

THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS
OF
ANCIENT
GREECE:
OLD
ECHOES,
NEW EARS



by Bonnie J. Monte

a study guide

**compiled and arranged by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey**

***The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece:
Old Echoes, New Ears***
a study guide

a support packet for studying the play
and attending The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's ***Shakespeare LIVE!*** touring production

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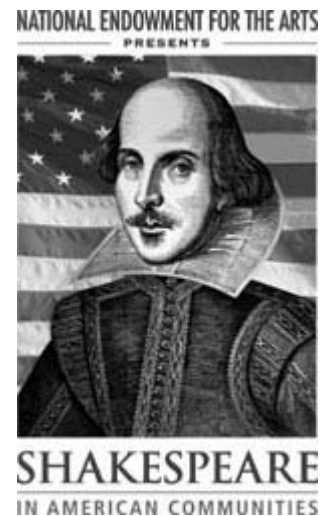
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CLASSROOM



FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Since Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte assumed leadership of the organization in 1990, the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Programs have been to demystify Shakespeare, take him "off the shelf" and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. In this, the 10th Anniversary season of our *Shakespeare LIVE!* educational touring company, we resolved to go "beyond the Bard," as we have long done on our Main Stage, creating an energized and accessible door to the literature of ancient Greece for students. Towards these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to enrich their teaching and to expand the *Shakespeare LIVE!* experience for their students beyond the hour spent watching the production.

The information included in the study guide and activity book will help you expand your students' understanding of Greek myth and legend in performance, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this study guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the study guide given limited classroom time.

Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the one-page "BRIEF SYNOPSIS" has greatly increased students' understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last ten minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.

When more class time is available prior to seeing the play, we recommend incorporating the background information on Greek myths and the play itself. For another production, one teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study-guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period.

Using the questions found in the "TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION," many teachers will opt to take a class period after the presentation to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic issues that are found in the play.

One school spent two days working through performance-based activities (a few of which are suggested in the "FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES" section) with a particularly "difficult and rowdy" class. They were astounded with the results. Their students took the opportunity to "ham it up," and discovered a great joy and understanding from performing classic literature.

"Where's My Character?" Promoting Active Listening

Teacher-tested, student-approved! Try this exercise with your students:

Before seeing the play, assign each student one of the characters to research. During the performance, that student should pay particular attention to the portrayal of "his" (or "her") character. Which aspects of the character did the playwright and the actors accurately portray? What things were left out?

This exercise can be readily done in conjunction with Follow-Up Activity #4 (see p. 13).

Several schools have brought members of the *Shakespeare LIVE!* company and the Theatre's education staff into their classrooms to run workshops, either on school time or after school. Workshop topics include Text in Performance and Stage Combat, but we are also happy to design a workshop to meet your needs.

To learn more about these and many other suggestions for engaging your students, I encourage you to join us this summer for our acclaimed summer professional development institute for teachers, *ShakeFest*. Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the study guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about the classics and live theatre.

Happy Teaching,

Brian B. Crowe, Director of Education

ACTIVITIES

A Brief History of Ancient Greek Literature

Written Greek literature began with the recounting of myths and legends by the poets of the Archaic era, principally Homer (ca 800 BCE) and Hesiod (ca 700 BCE). However, Homer and Hesiod's works represent a much older tradition of oral storytelling dating back hundreds of years earlier. In the case of Homer, archaeologists have determined that his descriptions of Mycenaean armor and artifacts, long-vanished by the time he wrote, are incredibly accurate. Poetry in ancient Greece was far more than a matter of entertainment or art— singer-poets, or *oidoi*, were historians and preservers of religious and cultural traditions.

Myth, to Homer and his contemporaries, literally meant “ritual speech”— the kind of speech appropriate to festivals, ceremonies and other gatherings; the kind of speech used by chieftains, priests and, of course, traveling poets. For this reason, any kind of knowledge important to human existence, whether it was the nature and disposition of the various gods or the history of one's ancestors, might be considered myth.

The act of publicly singing or reciting myths seems to have been in itself one of the major ways in which the ancient Greeks practiced their religion. As in modern churches, where reciting and listening to scripture is an important part of worship, Greeks gathered at public festivals to listen to poems honoring gods or ancestors. Political leaders might sponsor contests, where poets competed for prize money, as a public sign of their virtue and respect for tradition. The Greek tradition of drama seems

to have grown out of these kind of festivals, which were religious in origin.

By the Classical era, around 500 BCE, educated Greeks had begun to speculate on the origin and reliability of their myths. A new field, history, had been born, devoted to analyzing the traditions of the past and attempting to determine their truth. In the Republic, Plato criticized poets whose accounts of the gods undermine public morality by showing the gods engaged in improper behavior. In his tragedies, Euripides also treats the traditional myths sceptically, and sometimes critically.

Herodotus, the “father of history,” speculated that many of the characteristics and stories of Greek gods seemed to be stolen directly from ancient Egyptian religion. By around 300 BCE, Euhemerus proposed a surprisingly modern theory that the ancient stories about the gods were actually just garbled accounts of the harsh rule of ancient kings.

As Greek culture became absorbed in the Roman Empire, writers and historians continued to revisit the myths, but mainly to use them as the subject matter for literature or academic study. During the Middle Ages, Greek literature survived almost exclusively in Christian monasteries, where it was often reinterpreted in Christian terms. During the Renaissance, there was a vast revival of interest in the ancient literature of Archaic and Classical Greece, which has continued to the present day. For this reason, the ancient myths have had a profound impact on Western literature.

Throughout this study guide, dates have been written as “CE” or “BCE,” for “Common Era” or “Before Common Era.”

system and to account for its rites and customs. One constant rule of mythology is whatever happens among the gods reflects events on earth. In this way, events such as invasions and radical social changes became incorporated into myths. Some myths, especially those from the Greco-Roman and medieval periods, also serve to illustrate moral principles, frequently through feats of heroism performed by mortals.

