

2012 Study Guide for *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Who were the gods and goddesses in Greek mythology? Who was Eris? How did her Golden Apple contribute to the Trojan War? Which gods and goddesses were involved in the events leading up to the war? Which participated in the war itself, on which side, and why? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgement_of_Paris
www.livingmyths.com/Greek.htm
<http://www.greek-gods.info/greek-gods/>
2. Research the Trojan War. What was the source of the conflict? Who fought against whom? Who were the major players? How long did it last? What was the outcome? Who famously wrote about events in The Trojan War? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.stanford.edu/~plomio/history.html>
<http://www.ancienthistory.about.com/cs/troyilium/a/trojanwar.htm>
3. Read Homer's epic poem *The Iliad* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, two of Shakespeare's sources for this play. These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad>
<http://www.timelessmyths.com/classical/trojanwar.html#Iliad>
<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/English/TroilusandCressidaBkI.htm>
<http://www.omacl.org/Troilus>
4. What is honor? Why is honor important? When is being honorable a positive thing? When might being honorable have negative consequences?

5. According to the Random House Webster's dictionary, status is "the position or rank of an individual in relation to others." Describe some of the factors that determine an individual's status. When and how can one's status change? Describe situations in which status is important. Under what circumstances is status unimportant? What is the relationship of reputation to status?
6. Research the elements of Shakespearean tragedy and Shakespearean comedy. What characteristics does each traditionally possess? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_tragedy
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy
7. Define pander. How is the word related to Shakespeare's character Pandarus? These and other websites provide information:
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pander>
<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pander>

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

- <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>
- <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>
- <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>
- <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>
- <http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to the poem *Troilus and Criseyde* by Chaucer and *The Iliad* by Homer. In what ways is the play similar to these works? In what ways is the play different?
2. Refer to your research on Shakespearean tragedy and comedy. What elements of each of these genres do *Troilus and Cressida* exhibit? Discuss how you would categorize it.
3. Refer to your research on the origins of the Trojan War. To what extent are the Greeks justified in going to war? To what extent are the Trojans justified in refusing to relinquish Helen?

4. What arguments in favor of war are made in the text? What arguments against war? Which are more persuasive and why?
5. Chart the descriptions of Helen by the Greeks and by the Trojans. Note the differences in how she is perceived. What does she represent for each side? Why is she valued? What qualities make her worth fighting for? To what extent does she match the descriptions? To what extent does she contradict them?
6. Compare the debate in the Greek council with the debate in the Trojan council. In both instances, what are the issues? What arguments are made on each side? What decisions are reached? How are the decisions justified? What are the consequences of the decisions – for Agamemnon, for Achilles, for the Greek soldiers, for Hector, for Troilus, for the Trojan soldiers, for the people of Troy?
7. Describe Hector in his various roles: son, brother, husband, warrior, leader of the Trojans, decision-maker, man of honor. How does he change over the course of the play? In what ways does he embody the medieval chivalrous knight? In what ways does he not?
8. Refer to your reflections on honor. How do the following characters interpret honor: Hector? Achilles? Troilus? Cressida? Paris? Agamemnon? Menelaus? Thersites? Pandarus? Which ones embody their own ideals? Which ones fall short?
9. According to Ulysses, what actions and attitudes are causing problems for the Greeks in Act I, scene iii? What does he mean by “degree”? What remedies does he propose? What does he hope to accomplish? To what extent are Ulysses’ acts consistent with this philosophy? To what extent do his actions undermine it?
10. Rank each character according to status. How is status related to one’s reputation in the play? What factors contribute to each individual’s status? Who gains status as the play progresses? Who loses it? Choose a single character and chart his or her fluctuations in status according to actions, situations and who they speak to.
11. Who is loyal to whom? What engages their loyalty? Which characters betray others? What prompts their betrayals?

