



A **McCarter Theatre** production in association with Berkeley Repertory Theatre, the Shakespeare Theatre Company and Lookingglass Theatre Company | **Venue:** Matthews Theatre | **AUDIENCE GUIDE STAFF:** Editor for Literary Content: Carrie Hughes | Editor for Education Content: Paula Alekson | Editorial Administrator: Francine Schiffman | Web Design: Dimple Parmar | Contributors: Elizabeth Edwards, Paula Alekson, Adam Immerwahr, Christopher T. Parks, Akiva Fox, Lila Neugebauer, Cheshire Isaacs

Emily Mann on Argonautika



Dear Patrons,

As a child, I adored reading old fairy tales and ancient Greek myths. I gobbled them up—breakfast, lunch and dinner. I read and re-read the stories of heroes and monsters, gods and goddesses. My love for these stories has continued throughout my life, and I am happy to have the opportunity to share the magic of these adventures with you. My interest in the story of Jason and the Argonauts originates with the intersection of Jason’s quest with Medea’s life. Why does she love this man, and how does he become her betrayer? In Mary Zimmerman’s version of the tale, we see Jason’s great promise, and we watch the decisions he makes as he becomes a man. For many people, the story of Jason and the Argonauts has been lost in time, but Mary’s production brings Jason’s extraordinary odyssey back to full theatrical life with her usual innovative imagery, whimsy, and visual panache.

I love having Mary Zimmerman at McCarter. A MacArthur “genius grant” recipient, a Tony Award-winner (for her Broadway production of *Metamorphoses*) and a major American artist, her McCarter productions of *The Odyssey* and *Secret in the Wings* captivated McCarter audiences. I saw this production of *Argonautika* in Chicago at Lookingglass last year. I was transported. Zimmerman has an astonishing ability to tell a tale by transforming language into thrilling visual life. I am also pleased to have another production that originated at Lookingglass Theater Company on our stage. *Lookingglass Alice* was a high-point of last season. I will never forget the sight of Larry DiStasi reciting Lewis Carroll’s brilliant Jabberwocky - on a unicycle!

Like *Metamorphoses*, this production is exciting and dangerous! Like *The Odyssey*, Mary’s *Argonautika* harnesses all of the narrative drive of this compelling tale with a simple yet sumptuous design, glorious acting, and a thrilling and utterly theatrical approach. I know you will love this story and its fresh re-telling as much as I do. Please, enjoy!

All best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Mann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "M".

The Hero in Love

- By Akiva Fox, Literary Associate, Shakespeare Theatre Company

When a story endures for three thousand years, as the story of Jason and the Argonauts has, it endures for many reasons. To the ancient Greeks, myth and history were inseparable; they believed that these myths told the stories of their ancestors, whom they idealized as “better men, and closer to the gods than we are.” The myths were also important foundation stories for their society, explaining the origins of their own customs and traditions. And the myths functioned as pure entertainment, recounting a time of magic and heroism. The myth of Jason and the Argonauts, which began with Greek storytellers, has endured in many forms and in many lands. From the great epic poems of Apollonius and Valerius to modern books and films to Mary Zimmerman’s stage version, adaptations of this myth have seized on its potential as an escapist adventure on an immense scale.

In the twentieth century, the scholar Joseph Campbell studied a wide range of world myths to find common elements that bound them together. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell identified the “hero’s journey” as a series of steps followed by the protagonist of nearly every enduring myth: Departure (which includes the call to questing and supernatural aid in preparation), Initiation (which includes the trials faced on the journey, help from powerful companions and ultimate achievement of the prize) and Return (which includes the flight from pursuing enemies and the arrival home to enjoy the benefits of the prize). Perhaps because it was assembled from pieces of other myths, the story of Jason and the Argonauts fits this model almost perfectly.

But as ancient as it is, this myth still contains surprises. After the glorious quest for the Golden Fleece brings Greece’s bravest heroes past many dangers to their destination, they are able to fulfill that quest only when their young leader Jason falls in love with the teenaged sorceress Medea. The goddesses Hera and Athena, Jason’s patronesses, realize that only love can make Medea give him the Golden Fleece. But because they have no power over love, they must go to the source: Eros, the god of love and desire. In Apollonius’ telling, they discover the child-like Eros cheating at dice and bribe him to shoot love into Medea’s heart. Unwounded by Eros’ arrows, Jason in turn falls in love with Medea. Both fall prey to what the poet calls “Love the Destroyer.”

