we use first folio

**CurtT:** closest edition to Shakespeare

**CurtT:** I have taught male inmates to write BUT not through sbb

**BJB2:** what is the average education level of the inmates?

**BJB2** . o O ( and reading level )



**CurtT:** over the years, it has been varied from high school drop outs to master degrees

**HoraceR:** Do they have trouble understanding the text?

**CurtT:** the inmates who dropped out of school have gone on to get their GED and several have gotten associates degrees from the college

**BJB2:** how do the inmates become involved in the project?

**CurtT:** volunteer

**CurtT:** they have to be sponsored by an existing sbb member

**VennyS** joined the room.

**BJB2** bows to Venny

**HoraceR:** My biggest challenge is helping the students to understand what's happening

**CurtT:** the inmates self select

**BJB2:** very cool, Curt

**CurtT:** teach it through performance

**CurtT:** not through sitting and reading

**VennyS** bows to you

**CurtT:** Shakespeare was meant to be seen & heard, not read

**HoraceR:** So, as we read, we perform?

**VennyS** . o O ( experiencing? )

**CurtT:** yes

**HoraceR:** Great idea.

**CurtT:** use videos of productions

**CurtT:** show 5 versions of the same scene from 5 different productions

**CurtT:** show the students that there is no ONE way to do Shakespeare

**CurtT:** always open to interpretation

**HoraceR:** There are that many varieties for each of his plays?

**CurtT:** yes, and some plays have many more versions

**BJB2:** where do you access these versions, Curt?

**CurtT:** visit poor yorick

**BJB2:** alas!

**HoraceR:** ?

**CurtT:** company located in Stratford, Ontario

**VennyS:** poor yorick?

**BJB2:** <http://www.pooryorick.com/>

**CurtT:** <http://www.bardcentral.com/>

**CurtT:** also the writing company has a Shakespeare section in its catalogue

**CurtT:** amazon.com

**CurtT:** too

**HoraceR:** So Curt, what are your future plans?

**BJB2:** great. Thanks, Curt

**CurtT:** continue the work

**CurtT:** start a writing program in the women's prison

**BJB2:** Horace, he's going to become rich and famous and forget all us earthlings

**CurtT:** start a program for ex-offenders

**HoraceR:** Keep up the great work, and thanks for the advice lol

**CurtT:** the ideas never end

**CurtT:** as does the need

**CurtT:** good luck

**BJB2:** I'd be interested in the program for x-offenders

**BJB2:** because of the push for transitions

**CurtT:** I would like to start a Shakespeare beyond the bars

**CurtT:** for alumni

**CurtT:** to do the work on the outside

**BJB2** smiles. That sounds terrific

**CurtT:** great talking to ya'll

**BJB2:** perhaps start a mentoring program for newly released inmates

**DavidWe:** Thanks, Curt

**CurtT:** visit our webpage for more infor

**DavidWe:** which is?

**VennyS:** url?

**CurtT:** [www.kyshakes.org](http://www.kyshakes.org)

**BJB2:** Thanks so much for braving the storms and leading this discussion, Curt

**DavidWe** nods

**BJB2** waves goodnight

**CurtT:** my pleasure

**CurtT:** goodnight

**DavidWe:** Thanks, again, Curt. Good luck

**VennyS:** Thanks

**BJB2** left the room (signed off).