When these narratives are about real people or events, they are more properly called legends, to distinguish them from myths, which are imaginary. In these cases, the lives of the lead characters are embellished with borrowed or fictional additions. The goal of a legend was not to provide an accurate record of an individual's life, but to portray it as an example of virtuous or evil conduct—with appropriate consequences—to be emulated or avoided.

As the richness of the myths represented in this collection conveys, myth and falsehood are not synonymous. What is truth to one is fancy to another; however, it is not up to any of us to decide that one community's mythology is any more or less valid than another's. Myth is a positive force that unites many cultures rather than divides them. Throughout the world myths provide people with explanations, histories, role models, entertainment, and many other things that enable them to direct their own actions and understand their own surroundings.

Reprinted from *World Myths and Legends in Art*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, <http://www.artsmia.org/world-myths/>

What is Myth?

What is myth? There is no one satisfactory definition, since myths serve many different purposes. The first purpose was to explain the inexplicable. Since the beginning of humankind's existence, myths have functioned as rationalizations for the fundamental mysteries of life, questions such as: Who made the world? How will it end? Where do we come from? Who was the first human? What happens when we die? Why does the sun travel across the sky each day? Why does the moon wax and wane? Why do we have annual agricultural cycles and seasonal changes? Who controls our world, and how can we influence those beings so our lives are easier?

In the absence of scientific information of any kind, long ago societies all over the world devised creation myths, resurrection myths, and complex systems of supernatural beings, each with specific powers, and stories about their actions. Since people were often isolated from each other, most myths evolved independently, but the various myths are surprisingly similar, in particular creation myths.

So the need for myth is a universal need. Over time, one version of a myth would become the accepted standard that was passed down to succeeding generations, first through story-telling, and then, much later, set down in written form. Inevitably myths became part of systems of religion, and were integrated into rituals and ceremonies, which included music, dancing and magic.

The second function of myth is to justify an existing social

The Greek Gods

The beings referred to as “gods” in the ancient Greek myths comprise a wide variety of semi-human, super-human and sometimes monstrous creatures. It is now believed that many different cultures passed through the Greek peninsula and islands over the course of many centuries, each bringing with them their own set of gods and religious traditions. By the time poets like Hesiod began writing down these beliefs, Greece was a patchwork quilt of religious practices. Some gods were the spirits of a particular place (such as a town, river, or mountain), and were worshipped only at that locale. In other cases, gods from different cultures and time periods existed side-by-side in the minds of the ancient Greeks. Hesiod’s account of the war between the Titans and the Olympian Gods, which is partially retold in this play, is often thought to reflect the historical process by which the Greek gods of one era were replaced by the “new gods” that accompanied an invading culture.

Some of the mythical characters, such as Herakles, are described in both god-like and human ways. The great heroes of the past were often described in myth as being born from the union of a god and a mortal, and were often worshipped as divinities themselves. Often these heroes were regarded as the founders of specific cities and revered as forefathers by the cities’ latter-day residents.

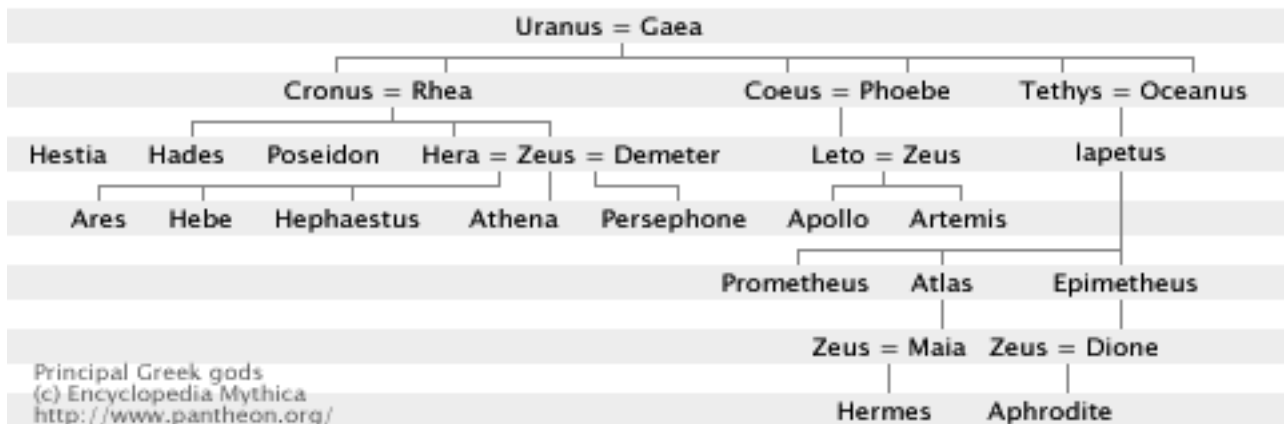
It is also clear that, as Herodotus theorized over 2,000 years ago, the ancient Greeks sometimes borrowed certain ideas about religion and the gods from other nearby cultures that they encountered through war or trade. The Greek goddess Aphrodite was represented in very similar ways to the goddesses Ishtar and Astarte, who were worshipped in ancient Palestine.

Gods and geography

The ancient Greeks worshipped a dizzying number of gods whose attributes are sometimes overlapping or contradictory. One explanation for this is the mountainous terrain of Greece, which kept its ancient tribes separate and led to the development of different traditions in different parts of the peninsula. Later scholars lumped all these traditions together as “Greek” myth.

For the most part, only the twelve major Olympian gods seem to have been worshipped throughout Greece and to have had great temples dedicated to them. In the case of these deities as well, there were local variations in their relative importance and the way they were worshipped. As the patron goddess of the city of Athens, Athena played a far greater role in the religious life of its citizens than those of other regions.