No Greek text addresses love and its god as fully as *Symposium*, Plato’s fourth-century dialogue that imagines a debate between Athens’ greatest minds. The differing views on love present Eros alternately as “the noblest and mightiest of the gods, chiefest giver of virtue in life” and “always plotting against the fair and good.” But the most unique view of love comes from the only female voice quoted in *Symposium*. The wise woman Diotima defines love as “the desire to possess a good or beautiful thing,” and one of the good things all people desire is immortality. Having children, one of the results of love, offers humans a chance to live forever through

their descendants. “I am persuaded that all men do all things,” she concludes, “in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue.”

In Valerius’ Roman version of the story, Jason knows that his uncle sends him on the dangerous quest for the Golden Fleece as a mere pretext to get rid of him, but he goes anyway. For he sees Glory (personified as a woman) beckoning him from a far shore. The heroes come from all over Greece with the same hope to achieve immortality through their deeds. Valerius could be describing Eros when he says that Glory “alone fires men’s hearts and minds.” This desire for glory and adventure sounds identical to Diotima’s reasons for love.

The love story between Jason and Medea may seem like an interruption of a “hero’s journey,” but in fact it becomes a perfect reflection of the quest itself. The story unites Jason’s desire for Medea and for the Fleece, as he steals both from King Aietes at the same time. In an incredible sacrifice, Medea must give both herself and the Fleece to Jason. They even consummate their marriage using the Fleece as a bed. If both love and adventure are a quest for immortality, it is no surprise that this myth combines the two elements so seamlessly. Ultimately, they are inseparable components of the story, and together they make the myth richer and more human.

For although Jason’s quest for the Fleece seems to follow the archetype of the hero’s journey, he cannot achieve his quest or return home without Medea’s help. Their love story allows the audience to question every aspect of the seemingly glorious journey to the Fleece—the true heroism of these heroes and their deeds, the importance of the Fleece, even the original justification of the quest itself. When Jason returns home with the prize, he finds neither personal glory nor benefit to his homeland. And the love story of Jason and Medea, forged on the quest, ends in tragedy at home. Perhaps this myth has endured for thousands of years because it shows us a hero both glorious and human.

This article appears courtesy of our co-producer, The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, DC.

Who's Who

ACTING COMPANY



Justin Blanchard
Hylas/Dymas



Allen Gilmore
Pelias/Ensemble



Sofia Jean
Gomez
Athena



K.C. Jackson
Pollux/Ensemble



Chris Kipiniak
Castor/Ensemble



Tessa Klein
*Aphrodite
/Ensemble*



Ronete Levenson
Andromeda/Ensemble



Atley Loughridge
Medea



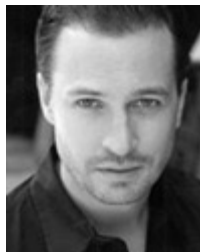
Andy Murray
Meleager



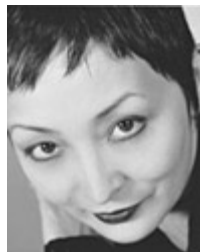
Søren Oliver
Hercules/Aiete



Jesse J. Perez
Idmon/Ensemble



Jake Suffian
Jason



Lisa Tejero
Hera



Jason Vande
Brake
*Amycus
/Ensemble*

ARTISTIC STAFF

ARGONAUTIKA

written and directed by Mary Zimmerman
adapted from *The Voyage of Jason and the Argonauts*
after Apollonius of Rhodes and Gaius Valerius Flaccus
translations by Peter Green and David R. Slavitt

<i>Set Design</i>	Daniel Ostling
<i>Costume Design</i>	Ana Kuzmanic
<i>Lighting Design</i>	John Culbert
<i>Original Music and Sound</i>	Andre Pluess & Ben Sussman
<i>Puppetry Design</i>	Michael Montenegro

