TROILUS & CRESSIDA

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
DIRECTED BY DAVID QUICKSALL

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE
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Dear Educators,

I’m going to bet that most of our audience has never seen Troilus and Cressida before. It’s one of Shakespeare's rarely-produced plays, due to its complex and challenging story. It is considered one of Shakespeare’s “problem” plays that is not quite a comedy (though it is full of bawdy humor), but not quite a tragedy (though it ends on a gloomy note of death and lost love).

It is a story of an endless war that seems only to benefit the most powerful. It's a story of both women and men being objectified, and judged only on their beauty or strength in battle. It is a story of characters needing to adapt in order to survive their situations, and a story of winning and taking power by underhanded means. In our first rehearsal, it struck me that the set will feature large statues of Aphrodite (Goddess of Love) and Ares (God of War). These ever-present statues of love and war will remind us of two of the central circumstances in the play - going to war over love, and love not being able to survive a war. What a story for our present moment.

This is one of the darker and more mature shows that we have this season, but it’s a good one for deep discussion. For those of you bringing your students, I hope you have great discussions about the myriad of very modern themes that were brought up 400 years ago.

Best,

Michelle Burce
Education Director of Seattle Shakespeare Company

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The Plot of 
*Troilus & Cressida*

It all began when Helen of Troy was fiercely abducted, and now for seven long years the Greeks and Trojans have been at war. Warriors cynically debate over the fate of their nations with little resolution.

The Greek army is encamped under the walls of Troy and, when the play begins, the war has reached stalemate. The Greeks are quarrelling amongst themselves. Achilles, their greatest champion, refuses to fight and has withdrawn to his tent with his lover, Patroclus.

Ulysses tries to get Achilles back to fighting by making him jealous of a rival warrior, Ajax. Ulysses announces Ajax as a new hero who will meet Hector, the Trojan champion, in single combat.

The Trojans are debating whether they should continue the war, just to keep Helen, or return her to the Greeks. Hector says that she is not worth the lives she costs, but when his brother Troilus suggests that honour demands they continue to fight for her, Hector agrees with him.

The single combat takes place between Ajax and Hector and ends in a show of friendship, but hostilities are resumed the following day.

Ensnared in the madness are the young Trojan prince, Troilus, and Cressida, the daughter of Calchas, a Trojan who has defected to the Greek camp. The young lovers are eagerly assisted by Cressida’s uncle Pandarus, who acts as their go-between. After just one night together the lovers are separated – Cressida is sent to join her father in the Greek camp, in exchange for the captured general Antenor. Diomedes, a Greek soldier, woos her to become his lover. Cressida almost immediately betrays Troilus by agreeing to become the soldier’s lover. Troilus finds out and is plunged into despair.

Hector goes into battle, despite his sister Cassandra’s prophecies of doom. Achilles learns of the death of Patroclus and this makes him want to fight again. He can’t defeat Hector in single combat, but catches him unarmed and kills him. Achilles drags Hector’s body around the walls of Troy.

The fall of Troy is now certain and the angry and heartbroken Troilus takes over from Hector as the Trojan champion, vowing revenge on Achilles. The dying, disease-ridden Pandarus is left to end the play.

Both nations and lovers battle it out in this funny and insightful drama of revenge and romance. Troilus and Cressida’s doomed devotion mirrors the world of war all around them. Classic characters from *The Iliad* – Hector, Ulysses, Achilles, Ajax, Helen – leap to life with the help of Shakespeare’s imagination to reveal the follies of war. At turns farcical and tragic, comedic and heart-breaking, *Troilus and Cressida* is one of Shakespeare’s most passionate plays.

CHARACTERS

TROJAN

TROILUS A young Trojan prince who falls in love with Cressida, a daughter of a Trojan traitor.

CRESSIDA A daughter of a Trojan traitor who falls in love with Troilus.

CALCHAS Cressida’s father who has defected to the Greek camp.

PANDARUS Cressida’s uncle Pandarus, who acts as their go-between.

HECTOR A Trojan prince known as the greatest fighter for Troy in the Trojan War.

ANDROMACHE Hector’s wife.

PARIS A Trojan prince. He elopes with Helen and causes the Trojan War.

PRIAM The last King of Troy before its fall.

CASSANDRA A daughter of King Priam. She is gifted with the ability to foresee the future, but cursed that no one will believe in her prophecies.

AENEAS A Trojan hero who appears in Virgil’s The Aeneid after the fall of Troy.

GREEK

ACHILLES A Greek hero. He is known for his incredible strength and courage, except his one vulnerability – his "Achilles heel.”

ULYSES A Greek hero also known as Odysseus, his Greek name. He is the main protagonist of Homer’s The Odyssey. He is the cleverest, most sly and manipulative of the army.

