



P.L.A.Y.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

BLOODY

DISCOVERY GUIDE

*Bloody Bloody
Andrew Jackson*

Jan 13–Feb 17, 2008
Kirk Douglas Theatre

Written by Alex Timbers Music and Lyrics by Michael Friedman
Directed by Alex Timbers

How to Use this Discovery Guide

Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson is an original musical based on the life of Andrew Jackson, one of the more hotly-debated presidents in United States history. The show puts a fresh, contemporary and wildly irreverent spin on Andrew Jackson and his administration, which encourages audiences to draw comparisons to current political affairs. This Discovery Guide will provide historical context for the events and perspectives shared in the play and raise questions intended to continue the political dialogue begun by the performance experience.

Vocabulary words are in **bold type**. Definitions are within each section.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

- Examine the life and times of President Andrew Jackson
- Identify the characteristics of political theatre and theatre as activism
- Consider the role of the citizen in a democratic society

- Explore the relationship between satire and realism and the function of anachronism and allegory
- Study the use of humor to convey a serious message and as a catalyst for change

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS

Doug Cooney, Discovery Guide Writer, is a playwright and novelist for young people. His original youth musical *Nobody's Perfect*, adapted from his novel co-written with actress Marlee Matlin, premiered at the Kennedy Center in October 2007. *Imagine*, a new youth musical, premieres at South Coast Rep in Florida in May 2008.

Rachel Fain, Managing Editor

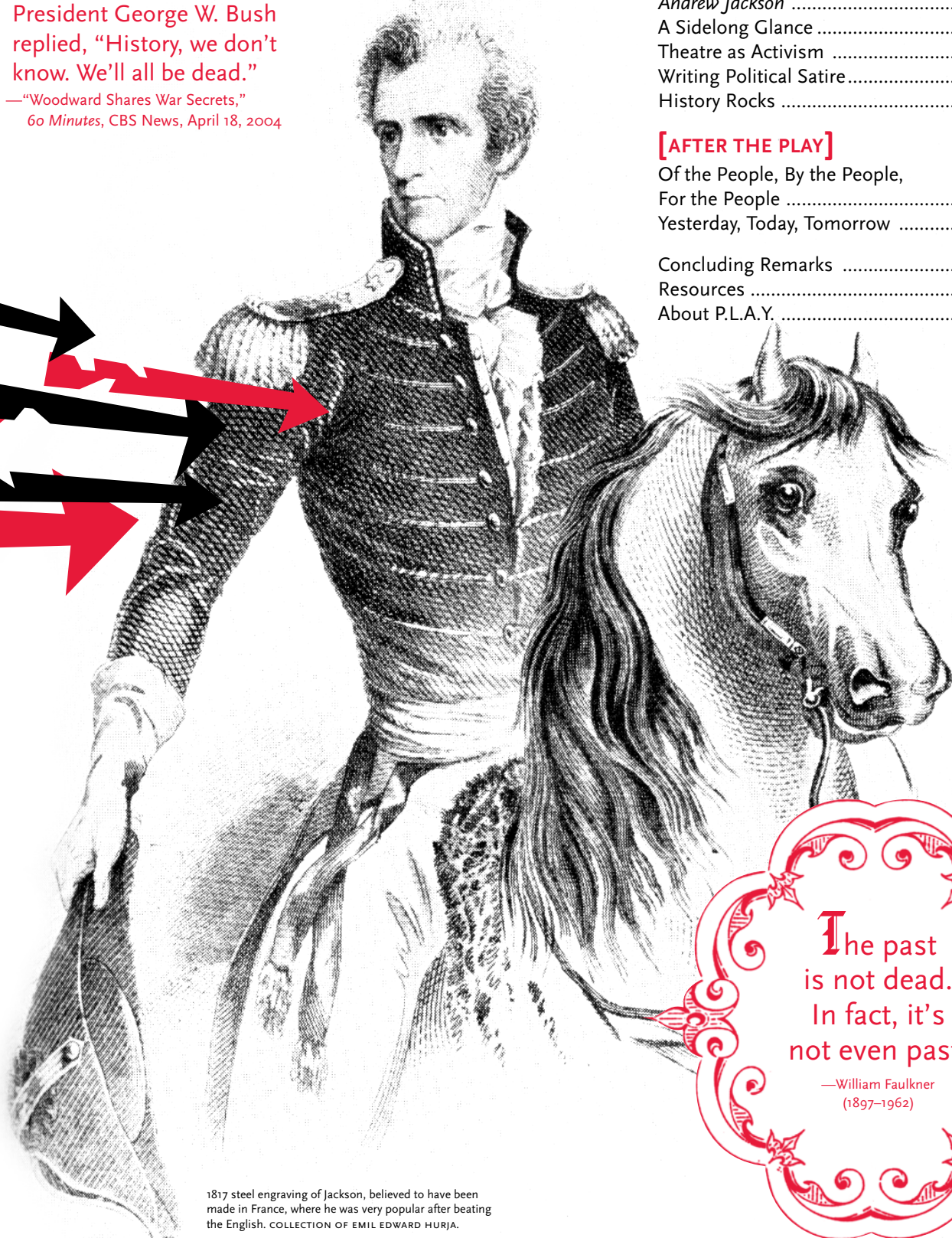
Jean Kling, Proofreader

Nishita Doshi, Graphic Designer

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When asked how history is likely to judge the war in Iraq, President George W. Bush replied, "History, we don't know. We'll all be dead."

