

GETTING INVOLVED

The Winter's Tale

Directing Challenge for Students

Exit pursued by a bear.

Directing Shakespeare's most famous stage direction

Mid-way through the play in Act III, Antigonus is carrying out the order to abandon the baby Perdita when a bear unexpectedly enters, pursues him and kills him offstage.

Your challenge

Imagine you are directing *The Winter's Tale* and you need to tackle the 'exit pursued by a bear' stage direction.

Present your directorial ideas for creating this moment on stage and make sure you take into consideration the contribution from your design team.

One key decision as director is the audience impact you are aiming for and how this moment fits with your production as a whole. How will you justify your interpretation of this event on stage? For example, is this a frightening moment, a moment of high comedy, or something else? The bear incident is right in the centre of the play and could be seen as a transition moment between the tragedy of the first half set in Sicilia and the comedy of the second half in Bohemia.

The only rule for your theoretical production, even with unlimited budget, is that using a real bear is not an option (sorry) but do reference the evidence from the social and historical content to how this moment might have been staged in 1611 (see below).

You can present your ideas in written form, through sketches and diagrams or use your computer and digital skills.

Bear history

In the UK, it is estimated that bears became extinct in the wild around 1,500 years ago. However, captive bears were a familiar sight in Shakespeare's London, especially near the Globe in Southwark, where bear-baiting was a popular and bloody spectator sport.

Many scholars believe there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the 'bear' in the original Globe production was, in fact, a bear. Yes, a real bear coming on stage for a brief cameo appearance. Perhaps a semi-tame bear with a bear handler. As well as the bear baiting taking place nearby, some of the men running The Lord Admiral's Men, Shakespeare's competitor's, also owned the license for bear keeping. It all adds up but like so much about the original performances, we can only speculate.

You might find the following links useful:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear-baiting>

<http://theshakespeareblog.com/2013/01/bears/>

For some light relief, listen to David Tennant being given 'Exit pursued by a bear' as his phrase on 'Just A Minute'.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p02jmd8z>

