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FOLGER'S BLACK SHAKESPEARE COURSE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RECONSTRUCTION RECEIVES SHAKESPEARE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA'S 2022 SHAKESPEARE PUBLICS AWARD

Washington, DC – At this year's annual April meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, the Folger received the 2022 Shakespeare Publics Award for its Black Shakespeare course developed in partnership with [Reconstruction](#), an online education company. Designed for middle and high school students, the five-unit course explores and celebrates the strong—and often unknown—connections between Black people and Shakespeare.

“We are enormously excited about our partnership with Reconstruction and Black Shakespeare!” says Peggy O’Brien, the Folger’s director of education. “At the Folger, we have known for a long time that an understanding of the complex relationship between Black people and Shakespeare is powerful and demands attention—a relationship that has been and can be still painful, productive, and joyful. That’s why we teach about it. The Black Shakespeare course offers an important constituency—middle and high school students—the opportunity to explore Shakespeare’s language and plays interactively and in ways that reflect the contributions of their own people. There’s something for them in Shakespeare, and Reconstruction’s students bring their whole selves to their explorations. We’re thrilled ... and the SAA’s Shakespeare Publics Award is such welcome icing on that already delicious cake.”

Folger Education staff, led by O’Brien and Education Program Coordinator Shanta Bryant, collaborated with scholars and teachers to create the five-unit Black Shakespeare course, including:

- Professor Patricia Akhimie, Rutgers University
- Professor David Sterling Brown, Binghamton University
- Noelle Cammon, Heritage High School (CA), Folger Teaching Shakespeare Institute 2018
- Donnaye Moore, Gwinnett County (GA) High School, Folger Teaching Shakespeare Institute 2016
- Amber Phelps, Baltimore (MD) City College High School, Folger Teaching Shakespeare Institute 2012

- Professor Ian Smith, Lafayette College
- Maryam Trowell, Live It Learn It

Each unit focuses on a specific Shakespeare play—*Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Titus Andronicus*, or *The Merchant of Venice*—and over ten sessions, students experience the play interactively while exploring theater and film productions as well as history. Students examine some of the many ways that Black Americans have encountered, responded to, taken ownership of, and enriched Shakespeare's words while fighting for the right to exert their extraordinary influence—all while making valuable connections to lives lived today.

Reconstruction launched the Black Shakespeare course in fall 2020. More than 300 students have already taken at least one unit. New classes are being formed for the summer and fall.

“We are thrilled that the Folger Shakespeare Library is being recognized for the groundbreaking curricula developed in partnership with Reconstruction,” said Kaya Henderson, co-founder and CEO of Reconstruction. “This is an important example of challenging, culturally relevant curricula that affirms students’ identities as Black people. When our students are able to explore and celebrate the strong, and most often unknown connections between Black people and Shakespeare, we witness their joy of learning! Black Shakespeare is one of our most popular courses! The classes come to life as students can draw from history and discuss the relevance of Shakespeare in the present. Black Students have been able to interpret classic literature, relating their experiences with stereotyping, bias, and racism through a modern-day lens. I am excited to expose more students to the now, award-winning, Black Shakespeare course.”

About the Folger Shakespeare Library

[Folger Shakespeare Library](#) is the world’s largest Shakespeare collection, the ultimate resource for exploring Shakespeare and his world. The Folger welcomes millions of visitors online and in person. We provide unparalleled access to a huge array of resources, from original sources to modern interpretations. With the Folger, you can experience the power of performance, the wonder of exhibitions, and the excitement of path breaking research. We offer the opportunity to see and even work with early modern sources, driving discovery and transforming education for students of all ages. During our multiyear building renovation, join us online and on the road.

About Reconstruction

[Reconstruction](#) is a unique curriculum company that provides live, K-12 supplemental and enrichment courses through an online platform that situates Black people, Black culture, and Black contributions to America and the world in an authentic, identity-affirming way. These interactive classes allow students to engage and discuss topics that have been neglected in current classrooms. Students of all backgrounds benefit from a more complete understanding of our shared history and society.

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