

Troilus and Cressida

By: William Shakespeare

Teaching notes and student activities

Plot

The war between the Greeks, led by Agamemnon, and the Trojans is in its seventh year and at a stalemate. The city of Troy is under attack from the Greeks because Paris, son of King Priam, of Troy, has abducted Helen, wife of King Menelaus, of Sparta.

The Trojan war hero, Hector, eldest son of Priam, challenges the Greeks to a one-on-one fight. Fighting becomes widespread and Hector kills the friend and lover of the Greek war hero Achilles. Achilles, unable to beat Hector in a one-on-one fight, attacks him with a gang of warriors when he is unarmed and slaughters him. The play ends with Achilles dragging Hector's body around the walls of Troy as the Trojan soldiers retreat, mourning the loss of their fallen hero.

Meanwhile, Troilus, a younger son of Priam, falls madly in love with Cressida, daughter of Calchas, a Trojan priest who has defected to the Greeks. Troilus employs Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, to bring the two together. Their love is consummated but they are torn apart as Calchas has a Trojan prisoner exchanged for his daughter. In the Greek camp, Cressida becomes the lover of Diomedes, a Greek lord, infuriating Troilus. Troilus threatens to kill Diomedes.

Troilus and Cressida has all the elements to make a good play (love, betrayal, war, violence, etc...), but it seems to have two major problems; first, the two plot lines are not fully integrated until the end of the play giving it a disjointed feel and secondly, there is debate as to whether or not this play is a history, tragedy or a comedy.

Themes and Issues

- War between nations
- Fighting over a woman/for a woman's love – Helen/Cressida
- Betrayal – Troilus by Cressida
- Family loyalty – Cressida to Calchas/ Paris, Hector, Troilus to Priam
- Egocentrism – Achilles/Hector
- Interference in love – Pandarus/Calchas
- Young love
- Classical mythology
- Human nature
- Order in society
- Morality

Language and Structure

- The play within the context of classical mythology
- Two stories within a play – war story and love story
- Crossing genres – history, tragedy and comedy
- Use of anti-climax

Extended Resources

Play: *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare

Wide Reading: *Troilus and Crisseyede* by Geoffrey Chaucer

The Iliad by Homer

Roman de Troie (poem) by Benoit de Sainte-Maure

Who's Who in Classical Mythology by Michael Grant and

John Hazel

Film: *Troilus and Cressida* (BBC-TV) director: Jonathan Miller, 1981

Troilus and Cressida (TV) director: Michael Croft, 1966

Any film in which love is set against the background of war - e.g. *Pearl Harbour*

Current Affairs: War in Iraq

Troilus and Cressida Activities

Writing & Speaking	Formal Individual	Working as individuals or in pairs, take on the role of reporter, reporting on the battle between Troy and Greece. Choose one aspect of the battle to report whether it be the stalemate, the fight between Hector and Achilles or a topic of your own choice. You will report to the class in a 1-2 min. presentation. You must also submit a written copy of your report including a headline for your story.
Writing & Listening	Formal Individual	Choose a song, from any genre and any era, which could be used as a theme song for the play for a film version. Along with the song, include the lyrics and a 1-2 paragraph explanation as to why you chose the song and how it represents the play
Writing	Formal Individual	Write an alternate ending or an epilogue to this play – imagine what will happen next?
Writing & Reading	Formal Individual	Imagine you are a play critic from the 1600's watching/reading the play in its original format. Write a review of this play. Following that, imagine you are a critic watching/reading the play today. Write a review from that perspective. Now compare the two perspectives – are there any variations in the critiques?
Speaking, Viewing & Reading	Informal Large Group	First in small groups, then as a class discuss the differences between the play as a text and in its film version. Look for commonalities/differences; does the film change the reading/interpretation?
Writing & Speaking	Informal Small Groups	In pairs, choose a scene or a portion of a scene and rewrite it in modern language. Do not discuss your choice with anyone but your partner. Present your rewrite for the class to identify which part of the play it is from.
Writing & Reading	Formal Individual	Write a formal essay (intro, body, conclusion) discussing the statement <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> is a tragedy? Consider the genre you would classify it as? Be sure to defend your answer with examples from the play.
Speaking,	Informal	In small groups, discuss whether or not Shakespeare under cuts the idea of heroism in

Reading & Listening	Small Group	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> . Explain how you have reached this decision. If you think he does not provide example(s) of a hero in the play and why he/she is a hero. Be prepared to defend your group's conclusion to the class.
Writing, Speaking & Listening	Informal Individual & Large Group	Prepare a list of point form notes comparing the Greek and Trojan armies in <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> . Use your notes to contribute to a class discussion focusing on the question: What makes a good army? Be prepared to make comparisons to the armies in today's world.
Writing & Reading	Formal Individual	Chose one of the characters in the play and research their mythological roots. Compare your findings to the way Shakespeare portrayed them in his play. Present your findings in a comparison essay.
Viewing, Listening & Speaking	Formal Small Group	In small groups of two to four, select a scene to rehearse and act in front of the class. The scene can last no more than five minutes therefore, you may need to edit the scene but be prepared to explain what you cut and why. Be sure to establish the context and the mood through use of costumes, props, etc.
Viewing, Listening, Writing, Reading	Formal Individual	Create a collage through either written word, visual, or sounds that represent at least one theme or issue from the play. Along with your collage you must include a paragraph summary/explanation of your project.
Speaking, Reading & Listening	Informal Small Group	In groups of four, each select a line from <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> , that connects or is in sequence with the other people in the group. The line should include instructions on how it should be read. Read your line to yourself. Once you've established how you will be reading your line present it in order with your other group members. Present to your lines, as a group, to the class, demonstrating how tone can affect the interpretation of a play.
Viewing	Informal Small Group	Again, in groups of four, each chose a line from the play that run consecutively. This time, act out the line using no words and only gestures, demonstrating how actions can affect the interpretation of a play.
Speaking & Listening	Formal Large Group	Imagine you are advisors to the Trojan King, divide yourselves into two groups. One side will represent the interests of Paris and Troilus who want to keep Helen thereby continuing the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The other side will be in support of Hector and Cassandra who want to return Helen to Greece, ending the war. Three students will represent King Priam. Debate the issue to the King. Once the debate has concluded then the King will decide the fate of Troy.
Viewing, Writing, & Reading	Formal Individual or Small Group	Working in pairs, create a "life box" for one of the characters in the play. Your life box should include six to eight items which would have been used daily by your character or the items can be keepsakes (no photos). Place the items in a box or some other storage item (feel free to decorate your container). Include with each item an explanation of its importance. (Linda G. Wolford. The Folger Shakespeare Library . www.folger.edu.com , 1998)
Writing, Reading & Viewing	Informal Large Group	On a wall-sized plot chart, or alternatively on individual plot charts, make entries as the plot unfolds and develops. Entries should be made only after the class has discussed and agreed on what should be included on the chart. This provides students with a visual understanding of plot development and an study guide for future tests/assignments.
Writing	Formal Individual	Create a playbill for <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> . Include a front cover design that is symbolic of the story line. Include a list of the cast (assigning current actors to each of the roles) and a brief synopsis of the play.
Speaking & Listening	Informal Large Group	Discuss as a class how Shakespeare treats romance in this play. Compare the portrayal of Troilus and Cressida to other Shakespeare lovers. What is the same? What is different? Is this a cynical representation of love?
Writing	Formal Individual	Examine the character of Thersites. In a mini-essay, discuss the role he plays in <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> . What is his purpose?