Coriolanus

By William Shakespeare
Director Robert Lepage

Grade Recommendation
Suitable for Grades 10–12

Content Advisory for Students
Some sexual innuendo and violence

Student Matinée Dates
June 13, 19; September 14, 21; October 2, 11

About the Play
Coriolanus is a political drama in which a Roman military hero’s bid for public office turns to tragedy after his enemies make use of his fatal inability to relate to the common people. The last of Shakespeare’s three “Plutarchian plays,” which also include Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra, it is believed to have been written in 1607-08.

Synopsis
For his valour in all but single-handedly winning the city of Corioli from the Volscians, led by Tullus Aufidius, Roman General Caius Martius is given the name of Coriolanus. The Roman upper classes, the patricians, also want to make him a consul – the highest office in the Roman republic.

Their choice is bitterly opposed, however, by the representatives of the common people, the tribunes Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus, who take advantage of Coriolanus’s evident contempt for the concerns of ordinary citizens to stir up resentment against him. So well do they succeed that the enraged mob denounces Coriolanus as a traitor and he is banished from the city.

Joining forces with his former enemy, Tullus Aufidius, and hardening his heart against the entreaties even of his staunchest friends and supporters in Rome, Coriolanus prepares to attack his former homeland, much to the alarm of its people. At last, his mother, Volumnia, accompanied by his wife and young son, goes to the Volscian camp to sue for peace.

Moved by her pleas, Coriolanus agrees to a treaty, whereupon Aufidius, who has come to distrust his new ally, declares Coriolanus a traitor and kills him.

Curriculum Connections
1. All grades: Language/English (listening to understand, speaking to communicate, reading for meaning)
2. All grades: Drama, Music, Visual Art
3. Grades 10–12: Health and PE (interpersonal skills, conflict resolution harassment, violence and abuse, leadership)
4. Grade 10: Civics (Politics) (civic awareness, civic engagement and action)
5. Grade 11: Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology (explaining human behaviour and culture, socialization)
6. Grade 11: World History to the End of the Fifteenth Century (conflict, civilizations, citizenship)
7. Grade 11: Politics in Action: Making Change (foundations of political engagement, policy, politics and democratic change)
8. Grades 11–12: Philosophy (metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, aesthetics)
9. Grade 12: World History Since the Fifteenth Century (conflict, cooperation, citizenship)
10. Grade 12: Adventures in World History (society and community, politics and conflict)
11. Grade 12: Canadian and International Politics (political foundations, civic awareness and responsibility)
TOPICS

Shakespeare
• Who he was, body of work, significance in English drama/literature
• Dramatists of the Renaissance
• Early modern drama

Elizabethan/Jacobean England
• Social and economic structure (class system, playhouses, plays and players)
• Values and beliefs (four humours, Chain of Being, etc.)
• Conventions of early English drama (tragedy, five-act structure)

Language
• Imagery, blank verse, rhetoric

THEMES AND MOTIFS
• Politics, society and self
• Family
• Power
• Language and communication
• War
• Pride and honour
• Arrogance vs. humility
• Gender roles
• Class and class privileges
• Past vs. progress
• Love
• Rivalry and envy
• Reputation
• Words vs. action
• Enemy and friend
• Fortune and fate
• Service
• Theatre
• Virtue, valour and worthiness
• Poverty vs. wealth and privilege

CLASSROOM WARM-UP
Coriolanus, the patrician (upper class) makes use of antithesis as he scorns the plebeians (ordinary people) of Rome. Look at Act I, scene 1: “What would you have, you curs...feed on one another?” Have the students, working in pairs, create a list of the antithetical words and phrases (e.g. peace/war). Then have each pair speak the speech to each other, alternating lines or phrases. Emphasize the insults and play up the antithesis. Notice how Shakespeare uses antithesis to intensify dramatic effect and to point out Coriolanus’s personality.

ENRICHMENT
Study Guide available at stratfordfestival.ca/studyguides

Prologues (interactive presentations on stage) at 11 a.m. before every student matinée except September 21.

Workshops and post-show chats may be arranged by calling the Education Department at 519.271.4040, ext. 2354.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Online
You can order your group tickets online at any time right from your desk. You can even select your seats! To start planning your trip, go to stratfordfestival.ca/schools.

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The Tools for Teachers program includes
Prologues, Study Guides and Stratford Shorts

Production Sponsor

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Production Support

Support for the 2018 season of the Avon Theatre is generously provided by the Birmingham family

Production support is generously provided by Larry Enkin & family in memory of Sharon Enkin, by Sylvia Soyka, and by Catherine & David Wilkes