

DEVELOPING CITIZEN ARTISTS

“The Trial of Orestes”

School partner:
**PS/IS 111,
Alfred S. Ochs School**

Cultural partner:
Epic Theatre Center

Teaching artists:
**Jessica Richardson
& Brandt Adams**

May/June 2007



After seeing a fully staged version of Aeschylus' Greek trilogy *The Oresteia*, the entire 8th grade wrote and performed a new adaptation of the play – *The Trial of Orestes* .

Through this creative exploration, students identify, develop, and express a singular point of view, develop as democratic citizens, and take an active role in building ensemble.

PARTNERS for
ARTS
EDUCATION

Context



PS/IS 111 is located in “Hell’s Kitchen” on West 53rd Street in New York City. Epic artists Jessica Richardson and Brandt Adams partnered with teacher Deborah Berg in all 8th grade English classrooms.

After seeing and analyzing Epic’s adaptation of *The Oresteia*, students learned performance and writing skills that helped them to write a new version of the play. The students then performed ***The Trial of Orestes*** (alongside Epic’s professional actors) for an audience of parents and community – who acted as the Jury.



Through this project, the students explored the following essential questions:

“How do we end a cycle of violence that has deep roots?”

“What’s the difference between Justice and Vengeance?”

PROJECT GOALS:

- To explore the major themes and questions of *The Oresteia*
- To develop students as Citizen Artists
- To foster a sense of community across the entire 8th grade
- To improve academic skills and increase literacy through activities that:
 - Engage students in distinguishing between literal and figurative
 - Incorporate Rhetorical devices into writing
 - Engage in both expressive and persuasive writing

CONTEXT

INQUIRY

THE STORY

REFLECTIONS and
FINDINGS

RESOURCES

STANDARDS

THE STORY

In order to prepare for the creation of THE TRIAL OF ORESTES, Epic Artists and the classroom teacher taught skills in rhetoric, objectives & tactics, characterization and improvisation. Then, students incorporated those skills as they explored the project's essential questions through a creative exploration of the play.

Students worked in the following small groups:

- Prosecution Opening/Closing Statement Groups** focused on Persuasive Argument & Rhetorical Devices
- Witness/Lawyer Teams** scripted their scenes using skills in characterization and questioning strategy
- Cross-Examining teams** prepared to improvise scenes with the opposing team's witnesses
- Flashback Scene teams** crafted scenes that told the story from the point-of-view of a prosecution or defense witness
- Media groups** crafted scenes that explored how the media deals with these essential questions



The residency culminated in a performance of **THE TRIAL OF ORESTES** on June 15, 2007

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Teaching Artist Reflections



“One of the coolest things I witnessed in this residency was an amazing level of ownership these students had over newly acquired skills. We taught a lesson in subtext and suddenly every scene had hilarious and interesting subtext included before and after almost every line. We taught a lesson in rhetoric, and the students continued to use rhetorical devices in their writing until the very end of the residency - Alliteration, repetition, metaphor, anaphora, and simile were found in every scene and speech. The students were hungrily devouring and using every skill we offered. They even did private, un-asked-for research into Greek Gods and some of the characters in the story. They also took ownership over the script making itself. I asked the students to elect someone in the group who would e-mail us their groups scenes and revisions. That same evening I was shocked to find my inbox crowded with strange e-mail addresses like “megaman” and “foxigirl54.” I thought I’d been attacked by spammers! But no. There were about 15 emails in my inbox from students containing their scenes.”

– **JESSICA RICHARDSON, Epic Teaching Artist**

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Student Reflections



“I learned that I could be courageous and a good leader” – Ansley

“I learned how to expect more of myself” – Milagros

“I learned to think about the world we live in today – to help me write.
Also, to put myself in the character’s place to feel the same as they did.” – Daysi

“I learned to be devoted and to speak out” – Andrew

“My mom and dad came to watch the show and they saw the hard work I did.” – Juan

“I will always remember the rehearsal and the play we did – because we got to practice
with professional actors and directors” – Marienell

“This is my first time ever being on stage for a play and guess what...this is not my last!!!” – Malik



The initial performance of THE ORESTEIA was written by Leah Ryan – in a commission from the New York State Council on the Arts.

The Epic Artists in the in-school performance at PS/IS 111:
Brandt Adams, Sarah K. Chalmers, Melissa Friedman, Rebecca Johnson,
Aaron Krohn, Jacob Ming-Trent, Jessica Richardson, Godfrey L. Simmons Jr.

The final TRIAL OF ORESTES also included
Epic Artists James Wallert, Catherine Eaton and Rachael Holmes.

www.EpicTheatreEnsemble.org

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NYS LEARNING STANDARDS: ARTS

ARTS 1 was addressed through the writing, rehearsal and performance of an original piece of theatre.

ARTS 3 was evident in the critical response to the initial in-school presentation of Epic's productions of *The Oresteia*.

NYS LEARNING STANDARDS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ELA 2 was addressed as students were asked to relate this Ancient Greek text to their own lives

ELA 4 was addressed as students communicated political and social concepts in the public forum.

NYS LEARNING STANDARDS: SOCIAL STUDIES

Social Studies 2 addressed in the exploration of the themes of Ancient Greece.

Social Studies 5 - all Epic programs are designed to awaken and explore the nature of citizenship and directly connects to the US History curriculum in 8th grade Social Studies.

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Credits

Carol Fineberg
New York Times Foundation
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