By William Shakespeare
Directed by John Kazanjian

TIMON
of
ATHENS

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Directed by John Kazanjian

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

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Dear Educators,

Welcome to our first ever production of *Timon of Athens*. This play is rarely performed, and it can be easy to see why. It is stylistically distinct in Shakespeare’s canon, with a more ambiguous ending that is not as satisfying. It has some inconsistencies and plot holes. In some ways, it feels halfway to a Medieval morality play, with few named characters who exhibit either a flat characterization with no arc, or a sudden shift in their views with little complexity.

However, there are many reasons to produce *Timon of Athens*, despite all of these idiosyncrasies of the script. Timon is a fascinating character to be performing in this modern age of political favors and wealthy benefactors. He is a character written in complete isolation — no real family, no faithful friends — but uses his wealth to attract supporters. His friends don’t just spend time with him for money, but they also gain a higher status just by being associated with someone as wealthy and important as Timon. When Timon falls on hard times, his friends no longer want to be associated with him. In business and politics this happens constantly — “failure is contagious” — and people are not willing to tie their fortunes to someone else’s.

This play can open up many avenues for discussion. For me, this play is full of ideas about the nature of social capital: what the relationship is between gifts and friendship, and what the expectations are of those you have supported in the past. It also addresses the very modern ailment of cynicism, as demonstrated through the philosopher Apamantus and through the thorough reversal of Timon’s attitudes toward humanity. What is the role of cynicism? Does it distance us from the world, or can it also protect us from being taken advantage of?

*Timon of Athens* is often unfamiliar even to the most dedicated Shakespeare fans. I encourage you to share this guide and spread the word about our production. It may be a long time before you have the opportunity to see this play again, and it is well worth seeing.

Best,
Michelle Burce
Education Director

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PRODUCTION SPONSORS
PLOT SYNOPSIS

Timon is a wealthy gentleman of Athens known for his generosity. He throws a large banquet, and invites all of his friends. At the feast, he accepts art from a Painter and a Poet, and he accepts jewelry from the Jeweller, which he later gives away. He gives money so that his servant Lucilius can marry an Athenian's daughter, and he offers money to help his friend Ventidius get out of prison. Timon then gives a speech about the value of true friendship, and provides dancing and entertainment to his guests. All of his friends are eager to please him so that they can receive gifts from Timon, except the cynical philosopher Apemantus. He attends the feast only to mock Timon and his shallow friends. By the end of the night, Timon has given away even more of his money and possessions.

Flavius, a servant of Timon, informs him that due to his extravagance, he has given away all of his wealth and is broke. Timon asks why he has not been told this before, but Flavius tried many times without success to curb his master’s spending and now it is too late. Flavius reveals that he had to sell all of Timon’s lands, leaving Timon in debt with no way to pay. Flavius is upset that Timon gave his money to flatterers and opportunists who claimed to be his friends only to get at his money.

When servants sent by Timon’s creditors show up to demand immediate payment, they are terrorized by Apemantus, who attacks them for how they are treating Timon. Timon realizes that he needs to borrow money, and sends out servants to his three closest friends to request a loan. Each one turns Timon down, giving their own reasons why they cannot loan him money.

Elsewhere, the famous Athenian general Alcibiades pleads with the Senate to be merciful to one of his Junior officers, who killed a citizen in a fit of rage. Alcibiades tries to persuade them that a crime of passion should not carry the same weight as a premeditated murder, but they disagree. They sentence the officer to death. When Alcibiades protests, they banish him from Athens. He takes his loyal troops with him, and vows revenge.

Timon decides to throw another banquet, inviting those that he feels have wronged him. His supposed friends show up, expecting that Timon will go back to offering gifts instead of asking for money. When the food comes out it is only rocks and warm water. In his anger, Timon throws the water and dishes at the guests, and flees the city. The loyal Flavius goes out in search of him.

Timon curses the city of Athens, and decides to live in a cave and eat roots. As he is digging for roots, he uncovers a hidden bag of gold, and remarks on the irony of finding great wealth when all he wants is food. Word spreads of his discovery. Alcibiades arrives and commiserates with Timon on their hatred of the city, and Timon offers to fund an assault on Athens. The Painter and the Poet and three bandits come to the cave, and Timon gives them all money. Apemantus shows up and they exchange barbs.

