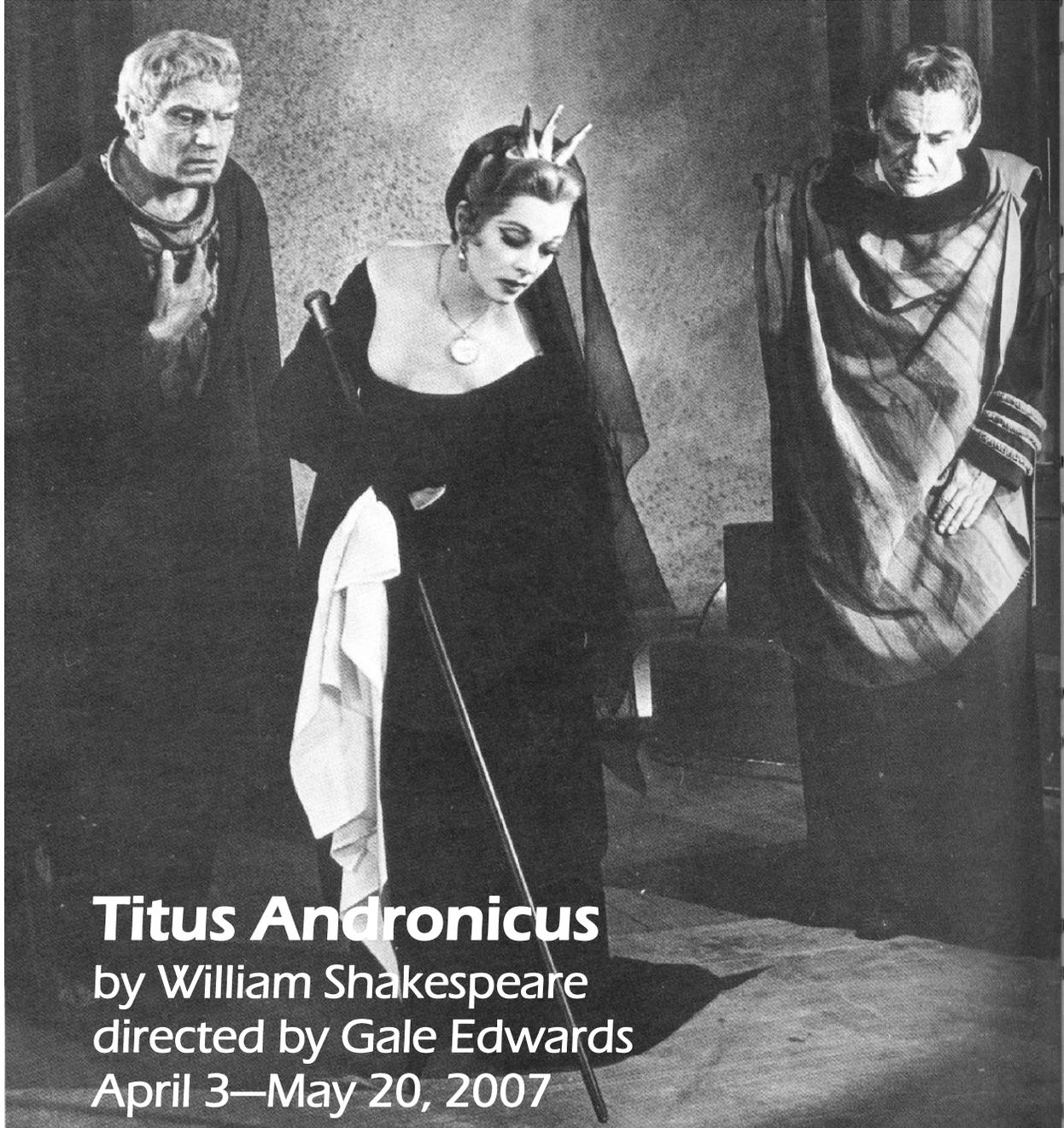


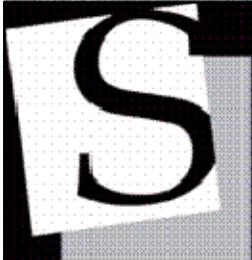
# First Folio

## Teacher Curriculum Guide



### **Titus Andronicus**

by William Shakespeare  
directed by Gale Edwards  
April 3—May 20, 2007



**SHAKESPEARE  
THEATRE COMPANY**

# First Folio:

## Teacher Curriculum Guide

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Cover: Laurence Olivier as Titus, Vivien Leigh as Lavinia and Alan Webb as Marcus in Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955.

Welcome to the Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of *Titus Andronicus* by William Shakespeare!

Each season, the Shakespeare Theatre Company presents five plays by William Shakespeare and other classic playwrights. The mission of all Education Department programs is to deepen understanding, appreciation and connection to classic theatre in learners of all ages. One approach is the publication of **First Folio: Teacher Curriculum Guides**.

For the 2006-07 season, the Education Department will publish **First Folio: Teacher Curriculum Guides** for our productions of *An Enemy of the People*, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *Richard III* and *Titus Andronicus*. **First Folio Guides** provide information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production at the Shakespeare Theatre Company. **First Folio Guides** contain material about the playwrights, their world and the plays they penned. Also included are approaches to explore the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance. **First Folio Guides** are designed as a resource both for teachers and students.

The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Education Department provides an array of School, Community, Training and Audience Enrichment programs. A full listing of our programs is available on our website at [ShakespeareTheatre.org](http://ShakespeareTheatre.org) or in our Education Programs brochure. If you would like more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688.

Enjoy the show!

# *A Brief History of the Audience*



***I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.*** —Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*

The nature of the audience has changed throughout history, evolving from a participatory crowd to a group of people sitting behind an imaginary line, silently observing the performers. The audience is continually growing and changing. There has always been a need for human beings to communicate their wants, needs, perceptions and disagreements to others. This need to communicate is the foundation of art and the foundation of theatre's relationship to its audience.

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## **In the Beginning**

Theatre began as ritual, with tribal dances and festivals celebrating the harvest, marriages, gods, war and basically any other event that warranted a party. People all over the world congregated in villages. It was a participatory kind of theatre; the performers would be joined by the villagers, resting on the belief that villagers' lives depended on a successful celebration—the harvest had to be plentiful or the battle victorious, or simply to be in good graces with their god or gods. Sometimes these festivals would last for days, and the village proved tireless in their ability to celebrate. Many of these types of festivals survive today in the folk history of areas such as Scandinavia, Asia, Greece and other countries throughout Europe.

## **It's Greek to Me**

The first recorded plays come from the Greeks (fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E.). Their form of theatre began in much the same way as previous forms did. It stemmed from the celebration of the wine harvest and the gods who brought citizens a fruitful harvest—specifically Dionysus, the god of wine. Spectators had a great deal of respect for their gods, and thousands would flock to the theatre to experience a full day of celebration. The day of drama and song made for a lively crowd. Staff-bearers patrolled the aisles to keep the rowdies under control. While theatre was free, your seat was determined by your station in life. The rich had cushioned seats at the front, while the peasants, artisans and women were forced to take seats at the back. In the later years, after a full day of drink, Greek audiences were not above showing disapproval at a less-than-spectacular performance. Stones were thrown, as well as other sloppy objects, hissing was popular, and loud groanings of discontent could usher any actor into early retirement.

## **The Romans, or the inspiration for *Gladiator***

The Romans took the idea of "spectator" an inch or so further. Their theatre (first through third centuries B.C.E.) developed in much the same way as the Greeks—with comedy, tragedy and festivals—but unfortunately ended

with what the Christians called "morally inappropriate" dancing mimes, violent spectator sports such as gladiator fights, and the public executions for which the Romans were famous. The Romans loved violence, and the audience was a lively crowd. Because theatre was free, it was enjoyed by people of every social class. They were vocal, enjoyed hissing bad actors off the stage, and loved to watch criminals meet large ferocious animals, and, soon after, enjoyed watching those same criminals meet their deaths.

## **The Far East**

In Asia, theatre developed in much the same way it has elsewhere, through agricultural festivals and religious worship. The Chinese and Japanese audiences have always been tireless, mainly because their theatre forms, such as the Japanese "Kabuki" and "Noh" plays and Chinese operas, could last anywhere between a full day, if not three days, beginning between *six to nine in the morning!* In China, the audience was separated; the higher classes sat closer to the action of the play, and the lower classes, generally a louder, more talkative bunch, would be placed in stalls at the back. The audience expected a superior performance, and if it lacked in any way, the audience could stop the production and insist on a different presentation. In Japan, theatre began with all-day rice festivals and temple plays sponsored by priests. These evolved into "street performances" where the performers led the audience on a trip through the village. In theatre houses, the upper classes sat in constructed boxes, and women in disguise (it was not considered proper for a respectable woman to be seen at the theatre) and lower classes would stand below with the "inspector" standing on a high platform in the middle, keeping a strict eye on everyone.

## **A Couple of Hundred Years without Art**

Tolerance takes a holiday during the period of European history known as the Dark Ages. During this time period culture of all kind goes on hiatus—most especially that frivolous, godless display of lewd and licentious behavior

known as theatre. Fortunately it reemerges with some severe restrictions during the Middle Ages.

