

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



Plotting the Play's Course

The plot of *Pericles* unfolds over a span of more than 14 years and the characters travel between many different cities. Working in small groups, have students create a timeline highlighting the major events of the play. Encourage students to first look through the play act by act to determine which events to include. Students should write a brief account of each major event, making certain to note the act and scene in which it occurs, changes of location and how each event affects what happens next to the major character(s) involved. Groups should also assign each event a line of text from one of the major characters in which s/he shares how s/he feels about the event. Upon completion, have groups share their timelines with one another and discuss any differences in events plotted. Display the timelines for classroom visitors to experience.



Mapping Pericles' Journey

In *Pericles* several characters travel across great distances in almost impossibly short amounts of time. For example, for Thaisa's coffin to travel from Tarsus to Ephesus (a 600-mile journey) in five hours, she would need to have "drifted" 120 miles per hour the entire distance. Referring to a map of the modern Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, have students create their own map of Pericles' journey in the play, including all the ancient places visited (Mytilene, Antioch, Ephesus and Tyre). Could Pericles have traveled as far and as fast as the play portrays? What are these places named today?



My Family's Journey

Pericles and his family take an epic journey over the course of the play. What is your family's journey? Ask students to draw a map of their family's history, tracing their geographical journey through as many generations as possible to the present day. What accidents of fate bring a family together or tear them apart?



Curses, Foiled Again

Shakespeare often built "foils" into his plays: characters or themes that can serve as a contrast to each other. *Pericles* includes many virtuous characters who can be contrasted with their corrupt counterparts. Have students get in small groups and create silent statues showing what each of the following looks like: tyranny vs. justice, corruption vs. virtue, a good mother vs. a bad mother. How can we communicate these themes with our bodies? As students watch the play, ask them to look for characters who may be "foils" of each other and compare the way they use their bodies to communicate character.



Freedom of Speech

Look at Pericles' speech to Antiochus (l.i.96-115) when he refuses to reveal the answer to Antiochus' riddle:

Great King,
Few love to hear the sins they love to act.
'Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it.
Who has a book of all that monarchs do,
He's more secure to keep it shut than shown...
Kings are earth's gods, in vice their law's their will;
And if Jove stray, who dares say Jove doth ill?

What does Pericles mean? Why does he refuse to reveal the truth about Antiochus? Can this speech apply to world leaders in our time? What systems does our country have in place to protect citizens who criticize their leaders? Ask students to write an essay about a recent event in which people from any country have been willing or unwilling to stand up and criticize their leaders. What were the consequences of their actions? Do students think Pericles did the right thing by refusing to speak the truth?



Adapting a Story

The story of *Pericles* is based on an ancient Greek story. Adapted from the original Greek into Latin and then into medieval English, the tale came to Shakespeare via the 14th-century poet John Gower, and Shakespeare collaborated with another writer to adapt it yet again. Have students separate into groups of four to six. With each group utilizing a well-known myth or fairy tale, have each student write four original lines of a new story based on this already-existing myth or fairy tale. After the first student has finished four lines have them pass the story to the next student and have the next student continue the story. Once all the groups have finished creating their story around the circle, have each group share their story with the entire class and then share the original myth or fairy tale it was based on. How similar were the new stories to the originals? How did they differ?



And the Moral of the Story Is...

Morality Plays, allegorical dramas popular in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries, contained characters that personified moral qualities (such as charity) or abstractions (such as death or youth), and taught moral lessons. At the end of the play, Gower relates the fates of all the major characters. Did Shakespeare intend for *Pericles* to be a morality play? Explore the moral qualities and abstractions that each character embodies and how those traits determine their fate.