Gods fulfilled a number of roles for the ancient Greeks. Their interventions explained the workings of the natural world, particularly the unusual or catastrophic. The gods were believed to have taught humans every form of valuable knowledge, from agriculture and crafts to ethical principles. As guardians of morality, the gods were believed to punish wrongdoers and reward the virtuous. However, the conflicts and jealousies among the individual gods also served to explain why bad things sometimes happened to apparently good people. Although immortal and enormously powerful, Greek gods generally behave much like human beings: falling in love, getting into fights, playing jokes, and celebrating. This may be why some later historians speculated that the myths were actually people’s vague remembrance of kings from the distant past. As the Greeks developed a more scientific picture of the world, the old stories about the gods came to be viewed less as an explanation of the natural world than as a record of the culture of their ancestors.



This family tree, adapted from Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* (1940) shows the family relationships among some of the major gods, including many of the characters in this play. The Muses, who are not shown, were believed to be more of Zeus’s many children, in this case with the goddess Mnemosyne (or Memory). Of course, the myths are not always consistent in their account of the gods’ origins. Many stories relate that Aphrodite had no parents at all, but simply appeared out of the sea.

The Theatre of Ancient Greece

The origins of Western theatre lie in the ancient Greek drama that flourished in Athens between about 600 and 200 BCE. In their earliest form, these performances grew directly out of *dithyrambs*, which were songs, dances and tales offered to the Greek god of fertility and wine, Dionysus. The dithyrambs were sung or chanted by a chorus.

Around 500 BCE, the poet Thespis (from whose name the word thespian is derived) introduced an innovation, the *hypokrite* or “responder.” In the intervals between the songs and dances of the chorus, the masked and costumed *hypokrite* would speak verse in the character of a god or hero. Evidence suggests that it was originally the author himself who took the stage to perform his poetry.

As time went on, poets introduced a second and finally a third *hypokrite*, and dialogue became an increasingly prominent part of the Greek theatre. The *hypokrites* became professional actors, for whom the poets wrote. There was no overlap between the chorus and the actors— they were viewed as artists of a completely different type.

Although Greek theatre continued to be produced in the context of religious festivals, eventually theatre’s religious function became overshadowed by its social, political and entertainment value. In classical Athens, it was seen as the duty of the government to produce theatre for the public. The Archon or leader of Athens was the sponsor of the theatre, and commissioned the writing of plays and the hiring of actors. Prominent Athenians would ensure their public prestige by sponsoring the choruses. Because admission was free, almost everyone attended performances. The great Theatre of Dionysus at Athens was able to hold over twenty thousand people who wanted to see a show.

The classical Greek poets developed three basic genres of plays: tragedy, comedy and satyr plays. Tragedies told of the suffering and downfall of great men, while comedies poked fun at the foibles and follies of humanity. Satyr plays usually dealt with the same subject matter as the mythological tragedies, but in a satirical way. For each of these genres, the actors wore different costumes, but a few things were constant. The actors were always masked, and usually wore quite heavy and elaborate costumes that made them look larger than life, to help represent gods or mythic heroes. Because of the way they were masked and costumed, ancient Greek actors were probably rather immobile, and relied on their voices and the author’s poetry for their power. Movement was the realm of the chorus.

In its heyday, the Great Dionysian Festival of Athens lasted about six days. To be included, the city’s poets would have to submit a tetralogy, or three tragedies and a satiric drama, to the Archon, who would select the three top entrants for participation in the festival. At the end of the festival, a committee would award first, second and third place to the three entries. Victory meant public honors and prize money for the author as well as the performers.

In developing this play, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece*, the writer and director, Bonnie Monte, as well as the design team, have adapted certain elements and characteristics

of the ancient Greek drama. You will notice for example, that one or two actors often narrate the stories, while a chorus of other actors underscores the storytelling with sound and movement.

In the ancient Greek theatre, the actors’ masks served not only to make them seem more mysterious and superhuman, but also to help conceal the fact that two or three people were playing all the speaking parts. While *Shakespeare LIVE!* uses a company of nine actors, masks and costumes perform a similar function in this production.

In developing the look of the costumes, Costume Designer Matthew Gregory also tried to reflect aspects of ancient Greek costume. Although these are far different than the bulky outfits that the hypokrites wore to represent gods on the Athenian stage, they are suggestive of ancient Athenian fashions. Both men and women of the time wore the *chiton*, a loose-fitting ankle-length tunic that belted at the waist. On stage, the chiton was regularly worn by actors portraying gods and heroes, and you will notice that many of the characters in this play wear garments that look very much like the classical chiton.



***The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece:* An Introduction**

As its subtitle implies, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece: Old Echoes, New Ears* brings together both old and new elements in presenting this subject matter. It begins, just as Hesiod's *Theogony* did almost 3,000 years ago, with the Muses, those daughters of Zeus who were the patron goddesses of the arts (which, to the ancient Greeks, included several types of poetry, music, theatre, dance, history and astronomy). The Muses were the keepers of knowledge and the beings whose divine help made humans able to translate that knowledge into beautiful expression.

In this play, Clio, the Muse of History, takes the stage, alone, just as an actor in the ancient Greek theatre might have, and uses poetry to invoke the audience's imagination. The style of the verse in this opening monologue also pays homage to ancient Greek poetry.

Once Clio's sister Erato, the Muse of Love Poetry, joins her onstage, however, the language of the play switches to modern prose, often with a few contemporary references (King Midas' hairdresser, Vidal) thrown in for good measure. This underscores one of the play's other themes, that, although these stories may have originated millenia ago, they reflect human experiences and behavior that we still recognize in our own lives.

This alternation—between poetry and prose, between classic and contemporary, between “old echoes” and “new ears”—con-

tinues throughout the play, inviting valuable comparisons and contrasts.

Echoes of the theatre of ancient Greece abound as well, not only in the costumes and masks, but in the use of a chorus that comments on the events of the play and “creates,” both with words and movement, the shifting landscape of the stories.

In the end, the chorus of gods and Muses reminds us to consider the myths of ancient Greece as simultaneously fictional and true. Just as dreams are the symbolic expression of our individual thoughts and experiences, myths are such a symbolic expression for whole cultures. Myths survive, in the words of the play, because they are about fundamental things, the great mysteries and puzzles that continue to fascinate and trouble us. And while these Greek myths and legends may have been, on the one hand, the outgrowth of a particular culture 3,000 years ago on the shores of the Aegean Sea, they are, on the other hand, connected by their fundamental nature to every other story that has ever been told.



