

Disaster Strikes!
A Teaching Framework for Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*
by
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PLOT

Pericles, in Antioch to woo the daughter of Antiochus the Great, solves a riddle that implicates Antiochus in incest, but fears for his life if he reveals what he knows. Disillusioned, Pericles returns to Tyre, but fearing for his life flees. In Tarsus, ruled by Cleon, he relieves a famine with grain from his ship's store. Still fleeing Antiochus, he is shipwrecked at Pentapolis. Rescued by fishermen, Pericles wins a jousting tournament, gaining Simonides' daughter, Thaisa, as his prize. Antiochus dies and Pericles sails towards home. In a storm, Thaisa gives birth to Marina, but also dies in childbirth and is buried at sea in a sealed coffin. Pericles leaves Marina with Cleon's wife, Dionyza, in Tarsus. Thaisa's coffin comes ashore at Ephesus, Cerimon revives her with potions and, believing she will never see her husband again, she enters the religious service of the goddess Diana.

Fourteen years later, jealous mother, Dionyza, hires assassin, Leonine, to kill Marina, but she is kidnapped by pirates who take her to a brothel in Myteline. Leonine claims Marina is dead and Cleon and Dionyza collude in a plan not to tell Pericles, on his way to reclaim his daughter. Meanwhile, Marina cannot be corrupted, but rather converts all her prospective customers, including Lysimachus the governor. Despondent Pericles is driven to Myteline by a storm. Marina is brought to the ship to cheer Pericles, reveals she is his daughter. Assured of her noble birth, Lysimachus falls in love with Marina. Pericles goes to the temple of Diana in Ephesus to tell his story. Pericles' long lost wife, Thaisa, now the high priestess, hears the story and reveals herself. The family is reunited.

THEMES AND ISSUES

1. Use and abuse of power
 - incest
 - murder
 - parent/guardian responsibility towards children
2. Leadership qualities
 - good leaders / bad leaders
 - ensorship (Elizabethan government control over content of stage plays)
3. Personal response
 - tragic events in life
 - control over one's own life—self-determination, choices
4. Relationships
 - family, love/marriage, friendships, ruler/subjects
5. Role of women
 - arranged or 'prize' marriages
 - choices/responses
6. Intertextuality
 - Gower's role
 - play's historical roots
7. Other than human
 - religious devotion
 - supernatural
 - coincidence and role of nature in human events

LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE

- Gower, as Chorus, summarizes much of the exciting action of the story, so what is intended to be the message of what is actually acted out on stage?
- The play becomes more cohesive and more deliberate when we analyze it within the political context of Shakespeare's day.

- The role of natural and divine intervention in human affairs--weather, off-stage effects in productions (shipwrecks, storms)—consider Shakespeare’s resources and motivation; also consider how this could be done with modern technology, film, etc.
- The topic of what character qualities a leader/ruler should have is absolutely current. Compare ideals in *Pericles* with today’s—refer to current events like September 11th, the Iraq war, local/provincial/federal election campaigns. Compare and contrast media representations across sources, countries, cultures.
- Plot complexity and setting—performance and staging demands. The complexity could potentially confuse the audience; how do you make it work to bring about the final resolution?

EXTENDED RESOURCES

Film: *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (BBC, 1984, directed by David Hugh Jones), *Clash of the Titans*, *Gladiator*

Texts: *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower, T. S. Eliot’s “Marina”

Internet:

<http://www.selfknowledge.com/2ws3810.htm> --a search start for all things *Pericles*, including a hypertext version of the play

<http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gowerbio.htm> --a biography of John Gower

<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/events/theater/documents/02857472.asp> --why *Pericles* is not regularly performed, the authorship issue (did Shakespeare really write it?)

<http://penciltripod.com/pande/marina.htm> --the text of Eliot’s “Marina” but also lots of pop-ups

Current Events: recent ‘big’ stuff like 9-11 and the Iraq war, pursuit of ‘war criminals’ e.g. Saddam Hussein, Chechen rebels, Afghan warlords, ongoing media commentary on world leaders, elections at all levels, student government elections in the schools

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Column 1 indicates individual (I), small group (S) or whole group (W) activities.