### **Pageant Wagons**

Western theatre further develops from the Greek and Roman traditions through the Middle Ages with “Mystery Plays” sponsored by the church. Organized theatre was frowned upon, as it was a place for congregation of the lower classes, encouraging disease and immoral behavior. Church leaders would allow performances of bible scenes, however, for the people who could not read. These productions moved to different locations much like traveling the “stations of the cross.” To spread the good word to the broadest section of the population, these plays left the confines of the church building and began to travel on what were known as “pageant wagons.” These wagons held one entire location and a series of wagons hooked together permitted a company to tell an entire story just about anywhere. Troupes of actors would roam the countryside setting up make-shift theatres in inns, pubs, public squares, pretty much anywhere they could park.

### **Within This Wooden O**

During Shakespeare’s era—the Elizabethan period—theatre companies were awarded status and privilege based on patronage from wealthy landholders or the royal family. With patronage came money, so the companies began building theatres. The theatre of Shakespeare’s day was attended by all, was inexpensive, and was known to be an incredibly good time. Surrounding the stage was the lower “pit” where the lower classes congregated—called the “groundlings”—and above, octagonally surrounding the pit, were the stalls reserved for the upper classes. If you were stationed in the pit, it was not uncommon to have a goblet of wine dumped on your head, to be drooled upon, or spat upon by the “more civilized” people above you. Elizabethan audiences did not know what it meant to be quiet for a performance and would talk back to the actors. Thought to be involved in spreading the “black plague,” the theatres were closed in 1592.

### **Look at me, look at me...**

During the Restoration, theatre became a luxury. For the almost entirely upper-class audience, the purpose of going to the theatre was “to see, and to be seen.” The stage was a rectangular area between a long hallway of boxes. The best seats in the house were often right on stage! The house lights were up full so the audience could see *each other* better, not the action on stage. The theatre of the Restoration consisted mainly of light, fluffy comedies performed in an oratory style—actors posing, wearing BIG costumes and practically screaming over the din of the audience. Theatre companies still existed on the patronage

of the very wealthy and often performed plays exclusively in the salons of the rich, famous and powerful. A few hundred years later, opera composer Richard Wagner figured out that to focus the audience’s attention away from themselves and onto the stage, the lights needed to be off—forcing the audience to watch the performance. Since that time, the audience has taken its cue that the performance is about to begin when the lights overhead begin to dim. This small adjustment in lighting effectively erected a permanent barrier between the action onstage and the audience.

### **Freud ... Tell Me about Your Mother**

While dimming the house lights has drastically changed the overall aesthetic of theatre, another modern movement has had even greater impact on theatre in the 20th century. Psycho-analysis—Id, ego, super-ego and subconscious desires—made theatre more introspective in its search for truth. As theatre became more psychological, more a representation of real life, the audience felt as if they were eavesdropping. Twenty-first-century theatre-goers spend a great deal of time and thought pondering the psychological motivations of characters. There is now an imaginary wall, called the “fourth wall,” separating the performers and the audience. It affects how we view the performance and how actors’ portray characters—we can observe the people onstage as they relate their problems, fears and desires without them noticing us at all.

### **Now the Options Are Endless**

Today, for the audience, just about anything goes. History has shared with us many types of theatre, and we, the spectators, bring our own experiences and histories to the event causing us to react differently to different productions. Unlike movies or television, the actor-audience relationship is a “live” relationship: each is in the other’s presence, in the same place at the same time. It is the exchange between the two which gives theatre its unique quality. As audience members we have an obligation to be attentive, allowing the performers to fulfill their obligation—to entertain and enlighten us. There is always a dialogue between audience and performer, whether visual or vocal. All individuals participating in the theatrical event, whether as audience or performer, bring to it a personal background and experience which becomes vital to their response, to the interaction. In the same way, every participant leaves the performance enriched both by their own individual experience and that of the larger community to which they belong for a brief moment within the confines of the theatre walls. We must listen to capture and understand what the performers are trying to communicate, and, at the same time, they must listen to us. 

# On William Shakespeare

No man's life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare's. For all his fame and celebration, Shakespeare's personal history remains a mystery. There are two primary sources for information on the Bard—his works and various legal and church documents that have survived from Elizabethan times. Unfortunately, there are many gaps in this information and much room for conjecture.

We know a man named William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford on April 25, 1616. Tradition holds that he was born three days earlier, and that he died on his birthday—April 23—but this is perhaps more romantic myth than fact. Young William was born of John Shakespeare, a glover and leather merchant, and Mary Arden, a landed heiress. William, according to the church register, was the third of eight children in the Shakespeare household, three of whom died in childhood. We assume that Shakespeare went to grammar school, since his father was first a member of the Stratford Council and later high bailiff (the equivalent of town mayor). A grammar school education would have meant that Shakespeare was exposed to the rudiments of Latin rhetoric, logic and literature.

In 1575, John Shakespeare suddenly disappears from Stratford's political records. Some believe that his removal from office necessitated his son's quitting school and taking a position as a butcher's apprentice. Church records tell us that banns (announcements) were published for the marriage of a William Shakespeare to an Ann Whatley in 1582 (there are no records indicating that this arrangement was solemnized, however). On November 27 of the same year a marriage license was granted to 18-year-old William and 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the couple six months later. We



The Chandos portrait of Shakespeare, which is the only one known to be produced during his lifetime.

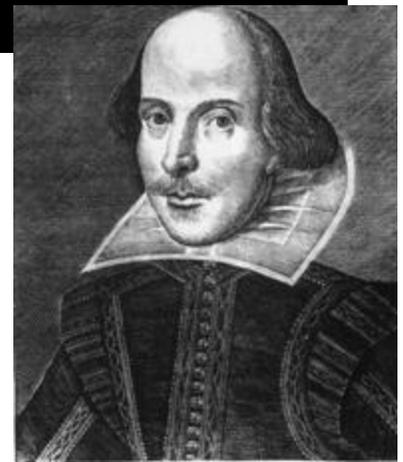
know that twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born soon after and that the twins were baptized. We also know that Hamnet died in childhood at the age of 11, on August 11, 1596. We don't know how the young Shakespeare came to travel to London or how he first came to the stage. One theory holds that young Will was arrested as a poacher (one who hunts illegally on someone

else's property) and escaped to London to avoid prosecution in Stratford. Another holds that he left home to work in the city as a school teacher. Neither is corroborated by contemporary testimony or public record. Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that in the years between 1582 and 1592, William Shakespeare did become involved in the London theatre scene as a principal actor and playwright with one of several repertory companies.

By 1594, Shakespeare was listed as a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. He was a member of this company for the rest of his career, which lasted until approximately 1611. When James I came to the throne in 1603, he issued a royal license to Shakespeare and his fellow players, inviting them to call themselves the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men leased the Blackfriars Theatre in London. This theatre, which had artificial lighting and was probably heated, served as their winter playhouse. The famous Globe Theatre was their summer performance space.

In 1616 Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbor in Stratford. Her father revised his will six weeks later; within a month he had died. The revised version of William Shakespeare's will bequeathed his house and all the goods therein to his daughter Susanna and her husband, Dr. John Hall, leaving Judith and Thomas only a small sum of money; his wife, who survived him, received the couple's second best bed.

In the years since Shakespeare's death, he has risen to the position of patron saint of English literature and drama. In the 1800s especially, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon was the real author of the plays; others choose to believe Edward De Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the author. Still others would prefer to believe Walter Raleigh or Christopher Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. While most people are content to believe that genius can spring up in any social class or rural setting, the gap between the known facts and the myths that surround Shakespeare's life leaves ample room for speculation.



Portrait of Shakespeare engraved by Martin Droeshout, found on the title page of the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's works, 1623.

# ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

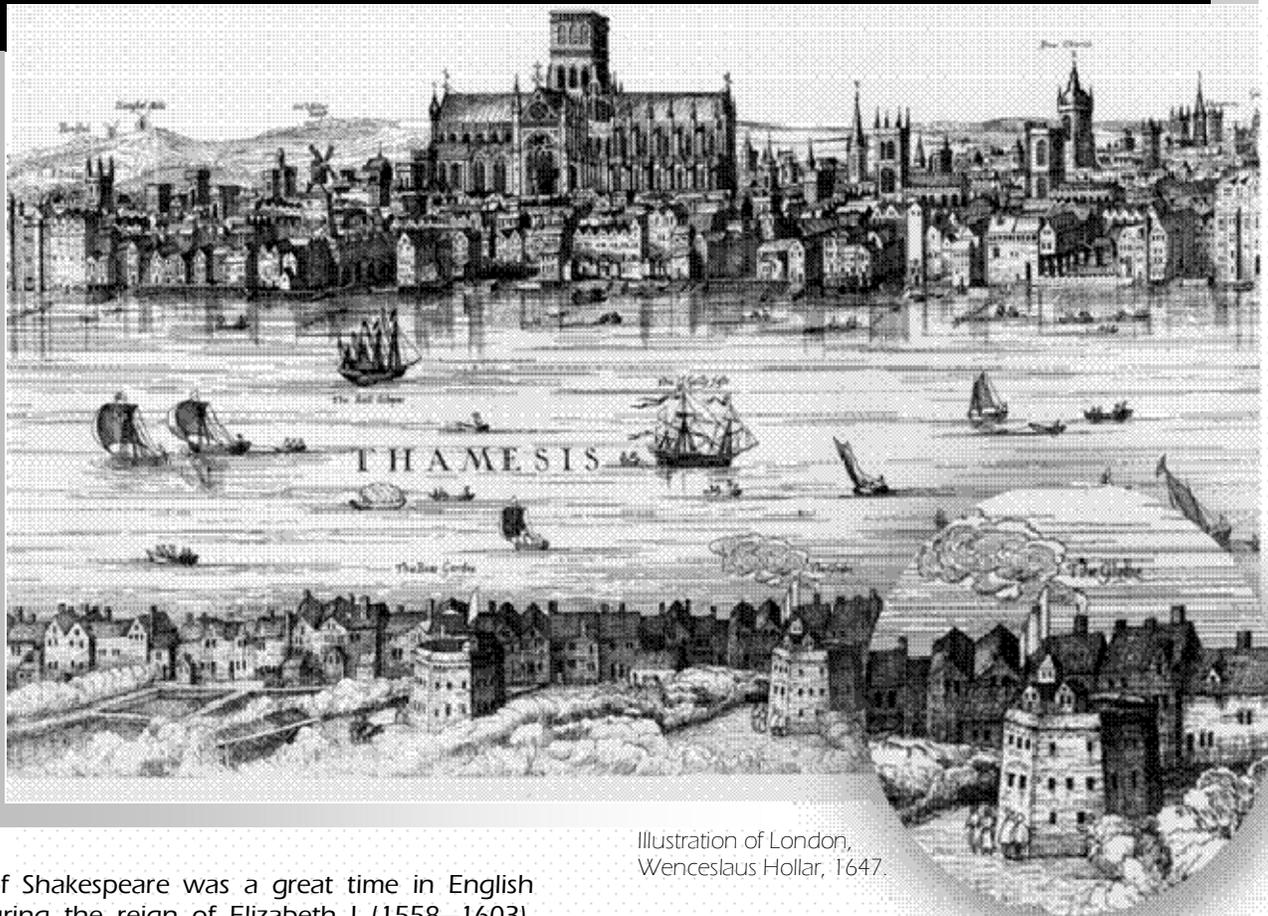


Illustration of London,  
Wenceslaus Hollar, 1647.

The age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), England emerged as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world, consolidating this position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father Henry VIII after a dispute with the Pope) during this time. London in the 16th century underwent a dramatic transformation; the population grew 400% between 1500 and 1600, swelling to nearly 200,000 people in the city proper and outlying region by the time an emerging artist from Stratford came to town. A rising merchant middle class was carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, England also experienced a tremendous cultural revival. This so-called English Renaissance found expression in architecture, music, literature and drama. Shakespeare both drew inspiration from and enhanced high and popular culture of the English Renaissance. Popular entertainment during the 16th century tended to be boisterous and often violent. Many men, women and children attended public executions of criminals that took place on a regular basis, and persons of all social classes and genders attended theatre performances. The trade of book-making flourished during the period as public education fueled the appetite for great works in print.

During the years 1590-1593, England suffered from an outbreak of terrible proportions; the bubonic plague or

“Black Death” claimed so many lives that English society stood on the verge of collapse. Many businesses, including theatres, closed, in part to keep people from spreading the disease and in part because of the labor shortage that resulted from such widespread illness and death. Once the epidemic subsided, the theatres re-opened and quickly regained their former popularity.

This explosion of commerce and culture lasted throughout Elizabeth's reign and into that of her successor, James I. James' rule brought many changes to English life; the two most pivotal were a bankrupt economy and an intense dissatisfaction from a minority religious group—the Puritans. In September 1642, the Puritan Parliament issued an edict that forbade all stage plays and closed the theatres, an act that effectively brought to a close the Elizabethan Renaissance. Theatres rapidly fell into disrepair and neglect until the Restoration in 1660.

In writing his plays and sonnets, William Shakespeare drew ideas from many different sources. His keen eye for detail and his sharp understanding of human nature enabled him to create some of the most enduring works of drama and poetry ever produced. But his work also provides an insightful commentary on 16th-century English values, life, history and thought. 

# Shakespeare's Works

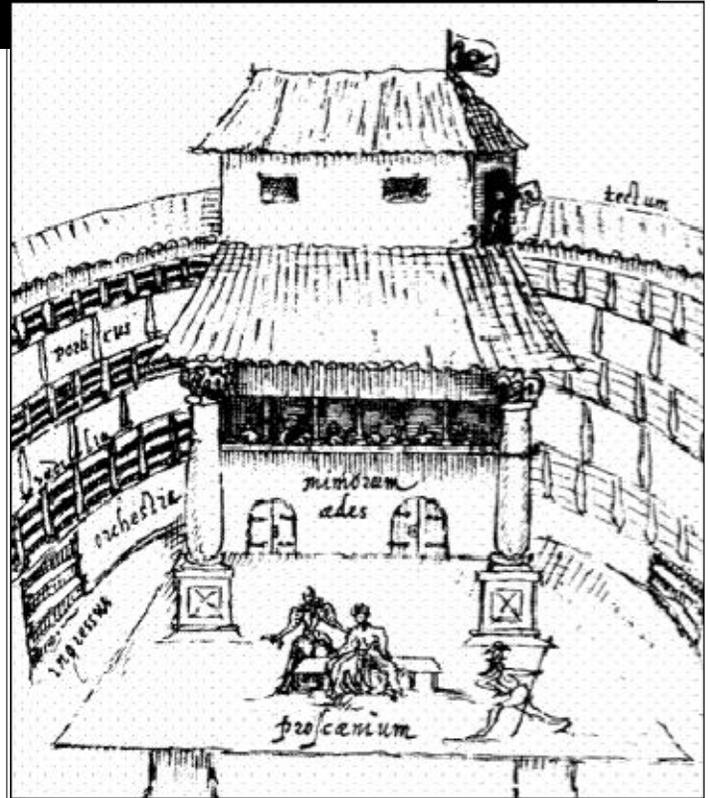
William Shakespeare, in terms of both his life and body of work, is the most written-about author in the history of Western civilization. His canon includes 38 plays, 154 sonnets and two epic narrative poems. During his lifetime, many of his plays were published in what are known as Quarto editions, frequently without receiving the playwright's permission. The Quartos are mostly flawed versions containing added material or missing entire passages from the original works. The first collected edition of Shakespeare's works is called the First Folio and was published after the playwright's death in 1623 by two members of his acting company, John Heminges and Henry Condell. Since then the works of Shakespeare have been studied, analyzed, translated and enjoyed the world over as some of the finest masterpieces of the English language.

Establishing the chronology of Shakespeare's plays is a frustrating and difficult task. It is impossible to know in what order the plays were written because there is no record of the first production date of any of his works. However, scholars have decided upon a specific play chronology based on the following sources of information: 1) several historical events and allusions to those events in the plays; 2) the records of performances of the plays, taken from such places as the diaries of other Shakespeare contemporaries; 3) the publication dates of sources; and 4) the dates that the plays appear in print (remembering that a play was produced immediately after it was written in the Elizabethan age, but may not have been published for years following the first production). Despite the fact that we have an accepted play chronology, we must keep in mind that the dating is conjectural, and there are many who disagree with the order of plays listed on the next page.

Drawing distinctions between Shakespeare's plays and categorizing his works has been a focus of scholars for hundreds of years, and the criteria used to differentiate the plays into types or genres has changed over time.

The distinction between tragedy and comedy became particularly important during Shakespeare's life. During that time writers of tragedy conformed to Aristotle's definition, relating the tale of a great man or woman brought down through hubris or fate. Comedy in this time, much like in our own, descended from the Roman "New Comedy" of Plautus and Terence, which kept away from politics and focused on love, domestic troubles and family affairs.

In the First Folio, some of Shakespeare's plays are divided by their theatrical genre—either Tragedies or Comedies—however, some of the tragedies' protagonists or heroes, like Romeo, Timon or Macbeth, do not easily accommodate Aristotle's definition.



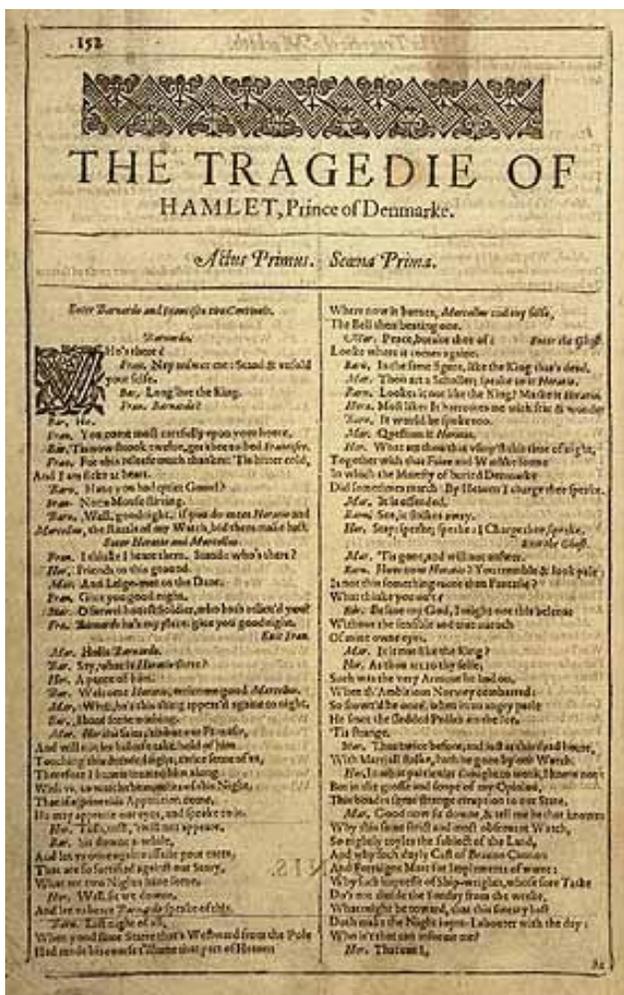
The "Dewitt" sketch of the Swan Theatre is thought to be the only contemporary visual account of an Elizabethan playhouse.

