

# THE COMEDY OF ERRORS | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S  
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

So, there are these two sets of identical twins: Two rich twins, both named Antipholus, and two poor twins, both named Dromio. But neither of them knows they have a twin! Years ago, one Antipholus/Dromio pair wound up in the town of Ephesus; the other pair ended up in Syracuse. The Dromios work as servants for the Antipholuses... Are you confused yet?

Now things get goofy. Antipholus/Dromio of Syracuse come to visit Ephesus, and they wind up going home with Adriana and Luce, the wives of the other Antipholus and Dromio, who think they've found their husbands. Then Antipholus/Dromio of Ephesus come home...

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

But soft! My door is locked. Go, bid them let us in.

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Maud, Bridget, Marian, Ciceley, Gillian, Ginn!

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

Mome, malt-horse, capon, coxcomb, idiot, patch!  
Either get thee from the door or sit down at the hatch.

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the street.

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch cold on 's feet.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Who talks within there? Ho, open the door.

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

Right, sir, I'll tell you when an you'll tell me wherefore.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Wherefore? For my dinner, I have not dined today.

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

Nor today here you must not. Come again when you may.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

What art thou that keep'st me out from the house I owe?

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio.

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

O villain, thou hast stolen both mine office and my name!  
The one ne'er got me credit, the other mickle blame.  
If thou hadst been Dromio today in my place,  
Thou wouldst have changed thy face for a name, or thy name for an ass.

## LUCE, (within)

What a coil is there, Dromio! Who are those at the gate?

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Let my master in, Luce.

## LUCE, (within)

Faith, no, he comes too late,  
And so tell your master.

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

O Lord, I must laugh.  
Have at you with a proverb: shall I set in my staff?

## LUCE, (within)

Have at you with another: that's—When, can you tell?

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

If thy name be called "Luce," Luce, thou hast answered him well.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Thou baggage, let me in.

## LUCE, (within)

Can you tell for whose sake?

## DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Master, knock the door hard.

## LUCE, (within)

Let him knock till it ache.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

You'll cry for this, minion, if I beat the door down.

## LUCE, (within)

What needs all that, and a pair of stocks in the town?

## ADRIANA, (within)

Who is that at the door that keeps all this noise?

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

By my troth, your town is troubled with unruly boys.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Are you there, wife? You might have come before.

## ADRIANA, (within)

Your wife, sir knave? Go, get you from the door.

## ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Go, fetch me something: I'll break ope the gate.

## DROMIO OF SYRACUSE, (within)

Break any breaking here, and I'll break your knave's pate.



## Underlined Words

within - inside a building (can also mean "offstage")  
Mome, malt-horse, capon, coxcomb - random Shakespeare insults!  
patch - clown  
wherefore - why  
owe - own  
office - job/position  
The one ne'er ... mickle blame - my job never gave me anything, and my name only got me in trouble  
Thou wouldst have changed... an ass - you would have traded your face for a name, and then changed that name to "ass"  
coil - disturbance  
set in my staff - hit you with my club  
baggage - good-for-nothing  
stocks - a device used for punishment  
by my troth - I swear!  
pate - head





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# THE COMEDY OF ERRORS | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

Draw

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!

A *Comedy of Errors* is a **farce**—a type of comedy that is funny because of its improbable situations and ridiculous characters. Does it make sense that two sets of twins would be separated at birth, somehow be given the same names, end up in the same working relationship, and dress/speak/act enough alike that they could be mistaken for each other... by their own wives?? **No!** It's not supposed to be realistic—it's supposed to be goofy. For these exercises, let loose! Have fun! This is not a serious play.

Most of what makes this scene fun is *seeing* it on stage. How would you stage this scene? How would you design it? What does your *Comedy of Errors* look like?

This whole scene is written in rhyming couplets—pairs of lines that rhyme at the end.

How does speaking in rhyming couplets feel different from the way you normally speak? Or from the other Shakespeare you've read? Try it a few different ways: like normal speech, like a Looney Tune, like dropping the mic...



The characters mostly speak in complete lines, but a few times two people *share a line*, complete with a rhyme. Read over those moments. Are they cutting each other off? Escalating? What's the effect of sharing a line in a scene like this?

## CONGRATULATIONS!

You just got hired as the **director** of *A Comedy of Errors*. And you've got one big problem to solve in this scene: More than half of the lines are spoken by people who are "within."

So...

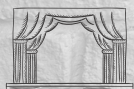
How will you stage this scene? Is there a physical wall? What does it look like? Or are the actors pantomiming (pretending there's a wall/door when there's nothing but air)? Or something else?

(Remember that there are three types of stage—and you get to pick which one you want.)

Proscenium

Thrust

In the round



Audience on 1 side.

Audience on 3 sides.

Audience on all sides.

## CONGRATULATIONS!

You just got hired as the **set designer** of *A Comedy of Errors*. The director has decided that the play will be **in the round**, and there should be an actual, physical wall of some sort between the people "within" and the people on the street.

Groovy.

But they just left all the problem-solving to you (pshh... typical!). Now the wall is **your** problem. So, what does it look like? Where is it located? How high is it? How thick? What is it made of? How will you make sure the audience can see and hear everyone?

## CONGRATULATIONS!

You just got hired as the **costume designer** of *A Comedy of Errors*... and the director has no vision! You're allowed to do whatever you want!

(Note: this never happens in the real world.)

What do the costumes look like? Are they flowy? Fitted? Patterned? Realistic? Clownish? Stylish? Is it set in a specific time period? Is everyone color-coordinated, or is this a kaleidoscopic cesspool of goofiness?

**IMPORTANT:** How are the twins dressed?