HELEN The Queen of Sparta and the wife of King Menalaus. She is said to be the most beautiful mortal woman in the world.

THERSITES A low-class Greek who runs around bad-mouthing the war, insulting everyone in sight, and offering many brutal social commentaries.

AGAMEMNON The General of the Greek army and the brother of King Menalaus.

AJAX A Greek commander known for his great stature and strength.

NESTOR The King of Pylos and the wise man for the Greeks during the Trojan War, giving advice and often settling disputes among the heroes.

DIOMEDES A Greek soldier. When Cressida is traded off to the Greek army, he pursues to win her heart over.

PATROCLUS A Greek commander. He shares a special bond with Achilles.

PARIS A Trojan prince. He elopes with Helen and causes the Trojan War.

PRIAM The last King of Troy before its fall.

CASSANDRA A daughter of King Priam. She is gifted with the ability to foresee the future, but cursed that no one will believe in her prophecies.

AENEAS A Trojan hero who appears in Virgil’s The Aeneid after the fall of Troy.
Sources

Shakespeare had access to many sources about the Trojan War on which to base this play. On one hand, Homer’s *The Iliad* had been translated into English. From this Greek source, Shakespeare pulls his perspective on Achilles, the basis of the characters Thersites and Nestor, and the basic story ending in the death of Hector. However, Homer was seen as pro-Greek, and Shakespeare and his English contemporaries viewed themselves as more sympathetic to the Trojans. Therefore, many of the sources used in this play were medieval romances set during the Trojan War. The main love story between Troilus and Cressida, with Pandarus as a go-between, is based on Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. Shakespeare is more concerned with the war itself and its effect on the lovers, and in general all of his major characters are darker and more cynical than Chaucer’s. In Shakespeare’s treatment, neither the war nor the love story is as glamorous as in his original sources.


Top left: The Kiss: the two lovers in the bedroom, a woodcut from page 501 of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer [William Morris, Kelmscott Press] (1896). Although Troilus and Criseyde is set in ancient Greece, they are dressed in medieval costume as Chaucer was writing in the 14th century. The artists, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones have illustrated the artwork in the style of that time. Bottom left: The fight scene of Ajax and Hector in ancient art. Painted on a wine-drinking bowl in the style of Exekias, c. 530 BC, from Pharsalos, Greece.
The Story of The Trojan War... takes place in the late Bronze Age. Homer wrote *The Iliad* 800-700 BCE, and exact dates are conflicting; 1,334 BCE according to Duris of Samos, 1,250 BCE according to Herodotus, and 1,184 BCE according to Eratosthenes. “A conflict between Mycenaeans and Hittites may well have occurred, but its representation in epic literature such as Homer’s *The Iliad* is almost certainly more myth than reality.” (Cartwright)

**Judgment of Paris**: The Goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite each claim to be the fairest of all. They ask the God Zeus to choose the fairest, which he avoids to get involved. Instead, he appoints Paris, the Prince of Troy to give a golden apple to fairest Goddess. He selects Aphrodite, who promises him Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world.

**Helen of Sparta**: King Menelaus’ wife, Helen, is the most beautiful mortal woman in the world. While King Menelaus is away in Crete, Paris steals Helen and brings her back to Troy.

**The Trojan War Begins**: When King Menelaus finds Helen gone, he calls for the Greek army to go to Troy and bring her back. The Trojan War begins, led by Menelaus’ elder brother Agamemnon, the commander in chief.

**Ajax vs. Hector**: A duel between the Greek hero, Ajax and the Trojan prince, Hector. Hector loses the fight as he is unable to penetrate through Ajax’s shield. With the God Apollo intervenes, they call the fight off and exchange gifts.

**Achilles’ Heel**: As a child, Achilles was dipped in the River Styx, which made him invulnerable everywhere except his heel where his mother held him by. When Patroclus, (Achilles’ friend), is mistaken for Achilles and is killed by Hector, Achilles kills Hector in retaliation. He then drives the Trojans back into Troy until Paris kills him by shooting an arrow in his heel.

**The Trojan Horse**: Odysseus creates a plan to build a giant wooden horse for Greeks to hide inside of it. The Trojans bring the horse into the city. The Greeks come out of the horse at night and open the gates of Troy to let the rest of the Greek army inside.

**King Menelaus vs. Paris**: Paris is defeated, but Aphrodite saves him.

**The fall of Troy**: The Greek army defeats the Trojans.
Our Production

Director David Quicksall has always loved the mythology around the Trojan War. One thing that particularly interests him about Shakespeare's take is what he doesn't focus on in his story. *Troilus and Cressida* is not as heroic and idealized as *The Iliad*; in this story, we instead see the gritty and flawed story of a war gone bad.