Plays are also categorized in the First Folio as Histories, done so because these works chronicled the lives of English Kings. These plays tended toward tragedy (*Richard II* or *Richard III*, for instance) or comedy (the Falstaff subplots of both parts of *Henry IV* and the Pistol-Fluellen encounters of *Henry V*.) Through the effort to categorize Shakespeare's plays in publication, we can see that his writing style mingled the antagonistic visions of comedy and tragedy in ways that still seem novel and startling. The recognition of this has led scholars since the publication of the First Folio to add additional genres—problem plays, romances, tragicomedies—to help classify the works of Shakespeare. Still other scholars have augmented these genres by grouping the plays chronologically, separating by time periods.

The first period, pre-1594 including *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors*, has its roots in Roman and medieval drama—the construction of the plays, while good, is obvious and shows the author's hand more so than his later works. The second period, 1594-1600 including *Henry V* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, shows more growth in style and a less-labored construction. The histories of this period are considered Shakespeare's best, portraying the lives of royalty in human terms. He also begins the interweaving of genres that would become one of his stylistic signatures. His comedies mature in this period, developing deeper characterization and subjects than previously seen in his work.

The third period, 1600-1608 including *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, includes the great tragedies—the principal works that would earn Shakespeare his fame in later centuries. The comedies of this period show Shakespeare at a literary crossroads—they are often darker and without the clear comic resolution of previous comedies—hence the term “problem plays” to describe them. The fourth period, post-1608 including *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*, encompasses what have been referred to as the romances or tragicomedies. Shakespeare at the end of his career seemed preoccupied with themes of redemption. The writing is more serious yet more lyrical, and the plays show Shakespeare at his most symbolic. Scholars argue whether this period owes more to Shakespeare’s maturity as a playwright or merely signifies a changing trend in Elizabethan theatre.

It is important for scholars, teachers and students to keep in mind that these “genre” classifications were not determined by Shakespeare during the writing of each play but imposed after his death to help readers better understand his work.



First Folio title page of *Hamlet*

## Shakespeare's Plays

<u>First Performed</u>	<u>Title</u>
1590-91	<i>Henry VI, Part II</i>
1590-91	<i>Henry VI, Part III</i>
1591-92	<i>Henry VI, Part I</i>
1592-93	<i>Richard III</i>
1592-93	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
1593-94	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
1593-94	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1594-95	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
1594-95	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>
1594-95	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1595-96	<i>Richard II</i>
1595-96	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1596-97	<i>King John</i>
1596-97	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
1597-98	<i>Henry IV, Part I</i>
1597-98	<i>Henry IV, Part II</i>
1598-99	<i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>
1598-99	<i>Henry V</i>
1599-1600	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
1599-1600	<i>As You Like It</i>
1599-1600	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
1600-01	<i>Hamlet</i>
1600-01	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
1601-02	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>
1602-03	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>
1604-05	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
1604-05	<i>Othello</i>
1605-06	<i>King Lear</i>
1605-06	<i>Macbeth</i>
1606-07	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
1607-08	<i>Coriolanus</i>
1607-08	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
1608-09	<i>Pericles</i>
1609-10	<i>Cymbeline</i>
1610-11	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
1611-12	<i>The Tempest</i>
1612-13	<i>Henry VIII</i>
1612-13	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen*</i>

\* *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is listed although a few scholars do not believe it is an original Shakespeare work. The majority of the play was probably written by John Fletcher, Shakespeare's close friend who succeeded him as foremost dramatist for the King's Men.



During the Elizabethan period, “English” was a relatively young language (only about 160 years old) combining Latin, French and Anglo-Saxon. There was no dictionary or standardized literacy education. People in Shakespeare’s London spoke much more than they read, causing the rules of grammar and spelling to be quite fluid. Writers created new words daily and poets expressed themselves in a new form of writing known as blank verse, first appearing in 1557 in *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aenis* by the Earl of Surrey:

They whistled all, with fixed face attent  
When Prince Aeneas from the royal seat  
Thus gan to speak, O Queene, it is thy will,  
I should renew a woe can not be told:

(Book II, 1-4)

That the verse was “blank” simply meant that the poetry did not rhyme, allowing rhyme-less poets such as Virgil and Ovid to be translated and Elizabethan playwrights to emulate the natural rhythms of English speech within iambic pentameter.

A typical line of verse from this time contains five units of meter or feet. Each foot contains two syllables. When the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed (dee DUM), it is an iamb (iambic meaning push, persistency or determination). The prefix penta means five, as in the five-sided shape—a pentagon. Iambic pentameter is therefore one line of poetry consisting of five forward-moving feet.

It was this new tradition of blank verse in iambic pentameter that Shakespeare inherited as he embarked on his career as playwright and poet. Similar to the human heartbeat, a horse gallop or the beat of a piece of music, iambic pentameter drives and supports Shakespeare’s verse, moving the language along in a forward flow that emulates the natural speech and rhythms of life. Here is a standard line of verse in iambic pentameter from *Romeo and Juliet*.

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
(II.ii.2)

If we were to say the rhythm and not the words, it would sound like this:

dee DUM dee DUM dee DUM dee DUM dee DUM

When we scan a piece of text (marking it with a “∪” for the unstressed and “/” for stressed), we simply tap out the rhythm of the line, based on dee DUM dee DUM dee DUM dee DUM, to see if the line is structured in iambic pentameter:

∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /  
But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
(II.ii.2)

Embracing the rules of this new verse, Shakespeare’s early writing operated almost entirely within strict iambic pentameter.

Prose in Shakespeare’s work is not in iambic pentameter and relies more heavily on other literary devices for its speed and rhythm. These devices include: antithesis (setting opposite words against each other), lists (series of actions or descriptive words that build to a climax) and puns (the use or misuse of a word to mean another word). Shakespeare used prose to express conversation between the lower classes, like the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or familiar or intimate scenes, as with Henry and Katherine at the end of *Henry V*. He also utilized prose to express madness or vulgarity, as in the nunnery scene of *Hamlet*. The exact meaning of a shift from verse to prose is not constant, but it always signals a change in the situation, characters or tone of a scene. Only *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* rely almost entirely on prose.

In the following passage from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, note antithesis in Ford’s comparison of himself with Page and of other men’s possessions with Mistress Ford, see the list of things Ford would rather trust others with than his “wife with herself” and observe the pun on “effect”:

**Ford**

Page is an ass, a secure ass; he will trust his wife, he will not be jealous. I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself. Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their hearts they may effect, they will break their hearts but they will effect. God be praised for my jealousy!

(II.ii.300-314)

As his writing skill level increased, Shakespeare gradually employed alliteration (the repetition of a vowel or consonant in two or more words in a phrase), assonance (resembling vowel sounds in a line) and onomatopoeia (words with sounds imitating their meaning) to create deeply poetic, vibrant images on stage for the characters and his audience. Examples of these three literary devices are found in the following four lines:

**Chorus**

From camp to camp through the foul womb of night  
 The hum of either army stilly sounds,  
 That the fixed sentinels almost receive  
 The secret whispers of each other's watch.

(*Henry V*, IV.4-7)

The hard “C” is repeated in the first line (alliteration), the “O” is heard in “through”, “foul” and “womb” (assonance) and the word “whispers” in the last line imitates the sound whispers produce (onomatopoeia).

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, he sometimes allowed a character’s thoughts to overflow their usual pentameter lines with an extra beat, often ending with a soft or feminine ending. He also utilized more and more enjambéd or run-on lines, allowing thoughts to continue from line to line, rather than finishing a thought per line. He grew to express the inner life of his characters and the size of their thoughts within the structure and the scansion of the text. In this famous passage from *Hamlet*, notice the overflow in the first line of Hamlet’s huge thought beyond the regular pentameter, forming a feminine ending:

u / u / u / u / u / u / u

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

(III.i.55)

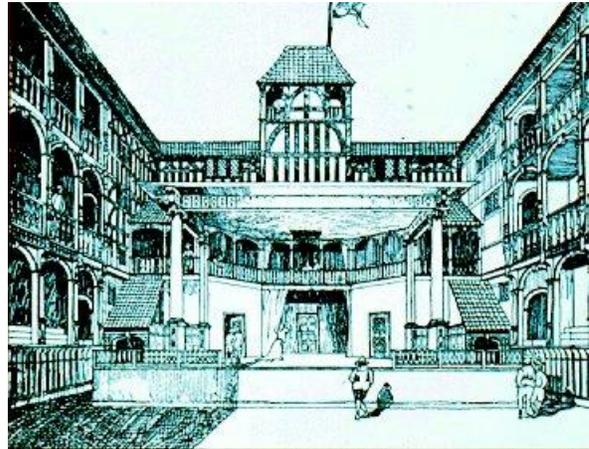
With this overflow, Shakespeare expresses the enormity of Hamlet’s thought, his situation and the uneasy exploration of this argument. (It is important to remember, however, scanning is subjective and must be decided by the individual actor or reader.) This line might also be scanned:

u / u / u / / u u / u

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

(III.i.55)

This creates a trochee, or an iamb of reversed stress—  
 DEE dum.