A Brief Synopsis

Clio, the Muse of History, introduces herself, having been conjured up by the audience to relate *her* history, the ancient Greek myths. She calls upon the audience to imagine the earliest memories of mankind, evoking the landscape of ancient Greece. Although Clio promises to begin her story “at the beginning,” she is sidetracked by the thought of flowers, and begins with the story of Narcissus and Echo instead.

Given the subject matter, her sisters Erato (Love Poetry) and Euterpe (Lyric Poetry) decide to assist her. As the sisters take turns narrating, we see Hera strip of Echo of the power of speech, and Echo proceeds to fall hopelessly in love with the vain Narcissus. As Narcissus proceeds on his selfish way, Clio shows us how the goddess Nemesis punished him by causing him to pine away for love of his own reflection.

As Erato falls into a fit of weeping brought on by the sad story, a chance comment by Terpsichore, Muse of Dance, inspires Clio to tell a story about King Midas and his unfortunate wish. As Clio recounts the story, we see the drunken and boisterous Silenus arrive in Phrygia, the kingdom of Midas, where he is welcomed with open arms and flowing wine. After ten days of carousing, Silenus rewards the king with an audience with the god Dionysus. For his hospitality towards Silenus, the god offers to grant Midas a single wish.

Without thinking, Midas wishes for the ability to have everything he touches turn to gold. Although Dionysus and Silenus warn him to think carefully about his wish, Midas insists on being given the golden touch. While he enjoys his new power at first, the full implications of his wish become clear when he tries to eat and finds his meal changing to gold before he can put it in his mouth. In desperation, he returns to the amused Dionysus and Silenus to beg them to take their gift back. Having taught Midas his lesson about haste and greed, Dionysus gives him the means to wash away his golden touch in the waters of the river Pactolus, leaving behind gold deposits in the sand.

As the Muses wrap up Midas’ story, they are suddenly alarmed by the rumbling of giants under the earth and flee, fearing a volcanic eruption will follow. Zeus takes advantage of their absence to take the stage in appropriately impressive fashion and to pick up the story Clio was supposed to tell— the story of the beginning, of the creation of the world and the gods.

With the help of a masked chorus of gods, Zeus relates the battle between the older generation of gods known as Titans, and his own generation, the Olympians. We see how Zeus’ father, the Titan Cronus, resolved to thwart fate by devouring his own children before they could overthrow him, and how Zeus ultimately fulfilled the prophecy, setting his brothers and sisters free and overthrowing Cronus and the Titans in a universal war. The twelve Olympian gods introduce themselves, followed by the return of the Muses, who suggest that Zeus move the story along to tell of the creation of mankind.

Zeus is not interested in talking about humans, so Apollo volunteers to take the next part of the narrative. With his lyre, Apollo narrates the coming of plant and animal life, and then the making of man by the Titans Prometheus and Epimetheus. As Apollo notes, however, Prometheus was so fond of his creation that he stole the gods’ power of making fire and gave that to man as well, drawing Zeus’ wrath.

Athena joins in to help narrate the creation of woman, as Zeus decides to take revenge on men their loyalty to Prometheus by creating Pandora, the first woman. Although an apparent gift, as her name implies, Pandora leads mankind into danger through

her curiosity, which drives her to open the sealed box which the Olympian gods gave her upon her creation. The box, of course, was filled with everything dangerous to man, and Pandora’s deadly curiosity unleashes these evils upon the earth. However, in the end, hope remains in the box as humanity’s ultimate gift from the gods.

Having revenged himself on humans, Zeus decides to complete his punishment of Prometheus, sending his minions Force and Violence to capture and chain Prometheus high in the Caucasus Mountains, where he is perpetually tortured. Despite his suffering, Prometheus refuses to give in to the unjust anger and tyranny of Zeus, and is eventually freed, an eternal symbol of heroic endurance.

After this grim story, the Muses, particularly Thalia (Comedy) insist on something lighter, so Clio resumes the story of Midas, who, cured of his greed, proceeds to fall victim to his vanity. At a musical contest between Dionysus and Apollo, Midas insists that Dionysus is the winner, despite the clear superiority of Apollo’s music. Infuriated by Midas’ stubborn flattery of the other god, Apollo replaces Midas’ ears with the ears of a donkey.

Completely humiliated by his new appearance, Midas returns home and resolves to hide his transformed ears from public view. The only other person who shares his secret is his hairdresser, Vidal, whom he swears to secrecy. Vidal finds it so difficult to keep from telling anyone the king’s hilarious secret that he resorts to digging a hole in the ground and whispering his secret into the earth. Unfortunately for the king, the ground where Vidal whispered grows reeds, and as the reeds blow in the wind, they pass Midas’s secret along to the whole world.

Zeus warns Clio that there is only time for one more story. With the assistance of the masked chorus of gods, they construct a labyrinth and proceed to tell the tale of Daedalus and his son, Icarus. As the gods narrate, we see Daedalus and Icarus thrown into the labyrinth by King Minos. With their food running out, Daedalus comes up with an ingenious and daring solution: he will construct two pairs of wings so that they can fly out of the maze. The wings work as planned, but the exhilaration of flight makes Icarus forget his father’s warnings to maintain a moderate speed and height. Soaring as high as he can, the wax holding the boy’s wings together melts, and he tumbles into the ocean.

As Clio notes, this story, and all the others, underscore how human experience and human nature remain unchanged, even 3,000 years after the events that the Muses have narrated. One by one, the gods join her in chorus, reminding the audience that even the oldest myths are symbols of the unchanging human psyche and experience.



