

Table of Contents

The Playwright

- Brief Biography

- Authorship

What's Titus?

- Synopsis

When's Titus?

- Production History

Why Titus?

- The Renaissance's Love of Gore

- Gore and Blood on the Stage

Who's Titus?

- Character Circles

- The Roman Family

- The Goths

Where's Titus?

- Roman Mythology Quiz

Discussion Questions

The Playwright



William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, in England in 1564. His father, Jon Shakespeare, was a tanner as well as an important political figure in Stratford-upon-Avon. There is not much recorded about Shakespeare's schooling, however it can be assumed that he attended a very good local grammar school where most of his instructors were Oxford graduates and his classes were taught mostly in Latin. When he was eighteen, Shakespeare married a 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The couple had three kids together: Susanna, Hamnet and Judith.

By 1582, Shakespeare was an established playwright in London. The plague kept many theaters closed during his early career, but he was still able to make money for poems and sonnets. When theaters were open, Shakespeare did most of his theater work in a district northeast of London, in two theaters owned by James Burbage, called the Theatre and the Curtain. In 1598,

Burbage built the famous Globe Theatre, for which Shakespeare was a stock-holder.

Shakespeare's social standing was increasing, so he applied for and received a coat of arms, with the motto: *Non sanz droict* (not without right). His coat of arms distinguished him from the social class of actors, who were associated with vagrants and criminals. Instead, Shakespeare was considered a gentleman.

Shakespeare's social class helped for him to become wildly popular with English nobility.

Shakespeare soon joined the group of the now famous writers who gathered at Mermaid Tavern, putting him in the company of writers such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Ben Jonson. In 1603, his company was taken under the patronage of King James I and renamed The King's Men. In 1608, they were given the Blackfriars Theater.

Shakespeare retired from theater in 1610 and returned to Stratford. He remained considerably wealthy, helping to rebuild the new Globe Theater after the first burned down. He died in 1616 and was buried in Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford. A monument to Shakespeare was set up on the north wall of the chancel, with a bust of Shakespeare. The bust and the engraving by Droeshout that prefixed the First Folio are the only renderings of Shakespeare that are considered to be accurate. In Shakespeare's will, he left most of his property to Susanna and her daughter, except for his "second-best bed," which he left to his wife.

The Playwright? (The Authorship Question)

Setting aside the theories that Shakespeare didn't write *any* his cannon or that he was a gay, Jewish, Catholic, Moorish, female and also a group of people with these descriptions, Shakespeare's authorship of *Titus* has been greatly disputed. His authorship has primarily been questioned because the poetic style and material of *Titus Andronicus* seem unworthy of William Shakespeare. However, throughout the centuries is debate there has never been solid evidence that suggests Shakespeare did not write most of *Titus* himself:

- The first person to question Shakespeare's authorship was Edward Ravenscroft, who adapted *Titus Andronicus* during the Restoration. His reasons for questioning authorship? That *Titus* is terrible... and since Shakespeare is not a terrible writer, he therefore could not have written *Titus*.
- In the eighteenth century, the main argument against Shakespeare's authorship was that *Titus* is too violent to be Shakespeare and also that *Titus* featured "uninspired" verse. (TS Elliott hated this play more than anything. He called it stupid many, many times.)
 - Maybe *Titus* is Shakespeare's most outwardly bloody play, but it is not his most violent: more characters die in *Richard III*, which has been almost unarguably Shakespeare's.
- The twentieth century saw the emergence of a new theory, this one stating that *Titus* was co-written or at least heavily edited by Shakespeare and someone else.
 - George Peele has been a favorite for shared authorship.
 - In 1931, Philip Timberlake did an in-depth analysis of feminine endings in *Titus*. Their concentration in the text led Timberlake to conclude that Peele wrote Act 1, 2.1 and 4.1, whereas the rest of the play was by Shakespeare.
 - Also in support of Peele, are certain cliches and other linguistic characteristics which are extremely typical of Peele rather than Shakespeare. In particular, the words "palliamment" (I.i.182) and "architect" were words which Peele probably coined and used frequently in his works while Shakespeare does not use these words in his other plays.