Finally Flavius finds Timon, seeking money and asking his master to come home. Timon recognizes in Flavius his one true friend, and gives him gold and sends him away. Timon invites the envoys from the Senate, who hope that Timon can stop Alcibiades, but Timon tells them to go hang themselves.

Alcibiades marches on Athens, and the Senators beg him for mercy. Alcibiades agrees to only seek out his and Timon’s enemies, but harm no one else. Word comes that Timon has been found dead, and Alcibiades reads Timon’s bitter epitaph.

CHARACTER LIST

Timon’s Household

Timon, a wealthy and famously generous Athenian lord
- Flavius, Timon’s head servant
- Servilius, a servant of Timon
- Flaminius, a servant of Timon
- Lucilius, a young servant of Timon

Timon’s “Friends”

Lucullus
Lucius
Ventidius
Sempronius

Servants of Timon’s Creditors

Philotus
Varro servant
Caphis
Lucius’ servant

Other Athenians

Alcibiades, an Athenian military leader and friend of Timon
- Timandra, a companion of Alcibiades
- Apemantus, a misanthropic philosopher

Poet, an artist patronized by Timon
Painter, an artist patronized by Timon
Jeweller, an artist patronized by Timon

Merchants, Lords and Senators of Athens, Soldiers, Messengers, and others

SEATTLE SHAKESPEARE COMPANY: EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE
John Kazanjian and his wife Mary Ewald (playing the role of Timon) have run New City Theater in Seattle for more than 30 years. The work of their company centers on language-based plays that engages in socio-political issues, as well as the work of form-breaking experimental playwrights. Kazanjian and the company recently explored Shakespeare’s works with productions of Hamlet and The Tempest.

“The play is about the 1%. It’s about the maldistribution of wealth,” said Kazanjian to the company at the first rehearsal. “One thematic way of looking at the play is the monetization of human relationships.”

Kazanjian said he was interested in cross-gender casting and noted that there are no female-identified characters in Timon of Athens with the exception of some sex workers. “I’m repulsed by the way that women are portrayed [in the play],” said Kazanjian. “It’s a man’s world, and all the power is with the men. So I wanted to turn that on its head.” In two key roles that are the most powerful characters in the play he cast Ewald as Timon and Julie Briskman as Alcibiades, an Athenian military general.

With a set that nods to Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre and costumes that purposefully float outside any single historic period, language and relationships are central to this production. “Language is more important in this play than plot and even characterization. Because, really, there’s only one principle character, and that’s Timon, who develops, changes, complexifies,” Kazanjian reflected. “It’s through language and through meaning that we get form. So form is secondary.”
GIVING CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

A Brief History on Money Lending, Usury, and Credit and its connection to Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* and *Merchant of Venice* — By Zandi Carlson, 2017

In the Book of Ezekiel, usury is listed alongside rape, murder, and robbery (Ezekiel 18:19-13). In Dante’s *Inferno*, a 14th-century epic poem about the nine circles of hell, usurers are placed at the lowest ledge of the seventh circle of hell — lower than murderers.

The original definition of usury was simply interest on a loan, interest being money charged for borrowed money. Usury later became the practice of lending money and charging the borrower interest, especially at an exorbitant interest rate.

In the eighth century under Charlemagne, first recognized Emperor of Western Europe, usury was declared a general criminal offence. In England, during the reign of Queen Mary, English Parliament disallowed the collection of interest. In 1570, Queen Mary’s successor, Queen Elizabeth I set legal interest rates as limited to less than 10% and this law lasted about 284 years, up until 1854.

“Bounty is magical: in his eye, it needs no replenishment, it cannot be depleted, it has no limits.”
— Coppélia Kahn.

Money Lending in *Timon of Athens*

While many governments throughout history have had regulations and laws regarding usury, Ancient Greece had no special legislation in regards to it. This makes Shakespeare’s setting of *Timon of Athens* removed enough from the contemporary perceptions of usury and money lending at that time. It’s easier for an audience to see a story highlighting a current issue when it is set in a different time period, which creates a distancing effect on the material. For example, this is the same strategy implemented by Author Miller to examine the witch-hunt mentality of McCarthyism through *The Crucible*.