Sources of the Play

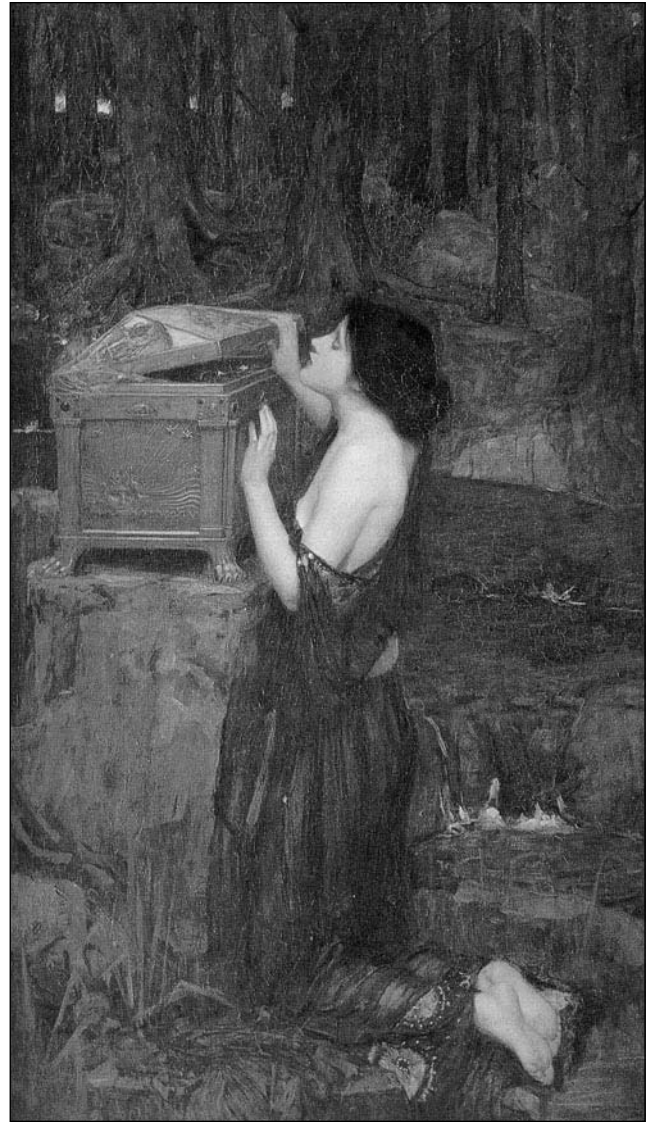
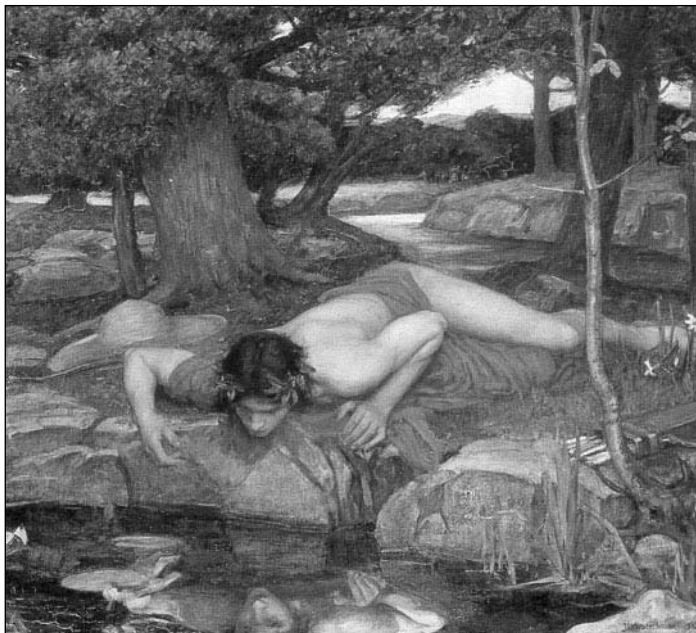
The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece: Old Echoes, New Ears has a number of sources, ultimately stretching back to the oral traditions of more than 3,000 years ago.

The Muses are mentioned in some of the very oldest Greek mythic literature, Homer's *Odyssey* and Hesiod's *Theogony*. As the patronesses of poets and artists of all kinds, they were obviously a popular subject for subsequent authors, right up to the present day. The *Theogony* is also the major original source for the story of the creation of the universe, the gods, and the war between the Titans and the Olympians.

The original source for the other stories told in the play, including Prometheus and Pandora, Echo and Narcissus, Daedalus and Icarus, and both of the King Midas stories, is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A Roman poet in the reign of Augustus Caesar, Ovid collected and retold hundreds of Greek myths in his masterpiece, the multi-part epic poem called *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). As a literary figure, Ovid seems to have been the Shakespeare of the Roman Empire, a poet whose work was both wildly popular and critically revered.

Ovid surged back to fame in the Renaissance, and Arthur Golden's 1567 English translation profoundly influenced William Shakespeare, among others. Ideas and scraps of plot from *Metamorphoses* are apparent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—*Pyramus and Thisbe* is the Mechanicals' woeful attempt at a stage adaptation of one of the chapters of Ovid's poem— as well as in many other plays. In the 20th century, poet Ezra Pound called Golden's version of *Metamorphoses* "the most beautiful book in the English language."

Since Ovid, a number of other writers have collected (and adapted) versions of the ancient myths. Bostonian Thomas Bulfinch published his collection, known as *Bulfinch's Mythology*, in 1855, subtitled "an attempt to popularize mythology." Bulfinch elaborated that this work was "not for the learned, nor for the theologian, nor for the philosopher, but for the reader of English literature, of either sex." For this reason, Bulfinch's adaptation of Ovid and Virgil sometimes leaves out the more violent or racy parts of the original text.



Bulfinch's collection was the most widely-read book on Greek mythology in the United States until the publication of Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* in 1942. A classicist and teacher, Hamilton devoted herself after her retirement to the study of Greek literature. She had never been to Greece or studied archaeology, but she insisted that "a people's literature is the great textbook for real knowledge of them." Although it is not without its critics, *Mythology* is still one of the most readable and widely-used collections of Greek myth.