World premiere at Lookingglass Theatre Company

Mary Zimmerman Bio

Mary Zimmerman is the recipient of a 1998 MacArthur Fellowship, the 2002 Tony Award for Best Director and ten Joseph Jefferson Awards, including Best Production and Best Direction. She is a member of the Lookingglass Theatre Company of Chicago, an Artistic Associate of the Goodman Theatre and a Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. Works which she has adapted and directed include *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (Berkeley Rep, Second Stage, Goodman, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Seattle Rep), *The Odyssey* (Lookingglass, Goodman, McCarter, Seattle Rep), *Arabian Nights* (Lookingglass, Manhattan Theatre Club, Brooklyn Academy of Music), *Journey To The West* (Goodman, Huntington, Berkeley Rep), *Metamorphoses* (Lookingglass, Seattle Rep, Berkeley Rep, Mark Taper Forum, Second Stage, Broadway), *The Secret in the Wings* (Lookingglass, Berkeley Rep, McCarter), *Eleven Rooms of Proust* (Lookingglass, About Face), *S/M*, and *Silk*. Other regional theater productions include: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Pericles* (Goodman); *Henry VIII*, *Measure for Measure* (NYSF); and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Huntington). In 2002 she created a new opera with Philip Glass, *Galileo Galilei*, which played at the Goodman Theatre, the Barbican in London and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. This fall, she debuted at the Metropolitan Opera with *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Zimmerman's career as a director spans fifteen years and her works have been staged from Broadway to Berkeley, but she still has a hard time saying she has a "life in the theater." Truth told, though, she can't remember a time when she wasn't interested in the art form. The daughter of two university professors, she spent her childhood in Lincoln, Nebraska, dreaming of being an actress. When she went to Northwestern University as an undergraduate she began as a composition and literature major but—two weeks later—switched to the Department of Performance Studies.

It wasn't until her graduate work at Northwestern that she discovered "the act of directing, creating and making theater—without being in it."

Northwestern proved to be fertile ground for Zimmerman. Her studies focused on

how to use the elements of staging—light, sound, disguise, gesture, movement—and she collaborated on adaptations of everything from Dickens novels to contemporary parodies. She cites her thesis performance, a 45-minute solo based on Proust's housekeeper, Celeste Albaret, as the most critical step in this development.

After receiving her BA, MA and PhD at Northwestern, Zimmerman joined the Performance Studies faculty, where her mentors are now her colleagues. The environment has continued to be fruitful. Her production of *Metamorphoses*, which went on to Broadway and was nominated for a Tony for Best Play, began as a student production. So did *Eleven Rooms of Proust*, a site-specific performance that she holds dear to her heart. The performance, first set in an old mansion and later staged in a factory, took eleven episodes from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and staged them throughout the space.

"It was this surreal, incredibly moving, very, very strange experience," Zimmerman recalls. "A friend said it was like the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disney, except you're sobbing the whole time."

During her time at Northwestern, Zimmerman also has developed a close working relationship with Chicago's Goodman Theatre and was instrumental in the development of her home company, Lookingglass. These companies staged such seminal works as *The Arabian Nights*, *The Odyssey*, *Journey to the West* and, of course, *Metamorphoses*. In 1998, she was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship, and in 2002 she won the Tony for Best Director for *Metamorphoses*.

In her work, she continues to be drawn to ancient literature and stories based in oral tradition. Her rehearsal process is open and organic, especially when she serves as both adapter and director. She allows time for a production's imagery to develop, often working off the physical improvisations of her ensemble of actors. When directing Shakespeare, her engagement is primarily with the text.

"I'm not a big one for seeing what other people have to say about it, how it was done elsewhere," Zimmerman says. "I try to be very open in my reception to what the story wants to be and how I can make it as absolutely clear and visually clear as possible. My goal is to express the play in a way that feels as right as possible. I'm not ever trying to force something on these stories."

Her hope is to have a child's openness and imagination, for—to paraphrase one of her favorite quotes by Willa Cather—"I'll never be the artist I was as a child."

"I love that quote," Zimmerman says. "It is a statement of my own belief that I'm at my best when I'm unselfconscious and using what's in the room. They don't call it a play for nothing. We think of 'play' as a noun. 'I'm going to see a play.' We forget that it's also a verb. Children play in order to survive. They're practicing at life in order to cope and survive later in life. Plays do the same thing. They're teaching us how to cope with situations, like the advent of our death. And we can sit back and observe."