An artist’s rendition of the inside of an Elizabethan theatre.

Eventually, in *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare became a master of building, breaking and reinventing rhythms and language to create an entire tone or world for a play. Continuously experimenting and exploring the combination of form, meaning and language, he used short and shared lines between characters more and more, as in *Macbeth*, allowing the speed and rhythm of characters’ thoughts to meet and collide.

**Lady Macbeth** I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.  
 Did not you speak?

**Macbeth** When?

**Lady Macbeth** Now.

**Macbeth** As I descended?  
 (II.ii.15-19)

By the time Shakespeare gives his final farewell in *The Tempest*, believed by many to be his last play, his verse is so varied and specific to character and situation that it is extremely difficult to scan. Shakespeare broke, rebuilt and reinvented the verse form so many times that he plays the equivalent of jazz in the rhythms of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. At the end of *The Tempest*, in Prospero’s powerfully simple epilogue, Shakespeare brings his work full circle by returning to the simplicity of regular verse. Having created almost 1,700 words, timeless characters and the greatest poetry in the history of the English language, Shakespeare “buries his art” and returns to the form with which he began.



Shakespeare's Life and Works	Western History	Events in Western Art, Science & Culture
<p>1564 William Shakespeare born to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-Upon-Avon.</p>	<p>1558 Queen Elizabeth I takes the throne.</p> <p>1562 A series of civil wars between Catholics and Protestants, known as the Wars of Religion, begin in France.</p> <p>1564 John Calvin, an influential Protestant leader during the Reformation, dies. An outbreak of the plague devastates London.</p> <p>1568 A revolt of the Spanish-ruled Netherlands against Philip II, King of Spain, begins the Eighty Years War.</p>	<p>1540 Michelangelo finishes painting <i>The Last Judgment</i>.</p> <p>1543 Copernicus' heliocentric theory, claiming the sun is the center of the universe, is first published.</p> <p>1564 Christopher "Kit" Marlowe born.</p> <p>1565 Arthur Golding translates Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i>. The text later influenced Shakespeare's work.</p>
<p>1570 John Shakespeare first applies for a family coat of arms. His application is denied.</p>	<p>1580 Sir Frances Drake circumnavigates the Earth.</p> <p>1586 Mary Queen of Scots is tried for treason and executed by beheading.</p> <p>1588 The British Navy defeats the Spanish Armada, avoiding a long war between England and Spain.</p> <p>1589 The Wars of Religion end when Henry of Navarre ascends to the throne to become King Henry IV of France.</p>	<p>1567 Richard Burbage, a tragedian who portrayed many of Shakespeare's characters, born.</p> <p>1572 Poet John Donne born.</p> <p>Playwright Ben Jonson born.</p> <p>1576 The first permanent theatre in England, The Theatre, is built.</p> <p>1577 Raphael Holinshed publishes <i>The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland</i>, which becomes Shakespeare's primary source for the history plays.</p>
<p>1582 William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway.</p> <p>1583 Shakespeare's daughter Susanna born.</p> <p>1585 Shakespeare's twins Judith and Hamnet born.</p> <p>1587 Shakespeare goes to London to pursue life in the theatre.</p>	<p>1598 Philip II of Spain dies. The French Protestants are permitted to freely practice their religion by the Edict of Nantes.</p>	<p>1580 Thomas Middleton, a playwright who collaboratively wrote many plays, born.</p> <p>1588 Marlowe's play <i>Dr. Faustus</i> first produced.</p> <p>1590 Marlowe's play <i>The Jew of Malta</i> first produced; it influenced Shakespeare's <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>.</p> <p>1592 Thomas Kyd's <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i> first produced. It influenced Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i>.</p> <p>1597 The Theatre permanently closes due to the expiration of its lease.</p> <p>1599 The Globe Theatre is built on Bankside from the timbers of The Theatre.</p>
<p>1593 Shakespeare writes <i>Venus and Adonis</i>. Also begins writing the <i>Sonnets</i>.</p> <p>1594 Shakespeare becomes a founding member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.</p> <p>1596 Hamnet Shakespeare dies at age 11.</p> <p>1597 Shakespeare purchases New Place in Stratford.</p> <p>1599 Shakespeare's family is granted a coat of arms.</p>	<p>1601 The Earl of Essex attempts to rebel against Queen Elizabeth, fails and is executed.</p> <p>1603 Sir Walter Raleigh is arrested, tried and imprisoned for disobeying the Queen by secretly marrying one of her maids of honor.</p> <p>Queen Elizabeth dies. King James VI of Scotland, son of Mary Queen of Scots, becomes King James I of England. The plague once again ravages London.</p> <p>1604 England establishes a peace treaty with Spain.</p> <p>1607 Jamestown, one of the first English colonies in the Americas, is founded.</p>	<p>1597 The Theatre permanently closes due to the expiration of its lease.</p> <p>1599 The Globe Theatre is built on Bankside from the timbers of The Theatre.</p>
<p>1601 Shakespeare's father dies.</p> <p>1603 The Lord Chamberlain's Men are renamed the King's Men. They perform at the Court of King James I more than any other company.</p>	<p>1610 King Henry IV of France is murdered. He is succeeded by his son, Louis XIII.</p> <p>1618 The Protestant German princes and their foreign supporters begin their struggle against the Holy Roman Empire. This marks the start of the Thirty Years War.</p>	<p>1603 The "Scientific Revolution" begins with Johann Kepler's recordings of planetary movements and Galileo Galilei's perfection of the telescope.</p>
<p>1605 Shakespeare purchases more land in Stratford.</p> <p>1608 The King's Men begin playing at the Blackfriars Theatre, a prominent indoor theatre.</p> <p>1609 Shakespeare's <i>Sonnets</i> published.</p> <p>1616 In March, Shakespeare, apparently ill, revises his will. On April 23rd he dies and is buried at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford.</p>	<p>1610 King Henry IV of France is murdered. He is succeeded by his son, Louis XIII.</p> <p>1618 The Protestant German princes and their foreign supporters begin their struggle against the Holy Roman Empire. This marks the start of the Thirty Years War.</p>	<p>1606 Ben Jonson's play <i>Volpone</i> is written.</p> <p>1607 Burbage leases the Blackfriars Theatre for indoor performances.</p>
<p>1609 Shakespeare's <i>Sonnets</i> published.</p> <p>1616 In March, Shakespeare, apparently ill, revises his will. On April 23rd he dies and is buried at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford.</p>	<p>1610 King Henry IV of France is murdered. He is succeeded by his son, Louis XIII.</p> <p>1618 The Protestant German princes and their foreign supporters begin their struggle against the Holy Roman Empire. This marks the start of the Thirty Years War.</p>	<p>1611 The King James Bible first published.</p> <p>1616 Ben Jonson's <i>Workes</i> published in folio.</p>
<p>1623 Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> published.</p>		

# Synopsis of *Titus Andronicus*

**A**fter the death of the emperor of Rome, the emperor's two sons Saturninus and Bassianus vie to replace him. Titus returns from 10 years of war with the Goths, having lost 21 of his 25 sons in battle. He also has captured Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and her three sons. Titus buries his dead sons and, despite her pleas, sacrifices Tamora's eldest to settle the score. Tamora vows revenge on Titus for this deed. The Roman tribune Marcus Andronicus announces that the throne has been offered to his brother Titus. Titus refuses the title of emperor, instead supporting the candidacy of Saturninus.

Saturninus becomes emperor and immediately chooses Titus' daughter Lavinia as his empress. Lavinia loves Bassianus, so the two run off together, leaving her brothers to defend them from pursuit. Titus rashly kills his son Mutius for disobeying the new emperor's command. When Saturninus sees Tamora, however, he gives up Lavinia and marries the Goth Queen instead.

Tamora's sons, Chiron and Demetrius, lust after Lavinia. Tamora's Moorish lover Aaron convinces them to take her by force. During a hunting party, Lavinia and Bassianus find Aaron and Tamora in the woods together and threaten to tell Saturninus of her infidelity. Chiron and Demetrius stab Bassianus and throw him into a pit and drag Lavinia off to rape her. Aaron lures Titus' sons Martius and Quintus to the pit, in order to frame them for the murder of Bassianus. Saturninus blames Titus' sons for Bassianus' death and takes them prisoner.

Marcus finds Lavinia in the woods, her hands and tongue cut off, and brings her to Titus. Aaron brings word that if Marcus, Titus or his remaining son, Lucius, will send Saturninus a severed hand, the emperor will send back Titus' two imprisoned sons in exchange. Titus sacrifices his hand, but a messenger returns, bringing Titus' hand back with the severed heads of Martius and Quintus. With all his other sons dead, Titus sends Lucius into exile for protection.

Lavinia chases after Lucius' young son when he is reading the story of Philomel, a mythical woman who was raped in the woods. She then writes the names "Chiron" and "Demetrius" in the dirt with a staff. Titus sends magnificent weapons to Chiron and Demetrius, and Aaron realizes that Titus has discovered their guilt. Suddenly, a nurse rushes in to tell the three men that Tamora has given birth to a



Cristofer Jean, Judith-Marie Bergan, Derrick Lee Weeden, B.W. Gonzalez and Gregory Linington as Goths in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2002 production of *Titus Andronicus*.

black child, and that they must kill it so that Saturninus does not find out. Aaron murders the nurse to keep her from talking and takes his newborn baby to the Goth camp to save its life.