—"Woodward Shares War Secrets,"
60 Minutes, CBS News, April 18, 2004



1817 steel engraving of Jackson, believed to have been made in France, where he was very popular after beating the English. COLLECTION OF EMIL EDWARD HURJA.

[BEFORE THE PLAY]

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The past
is not dead.
In fact, it's
not even past.

—William Faulkner
(1897–1962)

Pop Quiz: Don't F*** With the Facts

When Andrew Jackson became the seventh president of the United States, he was:

- A. A 20-something rock star with a broken heart
- B. A 60-year old career soldier with a musket ball lodged in his lung that made him cough so hard that his whole body shook and he often spat blood
- C. A 6'1", 135-pound war veteran with a shock of grey hair, piercing blue eyes, and so full of buckshot that he walked around rattling like "a bag of marbles"
- D. A threat to the nation, according to the late Thomas Jefferson

As a public speaker, Andrew Jackson would:

- A. Grab the microphone and launch into a big number
- B. Speak real good
- C. Speak with terrible diction because he had lost most of his top teeth
- D. Tend to curse and swear inappropriately

Which of the following is not true? Andrew Jackson was the first president:

- A. To be born in a log cabin
- B. To launch a campaign tour
- C. To be elected by a popular vote
- D. To win the popular vote and not be elected
- E. To ride a railroad train
- F. To be targeted in an assassination attempt
- G. To have running water in the White House
- H. To own slaves during his administration

TRUE OR FALSE:

During the Creek War, Andrew Jackson found a Native American baby in the arms of its dying mother on a battlefield and adopted the boy as his own son.

TRUE OR FALSE:

At President Andrew Jackson's funeral in 1845, his pet parrot, Poll, was removed for swearing.



EMBARRASSING TRUTH OR A DUEL-WORTHY LIE:

Andrew Jackson's wife, Rachel Donelson Robards, was already married when he married her.

Rachel Jackson. UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

When Andrew Jackson was shot and wounded in a famous duel with Charles Dickinson, the best shot in Tennessee, Jackson:

- A. Passed out and was rushed to the hospital
- B. Perched on one elbow and sang a song about it
- C. Calmly took aim and shot Dickinson through the heart



Illustration of a British officer striking young Jackson. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

TRUE OR FALSE:

When Andrew Jackson was 13 years old, he was taken prisoner by the British forces, mouthed off to the British commander and got hit in the head with a saber that inflicted a scar he carried until the day he died.

As president, Jackson used his veto power to put the kibosh on legislation:

- A. Once
- B. Okay, twice
- C. Never
- D. More often than all the previous presidents put together

TRUE OR FALSE:

During his presidency, Jackson bought 20 spittoons for the East Room at \$12.50 each. Critics said it was a waste of government money but supporters praised the move, saying it would save White House carpets.

Throughout his life, Jackson was believed to have been afflicted with heavy metal toxicity, a reference to lead and mercury poisoning and not to Guns N' Roses. To address this health condition, Jackson's physicians prescribed pharmaceutical drugs and:

- A. Two aspirin
- B. Aerobic exercise
- C. A stiff belt of whiskey
- D. Frequent and rigorous bloodletting

Elevate
those guns a
little lower.

—Andrew Jackson

The Age of Jackson: *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

ANDREW JACKSON BARGED INTO THE HISTORY BOOKS long before he became the seventh president of the United States (1829-1837). As a general leading the Battle of New Orleans (1815) during the War of 1812, Jackson savagely slaughtered the British troops and became an instant national hero. It was only a matter of time before he set his sights on the White House.

In the early 1800s, America offered a new beginning for the common man. Until that time, the gentlemen farmers of the eastern aristocracy controlled almost all the land and finances. With westward expansion, men did not need to rely on family, title or noble birth to make a name; instead, the era of the frontiersman had arrived, and a new breed of self-made men created their own destinies with swagger, braggadocio and unrelenting competition.

Andrew Jackson's birthplace shows his humble beginnings. HISTORICAL PICTURES SERVICE.



Andrew Jackson was just such a man. Born and raised as an orphan in a log cabin in the Carolina backwoods, he lacked both social class and family. Instead, he vaulted himself into leadership roles with a military career distinguished by its savagery and ambition.

Election laws changed to allow more of the populace to vote, and these common men identified with Jackson. In his first run at the White House in 1824, Jackson carried a **plurality** of both the popular vote and the Electoral College. However, since no candidate received a **majority**, the election decision was referred to the House of Representatives. The existing power-elite opted to preserve the status quo of the nation by designating John Quincy Adams as president; most likely, they freaked at the prospects of handing the reins to a reckless hooligan like Jackson.