The Greek Myths Through The Ages

“It is by no means to everyone that the gods grant a clear view of themselves.”

Homer, *The Odyssey*
ca. 760 BCE

“I hold that no man knows about the gods more than another.”

Herodotus, *History*
ca. 450 BCE

“Let us first make an announcement to the gods, saying that we are not going to investigate about them, for we do not claim to be able to do that.”

Plato, *Cratylus*
ca. 400 BCE

“Of the portents recorded in ancient tales, many did happen and many will happen again.”

Plato, *The Statesman*
ca. 340 BCE

“As a general thing we find that the ancient myths do not give us a simple and consistent story, consequently it should occasion no surprise if we find, when we put the ancient accounts together, that in some details they are not in agreement with those given by every poet and historian.”

Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*
ca. 40 BCE

“When I began to write my history, I was inclined to regard these legends as foolishness, but on getting as far as Arcadia I grew to hold a more thoughtful view of them, which is this. In the days of old those Greeks who were considered wise spoke their sayings not straight out but in riddles, and so the legends about Cronus I conjectured to be one sort of Greek wisdom. In matters of divinity, therefore, I shall adopt the received tradition.”

Pausanias, *Description of Greece*
ca. 160 CE

“We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece.”

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas* (1822)



Food For Thought

Muses, Muses, Everywhere...

In the three thousand years between *Theogony* and *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece: Old Echoes, New Ears*, the nine Muses have turned up in some rather unusual locations.

In the 1980 movie musical *Xanadu*, Olivia Newton-John plays Terpsichore as a Muse with a gift for roller disco, alongside Gene Kelly.

The Muses received the Walt Disney treatment in the 1997 animated movie *Hercules*, narrating it and its spin-off television series.

If you visit New Orleans, you will also find streets named after each of the Muses.

What's In A (Greek) Name?

The ancient Greeks defined themselves as Hellenes (or Greeks) in part through language— non-Greek-speakers were called *barbarophonoi*, the source of our word “barbarian.” Many tribes also claimed descent from a mythological hero named Hellas, hence the name “Hellene.”

Even so, different dialects and different accounts of tribal ancestry meant that these definitions were not truly satisfactory. As the philosopher Isocrates explained in the 5th century BCE, “the name ‘Hellenes’ suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and the title ‘Hellenes’ is applied rather to those who share our culture than those who share a common blood.”

More Muse Miscellany

Clio has lent her name to an asteroid (84 Klio), a car (the Renault Clio), a family of sea butterflies (Clioidea), and the international awards for advertising and design (the Clio Awards).

Polyhymnia, the Muse of Hymns to the Gods, was also associated with geometry and agriculture.

Terpsichore’s movie career (see above) began in 1947, when Rita Hayworth portrayed her in *Down to Earth*.

Many astronomical observatories worldwide have been named after the Muse of the stars, Urania.

Sneaker Dreams

Did you know that one of the world’s largest athletic shoe manufacturers owes its name to a Greek myth? Newly-hired designer Jeff Johnson had a dream about the Greek goddess of athletic and military victory, a winged woman of great speed. Inspired by his dream, he went to CEO Phil Knight, and became the first employee of Nike, Inc., named for the speedy goddess. Her wings inspired the company’s famous “swoosh” logo.

Holy Museum!

Our word “museum” originates from the ancient Greek practice of including a shrine to the Muses in school buildings, where students could undoubtedly go to pray for inspiration before their exams. This shrine was called a *musaeion*, which became our “museum.” Pieces of artwork may have been displayed here as an offering to the goddesses.



A Glossary of Characters and Places in the Play

Mortals:

Narcissus: A handsome but cold-hearted young man. His rejection of the nymph Echo results in his being cursed to love only himself.

Daedalus: A brilliant inventor and architect, hired by King Minos of Crete to build an impenetrable labyrinth. Having built the labyrinth, he and his son are then imprisoned in it when he falls out of the king's favor.

Icarus: Daedalus' young son.

King Minos: The King of Crete, and keeper of the monster called the Minotaur.

King Midas: The King of Phrygia, the land of roses (in present-day Turkey).

Pandora: The first woman, she was created by Zeus as a gift and punishment to mankind (her name means "gift of all gifts"). Married to the Titan Epimetheus, her wedding gift from the gods was a box that was never to be opened.

Theseus: Mentioned in the play, he was one of the earliest rulers of Athens and a hero who, among other great feats, killed the Minotaur and freed Athens from King Minos of Crete.

Nymphs, Monsters, and Other Magical Beings:

Echo: A beautiful nymph (or nature spirit) who ran afoul of Hera's jealousy, and was cursed to only be able to repeat the words of others.

Minotaur: A monster with the head of a man and the body of a bull. King Minos of Crete kept it in the labyrinth designed by Daedalus, and fed it young men and women who were taken prisoner in Athens.

Silenus: An immortal who was the teacher and companion of the god Dionysus. Cheerful, boisterous and perpetually drunk.

Giants: Huge, strong beings who fought sometimes for the Titans and sometimes for the Olympians. The Olympians eventually imprisoned them under the earth, where their struggles to escape caused earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

The Olympian Gods:

Zeus: The chief of the Olympian gods, he rules the sky and weather. Won his place by overthrowing his tyrannical father, Cronus.

Hera: Goddess of marriage, married women and childbirth, and wife to Zeus.

Poseidon: God of the sea, and brother to Zeus.

Hades: God of the underworld and the dead, and brother to Zeus.

Hestia: Goddess of the hearth and home, and sister to Zeus.

Hermes: Messenger and herald of the gods, as well as the god of commerce (and thievery).

Apollo: God of music, truth, and the light of the sun.

Artemis: Apollo's twin sister, and the goddess of wildlife, the hunt, and the moon.

Athena: Goddess of wisdom, civilization and warfare, she was born directly from Zeus' forehead, with no mother at all.

Aphrodite: Goddess of love and beauty.

Ares: God of war.

Hephaestus: God of fire and metalcraft.

