

## 2015 Study Guide for *Pericles* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the medieval poet John Gower. What did he write? Why did he write in English? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gowerbio.htm>  
[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John\\_Gower](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Gower)
2. Sample Book 8 of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, "Apollonius of Tyre," to get the rhythm of Gower's verse and rhyme style, which Shakespeare adopts for the choruses in *Pericles*. This website provides the text both in the original Middle English and in modern English:  
<http://www.richardbrodie.com/Book8.html#Appolonius>
3. Research the cities visited in *Pericles*: Antioch, Tyre, Tharsus (or Tarsus), Pentapolis, Mytilene, Ephesus. Where is each located? What are the notable features of each? The mythic associations? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_antioch#Foundation\\_by\\_Seleucus\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antioch#Foundation_by_Seleucus_I)  
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/299/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarsus\\_\(city\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarsus_(city))  
<http://www.tripolipost.com/article/detail.asp?c=7&i=5155>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mytilene>  
<http://www.ephesus.us/>
4. Research the meanings of these character names: Pericles. Cleon. Simonides. Thaisa. Marina. Lysimachus. This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.behindthename.com/>
5. What elements characterize the Shakespearean form we commonly call romance? How do romances incorporate aspects of both comedy and tragedy while being

neither? Why do romances demand that the reader or playgoer suspend the need for logic? What emotional effects does a romance produce? These and other websites provide information:

[http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Shakespeare\\_s\\_late\\_romances](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Shakespeare_s_late_romances)

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/romance.html>

6. What is a dumbshow? This and other websites provide information:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumbshow>

7. Research riddles, classical and contemporary; e.g., the Sphinx in *Oedipus Rex*, Gollum in *The Hobbit*, the Riddler in *Batman*. In cases such as these, what is at stake if one fails to come up with the correct answer? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.innovateus.net/innopedia/history-riddles>

<http://www.pitt.edu/~edfloyd/Class1130/sphinx.html>

8. Research *deus ex machina*. What do the words mean? Describe the theatrical technique that goes by that name. How did it come about? These and other websites provide information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus\\_ex\\_machina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus_ex_machina)

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/deus%20ex%20machina>

9. Research the divine beings that play a part in *Pericles*: Aesculapius (Asclepius), Diana (Artemis), Fortuna, Neptune (Poseidon). These and other websites provide information:

<http://aesculapbooks.com/abaes.html>

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/diana.html>

<http://www.thaliatook.com/OGOD/fortuna.html>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/neptunerome.html>

10. In the Elizabethan world view, what does music symbolize? What does music mean in a Shakespeare play? These and other websites provide information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_in\\_the\\_Elizabethan\\_era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_in_the_Elizabethan_era)

<https://oliverglit11.wordpress.com/2011/07/26/the-elizabethan-worldview/>

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

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

### **After seeing/reading the play**

1. Why does Gower come "From ancient ashes" to serve as Chorus? What verse form does he use, and why? Find instances in his speeches when he states the morals of the play. Referring to the clues in the text, what do you know about his personality? How does he advance the plot?
2. How does the use of music and singing alter or enhance the presentation of Gower's narration? When did he sing and when did he speak? When were his lines shared by other singers? How did this affect the mood of the play?
3. Refer to your research on dumbshows. What is accomplished in dumbshows that would be more difficult in dramatic scenes? What material does Gower present in conjunction with the dumbshows? How do his speeches set the tone for, and/or contrast with, what comes next?
4. Refer to your research on riddles. What is at stake if Pericles fails to guess Antiochus' riddle? What is his fate if he guesses correctly? How does he save himself?
5. Trace Pericles' journey from Tyre (before the beginning of the play), around the Mediterranean, ending up in Ephesus. What leads him or drives him to and from each place? What can he take with him and what is he forced to leave behind? What dangers does he hope to avoid? In what conditions is his absence a benefit to people and places? What circumstances render him powerless, and when is he able to assume his power? When does he control his journey, and when is he guided by Fate and Fortune?