In 1828, Jackson mounted a second run at the White House, cultivating **populism** as a political movement, actively forging the beginning of the Democratic Party and promising to clean up the corruption in Washington. Identified as a “man of the people” and still golden from the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson was handily elected and became the first president not descended from the eastern aristocracy or the original colonies. *More...*

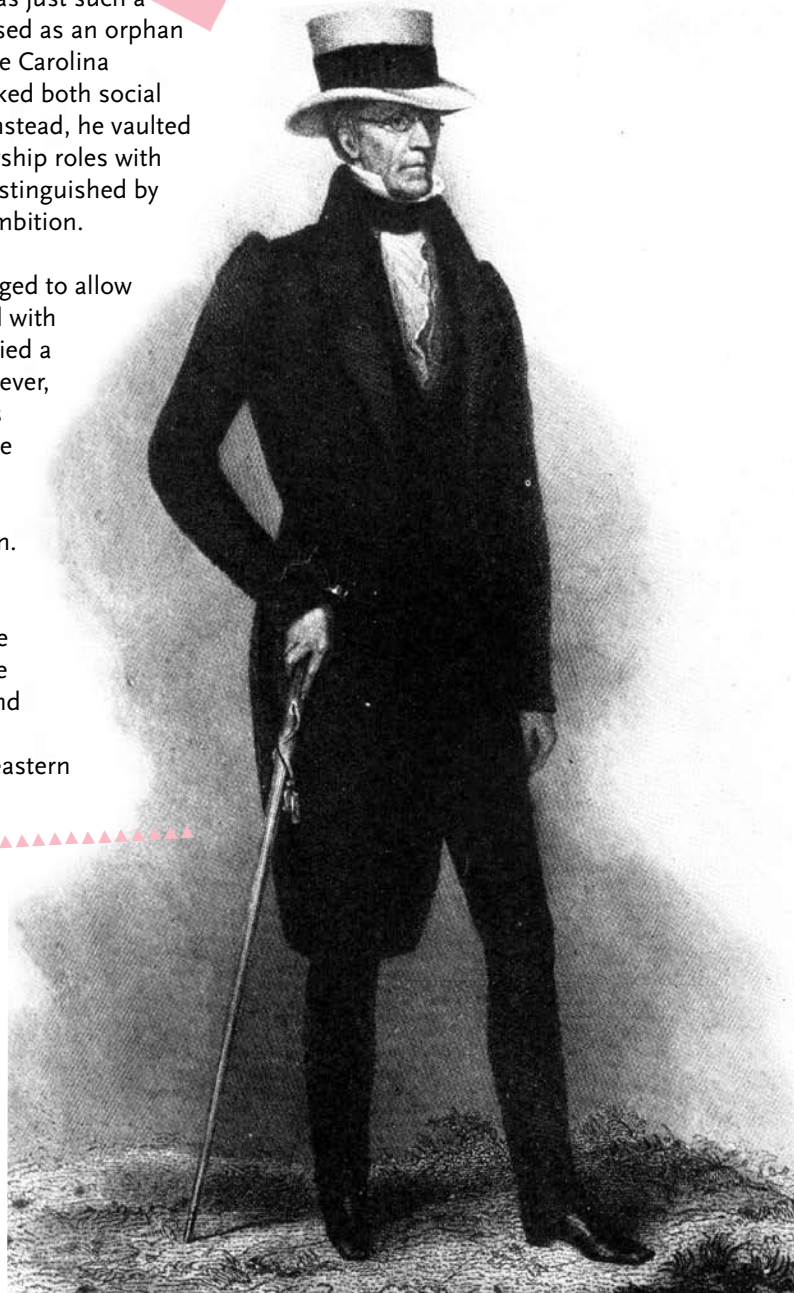
JACKASS

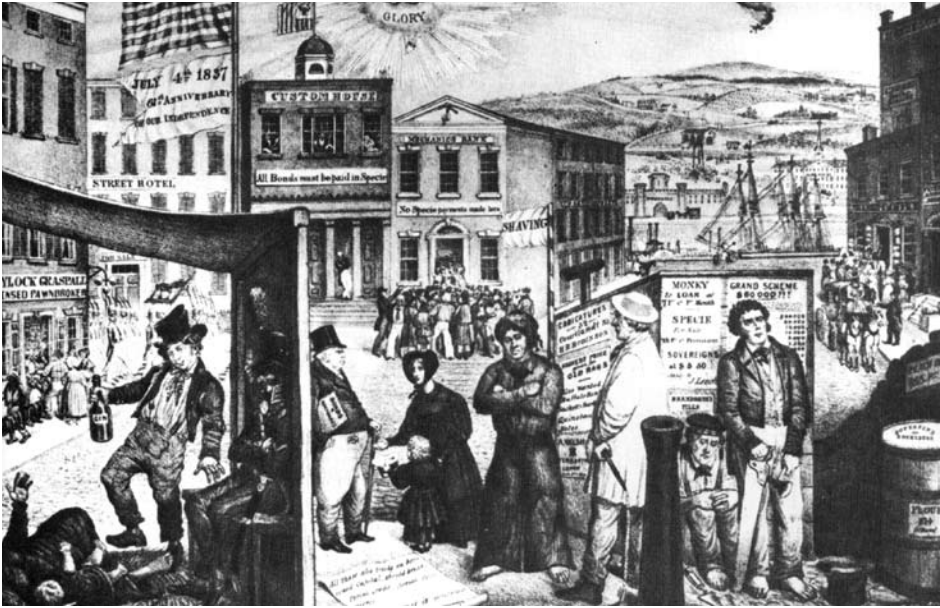


In 1830, opponents referred to Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Jackson as a “jack-ass” so often that Jackson embraced the nickname. Thirty years later, the Democratic Party was symbolized by a donkey in Thomas Nast's political cartoon for *Harper's Weekly*.

Since then, the donkey has been widely used as a symbol of the party, though unlike the Republican elephant, the donkey has never been officially adopted as the party's logo.

The Gentleman from Tennessee by Ralph E.W. Earl, 1835. COLLECTION OF CHARLES W. FREAR.





Vocabulary

Majority: A number more than half of the total; greater than 50%

Plurality: The largest part of the total, but not exceeding 50%

Populism: A political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against the privileged elite

Contemporaneous illustration of the economic crisis of 1837. HISTORICAL PICTURES SERVICE.

...Continued. During his administration, Jackson faced monumental challenges in advancing his own agenda, such as the elimination of the Second Bank of the United States and the nullification of tariffs, much less managing the “Indian Problem.” Jackson helmed the country during eight years of sweeping cultural change. Land issues loomed large as Texas, Arkansas and Michigan were

added to the Union, on the heels of Maine and Missouri less than a decade before. On a local level, the country experienced the Second Great Awakening, a nationwide religious revival consisting of renewed personal salvation at evangelical revival meetings. Dominant social causes included prison reform, temperance, women’s suffrage and the crusade to abolish slavery.

Popular culture of the day witnessed the best-selling novels of Charles Dickens, the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, Davy Crockett’s death at Alamo, Samuel Morse’s electric telegraph, Queen Victoria’s ascension to the throne of England, young Abraham Lincoln’s entrance into Illinois politics and Abner Doubleday’s first baseball.



THE TRAIL OF TEARS

As a direct result of Jackson’s administrative resolve regarding the “Indian Problem,” some 90,000 Native American tribal peoples were removed to the American West. The Cherokee Nation maintained a strong but beleaguered foothold in Georgia but they were eventually expelled by means of a treacherous mid-winter cross-country trek on foot known as “The Trail of Tears.” Mortality totaled between 4,000 and 8,000.