The differences between the Greek camp and the Trojan camp will be highlighted through costuming. The Greeks will be depicted in khaki and sand colors, as soldiers who have been living on the beach in a war camp for a long time. They will look messy, have a hodgepodge of armor pieces, and be worse for wear. By contrast, the Trojans will be shown as soldiers who get to go home every night - they are fresh, clean, and in bright colors of gold, teal, and white.
Quicksall is especially interested in the ideas of objectifying and commodifying of the people in the story. All of these characters are treated as objects that have a certain value based on their beauty, their power, or their strength, and they can be bargained for and traded accordingly. This “objectifying” of people will be reflected in the costumes as well, with lots of skin shown on both men and women, highlighting that beauty, power, and strength in an objectifying way.

The set for this production will be a series of small spaces - tents in the Greek camps, and bedrooms in the Trojan city - that serve as the backdrop for the plots and conflict of the show. Flanking the space will be two statues - Aphrodite, Goddess of Love, and Ares, God of War.

This production is also going to embrace the Elizabethan tradition of costuming Shakespeare. It will not be in Elizabethan dress, but rather will be a mix of eras that range from antiquity to contemporary, but focus more on what “feel right” for each character. In Shakespeare’s day, it was common for actors to wear last year’s fashion in their plays (regardless of era), so as to save money on costumes. This would be similar to theaters always hitting a thrift store for costumes today.

Quicksall’s photo collage of his initial visual brainstorm of Troilus and Cressida. Various marble statues represent the time period of the play and the idea of objectification of a human body. The beauty and strength in each gender are objectified and measured for their values.
Problem Play

In Shakespeare's plays you can basically assume that if everyone dies at the end it's a tragedy. And if everyone gets married at the end, it's a comedy. Histories...well, they're based on historical characters.

But what about the ones that end in marriage, but that don't seem so funny to the modern day audiences? We call these problem plays.

Most people think of Merchant of Venice, and the anti-Semitism surrounding Shylock, as a prime example of a problem play. Or perhaps you're aware of the lesser known Measure for Measure, in which Angelo, the man in charge while the Duke is out of town, tries to get a young nun, Isabel, to sleep with him in order to lift his sentence off of her brother for having sex out of wedlock (the irony is not lost in that case). The crafty Isabel gets out of it by having Angelo's ex-fiancée sleep with him instead - a bed trick ploy also used in All's Well that Ends Well - and everything ends well in the end with the Duke proposing to Isabel! Happy endings all around -- it ends with a wedding, so it's a comedy!

Anyone else not laughing at that plot?

While many people associate the term “problem play” with Shakespeare's darker comedies: All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and Merchant of Venice, it was first used to describe plays in the late 19th century by F. S. Boas. In his book, Shakespeare and His Predecessors (1896), Boas coins the “problem play” classification. A problem play is any play dealing with a social or political problem with the aim of igniting public debate, often where morality issues presented in the play are not resolved to a contemporary audience's satisfaction. (Owens)

In Boas' time contemporary plays such as Ibsen's A Doll's House, or Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession were considered problem plays. You only need to know what Mrs. Warren's profession was for the play to be scandalous at that time.

An excerpt from F. S. Boas' Shakespeare and His Predecessors (1896) coining the term, "problem play."
In *Troilus and Cressida*, there is a war going on between the Trojans and the Athenians. This could be the makings for a play that ends in heroic tragedy, with the brave heroes Hector and Achilles fighting in single combat to save their people and end the war. But instead, when neither can win the fight, Achilles ultimately ambushes an unarmed Hector. There is disillusionment, cynicism about war, and backstabbing, but not much in the way or heroics or tragedy.

There is also a love story between the title characters, and it starts off as a tale of star-crossed love, with Trojan Troilus falling in love with the captive Cressida. In a comedy, the audience would expect a wedding at the end; in a tragedy they would expect one or both to perish. Instead, Troilus appears to love Cressida mainly for her looks, and after they sleep together he seems to lose some interest in her. Cressida's father - who has defected to the Greek side - exchanges prisoners with the Trojans so that he can get his daughter back, so she returns to the Greek camp with Diomedes. Troilus learns Diomedes has seduced Cressida, and he is heartbroken. There is no soaring love story, and no tragic end for either lover. Troilus feels betrayed, and Cressida goes on with her life.

The modern director has the challenge of how to address these problems. Should they create some clever staging to make it make more sense? Should they lean into the problematic elements as a way to engage the audience in critical thought? Should they try to find the humorous parts within the problems? Every director is different and has the challenge of making it work for our contemporary minds.

Sources:
Pre-Show Reflection Questions
These questions will help students to think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it. Have students discuss these questions in partners or small groups, or write journal entries based on these prompts.