While a compelling argument is made for Peele's co-authorship, there is still not enough evidence that Shakespeare did *not* write *Titus*. Shakespeare and Peele were both writers of the same era, so it makes sense that their writing styles are similar. Additionally, *Titus* is often dated as one of Shakespeare's earlier works, so the less sophisticated writing style is accounted for in this way. And while certain words and tricks sound more like Peele than Shakespeare, when the whole play is taken into consideration (rather than just details) it is more similar to Shakespeare than to Peele. Overall, *Titus* is most similar to *King Lear*, as has often been compared to it in reviews of productions. *Titus*' bloody subject matter is similar to what is found in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, so *Titus* is not as out-of-left-field as some critics have believed. As previously mentioned, *Titus* is not even Shakespeare's most violent play. Shakespeare would have had to have been a versatile writer to gain the acclaim he did in his day, his plays' subject-matters are greatly varied from *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* to *Measure for Measure* to *Henry V* to *Titus Andronicus*.

The Play (What's Titus?)
(WARNING: SPOILER ALERT)

Titus Andronicus follows the story of a Roman general who has returned from war with twenty-one of his twenty-five sons dead. The people of Rome employ Titus to be their emperor, but he hands it off instead to Saturnine. He has captured Tamora, queen of the Goths, and sacrifices her oldest son in a religious ceremony. Tamora begs for him not to do this, and when Titus goes ahead and does it anyway, she swears revenge. The newly-crowned Emperor Saturnine falls in lust with Tamora and immediately marries her, making Tamora the new Roman Empress.

Tamora is romantically involved with Aaron, who has helped her to raise her two sons, Chiron and Demetrius. Aaron helps Tamora plot her revenge on the Andronci family and persuades Chiron and Demetrius to rape Titus' only daughter, Lavinia during a hunt in the woods. Meanwhile, Aaron tricks two of Titus' sons into falling into a deep pit and frames them for murdering Bassianus, Lavinia's husband. Chiron and Demetrius rape, mutilate and torment Lavinia, leaving her in the woods. Once Titus is reunited with his daughter, he swears his own revenge on Tamora and her clan.

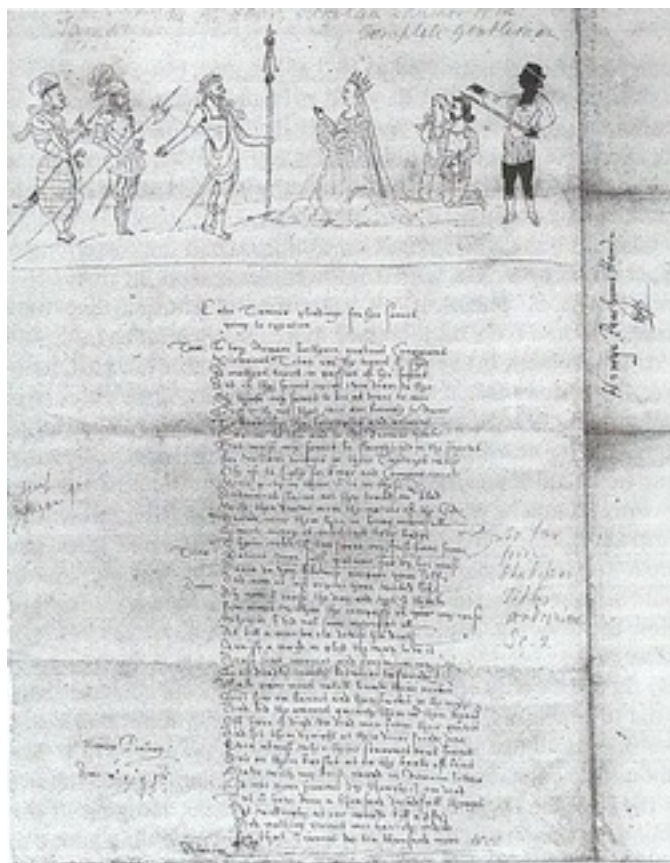
Titus' son, Lucius, is banished for trying to save his two accused brothers from death. Titus laments how he is unable to save his family when Aaron tells Titus that he can save his sons by sending his severed hand to the emperor Saturnine. Titus cuts off his hand, but it is returned to him along with the heads of his two sons. Titus urges Lucius to use his banishment to go to Goths and raise an army to secure Andronci revenge.

Thinking Titus mad, Tamora and her sons appear to Titus dressed as Revenge, Murder and Rape to try and finish their pursuit of vengeance. Titus plays along until he gets Tamora to leave and Chiron and Demetrius to stay. He slays the brothers and bakes their remains into a pie. Titus then hosts a dinner party for every almost character still alive. At the feast, Titus serves Chiron and Demetrius to Tamora who unknowingly cannibalizes her own sons. Titus kills Lavinia to save her from her shame. After Titus reveals what the pie is made out of, he kills Tamora. Saturnine slays Titus to revenge his wife's death and Lucius murders Saturnine for vindication.

With the old emperor dead, the Roman people must appoint a new one and they choose Lucius, who steps up to the job in honor of his woeful father.

Production History (When's Titus?)

Timeline:



1594- The first unquestioned production of *Titus Andronicus* takes place, recorded by Philip Henslowe, by the Earl of Sussex's Men on January 23. On January 28 and February 6, Henslowe records two more performances. Two more take place on June 5 and 12.

Also in 1594, the First Quarto is published and includes *Titus*.

1594 or 1595- Henry Peacham sees *Titus* and creates a sketch of what he had seen. The Peacham Drawing has disjointed lines from the play under the sketch. The Peacham Drawing has given modern scholars and performers a clear idea of what theater was like in Elizabethan England.

1596- *Titus* is performed in January by a troupe of actors from London.

1598- *Titus* is listed by Francis Meres as one of Shakespeare's tragedies.

1600- *Titus* appears in the Second Quarto.

1604- Thomas Middleton alludes to *Titus* in *The Ant and Nightingale*, which is a testament to *Titus Andronicus*' continuing popularity. The fact

that is not another recorded performance until the Restoration does not mean that *Titus* wasn't still being frequently performed. In the number of re-printings, *Titus* ranks seventh-- which beats *Romeo and Juliet*.

1611- *Titus* appears in the Third Quarto. The title pages of Q2 and Q3 suggest frequent revivals.

1614- Jonson makes an allusion to the play in his introduction in *Bartholomew Fair*, showing that the play was still popular.

1623- *Titus* is published in the First Folio, with the addition of a scene (III.ii).

1669- *Titus* is included in a list of plays formerly performed by the Black Friars but now performed by the King's Men.

1678- Edward Ravenscroft adapts the play for presentation at the Drury Lane theater under the title *Titus Andronicus or the Rape of Lavinia*". Ravenscroft claimed to have made many changes and improvements to Shakespeare's text, but under careful analysis, it doesn't appear that he made too many significant alterations to characters or language. His main change is the end, in which he makes Lucius sentence Aaron, who has been suspended on a rack during the entire final dinner. Ravenscroft's adaptation was extremely successful.

1678- 1724- Ravenscroft's version of *Titus* is performed regularly.

1725- 1838- *Titus* seems to go through a lengthy absence from the stage. This could be because of a general distaste of the horror genre during this period and because Shakespeare's authorship falls under scrutiny.

1839- *Titus* is performed for the first time in a little over a century, and for the first time in the United States at the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia.

1848- *Titus* is performed on the British Isles. Popular actor Ira Aldridge, 'the African Roscuis', produces and stars in it as Aaron.

1849-1860- Aldridge's adaptation continues to be performed. This adaptation has not survived, but the press' comments on it has:

"*Titus Adronicus* is not a favourite play ... Mr. Aldridge's direction is a wholly different affair; the deflowerment of Lavinia, cutting out her tongue, chopping off her hands, and the numerous decapitations and gross language which occur in the original are totally omitted and a play not only presentable but actually attractive is the result. Aaron is elevated into a noble and lofty character...."