6. Translate the knights' mottos in Act II, scene i. What do they tell Thaisa about the knights? What attracts Thaisa to Pericles? Compare this competition with the challenge of the riddle in Antioch. How do they differ in intention and outcome?
7. Explain the symbolism of the armor of Pericles' father, taking into account these elements: Pericles has inherited it from his father; it is lost in a shipwreck and tossed onto land by the sea; it is rusty; Pericles has lost ownership of it and to borrow it must rely on the goodwill of the fisherman; he needs it to participate in the celebration for Thaisa; he can both dance and compete in combat wearing the armor.
8. Refer to Act III, scenes ii and iv, and to your research on Aesculapius. Describe Cerimon. What is his position in Ephesus? Why is the chest containing Thaisa's body brought to him? How is he able to restore her to life? How does he explain her resurrection? What does Thaisa remember and what has she forgotten? What does she believe her condition to be? How does she foresee the rest of her life?
9. According to Gower's Act IV chorus, how much time elapses and what happens during that time? Where is Pericles? What has become of Marina? What trouble is she about to find herself in and why?
10. Trace the journey that Marina takes from the seashore of Tarsus to Pericles' ship in the harbor of Mytilene. What dangers threaten her? What persons intend harm? Why? When is she saved by outside forces? When does she save herself? What resources does she call upon?
11. What is the inevitable fate of the prostitutes in the brothel in Mytilene? What is likely to befall their customers? How do the Pander, the Bawd and Boult plan to deal with the problem? How do they regard Marina's virginity in contrast to the way she regards it? How does Boult plan to overcome Marina's scruples about prostitution? What arrangement does she make with the three?
12. Refer to your research on the *deus ex machina*. List the occasions in the play when an unexpected outside agency saves the day. How credible do you find these occurrences? To what extent can they be logically justified?

13. Describe Lysimachus. How does he demonstrate that he's not worthy of Marina? What changes must he go through to become a suitable mate for her?
14. Refer to Act V, scene i. Describe where Pericles has been since we saw him last, what he has been doing, and his emotional and spiritual state. Why is Marina brought to him? What steps does she take to heal him? What talents and abilities does she use? What are the stages leading to the reunion of Pericles and Marina?
15. Refer to your research on the goddess Diana. Note the instances when she is invoked. Who calls upon her and in what circumstances? Why is she an appropriate deity for this play?
16. The three storms in the play transform the condition of Pericles. For each storm, describe what he was before, what he is after and how each speeds him on his soul's journey.
17. Who are the wicked characters? What are their evil deeds? How are they punished and by whom?
18. Assess the play's rulers—Pericles, Antiochus, Cleon and Dionyza, Simonides and Lysimachus. Which abuse their power and how? How do the bad rulers betray themselves by their words, attitudes and actions? What is the condition of the land governed by a good ruler? By a bad ruler?
19. Compare the parent-child relationships: Antiochus and his daughter, Simonides and Thaisa, Dionyza and Philoten, Pericles and Marina, Thaisa and Marina. Which are exploitive and abusive? What are the parents willing to do for their children? What do the parents want from their children? What do they want for their children?
20. Refer to your research on Shakespearean romance. What elements of a romance occur in *Pericles*? What improbable coincidences move the action forward? What incredible events take place? How does the playwright make them credible? What is the place of logic in appreciating the play? Which events are potentially tragic? How are they turned around?

21. When and how does Pericles see through misleading appearances? When is he deceived by appearances? When is his own value masked by a rough exterior, and who sees through it?
22. Find the references to jewels. What do they symbolize? Who and what are compared to jewels?
23. Find the references to light and sources of light (e.g., stars). What do they symbolize? Who and what are compared to lights?
24. Refer to your research on music. When does the script call for music? Which characters are proficient in music (and dancing)? What are the uses to which music is put? What relationships are compared to music? At what points does it signify harmony?
25. What are the physical, symbolic and mythic attributes of the sea? Find 10 or more instances in the text where the sea is mentioned literally and/or figuratively. Note also sea words (e.g., Neptune, wave, drown, ooze, whale, shell). Describe the presence of the sea in each of the play's settings. How does it link the settings? How do storms at sea change the direction of people's lives? Which characters are born or reborn at sea?
26. If you are familiar with *Henry V*, compare the Chorus with Gower as chorus in *Pericles*. What instructions does each give to the audience? To what extent does each participate in the action? To what extent does each illuminate it? What other functions does each serve?

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