

Titus Andronicus

Plot –Titus Andronicus, Roman general, returns to Rome after a ten-year war. He has captured Tamora, Queen of the Goths, her three sons, and Aaron the Moor. Following Roman custom, he sacrifices her eldest son to his own dead sons, earning Tamora's unending hatred. Caesar of Rome has died, and under Titus's suggestion, Caesar's eldest son Saturninus is made the new Emperor.

Tamora is made empress and with her lover Aaron has Titus's two sons framed murdering Bassianus, the emperor's brother. She also urges her sons Chiron and Demetrius to rape Titus's daughter Lavinia, who brutally cut off her hands and tongue. Titus lops off his own hand to stop the deaths of his sons. Finally, Titus's last surviving son Lucius is banished from Rome. Lucius goes to the Goths (recently conquered) for aid to attack Rome. Each new tragedy hits Titus hard. Eventually, he acts as if he's gone mad. Meanwhile, Tamora gives birth to Aaron's son.

To capitalize on Titus's madness, Tamora pretends to be the spirit Revenge offering justice if Titus will convince Lucius to cease attacking Rome. Titus tricks her, captures her sons, kills them, and makes pie, which he serves Tamora. Titus then kills Tamora and Lavinia. Saturninus kills Titus. Lucius kills Saturninus, has the unrepentant Aaron buried alive, and Tamora's corpse thrown to the beasts. He becomes the new emperor of Rome.

Themes and Issues:

- Vengeance or Revenge. Metamorphosis of Man. Race: White vs. Black – Treatment, view. Sexuality and Rape. Death: War, Murder. Power / Power struggle: Powerful to powerless (Ruling class, Mirror of power: Titus and Tamora). Family. Nationalism. Objectification of women. Custom and Culture: Roman sacrifice vs. Goth Response. Leadership?
- First tragedy attributed to Shakespeare. Relevance?
- Violence on stage: realism vs. theatricality.

Language and Structure

- Elizabethan Revenge play vs. Traditional Tragedy (Roman).
- Images: Hands (body parts). Black and White references via Aaron. Roman Masculinity (swords, throne, Father figure) vs. Goth Femininity (mother figure, Pit).
- Stage performance: previous productions vs. modern productions.
- Shakespearian text and pronunciation in Roman setting.
- Globe Theatre and presentation of play: Audience, actors, lighting, sound, costumes – focus on play aspects.

Resources:

- Film: Joe Redner – 1999, Lawrence Olivier – 1955, Julie Taymor *Titus* – 2000, Jane Howell – BBC – 1985, Lorn Richey – 1997, Richard Griffin – 2000.
- Greek influence: Seneca, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Sophocles's *Tereus* - myth of Philomela.
- Current Events: Saddam's Sons. Serb / Croat Conflict. Afghan Conflict. Taliban & woman's rights.