Movies and television create the mistaken impression that Native Americans were a primitive people living in teepees. In fact, by the early 1800s, generations of Cherokee Indians in Georgia lived side-by-side with their white neighbors in European-style homes and farmsteads, with a written language and their own newspaper. Georgia sued to get the land back. Even though the Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of the Cherokee Nation, President Jackson turned his back on the court’s decision. The Cherokee Nation was ordered off the land.

The “Trail of Tears” is not the only legally-sanctioned forced relocation in American history; others include the deportation of Mexican Americans during the Great Depression, and the Japanese American Internment Camps of World War II.

“The Trail of Tears” by Robert Lindneux, 1942. WOOLAROC MUSEUM.



A Sidelong Glance



SATIRE IS OFTEN USED AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL CRITICISM.

Successful satirists use humor to indirectly expose the follies or faults of targeted policies or individuals. Critics say that **satire** is nothing but a license to insult. Fans of satire find entertainment value in the ridicule and usually agree with the point of view expressed. Satirists who skillfully nail their subjects are often presumed to be reliable sources of information – which heightens the persuasiveness of their satirical arguments. Modern audiences get regular doses from such television shows as *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *The Daily Show* and films such as *Shrek* and *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*.

The lampoon factor in satire typically uses exaggeration, **incongruity**, reversal and parody to win laughs. Reversal is a comic device that flips expectations, such as in the animated film *Shrek* with its unexpectedly sweet-hearted ogre and

a damsel-in-distress who knows karate. In *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, for example, the incongruous characterization of a president as a “rock star” makes a statement about the impact of celebrity culture on contemporary elections. The creators exaggerate Jackson’s reputation for violence with comic stage combat.

Satirists often use **anachronism** to add contemporary resonance or irony to a comedic situation. An anachronism is anything that is or seems misplaced in time. The principle works both ways; historic figures might speak contemporary slang, or a contemporary character might be depicted in historical garb. In *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* you will notice contemporary costume elements, music and slang. Of course, anachronisms are in the eye of the beholder. Andrew Jackson cusses a blue streak in the play, and while this may seem incongruous, who is to say that he swore any differently than we do today?



