

Antony and Cleopatra
By William Shakespeare

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PLOT

Mark Antony has fallen in love with Cleopatra and spends his time in Egypt rather than tending to his duties in Rome as a statesman and military leader. Political strife threatens the triumvirs (Antony, Caesar and Lepidus) and forces him to leave Egypt. When he returns to Rome, Caesar condemns him for neglecting his obligations in Rome. The conflict is seemingly called to a truce when Antony marries Caesar's sister Octavia. Upon hearing the news, Cleopatra resolves that Antony will be hers again. Once Antony and Octavia depart for Athens, Caesar decides to break off the truce and betrays both Antony and Lepidus. Hearing the news, Antony sends Octavia to Rome on a peacekeeping mission while he goes to Egypt to secure an army to fight against Caesar. Over the course of many battles, both Enobarbus and the Egyptians desert him. Enobarbus dies of guilt. Cleopatra sends word that she has committed suicide which leads Antony to commit suicide. However, he botches it up and is carried over to Cleopatra where he is briefly reunited with his lover before he dies. Caesar takes Cleopatra as prisoner and intends to parade her around Rome. However, she commits suicide and is buried beside Antony.

THEMES AND ISSUES

- Gender roles
- Power relations (Master and obedience)
- Suicide and society
- Youth and arrogance versus age and experience
- Honour, loyalty, ambition and betrayal
- Worldliness
- Order vs pleasure

LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE

- Play treatment of gender issues (ie. Adolescent boys playing women)
- Fictitious representations of historical characters and events
- Use of canonical text as a vehicle for contemporary issues
- Comparison of different interpretations of the same text
- Loyalty and honour in contrast to ambition and betrayal
- Five act structure to teach exposition, initial incident, rising action, turning point, falling action, climax, conclusion

EXTENDED RESOURCES

Comparative reading: Internet "The Story of Antony and Cleopatra: a comparative exploration of text and source" (google search phrase), Reading "Antony and Cleopatra" in *Shakespeare stories II* by Leon Garfield
Film: Carra's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1983), Miller's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1983), *Cleopatra* (1963)

TEACHER RESOURCES

(*) Bardossi, Beth, et al. "2003 Suggestions for Teaching Antony and Cleopatra by William Shakespeare". *Oregon Shakespeare Festival*. 2003. <http://www.orshakes.org/images/pdf/Antonyguide.pdf> (27 July 2003).

(#) Facciponti, Laura. *A Teacher's Guide to the Signet Classic Edition of William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001.

(+) Michaels, Wendy. *Gaze on Cleopatra: A workshop approach to Antony and Cleopatra*. Rozelle, Australia: St Clair Press, 1992.

(-) Smagorinsky, Peter. *Teaching English Through Principled Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Write a journal or a series of letters written from either Antony or Cleopatra's point of view. What thoughts, feelings or ideas might they have exchanged while they were away from each other or after Antony's marriage to Octavia? What might their individual thoughts have been before battle or treaty? (#) **I, W, I**