Titus, pretending to be mad, orders his followers to shoot arrows into the sky with letters attached begging the gods to assist his revenge. Word arrives that Lucius has joined with the Goths and is marching an army to conquer Rome. Aaron finds his way to the Goth camp, where he reveals his crimes to Lucius in exchange for sparing the life of the child he carries with him. A Roman messenger offers Lucius a meeting to negotiate with Saturninus at Titus' house, and Lucius accepts.

Believing that Titus is mad, Tamora and her sons appear at his house, disguised as the gods of Revenge, Rape and Murder to answer his letters. Titus begs Tamora to leave Rape and Murder with him for a while. The instant she leaves, Titus orders Chiron and Demetrius bound and gagged. He slits their throats, and Lavinia collects their spilled blood. Titus prepares a pastry with their blood and powdered bones and bakes their heads into two pies.

Titus welcomes Lucius, Marcus, Saturninus and Tamora to his home, serving Tamora her own sons' flesh for dinner. After killing Lavinia to put her out of her misery, he reveals what is in the pie and stabs Tamora. Saturninus immediately kills Titus, and Lucius in turn kills Saturninus. Lucius becomes the new emperor, and his first act is to bury Aaron chest-deep in the ground to starve to death. He orders all the bodies buried except for Tamora's, which is to be thrown to wild animals.

# Romans, Goths and Moors

**The Romans** For Elizabethans, Rome was the ultimate model of civilization. They looked to the ancient Roman Empire, which had ruled Europe and parts of Africa and Asia for more than a thousand years, for examples of excellence in every aspect of life—from politics to architecture and poetry. In addition, the island nation aspired to one day become the next Rome. Under Elizabeth I the British had built a powerful navy, defeated the Spanish Armada, and explored new, faraway lands. Their education system was based on classical texts both Latin and Greek. Shakespeare and other playwrights wrote dramas that took place in an idealized Roman world.

Unlike his other Roman plays, which depict the emerging, or collapsing, political system in conflict with the masses or the egos of the main characters, *Titus Andronicus* portrays a very different image of the Roman Empire. This bloody, gory tale takes place in a society that is corrupt, in which formal justice gives way to personal revenge. The ideal of Roman Stoicism (remaining emotionless and free from passion) and the intricate codes of honor lead to the destruction of Titus' own family, as he stubbornly sacrifices his Goth enemy Alarbus, and then kills his own son Mutius for standing in his way. Through Shakespeare's pen Shakespeare creates a bloody cautionary tale where Rome becomes a "wilderness of tigers."



Photo by Angus McBeary/Harvard Theatre Collection.

Laurence Olivier as Titus Andronicus in Peter Brook's production, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955.



20th Century Fox.

Jessica Lange as Tamora and Alan Cumming as Saturninus in Julie Taymor's 1999 film, *Titus*.

**The Goths** If the Romans symbolized civilization to the Elizabethans, then the Goths represented all things barbaric. Historically, the Goths were a group of Germanic tribes from northern Europe and Scandinavia. During the third century, tribes of Goths began to invade the Western Roman Empire, later leading to its collapse. The Goths in Shakespeare's play are portrayed as barbaric villains, capable of committing the worst kind of atrocities. When Tamora's pleas to Titus go unheeded and he sacrifices her eldest son, her thirst for revenge drives her for the rest of the play. Chiron and Demetrius rape and mutilate Lavinia without remorse but meet their own terrible fate at Titus' hands.

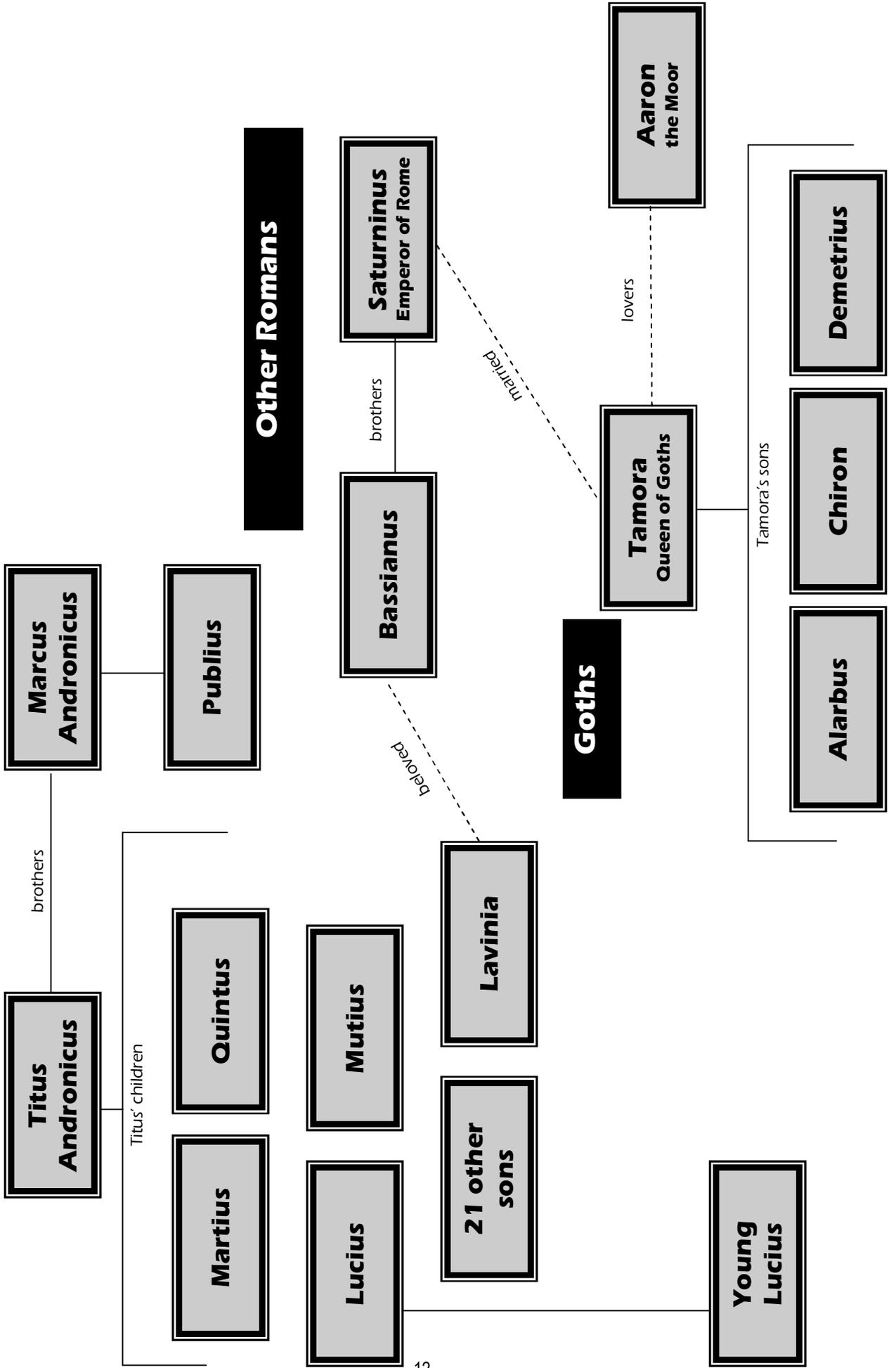
**The Moor** The term Moor, in Elizabethan times, had several meanings and not one clear definition. It could refer to someone who was Arab, Muslim or of black African descent. In general, it referred to a person who was different—in either race, religion or both—from white Europeans. This foreign appearance would have immediately signaled villainy to an Elizabethan audience. In Renaissance drama, Moors were almost exclusively villainous characters, often based on the Vice character (a one-dimensional personification of evil) from Medieval Mystery plays. Indeed, Aaron the Moor is the Vice character of the play, orchestrating much of the violence and delighting in his villainy. While Aaron never states a motive for his deceit, he exhibits moments of humanity when he must protect his illegitimate infant from murder. Here we can see Shakespeare incorporating and also wrestling with conventions of his time—creating the Moorish Vice character but not allowing him to be merely one-dimensional. (Shakespeare will later go on to write the first English play with a Moor as the tragic hero, further turning the convention on its head by creating a white Vice character, Iago, in *Othello*.)



Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

Keith Mitchell as Aaron and Barbara Jefford as Tamora at the Old Vic, 1957.

# House of Andronicus



# Vengeance Is Mine



Photo by Sarah Ainslie.

Brian Cox as Titus in *Titus Andronicus*, directed by Deborah Warner, RSC at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1987.

**T**itus *Andronicus* is a bloodbath, even compared to modern standards. Critics throughout the 18th and 19th centuries found the work crude and disgusting; it was both dismissed as an early, unfinished work and had its authorship challenged. During Shakespeare's lifetime, *Titus Andronicus* was his most popular and most performed play. Its success is also marked by the fact that it was Shakespeare's first play to appear in print in 1594. The play's early success can be better understood in the context in which it was written. The young Shakespeare had just arrived in London, and a popular form of tragedy, called revenge tragedy or "tragedy of blood," had just emerged on the Elizabethan stage. Shakespeare decided to make his mark by contributing a play to the genre of revenge tragedy. Highly influenced by *The Spanish Tragedy*, which in turn was influenced by Senecan tragedy, Shakespeare tried his hand at this form and created a sensationally violent, revenge-soaked drama in *Titus Andronicus*.