- Shakespeare is known for writing comedies and tragedies. What makes a play tragic? What makes a play comedic? How would you describe a play that is somewhere in between?
- Are there different rules in wartime than there are in times of peace?
- What is more important - love or survival?
- What is more important - honor or victory?

Post-Show Discussion Questions
After the show, discuss these questions in small groups or as a class. For all of these, student responses may vary. Some possible responses are provided, but students may have additional answers based on their reactions to the play.

Who are the most sympathetic characters in the play? Who are the “good guys”?

- Troilus himself is sympathetic. He has romantic ideals that he tries to live up to, but ends up heartbroken.
- Hector is a sympathetic character. He is a strong soldier, but ends up killed dishonorably.
- Cressida is sympathetic. She worries that Troilus doesn’t love her, especially after he consents to sending her to the Greek camp, so she does what she needs to survive.
- All of the characters are deeply flawed, and none are set up to be the good guys any more than other characters.

What might Shakespeare - through this play - be saying about war?

- Honor in war is just about personal grudges, as Achilles fights only when Patroclus is killed, Troilus fights because he is heartbroken about Cressida, and the entire war is conducted because Paris eloped with Helen, the wife of Menelaus.
- Victory is utilitarian, as the war is won not when the two sides agree to a peace settlement or when the armies have proven which side is worthier, but when Achilles has Hector ambushed and killed.
- War is destructive and pointless, as there is no clear winner, many Trojans and Greeks die over a personal slight, and there is no honor for anyone in this story.
In this play, people discuss their worth and value in a variety of ways - as commodities to be traded (Cressida) or jewels to be won (Helen), and as a function of how other people see them, such as Achilles feeling he is not valued enough. What determines a person's value? Are leaders Paris, Helen, and Menelaus more valuable than their subjects? Is a person's value determined by how others feel about them? (Answers will vary)

How are gender roles portrayed in this play? How are men expected to act, and what happens when they act differently? How are women expected to act, and what happens when they act differently?

- Achilles is supposed to be a strong warrior, but when he prefers spending time with Patroclus instead of fighting, he is criticized as being worthless.
- Troilus feels that when he is in love or feeling heartbroken, he is weak and acting like a woman. He is expected to be strong and fierce.
- Cressida is expected to be obedient, faithful, and loving. When she is seduced by another man, she is seen as being promiscuous.
- Cassandra and Andromache are expected to be quiet and obedient. When they challenge the men in their lives and tell them what to do, they are seen as superstitious or crazy.
Activity: Character Analysis

In this activity, students will choose a character from Troilus and Cressida and do a deep character analysis, citing moments in the play that reveal the complexity of these characters. There are several levels of this activity, depending on the level of the students. Teachers are invited to pick and choose which pieces of this activity to have students complete.

Individually or in small groups, students should choose a major character from Troilus and Cressida for a deep character analysis. Some great options for characters include:

- Troilus
- Cressida
- Hector
- Achilles

Other characters, such as Ajax, Pandarus, Diomedes, and Ulysses can also work for this activity.

Once students have chosen their character, choose a selection of the following character-analysis prompts to create a full picture of this character, depending on the level of the student.

Name of Character: _____________________

1. **Character Web**: Draw a character web for your character, describing their main relationships in the play. Put your character's name in a box in the middle of the web, then draw lines to indicate:
   - love relationships (...is married to...)
   - family relationships (...is the son of...)
   - military relationships (...commands in battle... or ...challenges in combat...)

   If students can think of other significant relationships, include those as well.

2. **In a Word**: If you were to choose one adjective or short phrase to describe this character, it would have to be: ________________
   - Why did you choose this adjective?
   - What events or actions made you think this about the character?

3. **Beginnings and Ends**: Describe this character at the beginning versus the end of the play.
   - What is the character like at the beginning?
   - How is this character different at the end?
   - What major event(s) caused these changes?
ACTIVITIES

4. **Physical Traits**
   - What do you think this character looks like?
   - What clues from the play tell you that?
   - Draw this character -OR- Choose a celebrity that you would cast as this character.
   - Why did you portray this character the way you did?

5. **Pros and Cons**: Shakespeare wrote character who are not 100% good or bad, but who are more complex.
   - Create a chart with three columns - “Morally Good,” “Grey Area,” and “Morally Bad.”
   - Using information from the play or from the script, categorize the actions taken and opinions held by your character into one of the three columns. Be sure to find at least six actions or opinions to add to your chart.

6. **A Different Point of View**: Sometimes characters are seen differently by themselves, their friends, their family, or their enemies.
   - How does this character see themselves? How do you know?
   - Choose two other characters - how do those characters view your character? How do you know? What do they say about your character? How do they treat your character?
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.

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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.

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.