2. Throughout the play, Cleopatra plays tricks on Antony to manipulate his feelings. Using your understanding of Cleopatra, imagine you are Cleopatra and write an article entitled “How to Get and Keep Your Man” for a popular magazine. **I, W, F**
3. In II.ii 191-250, Enobarbus describes in great detail to Agrippa the moment when Antony and Cleopatra meet. In small groups, suggest how you would film this scene. Take into account details such as point of view, time (present, flashback?), setting and mood. Draw a storyboard for your scene. **SG, S/L, I**
4. The battle scenes are considered the play’s climax. In small groups, choose a battle scene from Act III and IV and develop a storyboard showing the movement and action of the scene. Storyboards will be displayed in sequence. Discuss how the scene shifts and where the dramatic focus lies in your scene. (+) **SG, R/W, F**
5. Romeo and Juliet are a pair of lovers who commit suicide in the end. Antony and Cleopatra are an older pair of lovers who also commit suicide in the end. As a class, discuss your feelings towards the suicides of the two pairs of lovers. Discuss how age affects your feelings. How is suicide viewed today versus when the play took place? In what instances is suicide a cowardly act and/or an honourable act? **WG, S/L, I**
6. Carefully read over the descriptions of Octavia and Cleopatra and compare. How is each woman described in the play? In what ways does each woman represent her civilization? What does Antony stand to gain and lose by being with Octavia? Cleopatra? (*) **I, R, I**
7. Antony and Cleopatra are older characters while Caesar is a younger character. How does this detail affect their characters? Show different stage and film versions of *Antony and Cleopatra* (with young actors and older actors) and discuss the importance of age in the play. **WG, V, I**
8. In small groups, students will create and present a body map of one of the characters in the play (Antony, Cleopatra, Caesar or Enobarbus). On a large piece of paper, students will trace a classmate’s body. The body map will include (at least) 4 quotes explaining the character and 3 symbols. (~) **SG, W/R, F**
9. Recreate sets for Egypt and Rome. Divide into two large groups, each researching either Egypt or Rome, also taking into account the play’s descriptions of the two places. Your group will present and teach the other group about your location. **SG, R/V/L/S, F**
10. Recently, there has been a wave of remakes and modern versions of class stories. *Antony and Cleopatra* takes place many hundreds of years ago. However, some people suggest that it still has relevance to today. Answer the following: Where might we see similar plot lines today? If you were to adapt the play into a modern version, where might this take place? What would you change? What would you keep the same? **I, W, F**
11. Shakespeare often used actual historical figures in his plays (eg. *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Henry V*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*). As a whole group, discuss where the play is historically accurate and where Shakespeare uses artistic license. Watch “The Lion in Winter” and “The Madness of King George”. Discuss how film producers treat historical figures. (#) **WG, V, I**
12. Create a soundtrack for the play. Use music to show your understanding of the settings, the characters and plot. Remember to include the song lyrics if any and a two page rationale explaining the significance of each song to the play. **I, L, F**
13. Caesar provides a useful contrast to Antony in both his tactical ability and his relationship to his soldiers. Watch *Antony and Cleopatra*. Divide into small groups and watch for Caesar’s tactical ability, Caesar’s relationship with his soldiers, Antony’s tactical ability, and Antony’s relationship with his soldiers. Write down their findings and present their conclusions to the class. (+) **SG, V/S, F**
14. *Antony and Cleopatra* is seen by some as a farce rather than a true tragedy. Use examples from the play to support this point of view. **I, R, I**
15. Shakespeare’s tragic heroes usually die cleanly and grandly when they commit suicide. Yet, Antony botches up his attempt. As a class, discuss why this is significant to his character and the play. Read through the play and compare Antony’s suicide to Cleopatra and Enobarbus’s suicides. (*) **WG, R, I**
16. Cleopatra is a strong, self-assured, forceful and passionate female character. Actresses who have played Cleopatra in movie versions of the play have described her as a noble, strong, intense and complicated woman. Discuss to what extent does having a young adolescent male play the role of Cleopatra challenge that position. To what extent do you believe Shakespeare is advocating

- women's rights, especially considering King James is on the throne rather than Elizabeth. **WG, R/S/L, I**
17. In the play, many characters have to betray someone to be loyal to someone else. In small groups, chart occurrences of loyalty and betrayal. For each case, list who does what to whom and for what reason. (*) **SG, R/W, I**
 18. Working in small groups, imagine you have been asked to compile a book of famous sayings of warriors and heroes. Each character is permitted no more than five entries. Go through Act IV and find five sayings that you think best sum up Antony as warrior and hero. (+) **SG, R, I**
 19. The interactions between Antony and Cleopatra are visually interesting. In small groups, create a freeze frame for the following scenes between the two characters: I.iii, III.xi, III.xiii, IV.iv, IV.viii, IV.xii, IV.xv. Each group presents (in the order the scenes appear in the play) while the audience discusses images being presented. (+) **SG, V, F**
 20. There are many pivotal actions that lead to the play's outcome. Suppose you are a script writer and have been asked to rewrite the script to give it an alternate ending. What might you change? What would you keep? **I, W, F**