Many other lesser gods and goddesses accompanied and served the Olympians, including:

Nike: The goddess of victory.

Eros: Aphrodite's son, who caused mortals to fall in love with

his magical arrows.

Iris: The goddess of the rainbow.

The Nine Muses: Patron goddesses of the arts (including storytelling) who serve as narrators of this play. Their names are Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Terpsichore, Calliope, Polyhymnia, Urania, Thalia and Melpomene.

Dionysus: God of wine, music and nature.

Nemesis: Goddess of righteous anger and vengeance.

Timolus: A mountain god.

The Elder Gods and Titans:

Gaea: Goddess of the earth who gave birth to the succeeding generations of gods. Grandmother to Zeus. Her intervention helps her grandchildren overthrow her son Cronus.

Uranus: God of the sky who fathered the succeeding generations of gods. Grandfather to Zeus.

Cronus: Zeus' father and the ruler of the Titans. Swallowed his children alive to prevent them from fulfilling the prophecy that he would be overthrown by one of them.

Rhea: Zeus' mother, who hid him after his birth until he was old enough to challenge his father.

Mnemosyne: One of the Titans, and the goddess of Memory. She is the mother of the Nine Muses.

Ocean and Tethys: Titans who were gods of the sea until their defeat by the Olympians.

Hyperion: Titan who was god of the sun until his defeat by the Olympians.

Themis: Titan who was the goddess of justice.

Atlas: A Titan who was the brother of Prometheus, and who was condemned, after the Titans' defeat, to eternally bear the weight of the earth on his back.

Prometheus: Wise Titan who joined in the Olympians' revolt. He was later punished by Zeus for his friendship and popularity with human beings.

Epimetheus: Brother to Prometheus, he created men out of clay, and was given Pandora, the first woman, as a wife.

Places mentioned in the play:

Mount Olympus: The highest mountain in Greece, and the home of the Olympian gods.

Phrygia: The land of roses, located in modern-day Turkey. King Midas was its ruler.

Pactolus: River in Phrygia whose cascades washed away Midas' golden touch, leaving behind gold deposits in the river's sands.

Mount Caucasus: Distant mountain where Prometheus was chained and tortured.

Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. At the end of the play, the gods note that “what’s true is also untrue; what’s unreal is just as real as what’s really real.” What do you think they mean by this? If all these myths and legends are fictional, does this mean that they are meaningless? What relationship, if any, do the myths have to our lives today? You might want to discuss this along with the play’s subtitle, “Old Echoes, New Ears.”

2. The author of the play, Bonnie J. Monte, has chosen to write in a mixture of poetry and prose. The style of the writing sometimes sounds more like ancient Greek dramatic poetry, and sometimes more like the way we speak today. Why do you think she made this choice? Which characters speak in verse, and why do they do so? Is there a different feeling to the sections of the plays that are written as poetry?

3. *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece: Old Echoes, New Ears* contains a varied assortment of myths and legends. Some are comical, and some are serious or even frightening. Do they have anything in common? Are there any themes or ideas that run through each of the myths that the Muses and gods retell?

4. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato suggested that some of the myths should be banned, or at least not taught to children, because they depict the gods behaving in ways that are unfair, if not evil. Plato feared that these stories would encourage humans to excuse their own misbehavior. In the course of this play, for example, we hear how Zeus punished Prometheus out of jealousy and spite. Do you agree with Plato that these myths set a bad example? Can you think of any reason why the ancient Greeks would have written myths that sometimes depicted their gods in a negative way? How might these kind of myths also teach people a moral lesson?

5. Myths and legends, the play says, are “about those things that don’t change. That which is still mysterious to us. The great puzzles of humanity, the puzzles we cannot solve.” Which “great puzzles” would you include in this definition? Are there contemporary stories (whether in literature or the movies) that you would classify as myths or legends based on this definition? Explain.

About this Production

1. The director and scenic designer of this production have chosen to depict almost the entire world of the play using different pieces of fabric, which the actors move and transform into different shapes. What do you think influenced this choice? Did the scenery affect you differently than if, say, the set consisted of a series of painted backdrops? What role did your imagination play in watching the production?

2. In the theatre of ancient Greece, strange masks, platform shoes and bulky costumes were used to suggest that the actors were playing gods or other superhuman beings. How did the director and costume designer for this production indicate when the actors were playing humans and when they were playing other kinds of beings?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Write a review** of this production. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like the set and costumes). Explain what you liked about the production and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

2. **Alert the media!** The Greek myths are full of exciting and outrageous events— what political scandal could compare to your king suddenly sporting the ears of a donkey? Develop your own newspaper (*The Olympian Times*, perhaps?) or TV news network, and create “coverage” of these myths or others that you know. Don’t forget about the ads!

3. **Extended and Deleted Scenes:** Obviously, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece: Old Echoes, New Ears* includes only a handful of the many hundreds or even thousands of stories which have been preserved from the ancient Greeks. You are probably already familiar with several of the others. Take one or more of these stories and write a script for it— in the style of this production, you can use the Muses and/or gods as your narrators. Different groups within the class can write different scenes, and then present them for the whole class in a true ancient Greek theatre festival (see p. 6).

4. **Pick a character** from Greek mythology and research him or her. Make sure you know as much as possible about your character’s history and characteristics. Then, in class, dress up as your character, and see if everyone can guess who you are based on questions that the teacher or your classmates ask you.

5. **Story Circle.** As a class, compose your own folktale on the spot. Start with a traditional opening (such as “Once upon a time, there lived...”) and complete the sentence. Each member of the group will contribute one sentence, and then the story will move on to the next member. Of course, the sentences should follow one another logically. After composing your improvised story, read another folktale to the group out loud, and discuss the features of good oral storytelling. Remember that this is how the Greek myths were handed down and preserved for centuries before writing.

6. **Score the show.** In the ancient Greek theatre, music was a major component of the performance. If you are doing other performance-based exercises (such as #3 or #5), consider extending it by having groups develop a simple musical accompaniment for their stories. What kind of sound effects could be created with drums, recorders, or everyday classroom/household objects, and how could they help tell the story?

