

Ensemble approaches for investigating the world of *Antony and Cleopatra*



Patrick Stewart as Antony and Harriet Walter as Cleopatra in Gregory Doran's 2006 RSC production.
Photographer: Pascal Molliere

Gregory Doran's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* is an ensemble production. As a group, the actors explored the text with the director and searched for all the clues Shakespeare offers about the characters.

Each actor researched the text to find out:

- What their character does
- What their character says
- What others say about their character
- What their character wants

Try the following activities with your group.

HOW TO USE THE TEACHERS' NOTES

The exercises that follow are practical group activities designed to enable your group to work as an ensemble. They can be used by you with your group in any large, clear space. The most suitable key stage for the material is indicated although these exercises are differentiated by outcome and most of them would work from Key Stages 2 to 5.

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An ensemble approach for exploring character



Cleopatra (Harriet Walter) leads Antony (Patrick Stewart) in Act 1 Scene 1 of Doran's 2006 RSC production. Photo: Pascal Molliere

MOVING IMAGES

Key Stages 4 & 5

Discuss with the players what these lines mean:

*Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool*

Ask for volunteers to build up a still image of Antony as the 'triple pillar of the world'. Next ask how the picture could change to show Antony now as a 'strumpet's fool'. Work out with the players to decide how they could move from one image to the other. Ask a further volunteer to read the lines, while the image moves.

Divide the players into four small groups. Ask each group to research Act One:

- Group 1 must find all the positive references to Antony
- Group 2 must find all the negative references to Antony
- Group 3 must find all the positive references to Cleopatra
- Group 4 must find all the negative references to Cleopatra

(There are some examples below).

1 - Antony positive	2 - Antony negative	3 - Cleopatra positive	4 - Cleopatra negative
Captain's heart Disposed to mirth The demi-Atlas of this earth The firm Roman The brave Antony The greatest soldier My man of men	Strumpet's fool The greatest liar He drinks Wastes the night in revels Filled with voluptuousness Pawn to present pleasure Rebel to judgement	Egypt's queen Her passions are pure love A wonderful piece of work Most sweet queen Great Egypt Precious queen	Gypsy's lust Wrangling queen She is cunning Strong Egyptian fetters Idleness itself

Each player chooses one of the phrases they have found. They must devise simple, clear actions to go with that phrase. Ask the players stand in a circle, and hold one, two, three or four fingers up against their chest to show which group they belong to. Each player will cross the circle, saying their phrase aloud accompanied by the actions they have rehearsed.

A player from Group 1 starts, and they must cross to a player from Group 2, who crosses to a player from Group 3, who crosses to a player from Group 4 and so on, until all players have crossed the circle.

Finally, as leader, call out a group number and ask the players from that group to put up their hands. Select one of the players to come into the middle with their phrase and actions. They repeat their phrase and action, and another player from their group is selected to join them. The players in the middle keep on repeating their phrase and action until all members of their group have joined them, creating together a moving image of the character they have researched. Stop the group and repeat with the others. As each ensemble moving image is created, discuss with the other players which phrases stand out, and what is revealed about the character they see.

Ensemble approaches for investigating relationships

In rehearsal, Gregory Doran encouraged the actors to improvise around the circumstances of the play. Improvising is an important tool for the actors. It can be used to find out more about the characters and their history, about events that are referred to but not seen or to build up knowledge about the relationships between characters. Try the following activity with your group.



Ken Bones as Enobarbus in Gregory Doran's 2006 RSC production.

Photographer: Pascal Molliere

IMPROVISATION

Key Stages 4 & 5

Read through Act 1, Scene 2 line 82 - 118 (just before Enobarbus enters). Discuss with the players what is going on for Anthony at this point in the play. He is torn between the pleasure he feels with Cleopatra in Egypt and his duties and responsibilities in Rome. Caesar is under threat. His wife has died. How does he feel?

