

Ensemble approaches for investigating the world of *Julius Caesar*

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.



The final scene in Sean Holmes' 2006 RSC production of *Julius Caesar*.

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We encourage you to experience these activities and more in an RSC workshop where you'll learn how to use these techniques with your students. For more information on RSC Learning events, courses and workshops, please visit: www.rsc.org.uk/learning

An ensemble approach for creating the world of *Julius Caesar*



The opening of Sean Holmes' 2006 RSC production of *Julius Caesar*. Photographer: Suzanne Worthington

Sean Holmes 2006 production of *Julius Caesar* is an ensemble production. Most of the time, all of the actors are on stage, watching each other as they experience the events of the story.

To create atmosphere and build dramatic tension, the actors and musicians created detailed soundscapes. Using a mixture of live amplified sounds, actors and musicians capture sounds which give us a sense of place together with sounds which highlight strong feelings and emotions. With your group, try the following activities.

SOUNDSCAPING

Key Stages 3 - 5

Act 1 Scene 1 takes place in a street in Rome. A rabble of citizens is partying in the street. Caesar has won a great battle against Pompey, and his people are celebrating his success. One of the citizens says:

We make holiday to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph.

Sit the players in a circle and discuss this line. What are the significant words? Holiday, Caesar, rejoice and triumph. Explain that you'll work together to capture the atmosphere of this street party. Start by one player making eye contact with someone else and sending each of the key words across to other players in the circle as a stage whisper: each word to a different player. Whoever receives a word must pass it on getting louder as the party mood grows and more people join in.

What other sounds can the players imagine? (For example, chanting, clapping, singing, laughing, children shrieking, footsteps running or dancing, drums, horns, fireworks, a fire, cooking and sharing food, drinking...) Players can use their voices, the physical environment they are working in, perhaps simple percussion instruments to make sounds.

Divide the players evenly into four or five groups, and make each group responsible for a part of the soundscape: one group might take the sounds of the preparation, cooking and sharing of food, for example. Give one of the groups the four words to use in different ways. Each group rehearses their sounds until they are happy and confident in them, and briefly performs them for the other groups.

Now explain that you will conduct the soundscape. Your hands will indicate which group should come in when, and at what volume. Start a performance of your soundscape with the whispered words, and gradually add layers of sound and turn up the volume until it sounds like the party is in full swing. To end the soundscape, 'turn on' the players with these two lines from the opening of the play:

Hence home, you idle creatures, get you home: Is this a holiday?

You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!

Explain that the citizens are stopped from celebrating by officers of Rome. Ask the players how the citizens feel about Caesar at the beginning of the play, and how they feel about the party being stopped in this way.

An ensemble approach to exploring the mob

In Sean's production, the rabble is apparent and ever present: a sharp reminder that the future of Rome depends on their support. In rehearsals, the actors worked together to make still images of the citizens as their mood shifts and turns with the events of the play. With your group, try the following activity.



Act 1 Scene 2 – Caesar (James Hayes) and Antony (Ariyon Bakare) in Sean Holmes' 2006 RSC production of *Julius Caesar*. Photographer: Suzanne Worthington

STILL IMAGES

Key Stages 3 - 5

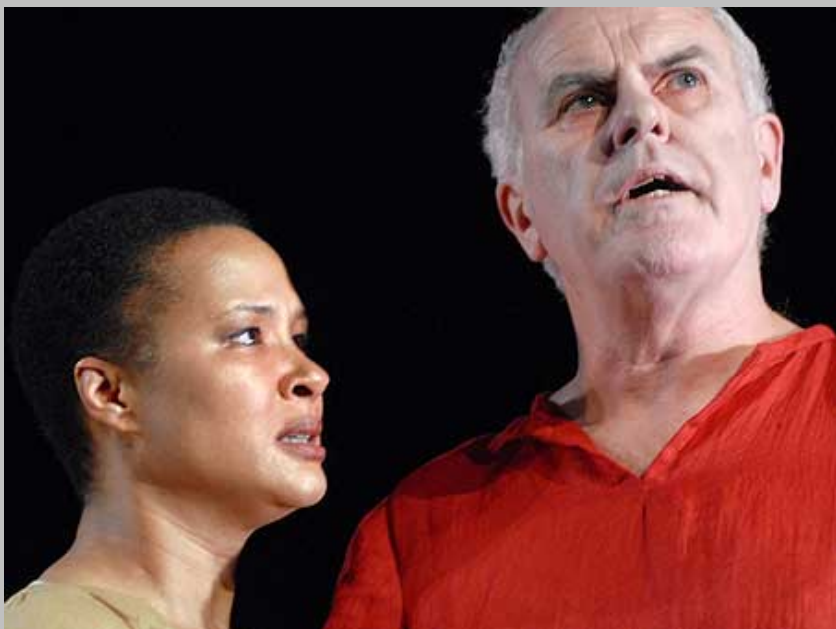
This activity follows on from the previous activity (Soundscaping). After soundscaping the opening of the play, ask the players to line up along a wall. Ask them to assume a posture and a facial expression, which shows how they feel when the party is stopped, while you count to ten. When you have finished counting, ask the players to freeze.

