

Shakespeare comes to life in Normanhurst

Budding actors at Loreto Normanhurst were treated to a theatrical masterclass from one of Bell Shakespeare's leading actors and directors earlier this year.

Over a weeklong residency, Bell Shakespeare's Chris Tomkinson guided the school's year 10 drama students through William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

It was the first time the professional theatre company had been in residency at a high school. It launched the program earlier this year to run alongside its well-established Actors at Work school

initiative. "It was absolutely incredible," says Chris Woods, Loreto Normanhurst's head of drama. "The girls were able to immerse themselves in Shakespeare, his language and ideas.

"We always try to make drama fun, exciting and as interesting as possible. After this residency we saw a level of understanding and engagement with the text we hadn't seen with the students before."

The week culminated in performances that used the school grounds as a backdrop for the play.

"Lady Macbeth's speech was

done in the cloisters with just a little light coming through the windows," Woods says.

"It was just incredible."

Bell Shakespeare's acting head of education, Joanna Erskine, says introducing students to Shakespeare and theatre at school is a step towards fostering a lifelong interest in the arts.

"It is a wonderful thing for students to see live theatre – to be given the opportunity to sit in a dark space, quiet, with no phone or Facebook or distractions and share an experience with their fellow

audience and the actors themselves," she says.

"*Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is about being young and impulsive and disobeying parental rule, with dire consequences. It's rude and vulgar and romantic and passionate – and it's got great fights and love scenes. Students never fail to connect with it on some level."

Woods agrees. "There wasn't a single girl who didn't find [Shakespeare's work] exciting, who didn't understand it or find relevance in it," she says.

Kilmeny Adie



Dramatic effect ... Emily Illek, a year 10 student at Loreto.