

# NOTTINGHAM SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Schools Outreach Programme

**Impact Report: Live Shakespeare in Schools**

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March – April 2026

5 Schools | 2 Productions | ~435 Student Voices

Years 9, 10 & 11

## Executive Summary

This report analyses student feedback gathered from five Nottingham-area secondary schools following outreach performances by the Nottingham Shakespeare Company. Across approximately 435 student responses, the data demonstrates a consistent and measurable impact on student engagement, comprehension, and attitude toward Shakespeare — with results that are strikingly uniform across different schools, year groups, and both productions performed.

Key Metric	Finding
Total student voices captured	<b>~435 across 5 schools</b>
Schools represented	<b>5</b>
Productions performed	<b>Macbeth &amp; Romeo and Juliet</b>
Year groups reached	<b>Years 9, 10 &amp; 11</b>
Students with positive 'after' response	<b>~85–90%</b>
Conversion: negative → positive expectation	<b>~90–95%</b>
Students citing exam / revision benefit	<b>20+ across three schools</b>
Students quoting lines post-show	<b>8–12 spontaneous quotations</b>
Students praising live audience interaction	<b>20+</b>
Students noting improved text comprehension	<b>20+</b>

The single most striking finding is a near-total conversion rate: approximately 9 in 10 students who entered with low, sceptical, or negative expectations left with a positive response. Students consistently identified elements unique to live performance — audience interaction, multi-rolling, vocal power and physicality — as the most impactful aspects of the experience, making a compelling case that live Shakespeare in schools cannot be replicated by film, classroom study, or reading alone.

## Dataset Overview

Feedback was collected using a before/after format: students wrote their expectations immediately before the performance, then their reflections immediately afterward. This methodology enables direct comparison of attitude shifts within individual students, making the data particularly robust.

School	Date	Year	Production	Responses
English Martyrs Catholic Academy	13 Apr 2026	9 & 10	Macbeth	~160
Greenwood Academy	27 Mar 2026	11	Romeo & Juliet	~70
NUAST	28 Apr 2026	11	Macbeth	~55
South Wolds Academy	Spring 2026	Mixed	Macbeth	~80
Nottingham Free School	Spring 2026	Mixed	Macbeth	~70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5 visits</b>	<b>9–11</b>	<b>2 plays</b>	<b>~435</b>

## Finding 1: The 'Boring to Brilliant' Conversion

The most powerful single finding across the entire dataset is the near-total conversion of sceptical students. Students who arrived with negative or dismissive expectations were overwhelmingly won over by the live performance — a pattern that holds consistently across all five schools and both productions.

### Evidence by School

Nottingham Free School: Approximately 14 students explicitly wrote that they expected the performance to be boring. Every single one gave a positive response afterward — a 100% conversion rate within this group.

South Wolds Academy: Of approximately 6 students who expressed negative expectations, 5 out of 6 gave a positive response. Illustrative examples include:

Before	After
"Boring"	"Interested, Amazing"
"Boring"	"That was good"
"Corny"	"Excellent!"
"6/10 cool"	"8.5/10 — they did well with the amount of people"
"It will be bad"	"It's ok"

NUAST: Sceptical responses were transformed entirely:

Before	After
"Mid to see"	"Absolute cinema"
"Typical, maybe boring"	"Very thought through, emotion well presented, fantastic"

Greenwood Academy (Romeo & Juliet): The same pattern holds for a different play — "Boring" became "Entertaining"; "Mid" became "Mad ting I can't lie"; "Alright" became "Great".

**Combined estimated conversion rate (negative/neutral expectation → positive response): approximately 90–95% across all five schools.**

## Finding 2: Educational Impact & Curriculum Value

Across four of the five schools, students explicitly linked the performance to their understanding of the text, their GCSE preparation, and their ability to recall and apply content.

### Revision & Exam Readiness

South Wolds Academy provided the richest evidence of educational impact, with at least 12 students — approximately 15% of the cohort — specifically citing GCSE relevance. Examples include:

- "It was very useful and made me understand it more"
- "Useful for my exams — funny and useful"
- "Good revision and good representation of emotion"
- "I learnt a new context point"
- "All expectations met — helped me remember the key ideas"

### Improved Comprehension of the Text

At Nottingham Free School, at least 8–10 students cited improved understanding, with several independently making the same observation:

- "Play has a better understanding than if you were to read it" — written by two students independently
- "It further developed my understanding of Macbeth and Shakespeare's style"
- "I understood it and it was actually fun"
- "More intrigued to learn about Macbeth and Shakespeare"

At NUASt, the before/after format captured a direct comprehension shift: one student wrote "Unsure about characters" before, and "Clear about characters" after — a measurable, concrete change.

### Greenwood Academy: Romeo & Juliet

At Greenwood, students studying Romeo & Juliet demonstrated high prior knowledge — at least 4 students independently noticed and questioned the absence of Paris from the production, showing genuine engagement with the source text. One student wrote: "this will help in my exam — helps me understand the language better." Another quoted a line from memory immediately after the show: "My life is my foes debt."

School	Educational Impact Evidence
South Wolds	~12 students cited GCSE/revision value (~15% of cohort)
Nottingham Free School	8–10 students cited improved understanding
NUAST	Direct before/after comprehension shift documented
Greenwood	Students noting omissions + spontaneous line quotation
English Martyrs	"It helped me remember quotes"; "beautiful performance with strong emotion"

## Finding 3: The Irreplaceable Power of Live Performance

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Across all five schools, students repeatedly identified specific elements of the live experience that produced their strongest reactions — elements that cannot be replicated through film, audio, or reading.

