



Heart of America Shakespeare Festival

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The Art of Argumentation! Julius Caesar

Teacher guide

Shakespeare in Education

At the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival we present education programs that nurture an early appreciation for the art of theatre and the work of William Shakespeare. We teach Shakespeare through performance in order to enhance understanding of language arts, Renaissance history and theatre performance. The story of Julius Caesar is a dynamic backdrop for students to explore the power of persuasion and reality of rhetoric. Professional teaching artists offer an inspiring glimpse into the world of the play. Students will work in small groups to come up with their own version of the events of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The workshop culminates in a mock trial of the conspirators in which students decide the final outcome.

Grades: 7-12

"I come not to praise Caesar, but to bury him." Mark Antony

"Et tu, Brute!" Julius Caesar

Pre-Class Activities

Words/Cell Phones before Blows

- There is a lack of open communication in the play. Identify moments where clear communication could have made a difference. Supposing the Romans had cell phones, have students write or improve conversations like:

Brutus asks Caesar what his true intentions are;

Portia calls Brutus to see how the battle is going;

Titinius calls Cassius to explain that it was his own army at his tents;

Antony calls Brutus to negotiate a truce at the end of the battle.

Very Superstitious

- Make a list of the omens, auguries, and superstitions that are brought up in the play. Make a parallel list of the superstitions that we have today. Invite students of different cultural backgrounds to explain the role of superstition in their culture. (For instance in many Asian languages the number four, sounds like the word for death, and therefore some buildings do not have a fourth floor.) What role does superstition play in our culture? When was the last time you crossed your fingers?

Post-Class Activities

Et tu Brute? Role Play

- Have students think of modern equivalents to Brutus's situation. For example, a friend is trying to persuade you to drive without a license. He says it's an emergency, you are a careful driver, but . . . What will you do?
- Or, our best friend has been elected student body president. Soon, you notice that he or she is taking advantage of the position by treating people differently, or cheating on assignments. How would you deal with this situation?

Mud Slinging

- Assign students in small groups to create a mud slinging campaign against the political parties of Brutus and Cassius or Antony and Octavius. They can create radio spots and commercials, design posters, T-shirts, or bumper stickers exposing their opponents' flaws. Have students "pitch" their campaign to the rest of the class.

Questions for Discussion

- There are many omens and superstitions in Julius Caesar. What are the historical reasons for this in the play?
- An anachronism is something that is out of place and time. Julius Caesar has a clock chime in it. Why do you think Shakespeare did this? Can you think of any other examples of this in movies, television or plays?
- This play is based on the life of an actual person, Julius Caesar. Compare his real life with the events of the play. Why do you think Shakespeare changed or elaborated on some of the events?
- If you were to write a play about an historical figure, who would you write about? Why?
- This play has many themes about honor. What does honor mean to you? What did it mean for the characters in the play? Discuss other cultures and how honor plays a part in their lives.

Online Resources

www.kcshakes.org

artsedge.kennedy-center.org

www.nosweatshakespeare.edu

nfs.sparknotes.com

pre and post class activities from the Utah Shakespearean Festival: www.bard.org

www.folger.edu

For further questions or activities contact the Director of Education for HASF: 816-531-7728