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

EXERCISE

Attach a current political cartoon to this page and explain below why it is funny. Be prepared to present the cartoon to the class.

A RECIPE FOR BLOOD

Using only ingredients you find in your kitchen, make stage blood. How realistic looking is it? How usable is it? Answer the following questions about the blood you produce. What color is it? Does it splatter and drip convincingly? Does it harden? Will it stain? Can someone put it in their mouth? Bring a sample to class for demonstration.

Vocabulary

Anachronism: The presentation of someone existing or something happening outside its chronological, proper or historical order
Incongruity: Incompatibility; something not in keeping or inconsistent with what is proper or expected
Satire: Irony, sarcasm or wit used to attack or expose folly, vice or stupidity

Theatre as Activism

A PLAY THAT CONCENTRATES ON POLITICAL ISSUES in its themes or plot is often referred to as political theatre. Politics have been fair game on the stage since the ancient Greeks. The plays of Aristophanes (447–385 BC) constitute the earliest recorded political satire and, not unlike *The Daily Show*, offer a reliable source of information about politics in his day. In Elizabethan England, Shakespeare's history plays resonated with contemporary political issues and sparked a healthy dialogue.

Another form of political theatre takes a more aggressive and “activist” attack in its approach. Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) developed a style called epic theatre, overtly intended to further Marxism and to cultivate communist sympathies. Brecht's brand of “**agitprop**” theatre delivers political theory and economics to the audience with little interest in emotional response to the story or its characters. Similarly, Augusto Boal (1931–), in his “Theatre of the Oppressed,” engages the audience as “spect-actors” moving them from passive observers of a play to active participants directly voicing their own personal views and opinions during the performance.

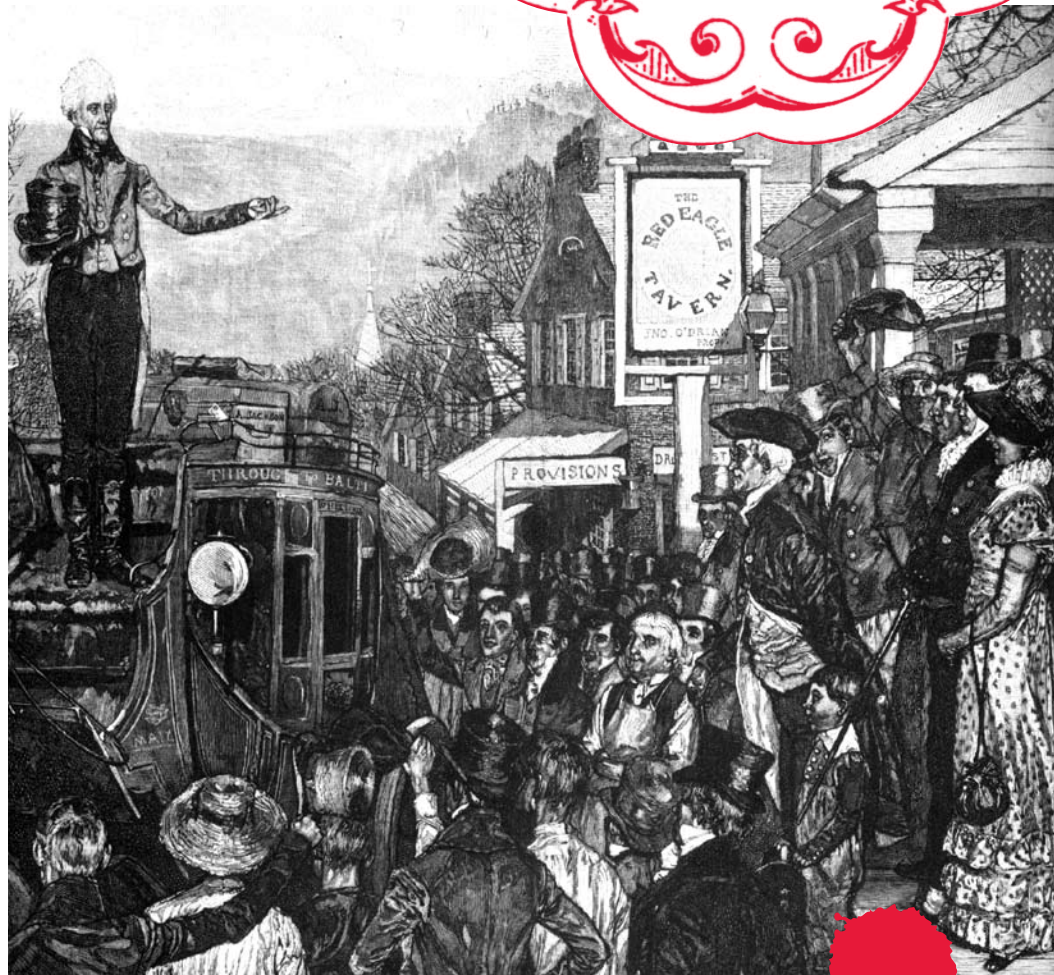
Vocabulary

Agitprop: Political propaganda, originally that favoring communism, disseminated through literature, drama, art or music and encouraging its audience to take action