This article first appeared in the McCarter Resource Guide for Secret in the Wings.

Argonautika from Myth to Stage Mary Zimmerman and the Art of Target Practice

Interview by Lila Neugebauer

Lila Neugebauer: What first drew you to mythology?

Mary Zimmerman: As a child, myths always felt to me like grown-up fairy tales. Like fairy tales, they contained adventures and supernatural elements. Misfortunes were passed through and triumphed over, epic journeys, impossible tasks. But I always sensed that there was a serious and darker layer to them. I sensed a symbolic content; there was something taboo or transgressive about reading these myths. I knew the Edith Hamilton book [*Mythology*] on my mother's shelf was an adult book — yet I read it obsessively, over and over. They moved and fascinated me in some way that hasn't stopped.

These stories are quite mysterious. They don't usually end happily, and the world changes or shifts because of the adventures in them. The contemporary or immediate relevance of this story for me is the futility of war, the futility of the conquest mission. Once the Argonauts have the fleece, it doesn't mean anything anymore. The conquering—of this Asian or Middle Eastern country—ultimately just brings destruction, and so much is lost. The whole mission is just a pretext—one man's way of getting rid of his nephew, who he's afraid is going to kill him. It's important to remember that there's a great futility to the entire heroic, idealized venture.

LN: It's no stretch to feel the relevance of that point, but are there particular challenges you encounter when adapting such ancient material for contemporary audiences?

MZ: These stories have proven their relevance and worth by sticking around. It's not just a conspiracy of literature teachers—that wouldn't last thousands of years. If they didn't have something to say to us about the condition of being a person, of facing loss and diminishment, they would be obscure and forgotten.

The challenging part of adapting anything that wasn't written for the stage is that the stage does not naturally or easily accommodate the events of the original. How do you do a fleet of boats? Or 50 men on board? Or sea monsters or gods flying around? Compress time and space, elongate certain moments? Converting all narration to

dialogue might seem the natural move in dramatization for the theater, but it would actually expand the text to an intolerable degree. You have to ask: what are you going to prioritize in your adaptation? The task is to find the essence through compression.

In both of the original epics, there's something like a hundred Argonauts on board. But they don't coalesce into a band of brothers in the way that you want them to; an Argonaut will appear for a scene and then you never see him again. They don't have full arcs. To create some of those arcs I incorporated stories about various Argonauts from the larger body of Greek myth. For instance, I have Hercules making reference to his mighty deeds in infancy, and I bring Meleager's and others' ends into the play. You know, one aspect I particularly adore is that Hercules and Hylas are clearly boyfriends, and it has no moral value one way or another. It doesn't diminish Hercules' masculinity an iota. In fact, it enhances it. Hercules' anguish at losing Hylas is one of the great romances of the story.

LN: Let's talk about the Jason legend—what was your source material?

MZ: I've known the Jason story in the same way I've known fairy tales and the other myths since I was little—from Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, on which I've based my entire career. The classic version of this tale is the Apollonius of Rhodes epic, and I chose the Peter Green translation, which is basically the standard. But in researching various translations, I came across another version of the Argonautika, written in Latin (as opposed to Greek), a couple of centuries later by a Roman poet named Gaius Valerius Flaccus. Combining these two texts is like doing Homer's *Odyssey* and then his cousin Fred's *Odyssey*—it might seem an odd choice, but I think it's in keeping with the oral tradition of constant combining and revising of stories. There are many beautiful things in Flaccus. There's a section in the adaptation where Jason's parents, upon hearing that their fate is sealed—that they're doomed—kill themselves, which is really Roman. That would only come from the Latin version, because the Greeks didn't celebrate suicide like that at all. In fact they had quite a negative feeling about it. So it's not just two different translations; it's two different original authors. I was drawn to the story in its spirit of rollicking adventure—there's tremendous humor in it, as well as humanity.

LN: You've discussed elsewhere Medea's role in the story—and Jason's markedly unheroic tendencies. What kind of a leading man is Jason?

MZ: He definitely acts unheroically towards Medea at the very end of the play, although the Apollonius version doesn't include that part of the tale; it ends with the arrival back home. Among other things, this story is, of course, a prequel to the Medea tragedy.