The Elizabethans had just discovered the plays of the ancient Roman poet, Seneca. These plays were written to be recited, not performed. The typical Senecan tragedy involved a long plot of someone seeking revenge with graphic descriptions of violence, and usually a ghost or witch or two. A typical revenge tragedy takes place in a court setting, and contains any or all of the following elements:

- an unjust murder, often a good ruler killed by a bad one overtaking the throne;
- ghosts or the personification of revenge who call on the living to avenge murder;

- a play-within-a-play, or the use of disguise and trickery to discover guilt;
- severed limbs and heads, extreme violence and mutilation
- an eruption of general violence at the end, in which nearly all the characters die, including the avenger.

Thomas Kyd adapted this form and wrote *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1587-1590). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's son, Horatio, is killed, Hieronimo spends the entire play tracking down his murderers. His frustration drives him mad; his revenge is to stage a play in which he uses actual knives instead of fake ones to kill the wrongdoers. In the end, Hieronimo is captured, bites out his own tongue to prevent himself from talking, and then stabs his captor and himself with a penknife. The Elizabethan audience had acquired a taste for the bloody in its drama.

This bloody tragedy was followed by a slew of imitators, including *The Atheist's Revenge*, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Thomas Kyd's friend and roommate, Christopher Marlowe, also contributed to the genre with *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*. Today, *Titus Andronicus* is back on the critics' good side, mainly due to a few excellent 20th-century stagings of the play. Recent critics are looking at *Titus Andronicus* and seeing the master playwright hard at work, using a genre that was popular at the time and expanding it by including deeper, richer characters and more complex moralities. They also see germs of his future work, including the greatest revenge tragedy of them all, *Hamlet*. 

# Blood and Gore

**T**itus *Andronicus* was said to be one of [Shakespeare's] most popular plays. Elizabethan audiences were bloodthirsty. They took pleasure in bear baiting and were accustomed to public executions and heads rolling at the Tower of London. They lived and died with the plague: an epidemic closed the theaters during the two years Shakespeare supposedly wrote *Titus* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. The survivors relished mayhem and murder on the stage and Shakespeare gave them what they wanted." – Alan S. Stone, "Shakespeare's Tarantino Play," *Boston Review*, 2000.

Thirteen murders, two decapitations, four mutilations (three hands, one tongue), one rape, ritual sacrifice and cannibalism—in Shakespeare's works, there is not another play that is so gruesome. Partially due to its violent content (and partially due to critical opinion that the language in the play was sub-par), *Titus Andronicus* was not performed in any major, unadapted productions between Shakespeare's death in 1616 and 1923. Despite the play's popularity in Shakespeare's time, and its current revival in the 20th and 21st centuries, for most of the play's history it has been reviled as a critical disaster. Perhaps elements of Elizabethan and modern culture, and our attitudes toward violence, have helped to make a place for this play in both Shakespeare's time and ours.

*Titus Andronicus* was the most popular play, the most often performed, in Shakespeare's lifetime. One has to wonder if Shakespeare's intent was to give his audience the bloody violence they craved. In addition to being performed the most frequently, the play was also published in four different quartos, indicating a high demand for this script. We know that violent plays were very popular at the time—for example, in *The Battle of Alcazar* by George Peele, another play printed in 1594 (the same year as *Titus Andronicus*),

the list of the properties needed for a "bloody banquet" in the play include dead men's heads in dishes, dead men's bones and blood. In *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, murder abounds throughout the plot, and the main character even bites out his own tongue. The sheer magnitude of the violence in *Titus Andronicus*, however, and the comparison with Shakespeare's other plays (which are not like *Titus* at all), make critics question whether Shakespeare was attempting to mock or parody the violence of the other plays of his time. By the end of the play, the violence borders on the ridiculous, as a stage direction reads, "enter Titus, like a cook, placing the dishes" (V.iii.25) when he serves Tamora the pies containing the flesh of her own sons. Directors who

have tackled this play have struggled with this balance between violence and humor. Bill Alexander (director of *Henry IV, parts 1 and 2* at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in the 03-04 season) directed a recent production of *Titus* for the RSC, and speaks about his experience with the play:

"The main problem for a modern production is getting the tone right; finding a delicate balance between the horror and dark humor of the play.



Brian Cox and Sonia Ritter as Titus and Lavinia, directed by Deborah Warner, RSC at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1987. Photo by Sarah Ainslie.

Shakespeare's audience must have had a profoundly different relationship to physical violence from us. They had a judicial system that made violence acceptable and public as part of its code. People were used to seeing their fellow humans hanging from gallows, thieves with amputated hands, heads displayed on bridges, traitors disembowelled on scaffolds, and to hearing the roar and laughter of the bear pit. They must have developed a sense of humor about it in a way we find difficult. This is going to be one of the main challenges in the rehearsal room."

– Bill Alexander, Director's Diary for *Titus Andronicus*, RSC, 2003.

This challenge is one of the elements that makes *Titus Andronicus* a difficult play to produce. Theatres with a strong sense of decorum, modesty and strict morality gained popularity after Shakespeare's death and into the 20th century. The violence in *Titus* caused the play to be not only avoided but also wholly reviled by critics for centuries. The first production to break this cycle was Robert Atkins' RSC production in 1923—performed merely because the RSC was producing every play in the canon—which drew unintentional laughter from the audience in the final scene. (Apparently the balance between horror and humor in that production was not carefully navigated). The first critically acclaimed production of modern times was Peter Brook's 1955 production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Laurence Olivier played Titus and Vivien Leigh played Lavinia. The violence in the play was stylized. Lavinia's wounds were represented by blood-stained streamers from her wrists and mouth. Another famous production of the play was Deborah Warner's 1987 RSC production, which handled the violence in a very different way. The gruesome details were shown realistically and unflinchingly—and the production was famous for causing audience members to faint.

In 1999, American director Julie Taymor produced an adaptation of the play on film, called *Titus*. This production combined gruesome realism with a number of fantastical elements. For example, the film begins with a framing device in which a young boy stages a brutal battle in his kitchen with food and toy soldiers, only to be kidnapped and taken to ancient Rome. Also, when Titus' severed hand is returned to him with the heads of his two sons, the delivery is made by circus performers. The result of these devices is a dark, gruesome humor. Now, for the first time in its history, the Shakespeare Theatre Company will be producing *Titus Andronicus* in 2007, directed by Gale Edwards.

These recent productions show that the play has gained popularity in the 20th and 21st centuries—perhaps because audiences today are as bloodthirsty as their Elizabethan counterparts. News of violence across the globe, two world wars, and a culture of saturation of violence in media and entertainment has made violence a part of everyday modern life. This, in addition to a broadening of what is “acceptable” in the theatre, has led to a culture in which we can stage the entirety of Shakespeare's canon without censorship and learn from it. 



Shakespeare Centre, photo by Angus McBean.

Laurence Olivier as Titus, Vivien Leigh as Lavinia and Alan Webb as Marcus in Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955.

# Code of Honor in *Titus Andronicus*

From the beginning of *Titus Andronicus*, characters devise more and more horrible revenges for each other in retribution for wrongs committed against them. The violence ends only when nearly all of the characters have met their gruesome ends. However, the characters in the play believe that their revenge is justified. Each character maintains a code of “honor” that allows him or her to perpetrate grievous wrongs against others without guilt or remorse, believing that his or her actions are just.

When Titus returns from battle with the Goth prisoners of war at the beginning of the play, he believes he is acting rightly when he sacrifices Alarbus, Tamora’s oldest son, to appease the souls of his 21 sons killed in battle. Tamora pleads for mercy, but Titus proceeds; his code of honor, dedication to Rome and strict religious belief do not permit him to relent. Based on the code of the battlefield, and the traditions of Rome, Titus believes this act of murder is not only appropriate but right. Tamora calls Titus’ code of honor “cruel, irreligious piety!” (I.i.133)—a fitting accusation since Titus’ religious devotion is part of the motivation to murder. Titus’ act sets in motion the events of the play—Tamora vows revenge on Titus and his family in retaliation for the pain she has suffered. Tamora believes that any cruelty perpetrated on the Andronicuses is justified by the act of cruelty done to her son.

Soon after, Titus again acts rashly and stubbornly based on his code of honor. When Saturninus, the new Roman Emperor, requests Titus’ daughter Lavinia’s hand in marriage, Titus immediately offers her to him, despite the fact that she is engaged to Bassianus. Lavinia, of course, rejects the match, but Titus’ code of honor will not allow him to accept dissent and disobedience of an order from the emperor. Lavinia flees, and her brother Mutius draws his sword on Titus to prevent him from chasing her. Titus then kills Mutius, his own son—one of four remaining sons who returned from battle with him. Lucius questions Titus’ act, but Titus remains firm:

Lucius My lord, you are unjust, and more than so,  
In wrongful quarrel you have slain your son.

Titus Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine;  
My sons would never so dishonor me.  
(I.i.295-98)

Titus shows no remorse for Mutius’ death because he believes that Mutius has “dishonored” himself and the family. Although he lost 21 of his 25 sons in battle,



20th Century Fox

Anthony Hopkins as Titus Andronicus in Julie Taymor’s 1999 film, *Titus*.

and slayed Tamora’s eldest to appease their souls, he does not mourn for Mutius and initially refuses to let him receive a proper burial or lie in the Andronicus tomb.