12. What does Thersites contribute to the play? Why do the other characters tolerate him? Describe the occasions in which his life is threatened; in each case, explain by whom and for what reason. How is he able to survive the last battle between the Trojans and the Greeks?
13. Describe Pandarus. What are his functions in the play? Refer to the definition of pander. To what extent does he deserve to be remembered for this one thing?
14. For these pairs– Hector and Achilles, Achilles and Ajax, Priam and Agamemnon, Helen and Cressida, Paris and Troilus, Menelaus and Troilus, Diomedes and Troilus, Thersites and Pandarus– answer the following questions: What do the two have in common? How do they differ? How does each regard the other (if at all)? What light does each shed on the other?
15. Describe the four women and their situations. What are their sources of power? What does each hope to accomplish by her actions? Which man or men is each associated with, and to what extent is she defined by them? What value do the men assign to each of the women? What might the play be saying about the nature of women? Support your theory with examples from the text. Refer to your research on the Trojan War. What was the fate of these women in the aftermath of war?
16. Tell the story from the point of view of Cressida. Describe her hopes and fears and options. Explain why she makes the choices she does. Tell the story from the point of view of Troilus, describing the same elements. How do they justify their actions?
17. Write the letter you imagine Cressida sends to Troilus from the Greek camp. How truthful is she? How does she describe her continuing love for him? How much of her changing loyalty does she reveal and in what terms does she justify it? Which elements of her letter cause him to dismiss the letter as “mere words”?
18. Refer to Act III, scene ii. What sensations does Troilus experience as he anticipates Cressida’s love? What does Cressida fear from Troilus’ love? How does Troilus expect women to behave? In what terms does he swear his love? In what terms does Cressida swear hers? How does she expect men to behave? What function does Pandarus serve in their courtship? In their vows of love? How would they progress without him?

19. Refer to Act IV, scene v. How does Troilus respond to his forced parting from Cressida? What does he fear? What does he promise? How does Cressida respond to the parting? What does she fear for herself? For Troilus? What does she promise? What tokens do the lovers exchange? How does Pandarus respond to the parting? Whose interests are most important to him and why?
20. What is Troilus afraid of? What justification does he give for his fear? What are Troilus' reasons for fighting? How do his reasons change from the beginning of the play to the end?
21. Compile the references to Time. For what is Time said to be responsible for? Whom does Time befriend? Whom does Time destroy? What is the value of past actions weighed against present actions? What is the relationship between Time and reputation?
22. Identify examples of food imagery, disease imagery and animal imagery. To what actions, individuals and conditions are these images applied? Which images exalt the thing being compared and which debase it? What do these images reveal about the characters (those speaking and those being compared) and the world of the play?
23. Consider Ulysses as a devious politician in the following three scenes: Act I, scene iii, when he influences Agamemnon and Nestor's opinion of Achilles. Act II, scene iii, when he harnesses Ajax's opinion of himself. Act III, scene iii, when he manipulates Achilles. In each case, describe the events he orchestrates. Who are his accomplices? What does he hope to accomplish? Why? How successful is he?
24. Trace the development of the romantic plot and of the political/war plot. How do they parallel each other? When do they converge? What is the main plot of the play? Who are the main characters? Why is the title of the play *Troilus and Cressida*? If you were to change the title of the play, what title would you choose?
25. What is the role of secrets in the play? Who hides facts from others? What is the purpose of hiding these facts? Who suffers and who is preserved because of secrecy?

26. Describe the city of Troy as created by director Rob Melrose and the design team for OSF's 2012 production of *Troilus and Cressida*. In what ways did the modern setting and costumes enhance your understanding of the play? Compare your research on the myths and classical legends about Troy to the Troy created in the OSF production. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
27. Discuss the decision to make the Trojans a Middle Eastern nation and the Greeks the American invaders. In what ways does this fit the Greek myth of the Trojan War? In what ways is it different?
28. How does the setting of this production change Cressida's journey in the play? In what ways does it add to the obstacles standing between her and happiness? How does this setting affect the way Helen is viewed in Trojan society?
29. If you are seeing *All The Way*, compare President Johnson and Ulysses as politicians. What tactics to achieve their ends do they have in common?
30. If you are seeing *Romeo and Juliet*, compare them with Troilus and Cressida on the following points: political situations; obstacles; helpers; pledges of love; farewells.

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