Column 2 indicates skills used: reading (R), viewing (V), listening (L), speaking (S) or writing (W).

Column 3 describes the activity, which may be formal/informal, assessed/non-assessed at the teacher’s discretion.

1	2	Twenty-Some-Odd Fun-Filled Activities for Studying <i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre</i>
		Pre-Reading Activities
I	W	Think about a time you were treated unfairly by someone in authority over you. Write about what they did that was unfair and how you felt when it happened.
W	L S	Brainstorm a list of qualities that you think would make a good leader. A bad leader?
I	V L W	Watch the six o’clock news for references to world leaders. What is the opinion of the news story about those leaders?
I	R V W	Use the internet to search for news articles or sites that talk about Sept. 11 or about the Iraq war (newspaper sites are a good start—check out their archives or back issues sections). What comments do the writers of the articles make about the leaders of the countries involved? (Tip: look for references to George W. Bush or Saddam Hussein)
		During Reading Activities
I S	R L S W	As you read the play, keep an ongoing list or mark the places where the characters comment on the behaviour of their rulers. When you’re done, go back and read these lines again. In a group, make a list of the qualities that the characters in <i>Pericles</i> think a good leader should have or that make someone a bad leader.

S	R L S	Choose one of Gower's speeches and decide how you would act out the events he is summarizing.
S	R L S W	Scan the play and create a time line of all the events, including what Gower tells us.
S	W	Write the script (you can use modern English!).
W	L S	Discuss why Gower tells us what he does. Discuss why Shakespeare included the scenes we have.
W	R L S	Both Thaisa and Marina find themselves in situations over which they have little control. Discuss their reactions in these situations. How do they assert themselves within these situations? What do their reactions suggest about women's roles in Elizabethan society?
I (or pairs)	W	Write a monologue for Marina to be delivered in Act IV between scenes v and vi.
S W	L S	Discuss the role of fate in the play. Is fate the same as divine intervention?
S	R V L S	The weather is essential for advancing the plot of <i>Pericles</i> . Consider whether this works in this play? View the opening scenes of <i>Clash of the Titans</i> . If you were making a film of <i>Pericles</i> , decide what you would do to make it believable to your viewers.
I (or pairs)	R L S W	The final resolution of the play happens because Pericles has a vision of the goddess Diana. Who is she in Greek mythology? What is the significance of her role in <i>Pericles</i> ?
I S W	R L S	Pericles never questions or gets angry at the gods; in fact, at the end of the play he seems merely grateful that the gods have restored his wife and daughter to him (V, iii, 56-7). Discuss what this says about the character of Pericles. Find other references in the play to support your answers.
I S	R W	Pericles was originally a Roman tale. Later it was rewritten by John Gower. Still later, Shakespeare used it in this play. Find another text, written since Shakespeare's time, that uses characters or story elements from this tale. Make a list of similarities and differences between the stories.
		Post-Reading Activities
I	W	Write a short story about an event that takes place for either Thaisa, Marina, or Pericles in the fourteen years that they were apart. Include some of your character's feelings about being separated from her/his family during this time.
I	R W	It has been said that Shakespeare didn't really write all of <i>Pericles</i> and that the play is not up to Shakespeare's usual high standards. Research and write a formal essay explaining why you do or do not agree with this statement.
I	R W	Research Elizabeth I. If <i>Pericles</i> is a critique of government leaders, do you think Elizabeth would have enjoyed watching it? Would she have allowed it to be performed? Was it performed?
I	R W	Several well-known fairytales contain a 'wicked stepmother.' Read at least two of these (e.g. Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty) and write a critical paper examining Dionyza's treachery toward Marina in light of them.
I	R W	Familiarize yourself with the story of Job from the Bible. When bad things happen, how does each of these characters respond? Write an essay that compares the actions and attitudes of Job and Pericles.
I	S	Choose a speech (5-10 lines) from <i>Pericles</i> to memorize and deliver to the class.
I S W	R V L S W	Choose one scene to act out in front of the class. Each group member should have a role (you may have a director and stage hands if you like). Decide on the atmosphere you want to create; choose props, music, costumes and lighting accordingly. Prepare production notes for your performance.