One of my earliest images for the production was of a girl with an arrow struck through her—once she's shot, that she would have this arrow stuck in her. That's how you feel it when you read it; the metaphor is so solid. I imagined we would see her white dress get bloodier and bloodier from that very painful love. The depiction of

love or lust in this show is dark, destructive. It renders someone helpless. It really bloodies her up, turning her into a kind of monster. In terms of the Medea myth, it's important to be reminded that she was a virgin girl—just a maiden minding her own business—and the gods used her to help Jason on his mission by shooting her full of love for him. In our play, she tries and tries to pull the arrow out of her chest, and she can't. It's nothing she wants, nothing she asks for. She's absolutely tormented by what it's prompting her to do. But it's the gods: she has no power over it and she can't escape it.

In terms of Jason, bear in mind that for the Ancient Greeks being heroic had more to do with having survived and gone through a lot, as opposed to inherent qualities of virtue. Jason is a reluctant hero as all epic heroes are—from Frodo Baggins, who doesn't want to go, to Odysseus, who didn't want to go either and is only trying to get home. E.T. is trying to get home. Dorothy is trying to get home. They're not trying to get out. It's the getting back that they're looking forward to.

LN: This idea of the reluctant journeyer...What do you think that's about?

MZ: [Joseph] Campbell might say that the hero's journey is one of self-actualization, and that's not necessarily a painless, pleasant thing. Leaving our childhood is not something that we necessarily do willingly. One of my all-time favorite lines in *The Odyssey* is when Athena says to Telemachus, the son, "Your childhood is over." She says you have to do this—you have to be a man—with this beautiful, emphatic line, "You cannot go on clinging to your childhood. You are not of an age to do that." And it's always like that, the goddess—generally goddess, not god—announces, you have to go, you have to do this thing. And it's very onerous for the person who has to do it.

LN: How does your work as an adapter play out in the rehearsal room?

MZ: I'm the director and I'm the writer; those things go hand in hand for me. So when I'm thinking about what episode to use of something that's multi-episodic, the choice often depends on what parts I have visual ideas for staging—and what will benefit from being staged. I start with no script. I write it bit by bit in the hours off from rehearsal, bring it in and it builds everyday. I'm inspired by the physical capabilities and talents in the cast. I have to make certain major decisions before we start, in terms of sets and costumes, but once we begin on that first day, it's a kind of free-fall. I'm under the clock; I use a normal rehearsal period of about four weeks. My process reflects my belief in the unconscious: by putting myself under such pressure, I lose self-consciousness, and I open up to the voice of the text. There's really not much choice. I have crazy impulses and I don't have time to get scared or shy or second-guess them. They're not the polite choices, nor often the considered choices – though they do get more considered and revised once the show is in previews and I can sit back and see what we've done. But initially, it is as though we are playing in the backyard.

The great Charles Ludlam said that in the superlative theater, you shoot an arrow and then draw a circle around it. You make it the perfect thing; you make the choice right with the circumstances you have. Rather than aiming for the target, you shoot and then you make it.

This article is courtesy of our co-producer, Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

Educators Introduction

Welcome to the McCarter Audience Guide educator materials for *Argonautika*. This guide has been assembled to complement both your students' theater-going experience and your class curriculum by offering a variety of interesting and edifying activities for both pre-show and post-performance instruction and enjoyment.

Mary Zimmerman's adaptations have been some of McCarter student audiences' favorite productions. Her unique staging and design concepts speak to a younger generation of theater-goers, who often thrill to the ensemble-based, fantastical retellings of some of mankind's greatest epics. The theatrical simplicity by which the tales are told create an excellent foundation for discussion about interpretation, character development, and story. Please make use of some of the activities and discussion topics found within this guide to enhance your students' pre- and post-performance experience. Use of this guide in conjunction with your students' attendance at McCarter's production of *Argonautika* affords opportunities for enrichment in historical and cultural studies, language arts, theater and visual arts. Teachers can also link their classroom directly with McCarter Theatre via the new McCarter Theatre Blog (<http://www.mccarter.org/blog>), which can be used to pose questions and post comments regarding the production as it moves from pre-production into rehearsal and performance.