Mutius’ death turns out to be in vain, for as soon as Saturninus views Tamora, he chooses her as his queen instead of Lavinia. This raises Tamora to a position of power in which she is able to manipulate events to enact her revenge against Titus. Throughout the play characters act on their desire for revenge disregarding any moral compass, this causes Rome to become a “wilderness of tigers” (III.i.53). Rome is no longer civilized; men and women are no better than beasts. By the end of the play; acts of dismemberment, rape and cannibalism have been committed, and the play ends with a mass murder.

The leadership of Rome then falls to Lucius, Titus’ eldest son, who has joined with the Goth army to invade Rome and remove Saturninus from power. In the absence of any code of honor besides revenge, the Romans have joined with the very enemy they spent years defeating to maintain control of their society. Shakespeare’s most violent play demonstrates how a society devoid of honor or justice brings about its own fall.



# Shakespeare's Symbolism

In his earliest tragedy, Shakespeare employs much more overt and heavy-handed symbolism than in his later plays. What follows is a discussion of some of the major symbols in *Titus Andronicus*.

## Hands and Dismemberment

Dismemberment is a common act of violence in the play. Rome continues its downward spiral, with more and more characters subjected to this violence. Lavinia's hands and tongue are severed. Titus cuts off his own hand in an attempt to save his sons. This offering is then returned to him with the decapitated heads of the sons he was hoping to save.

Hands, in general, are often perceived as instruments of communication. Because Lavinia has been relieved of her hands and tongue, she is unable to accuse the perpetrators of the violence against her. Hands are necessary parts of the body, used to hold items, manipulate tools, exchange greetings and offer affection. Lavinia is rendered completely helpless by the loss of her hands. Titus' act of removing his own hand shows how he is implicated in his own downfall—his loss of power over Rome and over his own mind—as he voluntarily becomes “lame.”

More symbolically, the political state was thought of as “The Body Politic” in Elizabethan times. Literally, the human body was a metaphor for society, with the head representing the king, and the other echelons of society representing the lower parts of the body. When the state was suffering, it was thought of as a disease affecting the body. Shakespeare shows hands and heads removed over the course of the play, mirroring the dismemberment of the Body Politic of Roman society.

## Animal Imagery

Shakespeare continually references animals in *Titus Andronicus*. Titus calls Rome a “wilderness of tigers” (III.i.53). The Clown delivers a basket containing two pigeons to the emperor before he is hanged (IV.iv). When Aaron slays the nurse who brings him his baby, he compares her to a pig: “Weeke! Weeke! / So cries a pig prepared to the spit” (IV.ii.146-47). At the end of the play, Lucius orders that Tamora's body be thrown “forth to beasts and birds to prey” (V.iii.198). Shakespeare weaves frequent references to animals into his text in order to underscore the bestial nature of the violence in the play and the disintegration of civilization. 



Sketch of *Titus Andronicus* by Henry Peacham, c.1595.  
Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Britain.

# Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



## Create a Vice Character

When Shakespeare was a young writer learning his craft, he based many of his characters and the structure of his plays on earlier forms of drama, including Medieval Mystery plays. The character of Aaron, in particular, can trace his history back to the Vice characters of early medieval plays. Vice characters were one-dimensional representations of evil. While Aaron orchestrates the death of many other characters in the play without remorse, Shakespeare also fleshed out Aaron by making him dynamic, charismatic and caring about his small child. Ask students to brainstorm ideas for a play that would include a modernized version of a Vice character. Ask students to develop a character sketch of their own Vice character—including their age, background and costume. What would be the motivation for wrongdoing? Ask students to move around the room and create a voice and physicality for this character, then present their choices to the class.



## Costume Design

One of the first steps in producing a play is designing the “look” of each character. Shakespeare includes characters from three very different worlds in this play. Ask students to re-read *Romans, Goths and Moors* and think about the differences between the worlds of each of these characters. How would students design the costumes for the Goths and Romans to show the difference in their societies? What about Aaron, who is an outsider in both worlds? Ask students to create costume sketches for Aaron, Tamora and Titus. They can use watercolor, colored pencil or collage to show color, line and form. Students can also include scraps of fabric as samples if available. Ask students to justify their choices with evidence from the text, and create a narrative explaining what they hope the audience will understand from their choices.



## Is Revenge Ever Justified?

*Titus Andronicus* forces audiences to ask the question: is revenge ever justified? Ask students to make a list of acts of revenge in the play. Then ask them to journal their response to the above question. Is there ever a time when revenge is justified or necessary? Ask the class to discuss their answers in relation to the characters’ actions in the play. Did the characters have any other way of redressing the wrongs done to them? If an act of revenge is justified, where do we draw the line? What is the difference between revenge and justice?



## Soldiers Coming Home

*Titus Andronicus* begins with the Romans marching home from a long, exhausting war. Ask students to discuss how the soldiers and generals in *Titus* adjust to returning home to a peaceful society. Do they make a smooth transition? Are there elements of a warring culture that contribute to some of the misfortunes in the rest of the plot of the play? Ask students to interview a veteran or conduct an internet search about the transition from war to peace time and any challenges faced returning to civilian life.



20th Century Fox

Harry Lennix as Aaron and Angus Macfadyen as Lucius in Julie Taymor’s 1999 film, *Titus*.



## Staging Violence

Every production of *Titus Andronicus* must deal with violence in its own way. Some productions make the violence stylized, or unrealistic, while others portray it as realistically as possible. Ask students to divide up into groups and choose one of the following scenes:

- Aaron severing Titus’ hand (Act 3, Scene 1)
- The deaths of Chiron and Demetrius (Act 4, Scene 2)
- Titus dressed as a cook and Tamora eating her sons’ flesh in a pie (Act 5, Scene 3)
- The deaths of Lavinia, Tamora, Titus and Saturninus (Act 5, Scene 3)

Ask each group to act as directors for that scene and prepare for rehearsal. Ask them to create a list of potential staging difficulties with possible solutions. Then ask them to decide what approach their production will take to stage the violence. Have students write up their ideas of how the scene will be staged and present the concept to the class. Discuss what is effective about each group’s staging choices and why.

# Classroom Connections

...After the performance



## Recipe for Revenge—Titus' Cookbook

One of the challenges of performing *Titus Andronicus* is the creation of realistic props—including the flesh pie at the end. Ask students what they thought of the pie in the Shakespeare Theatre Company production. Was it theatrically effective? How do students think the pie was made? Ask students to brainstorm ideas as the propsmaster of the show. How could a realistic pie be created? What would they want it to look like? Ask students to remember that the actors onstage must actually consume the pie. What if one of their actors was a vegetarian? Ask students to brainstorm their solutions and then present them to the class as if presenting them to the director of the play.



## Write Your Own Revenge Tragedy

*Titus Andronicus* is a prime example of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Ask students to re-read *Vengeance Is Mine* to review the elements of a revenge tragedy. Then ask them to write their own—if they completed “Create a Vice Character” before the play, they can use that character in their revenge tragedy, or revise their ideas after seeing the play. After students have completed their plays, ask the class to do staged readings of each others' work. What are the elements of a modern revenge tragedy? Does this form still have relevance today?



## Good Humors

In Shakespeare's day many believed that the body was ruled by four elemental fluids that dominated a person's temperament: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These liquids, or humors, were used as a means of classifying people and their behavior. A healthy, “normal” person would have a perfect balance of all four humors, but an overabundance of any one of them could cause changes in one's personality. As a class, research the qualities of each humor and how they affect human behavior. Ask each student to select a character from *Titus Andronicus* and determine which humor dominates his/her personality, citing evidence from the text that supports the diagnosis.



## Review the Production

Many writers and theatre enthusiasts make their careers by reviewing theatrical productions. Often, a good or bad review can make or break a production's ticket revenue. Ask students to imagine that they are writing a review of *Titus Andronicus* at the Shakespeare Theatre Company for the *Washington Post*. Or, ask students to read the *Post* review and write an op-ed letter responding to the review, either agreeing or disagreeing with the reviewers comments. Send students' letters to the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department!



## Do Military Men Make Good Leaders?

As soon as Titus returns from the war, he is offered the crown and asked to be emperor of Rome. He refuses and defers to Saturninus. Why do you think Titus refuses the crown? Do you think that he would have been a better leader than Saturninus? Make a list of current presidents and leaders of the United States, and list whether they have served in the military or not. Ask students to discuss if they think military service is important to good leadership. Would students vote for a candidate with military experience over one without? What are the different skills necessary to manage troops in wartime and lead a country? Ask students what they think the outcome of the play would have been, had Titus accepted the crown.



Photo by Angus McBeany/Harvard Theatre Collection.

Anthony Quayle as Aaron in Peter Brook's production, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955.

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### Websites

- Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet—[shakespeare.palomar.edu](http://shakespeare.palomar.edu)
- The Shakespeare Resource Center—[www.bardweb.net](http://www.bardweb.net)
- Shakespeare: A Virtual Field Trip—[hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/Svtour.html](http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/Svtour.html)
- Shakespeare Birthplace Trust—[www.shakespeare.org.uk](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk)
- Life in Elizabethan England—[www.elizabethan.org](http://www.elizabethan.org)
- The Complete Works of William Shakespeare—[www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/](http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/)
- Royal Shakespeare Company—[www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk)