

## 2002 Study Guide for *Titus Andronicus* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research revenge plays/tragedies. What are the elements of a revenge play? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge\\_play](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge_play)  
<http://www.everything2.com/title/Revenge+Tragedy>  
[http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study\\_tools/revenge.html](http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study_tools/revenge.html)
2. What is dramatic irony? What is the effect of dramatic irony on an audience? What is the difference between irony and dramatic irony? What is the difference between dramatic irony, irony and sarcasm? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/dramatic+irony>  
<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>
3. Define hero. Define tragic hero. What is a tragic flaw? What is the difference between a hero and a tragic hero? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragic\\_hero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragic_hero)  
<http://shakespeare.nuvvo.com/lesson/4435-elements-of-a-tragic-hero-in-literature>
4. What was the political system in ancient Rome? What was the role of an emperor? How did he gain his position? How much power did he hold? What was the position of the military in the Roman Empire? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://rome.mrdonn.org/senate.html>  
<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romanempire/p/ImperialSuccess.htm>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_of\\_ancient\\_Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_ancient_Rome)
5. What was considered the proper behavior for Roman women? How much independence did they have? What restrictions were placed on their activities? Who controlled their lives? These and other websites provide information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_Ancient\\_Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Ancient_Rome)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/roman\\_women\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/roman_women_01.shtml)

<http://www.moyak.com/papers/roman-women.html>

6. Who were the Goths historically? What country did they come from? What was their relationship to the ancient Roman Empire? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths>

<http://www.hyw.com/Books/History/Goths.htm>

7. What is a Moor? What country, or countries, do Moors come from? What was the attitude towards Moors in ancient Roman society? In Elizabethan England? These and other websites provide information:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moors>

<http://advanced11.edublogs.org/2007/05/22/moors-in-elizabethan-england/>

<http://www.heritage-history.com/www/heritage->

[books.php?Dir=books&author=florian&book=moors&story=conquests](http://www.heritage-history.com/www/heritage-books.php?Dir=books&author=florian&book=moors&story=conquests)

8. Look up the word “barbarian.” What lies at its root? Who used the word originally, and about whom? What behaviors does it suggest? What does the word tell you about the attitude of the person using the word toward the person being described? This and other websites provide information:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbarian>

9. Research the meaning of characters’ names: Andronicus, Lavinia, Bassianus, Saturninus, Chiron, Demetrius, Tamara, Aaron.

[http://www.babynology.com/shakespearean\\_babynames.html](http://www.babynology.com/shakespearean_babynames.html)

[www.etymonline.com/](http://www.etymonline.com/)

**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. At the beginning of the play, Bassianus and Saturninus make their claim to the throne. What justification do they offer as to the legitimacy of their respective claims? Compare the different ways that both these brothers ultimately become emperor.
2. Titus is initially proclaimed emperor. Why does he refuse to accept this honor? Why does he recommend Saturninus be named emperor instead? What does this say about Titus' view of Roman politics?
3. Refer to your research on the Goths. How would you characterize the relationship between the Romans and the Goths at the time of the play?
4. Refer to the definitions and etymology you found for the word *barbarian*. In Act One, which characters are barbarous and which are civilized? What actions justify these designations? To what extent does the barbarism displayed by these characters shift during the play?
5. What does honor mean to Titus at the beginning of the play? What constitutes honorable and dishonorable behavior to him? How does his view of honor shift over the course of the play?
6. As the play begins, what does family mean to Titus, Tamora and Aaron? Compare and contrast their parental philosophies. What ambitions do they hold for their children? How do their views of family change over the course of the play and why?
7. Why does Titus refuse to mourn for his 22 dead sons? What is his justification for ordering Lavinia to marry Saturninus? For killing Mutius? For begging for the lives of Quintus and Martius? What insights do these justifications offer into his feelings toward what he believes he owes Rome and what he believes Rome owes him?
8. How many mistakes does Titus make? What are his mistakes? What might he have done to change the course of the play's events?

9. Refer to your research on Roman women. In what ways does Lavinia embody Roman virtues? In what ways does she not?
10. What is the function of Lavinia in the play? What does she symbolize as the play progresses? How do the other characters value her? Why does Tamora, who speaks eloquently of parenthood in the opening scene, not show mercy on Lavinia?
11. Hands are mentioned some 80 times in the play and tongues more than 25 times. What do hands and tongues symbolize in the play? Why are Lavinia's hands chopped off? Why is Titus asked to cut off his hand in exchange for the lives of his sons?
12. Lavinia has her tongue cut out so that she will be unable to speak the truth. Who else is kept from speaking in the play? In what circumstances and how? Who is punished for speaking? When are words used as tools in the play? When are they weapons?
13. Why does Titus kill Lavinia? Is her murder cruel or merciful? Who is more to blame for Lavinia's death, Titus, Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron, Tamora, or Aaron?
14. There are many instances of physical dismemberment in the play. What could be the reason for characters choosing to sever limbs from the whole body, rather than kill them outright? What metaphorical limbs has Titus severed over the course of the play? How does the dismemberment of Titus relate to the maiming of the Roman political system? Explain the significance of Quintus and Martius being killed by means of beheading.
15. Though the play is filled with graphic violence, there are a few moments of tenderness as well. What characters do they take place between? What do these scenes reveal about the characters? What is the effect of these moments of tenderness in a world of extreme brutality?
16. What role does forgiveness and remorse play in the story?
17. What disguises do the characters wear, physically and in terms of their behavior? What do their disguises say about their underlying personalities? How are the

emblematic roles of Revenge, Rapine and Murder appropriate for Tamora and her sons? How do the disguises employed by Titus, Tamora and Aaron help them achieve their goals?

18. At the end of the play Tamora is referred to as a “ravenous tiger” and Aaron is referred to as an “inhuman dog”. Why are they compared to animals? What makes them inhuman to the other characters? What else, other than humans, is referred to in animal terms within the play?
19. How does Aaron raise his status within the community in which he finds himself? What are the obstacles he must overcome in order to garner credibility? How does he use language to manipulate others to do his will? What actions does he take in order to protect his legacy and the furtive nature of his villainy?
20. What does it mean to be loyal in the play? How important is keeping one’s word? Who is loyal to whom? What is gained for this loyalty? What is the price paid?
21. What is the difference between the feast that occurs offstage early in the play and the one that takes place onstage near the end? What is the significance of eating/feeding in the play?
22. How many people die during the play? How many corpses are onstage at the end? Does the play end positively or negatively, on a note of hope or despair? What is the lesson learned at the end of the story?
23. What is the place of divine retribution in the play? Who appears to be in control of the cycle of revenge that occurs? Explain if you think that the cycle of revenge is complete at the end of the play or if there is room for it to keep going.
24. Who is the greatest victim in the play? Who is the most innocent? Who gets what he or she deserves?
25. Refer to your research on various names’ meaning. How does the meaning of their names enrich your understanding of the characters’ actions and the play as a whole?

26. Refer to your research on revenge tragedies. What elements of a revenge tragedy does *Titus Andronicus* contain? What elements are missing? What factors conventionally cause madness in revenge tragedies? In Titus's case, which of his actions are caused by genuine madness? When does he feign madness? For what purpose? How effective is this strategy?
27. Refer to your research on heroes and tragic heroes. How is Titus a hero? What heroic actions does he perform? How is he a tragic hero? What is/are his tragic flaw(s)?
28. Refer to your research on dramatic irony. What are the moments of dramatic irony in the play?

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