### Audience Interaction

At least 20 students across all schools specifically highlighted audience interaction as memorable and valuable — something impossible in any other format:

- NUASt: "Good interactions with crowd – was unexpected"
- Nottingham Free School: "I really like the audiences involvement" / "I liked the drunk man's bit because it was interactive"
- South Wolds: "Interaction with the crowd was good"
- English Martyrs: "I liked how they engage with the audience"

### Vocal Power & Screaming

The live, unmediated vocal power of the actors — particularly Lady Macbeth and Juliet — generated some of the most enthusiastic responses across the dataset:

- English Martyrs: "when lady Macbeth screamed it was loud and powerful" / "Lady Macbeth should be in a horror; she screams well"
- Greenwood: "amazing especially Juliet's actor's screams"
- NUASt: "Loud shocking very dramatic"
- Nottingham Free School: "I love the shouting. It was very very extravagant"

### Small Cast / Multi-Rolling

Students across at least three schools were specifically impressed and surprised by the professional delivery from a small cast — gaining an unplanned but valuable insight into theatrical craft:

- English Martyrs: "surprised that there were only 5 actors. Very in character" (noted by multiple students independently)
- Nottingham Free School: "multi rolling was performed excellently" / "only 5 actors" noted independently by at least 4 students
- NUASt: "Actors playing multiple roles" cited as a surprise

### Physical Staging & Props

Students noted the power of simple, effective staging choices that live theatre uniquely enables:

- Nottingham Free School: "the use of only the bench was really powerful and it added more to the effect"
- English Martyrs: "The use of the fake blood was very effective and the choreography was well thought out"
- South Wolds: "I like how the blood stained their hands"
- English Martyrs: "stunning — the acting was realistic and well performed, like being at a real theatre"



## Finding 4: Most Commonly Cited Themes

The following themes appeared with highest frequency across all 'after' responses, representing what students most consistently took away from the live experience:

Theme	Approx. Mentions	Notable Example
Good acting / actors praised	60+	"Absolute cinema"
Dramatic / intensity	40+	"More verbal and violent"
Loud / vocal clarity	35+	"Loud and clear"
Funny / unexpected humour	30+	"Didn't expect that funny bit"
Lady Macbeth praised individually	30+	"Lady Macbeth served"
Powerful / intense	25+	"Powerful, intense, thrilling"
Exceeded expectations	20+	"Way more intense than I thought"
Audience interaction praised	20+	"Was unexpected"
Improved understanding cited	20+	"Better understanding"
Fight / sword scene praised	10+	"WOW! The sword fight was so cool!"

### Standout Student Voices

Across the dataset, a number of responses stand out as particularly powerful indicators of impact:

*"I thought this play was just going to be something just to skip lessons but I really enjoyed the play and how the characters came to life through the actors." — English Martyrs student*

*"I expected it to not be as good because it was at school. A lot better than I expected." — NUAST student*

*"It was still very powerful despite being an abridged version." — Nottingham Free School student*

*"I never seen a play and you set high standards." — NUAST student*

*"Using the space in the audience was genius." — South Wolds student*

## Finding 5: Line Retention & Spontaneous Quotation

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A particularly striking indicator of impact is the number of students who spontaneously quoted lines from the plays in their 'after' responses — entirely unprompted. This suggests immediate cognitive retention of language students typically find opaque on the page.

At NUASt, one student quoted seven lines from memory immediately after the performance:

- "My dearest partner of greatness"
- "Poor country"
- "Unsex me here"
- "Is this a dagger I see before me"
- "Stuck in my throat"
- "Wash this filthy witness from your hand"
- "Was he not born of woman"

At Greenwood, a student quoted "My life is my foes debt" spontaneously from Romeo & Juliet.

Multiple students across English Martyrs and South Wolds cited the performances as helping them recall quotes for their exams. This represents a direct, measurable curriculum benefit that standard classroom delivery struggles to achieve.

## Conclusions

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The data gathered from 435 students across five schools and two productions provides compelling, consistent evidence for the educational and cultural value of the Nottingham Shakespeare Company's schools outreach programme. Five conclusions are supported by the data:

**1 Live Shakespeare converts sceptics at scale.**  
A 90–95% conversion rate from negative to positive expectation is a remarkable outcome. This is not incremental improvement — it is a transformative shift in student attitude.

**2 Live performance produces measurable curriculum outcomes.**  
Students cited improved comprehension, quote retention, exam preparation and character understanding — outcomes that align directly with GCSE assessment objectives.

**3 The results are consistent across productions, schools and year groups.**  
The same patterns appear whether the production is Macbeth or Romeo & Juliet, whether the audience is Year 9 or Year 11, and whether the school context is urban comprehensive or specialist academy. This consistency strongly suggests the outcomes are programme-level, not incidental.

**4 Live performance offers something no other medium can.**  
Students consistently praised elements only possible in live theatre: audience interaction, unmediated vocal power, physical staging, and the surprise of immediate, shared experience. Film, recording, and classroom reading cannot replicate these.

**5 The programme reaches students who would not seek out theatre independently.**  
One NUASt student wrote: "I never seen a play and you set high standards." Outreach programmes are, for many of these students, their first encounter with professional live theatre. The data shows this encounter is overwhelmingly positive and lasting.

**The evidence is clear: live Shakespeare in schools works. It works educationally, emotionally, and culturally — and it works for students who arrive convinced it won't.**