Now discuss Enobarbus. Who is he? What is his relationship with Anthony? Are they friends or do they have a formal, professional relationship? Which of them has the highest status?

Ask the players to make pairs, and name themselves A and B. They are going to improvise a conversation between Anthony and Enobarbus at this point in the play. Player A will be Anthony and B will be Enobarbus.

Enobarbus wants to find out what is troubling Anthony. Anthony wants Enobarbus to help him make up his mind what to do: should he stay in Egypt or return to Rome?

After improvising, find out what Anthony decided to do in each pair, and why.

Now read on in Act 1 Scene 2 to discover this scene as Shakespeare wrote it. Discuss what the scene reveals to us about these two characters and their relationship.

An ensemble approach for Act 1 Scene 3

Textual accuracy and precision are a benchmark of the Royal Shakespeare Company's work. Gregory Doran encouraged the actors in this production to be absolutely sure of what they were saying and what they meant. This sounds obvious but it takes many hours of rehearsal to do the detailed work with Shakespeare's words required to make absolute sense of the words.

Patrick Stewart and Harriet Walter are exceptional and highly experienced actors, but they spent a great deal of the time in rehearsal negotiating exactly what the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra should be. It is in this detailed negotiation where the depth of relationship is built between actors. The electricity on stage between Patrick Stewart and Harriet Walter is possible because they know the characters inside out and at any moment they are both sure what the other means by what they are saying.

ACTION, OBJECTIVES AND INTENTIONS

Key Stages 4 & 5

Distribute copies of the edited Act 1 Scene 3 (see next page). Ask the players to work in pairs, and name themselves A and B. Player A will read Anthony's lines and B will read Cleopatra's. Ask the players to try the following:

- Stand back to back and read the scene to each other. They must use the sounds in the words to make sure their partner can hear everything they are saying
- **Paraphrase** the scene into their own words. Read their modern English version to each other, with Anthony attempting to interrupt throughout (not just where he does in the script). Cleopatra must not allow him to get a word in. What does this tell us about the characters and their relationship with each other?
- Return to Shakespeare's words. Divide up the scene into the various strategies that Cleopatra tries to persuade Anthony to stay. Draw a line under each section. Name each section in terms of what the characters are trying to do to each other. For example, section 1 might be 'Cleopatra attempts to win sympathy from Anthony by pretending to be ill.' They will have divided the scene up into **units of action**.
- Discuss what each character's **objective** might be in the scene. For example, Anthony's objective might be 'to leave with out upsetting Cleopatra'. Or it might be 'to make Cleopatra understand why he must leave.' Or it might be 'to assert his autonomy'. Each pair may have a different interpretation.

A word can mean very different things according to the **intention** of the speaker. Experiment by asking different players to simply say the word 'yes' in different ways: as if they have won the lottery, as if they are reluctantly agreeing to do the washing up, as if someone has just asked them to marry them. Now ask the players to pass any object between them, in the manner of the intention that you call out. Call out a series of intentions, for example: tempt, dismiss, encourage etc. Ask the players to apply this same process to the words in the edited scene.

- Before each phrase, note down what Anthony and Cleopatra intend the other to understand from what they are saying.
- Read the scene to each other, prefacing each phrase with the intention spoken aloud.
- Rehearse the scene using just Shakespeare's words, but making the character's intentions as clear as they can.

Share and discuss several interpretations of the scene.

Act 1 Scene 3 (edited)

Cleopatra I am sick and sullen.

Antony I am sorry to give breathing to my purpose -

Cleopatra Help me, I shall fall.

Antony Now, my dearest queen -

Cleopatra Pray you, stand further from me.

Antony What's the matter?

Cleopatra What, says the married woman you may go?
Would she had never given thee leave to come!
Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here.
I have no power upon you; hers you are.

Antony The gods best know -

Cleopatra O, never was there a queen
So mightily betrayed!

