

*Shakespeare's
Next Top
Fool*



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**BIG DOG PUBLISHING
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Shakespeare's Next Top Fool

FARCE. In this reality-TV show, fools compete for the title of Shakespeare's Next Top Fool. Contestants include the clown from *Othello*, King Lear's fool, and the gravediggers from *Hamlet*. With a stage full of fools, Rosalind and Touchstone have their hands full hosting this show. In addition, the camera crew, consisting of Montagues and Capulets, can't stop fighting. Security guard Nick Bottom keeps trying to take other people's jobs. Then the judges begin to disappear. Bianca is dragged off by her shrewish sister, Caesar is called away to the senate, and Macduff picks a fight with Macbeth. A fun way to introduce students to Shakespeare. Easy to stage.

Performance Time: Approximately 30-45 minutes.

Characters

(7 M, 12 F, 8 flexible)

(Doubling possible.)

- ROSALIND:** Host of "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool"; resents that others think him a fool; from *As You Like It*; female.
- TOUCHSTONE:** Commentator for the reality TV show, "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool"; resents that others consider him a fool; fool from *As You Like It*; male.
- PUCK:** Stage manager for "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool"; mischievous spirit from *A Midsummer's Nights Dream*; flexible.
- FAIRY:** Puck's assistant stage manager; flexible.
- JULIUS CAESAR:** Judge on "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool"; from *Julius Caesar*; male.
- BIANCA:** Judge on "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool," Katherina's beautiful mild-mannered younger sister; from *The Taming of the Shrew*; female.
- MACBETH:** Judge on "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool"; character from *Macbeth*; speaks with a Scottish accent, opt.; male.
- LADY MACBETH:** Macbeth's wife who assists him; from *Macbeth*; wears a dress with a large red spot on it; speaks with a Scottish accent (opt.); female.
- NICK BOTTOM:** Security guard who keeps wanting another position; clown from *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*; wears donkey ears or a donkey head; male.
- SOOTHSAYER:** Soothsayer; from *Julius Caesar*; flexible.
- OTHELLO:** Jealous husband newly married to Desdemona; from *Othello*; male.
- DESDEMONA:** Othello's loyal wife; from *Othello*; female.
- CLOWN 1:** Clown from *Othello*; flexible.
- CHORUS:** Substitute host; flexible.
- REGAN:** King Lear's honey-tongued, treacherous daughter; from *King Lear*; female.

GONERIL: King Lear's villainous daughter; from *King Lear*; female.

CORDELIA: King Lear's honest, sweet youngest daughter; from *King Lear*; female.

LEAR'S FOOL: King Lear's wise court jester; from *King Lear*; flexible.

KATHERINA: Shrew from *The Taming of the Shrew*; female.

GRAVEDIGGER 1, 2: Clowns from *Hamlet*; flexible.

WITCH 1, 2, 3: Caterers for show; hags from *Macbeth*; female.

BEATRICE: Enjoys engaging in witty repartee with Benedick; from *Much Ado About Nothing*; female.

BENEDICK: Beatrice's rival in contests of wit; from *Much Ado About Nothing*; male.

MACDUFF: Macbeth's rival who was untimely pulled from his mother's womb; from *Macbeth*; male.

Setting

A TV studio.

Set

TV studio. There is a long table SR, slanted to face the audience. There are six chairs on one side of the table.

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Props

Clipboard
Skull

Special Effects

Thunder
Lightning
Sad sonata
Disco ball/lights
Dance/disco music

*"A fool thinks himself
to be wise,
But a wise man knows himself
to be a fool."*

—Touchstone

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(AT RISE: A TV studio. There is a long table SR, slanted to face audience. On one side, there are six chairs. Rosalind enters and goes CS.)

ROSALIND: *(To audience.)*

"O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!"
Good evening, gentry and groundlings! You penny
pinchers in the pit, please refrain from gambling, drinking,
purse cutting, and brawling until you are outside the
premises of the television studio. Thank you. Allow me to
introduce myself. I am Ganymede, a gentle, callow youth,
and your host of "Shakespeare's Next Top Fool," the reality-
TV show where all of Shakespeare's clowns compete to see
who is the silliest, wittiest, and all-around most foolish of
The Bard's many fools.

(Touchstone enters.)

TOUCHSTONE: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise
man knows himself to be a fool."

ROSALIND: What's that supposed to mean, Touchstone?

TOUCHSTONE: Why, its meaning, Rosalind.

ROSALIND: Touchstone, that isn't an answer! *(Aside.)* And
my name isn't Rosalind, remember?

TOUCHSTONE: *(Aside.)* I didn't know putting on a pair of
breeches could change your name. I changed my pants this
morning. Does that mean I may change my name as well?

ROSALIND: *(Aside.)* Oh, Touchstone, you fool. I was
banished by my evil uncle, Duke Frederick and left the court

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disguised as a young boy while I seek my banished father in the Forest of Arden.

TOUCHSTONE: So you didn't put on boy's clothes to change your name?

ROSALIND: No, for safety. "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold."

TOUCHSTONE: That's a shame. I would have liked to change my name. Well, I shouldn't complain. I mean, the clown in "Antony and Cleopatra" doesn't even have a name. He's just "the clown."

ROSALIND: Women disguising themselves as men is not that unusual. There are plenty of Shakespeare's heroines who don boys' garb: Viola in "Twelfth Night," Portia in "The Merchant of Venice," Julia in "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

TOUCHSTONE: Only in Shakespeare's day it would have been a boy dressed as a girl dressed as a boy...as if that makes any sense. (*Scoffs.*) And they call him one of the greats of Western literature, and me a fool!

ROSALIND: You are such a fool.

TOUCHSTONE: "Better a witty fool, than a foolish wit."

(*Puck enters, holding a clipboard.*)

PUCK: Look, Rosalind, you ready to get started with the show?

ROSALIND: Who are you? And my name is *Ganymede*, not Rosalind.

TOUCHSTONE: (*To Puck.*) She's in disguise.

PUCK: (*To Rosalind.*) Whatever your name is. I'm Robin Goodfellow..."that shrewd and knavish sprite," "that merry wanderer of the night." You know, I frighten maids in the villagery, curdle milk, mess up people's GPS...that kind of thing. Look, I'm your stage manager. You ready to start or what? I have a fairy reverie to get to tonight.

ROSALIND: Yes, of course. We're ready to begin.

PUCK: Great, I'll bring out the judges. *(Calls.)* King Duncan!
You are up!

ROSALIND: *(To audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a warm welcome to the King of Scotland, King Duncan! This monarch, straight from the 16th century, likes to spend his time crushing revolts or spending time with his two young sons, Malcolm and Duncan. Give it up for King Duncan!
(Awkward pause. Calls.) King Duncan of Scotland...?

PUCK: *(Shouts.)* Duncan! Your Majesty! You're up! *(To audience.)* Sorry about this! *(Calls.)* Fairy! Fairy! Some help here!

(A frazzled Fairy enters.)

PUCK: *(To Fairy.)* Well, where is our first judge?

FAIRY: Look, Puck, I've searched for King Duncan,
"Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through briar,
Over park, over pale,
Through flood, through fire,"
I did search everywhere!

PUCK: Did you try the break room...dressing room?

FAIRY: That, too! Didn't see the guy. But I did run into two who claim that they are here to fill in for King Duncan.
(Calls.) Macbeth! *(Thunder, lightning. Calls.)* Lady Macbeth!
(Thunder, lightning.) You're up!

[END OF FREEVIEW]