Our student audiences are often our favorite audiences at McCarter, and we encourage you and your students to join us for a live and lively conversation with members of the cast after the performance. Our visiting artists are always impressed with the preparation and thoughtfulness of McCarter's young audiences, and the post-performance discussion offers a unique opportunity for students to engage intellectually with professional theater practitioners. We look forward to seeing all of you for a wonderful discussion about *Argonautika*.

Core Curriculum Standards.

According to the NJ Department of Education, "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." Our production of *Argonautika* and the

activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students' education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

- 1.1 All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.3 All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.4 All students will develop, apply, and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.
- 1.5 All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

Viewing *Argonautika* and then participating in the pre- and post-show discussions and activities suggested in this resource guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

- 3.2 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.4 All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
- 3.5 All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources.

In addition, the production of *Argonautika*, as well as the resource guide activities, will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

- 6.1 All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography and economics.
- 6.6 All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and other geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

Pre-Show Discussion Questions and Activities

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to introduce your students to Argonautika and its origins, context, and themes, as well as to engage their imaginations and creativity before they see the production.

1. THE JOURNEY. At the heart of most great epics, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Virgil's *Aeneid* to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, is the classic hero who must overcome great adversity to fulfill some great prophesy and/or defeat evil. The stories typically involve grand adventures plagued with dangers (often supernatural) that test the

hero's courage and internal fortitude. There is often some god or god-like intervention which supports and/or stands in the way of the hero. The tale of Jason and his Argonauts incorporates each of these elements, as our hero and his companions strive to overcome seemingly impossible challenges in order to accomplish their quest.

- Many writers of comic books, movies, novels, and television shows use classical material as a foundation for the mythology they create for their works of fiction. George Lucas, for instance, was extremely interested in Homeric archetypes when he created the “*Star Wars* Universe.” Ask your students if they can think of some modern epic tales that fit within the defined parameters above. Are the supernatural forces religious, as in *Argonautika*? Is the hero of the tale clearly defined as the protagonist? What setting is used to contain the epic nature of the story?
- Ask your students if they have ever been on an “epic” quest for something. Did their journey involve many different encounters with adversarial and benevolent forces? Did they feel as if there were any supernatural forces involved? Did they succeed in their ultimate goal? Did they undergo a transformation as a result of their completion of the quest?
- Ask your students if they have a story about someone they know who faced great adversity against seemingly impossible odds. What is their relationship to this person? Was this person's faith challenged when making the decisions necessary in order to achieve victory? What allies or comfort did this person have to help bolster his or her confidence?

2. SOMETHING FROM NOTHING. Mary Zimmerman is known for manifesting the worlds of her plays through the creative use of scenery, costumes and properties. Two benches and a sheet of fabric become a boat. A flock of birds gliding across the sky is created by four actors in motion with their arms spread wide. In an effort to enhance your students' appreciation of the theatrical innovation as illustrated by the professional acting company in *Argonautika*, split your students up into groups of four or five and present them with the prompts below. Each prompt should be preceded by the following preamble, “You have twenty seconds to create something from nothing. Use your minds, use your bodies and voices to create...”

- A Magical Spell
- The Voice of a Goddess
- A Snake
- A Sea Voyage
- Fire
- A Storm
- A Dragon
- A Tidal Wave
- Harpies
- A Forest

- Fear

3. ZIMMERMAN ON THE NET. Mary Zimmerman is revered as one of the great innovators of the modern theater. She won the Tony Award in 2002 for Best Director for her production of *Metamorphoses* on Broadway. Her productions have been produced in major theaters across the United States. Have your students, either individually or in small groups, go onto the internet and research reviews of past productions by Mary Zimmerman. Have each student/group look for common themes or dramatic and directorial signatures or sensibilities as described by these professional theater-goers. If they go to “Google,” they can type in the following search words to yield abundant results:

- Zimmerman Metamorphoses review
- Zimmerman Odyssey review
- Zimmerman Secret in the Wings review
- Zimmerman Arabian Nights review

Note that some of the results which appear are for productions that have not been directed by Mary Zimmerman though they use the text she wrote. This distinction should be considered when compiling an assessment of reviewers’ reactions to her work. Have each group/student answer the following questions:

- What words do the reviewers use to describe the lighting, scenery and costume design?
- What are some of the common themes that pervade these reviews’ descriptions?
- How are the acting performances described?
- Do these reviews make you want to see a production of the play they describe? Why/Why not?