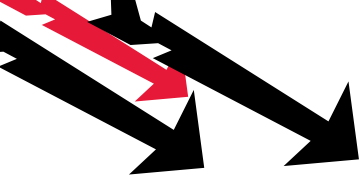
Allegory: The representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures or events in narrative, dramatic or pictorial form

Of course, the themes or subject matter of a play do not need to be overtly political for a play to be considered political. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* contains not a word of politics and still resonates as a sharp indictment of small-town America. Other realist dramas rely on **allegory** to make their political point. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is about the Salem Witch Trials, but remains an unmistakable attack on the blacklisting tactics of the House Un-American Activities committee. More recent examples of political theatre include Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, and the works of Anna Deavere Smith, Caryl Churchill, Tom Stoppard, Dario Fo, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and Culture Clash.

Political satirist Sarah Jones, known for her acclaimed solo performance *Bridge & Tunnel*, doesn't believe that art exists without politics. “I've never seen art for its own sake. Even *Oklahoma!*, as a piece of theatre, is a statement that we don't want to challenge the pleasantness of America: ‘We like the story just as it is. We don't want to tell the story of the Trail of Tears.’ That's a political choice.”



Newly elected President Jackson on his way from Tennessee to Washington. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



EXERCISE

Television and film are also sources for political “theatre.” Many current offerings take barbed jabs at contemporary issues, and they don’t always wear their politics on their sleeve. *Happy Feet*, for example, makes a statement about global warming in a movie otherwise preoccupied with tap-dancing penguins.

Choose a political play, movie or a television program and answer the following questions.

Title: _____

What is the political perspective or point of view of the creator?

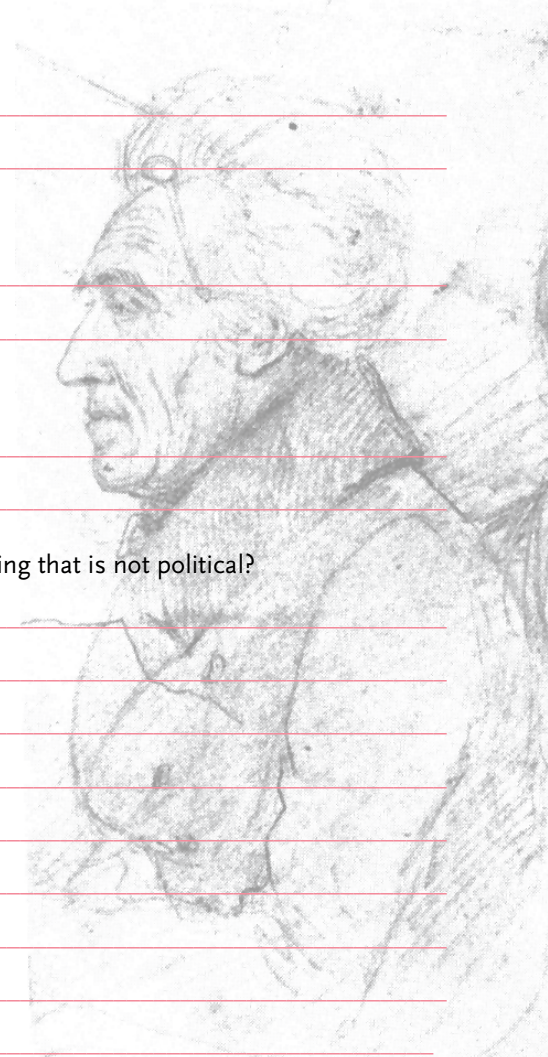
Does the show urge you toward particular behavior or action? What?

Do you rely on the program for information or insight?

Do you repeat information you acquired from the program when you talk with friends?

How have the perspectives of the program changed you?

How is the experience of watching a political program different from watching something that is not political?



Pencil sketch of Jackson drawn from life by Edward W. Clay in 1831. Around the mouth and eyes the artist caught some of the physical pain Jackson constantly endured. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

Writing Political Satire

SATIRE OFTEN RELIES ON PARODY FOR LAUGHS. Choose a contemporary political event, issue or individual. Research the subject thoroughly so that you are well acquainted with the facts. Then choose a famous historical document or event and rewrite it to satirize the current political scene you have chosen. Don't forget to employ exaggeration, reversal and incongruity.

Drawn From Life by William H. Brown. COLLECTION OF EMIL EDWARD HURJA.



History Rocks



EARLY 20th-CENTURY STAGE MUSICALS were mostly song and dance variety shows with the main emphasis on spectacle, like *Ziegfeld Follies*. Actual storytelling did not become part of the mix until Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's *Showboat* (1927) which adapted Edna Ferber's novel into song and dance. After that, "book musicals" became the norm on Broadway, epitomized perhaps by Lerner and Loewe's smash hit *My Fair Lady* (1956), based on George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*.