-*The*

Era, 1857

1861-1922- *Titus* again goes through another silent period during which we do not know of any productions.

1923- *Titus* is revived at the Old Vic. *Titus* had not been performed in London for half a century and had not been performed with Shakespeare's original text since roughly 1670. The director, Robert Atkins, was attempting to produce as many of the First Folio (plus *Pericles*) plays as possible in an approximated Elizabethan style. The audience laughed at the melodrama of the show.

1951- Since this year, there have been countless productions of *Titus* with a few particularly notable ones including Peter Brook's, Joseph Papp's and Julie Taymor's 1999 film.



Why Titus?

When looking back on the Renaissance these are usually the sorts of things people think about:



Not things like this:



...which is one of Rembrandt's lesser-known etchings.

This is another well-known Renaissance piece:



Compare it to this:



Bethlemitischer Child Murder, Nicolas Poussin

Shakespeare was writing for an audience who loved violence, gore, revenge and the Classical Era. *Titus* features fourteen deaths (traditionally with nine of them on stage), eight severed members, one rape, one live burial, one case of insanity, and one of cannibalism. All of these elements combined to make *Titus* an extremely popular play in its time.

Blood and Gore

Imagine that you have to put on *Titus*. It's 1595 and synthetic blood, red food dye and plastic haven't been invented yet. Nine of your actors have to die on stage, and the audience is going to expect blood. Blood and gore were used to excite and amaze the audience. What kinds of things can you do?

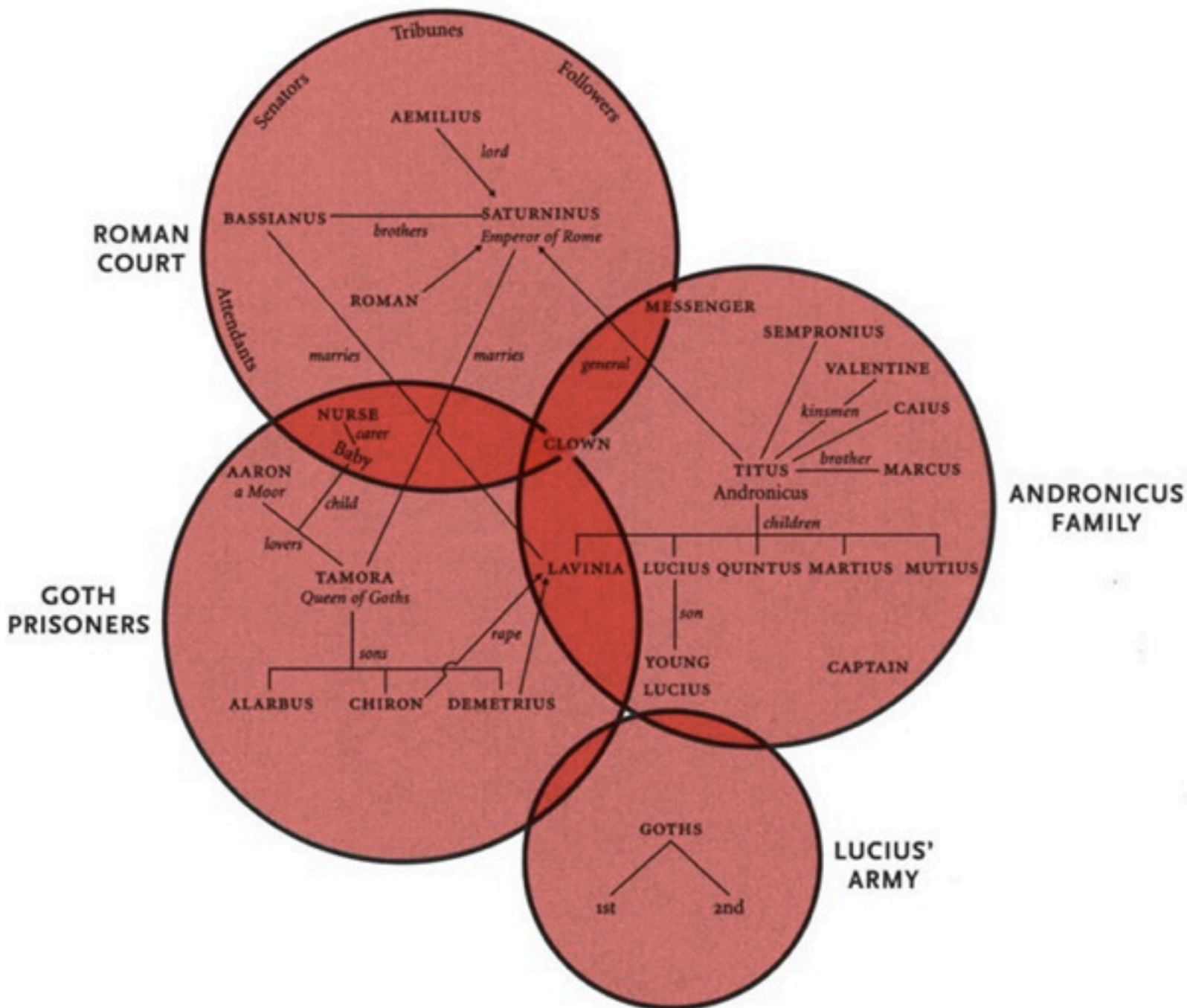
Can you identify which the following Shakespeare did and which techniques are totally made up?

