

## Teachers' Guide Activity 1.1. Greatness and Power: Caesar and Me

Th' abuse of Greatnesse, is, when it  
Disjoynes \ Remorse from power. (JC 2.1.18)

### About *Death of a Chief*, an adaptation of *Julius Caesar*



*Death of a Chief* co-adapted and co-directed by Yvette Nolan and Kennedy (Cathy) MacKinnon, restructures Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to address Aboriginal issues of politics, gender, class, race, and nation. For Nolan and MacKinnon adapting Shakespeare is about the process of understanding the complexities of community, ambition, power, betrayal, and the lives of Native people in Canada today. Their adaptation rethinks the process that reconfigures First Nations political hierarchies to make leaders more accountable to the people.

Drawing parallels between a classic tale of power and betrayal, *Death of a Chief* presents intimate performances, discussions, and workshops that include personal stories, dance, movement and song, and demonstrates how Shakespeare is used to understand one's own history.

On Wednesday, October 25, 2006, a workshop of *Death of a Chief* was held at the [Macdonald Stewart Art Centre](#) (MSAC), Guelph. In the spring of 2008, the production will be presented as a full performance at the [National Art Centre](#) in Ottawa. Nolan and MacKinnon assisted in the development of Activity 1.1. and Activity 1.2.

Activity 1.1 and Activity 1.2 support The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10

Native Studies Program: <<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/nativestudies910curr.pdf>>

Video still image: Sorouja Moll from documentary "What Means This Shouting," co-produced by Marion Gruner and Sorouja Moll.

### Introduction

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What does 'Th abuse of Greatnesse' mean and what is its relationship to history and present day power-politics? What does it mean when Brutus stabs Caesar? Is the character a hero or a villain? *Julius Caesar* is a story of leadership and community, government and responsibility, power and the abuse of power, spectatorship and participation.

Why do Yvette Nolan, Artistic Director at Native Earth Performing Arts (Toronto) and her co-director Kennedy (Cathy) MacKinnon use Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to explore stories of Native history and present day politics in Canada?

Identity is a concept that entails asking 'who am I' and this Activity's investigation and personal journey of discovery and realization prepares students for an understanding of Aboriginal Studies

in Canada. Through knowledge of their own histories and stories in Canada, students will then approach the historical and present-day leadership issues of Aboriginal nations in Canada.

Activity 1.1 uses the video *What Means This Shouting*, a short documentary about the creation of *Death of a Chief*, as a guide to reflect on how Shakespeare is used to question power and leadership in students' own personal history and their relation to governance structures that may have affected those histories. Activity 1.1 is an introduction to Activity 1.2 which will then focus on the process of questioning leadership and power in First Nations communities. As Michaela Washburn, an actor in *Death of a Chief* explains, "we all know about power; we all know about betrayal, it's in our own lives."

Using *Death of a Chief* as an example of theatre that questions personal and political histories, leadership and community, and power and responsibility in Canada, students will drive their own learning concerning politics, leadership, community, and family, in past and present day Canada while gaining knowledge and understanding of the underlying themes in *Julius Caesar*.

### Purpose

- Demonstrate an interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* by thinking, writing, and critically analyzing the complex issues concerning the various historic and contemporary leadership in Canada including First Nations governments, leadership, and community structures.
- Carry out research, record and organize information through an interview process; analyze and evaluate research; communicate the research and apply insights to other situations.
- Apply research to Shakespearean text while studying methods in contemporary and historic theatrical practices.
- Acquire knowledge and understanding of the student's own histories in Canada and relationships among Shakespeare and leadership, nations, and familial histories.
- Identify and explain the strands of identity, relationships, sovereignty, challenges and successes through historical inquiry.
- Create and practice adaptation by demonstrating how the literary device applies to Shakespeare and the students' own histories.

### Outcome

- Transfer of concepts, skills and procedures to new contexts by interviewing, compiling, and organizing primary historical information and then comparing their research to a literary text.
- Application of procedures, equipment, and technologies with "hands on" research work to build understanding and increase access to historical and present day situations of leadership in Canada.
- Making connections between personal experience and central themes in *Julius Caesar* as the students' prepare to explore political structures including First Nations histories, governments, and communities.

### Primary Materials

- *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare.  
<[http://shakespeare.mit.edu/julius\\_caesar/full.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/julius_caesar/full.html)>
- Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project: *Death of a Chief*, by Native Earth Performing Arts.  
<[http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/anthology/the\\_death\\_of\\_a\\_chief.pdf](http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/anthology/the_death_of_a_chief.pdf)>

- *What Means This Shouting*, short video documentary, co-produced by Marion Gruner and Sorouja Moll. Download may take approximately three minutes due to the size of the file. Please be patient.
- Student's story or stories.
- Equipment to record and interview a family member or an individual in whose history the student is interested. Suggested methods are notebook, journal, audio recorder, email, cell phone, videotape recorder. Students are encouraged to share all equipment.
- Students, as an option, may decide to interview two people at a time; for example two aunts, or a grandmother and father, a guardian and a sibling, the store clerk down the street and his mother, etc.
- Final presentation equipment.

### Activity Preface

Students will demonstrate their knowledge by making connections between their own lives and the central themes in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The interview process will encourage students to identify and explain the diverse histories in Canada, the notions of community and responsibility, power and leadership, and how the process of adaptation increases learning potentials through different possibilities that emerge as stories get told?

### Before

- Read *Julius Caesar* and discuss as a class.
- Brainstorm on the definition of "leadership" and use the following quote from the play. Record themes.