Put your hand on a few citizens' shoulders and ask them to speak aloud what they are thinking at that moment. Players should respond in the first person, as if they are the person they are depicting.

You can repeat this activity periodically as you explore the play, investigating moments in the action when the mood of the mob changes.

An ensemble approach to exploring a theme: Superstition

Throughout *Julius Caesar*, people speak of signs and portents. Superstition guides many of the characters. Director Sean Holmes and the actors spent hours investigating all references to superstition in the text. The musicians and actors created soundscapes to underpin all references to superstition. With your group, try the following activity.



Act 2 Scene 2 – Calphurnia (Golda Rosheuvel) tells Caesar (James Hayes) about her dream. (2006 RSC production)
Photographer: Pau Ros

PHYSICALISING THE IMAGES

Key Stages 3 - 5

Read through the extract of Act 2 Scene 2 where Caesar's wife Calphurnia recounts a dream she has had the night before the Ides of March (see page 5).

Divide the players in half. Ask one half of the group to work in pairs. Give each pair a line or phrase from Calphurnia's description of her dream. They must find a strong physical action to go with every word in their short section of text (excluding connectives). Ask the pairs to rehearse their phrase until they can perform the actions with the words.

Meanwhile, ask the other half of the group to read through the extract from Act 3 Scene 1 (also on the next page), where Caesar is murdered. Ask one player to be Caesar, the others to be conspirators. They must devise a silent enactment of Caesar's murder based on what they've read in the script. How will they kill him? Circle him? Come from behind? One by one or together? They can use only one line:

Speak, hands, for me

Any of the conspirators can use the line, as appropriate to the sequence they create.

Finally, the players who have rehearsed Calphurnia's dream stand in a circle, surrounding the other half of the group. The Calphurnia group present their phrases in sequence round the circle, while the other group show the murder in the middle. First, start both groups at the same time. You may need to order the sequence to fit the words of the dream with "Speak, hands, for me".

Now discuss with the players what Calphurnia's dream means. Do we place importance on our dreams today? Can we dream about the future? What do the players feel is the significance of dreams?

Extract from Act 2 Scene 2
(Calphurnia's dream)

Calphurnia And graves have yawn'd and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds,
In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
The noise of battle hurtled in the air;
Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
O, Caesar, these things are beyond all use,
And I do fear them!

Extract from Act 3 Scene 1
(The murder of Caesar)

Cinna O Caesar!

Caesar Hence, wilt thou lift up Olympus?

Decius Great Caesar!

Caesar Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?

Casca Speak, hands, for me!

*(Casca, Decius, Cinna, Trebonius, Cassius, Metellus and Brutus stab Caesar.
Casca strikes the first, Brutus the last blow)*

Caesar Et tu, Brute? - Then fall, Caesar!

(He dies)

Cinna Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!

Brutus People and Senators, be not affrighted.
Fly not, stand still. Ambition's debt is paid.

Cassius Where is Anthony?

Trebonius Fled to his house amaz'd.
Men, wives and children stare, cry out and run,
As it were doomsday.

Brutus Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords.
Then walk we forth, even to the market-place,
And waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
Let's all cry, "Peace, freedom and liberty!"

An ensemble approach to Act 3 Scene 2



Act 3 Scene 2 – Brutus' speech (John Light as Brutus in Sean Holme's 2006 RSC production)
Photographer: Pau Ros

After Caesar is murdered, Brutus speaks to the citizens of Rome to explain why the conspirators have acted against Caesar. He gives Anthony permission to make a funeral speech for Caesar to the citizens.