While Aristotle may have written extensively against usury and commerce (to him money was barren, and should only be used to buy goods, not increase wealth), the Greek language itself has a multiplying view on money. The Greek word for interest is *tokos*, which meant “offspring” or “child,” meaning that money was meant to grow. This helps put Timon’s actions into the play into perspective — to him, giving could produce abundance. Timon’s extravagant gifts act to secure his position as a dominant member of society, creating the illusion of friendship. By refusing his beneficiaries the opportunity to reciprocate his gifts he keeps them at a distance and keeps himself in a position of power.

Timon:

You mistake my love; I gave it freely ever, and there’s none Can truly say he gives, if he receives.

*Timon of Athens* I.ii.

When he learns that he is in debt, not only due to his borrowing, but the interest he’s accrued on the gifts he’s purchased, no one is willing to help him out, because his power was created from this one-sided economy, not a circular gift economy. Or as Kahn puts it, “Giving is a one-way street on which only Timon can travel.”

In Act II.ii, when the servants come to Timon with their master’s bills, Apemantus calls the servants; “Poor rogues, and usurers’ men!” He taunts them with the term, “usurer.” Yet they answer that they are indeed that which he speaks of. Apemantus may represent the voice of Shakespeare’s contemporaries who were against usury.

*Timon of Athens* was written sometime between 1605 and 1608. It was in 1608 that Robert Cecil was appointed Lord Treasurer, in an attempt to resolve King James’ financial crisis. One recommendation Cecil gave: limit gift giving. James had inherited debts from Queen Elizabeth, but unlike Elizabeth, had not been frugal in his spending. The Jacobean patronage system’s spiral into financial crisis could have influenced Shakespeare in the telling of the tragedy of Timon.
Money Lending in The Merchant of Venice

Now, let’s look at Shakespeare and Shylock. As stated above, the Torah forbids charging interest on loans between members of the Jewish faith (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37). Charging interest on loans made to foreigners, who in the context of the Iron Age theocracy of Judah were assumed to practice other religions, is permitted (Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

We already learned that under Queen Elizabeth, the strict anti-usury laws had been lifted. By the late sixteenth century, lending with interest was commonplace according to Keith Wrightson, author of *English Society 1580–1680*. Throughout the Renaissance age and beyond it, many were uncomfortable with the concept of usury. Antonio, a capitalist merchant (and the title character in *The Merchant of Venice*) is in need of financial credit for business ventures, yet he is judgmental of the moneylenders who demand interest. Antonio usually is in a position to lend to friends free of interest. But Antonio’s business ventures are failing, and when his friend Bassanio comes to him for a loan, he is forced to go to Shylock for help. Shylock resents Antonio’s practice of lending without interest. In an aside to the audience he says;

**Shylock:**

He lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.

*Merchant of Venice I.iii*

Shylock’s choice to loan Antonio money is not only tempered by Antonio’s struggling business ventures (his bad credit, if you will), but also by Antonio’s former treatment (spitting on him, calling him a dog) and accusing Shylock of usury. The contrast between the two men and their opinion on money lending practices makes them enemies. Shylock strikes a deal in order to smooth things over and be kind, as he puts it. He’ll agree to the loan, with zero interest, with the simple agreement that if Antonio cannot pay the loan in three months, Shylock gets a pound of Antonio’s flesh.

**Shylock:**

This kindness will I show.

Go with me to a notary, seal me there
Your single bond; and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Express’d in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.

Antonio:

Content, i’ faith: I’ll seal to such a bond
And say there is much kindness in the Jew.

*Merchant of Venice I.iii*

Money Lending into the Modern Era

Let’s bring this idea of credit and money lending up towards the present. In the US, before the Civil War, if you went to the town store and did not have cash on hand, your grocer could say “I know you, I trust you, come back and pay next week.” That was your credit rating; just a personal relationship with someone you did business with frequently. Populations in cities increased post-Civil War; this growth meant that store owners no longer had that personal relationship with each of their customers. They needed a way of knowing if someone could be trusted if they purchased on credit. Herman and Conrad Cells decided to go around to all the merchants in Brooklyn, NY, and compile information on the customers and if they could be trusted to pay on time. This was such a success that others started compiling their own lists and ratings, and credit bureaus were created. There are now three major credit bureaus.

Today, credit bureaus pull your information for banks and businesses to use when analyzing how much of a risk you are, or how “creditworthy” you are. This can eventually determine what kinds of jobs you can get, where you can rent, and how much interest you will be charged on a home loan. Charging interest on loans — such as interest on a mortgage, credit card bill, or student loan — is no longer considered a distasteful practice, but is commonplace and expected. Charging extremely high interest, such as on payday loans, is often viewed as distasteful and exploitative, but it is not illegal. Our attitude toward predatory lending may be the closest analogy to help us understand the Elizabethan attitude toward charging interest on loans at all.

Sources


*Timon of Athens: Biological Finance.* By Michael Flachmann From Souvenir Program, 1993


TIMON TIDBITS

The Life That Became Legend
You probably knew you were coming to see a play that was written 400 years ago, but did you know this is story that has been told for over 2,400 years? Based on the changing fortunes and character of a real person, Timon’s life was a wildly popular story for over half a millennia!

The real Timon was a wealthy Athenian who lived during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) and gained a reputation for lavishing his inheritance on friends. When his money ran out, Timon’s friends refused to help, and he had to take on work as a field laborer for survival. When the impoverished Timon found a buried bag of gold, his former friends returned in hopes of regaining his favor, but Timon threw dirt at them instead.

Writing within years of Timon’s lifetime, Aristophanes refers to him in the play Lysistrata (411 BCE), claiming that Timon hated bad men, but was kind to women. A female chorus sing the following lines:

Once there was a certain man called Timon, a tough customer, and a whimsical, a true son of the Furies, with a face that seemed to glare out of a thorn-bush. He withdrew from the world because he couldn’t abide bad men, after vomiting a thousand curses at them. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

In Geographica (7 BCE), Strabo recounts how Mark Antony, in deep despair following the Battle of Actium, built a coastal hermitage and named it Timonium:

This was his last act, when, deserted by his partisans, he retired to Alexandria after his defeat at Actium, and intended, being forsaken by so many friends, to lead the [solitary] life of Timon for the rest of his days.

A Famous Friend
Timon’s friend Alcibiades is a pretty famous historic figure in his own right. Born to a powerful Athenian family, he was a student of Socrates and first cousin, once removed, to Pericles. Alcibiades quickly became a prominent politician and military commander. He was, however, very bad at staying on people’s good side.

When political enemies within Athens leveled charges of sacrilege against him, Alcibiades defected to the enemy, Sparta, and made war against his kin and former peers. When the situation in Sparta also soured, he defected again, this time to Persia. Eventually, Athens took him back, but it didn’t last, and he was exiled again after just a few years.

Co-Authorship
Many scholars believe that Thomas Middleton helped to co-author Timon of Athens with Shakespeare. Evidence for co-authorship includes some plot inconsistencies, a large number of long lines not written in iambic pentameter, and a somewhat unsatisfying ending, with Timon neither experiencing forgiveness nor concluding his revenge. Scholars point to Middleton specifically because there is a high usage of words and phrases that are common in Middleton’s other writing, but rare in Shakespeare’s, and the play has a bitter sarcastic tone that is more reminiscent of Middleton’s writing. It is also suggested that the play was never really finished, as both playwrights had other projects that they moved on to — Shakespeare immediately wrote Antony and Cleopatra, while Middleton moved on to The Revenger’s Tragedy.
Pan-Timonian!
When Renaissance translations of Roman and Ancient Greek texts introduced Timon to the English-speaking world, it didn’t take long for his name to become synonymous with the misanthropy (the hatred or distrust of humankind) — literally.

Here are the Timon-inspired words that have secured a place in the English lexicon, along with the works in which they first appeared:

- **Timonist n.** A bitter misanthrope.  
  *Greene’s Mourning Garment*, 1590.

- **Timonism n.** A form of bitter misanthropy, a despair leading to hatred or contemptuous rejection of mankind. A bitter or cynical utterance or behavior.  

- **Timonian adj.** A form of bitter misanthropy relating to Timonism.  
  *Plutarch’s Parallel Lives*, a 1770 English translation.

- **Timonize v.** To behave as a misanthrope.  
  To cause (someone) to slide into bitter misanthropy.  
  *The Gentleman Instructed*, 1713.

Delayed Debut
Scholars believe that *Timon of Athens* was written around 1605–1606, but the earliest known staging of the play wasn’t until 1674 — and even that was an adaptation! It wasn’t until 1761 that the original script was performed.