4. DESIGN TEAM. A scenic designer creates the environment where the action of the play takes place. A costume designer selects the clothing the actors will wear. The lighting designer helps define the mood and general atmosphere. The director is responsible for unifying the visions of a production’s designers to create a cohesive picture. There are often many meetings with the design team to discuss the concept for a play and how it should be realized on stage. Review with your students the story of Jason and the Argonauts, then split them up into teams and have them take on the roles of scenic, costume and lighting designers, as well as director. Have the director come up with a concept for the play and discuss with the designers how they might design the production. Is there some visual idea or style that ties the whole production together? Is there a feeling or emotion that they would want to express through their design of this production? Have teams prepare a design presentation for their classmates with drawings, visual research and/or writing. Students should be prepared to field their classmates’ questions about their design choices.

5. A THEATER REVIEWER PREPARES. A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a “professional audience member,” whose job is to report the news, in detail, of a play’s production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community, or those interested in the Arts). To prepare your students to write an accurate, insightful and compelling theater review following their attendance at Mary Zimmerman’s *Argonautika*, prime them for the task by discussing the three basic elements of a theatrical review: reportage, analysis and judgment.

- Reportage is concerned with the basic information of the production, or the journalist’s “four w’s” (i.e., who, what, where, when), as well as the elements of production, which include the text, setting, costumes, lighting, sound, acting and directing (see the [Theater Reviewer’s Checklist](#)). When reporting upon these observable phenomena of production, the reviewer’s approach should be factual, descriptive and objective; any reference to quality or effectiveness should be reserved for the analysis section of the review.
- With analysis the theater reviewer segues into the realm of the subjective and attempts to interpret the artistic choices made by the director and designers and the effectiveness of these choices; specific moments, ideas and images from the production are considered in the analysis.
- Judgment involves the reviewer’s opinion as to whether the director’s and designers’ intentions were realized, and if their collaborative, artistic endeavor was ultimately a worthwhile one. Theater reviewers always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.

Remind your students that the goal of a theater reviewer is “to **see** accurately, **describe** fully, **think** clearly, and then (and only then) to **judge** fairly the merits of the work” (Thaiss and Davis, *Writing for the Theatre*, 1999). Proper analytical preparation before the show and active listening and viewing during will result in the effective writing and crafting of their reviews.

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to have students evaluate their experience of the performance of Argonautika, as well as to encourage their own imaginative and artistic projects through further exploration of the play in production. Consider also that some of the pre-show activities might enhance your students' experience following the performance.

1. **ARGONAUTIKA: A DISCUSSION.** Following their attendance at the performance of *Argonautika*, ask your students to reflect on the questions below. You might choose to have them answer each individually or you may divide students into groups for round-table discussions. Have them consider each question, record their answers and then share their responses with the rest of the class.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Play in Production

- a. What was your overall reaction to *Argonautika*? Did you find the production compelling? Stimulating? Intriguing? Challenging? Memorable? Confusing? Evocative? Unique? Delightful? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.
- b. Did experiencing the play heighten your awareness or understanding of the play's themes? [e.g., overcoming adversity in the face of fear, the meaning of the word "Hero," destiny.] What themes were made even more apparent in performance? Explain your responses.
- c. Do you think that the pace and tempo of the production were effective and appropriate? Explain your opinion.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Characters

- a. Did you personally identify with any of the characters in *Argonautika*? Who? Why?
- b. What qualities were revealed by the action and speech of the characters? Explain your ideas.
- c. Did any characters develop or undergo a transformation during the course of the play? Who? How? Why?
- d. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play? Explain your responses.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Style and Design of the Production

- a. Was there a moment in *Argonautika* that was so compelling or intriguing that it remains with you in your mind's eye? Can you write a vivid description of that moment? As you write your description, pretend that you are writing about the moment for someone who was unable to experience the performance.
- b. Did the style and design elements of the production enhance the performance? Did anything specifically stand out to you? Explain your reaction.
- c. How did the production style and design reflect the themes of the play?
- d. What mood or atmosphere did the lighting design establish or achieve? Explain your experience.
- e. How did the sound design enhance your overall experience?
- f. Did the design of the costumes and makeup serve to illuminate the characters, themes, and style of the play? How?