1. A handkerchief soaked in animal blood
2. A turntable with a blood soaked dummy to substitute for the actor
3. The actors kept their own pigs for blood under the stage
4. Animal intestines, tongues and bones were often used to enhance the effects
5. Bladders were filled with animal blood and concealed beneath the actors costumes so that they could be punctured by the other actor's stage weapons
6. Criminals would be used as body doubles and meet their punishment on the stage
7. Specially made tables had a hole for someone's head, then someone would sit under the table (their head through the hole), get blood splattered on them, and try to look dead while not shaking the table cloth hiding their body
8. Animal skulls would be covered in a wig or human hair in order to look like a severed head

Answers: 3, 6 and 8 are bogus.

Who's Titus?

The characters of *Titus* are divided into three three basic groups: The Andronicus Family, The Roman Court and the Goths.



Titus Andronicus was never a real person. Shakespeare fictionalized history by telling a story based heavily on what he had read in the *Gesta Romanorum* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare capitalized on the Roman rituals and brutality in order to make *Titus* memorable.

Family is extremely important to all of the characters in *Titus*. Family plays into the major devices of revenge and ritual used in the play.

The Roman Family

- Families were dominated by men. The head of the Roman family was the oldest living male, called “paterfamilias” or “father of the family”. This man looked after the family’s business affairs and property and could perform religious rites on behalf of the entire family.
- The paterfamilias had absolute power over his household. If anyone pissed off the paterfamilias he could legally disown them, sell them into slavery or kill them.
- Sons were extremely important because it was up to the sons to continue the family name. A father without sons would likely adopt one to make sure the family name perpetuated.
- Women usually married in their early teenage years, men in their mid-twenties.
- Materfamilias exerted power behind the scenes and managed the household. An upperclass materfamilias was expected to help her husband’s career by exuding modesty, grace and dignity.
- Women only had so much influence though. Paterfamilias decided what happened to newborn babies. After birth, the midwife placed babies on the ground: only if the paterfamilias picked it up was the baby formally accepted into the family. If the baby was not picked up, then it was abandoned outside. Exposed babies were left in specific places so that they could be picked up and used as slaves.
- About 25% of infants died in their first year of life. About half of all children died before the age of ten. Because of the high mortality rate, women who successfully gave birth were rewarded. After three live babies, women were recognized as legally independent.

The Goths

The Goths spent years at war with Rome. It is interesting to note that Elizabethan’s usually looked favorably upon the Goths, which is why it is a good thing when Lucius bolsters support from the Goths.

