

# Shakespeare in a Jersey

by Bronwyn Graves, editor-in-chief

“Et tu, Brutè?” croaked Eddie George as he slumped to the ground, his toga covered in blood. The EHHS students, who made up the majority of the audience, sat forward in their seats and watched as Roman senators knelt over the bloody body.

“It was so emotional. Eddie George is a legit actor. I found myself angry with Brutus and the other senators when they betrayed Caesar,” says Dacy Thomasson, a fan of the retired football star.

However, George’s presence in the Shakespearean production *Julius Caesar* provoked quizzical looks from some. Surely the former Tennessee Titans’ running back would not fit in with the more qualified actors of the Nashville Shakespeare Festival.

“I pleasantly was surprised that there wasn’t an ability gap between Eddie George and the seasoned Shakespearean actors,” says English teacher Will Penner. “It seemed like he was there on merit, and he worked seamlessly into the play.”

Penner, an avid lover of Shakespeare, spent about 15 hours coordinating the trip that allowed more than 140 students to attend a premier of the play *Julius Caesar* for free.

“Shakespeare is always the most difficult unit for many high school students, and it’s met with the most groans. I

hoped that by seeing a Shakespearean play, students would change the way they thought about reading [his works],” Penner explains as his reason for planning the trip.

Many of the students in the audience had prior knowledge of *Julius Caesar*, as they had taken Penner’s Honors English 10 class. His students had read the complicated play out loud as part of the curriculum. But as many of the students discovered, reading a play and experiencing a play are two different things.

“When we read in class, you couldn’t hear the emotion in the lines,” says Austin Toy, a junior in Penner’s English class.

“Watching the actors’ emotions and reactions helped me understand the meaning of what they were saying,” says sophomore Sarah Miller, whose class started reading the play before the trip and finished it a few days later. “Now, when I read the play, I remember the actors’ behaviors and it helps me understand the language.”

Students who went on the trip were very well behaved, according to faculty sponsors.

“The students were respectful, responsible, and represented our school well,” says Christina Dressler, a chaperone on the trip.

“I was impressed with the behavior and attitudes of the students, and even more so with the quality of their questions



photo by Bronwyn Graves

EHHS students exit the theater at Belmont University and search for a place to eat lunch.

[during the question and answer session with the cast of the play],” says Penner.

Because he felt that the trip was successful, Penner says that

he would like to plan a similar trip next year to see another Shakespearean play.

Who knows, maybe Derek Jeter will be in next year’s play.

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