Teachers:

Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to info@ShakespeareNJ.org, and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.

Test Your Understanding

- Where is the home and palace of the Greek gods located?
a) Mount Olympus
b) Mount Caucasus
c) The Underworld
d) Phrygia
- How many Muses are there in total?
a) Three
b) Seven
c) Nine
d) Twelve
- Who was Hera's husband?
a) King Midas
b) Zeus
c) Cronus
d) Apollo
- Who was Narcissus in love with?
a) Echo
b) Aphrodite
c) Hera
d) himself
- Which Muse is devoted to history?
a) Clio
b) Terpsichore
c) Erato
d) Thalia
- Who grants Midas' wish for the golden touch?
a) Zeus
b) Silenus
c) Dionysus
d) Clio
- Daedalus was the most famous _____ of ancient Greece.
a) king
b) musician
c) storyteller
d) architect
- Prometheus gave human beings the gift of _____.
a) gold
b) water
c) fire
d) music
- Pandora was given a _____ filled with all the world's evils.
a) cup
b) box
c) bag
d) labyrinth
- To punish King Midas for calling Dionysus a greater musician than he, Apollo cursed the king with _____.
a) the ears of a donkey
b) the golden touch
c) the curse of Echo
d) a bad hairdo
- What did King Minos keep imprisoned in his labyrinth?
a) the Titans
b) the Minotaur
c) the Furies
d) the evils of Pandora
- Icarus flew too close to _____.
a) the moon
b) Mount Olympus
c) the sun
d) the labyrinth
- Cronus became infamous for eating _____.
a) a giant
b) his brothers
c) stones
d) his children
- Who is the only Titan who assists the Olympians in their war?
a) Prometheus
b) Epimetheus
c) Atlas
d) Hyperion
- What is left behind in Pandora's box after she opens it?
a) Regret
b) Hope
c) Endurance
d) Memory

Meeting NJ Core Curriculum Standards

With New Jersey's implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, teachers and administrators are seeking programs and materials that will help achieve these new classroom requirements. By merely viewing a *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance and participating in the post-performance discussion, students can meet many Curriculum Standards. The activities included in this study guide, when implemented in the classroom, as well as teacher assigned writing assignments will allow students to meet additional Curriculum Standards.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

The Visual and Performing Arts Standards require students to experience, perform and comment on various forms of fine art. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance, and incorporation of the enclosed study guide exercises, will help meet the following Curriculum Standards.

STANDARD 1.1: All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in responses to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

STANDARD 1.2: All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each of art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and/or visual arts.

STANDARD 1.4: All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.

STANDARD 1.5: All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

Active listening and responding to what has been presented are two major aspects of the Language Arts Literacy Standard. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance can be used as a springboard classes to help students meet the following Standards.

STANDARD 3.2: All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.

STANDARD 3.3: All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Gaining an awareness and understanding of various cultures and cultural influences throughout history is part of the root of the Social Studies Standards. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance can, once again, be used as a springboard into activities that will help meet the following Standard.

STANDARD 6.2: All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history and philosophy, and related fields.

Artwork Credits:

p6: Actress dressed in an Ionic chiton, from www.costumes.org/history/greece.

p7 (left): *Clio, Euterpe and Calliope* by Eustache Le Sueur (1640-45). Louvre Museum collection, from Wikipedia.

p7 (right): Classical Greek sculpture of Clio, from the Vatican Museum collection.

p8: Statue of the Minotaur, 5th century BCE, from the National Museum of Athens collection.

p9 (top right): *Pandora*, by John William Waterhouse (1896), from Wikipedia.

p9 (bottom left): Detail of *Echo and Narcissus* by John William Waterhouse (1903), from Wikipedia.

p10: Woodcut illustration of the labyrinth by Vergilius Solis (1514-1562).

p11: Classical Greek sculpture of Apollo playing the lyre, from the Vatican Museum collection.

p18: Photo of the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, the Main

Sources for this study guide:

Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*, Mentor Books, 1940.

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Arthur Cotterell, *The Macmillan Illustrated Encyclopedia of Myths and Legends*, Macmillan Publishing, 1989.

Wikipedia, the Free Online Encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org)

Introduction to Greek Theatre Online Course, Dr. Eric

W. Trumbull, Northern Virginia Community College

(novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/spd130et/ancientgreek)

TheatreHistory.com

The Costumer's Manifesto (www.costumes.org)

Classical Mythology course website, Dr. Rand Johnson, Western Michigan University (homepages.wmich.edu/~johnsonrh/myth)

"Origins of Greek Mythology" by Michael Stewart, in *Greek Mythology: From the Iliad to the Fall of the Last Tyrant*.

(www.messagenet.com/myths/essays/origins.html)

World Myths and Legends in Art website, from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (www.artsmia.org/world-myths)

Test Your Understanding Answer Key

1. a 2. c 3. b 4. d 5. a 6. c

7. d 8. c 9. b 10. a 11. b 12. c

13. d 14. a 15. b

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (formerly called “New Jersey Shakespeare Festival”) is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey’s only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare’s canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 44th season in 2006.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre’s mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company’s dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting “new” theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998 provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY

Shakespeare LIVE! is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exceptional abridged productions of Shakespeare’s masterworks directly into the classroom. Workshops are also available in Stage Combat and Shakespeare in Performance.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS

Young actors are given the opportunity to participate in the excitement of the Theatre’s summer season through this program, which offers classes, a final presentation, as well as behind-the-scenes and front-of-house experience. Geared for students in grades 6 through 12, admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the intensive Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas. For a full brochure of the opportunities available, please contact the Education Department.

SHAKEFEST: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is an weeklong intensive filled with myriad practical ways to conquer “ShakesFear” and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and “speaking the speech.”



For more information about these and other educational programs at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, log onto our website, **www.ShakespeareNJ.org** or call **(973) 408-3278**