Antony Cleopatra -

Cleopatra Why should I think you can be mine, and true,
Who have been false to Fulvia?

Antony Most sweet queen -

Cleopatra But bid farewell and go. When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words. No going then.
Thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turned the greatest liar.

Antony How now, lady?

Cleopatra I would I had thy inches. Thou should'st know
There were a heart in Egypt.

Antony Hear me, queen:
The strong necessity of time commands
Our services awhile, but my full heart
Remains in use with you.

An ensemble approach for designing and imagining a reported scene



Agrippa (Keith Osborn) and Enobarbus (Ken Bones) in Doran's 2006 RSC production.
Photographer: Pascal Molliere

The set, lighting, music, sound, costumes of *Antony and Cleopatra* all create a specific sense of place and atmosphere, transporting the audience in their imaginations to Egypt or Rome. Unlike filmmakers, theatre practitioners are not usually trying to re-create a historically accurate 'natural' environment. In this production, the designers worked together to create a highly evocative, stylised, multi-sensory world for the actors to inhabit, which is flexible so that the action can move swiftly from place to place. Try the following activity with your group.

SENSORY SCENE

Key Stages 4 & 5

Ask the players to work in pairs. Distribute copies of the edit of Act 2 Scene 2 (see next page). As leader, read aloud what Enobarbus. Ask the players to close their eyes and imagine they are Enobarbus. Ask the players to imagine the sounds, smells, tastes, textures as well as the sights Enobarbus experiences as you read the description again.

Ask the players to discuss with their partner the detailed sensory experiences available in the description: the crowd, the sounds of the water and the oars and so on. Now ask the pairs to swap partners. Each new pair names themselves A and B. A closes their eyes, and B takes them on a physical journey through the scene they have imagined, detailing all the sensory experiences and encouraging A to reach out and touch imaginary textures, hear sounds, smell scents, taste the air etc. Now the players swap, with A leading B.

Afterwards, encourage the players to design what they have imagined. This could be done in the form of a model or a collage, with as much detail as possible about how to engage all the audience's senses.

Now divide the players into four groups, and give each group a section of text as indicated below. They must make a still image of what is described. Ask all the groups to present their still picture simultaneously. Pull one volunteer out to read Enobarbus words. This player should walk round the groups, and the picture he is describing should start to move whilst he is referring to them.

Finally, working with the same section of text, each group should prepare a presentation of their section, making full use of the words and sounds they have imagined. They must decide who will speak the words, and can use echoing, whispers and vocal sounds to augment the words.

An ensemble approach to the world of the play

Throughout this production, there are sharp reminders of the cultural differences between Egypt and Rome, and the deep impact these differences have on Antony and Cleopatra's personal and political relationship. Try the following activities with your group.



A scene in Rome in Doran's 2006 RSC production (l-r: Patrick Stewart, James Hayes, Edmund Kingsley, Luke Neal, Keith Osborn, John Hopkins) Photo: Pascal Molliere

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES - 1

Key Stages 4 & 5

Divide the players into two groups. Ask one group to think about the Egypt they have discovered in the play, and the other group to think about Rome. Each group must brainstorm and list words or phrases that describe that culture as they see it. Now ask each group to make a still image showing the people of that culture, making sure that they include something to show each aspect of the culture they have identified. Finally, share the images with the whole group. Ask the other group to guess which words and phrases were on the list.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES - 2

Key Stages 4 & 5

At the end of the play, Caesar says:

She shall be buried by her Antony.

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it

A pair so famous.

Ask each group to present a still image of the monument on Antony and Cleopatra's grave: one group from the Egyptian perspective, the other from the Roman. Not all the players will be needed so the spare players will be people visiting the monument. Share the images. Ask the players what the ordinary people of Egypt or Rome think of this famous pair. Taking each image in turn, ask the players to approach the 'monument' individually and rest a hand on it, speaking aloud what their opinion of the couple is after their deaths.