2. DIVORCE PAPERS. In the matter of Jason and Medea's relationship, we know that Jason eventually abandons Medea despite the sacrifices she made for him. When Medea later kills their children, Athena suggests there may be justification for her brutal actions. Have your students imagine that setting for the play takes place in New Jersey in 2008. Jason has dragged Medea to America from an exotic land, only to announce that he is going to leave her and marry the daughter of a Texas tycoon. Although modern times could yield the same results as this ancient tale, let us pretend that Medea now wants to settle this in a court of law. Have your students draw up divorce papers that justify Medea's claims of cruelty against her estranged husband. What are her demands in this modern world? What kind of recompense could be made to punish Jason properly for her pain and anguish? Is there some special punishment the judge could demand of Jason outside the realm of typical judgments?

3. DEUS "EXTRA" MACHINA.

Often Greek epic heroes are given aid by the gods or other supernatural forces without whose intervention they would fail or die. Over the course of *Argonautika* Jason is given a great deal of assistance in completing his quest by goddesses Athena and Hera as well as by his mortal sorceress-love, Medea. Have your students review the events presented in the play and speculate what might have happened in each scenario had Jason been left unassisted. What might have been the immediate outcome of the conflict in question? What might have been the long-term outcome? Have your students choose one of the events that occurs in *Argonautika* and write a short story that describes how it might have turned out had Jason been unaided. They can also imagine a new ending for the Argonauts' quest.

4. ROLL CALL. In a modern take on the recruitment of Argonauts, Mary Zimmerman's *Argonautika* includes a chanted "roll call" that is in the style of a "rap" or "hip hop" song. It is upbeat and lends an irreverent silly tone to what could have been a pedantic announcement of Jason's companions. Have your students find a classical myth that they want to modernize through song. Either by creating their own tune, or using an existing song and rewriting the lyrics, have them tell the tale, or some section of a tale, and perform it for the rest of the class. It does not need to be funny, nor is comedy frowned upon.

Additional Resources

Other Theater Resource Guides:

- "First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide: *Argonautika*." 7 August 2007. Shakespeare Theatre Company. 13 February 2008 <http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/_pdf/first_folio/folio_argo_entire.pdf>.
- Maier, Dave and Shannon Howard, eds. "*Argonautika* Student Matinee Study Guide." 26 November 2007. Berkeley Rep School of Theatre. 13 February 2007 <http://www.berkeleyrep.org/school/images/AR_studyguide.pdf>.

Jason and the Argonauts—Print:

- Apollonius of Rhodes. *Jason and the Golden Fleece*. Trans. Richard Hunter. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Flaccus. *The Voyage of the Argo*. Trans. David R. Slavitt. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Jason and the Argonauts—Online:

- Apollonius of Rhodes. "The Argonautika." Trans. R.C. Seaton. Ed. Douglas B. Killings. *The Online Medieval and Classical Library*. January 1997. 13 February 2008 <<http://omacl.org/Argonautika/>>.
- Flaccus, Valerius. "Argonautika." Trans. J. H. Mozley. *The Theoi Classical E-Texts Library*. The Theoi Project. 13 February 2008 <<http://www.theoi.com/Text/ValeriusFlaccus1.html>>.

Greek Drama and Art:

- Aristotle. *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. Trans. S.H. Butcher. New York: Dover Publications, 1951
- Csapo, Eric and William J. Slater. *The Context of Ancient Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Hildy, Franklin J. and Oscar Brockett. *History of the Theatre: Foundation Edition*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2007.
- Winkler, John J. and Froma I. Zeitlin, ed. *Nothing to Do with Dionysus?: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Greek Mythology:

- Bulfinch, Thomas. *Greek and Roman Mythology*. New York: Dover Publications, 2000
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Mythic Image*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1998.
- Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Classic, 1990.
- Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. E.V. Rieu. New York: Penguin Classics, 1946.
- Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking Press, 2006.
- Zimmerman, John Edward. *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. New York: Bantam, 1983.

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