In 1967, the "rock musical" shattered all the old conventions and created new ones. *Hair* arrived on Broadway with a new sound, the exuberance of a rock concert, dancing in the aisles and a nude ensemble finale. After that, rock artists began creating concept albums known as "rock operas" like The Who's *Tommy* and *Quadrophonia*, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* and Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Contemporary musicals typically combine elements of the original song-and-dance spectacle, the book musical and the rock concert while tackling such unlikely subjects as a Puccini opera (*Rent*), a transgender rock singer (*Hedwig and the Angry Inch*) and coming of age in 19th-century Germany (*Spring Awakening*).

Typically, songs in a "book musical" move the story forward by presenting characters' declarations of what they want, who they are or what is happening. In *The Lion King*, for example, characters state "I Just Can't Wait To Be King," ask "Can You Feel The Love Tonight?" and celebrate "The Circle of Life." Songs in rock musicals often have a different purpose, serving as personal anthems of raw emotion or offering ironic commentary on the action or the world at large. For example, in *Tommy*, the hero sings "I'm Free" and "See Me/Feel Me," and the world responds "We're Not Gonna Take It."

EXERCISE

Choose a song played in class from *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* and write a short paragraph describing how you imagine the song functions in the actual production. Does it tell the story? Does it describe a character? Does it describe the spirit of the country at the time? Does it provide an opportunity for a character to make a decision? Does it provide an ironic commentary on the action of the play?

Handwriting lines for the exercise.



Of the People, By the People, For the People

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy famously said,

“Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Bear me out in it,
thou great democratic
God! ...Thou who didst
pick up Andrew Jackson
from the pebbles; who didst
hurl him upon a war-horse;
who didst thunder him
higher than a throne!

—Herman Melville,
Moby Dick

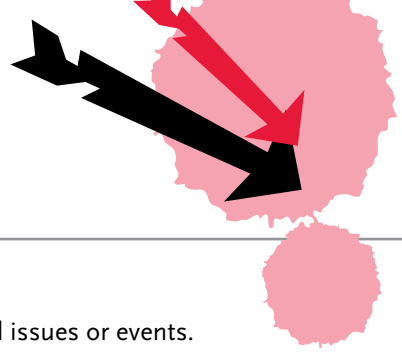
As Milton Friedman observes in his book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, neither half of Kennedy’s oft-quoted statement expresses a relationship worthy of free men in a free society. “What your country can do for you” implies a **paternalistic** system in which the government is the provider and the citizen is the ward. “What you can do for your country” implies that the citizen is beholden to service a masterful government. Instead, Friedman asserts, a truly free man will ask, “what can I and my fellow citizens do through government to meet our responsibilities, realize our goals and protect our freedom?” Furthermore, Friedman asks, “How can we keep the government we create from becoming a Frankenstein that will destroy the very freedom we establish it to protect?”

In the age of Andrew Jackson, American democracy was still a toddler finding its legs. The Founding Fathers had initiated an **audacious** experiment – democracy – dedicated to the creation of a free society in a world otherwise governed by tyranny, servitude and misery. Only seven presidents later, the country was challenged to live up to its words. The common man wanted his share in the advantages of a free society too.

But what is the role of the citizen? Are we obliged to stay informed as to every legislative action, judicial ruling or presidential decision and to voice our opinion? Or does individual responsibility end with the casting of a ballot? In *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, the citizens insist that “something needs to be done” about the “Indian Problem,” yet no one steps forward with a **tenable** solution. President Jackson is charged with the task of coming up with a solution and shouldering the blame. Today, polls regarding the war in Iraq indicate that Americans favor an exit policy. But who is expected to come up with the terms of that policy?

The fact that these questions remain unanswered shows how little democracy has advanced over the years. If it was a toddler in the Age of Jackson, perhaps it is a surly teenager today.





EXERCISE

List five elements of *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* that remind you of current political issues or events. For each example, describe what your responsibility as a citizen is, relative to that issue or event.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

