

LESSON 4 Strange Sightings

Drama: Frozen Tableaux

Throughout the play there are many references to *omens*. Display this word to pupils and elicit understanding. Explore other terms: *sign, symbol, warning* and *prophecy*.

Refer to a point in the play e.g. prior to the heavy storm in Act I Scene III, Casca reports a number of strange sightings: hot fire dripping from the sky, a slave boy's hand was lit on fire but it didn't burn, a lion had been seen roaming the capitol, men were seen walking the streets covered in flames, and a night owl was seen screeching in the market place in broad daylight.

As well as this, Caesar's wife Calpurnia has strange dreams, which are also believed to be omens. The night before Caesar is stabbed she dreams that his statue is covered in blood whilst many smiling Romans bathe their hands in the flowing blood. As well as this she has a vision of a lioness giving birth in the street, and also sees a group of birds fighting in the sky.

Don't forget to draw attention to the soothsayer's words to Casear in the opening scenes, '*Beware the ides of March*'.

Allocate roles to pupils: Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Calpurnia and Cicero. Other pupils will be in role as citizens of Rome and will act out the strange sightings.

In groups, pupils improvise short scenes based on one of the short sightings. Encourage children to use exaggerated movements and gestures to emphasise the unnatural feeling of these events. What will their character say? How will they react? Towards the end of their scene, once the 'omen' has passed, use a drum, cymbal or bell to 'freeze' their scene. Can the rest of the class recognise which strange sighting they are expressing?

Extension:

To extend this, introduce 'thought tracking'. Once the scene is 'frozen', the teacher then taps the shoulder of one character, and invites them to speak their thoughts aloud.

Alternatively, some pupils could be in role as journalists and 'interview' some of the local people who have witnessed these sights. The journalists will need to take notes, and take statements from any bystanders to be included in their subsequent news report.

Writing: Newspaper Report

Explain success criteria for this task:

- Orientation paragraph (who, what, where, when)
- Use of passive voice
- Use of reported speech
- Headline (catchy, use of puns, alliteration)

Pupils can choose their own newspaper's name e.g. *'The Roman Herald'*, *'The Capitol Tribune'*, *'The Daily News'* etc.

Brainstorm some suitable headlines e.g. FIRE IN THE SKY, GODS SEND OMENS, STRANGE SIGHTS, LIONS ROAM ROME, WHY THE IDES?

Model the first 'orientation' paragraph:

Citizens of Rome have been warned to stay indoors following reports of strange sights around the city. In the past few days, local residents have made frightened calls to the authorities alerting them to some very unusual occurrences.

Explain the need to state the main facts (who, what, where, when). Then move on to the main body of the report, drawing the pupils' attention to the use of passive, and reported speech:

On Tuesday at approximately 8am, guards were called to the main square and discovered lumps of hot lava falling from the skies. Some locals stated that they could not take cover swiftly enough, and were injured in their attempt to escape.

Then model the use of direct speech:

One local carpenter, Aurelius, aged 30 described the scene as chaotic, 'there were fleeing bodies everywhere' he commented, 'I've never seen

anything so frightening. Is this an omen from the gods?'

Shortly before dusk, further reports indicated a worrying sight outside the city temple. Amelia, a slave girl aged 18, could not believe her eyes, 'I was shocked to discover a group of men in the street, consumed by flames' she said, 'I thought I was dreaming, but when other temple worshippers started screaming I knew this was for real'. We are currently investigating these reports, and will inform our readers when we have been informed of these men's identities.

Show how to finish the article by summing up events, and drawing possible conclusions:

Some people are suggesting that these unnatural phenomena are linked to the recent return of our noble ruler Julius Caesar. Is it a sign that our gods are displeased? Are there more strange omens to come? Ring our omen hotline now on 666-090 for advice and help. More news in tomorrow's issue.

Pupils can select from one or more of the following list of omens in Julius Caesar:

- The raging thunderstorm which drips hot fire from the sky ('raining fire')
- a slave boy's hand was lit on fire but it didn't burn
- a lion roaming the streets
- men, in flames, walking the streets
- night owl screeching in the market square in the middle of the day
- Calpurnia's dreams (Caesar's statue covered in blood whilst Romans bathe their hands in it, a lioness giving birth in the street, birds fighting in the sky)
- The soothsayer's words: 'Beware the ides of March'
- Caesar asks a priest to sacrifice a bull to determine the meaning of these strange events, but the bull's heart was not there
- Caesar's ghost appearing before the battle at Philippi

JOURNALISTIC PHRASES

- It can be reported that...
- There have been rumours that...
- Some locals have stated that....
- There have been suggestions that...

TIME CONNECTIVES

- Shortly before dusk . . .
- Later that day . . .
- Before long . . .
- As evening fell . . .
- As the sun set . . .
- Soon after . . .
- Hours later . . .
- Unfortunately . . .
- Fortunately . . .
- Soon
- So
- Afterwards
- After that
- Later on
- Next
- Moments later
- Seconds later
- Much later
- Within minutes
- Without any warning . . .
- At that very moment . . .

REPORTED SPEECH (no speech marks needed)

- He/she reported that . . .
- He/she also claimed that . . .
- He/she went on to state that . . .
- He/she confirmed that . . .
- He/she claimed that . . .
- He/she disputed that . . .
- She refused to accept that . . .
- He agreed that . . .
- She went on to tell us that . . .
- He continued by informing us that . . .
- In addition to this . . .
- He/she also spoke of how . . .
- He/she refused to accept that . . .
- She reputed . . .
- She emphasised . . .
- He continued by . . .
- A spokesman stated that . . .