Watch the video clips of these speeches from Sean Holmes' 2006 production on the RSC Exploring Shakespeare website.

John Light, playing Brutus, is wearing white and covered in Caesar's blood: his hands, face and body are bloody. He carries a dagger, still wet with blood. Both Brutus and Anthony speak directly to the audience, as if we are people of Rome.

Sean and the actors tried many different ways of staging this scene in rehearsal. They experimented with the idea of the mob. They tried placing actors in the audience to speak directly from the crowd; they tried having the actors as a mob down-stage, who responded to what Brutus and Anthony say. Eventually, they settled on placing the mob upstage of Brutus and Anthony, with Brutus and Anthony speaking their lines to the whole audience.

The two characters are, in effect, surrounded by the mob, and as an audience we experience the full impact of Shakespeare's language as both men try to persuade us to their point of view, and win our sympathies. The responses of the mob are captured by microphone and are amplified through speakers all around the audience. With your group try the activity on the next page.

An ensemble approach to Act 3 Scene 2

TAKING SIDES

Key Stages 3 - 5

Watch the extract of Brutus' speech on the RSC Exploring Shakespeare website. What is the main thrust of his argument? Discuss with the players why he has chosen to appear before the citizens still covered in blood. What is the effect of having the murder weapon in his hand?

Now watch the extract of Anthony's speech. What words would the group use to describe how Anthony feels? Compile a list. What does he say about Brutus? What does he say about Caesar?

Divide the players into two halves. One group is given the things which citizens say before and after Brutus speaks. The other group is given the things which citizens say before and after Anthony speaks. In pairs, the players must paraphrase into modern English the things that the citizens say. Afterwards, ask the players how the citizens view Brutus and Anthony. Both men have some sympathy from the citizens.

Now ask for two volunteers. One will represent Brutus, the other Anthony. They stand at opposite ends of the room. The rest of the players gather in the centre of the room. Ask the players what each man stands for. (Brutus stands for justice against ambition. He has killed Caesar for the good of Rome. Anthony stands for loyalty to Caesar. He believes the conspirators have murdered Caesar without justification.)

Now, you, as leader, read out the extract of Brutus' speech (on the next page). As you read, the players can move towards either Brutus or Anthony, physically taking a step towards one point of view or the other. They can use the lines they have created by paraphrasing the citizen's words, and say them if they feel one of them to be appropriate. Repeat the exercise with Anthony's speech (also over the page).

Afterwards, discuss which arguments and phrases the players felt were most persuasive and why. You can use this discussion to introduce the idea of rhetoric. Which rhetorical devices does each character use, and how do their words make the citizens feel?



Act 3 Scene 2 – Antony's speech (Ariyon Bakare as Antony in Sean Holme's 2006 RSC production) Photographer: Pau Ros

Extracts from Act 3 Scene 2

Brutus

Be patient till the last.

Romans, countrymen and lovers! Hear me for my cause; and be silent, that you may hear; believe me for mine honour; and have respect for mine honour, that you may believe; censure me in your wisdom; and awake your senses that you may be the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If, then, that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer, -Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him; there is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

Anthony

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you that Caesar were ambitious;
If it were so, it was grievous fault;
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest,
For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honourable men,
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse; was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, - not without cause;
What cause withholds you, then, to mourn for him?
O judgement thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason!- bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

An ensemble approach to Act 3 Scene 2



John Light as Brutus (far left) and Ariyon Bakare as Antony (far right) after the murder of Caesar.
(2006 RSC production) Photographer: Pau Ros

In rehearsal, John Light (who plays Brutus) and Ariyon Bakare, (who plays Anthony) studied the ways in which contemporary politicians construct and deliver their speeches. They looked at the use of *antithesis* in political rhetoric: where two contrasting ideas are used to explore an issue in order to promote the sense that the speaker is fair and balanced. Shakespeare uses antithesis to great effect in both these speeches. With your group, try the following activity.

RESEARCHING RHETORIC

Key Stages 3 - 5

Ask the players to research a contemporary politician, using the internet. Ask them to find examples of how that politician uses persuasive language.

- What strategies does the speaker use?
- Which words stand out, and why?
- Can they find an example of antithesis in modern political speech?