



# ACTORS FROM THE LONDON STAGE

## Actors From The London Stage Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Actors From The London Stage?

**Actors From The London Stage** (AFTLS) is a residency program that has toured American colleges and universities since 1975. Each five-actor troupe features a rotating, gender-fluid cast of classically-trained British actors from such prestigious companies as Shakespeare's Globe, the National Theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Its five-day residencies include tour de force performances of a Shakespeare play and dozens of collaborative campus workshops tailored to enrich coursework across the academic spectrum. Actors are auditioned and selected in London by our board of Associate Directors.

### How did AFTLS begin?

Actors From The London Stage was developed and co-founded in 1975 by **Sir Patrick Stewart**, then a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and **Dr. Homer "Murph" Swander**, a distinguished professor the University of California-Santa Barbara. According to Stewart, "Actors have a personal connection with dramatic texts, which is distinctive and different from the scholars. Our program gives the actor a unique platform from which to explore with professors and students what he or she does and why it is done."



### How does an AFTLS residency work?

Artists tour the United States during the spring and fall academic terms. Artists arrive and depart each campus on Monday. Sunday is the Artists' day off; no residency activities should be scheduled. Tuesday through Saturday is available for residency activities. Residency activities may occur between 9am and 11pm.

- **Performances:** Artists present up to three performances of a full-length play by William Shakespeare. The five-member ensemble deftly combines innovative

staging with essential props and simple costumes. Each actor shares responsibility for the direction of the play, performs two or three major roles, and several minor ones. Through imagination and collaboration, the cast conjures Shakespeare's immortal words and worlds into being.

- **Workshops:** Artists discuss, demonstrate, and teach how Shakespeare, rhetorical and textual analysis, and the tools of a professional actor can enhance critical reading and public presentation skills. Participants learn how texts become scripts, words become actions, and actions become meaning. Artists work directly with professors to create custom content to serve the unique needs of each session. This customization creates workshops guaranteed to heighten each student's intellectual curiosity regardless of discipline. Whether coaching accounting students on successful presentation skills, or instructing law students in the art of persuasion, AFTLS workshops promote a campus-wide dialogue inspired by the works of William Shakespeare.

### **When you say “services,” what do you mean?**

A "service" is defined as the appearance of one Artist in one of the two residency activities described above. Each residency is entitled to up to fifty services, ten on each of the five residency days: Tuesday through Saturday. Each single-Artist workshop counts as one service. If a workshop utilizes more than one actor, it will be charged for additional services accordingly. Workshops may last up to two hours. Each performance counts as five services since all five Artists participate. Each Artist is scheduled for up to two services per day.



***"This immensely gifted troupe has the power to bring to vivid life anything to which it turns its attention." – Stephen Greenblatt, General Editor of The Norton Shakespeare***

### **How do I make the most of my week with AFTLS?**

Making the most of your AFTLS residency is our top priority. The AFTLS office is happy to discuss classes that have been particularly successful in the past, and can help you craft workshops that suit your individual needs. In the most basic sense, the best classes are flexible by nature and allow the actor to draw on their unique skills to impart the lesson. Upon arriving at the host institution, each faculty member who has requested a workshop will have a chance to

speak one-on-one with the actor assigned to their class during the faculty meeting. This conversation establishes the goals for the visit, and gives the actor some insight into the teaching style. Remember, the more flexible faculty are, the more opportunities the actor has to engage the students in active learning.

### **Does the residency need to be a full week? Can I schedule a performance without a residency?**

The intensive and far-reaching residencies developed by AFTLS are designed to last a full week on each campus. The length of the visit allows for up to 50 services, which provide a deep and engaging residency across campus. Each week includes up to three performances of one of Shakespeare's masterpieces. The performances are a capstone of the week and are an essential component of the residency.

***"Superior involvement, meaningful activities, and thoughtful feedback to the class. What expertise and energy they brought with them; we would welcome AFTLS back any time." – Donell Stines, University of North Carolina, Charlotte***

### **Does an AFTLS residency extend beyond theatre and English classes?**

Yes! AFTLS actors bring their unique knowledge to a wide variety of classes, not only courses on theatre and Shakespeare. In the past, AFTLS has staged workshops for disciplines across the academic spectrum. The actors bring a unique skillset (focused on their training and experience in the performing arts) that is relevant to any course of study. For instance, AFTLS actors have led workshops on public speaking in accounting classes, debated the "morality of character" in a philosophy course, taught elements of rhetoric to aspiring lawyers, and demonstrated the importance of active storytelling for budding curators seeking to bring works of art to life for visitors to museums and galleries. For classes where studying dramatic texts is not traditionally a focus (e.g. business, law, etc.), the actors are adept at illustrating how their unique skillset and approach to problem solving can be applied to the field.



### **What are some examples of how an actor might engage theater and English students specifically?**

The actors' primary focus when working with Shakespeare and other dramatic literature is interpretation: interpretation of the text as performance and interpretation of the text as poetry. The actors get all members of a class involved in reading and thinking about the play. Sometimes the actor will talk the class through the lines in a variety of ways—by reading only the consonants, by reading only the vowels, or by stressing each word he or she wants to emphasize. This aids the students' understanding of character motivations, subtext, and linguistic textures. The actor may ask a class to "act out" a particular scene from a play, or he or she may perform one scene in multiple ways to illustrate the effect of an actor's/director's interpretation on the performance.

***"From superb classes to magical performances, AFTLS was truly impressive. The college community is uplifted and inspired." – Helga Duncan, Stonehill College***

#### **Can the actor lecture on specific areas relevant to a course?**

The hard and fast rule is this: On academic matters, the instructor is the expert, the actor the amateur. Since the actors are not professors, the best results are achieved when they are allowed to play from their theatrical strengths and are not asked to pose as authorities on issues outside their realm. The actors are experts on play scripts— but not ALL texts. They will be well prepared to develop classes out of their work with the Shakespeare play AFTLS is performing, and will also have experience with other dramatic texts and other areas of study.

#### **Can the actor attend a class to read a text for the students?**

Although it may sound lovely in a British voice, bringing the actor into a class simply to read a scene or passage is generally not the best use of the class time. The actors excel at working with the students—getting them to read, act, interpret, and engage.

#### **Finally...**

A single workshop in a course is only one part of the AFTLS residency experience. Please encourage the students to attend a performance of the play. The students are generally excited to see "their actor" perform, and will certainly come away from the experience with a newfound appreciation of Shakespeare and the arts!

***"There wasn't a moment to be found where you weren't utterly captivated by the group's creativity." – Katherine Waddell, BroadwayWorld.com***

***"It felt like my classroom was getting bigger. My students clearly felt their creative minds expanding in the actors' presence." – Rebekah Maggor, Vanderbilt University***

***"AFTLS was exceptional, amazing, electric. The choreography was creative; the timing superb; the stage never static, every moment as precise and sacred as a ballet." – Mia Cabello, San Antonio Paisano***

**Still have questions?**

Would you like to know more? [Get in touch today](#) and let's talk about how Actors From The London Stage can enrich your campus.