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- Present the short documentary, *What Means This Shouting*.
- Brainstorm with the students about how Shakespeare is used by the actors and adaptors to explore personal and community histories. Record themes.
- Discuss themes of nation, leadership, and community represented in the adapted forms and explore how themes are present in the students' lives and in their own familial histories. For example, discuss the following questions:
  - What is a community?
  - Is there a relationship between community and leadership in *Julius Caesar* and present day?
  - What does the line from the quote mean: "disjoynes remorse from power"?
  - Students to record answers and will be asked later to compare it with their own ideas after this interview process is complete.

### During

- Students will research and prepare a project concerning their own personal histories and their present-day understanding of leadership and how it relates (or doesn't) to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.
- Students will interview a family member or an individual they are interested in about their history before and while living in Canada: parent, aunt, guardian, grandparent, etc. Handwriting the interview answers will work but students are encouraged to audiotape or videotape the interview and then transcribe the interview in its entirety.
- Schedule the loan of audio\visual equipment among students.

### Suggested Interview Questions

The interview process introduces students to the important research method of gathering primary material, as well as the adaptation process, and the "hands on" experience of producing a

documentary. The student's initial engagement with researching political structures of leadership in their own lives will serve to build their comprehension level and prepare them for Activity 1.2 "What Means this Shouting: Native Studies in Canada."

- How long has your family been in Canada?
- Why did your family choose to come to Canada? (Better life, better work, fleeing persecution, etc.) Note: Unless they are First Nations, their family came at some point to Canada, even if it was three-hundred years ago.
- Are they familiar with the Shakespearean play *Julius Caesar*? Read the quote provided (students may choose another quote) and ask if they can draw a comparison to historic or present day politics. The historic comparison could be from a country other than Canada.
- Do they think Brutus is a hero or a villain? Explain why.
- Do they vote? For whom, and why? How do they choose who they vote for?
- How would they define leadership?
- Compare and contrast their definition of leadership to your definition. Explain the similarities and differences. How and why do they differ?
- What qualities make a good leader?
- What qualities make a poor leader?
- Do they remember a time before Medicare? What are the differences between then and now?
- Do they know who Pierre Trudeau is? What are their thoughts?
- Is there a politician that they don't like? Discuss why.
- Name a leader they admire and discuss why in relation to the Shakespearean quote.
- Is there someone who has inspired them in their life? Have them discuss why.
- Could they imagine themselves being a leader? In what capacity would they lead, for example, in politics, sports, business, volunteer initiatives, social activism, school council, etc? What are some of the challenges in being a leader? Have they confronted those challenges and how did they solve them?

### After

- Teachers will meet with students in small groups to discuss the interview process, addressing the challenges and successes, the processing of information, and how the adaptation facilitates or hinders the research.
- Students will complete a two-page (500 words) personal writing essay based on the interview process and asking the following questions: What was your experience in the interview process? What did you learn? How has it changed your ideas about leadership, community and family? Did it help your understanding of the play *Julius Caesar*? Did it help your understanding of political structures and histories in Canada?
- Students will also prepare a visual component, similar to the *Death of a Chief* video documentary. Using photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, journals, and/or drawings, students will create a folio and/or a collage of their personal histories. Within this work, students will be asked to discover connections to Shakespearean text or question how and why it does or does not enter their histories.
- Teachers will assist in the building of the essay. Teachers may also introduce alternative methods including journals, sketchbooks, digital diaries, etc. instead of a formal essay.
- Teachers will schedule classroom presentations.

### Extension Activities

The extension activities are suggested to broaden the students' new associations with the Shakespearean text and the multiple histories in Canada.

- Students would be encouraged to visit a library to view microfilm of a newspaper that was published on the day the person they interviewed was born. Print the document and present it to the individual interviewed. Discuss the content and examine the articles

- related to leadership and community. Is there an article that connects to the quote from *Julius Caesar*? Explain.
- Read a newspaper and respond to an article concerning the abuse of greatness and power, insert a quote from *Julius Caesar* that supports your argument in a drafted and edited letter to the paper's editor. Send it.
  - Invite your Member of Parliament, the Mayor, or the head of a local corporation (or all three) to visit your classroom and have them discuss their thoughts concerning histories in Canada, Shakespeare, the quote, leadership, and community.
  - The teacher creates a ©Facebook page for the class and on the site documents the students' presentations. The students would be encouraged to build the ©Facebook page. Students would take turns to discuss their projects and histories on-line, as well as open the dialogue and exchange stories, with relatives who live across the country or around the globe. Teachers and students would maintain the Shakespearean connection to *Julius Caesar* by writing a paragraph about the class project and add quotes from the play for individuals and groups to comment on the discussion board <[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)>. Integrating contemporary technology into the students' learning space will expand their interest in the project, open new possibilities, and motivate their learning and understanding about Shakespeare, histories, and communities.
  - Student could ask the individual they interviewed if they would share a photograph and the story behind the image. From that story, the student will then create a monologue, a scene, or a one-act play. A single line, any line from *Julius Caesar*, would be the opening line in the work. For example, the following quotes from the play could open a student's monologue:
    - “I am indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes: when they are in great danger I recover them.” (JC 1.1.23)
    - “Love and be friends, as two such men should be,  
For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye.” (JC 4.3.132)
    - “But I am as constant as a northern star.” (JC 3.1.60)
    - “Whither are you going?” (JC 3.3.6)