- The Goths are an East Germanic tribe who originated in Scandinavia.
- They appeared in Roman Empire in the 3rd Century
- The Huns liked to attack the Goths, which pushed the Goths to seek more land to conquest from the Romans.
- The Gothic War of 376-382
 - This war was a major turning point of the Roman Empire, as this was the first barbarian invasion that triggered the fall of Rome
 - The Huns were attacking the Goths, so the Goths sought asylum in Rome. They were allowed in, because the Romans saw the Goths as a new group of people to tax!
 - Their point of entry was treacherous and killed many Goths

- Weapons were supposed to be confiscated, but Romans accepted bribes to allow Goths to keep them
- So many people crammed into one small, pretty terrible, part of the Empire led to famine-- Rome failed to deliver the food, water or land they had promised the fleeing Goths. Eventually, they were ushered into a large ghetto (guarded by Romans) and left to starve while the Roman guards ate the last of the grain.
 - The Romans offered an alternative to starving: slaves for dog meat
 - The Goths were told to go south to find resources and aid, so they set off on a death march.
 - The Goths were barred from the city they were promised and Romans tried to assassinate many Goth leaders at a banquet
 - Open revolt began, and many Goths plundered Roman towns and resources, which led to war.

The Roman Court

Shakespeare presents a very Anglicized version of Rome, since he needs to make the characters accessible and in a world the common groundling can understand.

Where's Titus?

Titus takes place in a Shakespeare's fabricated version of The Roman Empire. He frequently references their gods in order to drive home his messages. How well do you know the Roman Gods?

Roman Mythology

Can you match the Roman Gods with their descriptions and Greek counter part?

1. She is a virgin goddess who is part of a holy triad often worshiped by Roman cults. She is the goddess of wisdom, learning, the arts, science, medicine and trade. (Minerva- Athene)
2. The twin brother of Diana. He is The Archer, often depicted with a silver bow. He is the god of healing, music, light and truth. (Apollo-Apollo)
3. Originally the goddess of gardens, she became the goddess of love and beauty after an influx of Greek lore. Doves, horses and swans are all sacred to her. (Venus- Aphrodite)
4. The corn goddess: she is the goddess of grain, motherhood and marriage. (Ceres- Demeter)
5. The King of the Gods: he is the god of the sky, lighting and thunder. He is considered the patron god of Rome. (Jupiter- Zeus)
6. The virgin goddess: she is the goddess of fertility, the moon and the hunt. (Diana- Artemis)
7. The Queen of the Gods: she is Jupiter's wife and sister. She is the guardian of the Roman Empire's finances and the Matron Goddess of all Rome. (Juno- Hera)
8. He is the god of war, spring, growth in nature, agriculture, terror, anger, revenge, courage and fertility. He is the father of Rome because he is the father of Romulus. (Mars- Ares)

IF YOU NEED IMAGES: <http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/roman/>

Roman Names

- I. Minerva
- II. Mars
- III. Ceres
- IV. Apollo
- V. Jupiter
- VI. Diana
- VII. Venus
- VIII. Juno

Greek Names

- A. Zeus
- B. Apollo
- C. Athene
- D. Artemis
- E. Hera

F. Demeter
G. Ares
H. Aphrodite

Answers: 1- I- C; 2- IV- B; 3- VII- H; 4- III- F; 5- V- A; 6- VI- D; 7- VIII- E; 8- II- G

Discussion Questions

1. How do the types of acceptable social interactions differ between the different communities in the play? What do you think it means when someone starts acting like someone from a different group?
2. Think of rituals in your life, no matter how small. How do you feel when this rituals are altered? How would you feel if they were completely stripped away? How about the rituals in the play? How does the play change when ritual breaks down?
3. Look at Tamora, Lavinia and Young Lucius: how are they different? The same? How do they become more less like each other throughout the play?
4. Certain characters can be seen as villians in *Titus*, but why do the characters act as horribly as they do? Can any one character be faulted?
5. How does Titus Andronicus treat the different members of his family? What seems to be the reason for the differences?