Classroom Connections

...After the performance



Choosing an Emblem

In Act II, Scene 2 of *Pericles*, the knights courting Princess Thaisa of Pentapolis each have a proverb and an emblem. The princess reads the proverbs as they are written in Latin and describes the emblem to her father, who then translates the proverb into English. These proverbs and emblems were meant to represent the knights' belief systems, demonstrating their virtue and abilities. Presumably, Shakespeare took them all from the 1586 text *A Choice of Emblems* by Geoffrey Whitney, the first published book of emblems in English complete with woodcutting images. Present samples of other emblems and pictures from Whitney to the class (www.mun.ca/alciato/wcomm.html). Working individually, have students find one proverb or motto from three different sources (i.e. *Pericles* or another Shakespeare play, a religious text, a contemporary song) that they feel describes their personality or personal strengths. Have students design a corresponding graphic for each proverb either by drawing or collage of images. Each student should present their completed emblems to the class and, if they choose, briefly explain why they selected each proverb and graphic.



Outlook on Life

In his book *The Power of Myth* Joseph Campbell writes: "Chance, or what might seem to be chance, is the means through which life is realized. The problem is not to blame or explain but to handle the life that arises.... The best advice is to take it all *as if* it had been your intention—with that, you evoke the participation of your will." Write the quote on the board and ask students to consider it in relationship to *Pericles'* behavior throughout the play. Is *Pericles'* life shaped by chance? Does he behave as if it is? Does he appear to hold others responsible for his fortunes or misfortunes? Does he move as if he is in complete control of all events—positive and negative? Have students journal a response to the quote, noting three examples from the play that support their reaction, and afterwards share their responses with one another in small groups.



Fathers and Daughters

Some Shakespearean scholars believe that in his latter works, the Bard examined more closely the bonds between fathers and daughters because of his developing relationship with his eldest daughter Susanna. Reflect with the students on their views of father-daughter relationships: What are contemporary views of the roles of fathers and daughters in each others' lives? What images or stories from television shows, news, movies, books or magazines support these views? How do you see them playing out in your personal experiences? Have students compare their contemporary views to the relationships between *Pericles* and Marina, Antiochus and his daughter, and Simonides and Thaisa.



Opposites

Shakespeare incorporated many opposites into his plays, within the dramatic structure as well as the language, and *Pericles* is no exception. Working individually, have students brainstorm opposites in the play—referring to the language, story, characters or events. Ask students to share their responses. Which opposite seems to be most prominently explored throughout the play? How could it be shown in a production through costumes, scenery, lights and sound? Have students work in small groups to brainstorm a production concept and share with the rest of the class.



Water, Water Everywhere

Water as an ancient and universal symbol has many interpretations. Many view water as a symbol for purification, nourishment, rebirth, regeneration, renewal and fertility. Others see water as an uncontrollable element, a sign of despair, hopelessness, destruction and death. *Pericles* is rich with water imagery—ask students to examine the text noting references to water imagery. Ask students to explore the symbolism of water in these passages of text. What does Shakespeare convey through this use of imagery?



What is a Family?

The notion of "family" is one that has evolved significantly throughout history; from prehistoric times through modern times. In today's headlines we are constantly reminded of the changeability of the word family as single parents, adoptive parents and gay couples all make us question our definition of family. What are the required characteristics of a family? How do we define family? What roles do family members play? How does a child's upbringing affect his/her personality, and how much of personality is genetic? Could an audience member's definition of family affect his/her perception of *Pericles*, a play about variations of familial relationships?



A Monarch's Role

In *Pericles* Shakespeare shows audiences different rulers from several different cities. Brainstorm as a class the duties and responsibilities of a king or leader to his kingdom and people; write the responses on the board. Individually have students identify the kings or rulers in *Pericles* and list 2-3 qualities each possesses that make him either a good or bad ruler, making certain to support each assigned quality with a quote or act. Compile a class list of all the rulers and divide the students into small groups, assigning each group a ruler. Within the groups, have students create a How-To-Rule manual, written from their assigned ruler's perspective. What sort of advice would he give to future kings? What actions should they take to instill a prosperous kingdom? Does it matter what the people think of the ruler? Would he recommend a particular course of action or policy? Have groups present their manuals to the rest of the class; compile the manuals into a larger binder for students and visitors to reference in the future.