Reading, Writing, Listening, Viewing, Speaking. Formal / Informal	Group – small/ class/ individual. Assess / Not assessed.	Questions
Formal. Read + Write	G - Individual Assess.	1. At the start of the play, Saturninus and Bassianus are both trying to get support for their claim to the throne. What does each character focus on in their speeches to get support from the people of Rome? Based on their speeches, who do you think would make the better leader for Rome? Why?
Informal. Speak + Listen	G – Class Not assessed.	2. In the beginning of the play, Titus performs a ritual for his dead sons by sacrificing Tamora’s eldest son (as per Roman rites). What “Rules of War” are in place within the 20 th Century? Do we have any?
Formal. Write.	G – Individual Assess.	3. If you were to create a food dish to hide the body of your murder, what style of food dish would it be and why?
Informal. Write, Speak, + Listen.	G – small. Not assessed	4. Suggest how you might produce this play with all its gore and horrific images and still keep the humanity of the play?
Formal. View, Read, + Write.	G – individual Assessed.	5. Titus is quoted to be “the bloodiest play of Shakespeare.” In your opinion, can this play be performed “bloodless,” and still be effective? If not, then why not? How would you adapt the production? Give evidence from the play to help support your answer.
Formal. Read + Write	G – Individual Assessed.	6. Titus claims that he’s a loyal servant of the state. What proof is there of his claim? Refer to evidence from the text.
Formal. View, Read, Listen, + Write	G – Class. Not assessed.	7. We have seen Aaron in 1.1 but not heard him. Now he has a soliloquy, the first in the play (2.1.1-25). What do we learn about him? About Tamora? (1) <i>Display soliloquy on overhead</i>
Informal. Speak, Read, + Listen.	G – small. Not assessed.	8. In 2.3, when Lavinia and Bassianus meet Tamora during the hunt, they treat her very briskly. How does this interaction with Tamora affect the image of Lavinia as an innocent and a victim of harm?
Informal. Speak, listen, + View	G – Class to G – small. Not assessed.	9. Watch the film <i>Titus</i> . Does this interpretation meet your expectation of the play? How does it fail? What would you change? What would you keep the same? When writing your answer, consider the opening and ending of the film.
Formal. Read + Write	G – Individual. Assessed	10. Do you think that Marcus gives a realistic response to the discovery of Lavinia after the ravishing by Chiron and Demetrius? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

(1) - http://english.sxu.edu/boyer/304_rdg_qst/tit_nor_qst.htm - reference to questions

Formal. Speak, Listen, Read, + Write.	G – Small. Assessed.	11. Consider Titus’s reaction to the different catastrophes in his life: His son murdered by his own hand, being dismissed from Rome’s court, his sons being charged and murdered for the death of Bassianus, the rape of Lavinia, and the banishment of Lucius? What was more tragic to Titus?
Informal. Write, Read, + Speak.	G – Individual to G – class. Not assessed.	12. Discuss Titus’s response when Marcus brings Lavinia to him. Read 3.1.63-80 in terms of the play's attitude toward women. A recent discussion has noted the finality of Marcus' "This <i>was</i> thy daughter," assuming that because of what has happened she no longer is, and may no longer be human, having lost what is traditionally the only important thing women have, their "honor." Compare Titus's response, "Why Marcus, so she <i>is</i> ." (1)
Informal View, Listen, + speak	G – Small Not assessed.	13. Titus Andronicus was quite popular during the Shakespearian time period, then for many years was not performed. Within the later half of the 20 th century, there was a revival of the play on stage and on film. Suggest why there was a sudden need to perform this play inside these time periods?
Formal. Read + Write	G – Individual Assessed.	14. Why was there such a strong reaction to the death of the fly (3.2 52-77)?
Informal. Speak + Listen	G – small. Not assessed.	15. In 3.1, why do the men have a “contest” to see who will chop off their hand to save Titus’s sons?
Formal Write	G – individual Not assessed	16. Do you agree with the sentiment from Saturninus that a ravaged daughter must be murdered? Why or why not?
Informal. Speak + Listen	G – Class. Not assessed.	17. Why would Tamora and her sons put on the presentation and pretend to be Revenge, Rape, and Murder to Titus? What’s the purpose of her doing this, other than to get Titus to ask Lucius to stop his advance towards Rome? Do you think it was effective (purposeful) to the play? Is this a “play within a play?”
Informal. Speak, Read, + Listen	G – Class Not assessed	18. How does Aaron’s child affect the play? What consequences would Tamora and Aaron face if the child were to be found? If Aaron is such a bad guy, then why does he go out of his way to save the child (what does this show)?
Informal Speak + Listen.	G – Small. Not Assessed	19. At the end of the play, there is no reference to what will happen to Aaron’s child. Based on your reading, what do you think will happen to the child? Will Lucius honor his promise?
Informal. Speak, View, Read, listen, Write.	G – Class to G – Individual Assessed.	20. Examine <i>the Myth of Philomela</i> , and compare it to that of <i>Titus Andronicus</i> . Which do you enjoy more? Which is more believable? Why?

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Assignment #2

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