It has been speculated that the Revels Office (the media censorship of the day) suppressed the play for its apparent parallels to James I. The newly crowned King had a reputation as a lavish spender who was overly generous to his friends. To this day, *Timon of Athens* remains one of the least produced works in Shakespeare’s canon.

Undeveloped Characters
*Timon of Athens* contains an unusually large number of unnamed characters — the Painter, Poet, Jeweler, Fool, Lords, Senators, and Bandits. Even those characters that are named are, at times, indistinguishable from each other. The main characters in the play seem to be echoes of other Shakespearean characters that are more fully developed elsewhere. Timon himself seems to follow a similar arc as *King Lear*, but exhibits the generosity of Marc Antony. The trio of Timon, Alcibiades, and Apemantus mirrors the trio of Lear, Edgar, and the Fool on the heath in *King Lear*, which was written around the same time as Timon.

Disney’s Double Shakespeare
The plot of Disney’s *The Lion King* is famously influenced by *Hamlet* — but there’s even more Shakespeare hidden in the 1994 animated classic.

The character of Timon is a misanthropic meerkat that has renounced Serengeti society to live off grubs in the wild. The pronunciation may be different … but we can see what’s happening.
When Timon asks his friends for help, does that negate the generosity of his earlier actions?

- Yes. It reveals that the earlier gifts were not freely given, but were actually the first half of an expected transaction that Timon is forcing on his friends.
- No. It is reasonable for Timon to assume that people he has been kind to will be kind to him. Timon believed that they were his true friends and would take care of him when he fell on hard times.

Is Timon a good man?

- Yes. Timon was a generous and friendly person until the situation forced him to become cynical.
- No. Timon had a rose-colored view of the world and deluded himself into thinking that he could win friends with gifts. When he found out the truth of his “friends,” he became a spiteful person.
- Yes and no. Timon is no better or worse than anyone else, he’s just more extreme in his current mood, and goes from extremely generous to extremely hateful very quickly.

Are the senators who accept gifts from Timon, but won’t help him later actually his friends? How would you classify their relationship to Timon?

- They are not Timon’s friends. They are opportunists who use him for his wealth.
- They are casual friends of Timon. They enjoy hanging out with him and accepting his gifts and favors, but they don’t feel obligated to return the favor.
- They are politicians, accepting gifts where they can, but not spending their own money if they don’t have to.
Overview
In this play, Timon starts out extremely generous toward his friends, but ends up bitter and overly cynical about humanity. He seems to have no middle ground in his generosity and kindness. In the two following activities, students will examine Timon’s generosity from two different lenses. In the first, students will consider how someone could have “too much of a good thing,” and come up with examples of other virtues that can be harmful in the extreme. In the second, students will come up with their own examples of literary characters who exhibit generosity, and compare them to Timon.

Activity 1
Too Much / Too Little of a Good Thing
Discuss: Can too much of a virtue be as bad as too little? As a large group, discuss the ways in which generosity can be good in moderation, but harmful if you have too much or too little.

Have students break up into small groups, and give each group a different virtue to discuss. Groups should come up with an example of how someone could exhibit that virtue too much, too little, or just the right amount. Here are some examples of virtues to use:
- Honesty
- Courage
- Forgiveness
- Patience
- Flexibility
- Humility

Present: Groups will then present their examples to the class. Optional: Students can present their examples in the form of three short skits.

Activity 2
Compare and Contrast Writing Prompt
Have students choose a fictional character who exhibits generosity in some way, and write 2–3 paragraphs comparing and contrasting that character to Timon. Students should choose a character that they know well.

Some guiding questions for this writing prompt could be:
- In what ways is each character generous?
- Are they generous to their friends? To strangers?
- Do they ask anything in return?
- What causes this character to start or stop being generous (if anything)?
- Does this character exhibit extreme generosity? If so, does it work out well for them?

Here are some examples of characters that could be used by students. Other examples from popular television, comics, books, or stories are also welcome.
- Ebenezer Scrooge (from A Christmas Carol)
- The Tree (from Shel Silverstein’s The Giving Tree)
- The Little Red Hen (folk tale)
Mission Statement
With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

ABOUT US
Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region’s year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company’s growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works.

Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops
- In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
- Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
- Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions
- Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
- Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes
- Our summer “Camp Bill” series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
- In our Fall and Spring after-school “Short Shakes” programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
- Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.

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