

# All The Prado's a stage

**For student performers at fifth annual Shakespeare fest, the Bard still rocks**

By [Keith Darcé](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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Nelvin C. Cepeda / Union-Tribune

Loren Lott, a student at the Common Ground Youth Academy, takes a turn in a “Macbeth” presentation.



Photo by Nelvin C. Cepeda - Union-Tribune

The fifth annual [San Diego](#) Student Shakespeare Festival attracted 40 elementary, middle and high school teams from across the county to Balboa Park, including San Diego Civic Dance Arts.

**Online:** For more photos from the San Diego Student Shakespeare Festival, go to [uniontrib.com/bard2010](http://uniontrib.com/bard2010)

## **San Diego student Shakespeare festival Winning groups**

- Hawthorne Elementary (grades three and four)
- The Festival Players (middle school)
- High Tech High
- Mira Mesa High
- Leigh Scarritt Productions (high school)

BALBOA PARK — Wearing a billowing black coat and belting out his lines in Elizabethan English, Isaac Resca-Candini was in his element performing on a small stage set up on The Prado in Balboa Park on Saturday.

"It's just like reliving an act that was made a few hundred years ago," Resca-Candini, 10, said after his performance with eight classmates from Hawthorne Elementary School in San Diego's North Clairemont area.

The group was among 40 elementary, middle and high school teams from across San Diego County taking part in the fifth annual San Diego Student Shakespeare Festival.

Resca-Candini's performance of the character Gonzalo from the play "The Tempest" marked something of a comeback for the fourth-grader.

"I took a break from theater for a while, but now I'm back in showbiz," he said.

The festival, which is put on by the San Diego Shakespeare Society, has grown quickly since its first year when 28 schools participated. Organizers said Saturday's event drew more than 400 students.

The society spent about \$30,000 putting on the event, and nothing was charged to the participating schools or students, said Sandi Buehner, the festival's producer.

Staged just a few steps from the park's Old Globe Theatre, the festival provides students with the rare opportunity to perform Shakespeare as it was originally intended — outdoors in front of a diverse and sometimes noisy crowd of spectators.

Each group took turns performing scenes from a Shakespeare play on one of six stages erected along the park's main walkway. Judges awarded trophies to the schools performing the best scenes in several categories and medals to the best actors.

Although the lines had to conform with the Bard's original works, the performers were free to bring their own interpretation to costumes and staging. Joining the more conventional leggings and high starched collars were tuxedos, evening gowns, Western wear and Indian saris.

The four girls playing witches in Carlsbad High School's performance of a scene from "Macbeth" wore shredded black and [burgundy](#) tops and seemed to have enough spray in their wildly tangled manes to fuel a jet plane.

Sheila O'Neill, 16, and a sophomore at the school, played the leading witch Hecate.

She said she loves the poetry of Shakespeare's writing and the timelessness of his stories.

She pointed to "Macbeth," the tale of a Scottish general who is inspired by the prophecy of witches to murder his king and a fellow general in order to seize the throne for himself: "We all go a little too far to get something we want and regret it later. Maybe not killing someone, but betraying a friend."

Many of the drama teachers and theater coaches who work with the students tap into the troubles of everyday life to create connections with the plays, said Buehner, the festival producer. "Is there crime in the area? Do families feud?" she said.

The festival's growth, despite school budget cuts and increasingly restrictive curriculum requirements, stands as a testament to the enduring appeal of Shakespeare, said Charlene Dibelka, who teaches drama at Montgomery High School in San Diego. "More kids are having to take support classes and they don't have room for electives" such as theater, she said.

For many parents, the festival offered a chance to see their children overcome fears as they stepped onto the stage in front of a crowd of mostly strangers.

"It's amazing," said Zulema Buitron of Chula Vista after watching her son Andrew, 16, perform with a group from Preuss High School in La Jolla.

"It makes me feel so proud to see my son acting," she said. "He was born with these special talents."

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