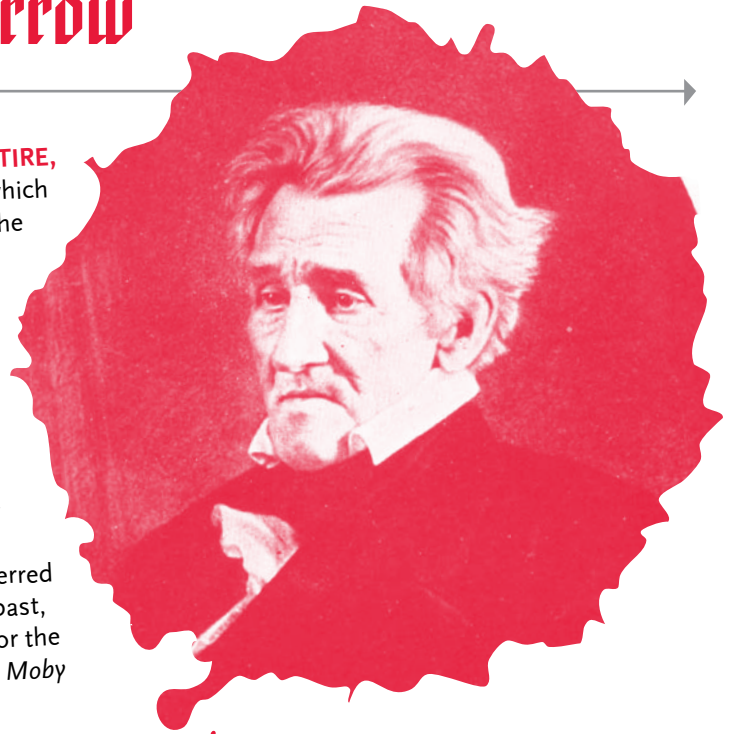
Vocabulary
Audacious: Fearlessly, often recklessly daring; bold
Paternalistic: Treating or governing people in a condescending manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them rights or responsibilities
Tenable: Capable of being maintained in argument; rationally defensible

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

A DISTINCTION NEEDS TO BE DRAWN BETWEEN POLITICAL SATIRE, which offers a quick skewering of its target, and allegorical satire, which attempts to engage its reader in a more empathetic experience of the underlying perspectives. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is perhaps the most popular example of allegorical satire, tracking the birth of communism in barnyard politics. Political satire sweetens the argument with humor, while allegorical satire sweetens its argument with story.

An allegory is a literary form in which an abstract truth is presented as an extended metaphor through the characters, their actions or the events that comprise a narrative story. More simply stated, an allegory is a story with two meanings: a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. Fables, myths and legends are often referred to as allegorical. In this manner, a story might be situated in the past, but resonate with contemporary issues – and raise implications for the future. Contemporary examples of allegories run the gamut from *Moby Dick* and *The Wizard of Oz* to *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Battlestar Galactica*.

Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson tracks Jackson's journey to the White House and his efforts to deal with a significant turning point in the evolution of American democracy. The literal meaning of this story is a history lesson. However, Alex Timbers layers his re-telling of Jackson's career with symbolic resonance to contemporary issues and concerns in a manner that suggest the allegory.



Photograph taken on April 15, 1845, two months before Jackson's death, by Matthew B. Brady. L.C. HANDY STUDIOS, WASHINGTON.

EXERCISE

Choose one of the five contemporary political issues or events you identified on the previous page. Create an allegory in narrative form that satirizes some aspect of that political issue or event. Use a familiar fable, myth or legend as a source and use anachronism as well as exaggeration, incongruity, reversal and parody. Remember that you want your allegorical satire to offer a persuasive argument on the underlying political subject matter – so attack the assignment with an agenda!

Who cut the cheese?

As president, Jackson once received a 1,400-pound wheel of cheese as a gift. The cheese – at four feet in diameter and two feet thick – stood aging in the White House foyer for two years. As the stench became overwhelming, Jackson scheduled a cheese tasting for the general public. The cheese was consumed in two hours.



The White House in Jackson's time. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Concluding Remarks



WE HOPE THIS GUIDE HAS ENHANCED your experience of *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* in its examination of the role of humor in conveying serious messages, political criticism and as a catalyst for social change. Theatre is most successful when it provokes dialogue. Hopefully this guide will facilitate lively debates on the lessons of American history and the role of the citizen in democratic society today.



Resources

WEBSITES

www.lesfreres.org

The official website for Les Freres Corbusier, playwright/director Alex Timbers' theatre company

www.thecivilians.org

Composer Michael Friedman is a founding member of this theatre company

profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=147525746

MySpace web profile for *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/aj7.html

Everything you ever wanted to know about Andrew Jackson

www.comedycentral.com/dailyshow/index.jhtml

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, a smart and funny "fake news" broadcast that satirizes current events through interviews, features and Stewart's analysis

www.politicalcartoons.com

A website containing political cartoons from well-known cartoonists around the world

BOOKS

Andrew Jackson by Sean Wilentz and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (Times Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2005)

Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times by H.W. Brands (Anchor 2006) An excellent textbook resource on the Age of Jackson

FILM & TELEVISION

Rachel and Andrew Jackson (PBS Home Video/DVD, 2006) A documentary featuring letters and quotes read by presidential hopeful Fred Thompson and country-western singing star Loretta Lynn

Examples of rock music used as historical anachronism in film:

A Knight's Tale directed by Brian Helgeland (SONY Pictures, DVD, 2002)

Jesus Christ Superstar directed by Norman Jewison (Universal Pictures, DVD 2004)

P.L.A.Y.

FOR 37 YEARS, Center Theatre Group's P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth) has served 25,000 – 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its theatrical productions and to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

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TARGET



Bank of America



